

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BIBLE FOR ALL (BFA) MATERIAL FOR DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

Dig Deeper Study Tools

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Nehemiah — Strengthening Faith, Strengthening Community

Sermon Series

12 April 2026

April Study 1

Nehemiah 7:4-73a

19, 26 April 2026

April Study 2

Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18

Introduction to Nehemiah (Biblical Theology Study Bible NIV)

The book of Nehemiah, along with its companion Ezra, comes from the time of the return from exile in Babylon and vividly narrates the obstacles and opposition the Jews encountered when they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and eventually made the city habitable and secure. Ezra and later Nehemiah led the restoration and rebuilding not only of the broken city but also the broken people. Their roles were different, but we should not exaggerate the difference. Ezra, although primarily a teacher, had clear ideas about the constitution of the returned community; and Nehemiah, while primarily an administrator, had a vital spiritual life. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are both concerned with the interplay of the public and the personal and the inextricable link of the material and the spiritual.

Leading Themes

Nehemiah comes to us first as a man of prayer before we see him in action as a gifted administrator and leader. All he does is driven by loyalty to the God of the covenant. He is passionate about the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the establishment of God's people in the land, including a resumption of community life and worship.

- The doctrine of God
- The supremacy of Scripture
- The history of salvation
- The importance of prayer
- The nature of leadership
- The provisional nature of the work: The book ends not with a great flourish but with a renewed call for faithfulness and a heartfelt prayer for God's help. Before the end of Nehemiah's service, initial enthusiasm is running out, leading to lapses into past ungodly practices. Until the kingdom is consummated, there will always be the need for faith, obedience, and daily dependence on the Lord's help.

The Portrait of Nehemiah in the Book

Nehemiah comes across more vividly than Ezra. We should not rigidly distinguish between Ezra the spiritual leader and Nehemiah the political leader because each is prominent in both spheres. Yet Nehemiah, although a lay figure, is involved in projects of building and spiritual reformation usually associated with kings and prophets. Like Hezekiah and Josiah, he rebuilds and repairs the city and calls the people to return to the celebration of the great festivals that commemorate aspects of Israel's relationship with its covenant Lord.

Nehemiah is not strictly a prophet, but the book opens with the phrase "The words of Nehemiah," analogous to introductions in the Prophetic Books (e.g., Jer 1:1; Amos 1:1). His words often are prophetic (e.g., 2:12, 17–18), and false prophets harass him (6:10–14) as they do the great prophets. Neither is Nehemiah a priest, but he is thoroughly involved in the renewal of priests and Levites (chs. 7–13). He is not a perfect figure, and we are not invited to admire or imitate him in every respect—e.g., beating people and pulling out their hair (13:25)! We are not Nehemiah, but Nehemiah's God is our God; and we, like Nehemiah, are servants. Thus, we can see in the struggles he faced and the reforms he carried out a voice for our own day. Ezra and Nehemiah acted to restore Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord: they confessed their sin of

turning from the Lord in disobedience; they restored the Torah at the heart of the nation's life; and they carried out the necessary restoration to allow the kind of settled life and security where progress could be made.

Relevance

- It is important to be rooted in the story of God's past dealings without living in the past and pining for a mythical golden age. The hard grind of recovery and reform is calculated to bring out strong faith.
- We must emphasise the gospel's uniqueness and confront spiritual and moral compromise.
- Prayer is the link between balancing God's sovereignty with the need for action.
- In our day we will never complete the work, because God begins and finishes that for his glory.

Timeline (adapted from ESV Study Bible)

<i>Event</i>	<i>Month/Day</i>	<i>Year (BC)</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Cyrus king of Persia captures Babylon		539	Dan 5:30-31
First year of Cyrus; issues proclamation freeing Jewish exiles to return		538-537	Ezra 1:1-4
Jewish exiles, led by Sheshbazzar, return from Babylon to Jerusalem		537?	Ezra 1:11
Altar rebuilt		537	Ezra 3:1-2
Temple rebuilding begins		536	Ezra 3:8
Adversaries oppose the rebuilding		536-530	Ezra 4:1-5
Temple rebuilding ceases		530-520	Ezra 4:24
Temple rebuilding resumes (2 nd year of Darius)		520	Ezra 5:2; compare Hag 1:14
Temple construction completed (6 th year of Darius)		516	Ezra 6:15
Ezra departs from Babylon to Jerusalem (arrives 7 th year of Artaxerxes)		458	Ezra 7:6-9
Men of Judah and Benjamin assemble at Jerusalem		458	Ezra 10:9
Officials conduct three-month investigation (intermarriage)		458-457	Ezra 10:16-17
Artaxerxes decrees that work on Jerusalem's walls and foundations should stop		Just before 445	Ezra 4:7-23
Hanani brings Nehemiah a report from Jerusalem (20 th year of Artaxerxes I)		445-444	Neh 1:1
Nehemiah goes before Artaxerxes	1	445	Neh 2:1
Nehemiah arrives to inspect Jerusalem walls		445	Neh 2:11
Wall is finished	6/25	445	Neh 6:15
People of Israel gather	7	445	Neh 7:73-8:1
People of Israel celebrate Feast of Booths	7/15-22	445	Neh 8:14
People of Israel fast and confess sins	7/24	445	Neh 9:1
Nehemiah returns to Susa (32 nd year of Artaxerxes I)		433-432	Neh 5:14, 13:6

