

7. Overwhelming experience with so many thousands in tears with conviction brought about by the word of God and the Holy Spirit! I think the sense of the awe of God would have been amazing!

8. They encouraged the crowd to celebrate with joy and feast together.

8a. The joy of the Lord!

9. “They should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem.” Neh. 3:15.

10. It seems 100% of the people participated, they were together for over a week and much of their time was spent listening to the reading and teaching of God’s word and celebrating the feast together.

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

CONTENTS TOPICS AND PRIMARY PASSAGES

GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY	PAGES 2 - 3
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	PAGES 4 - 8
STUDY 1 A LEADER’S PRAYER LIFE Nehemiah Chapter 1	PAGES 9 - 14
STUDY 2 PRINCIPLES IN LEADERSHIP Nehemiah Chapter 2	PAGES 15 - 20
STUDY 3 TEAMWORK Nehemiah Chapter 3	PAGES 21 - 28
STUDY 4 FACING EXTERNAL OPPOSITION Nehemiah Chapter 4	PAGES 29 - 35
STUDY 5 DEALING WITH INTERNAL DIVISION Nehemiah Chapter 5	PAGES 36 - 42
STUDY 6 WHEN ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE Nehemiah Chapter 6	PAGES 43 - 50
STUDY 7 THE GENEROUS LEADER Nehemiah Chapter 7 & 10	PAGES 51 - 57
STUDY 8 NATIONAL REVIVAL Nehemiah Chapter 8	PAGES 58 - 64
LEADERS NOTES	PAGES 65 - 80

GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

1. General Introduction

The general introduction is very helpful to read as a group before commencing the study. It will take less than five minutes to complete and will add considerable historic and cultural context.

2. Quiet Times

Consider using the booklet in your personal quiet times with the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you genuinely desire to draw closer to God and become more surrendered to His will and informed of His purposes. If you are a small group Bible study leader, encourage the people of your group to do the same.

3. Getting Started

Each study commences with the reading of the main passage and some opener questions to help people ease into the study. This section is suggested to take no more than 10 minutes.

4. Bible Study Discussion Questions

The Bible study questions are aimed at taking 60 minutes to complete. It is recommended not to spend too long on any given question but keep the study moving. Please remember that while one or two may be happy to sidetrack on one question or concept for 15 minutes, there are others who find that portion of the discussion quite dull.

STUDY 8

NATIONAL REVIVAL

Leaders Notes

1. Extremely important. Bible reading and the preaching of Bible based sermons is essential for the congregation to become strong Christians.

2. They listened attentively, just as we should when in a church service, seminar or Bible study where the word of God is being read or quoted.

3. The wooden platform was designed not only so the crowd could see Ezra, but also so that his voice would be better projected from that elevated position.

3a. Today: microphone, sound system, lighting, power point, occasionally drama, music items or film clips.

4. They entered into enthusiastic praise and worship. If our hearts are in the right place spiritually, the public reading of Scripture and preaching soaked in God's word should draw us into worship.

5. The reading and teaching of God's word is too big a responsibility to fall on just one person. Often a variety of teachers means a more diverse exploration and presentation of the Scriptures, which can be healthy.

6. The Levites wanted to make the Scriptures clear, explaining how the Old Testament related to the people's lives so the average person would have a better understanding.

7. People brought the first of their new-born cattle or sheep, crops or fruit and produce from the land in general, such as wine. It was taken to the temple as an offering.

8. 10% of all the person's produce.

8a. The Levites were also expected to tithe.

8b. The people were told not to neglect the house of their God. The tithe supported all those who worked at the temple: the Levites, ministering priests, gatekeepers and singers.

5. Application Questions

Each chapter is practical with application questions scattered throughout the study. If you are the study leader, answer these in your preparation phase or in your quiet times. To help the group share at this point you may need to get them started with your own response to the question, which could be a personal experience. Wrestling with application to life questions is often where the real spiritual growth takes place so it is important not to skip them.

6. Prayer

A healthy small group Bible study will of course pray together. Written into every study is a time of prayer at the end. As a leader bear in mind that added to the 60 minutes of Bible study discussion questions is 10 minutes of prayer to conclude your time.

7. Accompanying Audio Messages

Inspiring audio messages that are directly related to the studies are also available. The Bible study leader's preparation time is made easy by utilising motivating stories and powerful Scriptural insights from each 35-minute message. The sermons are available online at www.tbc.org.au/sermons.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Persian Empire was the largest in the world, making King Artaxerxes who Nehemiah served, the most powerful man on earth. If the Persian Kingdom was in power today at it's peak it would include Iran, Iraq; to the south of its capital Susa: Saudi Arabia, to the East: Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of India, to the north: Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, to the west: Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Israel. The Empire lasted for approximately 220 years from 549 B.C. to 330 B.C.

