

The Thread

Discovering The Thread of the Gospel Through The Big-Picture Story of the Bible

Part 2: A People Rise. A People Fall. Lesson 25: Nehemiah and Rebuilding



Session Snapshot

Narrative Passage: Nehemiah 1; 2:1-10; 2:11-18; 12:27-43

Gospel Focus: Revelation 21:1-8

Student Takeaways:

- Students will understand why the narrative of Nehemiah repairing the wall is such an important end to the Old Testament's look at the Israelite's story.
- Students will understand that God is moving toward a future where all who have believed in Him will live together, with God, in a new Jerusalem.
- Students will express their thoughts on what they think is the most significant detail of the new creation John refers to in Revelation 21.



Overview

This week is a turning point in your journey through the big-picture story of the Bible. You'll be close to finishing up the Old Testament part of the story. The Old Testament holds its challenges for modern readers. But when you know the backstory, it makes Jesus' life, death, and resurrection even more awesome. This week you'll look at the story of Nehemiah, and through this story, you'll get a glimpse at what it was like to try and rebuild Jerusalem. Nehemiah and the remnant of God's people were facing a major uphill battle, one with a ton of emotional implications. But, they recognized that this was the Lord's will. And they persevered and finally succeeded. You'll also learn about the New Jerusalem God plans to usher in at the end of all things. It's a very cool connection to make with one of the last chronological stories of the Old Testament.



Teacher Prep Video

Each *Thread* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your *Thread* lesson 25 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 25, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.



Bible Background

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide the basic context for the passages you'll be studying.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson we encourage teachers to help students know who wrote a particular book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **Why teach context?** Grasping the big-picture view of God's story of redemption is difficult for teenagers without understanding the context of the books and passages they're studying.

Nehemiah

Author: Nehemiah is the main character of the Book that shares his name. But he is not the only author. In

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fact, Nehemiah was more than likely written by (at least) Nehemiah, Ezra, and the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Time frame: Nehemiah, a Jewish exile serving in the courts of the Babylonians, initially arrived in Jerusalem in 445 BC, and came back again sometime between 433 and 423 BC. The Book would have been written during and sometime after these events.

Purpose: The Jews were at a historic low-point. They had been conquered and dispersed. The Temple and the city walls had been destroyed. Nehemiah is part of the narrative of the rebuilding of the Temple and the city. It was written as a historic narrative to record the events, but also to encourage the Jews as they struggled to re-discover their national identity at great cost.

Revelation

Author: The writer of Revelation identifies himself as John four times. Scholars agree that it is most likely John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' most beloved disciples.

Time frame: Revelation was written toward the end of John's life somewhere between 90 and 95 AD.

Purpose: The purpose of Revelation was to reveal the fullness of Christ's identity and to provide hope for suffering Believers at the time who were encountering grave persecution and suffering. Today it provides us hope of what is to come, as well as a stark warning of the battle that rages until Christ returns.



Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- An introductory activity called Getting Started designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- A section entitled The Story featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- A special emphasis entitled The Thread where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- An application-focused segment called Wrapping Up helping teenagers ask the question, "How am I impacted by what I learned today"?

Getting Started

- **Goal:** To get students thinking about how there are problems in our life that don't seem to have solutions, but we really wish we could fix.
- **Set-Up:** Paper and pens for each student.

FIRST, start the conversation on a light note by getting students thinking about things they would change. Ask something like:

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- **Think about your room in your house. If you could change one thing about your room, what would it be, and why?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What about your whole house? If you could change one thing about your house, what would it be and why?**
 - Answers will vary.
- **What about school? What's something you'd change about school?**
 - Answers will vary.

THEN, guide the conversation to a more serious discussion. Ask something like:

- **What about your life? What's one thing you'd change about your life?**
 - Answers will vary. Encourage students to be serious with their answer and to write it down on their piece of paper. Try and get them to think about a thing or situation they really struggle with. Getting better at a video game or winning the lottery aren't the type answers we're going for. Let them know that they won't have to show it to anyone. If anyone is willing to share their answer, give him or her time to do so.

FINALLY, let your students know that you'll be talking a bit about a time and place in history when a whole city wished one thing was different. Say something like:

- **Today, we're going to hear a story about some people who were pretty desperate for something to be different in their lives, and one man who asked God for help in changing that thing.**

Transition to The Story.

The Story

- **Goal:** For students to understand why the narrative of Nehemiah repairing the wall is such an important end to the Old Testament's look at the Israelite's story.
- **Setup:** Students will need a Bible or a Bible app.