Outline of Nehemiah (with preaching schedule)

BFA	Date	Text
STRENGTHENING FAITH: THE RETURN OF NEHEMIAH AND THE REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM'S WALLS		
Jan Study 1	4 Jan 2026	Be Resolute, Come in Brokenness Neh 1:1-4
	11 Jan 2026	Be Resolute, Seek God in Prayer Neh 1:5-11
Jan Study 2	18 Jan 2026	Be Resolute, Act on God's Timing Neh 2:1-8
	25 Jan 2026	Be Resolute, Discern Challenges & Rally God's People Neh 2:9-20
	1 Feb 2026	Be Resolute, Everyone Matters Neh 3:1-32
Feb Study 1	8 Feb 2026	Be Resolute, Fight for Our Families Neh 4:1-14
	15 Feb 2026	Be Resolute, God Fights for Us Neh 4:15-23
Feb Study 2	22 Feb 2026	Be Resolute, Fear God Neh 5:1-13
	1 Mar 2026	Be Resolute, Care for God's People Neh 5:14-19
Mar Study 1	8 Mar 2026	Be Resolute, Stay Focused Neh 6:1-14
Mar Study 2	15 Mar 2026	Be Resolute, Remain Vigilant Neh 6:15-19
	22 Mar 2026	Be Resolute, Appoint Godly Leaders Neh 7:1-3
	29 Mar 2026	PALM SUNDAY (break from Nehemiah series)
	5 Apr 2026	EASTER SUNDAY (break from Nehemiah series)
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY: THE PEOPLE AND THEIR RECOMMITMENT TO GOD		
Apr Study 1	12 Apr 2026	Be Resolute, Guard Healthy Membership Neh 7:5-7, 60-73
Apr Study 2	19 Apr 2026	Be Resolute, Gather Around the Word Neh 8:1-7
	26 Apr 2026	Be Resolute, Celebrate His Grace Neh 8:8-18
May Study 1	3 May 2026	Be Resolute, Come in Confession and Worship Neh 9:1-8
	10 May 2026	Be Resolute, Remember God's Faithfulness Neh 9:9-21, 32-38
May Study 2	17 May 2026	Be Resolute, Commit As A Covenant Community Neh 10:1-3, 28-39

<i>BFA</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Text</i>
THE EFFORT TO STRENGTHEN FAITH AND COMMUNITY HAS TO CONTINUE: THE REDEDICATED PEOPLE WITH THE DEDICATED WALL		
Jul Study 1 (recap)	24 May 2026	Be Resolute, Take Up Your Assignment Neh 11:1-25
	31 May 2026	Be Resolute, God Remembers the Faithful Neh 12:1, 7-9, 22-26
	7 Jun 2026	Be Resolute, Celebrate God's Victory Neh 12:27-47
	14 Jun 2026	Be Resolute, Protect Worship Space Neh 13:1-14
	21 Jun 2026	Be Resolute, Guard Sacred Time Neh 13:15-22
	28 Jun 2026	Be Resolute, Reject Compromises Neh 13:23-31

12 April 2026
April Study 1
Nehemiah 7:4-73a

PREPARE (INDIVIDUAL): READ, MARK, AND REFLECT

Read the text throughout the week(s) before your group time.