(Knowing the Bible.net.)

Many today are fascinated with the wealth, culture, colours, customs, architecture and mystery of the Persian Empire; this is captured in Disney's Aladdin, the fantasy romance released in 1992. God loved the Persian people of old as observed in Biblical books such as Daniel, Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah. God often used the Persian kings to fulfil His purposes. Today the Iranian people, many of whom still call themselves Persian are largely Muslim in belief. However, in the last few decades phenomenal numbers of Persians are coming to faith in Jesus, it is clear that the one true God still has great purpose for this people.

The founder of the Persian Empire was Cyrus the Great, formally king of the small state of Anshan close to the Persian Gulf. He had displaced his overlord Astyages in 549 B.C. consequently inheriting the vast Median Empire. He extended his rule far to the west into Asia Minor by defeating Croesus of Lydia in 547 B.C. In 539 B.C. Babylon fell to him without a struggle, the Jewish nation was in exile in Babylon at the time.

In 530 Cyrus went to battle in the eastern regions, only to die and be succeeded by Cambyses, his son, who in 525, with tremendous speed and skill conquered Egypt and added it to the Persian Empire. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Pages 16-17. Copyright 1979.)

STUDY 7

THE GENEROUS LEADER

Leaders Notes

1. He appoints people of worship for the temple, leaders he can trust, and aims to fill the city with more residents.
2. It was important for the community to establish their identity of being genuine descendants of Abraham. For us today it supports the fact the Bible is not a book that is unreliable and has no foundation in real events as the sceptic may state, but it is firmly established as an historical record.
3. Leaders can't encourage the community to do something if they are not personally doing it also. When leaders set the example of generosity, others often follow.
- 3a. Nehemiah was committed to worship. He wanted those in the priestly ministry to have all that was required.
4. Worship was clearly very important to them and they were very generous, extravagant even in their giving!
5. People gave of their possessions, even sold properties and houses and it was given to the church leaders; the apostles to manage in the running of the church of Jerusalem.
6. The money was given for the house of God, contributing to the various levels of worship ministries, including atonement offerings.

4. Nehemiah was confident the Lord had not sent this prophet, and so saw no reason to meet with him.

4a. It was not the place of the governor to go into the temple whenever he wanted. Only the Levites, that is the priests had that privilege. (The temple courts would have been acceptable for lay people, but that was not where he had been asked to meet.)

4b. He knew the word of God, that it was not appropriate for him to enter the temple and he practiced spiritual discernment. Likewise we need a good knowledge of the Scripture and to be a spiritually discerning Christian.