FIRST explain that in this lesson you'll be looking at Nehemiah, a story that happens during a time in history when Israel was no longer an independent nation, let alone a powerful one. If you'd like, use the "Connecting The Dots" section below to do a little review and/or fill in the gaps from your last lesson and this one.

Connecting The Dots

As you teach The Thread, there will naturally be some gaps in the story. This is an optional way for you to fill in some of the gaps between the last lesson you taught and this one. Use it as a way to review and/or to connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- **Israel became a divided nation, resulting in two kingdoms, Israel and Judah.**
- **Israel was eventually defeated by Assyria and the Babylonians defeated Judah. Most of the wealthy and influential people were captured and taken into exile.**
- **Several decades later, after the Persians defeated the Babylonian Empire, the exiles from Judah were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Some decided to stay.**

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BEGIN by asking the students to think all the way back to Genesis and the promises God made to Abraham. Ask something like:

- **Can anyone remember any of the promises God made to Abraham?**
 - o Answers may vary. There are a few correct answers they can give. See if they remember God's promise to give Abraham's offspring a land to possess (Genesis 15:7). Remind them that this is the Lord's promise of the Promised Land.
- **So, how do you think that promise looked after Israel and Judah were both defeated and left in shambles all while a lot of the people were living in exile? What do you think most people thought about the Lord's promise of His people having a land to possess?**
 - o Answer: Things probably didn't look good on the surface. The people were probably struggling with a lot of doubt. They were scattered all over the place. That didn't look like a land to possess.

THEN, explain to the students that this wasn't a minor issue in Nehemiah's opinion. He remembered God's promises and trusted them, but knew he wasn't called to sit back and wait for something to happen. Let the students know that you're going to quickly look at a few passages from Nehemiah to get an overview of the whole book.

Read or have a student read Nehemiah 1. Ask something like:

- **Nehemiah is pretty upset in this chapter. What news does he get that makes him so upset?**
 - o Answer: He finds out that Jerusalem has been destroyed and that the wall around the city has been broken down.
- **Why do you think this is such a big deal to Nehemiah?**
 - o Answer: First, he recognizes that it was the Jews' sin that had brought destruction to Jerusalem. He mourned the fact they had turned their back on God. He also knew that a strong wall was a city's first defense against enemies. With the wall broken down, the people inside were not safe.
- **Nehemiah pleads with God once he hears the bad news. Take a look at verses 8-9. What is Nehemiah asking God to do?**
 - o Answer: Specifically in these two verses, Nehemiah is asking God to remember one of His promises, that even if the people rebelled against God and were exiled, He would restore them if they repented and returned to Him.

NEXT, read or have a student read Nehemiah 2:1-10. Ask something like:

- **We know from the last chapter that Nehemiah was hopeful God would use him in some way to help Jerusalem. Do you think Nehemiah had a plan?**
 - o Whether this was part of Nehemiah's plan or not, things worked out pretty well for him. Even though he was very close to the king as the cupbearer, he wasn't generally allowed to freely talk about his own desires or wishes. So, the fact that Artaxerxes starts the conversation to allow Nehemiah to talk about what was going on in Jerusalem is a small miracle in itself.
- **Look back at verse 8. What is Nehemiah's attitude toward the fact that the king was allowing him to rebuild Jerusalem's walls?**
 - o Answer: He was grateful to God and gave him credit.

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- **In verse 10 Nehemiah foreshadows some opposition that he eventually encounters in building the wall. Why do you think Sanballat and Tobiah weren't happy that someone had come to repair the walls of Jerusalem?**

- o Answers will vary, but these men had used the weakness of Jerusalem for their own political and financial advantage.

THEN, read or have a student read 2:11-18. Ask something like:

- **Nehemiah doesn't tell the people in Jerusalem at first why he's there. Why do you think he waited?**

- o Answers will vary; likely he knew he would have some opposition to his plan. He also probably wanted to see how much work would be needed before he presented his plan to the city leaders.

- **The people had probably wanted to rebuild the wall before Nehemiah arrived. After all, they were far less safe without a secure wall. Why had they not rebuilt it already?**

- o Answer: The biggest reason would have been a lack of resources, but there also could have been a lack of confidence that they would be able to even pull it off.

- **How do you think they felt when Nehemiah shared his plan and the fact that he had the resources and political power to make it happen?**

- o Answers will vary; they likely felt hopeful for the first time in a long time.

NEXT, explain that through some difficulties and opposition from enemies, Nehemiah leads the people of Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. Read or have a student read Nehemiah 12:27-43. Say something like:

- **What is the main theme that you notice in this celebration?**

- o Answer: Thankfulness and joy. Have students think about all that the people in Jerusalem had been through. None of them were alive when Israel was still an independent nation, but their parents and grandparents had passed down stories to them about God's promises to give His people a land and uphold David's kingdom, which was in Jerusalem.

