

## 2019 Through the Bible Reading: *Bible Study Support*

| The Book of Nehemiah                         |   |
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| Background (Who, what, why, when)            | <p>The Book of Nehemiah is written in the first person, most likely by Nehemiah himself. At the beginning of the book, we see that Nehemiah is an important official in the court of King Artaxerxes, and had the title of Cup Bearer. Even though he had remained in Persia (serving King Artaxerxes) after the Jewish exiles had been allowed to return home, Nehemiah's heart for God's people and for Judah is evident.</p> <p>The Book of Nehemiah begins in 444 B.C. and Biblical scholars place it around the time of the return of the Jewish remnant to Jerusalem.</p> <p>The book of Nehemiah takes place after the exiled people of God have returned to the Promised Land. In the book of Ezra, we see the people returning to the land, their commitment to serving God, and to the establishment of God's nation. The temple is rebuilt but the people of God are harassed and under threat from their neighbors. Far from Jerusalem, Nehemiah hears of the harassment of God's people and the broken state of the wall.</p>  |
| Interesting Facts in Nehemiah                | <p>Although the book of Esther is placed later in sequence of our Bible, scholars believe that Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah.</p>   |
| Reasonable Defense for the faith in Nehemiah | <p>What can we learn from the book of Nehemiah today?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We are to care about those things that God cares about. Even though Nehemiah was living far from his people and their homeland (Judah), he was deeply concerned with their welfare. Hearing the bad report from Hanani that the people are in "great trouble and shame" (1:3) and that the wall is broken down, Nehemiah is heartbroken. Nehemiah's love and his heart for God's people mirrors God's love and His heart for His people.</li> <li>2. We are to cultivate an intimate relationship with God through prayer. When Nehemiah is mourning and overwhelmed, he prays. (1:5-11). When he is in need of help and petitioning King Artaxerxes, he prays (2:4). When he is being ridiculed and threatened, he prays (4:4-5, 6:14). When he feels weak, he prays (6:9). When he is leading the people, he leads them in prayer (9:5-38). When he wants justice, he prays (13:29).</li> <li>3. We can be confident that God sees and will remember our faithfulness. Nehemiah was not a priest or a prophet. Instead, in today's world, he might best have been understood as businessman, bureaucrat, or administrator. He was far from what was 'happening' with his people. But Nehemiah was a faithful man, dependent and ultimately confident in his God, and God was pleased to use Nehemiah to restore and bless His people. And even though what he accomplished for God was a remarkable task, Nehemiah knew that the people would forget him, and so with confidence he asks God to remember him. (5:19, 13:14, 13:22)</li> </ol> |
| Memory Verse                                 | <p><i>"Then he said to them, 'Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'"</i> (Nehemiah 8:10 ESV)</p> <p><i>"I sent messengers to them, saying, 'I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop, while I leave it, and come down to you?'"</i> (Nehemiah 6:3 ESV)</p>  |

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| <p>Practical Application to memory verse</p>             | <p>The environment surrounding Nehemiah and his work was complex and chaotic. Enemies and naysayers harassed and attempted to distract from the work at every turn. When God calls us to a specific and significant work, we can expect the same. Nehemiah's strategy to overcome the danger and distraction was simple, steadfast focus and confidence in the primacy of the task God had called him to. When Nehemiah's (and Jerusalem's) enemies try to get Nehemiah to stop the work and come meet with them so that they can harm him, his response is simple, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop, while I leave it, and come down to you?" (6:3). How freeing and empowering it is for us to have the same response to those distractions and harassments that threaten to keep us from what God has called us to. Commit this verse to memory and recall it to your mind when distraction or division threatens to keep you from doing what God has called you to!</p>  |
| <p>Life Application from Biblical Themes in Nehemiah</p> | <p>Pray First! The book is not a long book, but we see fourteen prayers from Nehemiah in it. He was a man totally constrained, totally dependent on God's movement in his life, which he experienced through prayer. Nehemiah gives us a beautiful example of a bold and eager servant of God who, nevertheless, remains patient and unwilling to run ahead of God's plans.</p> <p>Chapter 2 provides an example of just how much of a priority Nehemiah placed on hearing from God. As the King's Cupbearer, Nehemiah is in an extraordinary position to ask the King for the permission and help that he needs to visit and rebuild Jerusalem's wall. When the King asks Nehemiah why he is so upset (2:2), Nehemiah answers openly, explaining that his homeland is in a state of disrepair (2:3). When the King hears this, he essentially responds by asking Nehemiah, "How can I help?" The temptation for Nehemiah to blurt out any number of ways the King could help must have been enormous. The earthly power of King Artaxerxes, which was now at Nehemiah's disposal, would have been remarkable. The excitement for Nehemiah at having been offered a blank check in effect must have been overwhelming. But Nehemiah's immediate response to the King's question is this, "<i>So I prayed to the God of Heaven.</i>" (2:5). It is only after Nehemiah prays to the King of Kings, that he answers King Artaxerxes's question, and asks for specific permission and help. The King provides to him what he has requested without hesitation because, Nehemiah tells us, "<i>for the good hand of my God was upon me.</i>" (2:8).</p> |