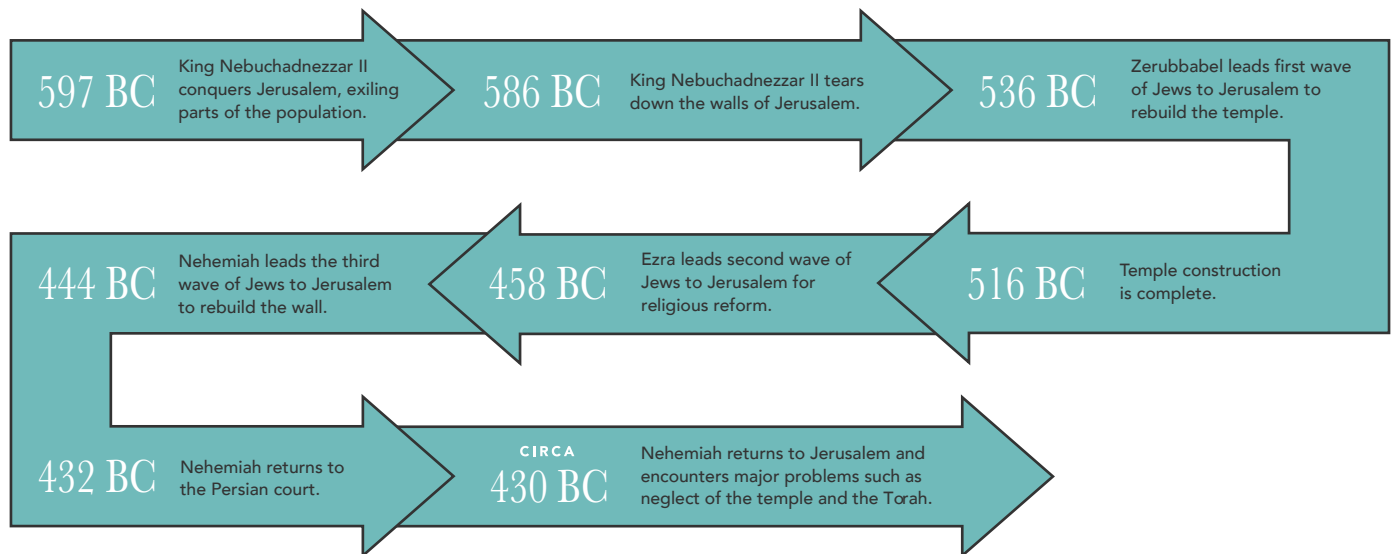


# Nehemiah Part 7: A Disciplined Life Go Deeper Guide

## HISTORICAL TIMELINE FOR NEHEMIAH

To get a video table of contents that frames the story of Nehemiah within the greater biblical narrative, checkout Bible Project Video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkETkRv9tG8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkETkRv9tG8)



## SCRIPTURE

A significant part of Nehemiah's context is the efforts that Ezra, a student of the scriptures, undertook to help the people of Israel regain a love for reading God's word. So it's fitting that during this series you'll be invited to read larger portions of scripture in one sitting, something that has become a lost discipline in our culture as well.

So grab your Bible or use a device to access an online bible, and set aside 15-30 minutes to read a full chapter or two.

**This week you'll go back and read the end of Nehemiah chapter 10:28 through chapter 11.**

## READ THIS OVERVIEW

In this week's survey through Nehemiah we are going back into the last portion of chapter 10:28-31 to take a deeper look at the specifics of the new vow that the Jewish people were making to honor God with how they lived their lives. This vow was a big deal because it captured not just a confession of how they had missed God's law, but a promise for how they would obey God's word. And to take it a step further, they were willing to sign their names on it!

When you put this vow under a magnifying glass we see that there's eight promises that fall under three themes: separation from the idols of surrounding nations, keeping sabbath rhythms, and caring for God's house.

In chapter 11, Nehemiah provides a list of the leaders and various families who repopulate Jerusalem while the rest of the leaders stay in other cities. They work through a specific process to decide who goes where and take great care to account for each person, name by name.

