

Supplementary Materials for KOOL Journal for Parents/Adults

Week: 10, 26 Mar – 1 Apr 2018 (pp. 84 – 89)

Context

In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra-Nehemiah is a single work. But in our English Bible it has been divided into two separate books.

The main history contained in the book of Nehemiah covers about twelve years, viz., from the 20th to the 32nd year of Artaxerxes Langimanus, i.e. from B.C. 445 to 433. The whole narrative gives us a graphic and interesting account of the state of Jerusalem and the returned captives in the writer's times, and, incidentally, of the nature of the Persian government and the condition of its remote provinces.¹ Susa (1:1), was the royal winter residence, and the citadel or palace was a distinct quarter of the city.

Key Characters #1: Nehemiah

Nehemiah was the son of Hacaliah (1:1). The father's name enables us to distinguish Nehemiah from the men of the same name mentioned in Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 3:16. He could have come from the tribe of Levi as it should be observed (a) the mention of his 'brother' Hanani's appointment (7:2) along with the appointment of the porters, singers, and Levites; (b) the prominent consideration paid by Nehemiah to the interests of the priests and Levites. Others have suggested he could have been from the tribe of Judah due to the mention of his father's 'house' in 1:6.

Nehemiah led the third return of the exiles from Babylon to Judah, twelve years after Ezra's return. It took about three months beginning in November/December but the numbers who followed him were not mentioned. Nehemiah remained in Jerusalem for at least twelve years (5:14) though it only took him 52 days to complete the building of the walls (6:15).

Other Characters #2-#4: Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem (2:10,19)

Sanballat the Horonite was the Satrap (Governor) of Samaria under the Persians, whose secretary or minister was "**Tobiah** the servant, the Ammonite." The revival of Jerusalem would be a blow to the recent ascendancy of Samaria. **Geshem** the Arab completes the triumvirate of the leaders of the opposition to the mission of Nehemiah. Geshem was probably the leader of an Arabian company mostly in Sanballat's service. They charged Nehemiah with rebellion (2:19, 6:6).

26 Mar – 1 Apr 2018: Nehemiah 1:1 – 2: 20

- Watch videos:
 - Whiteboard Bible 10 - The Second Temple (Nehemiah), P.X.T P.X.C, Published on Feb 7, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyGhKS6I7O4>
 - Nehemiah and Ezra in **The Prophetic Connection**, C4ICanada, Published on Aug 14, 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxhpLZxulTw>

- **Review Verse of the Week: Nehemiah 2:5b**

Let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.

Date/Read	Reflection and Response (R & R)
<p>Mon. 26 Mar</p> <p>Nehemiah 1:1 – 4</p> <p>{Nehemiah 1:3-4}</p>	<p>This passage tells us how God prepared a man for a great work, and how the man prepared himself. Nehemiah prepared himself for his work by brooding over the tidings with tears, by fasting and by prayer. “No man will do worthy work at rebuilding the walls who has not wept over the ruins.”ⁱⁱ But Nehemiah went beyond brooding to put all his resources of knowledge, experience and organization to determine what should be done.</p> <p>R & R:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nehemiah felt that Israel needed a fresh start for the rebuilding that had been stalled, having once again drifted away from God and back to their old patterns of life, old materialism and old values (e.g. intermarriage, doing business on Sabbath, etc.). What kinds of things will jolt us into wanting a fresh start? • Though prayer should be a pervasive part of our lives, what are some of the more difficult events in our lives when we should seek God’s help earnestly? Throughout the New Testament, we are exhorted to pray and seek God’s help on a consistent basis, e.g. 1 Thess 5:17; Phil 4:6. <p>Note:</p> <p>Cities in the ancient world were walled for protection and symbolized strength and peace. Unwalled cities merited contempt and Nehemiah could not stand the thought that the city of God did not have walls. So he committed himself to rebuilding them.</p>
<p>Tue. 27 Mar</p> <p>Nehemiah 1:5 – 11</p> <p>{Nehemiah 1:5-11}</p>	<p>This passage can serve as a model prayer to seek God’s help when we face unusual challenges in doing God’s work: acknowledge God’s greatness (1:5a); remind God of His promises (1:5b, 8-10); confess our sins and the sins of our people (1:6) and be specific in our requests (1:11). When God’s people pray, difficult decisions fall into proper perspective, and appropriate actions follow.</p> <p>R & R:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of the four elements of Nehemiah’s model prayer do we tend to leave out? • Nehemiah was recorded in this book as having prayed eight times spontaneously as he had established an intimate relationship with God. Do we take time to cultivate a close relationship with God through times of in-depth prayer?
<p>Wed. 28 Mar</p> <p>Nehemiah 2:1 – 5</p> <p>{Nehemiah 2:1-5}</p>	<p>Since it was against Persian law to appear sad in the king’s presence, Nehemiah was frightened of the possible consequences (‘overwhelmed with fear’ in 2:2) but he found favour with King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah certainly whispered a brief prayer for wisdom (2:4b) as the opportunity presented itself to ask for the king’s permission to return and rebuilding his home city. Wisely, he did not mention Jerusalem in name as this would have embarrassed the king who had earlier ordered the work to be stopped (Ezra 4:6-23). Jerusalem was the Jews’ holy city and as Judah’s capital city, it represented Jewish national identity.</p>