- **What do you think it was like to hear stories but live in a time when Israel was no longer its own nation, and Jerusalem was anything but a royal city?**

- o Answer: They may have lost hope, and they probably wondered whether God had forgotten His promises and His people.

- **With that in mind, what do you think this rebuilt wall meant to the people of Jerusalem?**

- o Answer: From their celebration, we can tell the people had a renewed hope in God and the covenant He made with Israel. They had a renewed understanding of God's promises and what He had called them to do.

If students don't have any questions, transition into The Thread and take a crack at seeing where we see the connection of the Gospel to the big-picture narrative of Scripture.

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FIRST, have your group turn to Revelation 21. While they find it, briefly give your group some background of what they're about to read. Say something like:

- **John, the author of Revelation, was given a glimpse into heaven and eternity, and he recorded his experience in Revelation. A major theme in Revelation is that Jesus is the rightful King of heaven, and much of Revelation points to the fact that His kingship was confirmed through His sacrifice for us on the cross.**

THEN, read or have a student read Revelation 21:1-8.

- **So, what did John see in these verses? What is he describing?**
 - o Answer: He's describing heaven. But heaven isn't going to be just floating around on clouds like some people think. What John is describing here is a very real, physical reality. He's talking about what it's going to be like when we dwell with God forever. This is a land promise!
- **What are some characteristics of heaven that John mentions?**
 - o Answer: There will be no death, no tears, no mourning, and no pain. All things will be made new and God will dwell among His people. If you're able, take time to write down the students' answers on a dry erase board.
- **What is the connection between this passage and God's promises to Abraham?**
 - o Answer: God promised His people that they would dwell in a land where He was their God and they were His people. While there were immediate fulfillments of that along the way, this is the ultimate fulfillment of that promise.

Ask:

- **This is going to sound like a totally random question. No, I haven't lost my mind. Hang with me. What is the point of an appetizer at a restaurant? If you're really hungry, is the appetizer usually going to fill you up?**
 - o Answer: The point is to get you ready for the real meal. The appetizer whets the appetite. If it were all you ate, you wouldn't be fulfilled.
- **How did the story of Nehemiah help point forward to the reality of Revelation? How was it a bit of an appetizer for what we read in Revelation 21:1-8?**
 - o Answer: The experience of brokenness and the consequences of sin make us long for something more. The reality that things aren't ok makes us long for the One who can make them ok. The rebuilding of the wall demonstrated God's faithfulness to His people and His promises. It gave a taste of what the ultimate fulfillment of His promises would be like. It didn't totally fulfill God's promises and it didn't totally satisfy His people, but it gave them a taste of what that complete fulfillment would be like.

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If your students don't have any more questions, transition into the "Wrapping Up" section.

Wrapping Up

- **Goal:** For students to be able to express their thoughts on what they think is the most significant detail of the new creation John refers to in Revelation 21.
- **Set-Up:** None.

FIRST lead a discussion about the hope that Revelation 21 talks about. Ask something like:

- **What jumped out to you the most about the Revelation 21 passage we read? Why is that significant to you?**
 - o Answers will vary.

Have them look at the answer they wrote down at the beginning of the lesson and then look at the descriptions of heaven you wrote on the board. Ask something like:

- **Will the answer you wrote down be made right in heaven? If you're willing to share your answer, explain.**
 - o Answers will vary. Help your group connect what they have shared so far about difficulties in life with some of the promises in 21:1-8. Explain to them that all of our brokenness, insecurities, struggles, and sin will be no more. Our pain and suffering will be no more. Our security will be in God. Everything we struggle and suffer with will be made right and we'll be perfectly satisfied in God's presence.
- **What do you long for most, having a problem fixed or being in God's presence? Why is the difference between the two significant?**
 - o Answer: We all have problems we want fixed. There's nothing wrong with that. But if we want them fixed more than we want God, then we have an issue. The problem, or the solution to the problem, has become an idol. The most amazing part of Revelation 21 should be that we are going to dwell with God forever in the land He has ultimately promised us. He's the one that's going to satisfy every longing we've ever had. He's more precious than the earthly solution to any problem we have.

If your students don't have any questions, close your Bible study in prayer, perhaps including thanksgiving for what God has promised followers of Jesus about eternity.

- **If you've purchased the *Tracing The Thread* devotional journal, remind students that they'll be working through Week 25 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions, and to give memorizing this week's verse their best shot.**
- **If you'll be utilizing the digital devotions included in the *Thread* curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.**
- **Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.**

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We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.