5. He mocked them and sought to threaten them.

6. Some may have felt there was financial benefit to staying in a good relationship with him, and some had family ties.

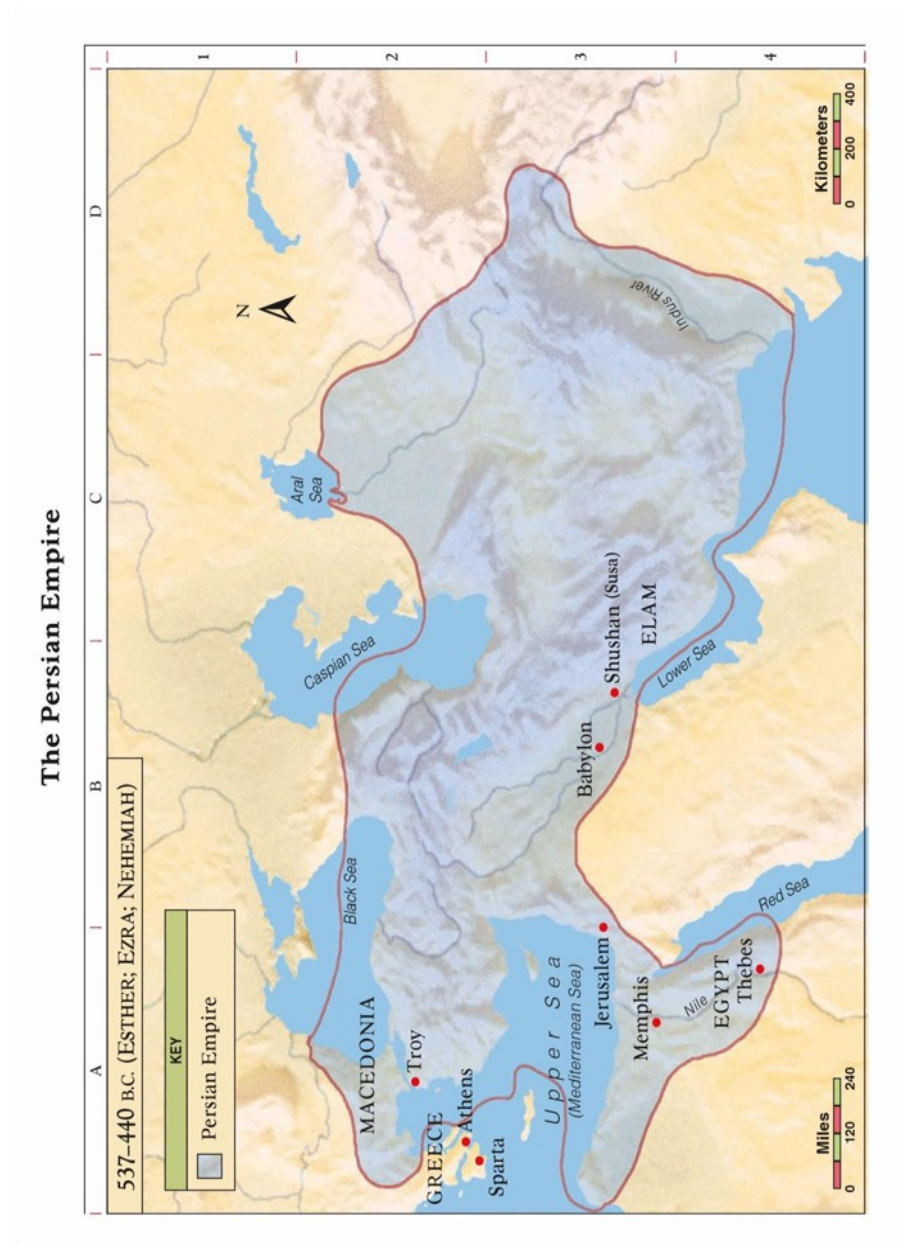
6a. He would have felt very unappreciated and probably surprised that the Jews could be so foolish to support someone who had no interest in them as a nation.

6b. Often disunity in churches is a direct result of Satan getting in the ears of some Christians and causing them to become critical and unsupportive of the very vision the Holy Spirit is endeavouring to carry out. Christians need to be spiritually alert.

7. Tobiah and some of the nobles of Judah are masquerading as angels of light but really, they are opposing the work of God. The problem is that some of the Jews have been deceived by them.

8. Nehemiah's enemies lost their confidence and became afraid!

8a. They believed God himself had helped the Jews.



Cambyes was succeeded by Darius the 1st (521-486). The Prophet Daniel was the most empowered official working for Darius. When Daniel was miraculously delivered from the lion's den, King Darius potentially came to believe in the one true creator God, the God of Israel.

Daniel 6:25-28

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

‘May you prosper greatly!

²⁶ ‘I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

‘For he is the living God
and he endures for ever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.

²⁷ He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.
He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions.’

²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

The adjacent picture of the fortified wall (although not the actual excavated wall of 445 B.C.) provides a helpful example of what the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah looked like.

STUDY 6

WHEN ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

Leaders Notes

1. With the work of the walls almost complete he could not afford the time. But more importantly he knew it was a trap; a chance to have him killed.

1a. Nehemiah was not distracted from the vision God had given him, likewise we should not get distracted by Satan from the work we are involved with for Jesus, rather stay focused on the vision He has given us.

2. It was to ensure that the malicious rumours it contained would sooner, rather than later become public property. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Copyright 1979. Page 108).

2a. It was to cause word to get back to King Artaxerxes that he has a Jewish revolt taking place; and so the King would have called Nehemiah back to find out the truth of this accusation, and as a result the work of fortifying the city of Jerusalem would cease. It was also sent to discredit him amongst his own people, for there had not been any agreement of Nehemiah being appointed king.

2b. He will not be intimidated but simply speaks the truth of what is genuinely happening.

2c. When active in the work of God, Satan will try and turn people against you. Our response: simply speak the truth.

3. He is discerning of people's motives as he is a man of prayer. God gives him that discernment.

4. The Jews were charging interest on their loans to fellow Jews and this was not permitted in Old Testament Law. Nehemiah valued the teaching of Scripture and aimed to live by it.

