

DEEPER

Daily Bible Study

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Based on the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide

Nehemiah

2019, Quarter 4, Lesson 2

Sabbath (October 5): The King's Cupbearer

The Bible records God's working of His purposes through people. Although the Creator is all-powerful, and could accomplish His plans in many others ways, He most frequently chooses to work through people. Nehemiah was one such person that God chose, called, and empowered to fulfill an important mission. In today's lesson we will take a brief look at a few characteristics of this exemplary man. As Ellen White explains in the book *Prophets and Kings*,

Nehemiah, one of the Hebrew exiles, occupied a position of influence and honor in the Persian court. As cupbearer to the king he was admitted freely to the royal presence. By virtue of his position, and because of his abilities and fidelity, he had become the monarch's friend and counselor. The recipient of royal favor, however, though surrounded by pomp and splendor, did not forget his God nor his people. With deepest interest his heart turned toward Jerusalem; his hopes and joys were bound up with her prosperity. Through this man, prepared by his residence in the Persian court for the work to which he was to be called, God purposed to bring blessing to His people in the land of their fathers. {PK 628.1}

Discussion Questions:

- Read Nehemiah 1:4. What does this verse reveal about Nehemiah's concern for God's people and God's cause? (Both of these things are close to his heart, and he is greatly concerned when word arrives that enemies of God have largely accomplished their purpose to frustrate and stop the work of God's people.)
- Read Nehemiah 1:11. What position did Nehemiah hold, and what does this reveal about him? (He was the king's cupbearer. In addition to his concern for spiritual interests, he was a hard and trusted worker dealing with more ordinary things of everything life. His work ethic had obviously caught the attention of the king.)
- Read Nehemiah 2:4. How did Nehemiah respond in times of urgency and emergency? (He prayed for wisdom.)
- Read Nehemiah 2:7,8. What else is revealed about Nehemiah here? (He prepared and planned his actions to the best of his ability.)

Sunday (October 6): Nehemiah Receives Bad News

In mid-November to mid-December of 445 B.C., Nehemiah received a visit from Hanani, possibly his blood brother. The news was not good—the Jews had been forced to abandon their

Nehemiah

2019, Quarter 4, Lesson 2

rebuilding of Jerusalem because of opposition from Samaritans and others nearby. Ezra 4 records the efforts of those opposing the Jews and reveals that their plot was so effective that King Artaxerxes ordered the building in Jerusalem stopped. According to Ezra 4:23, this allowed the enemies to destroy the walls of the city, and for years the work in Jerusalem had lain dormant.

This sequence of events fits well with what we know of the historical situation within the Persian empire at that time. In 448 B.C. Megabyzos, governor of the province that included Jerusalem and Samaria, rebelled. It seems likely that only during this time would the Persian king have dealt directly with local officials, such as those that wrote the letter of opposition to the Jews. The Samaritans would have used the opportunity to assure the king of their loyalty and at the same time try to stop the Jews from rebuilding Jerusalem by accusing them of planning a revolt. In that case, Artaxerxes would probably have grasped at any chance to create unrest and difficulties in the rebellious governor's territory, while at the same time working with the Samaritans who claimed loyalty to the throne. At any rate, when Nehemiah finally learns what has been happening in Jerusalem, he is heart-broken.

Discussion Questions:

- Read Nehemiah 1:3. What had happened to the rebuilding efforts in Jerusalem? (The walls were broken down and the gates burned with fire.) Does it ever seem like God's work and God's church today have suffered crushing defeats and obstacles? (Yes, sometimes it does seem that way.) Spiritually speaking, how might the walls and gates of God's church today be under attack? (Answers will vary. Nearly every foundation of truth is being questioned, marginalized, and attacked by the world—and, at times, those within the church—today.)
- Read Isaiah 58:12. Seventh-day Adventists have frequently applied this passage to our own prophetic mission, especially in regards to restoring the seventh-day Sabbath (see verse 13). Do you think Nehemiah was looking for an opportunity to be a “rebuilder,” or did the opportunity just come to him? (It seems that the opportunity just came to him.) How about you? What will your response be when God's call comes to your life? (This is just a thought question!)
- Read Nehemiah 1:4. How did Nehemiah respond to the bad news? (He “sat down, and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.”) What does Nehemiah's response tell us about what our response should be to God's call to “repair the breach”? (First, we should grieve and mourn for the lost opportunities and spiritual defeats suffered by God's people. Second, any restoration effort must begin—and proceed—with fasting and prayer.)

