

Rising From the Ruins

Prayer and Partnership

Nehemiah 1-3

Leaders Guide

It's twenty-two years since Ezra returned to Jerusalem. The temple is built but there is bad news. God's work is not finished yet. Time for a new leader.

Who is Nehemiah?

We have seen how God uses unlikely people to get His work done. He used several pagan kings of Persia (Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes) to help with the building of the temple. He calls leaders from among the faithful (Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah) to proclaim His plans and refugees and exiles (Israelites both local and from Persia) to carry out His work. Now he reaches out to another king (Artaxerxes) and another exile (Nehemiah) to take His plan one step further.

Read Nehemiah Chapter 1:1-4

If you were a reporter for the Jerusalem Journal, you would need to research your assignment. Find out the following:

Who is the story about? _____

Where was he? _____

When did the events happen? _____

From whom did he get his information? _____

What was the problem? _____

What was his reaction? _____

The Prayer

Nehemiah is a very devout Jew. You know that because his first instinct is to seek God's advice after finding out the bad news. Nehemiah's prayer is an example of how to approach God when you need help, advice, intervention, and strength. Nehemiah did not pray just once, he prayed for many days (verse 4). Let's analyze Nehemiah's prayer. Look for the following sections: a request, a confession, praise, a reminder, a plea for attention.

Read Nehemiah 1:4-11

Answer the following questions:

- List the verses that best fit the sections listed above.
 - Request _____
 - Confession _____
 - Praise _____
 - Reminder _____
 - Plea for Attention _____
- What is the purpose of Nehemiah's prayer?
- Have you ever prayed about something for a long time? What are some positive reasons might God have for not answering a prayer instantly?

The Cupbearer's Request

The last sentence in Chapter 1 tells us that Nehemiah was a cupbearer of the king. A cupbearer is more than just a servant. He actually tastes the food and drink for the king to prevent poisoning. This required loyalty on the part of the cupbearer and trust on the part of the king. Let's examine the relationship between Nehemiah and King Artaxerxes.

Read Nehemiah 2:1-10

Answer the following questions:

Level A

- How did the king know that Nehemiah needed help?
- How did Nehemiah explain what was wrong?
- Nehemiah makes a quick prayer before stating his request. Have you ever said a quick prayer before doing something difficult? How does this make Nehemiah

very human?

- What does Nehemiah ask of the king?

Level B

- What kind of relationship must Nehemiah and the king have in order for the king to recognize Nehemiah's sadness?
- Persian kings had a great respect for their ancestors and their graves. How does Nehemiah use this to state his case?
- It must be frightening to ask a king for help. What does Nehemiah do during his conversation with the king? How does it help him?
- What does he ask the king for and how practical are his requests?

Level C

- How many people do you know well enough to recognize when they are sad? What does this tell you about the relationship between Nehemiah and the king?
- Persian kings had a great respect for their ancestors and their graves. How does Nehemiah use this to state his case?
- Nehemiah takes a moment for another quick prayer right in the middle of his conversation with the king. What does that tell you about the kind of man he was?
- He asks for a leave of absence and other practical things. Were the requests that of a strategic planner or a "think on your feet" kind of person? Explain.

The Inspection

In spite of some opposition, Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem to start his project. First things first - he must inspect the walls to see the scope of the problem in order to make his plans for repairing them.

Read Nehemiah 2:11-20.

Answer the following questions:

Level A, B, and C

- Why do you think Nehemiah went out at night to do his inspection?
- What kind of damage did he find?
- What are the highlights of his report to the priests, nobles, and officials?

- How does he respond to naysayers?

Partnership

Partnership: **Definition:** the state or condition of being a partner; participation; association; joint interest. What does a partnership look like? In Nehemiah we see the entire community working together to repair the walls of Jerusalem. Community efforts are exciting. They are worthy of celebration. They are also difficult to organize and sometimes take on a life of their own. Let's look at the record of what happened in Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership.

Read Nehemiah 3.

Answer the following questions:

Level A

- Who repaired the gates? What were their everyday occupations?
- What kind of people repaired the sections between the gates? What struck you as unusual about the workers? Who didn't help?
- How do you think people were assigned their part in the project? Did you find any clues in the reading?

Level B

- How was the wall building project organized? What did you notice that surprised you?
- Organizing a large project is a big undertaking. Have you ever been a member of a group project (even a small one)? How were the various parts of the project assigned? What feelings did the participants have about their piece of the project? About the project as a whole?
- What is the value of participation in a group project? How does a cooperative partnership effort affect the participants, community, organization?
- Have you ever organized or supervised a group project? What strategies were crucial for success? What problems needed to be worked out?

Level C

- How did Nehemiah convince the community to take part in the rebuilding? (see Neh 2:17-18) What were the key points he used in his speech? How can that translate into convincing a group to take on a big task in our lives?

- Has your church and/or community participated in any large projects? What made them successful (or not)? Do you see any parallels with Nehemiah?
- If you were appointed to organize a massive project for your church, what strategies would you want to include in your planning? See Ephesians 4:1-3,16, Phil 1:27-28, Heb 13:17, Ps 127:1-2 for extra ideas.