4a. The Scriptures often give helpful insights that are fair and reasonable. It also honours the Lord; we are putting Him first and not simply being swept along by the culture of our time.

5. He created a solution and challenged those who were at fault according to Scriptural practice to immediately give back acquired Jewish property and to stop charging interest.

6. They confirmed they would act on Nehemiah's request and took an oath that they would not go back on their word.

7. They were very pleased and took the opportunity to praise the Lord!

8. Nehemiah is modelling living with less extravagance; leaders should practice what they are calling others to do. It would lack integrity if he instructed the nobles and wealthy to give back lands and stop charging interest, if he was not also prepared to make some material sacrifice.



The next Persian King is Xerxes (486-465) who features in the book of Esther. Which brings us up to King Artaxerxes (464-423) who is the reigning king during Nehemiah's time. The Persian Empire continues for about another century until they are conquered by the Greeks under the leadership of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Inter-Varsity Press. Derek Kidner. Pages 17-18. Copyright 1979.)

Persian Kings 549-330

King	Approximate Reign
Cyrus the Great	549-531
Cambyses	529-521
Darius the First	521-486
Xerxes the First	485-465
Artaxerxes the First	464-423
Darius the Second	423-404
Artaxerxes the Second	404-359
Artaxerxes the Third	359-338
Arses	338-336
Darius the Third	336-330

(Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Inter-Varsity Press. Derek Kidner pages 16-19. Copyright 1979.)

STUDY 5

DEALING WITH INTERNAL DIVISION

Leaders Notes

1. Many needed food (Neh. 5:2). Some had to mortgage their properties during a time of famine (v3). The Persian taxes were substantial, some had to even borrow money to pay them (v4). Others had sold able bodied sons and daughters for slavery to fellow Jews - their own "countrymen" (v5).

2. He was angered by the exploitation because he cared about the Jewish people.

2a. The book of Leviticus makes it clear the Hebrew people were not to make slaves of their fellow people. Nehemiah saw that the Jews were breaking this commandment and exploiting their own countrymen!

2b. He considered the problem, confronted those involved, and called a meeting to deal with it.

3. First step is to go to the person you have a problem with. If that doesn't work involve one or two other appropriate people. If that still doesn't work, it may have to be dealt with in a church membership meeting.

3b. As the Matthew passage states, the two of you may be able to sort it out, possibly quite easily. The danger of involving others before you have gone to the person is that it may complicate the situation and you are in danger of gossiping rather than genuinely trying to restore the relationship.

6. He told them not to fear but remember the Lord; in other words, get your eyes off the problems and back on God. He instilled fresh confidence in the workers hearts.

7. The word of God is the Christians sword, particularly when used guided by the Holy Spirit.

7a. Serving God however He leads, in a whole variety of ministries. We know laboring for Him is not in vain.

7b. Whatever ministry or service to God we are involved in, it will be more effective if we learn to fight with the sword of the Spirit. The knowledge of God’s word, using it in prayer and quoting it to fight against spiritual attack are powerful weapons.

8. Although Nehemiah uses military strategy, his primary confidence is placed in the Lord stating, “Our God will fight for us!”

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 1

A LEADER’S PRAYER LIFE

Nehemiah Chapter 1

Introduction

In this first chapter we gain some very helpful insight into Nehemiah’s personal prayer life. Here we can discern principles concerning what a Christian leader’s prayer life should include. He also gives us a pattern of how to pray when wanting a nation to be restored under God: politically, economically and spiritually.

Opening Discussion Questions

How important do you consider prayer in the Christian life?

Have you ever been moved to tears when praying?

What was it about?

Did you receive a positive answer?

As a group, read Nehemiah Chapter 1:1-11.

Nehemiah 1:1 “The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa.”

The month of Kislev: mid-November to mid-December 445 B.C. (Winter).
The twentieth year: refers to the 20th year of King Artaxerxes' reign who was ruler over the vast Persian empire from 464 to 423 B.C. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Inter-Varsity Press. Raymond Brown. Page 14. Copyright 1998.)

Susa: Capital of the Persian Empire and the site of the king's winter palace (In Southwest Iran east of the Tigris River). (Ezra and Nehemiah, Christ Centred Exposition. James M. Hamilton Jr. Holman Reference. Page 99 . Copyright 2014.)

1. Many sceptics argue the Bible is nothing more than vague outdated religious sayings and is not rooted in history. How could you use Nehemiah 1:1 to refute that idea?