Nehemiah 7:4-73a

The List of the Exiles Who Returned

⁴ Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. ⁵ So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there:

⁶ These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, ⁷ in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah):

The list of the men of Israel:

⁸ the descendants of Parosh	2,172
⁹ of Shephatiah	372
¹⁰ of Arah	652
¹¹ of Pahath-Moab (through the line of Jeshua and Joab)	2,818
¹² of Elam	1,254
¹³ of Zattu	845
¹⁴ of Zakkai	760
¹⁵ of Binnui	648
¹⁶ of Bebai	628
¹⁷ of Azgad	2,322
¹⁸ of Adonikam	667
¹⁹ of Bigvai	2,067
²⁰ of Adin	655
²¹ of Ater (through Hezekiah)	98
²² of Hashum	328
²³ of Bezai	324
²⁴ of Hariph	112
²⁵ of Gibeon	95
²⁶ the men of Bethlehem and Netophah	188
²⁷ of Anathoth	128
²⁸ of Beth Azmaveth	42
²⁹ of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth	743
³⁰ of Ramah and Geba	621
³¹ of Mikmash	122
³² of Bethel and Ai	123
³³ of the other Nebo	52
³⁴ of the other Elam	1,254

Notes and Questions

Genealogy was important to the post-exilic people because it anchored them and gave them identity as God's people who trace all the way back to Adam

Compare this list to the list in Ezra 2:1-70.

35	of Harim	320
36	of Jericho	345
37	of Lod, Hadid and Ono	721
38	of Senaah	3,930
39	The priests:	
	the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua)	973
40	of Immer	1,052
41	of Pashhur	1,247
42	of Harim	1,017
43	The Levites:	
	the descendants of Jeshua (through Kadmiel through the line of Hodaviah)	74
44	The musicians:	
	the descendants of Asaph	148
45	The gatekeepers:	
	the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai	138
46	The temple servants:	
	the descendants of	
	Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,	
47	Keros, Sia, Padon,	
48	Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmaj,	
49	Hanan, Giddel, Gahar,	
50	Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda,	
51	Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah,	
52	Besai, Meunim, Nephusim,	
53	Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,	
54	Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha,	
55	Barkos, Sisera, Temah,	
56	Neziah and Hatipha	
57	The descendants of the servants of Solomon:	
	the descendants of	
	Sotai, Sophereth, Perida,	
58	Jaala, Darkon, Giddel,	
59	Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim and Amon	
60	The temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon	392

⁶¹ The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descended from Israel:

⁶² the descendants of
Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda 642

⁶³ And from among the priests:
the descendants of
Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai (a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name).

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These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. ⁶⁵ The governor, therefore, ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁶ The whole company numbered 42,360, ⁶⁷ besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 245 male and female singers. ⁶⁸ There were 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁹ 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.

⁷⁰ Some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. ⁷¹ Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. ⁷² The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests.

⁷³ The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.

PREPARE TO SHARE (INDIVIDUAL): LOOK BACK

What has God been teaching you in the last few weeks?

Who has God laid on your heart to pray for?

GROUP: SHARE AND PRAY

Take note of one another's prayer concerns.

Come together to pray for each other, the church, and the world (see this month's prayer bulletin).

GROUP: WORSHIP TOGETHER

Prepare your hearts to meet God and one another in His Word through worshipping together.

GROUP: STUDY 1

Read Nehemiah 7:4-73a.



CONTEXT:

What happens around (before/after/during) this passage?

1. Consider what Nehemiah had said he was going to do in Neh 2:5. How far has he gotten in this task?



OBSERVATION:

What do you notice as you read this passage?

2. According to Neh 7:4-5, what problem remains after the wall is completed, and what action does Nehemiah take in response? See also Neh 11:1 for Nehemiah's final action in this area.

3. Why did Nehemiah assemble the people by genealogy? (Neh 7:5)

4. What groups are carefully named and numbered in this passage? What does this tell you about how Jewish society was structured?

5. What reason was given for the exclusion of the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai from the priesthood? What arrangements were made for them?

6. How many people were included in the numbering? Is this the full number of Jews? Were all of these meant to live in Jerusalem?



INTERPRETATION:

What is the meaning & significance of your observations?

7. Why is the list in Neh 7:5-73 necessary? Consider Neh 7:4, Neh 8, and the earlier events of Neh 4-6.

8. What does the careful attention to priestly lineage reveal about Israel's understanding of holiness, worship, and access to God?



BIG IDEA: What is the main message of the passage?

Sum up the main idea and supporting ideas.

9. Fill in the blanks for the summary statement below:

The restoration work for _____

does not end with _____

but continues with _____

starting with _____

10. What do you think an equivalent of Nehemiah's list would be for us today?

Think further: why did Nehemiah use Ezra's list instead of conducting a census? What links does this establish?

The main idea answers two questions: First, "Who or what is the author talking about in the passage?" That's the question of the topic. Second, "What does the author want me to know about the topic?" or "What is the author saying about what he is talking about in the text?" What is his claim or argument, or proposition about the topic? The second question leads to the main idea.



APPLICATION:

Why did the Holy Spirit give us this text?