One of the things that Nehemiah teaches us this week is that God wanted His people to be intentionally different so that they could be a light to the nations around them. In this week's sermon, Pastor Albert said, "Our brand as Christians is not about us being perfect, but our brand is about our desperate pursuit of God, and His desperate pursuit of us, in spite of us". That's the light that we project to the world, through the disciplined life that we live. It's through our broken and messy humanity that the God of the Bible and Jewish people wanted to display His love and mercy to the rest of the world. So the question we leave you with this week is how are you being different? How is your humanity being challenged to live differently, so that it can reflect the light of the creator of the universe? Check out the next section for a really radical way that followers of Jesus have been putting this into practice for thousands of years.

## ENGAGE A PRACTICE

**From Practicing the Way, a Christian non-profit committed to creating resources that help the Church become more like Jesus.**

Fasting is a willing abstinence from food for a period of time. It's one of the most abused and least used of all the discipleship practices. Yet for millennia, it has been a core practice for apprenticeship to Jesus. All the great heroes of the Old Testament fasted. The first story we read about Jesus' adult life is of him fasting for forty days and nights, like Moses and Elijah before him. The central characters of the New Testament continued this practice, as did the early church, which fasted twice a week - every Wednesday and Friday - for over a millennia. It's not until quite recently that fasting fell out of favor.

And that comes as no surprise. We live in a culture not only of food, but of excess and luxury and addiction to what psychologists call "the pleasure principle." Yet for so many of us, the desires of our body have come to hold power over us. In the battle with our "flesh," we have become its slave, not its master.

So fasting is an ancient Christian discipline that helps us break the secret power our flesh typically has in our life – our desires, sins, and cravings – and to feed on the Holy Spirit. Below you'll find some simple instructions on how you can engage this practice this week.

**But how do you fast if you've had an unhealthy relationship with food?**

Listen to a conversation on eating disorders, body image, and Jesus' call to health and wholeness. On this podcast a woman is interviewed who has overcome an eating disorder in her own life and hear how she interacts with fasting now. Listen here: <https://practicthewayarchives.org/teaching/relationship-to-food>

1. Set aside a day to fast.
2. Pick a time to end the fast. Our recommendation is that you start your fast with your evening dinner meal and go through to lunch the next day. Another option is the "regular" fast, which goes from sunup to sundown, about twelve hours – so you would skip breakfast and lunch and then eat a late dinner. You can make your fast longer by skipping more meals (perhaps fasting for a full twenty-four hours), or shorter by breaking your fast at noon or 3pm. Again, it's your call.



3. As you fast on the day you decide, each time you feel a hunger pain or think about food or take a lunch break (with no lunch!), use it as a prompt for prayer. Turn your heart to God and ask him to starve your flesh and feed your Spirit. Use your imagination to “see” yourself drawing strength from God himself.

4. If you want a “value added” experience, here are three other things you can do:

- **Break a Habit** – Identify a specific habit that might be destructive and that you want to break. Spend the day in prayer for freedom in that area.
- **Journal** – Take a little time for self-reflection. Get your journal out or go for a walk and think about what this practice is revealing about you. Richard Foster said, “Fasting reveals the things that control us.” If you just feel “hangry” all day, or if you can’t make it more than a few hours, ask yourself, “Why do I feel this way?” Treat yourself compassionately, as God does, yet honestly as well. Remember: the point isn’t a guilt trip but freedom.
- **Read Scripture** – “Feed” on the word of God, like Jesus did in the wilderness.

### WRAP UP WITH A PRAYER

Let’s use Psalm 61:1-2 as a prayer during our fasting this week. Take time to read through it out loud 2-3 times, slowly meditating on each phrase.

**1 Hear my cry, O God;**

**listen to my prayer.**

**2 From the ends of the earth I call to you,**

**I call as my heart grows faint;**

**lead me to the rock that is higher than I.**