STUDY 4

FACING EXTERNAL OPPOSITION

Leaders Notes

1. They are endeavoring to intimidate the Jews to stop the work.

1a. In Nehemiah's position as a chief adviser to the Persian King, he would have been very aware of the various nations that were a part of the Persian Empire and the nature and intent of the leadership of those nations. The fact that he examined the city of Jerusalem under cover of darkness reveals he was anticipating opposition. (Neh. 2:11-12)

2. He prayed aggressively, using prayer as a spiritual weapon.

3. They did not give up, rather they kept on with the project, working with all their heart.

4. Nehemiah takes strategic action. He posted a guard day and night and particularly paid attention to the most vulnerable places; the lowest parts of the walls where he stationed people armed with swords, spears and bows. But they continue the enterprise, working long days.

5. Although the physical work was substantial, the threats from Sanballat, Tobiah and the Arabs must have been taking a toll and draining the Jews emotionally which would have affected their physical condition.

5a. They are repeating the negative words and threats of Sanballat and Tobiah.

5. It is good to serve God in an area in keeping with your spiritual gifts or natural abilities. But any Christians who have a servant heart are willing to do whatever it takes to get the job of building God's Kingdom done.

6. Parents modelling doing the Lord's work with the children is not only a good example for the kids, but also other Christians and a witness to the world. Of course, it is not always possible and does not always work.

7. Malkijah was a district ruler but not concerned to take on the least prestigious job. Humility makes a great team player.

8. People who are negative or apathetic can deflate the passion of a team. Those who are enthusiastic build team energy! Their positive attitude can be infectious.

9. It was logical to save travel time but also, he could guarantee that the workers would have done a thorough job as it was protecting their own home.

Read Nehemiah 1:2

2. Who or what does the "Jewish Remnant" refer to? Read Ezra 7:7-9 to provide insight.

3. What is significant about the fact that the wall was broken down? (Neh. 1:3)

4. What do we learn about Nehemiah's heart for his nation in verse 4?

4a. What is particularly on your heart to pray for at the moment?

Invite two or three to share and these needs could be mentioned in prayer at the end of the study during the final prayer time.

5. In verse 5, how did Nehemiah approach God as he started to pray? (Note that when we read “LORD” the word in all capitals, it means that in the original Hebrew text God’s personal name “Yahweh” was used.)

6. What is Nehemiah confessing and who does he include? (Neh. 1:6-7)

7. Reflect upon Nehemiah 1:8-9 and Deuteronomy 30:1-5

What principle is Nehemiah using in his prayer life here?

8. Examine Nehemiah 1:10-11. Nehemiah’s prayer finishes with a specific request. What success is Nehemiah asking God for?

STUDY 3

TEAMWORK

Leaders Notes

1. If spiritual leaders are active in God’s work and setting the example of working as a team, it can positively influence the whole community.

2. Yes, when people are focused on the Lord, it leaves less room for ego that often creates division. Genuine worship is a unifying reality.

3. The town of Tekoa was approximately 20 kilometres from Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem will clearly not protect their town. But others doing the work of the walls including the working class of Tekoa, also had their hometowns outside the walls of Jerusalem. It is likely the nobles simply felt that menial tasks were below their dignity. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series . Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 66-67. Copyright 1998.)

3a. Nehemiah probably did not assume everyone would engage in the work. He may have thought that it was not worth his energy trying to get those unwilling involved. Similarly, church leaders should have realistic expectations; not everyone will be involved in ministry.

4. Jericho (Neh.3:2), Gibeon and Mizpah (v7), Zanoah (v13), Beth Hakkerem (v14), Beth Zur (v16) and Keilah (v18).

4a. They demonstrate a servant heart, for the good of others and their nation; and perhaps in worship to God they did the work. We Christians today should carry the same attitude as we serve in the local church or para-church organisation.

6. They enthusiastically supported the vision. They got behind it as Nehemiah highlighted the need - the terrible state of the city, it would have been a felt concern of most of the Jews. He also highlighted the fact that the earthly authority, King Artaxerxes was supportive and more importantly, the heavenly authority God was supportive.

7. An effective leader is not deterred by opposition to the vision. Rather Nehemiah drew attention to the reality that he believed God himself would give him and the Jews success.

8. Any leader aiming to achieve a vision requires effective teams to see it realised. Mobilising teams is essential to achieving a vision. One person can't do it all.

8a. Why is it important to pray specifically at times?