11. Nehemiah acts deliberately to know who belongs in the city before repopulating it; how should this shape the way believers today think about identity and belonging among God's people?

12. How does the detailed listing of names and families in this chapter shape our understanding of belonging and responsibility among God's people?

Think further: How can each of us contribute to building a united community that can serve God and spur each other in the faith?

GROUP: DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS

Discuss as a group how we can better know our own congregation members and strengthen our identity and belonging as God's people in ORPC.

19, 26 April 2026
April Study 2
Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18

PREPARE (INDIVIDUAL): READ, MARK, AND REFLECT

Read the text throughout the week(s) before your group time.

Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18

Ezra Reads the Law

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns,

8 ¹ all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

² So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

⁴ Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

⁵ Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up.

⁶ Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

⁷ The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah— instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.

⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

⁹ Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

¹⁰ Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Notes and Questions

The seventh month is the month of Tishrei, the month with the high holy days of Rosh Hashanah (Head of the Year; 1st day of 7th month), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement, 10th day of 7th month), Sukkot (Feast of Booths/Tabernacles, 15th day of 7th month)

Daybreak till noon is about 5-6 hours.

Others who could understand implies children were present.

Reading aloud was the norm then even for those who were literate.

"Making it clear and giving the meaning" could mean translation from Hebrew into Aramaic, or explanations, or both.

The "joy of the Lord" could mean "joy belonging to the Lord" or "joy found in the Lord".

¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.”

¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

¹³ On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. ¹⁴ They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month ¹⁵ and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters”—as it is written.

¹⁶ So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷ The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

¹⁸ Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

PREPARE TO SHARE (INDIVIDUAL): LOOK BACK

What has God been teaching you in the last few weeks?

Who has God laid on your heart to pray for?

GROUP: SHARE AND PRAY

Take note of one another's prayer concerns.

Come together to pray for each other, the church, and the world (see this month's prayer bulletin).

GROUP: WORSHIP TOGETHER

Prepare your hearts to meet God and one another in His Word through worshipping together.

GROUP: STUDY 2

Read Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18.



CONTEXT:

What happens around (before/after/during) this passage?

1. Skim through Neh 8. What is happening in Neh 8, and how is it different from the preceding few chapters?



OBSERVATION:

What do you notice as you read this passage?

2. Who initiates the reading of the Law in Neh 8:1?
3. Neh 8 describes Ezra teaching over two days.
 - a. Who was involved in the first day's teaching, and what was their response?
 - b. Who was involved in the second day's teaching, and what was their response?
4. Read Neh 8:9-11. What were the people told to do? What strikes you about this?
5. What is the festival of the seventh month referred to in Neh 8:14? Consider Exod 23:16b, Deut 16:13-15, and Lev 23:33-43.

Think further: What is the Law referenced here?



INTERPRETATION:

What is the meaning & significance of your observations?

6. Read Neh 1:5-11, and consider Neh 8:1 with it. Why do you think Neh 8 is significant given this context?

7. Read Neh 8:9-11 again. Why did the people respond in this way, and why were they told to respond differently? What does this tell us about faith and repentance?

8. Why is it significant for the Jews to observe “the festival of the seventh month”? Why do you think a comparison is made to “the days of Joshua son of Nun”?

Think further: Why was it important for the people to hear from the Word of God at this point?



BIG IDEA: What is the main message of the passage?

Sum up the main idea and supporting ideas.

9. Fill in the summary table of events in Nehemiah 8 and write a summary statement mirroring it.

	First Day (Neh 7:73-8:12)	Second Day (Neh 8:13-18)
Who assembled		
What was done		
Response		

The main idea answers two questions: First, “Who or what is the author talking about in the passage?” That’s the question of the topic. Second, “What does the author want me to know about the topic?” or “What is the author saying about what he is talking about in the text?” What is his claim or argument, or proposition about the topic? The second question leads to the main idea.

When _____ (who assembled)

they responded by _____(response).

10. What does Neh 8 tell us about the role of God's Word in our lives?



APPLICATION:

Why did the Holy Spirit give us this text?

11. What does "the joy of the Lord is your strength" look like in your life?

12. Here in Nehemiah 8, the people's immediate response is one of obedience. What has God been saying to you in His Word (not just in Nehemiah but in your own quiet time with God) and what will obedience to God's Word look like in your life this week?

Think further: Aside from our DG studies, SoCM, and our worship services, what could it look like for us to learn Scripture communally today?

GROUP: DISCIPLESHIP FOCUS

Share with your group a time when the Word strongly convicted you of sin. What happened, and how did you respond?