	<p>R & R:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a fear holding you back from doing God’s work? Learn from Nehemiah’s example: he acknowledged his fear but committed it to God. • Nehemiah not only fasted and prayed but was prepared to seize any opportunity to further his plan (not to advance himself but God’s kingdom). He used his position as the King’s trusted servant to intercede for his people. How can we use our present positions to serve God? • Are we prepared like Nehemiah (who gave up a high position in the capital city for the uphill task of leading a stubborn and demoralized people in a shrunken, tiny Judah back to conform to God’s Law) to leave our comfort zone for whatever work He has called us to? <p>Note: As the king’s cupbearer (1:11), Nehemiah did more than just taste his food. He was the king’s executive assistant and for this job, he had to have skills to manage the king’s personnel, must be loyal and most of all have the king’s trust. On his return to Jerusalem, he was appointed the governor of Judah (5:14) and given his own residence (2:8). Nehemiah was prepared to give up an important position in the Persian court to be the governor of a minor district surrounded by hostile people. This is a measure of his commitment to God.</p>
<p>Thu. 29 Mar Nehemiah 2:6 –16 {Nehemiah 2:7-9, 11-16}</p>	<p>When we are praying and asking for God’s help, we should use our own talents and abilities to be part of the answer to our prayers. We should also carefully and deliberately plan ahead to carry out the difficult task. Nehemiah was so well prepared that he even knew the name of the person (Asaph) in charge of the forest from which he would get his timber. Upon arrival, spent three days in devotion and rest, after Ezra’s example before doing the recce cautiously alone with his mount to assess the damage and strategize before making the plan public.</p> <p>R & R:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nehemiah had no fear in asking for the king’s help. Do we dare to ask the right persons for help? • How do we strike a balance between seeking God’s divine help and being prepared to seize the opportunity when it arises? • What was Nehemiah’s response when God answered his prayer? Do you acknowledge God as your power source and giver of your gifts?
<p>Fri. 30 Mar Nehemiah 2:17–20 {Nehemiah 2:17-18}</p>	<p>When his plans were matured, Nehemiah boldly made an earnest appeal to their patriotism (2:17 – ‘so that we will no longer be in disgrace’). He related how God answered his personal prayer, which caused the people to respond enthusiastically to the good cause. Nehemiah’s reply to the swift opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem is a defiance in the name of the God (with no reference to the king’s permission yet). The closing words imply that, as in the days of Zerubbabel, the Samaritan enemies desired really to have their share in the undertaking. Nehemiah echoed Zerubbabel’s answer, but strengthens it: the Samaritans had no legal right, nor historic claim in Jerusalem.</p>

	<p>R & R:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nehemiah challenged the people with his vision. Do we share with others when God implants an idea in our mind to accomplish something for Him and trust the Holy Spirit to enlist them to help realize the vision? • Do we anticipate opposition when we embark on God’s work and how do we handle it? <p>Note: Opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem had been going on for 90 years by the Samaritans. When Nehemiah arrived in Judah, swift opposition greeted him as he was no ordinary exile but the king’s personal adviser and cup-bearer, arriving with the king’s approval to build and fortify the city. A rebuilt Jerusalem would be a threat to the authority and secure position of the Samaritan officials.</p>
<p>Sat. 31 Mar</p>	<p>Read again chapters 1 and 2.</p> <p>R & R:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why it is important to blend prayer and planning in various situations. Do we count the cost before we start on a project? (Lk 14:28-30). • Marvel at God’s sovereignty over a secular king who gave Nehemiah not only permission and protection but also provisions to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Our God is the King of all kings. Do we trust Him to lead our country through a secular government to accomplish His will?

References

<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/nehemiah/2-20.htm>

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<https://bibleprinciples.org/pf-search-book/> (search videos by book and click on Nehemiah)

Lawrence O. Richards, **The Teacher’s Commentary**, 1987, Victor Books.

Tyndale House Publishers, **Chronological Life Application Study Bible**, 2004.

ⁱ http://biblehub.com/topical/t/the_book_of_nehemiah.htm

ⁱⁱ A Reformer’s Schooling, **MacLaren's Expositions** in <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/nehemiah/1-1.htm>