“Cupbearer to the king”

Writing in the same century as Nehemiah, the Greek historian Herodotus explains that the cupbearer's office was highly esteemed among the Persian people. The wine steward was a man of recognised dignity in court circles, entirely trustworthy, the king's confidant and next in rank to princes. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 41. Copyright 1998.)

Read Nehemiah Chapter 2:1-5.

When Nehemiah commenced praying and fasting it was the month of Kislev which is mid-November to mid-December 445 B.C. (Neh. 1:1). When Nehemiah brought an important request to King Artaxerxes it was the month of Nisan which is mid-March to mid-April 444 B.C. and the beginning of the Persian and Jewish New Year (Neh. 2:1). Both are reckoned to fall within the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 84 & 86. Copyright 1979.)

9. After Nehemiah had been praying for 4-5 months, he then took action. Why is it important to act on our prayers?

9a. Do you think he felt apprehensive in approaching the king with his request? Why?

The following is a summary of five broad principles Nehemiah used when praying. Conclude your time by utilizing these principles and spending the last 10 or 15 minutes of your time praying. You may choose to pray for your nation or the city where you live. Another option is your church or a specific ministry. After you have finished praying, be mindful of part E. Do you need to act upon any of your prayers?

- A: Pray in the awe of God (Neh. 1:4-6a).
- B: Confess sin (national, historic and personal) (Neh. 1:6b-7).
- C: Claim God's promises (Neh. 1:8-9).
- D: Pray specifically (Neh. 1:10-11).
- E: Act on your prayers (Neh. 2:1-5).

Study Notes:

STUDY 2

PRINCIPLES IN LEADERSHIP

Leaders Notes

1. Nehemiah communicates to the king that he wants to go to Judah and rebuild the city of Jerusalem, this is key to seeing the Jews re-established as a nation.
2. He arranged for documents so he may have safe-conduct; documents giving him the freedom to use the timber of the king's forests which would be necessary for beams for the many city gates and for some portions of the city wall and residences. Also, officers and cavalry to accompany him.
3. He may have discerned that the timing was not yet right to cast the vision of what God had put on his heart. As he was an important official, he did not want those outside of the Jewish nation to know his plans. He knew other nations may be opposed to the rebuilding of the city.
4. When later casting the vision, he wanted to be sure he had done some thorough research and had all his facts correct.
5. The Babylonian army had destroyed Jerusalem; it happened as a result of the kingdom of Judah rejecting the word of God for many years, one of the worst examples of this being King Manasseh.

6. He confesses sins, past and present. He includes the people of Israel, his family and himself. His confession includes not obeying the Lord's commands, as confession of sin should include not only what we have done in wickedness, but also what good thing we have not done in disobedience!

7. He is claiming a promise from the word of God, pertinent to the situation he finds himself in.

8. He wants King Artaxerxes to grant him permission to go to Jerusalem and help the Jewish people be re-established as a nation. (Neh. 2:5)

8a. As important as general prayers or big picture prayers are, we must also pray specifically. For example, instead of simply asking the Lord to save the lost people of my city, pray specifically by name for some of your lost friends or work colleagues.

9. If we are able to act upon our prayers but choose not to, it would suggest we are not genuinely committed to the very thing we are requesting. God often wants us to be part of the solution to the answer of our prayers.

9a. It was not considered appropriate for servants to the king to show negative personal emotions; a breach of etiquette. Such a display a Persian king may punish. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kinder. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 87. Copyright 1979.)

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 2

PRINCIPLES IN LEADERSHIP

Nehemiah Chapter 2

Introduction

Nehemiah is an important official to King Artaxerxes; he is the king's confidant and next in rank to the princes. He has worked closely with the king and would have observed him practice many leadership principles. Artaxerxes has been in power for approximately 20 years and will remain in his position for a further 20 plus years. He is an experienced king, managing the greatest empire on earth at that time. It would have taken extraordinary skill to do this well. God has given Nehemiah the opportunity to witness tremendous leadership principles being put into practice. He will now exercise what he has learnt as he endeavours to re-establish and govern the nation Israel.

Opening Discussion Questions

"Everything rises and falls on Leadership" - John Maxwell

Do you agree with this famous quote from Maxwell's book; "21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership"? Why or Why not?

Do you think Leadership is a gift or can it be learned?

Or can it be a gift for some but learned by anyone committed to developing themselves?

Maxwell adds to his statement...

“Everything rises and falls on leadership, but knowing how to lead is only half the battle. Understanding leadership and actually leading are two different activities. (John C. Maxwell Quotes. Brainy Quote Website.)