Monday (October 7): Nehemiah's Prayer

In today's lesson we will look at Nehemiah's heart-felt prayer to God for help. His prayer, like so many prayers found in the Bible, reveals important principles for us today in our own prayers for help and guidance.

Discussion Questions:

Nehemiah

2019, Quarter 4, Lesson 2

- Read Nehemiah 1:5. In this opening to his prayer, Nehemiah virtually quotes from the second commandment found in Exodus 20:6. For what reasons might Nehemiah have started his prayer this way? (The second commandment reveals the character of God as One that keeps His promises, that extends mercy to those that need it, and that works justice and judgment when appropriate. Knowing the character of the One you are praying to makes all the difference.)
- Read Nehemiah 1:6,7. In these verses Nehemiah confesses the sin of his people, and identifies himself with those that have erred and wandered from God, much as Daniel did in his beautiful prayer (see Daniel 9:5). For what reasons did Nehemiah identify himself with those who were guilty of so many sins? (This attitude reveals the character of Christ, Who identified with sinful and guilty humanity so that He could intercede for us. Nehemiah is interceding for his people, and is pleading that God's name and character be vindicated in how He redeems His people.)
- Read Nehemiah 1:8. What does Nehemiah ask God to do here? (Remember His covenant and promise to bring His people back from captivity into the Promised Land.) Why is it so important to pray God's promises back to Him? (Answers will vary. God wants to build our faith in His Word and promises, and this is most effectively done when we are consciously and deliberately claiming His promises.)
- Read the following statements explaining what happened as Nehemiah prayed, and discuss how the same can be true for us today: "As Nehemiah prayed, his faith and courage grew strong. His mouth was filled with holy arguments. ...as he prayed a holy purpose formed in his mind" (PK 629).

Tuesday (October 8): Nehemiah Speaks Out

Before Nehemiah presented his burden and request to King Artaxerxes I, he prayed at length for God's providential leading. Considering what we know historically of this particular king, we can understand Nehemiah's prolonged time in prayer. Artaxerxes I was a moody and unreliable character, from whom one could always expect a change in attitude. For example, after the Egyptian Inarus had been promised that his life would be spared if he surrendered, the king later murdered him. This act of royal perfidy made Artaxerxes's brother, Megabyzos, so angry that he rebelled against the crown, nearly wrecking the empire.

One occasion, when a lion unexpectedly attacked the king, Megabyzos stepped in front of the king and saved his life. However, Artaxerxes apparently didn't like the idea that he had needed someone else's help, and demanded that Megabyzos be killed. He finally reversed this order and commanded that his brother be banished instead. Given these insights into the king's temperament, one can understand why Nehemiah felt the need of much prayer before presenting his request.

Discussion Questions

- Read Nehemiah 1:11. How did Nehemiah's position as cupbearer prepare and enable him to carry out his mission to Jerusalem? (God had placed him in a position with access to, and influence with, the king.) In looking at your situation in life, how might God be positioning you to fulfill a special work for Him? (Answers will vary. Remember that

Nehemiah

2019, Quarter 4, Lesson 2

each one of us has a sphere and realm of influence that is important and unique from any other person. God needs you to work for Him!)

- Read Nehemiah 2:1. In what month did Nehemiah finally present his request to King Artaxerxes I? How long had he been praying? (His request was made in the month Nisan, four months after he began praying.) Does this seem like a long time to pray for something like this? (It probably did to Nehemiah!)
- Read Nehemiah 2:5-8. Would you characterize Nehemiah's request as timid or bold? (It seems rather bold.) What do you think enabled him to make such a request? (His time in prayer gave him assurance that God was leading in this situation.) What are the lessons for us today? (Answers will vary.)

Wednesday (October 9): Nehemiah Sent

Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem was not without opposition from the Jews' enemies. His very presence in the city was enough to stir up the anger and jealousy of Sanballat and Tobiah. Ellen White writes in the book *Prophets and Kings*:

Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem was accomplished in safety. The royal letters to the governors of the provinces along his route secured him honorable reception and prompt assistance. No enemy dared molest the official who was guarded by the power of the Persian king and treated with marked consideration by the provincial rulers. His arrival in Jerusalem, however, with a military escort, showing that he had come on some important mission, excited the jealousy of the heathen tribes living near the city, who had so often indulged their enmity against the Jews by heaping upon them injury and insult. Foremost in this evil work were certain chiefs of these tribes, Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. From the first these leaders watched with critical eyes the movements of Nehemiah and endeavored by every means in their power to thwart his plans and hinder his work. {PK 635.1}

Discussion Questions:

- Read Nehemiah 2:9,10. Have you ever been opposed by someone simply because of who you are, or because of what your job is? How do you think this made Nehemiah feel? (It doesn't feel good, yet Nehemiah seems to have been fortified by his extended time of prayer to meet and withstand opposition. This was, after all, just the beginning of fierce opposition toward him and his work.)
- Read Revelation 12:17. What similarities do you find between Nehemiah's experience and the opposition against God's remnant at the end of time? (Both are opposed because of who they are and what their God-given job is.) What does Revelation 12:17 reveal is the key to withstanding the dragon's attacks at the end of time? (Keeping the commandments of God and clinging to the testimony of Jesus Christ.)
- Read Matthew 10:24,25. What reality does Jesus want us as His disciples to realize and accept? (If and when we follow Him, we will be opposed just as He was.) Think through the Bible (or more modern) stories of those whom God has used. Were any of them able to accomplish their mission without any opposition? (No.) What gave these characters the strength they needed to stay faithful? (Answers will vary.)

Nehemiah

2019, Quarter 4, Lesson 2

Thursday (October 10): Nehemiah Prepares for His Task

Nehemiah's careful—and somewhat secretive—investigation of the situation in Jerusalem, his persuasive speech to the Jewish leaders, and his bold response to the taunts of their enemies, all serve as powerful examples for us today of what makes for effective spiritual leadership. In today's lesson we will look at several aspects of Nehemiah's leadership.

Discussion Questions:

- Read Nehemiah 2:17,18. How would you summarize the content of the message given by Nehemiah to the leaders in Jerusalem? (He first honestly summarizes the problem and the challenges facing them. Second, he gives them a good reason why the situation should be addressed—that neither they nor God should be reproached any more. Finally, he relates God's guidance on him up to that point.) What effect did Nehemiah's words have on the people? (They are encouraged and motivated to complete the work of rebuilding Jerusalem.) In what ways can Nehemiah's approach to solving the problem serve as a model for God's church, and each of us personally, today? (Answers will vary.)
- Read Nehemiah 2:19,20. What is so significant about Nehemiah's reply when mocked and charged with planning a rebellion? (He refers to God and His promises to prosper His people.) Compare Zerubbabel's similar response in Ezra 5:11, and discuss why both answers provide such a powerful role model and example for us today. (Answers will vary. Nehemiah and Zerubbabel knew Whom they were working for and Who had called them to their mission. They also realized that their protection and defense ultimately came only from God as well.)
- What other aspects of Nehemiah's leadership style stand out to you? (Answers will vary.)

Friday (October 11): Keys to Success

No doubt God accomplished much through Nehemiah. Yet, Nehemiah himself contributed in powerful ways to the success of the mission that God had laid upon his heart. In today's lesson we will look at several more keys to Nehemiah's success.

Discussion Questions:

- Read the following passages, and discuss how each reveals important keys for success in sharing our message and accomplishing our mission today:

In secrecy and silence Nehemiah completed his circuit of the walls. "The rulers knew not whither I went," he declares, "or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work." *The remainder of the night he spent in prayer*; for he knew that the morning would call for earnest effort to arouse and unite his dispirited and divided countrymen. {PK 636.4}

Nehemiah presented before the people their reproach among the heathen—their religion dishonored, their God blasphemed. {PK 637.3}

...having shown that he was sustained by the combined authority of the God of Israel and the Persian king, *Nehemiah asked the people directly whether they would take advantage of this opportunity* and arise and build the wall. {PK 638.1}

Nehemiah

2019, Quarter 4, Lesson 2

Nehemiah's whole soul was in the enterprise he had undertaken. His hope, his energy, his enthusiasm, his determination, were contagious, inspiring others with the same high courage and lofty purpose. Each man became a Nehemiah in his turn and helped to make stronger the heart and hand of his neighbor. {PK 638.3}

Nor did Nehemiah's energy abate, now that the work was actually begun. With tireless vigilance he superintended the building, directing the workmen, noting the hindrances, and providing for emergencies. Along the whole extent of that three miles of wall his influence was constantly felt. With timely words he encouraged the fearful, aroused the laggard, and approved the diligent. And ever he watched the movements of their enemies, who from time to time collected at a distance and engaged in conversation, as if plotting mischief, and then, drawing nearer the workmen, attempted to divert their attention. {PK 639.3}

In his many activities Nehemiah did not forget the source of his strength. His heart was constantly uplifted to God, the great Overseer of all. "The God of heaven," he exclaimed, "He will prosper us;" and the words, echoed and re-echoed, thrilled the hearts of all the workers on the wall. {PK 640.1}