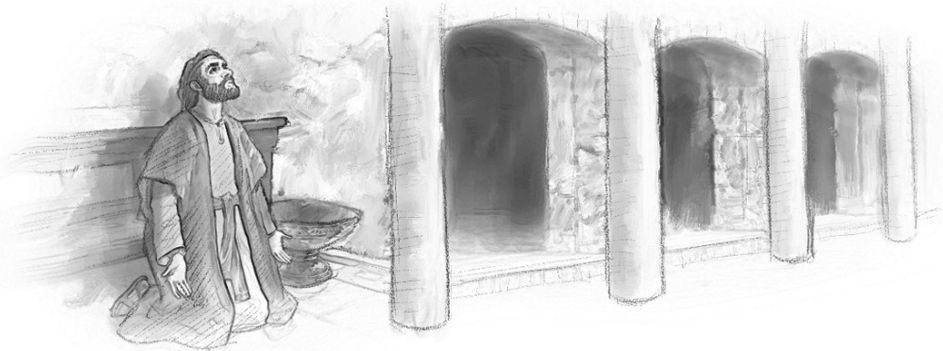


Nehemiah



SABBATH—OCTOBER 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Nehemiah 1:1-4; Nehemiah 1:5-11; Nehemiah 2:1-8; Nehemiah 2:9, 10; Nehemiah 2:11-20.

MEMORY VERSE: “When I heard this about the people of Jerusalem and about the wall, I sat down and cried. I was very sad. I fasted and prayed to the God of heaven for several days. Then I prayed this prayer: ‘LORD, God of heaven, you are the great [mighty] and powerful God. You are the God who keeps his agreement of love with people who love you and obey your commands’ ” (Nehemiah 1:4, 5, ERV).

LAST WEEK, we learned about two groups of Jews who go back to Judah. But there is one more group of Jews that God gets ready to send back. God gives this group a special job. The 1st two groups go back to build again Jerusalem and to finish building the temple. But leaders from the countries around Jerusalem try to stop God’s people from finishing their work. God’s people get scared and stop building. The leaders from nearby countries do not want the Israelites to build the city and its walls. These leaders are afraid that the Israelites will become a powerful country again (Ezra 4:6-24). So, these evil leaders want to stop Israel. But God never leaves His people when they are in trouble. He always will help His people do the work He gives them.

God chooses another man to carry out His plan. This man is named Nehemiah. This week, we will learn about Nehemiah and the work God gives him to do.



God never leaves His people when they are in trouble.

NEHEMIAH GETS SOME BAD NEWS (Nehemiah 1:1–4)

The book of Nehemiah starts in the same way that the book of Daniel does (read Daniel 1:1, 2). It starts with bad news. Yes, many people go back to Judah. But things are not going very well for God's people there.

Read Nehemiah 1:1–4. Why is Nehemiah so upset? What does he do when he gets the bad news?

Some Jews come to Shushan. Shushan was one of the top centers in the Persian Kingdom. Nehemiah works in Shushan in the royal palace. He is one of the king's cupbearers. A cupbearer tastes the king's drinks before the king drinks them. The cupbearer makes sure these drinks are safe. The Jews who come to Shushan were taken as prisoners many years earlier. One of the Jews is named Hanani. Hanani and Nehemiah talk. Their talk happens sometime between mid-November and mid-December of 445 B.C. That is 13 years after Ezra goes back to Jerusalem. Hanani tells Nehemiah that people in Jerusalem are not doing well. The people are not able to build the city. Neighbors from countries near Jerusalem destroyed the city walls.

Nehemiah must have heard the bad news about how the Samaritans destroyed the city walls. But now Nehemiah knows the story is true. To make things worse, King Artaxerxes himself stops the building because some leaders complained to the king about the Jews (Ezra 4).

Yes, God's people finish building the temple. But the people do not use the temple to worship God at all. Why not? Because the people who work in the temple are afraid to live in Jerusalem. That news makes Nehemiah sad. The reason the Jews went back home is so they can give glory to God. But now they are afraid to live in their city. So, no one is taking care of God's house. God's people are too afraid of the leaders near Judah.

What does Nehemiah do? Does he complain about the Jews? Does he blame them because they do not trust God and have no faith? No! He turns to God. He gets on his knees and prays. He also fasts or eats no food for a few days.

When Nehemiah gets bad news, he cries at first. Then he fasts and prays. What does his example show us that we must do when there is trouble in our lives?



A cupbearer tastes the king's drinks before the king drinks them. A cupbearer makes sure these drinks are safe.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER (Nehemiah 1:5–11)

Read Nehemiah's prayer in Nehemiah 1:5–11. What are the different parts of his prayer? Why does Nehemiah include himself in his prayer as part of the group who is guilty?