Read Nehemiah 2:4-20

1. In Chapter 1 we see Nehemiah deep in prayer and God gives him a vision to fulfil. In brief, what is that vision? (Neh. 2:4-6)

2. Read Nehemiah 2:7-9. It is one thing to get a vision, it is another to see that vision resourced. List some of the things Nehemiah organised.

STUDY 1

A LEADER'S PRAYER LIFE

Leaders notes

1. The opening verse of the Book of Nehemiah provides a wealth of historic information. The reigning king, date of event and location. All verifiable in other literature. Most serious historic scholars would confirm this. The text of the Hebrew Bible was copied with a high degree of accuracy from the time of the first century. (Evidence that Demands a Verdict - Josh McDowell, Sean McDowell. Thomas Nelson Publishers. Page 122. Copyright 2017.)

2. Ezra and many others had left Susa to return to Jerusalem in the 7th year of the king, some 13 years before Nehemiah received information regarding Jerusalem in 458 B.C. These people and those who had arrived earlier under Zerubbabel's leadership were referred to as the "Jewish remnant."

3. At this time in history cities required robust defensive walls to protect them from invading armies. Without walls even a group of bandits could raid the city. The completed walls would signify the Jews were once again a nation.

4. He was deeply moved about their plight, he cared for them, moved to tears, fasting and prayer.

5. He came with a sense of deep respect, calling Him "awesome" and "great"; viewing Him as the "God of heaven" not just the God of the Jews. He also comes with a sense of intimacy using God's personal name Yahweh (LORD) and referring to Him as one who makes covenants of love.

How could you get the Bible more deeply into your life?

Tick the boxes you plan to include:

- ☐ Personal quiet times in the Bible.
- ☐ Making listening to the preaching of God's word at church a priority.
- ☐ Joining a small group Bible study.
- ☐ Listening to the Bible online or on CD.
- ☐ Completing a Bible college subject.
- ☐ Going to conferences with Bible based preachers.
- ☐ Watching or listening to sermons on YouTube
- ☐ Enjoying movies that are accurate portrayals of Bible stories.

Conclude your time by praying for a city-wide revival, knowing that a great turning back to God's word will be key.

Study Notes:

2a. Are you active in resourcing your churches' vision? Do you give of your time, finance and gifts? Share how you are currently involved or plan to be involved.

3. Reflect upon Nehemiah 2:11-12. Why hadn't Nehemiah yet told the Jews the vision that God had given him? Why did he examine the city of Jerusalem at night?

4. Read Nehemiah 2:13-16. Why do you think it was important for Nehemiah to do some research, and examine the state of the walls and city for himself?

5. Who was it that had destroyed the walls and city of Jerusalem and why? Consider 2 Kings 25:8-10 and 24:1-4.

6. Read Nehemiah 2:17-18. What was the people's response as Nehemiah cast his vision? Why do you think they responded this way?

6a. Do you feel supportive of your local church vision and ministries? Is there an area of leadership that you could volunteer for, to help see the vision realised?

In the next passage we read of three opposing influences:

- Sanballat the Horonite: Governor of Samaria.
- Tobiah the Ammonite: Probably Governor of Ammon and a member of an influential Jewish family.
- Geshem the Arab: Leader of a quite powerful group of Arab communities.

(Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 18. Copyright 1979.)

7. Review Nehemiah 2:19-20. What do you notice about Nehemiah's response to those who stand in opposition to the vision?

How would you feel about such a phenomena taking place in the municipality or city where you live?

In summary we have learnt 10 great principles about Gods word.

Five principles when sharing God's word:

- A. When sharing God's word, read it aloud (Neh. 8:1-3a).
- B. When sharing God's word, use aids to help (Neh. 8:4-5).
- C. When sharing God's word, use a team to teach (Neh. 8:7).
- D. When sharing God's word, explain it and apply it (Neh. 8:8).
- E. When sharing God's word, encourage people to pass it on (Neh. 8:13-15).

Five responses to receiving God's word:

- A. Your response to God's word: listen attentively (Neh. 8:3b).
- B. Your response to God's word: exuberant praise and reverent worship (Neh. 8:6).
- C. Your response to God's word: repent of sin (Neh. 8:9).
- D. Your response to God's word: joyfully celebrate (Neh. 8:10-12).
- E. Your response to God's word: throw yourself into the full revival experience! (Neh. 8:13-15).