The Seven Parts of Nehemiah's Prayer:

1. God, You are wonderful. You show mercy (Nehemiah 1:5).
2. Hear me, God (Nehemiah 1:6).
3. Nehemiah confesses his and his people's sins (Nehemiah 1:6, 7).
4. Remember Your promises, God (Nehemiah 1:8, 9).
5. You have saved us (Nehemiah 1:10).
6. Hear me, God (Nehemiah 1:11).
7. God, please bless us and show us mercy (Nehemiah 1:11).

Nehemiah's prayer is beautiful. It shows us that God is wonderful. It shows us that Nehemiah knows that he and his people are sinners. The prayer ends with Nehemiah's cry to God for help. Nehemiah's prayer is almost the same as Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9. Is it possible that Nehemiah knows about Daniel's prayer? Yes, it is. Do you see that Nehemiah does not start his prayer with a cry for help? First, he says that God is wonderful and mighty. Then Nehemiah says that God always keeps His Special Agreement, or Covenant, with His people. God shows mercy to the people who love Him.

Nehemiah's prayer has a special pattern or style. The center of his prayer is Nehemiah 1:8. In this verse, Nehemiah asks God to remember His promises. Yes, God divides His people when they disobey Him. But God also promises to bring His people back home. Then God will make everything new. Nehemiah tells God that His people are turning back to Him. So, now it is time for God to keep His promises. Nehemiah is not afraid to ask God to remember His promises to His people. Of course, God always remembers His promises. But it also makes Him happy when we ask Him to keep them. God wants us to believe Him and ask Him to keep His promises to us. When we ask God to keep His promises, our faith grows stronger.

What are some of God's promises that you can ask Him for right now? Why is it important never to stop asking God to keep His promises?



When we ask God to keep His promises, our faith grows stronger.

NEHEMIAH TALKS TO THE KING (Nehemiah 2:1–8)

Nehemiah 1:11 says that Nehemiah is the king's cupbearer. As we saw, a cupbearer tastes the king's drinks before the king drinks them. We may not think this job is very important. But many cupbearers had a lot of power. That is because they stay very close to the king. Cupbearers tasted the king's drinks to make sure they were safe to drink. A writer named Herodotus tells us that Persians honored cupbearers. In Persia, cupbearers were very important leaders. The cupbearer to King Esarhaddon of Assyria also was the top leader in that kingdom. So, we can see that Nehemiah has a top job in the Persian Kingdom. Nehemiah's job puts him very close to the king. So, Nehemiah asks God to give him a chance to tell the king about what is happening in Judah.

Read Nehemiah 2:1–8. What do these verses tell us happens when Nehemiah prays and fasts? Fasting, as we read, is a choice someone makes to stop eating for a few days.



God always answers our prayers at the right time.

Nehemiah's prayer is answered in the month of Nisan. Nisan is the same as our month April. The year is 444 B.C. Four months have passed since Hanani and the Jews told Nehemiah the bad news about Jerusalem. For four months, Nehemiah prays and fasts. Every day Nehemiah must have thought that God did not hear him. But we must remember that God always answers our prayers at the right time. God gets the king ready to hear Nehemiah. Then the king gives Nehemiah all the help he needs.

God helps Nehemiah talk to the Persian king, Artaxerxes the 1st. Artaxerxes makes Nehemiah a governor over Judah. The Bible also says the queen is at this meeting. What does that tell us? We know that it was not usual for the queen to attend big feasts. So, it is possible that Nehemiah's meeting with the king happens during a private dinner. Nehemiah does not talk about the problems in Jerusalem first. Nehemiah starts by telling the king about why he is sad. Later, Nehemiah tells the king about Jerusalem. By that time, Nehemiah wins the king's favor. Then Nehemiah is ready to tell the king about Jerusalem.

THE KING SENDS NEHEMIAH HOME (Nehemiah 2:9, 10)

The king gives Nehemiah letters to take to Sanballat the Horonite and to Tobiah the Ammonite. Sanballat and Tobiah are two governors who live in the land across the River. The king's letters tell Sanballat and Tobiah to let Nehemiah travel safely across their land to his country. Then the king gives an order to Asaph. Asaph is in charge of the king's forest. The king tells Asaph to give Nehemiah all the wood he needs to build the city, walls, and temple gates.

Read Nehemiah 2:9, 10. These verses tell us about the attacks that will happen soon to Nehemiah and the Jews. Who will attack Nehemiah and the Jews? In what ways will these leaders attack God's servant and His people?

Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem sometime in the last six months of the year 444 B.C. King Artaxerxes's letters to the two governors cause problems in Judah. Sanballat and Tobiah try to stop Nehemiah even before he does anything! Tobiah is a Jewish name. It means "The LORD is good." (Tobiah's son Jehohanan also has a Jewish name. It means "The LORD shows mercy.") Tobiah serves as a governor of Ammon to the east of the land of Judah. Sanballat is the governor of Samaria to the north. Geshem the Arab (Nehemiah 2:18, 19) controls the land to the south. Geshem also controls the lands of Edom and Moab. So, Jerusalem has enemies on every side! The leaders of the countries around Jerusalem want nothing to do with Nehemiah. Why? Because he shows mercy to the poor and other people that these evil leaders hurt.

"Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem with the king's soldiers. The king sends the soldiers to protect Nehemiah. The governors get jealous when they see Nehemiah arrive with all those soldiers. The soldiers are a sign of the king's favor. They show the governors that the king sends Nehemiah to do important work. The governors hate the Jews. They often hurt them and are mean to them. The worst bullies are Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. From the start, these three leaders watch everything Nehemiah does. They try to find fault with his work and his actions. These men use all their power to try to stop Nehemiah's plans and his work."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 635, adapted.



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NEHEMIAH GETS READY FOR HIS WORK (Nehemiah 2:11–20)

Clearly, we can see that the Lord gives Nehemiah his work. God will give Nehemiah everything he needs to do it. Nehemiah trusts in God's promises. Nehemiah knows God will help him. He also knows that God gave him his work to do. So, he goes to work. But he takes no chances. He moves ahead carefully in his work. He prays about everything.

Nehemiah 2:11–20 shows us the things Nehemiah does to get ready to rebuild the city's wall. What things does Nehemiah do?

We can learn a lot about how to be a good leader from what Nehemiah does to get ready.

Lesson #1: Nehemiah does not tell anyone about his plans. He says, "I had not said anything to anyone about what my God had put on my heart to do for Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:12, ERV). This verse shows us something else important. As we clearly see, Nehemiah does not tell his plans to the enemy. But Nehemiah also does not tell the Jewish leaders. He goes out at night with a few men. They visit the city at night to see the work that needs to be done.

Lesson #2: Before Nehemiah takes any action, he plans all the work that needs to be done.

Lesson #3: Now Nehemiah is ready to talk about his plans. First, he tells the leaders of God's people about everything God has done so far to lead him. Next, Nehemiah adds the king's words and promise to help. Then a miracle happens. The Jews decide to support Nehemiah's decision to rebuild. Yes, the leaders from beyond the river will try to stop them. But the Jews will go forward anyway. God gets the king ready to help Nehemiah. Now God shows Nehemiah that He helps the people get ready too. The leaders of God's people agree to help Nehemiah with all their hearts. They answer him with courage and strength.



Nehemiah goes out at night with a few men. They look at the city to see the work that needs to be done.

Read Nehemiah 2:19, 20. What do these verses tell us about Nehemiah's faith?

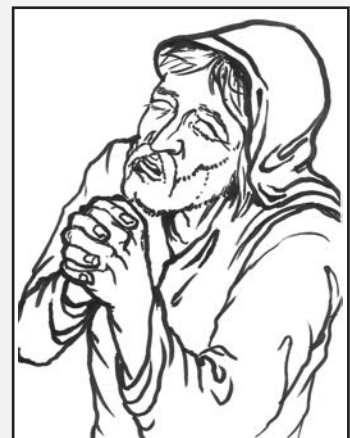
Nehemiah is not afraid to include God in everything he says and does. Nehemiah gives God glory, even when people laugh at him or do not believe in God at all.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read “A Man of Opportunity,” pages 628–634, in *Prophets and Kings*.

Nehemiah is a man of prayer. “Nehemiah often cries to God for his people. But now as Nehemiah prays, a holy plan comes into his thoughts. He decides that he will build again the walls of Jerusalem. He will help make Israel a strong country again. But first, he must get the king’s help. Then, Nehemiah must get the necessary equipment and building supplies. So, Nehemiah asks the Lord to bless him. Nehemiah prays that God will cause the king to help him. Then Nehemiah can carry out God’s plans. Nehemiah prays, ‘ “Help me today as I ask the king for help. Make him pleased with me so that he will be kind and give me what I ask for.” ’ [Nehemiah 1:11, ERV]. Nehemiah waits four months for God to answer his prayer. Then at the right time, God gives him a chance to ask the king for help.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 629, 630, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 The Bible shows us that God’s people have difficult experiences as they work for Him. Can you find an example in the Bible of a servant of God who does not have any hard times or bad experiences? What does your answer tell you about why we should not get upset about trouble or attacks while we are doing God’s work?
- 2 Read Nehemiah 2:18. What does this verse tell us about our personal stories about God? How powerful are they? Why is it important that the Jewish leaders agree to help Nehemiah and support his work?
- 3 Ezra and Nehemiah can do nothing without the king’s help. These men of God work with leaders who do not believe in God. How can we, as a church, work well with the leaders in our community? At the same time, why must we be very careful when we do work with them?
- 4 Read Nehemiah’s prayer (Nehemiah 1:1–11) in class. What does this prayer teach you that helps you grow closer to God? What does this prayer teach you about trusting God’s promises? What does it teach you about confessing your sins and giving your life fully to God?



“Nehemiah was a man of prayer.”