The reading of Scripture on the second day (Neh.8:13) reminded the people that halfway through this seventh month they were to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This was one of the three most important feasts, the others being the Passover and Pentecost. The idea was to make temporary dwellings, celebrate the harvest God had blessed people with and focus on worship, the holy Scriptures and fellowship. A bit like an extended version of a modern-day church camp! (Unger's Bible Dictionary, Merrill F. Unger. Moody Press Chicago. Copyright 1985. Page 359.)

9. Consider Nehemiah 8:13-15. Having discovered or been reminded of an important teaching from Scripture, what were those who had learnt that truth encouraged to do?

10. Read Nehemiah 8:16-18. What percentage of the Jewish nation participated in the described event? How long did it last? What did they spend their time doing?

10a. During historic revivals church services often run daily, many people greatly reduce their hours of work, there is a tremendous focus on God's word, worship and prayer. God's truths are shared throughout the whole community. The whole nation of Jews had become deeply God conscience!

8. Read Nehemiah 3:1-5. Here we see examples of teamwork taking place. Why is mobilising a team or teams to achieve the vision important in leadership?

8a. Are you currently a part of a ministry team? How are you involved?

If you are not yet involved in a ministry team, ask your small group where they think you could fit and be a team player in building the greatest kingdom on earth; God's Kingdom!

In summary, we observe 7 principles Nehemiah puts into practise. The effective leader:

- A. Receives a vision from God (Neh. 2:4-6).
- B. Resources the vision (Neh. 2:7-9).
- C. Knows when to share the vision (Neh. 2:11-12).
- D. Knows how to research the vision (Neh. 2:13-16).
- E. Is not deterred by opposition to the vision (Neh. 2:17-18).
- F. Inspires people to believe the vision (Neh. 2:19-20).
- G. Mobilises teams to achieve the vision (Neh. 3:1-5).

In conclusion, consider some of these questions of application:

- Do some of these 7 principles need to be more apparent in your local church?
- Is there one or two of these areas you need to pray for regarding a ministry you are involved in?
- Is there an area of leadership or ministry that you have been asked to consider but you have not yet responded?
- Could the Lord be calling you to take on a leadership responsibility?

Finish with a time of prayer considering the leadership principles covered and the final application questions.

Study Notes:

6. Read Nehemiah 8:8. What did the Levites endeavour to do as they opened the Scriptures?

7. Reflect upon Nehemiah 8:9. It seems the word of God has brought conviction of sin, and a great weeping with tears of repentance has come over the crowd. Nehemiah 7:66 indicates that there were probably more than 40,000 Jews present. This is a classic scene of a national spiritual revival! What do you think it would have felt like to be there?

8. Read Nehemiah 8:10-12. After Ezra and the Levites can see the people have deeply repented, what do they encourage them to do?

8a. What are the people told will be their strength?

3. Examine Nehemiah 8:4-5. What sort of aid had been created to assist in the communication of God's word and why?

3a. What aids do you consider useful in the communication of God's word today?

4. Consider Nehemiah 8:6. After the reading of God's word, how did the crowd respond? What do we learn from this?

5. Examine Nehemiah 8:7. It seems likely that after a substantial time of reading the Scriptures, Ezra then invited a team of Levites to instruct or teach the people. Why is it important to have a team of teachers or Bible study leaders?

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 3

TEAMWORK

Nehemiah Chapter 3

Introduction

Jerusalem was considered a large city, and because many roads converged there, it required many gates. The wall on each side of these heavy wooden gates was taller and thicker so soldiers could stand guard to defend the gates against attack. Sometimes two stone towers guarded the gate. In times of peace, the city gates were hubs of activity – city council was held there, and shop keepers set up their wares at the entrance. Building the city walls and gates was not only a military priority, but a boost for trade and commerce and would help establish the nation as a worshipping community.

During the following study not every verse will be referenced as the chapter is quite long; approximately the same length as the previous two chapters combined.

Opening Discussion Questions

Share a positive or negative memory concerning working with a team.

What made it good?

What made it difficult?

As a group, read Nehemiah 3:1-16

1. In Nehemiah 3:1a we read “Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.” The first people mentioned to commence work were the nation’s spiritual leaders. Why is it important that spiritual leaders set the example of teamwork?

The first gate to be mentioned that work commenced upon, was the sheep gate. However, this was not a gate for the farmers to bring in their herds to sell in Jerusalem. Rather it was an entrance for the perfect lambs without blemish to be taken for sacrifice. This gate was positioned near the temple. It was clear that Nehemiah was making sure worship to God was a priority. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 64. Copyright 1998.)

2. Read Nehemiah 3:1. When worship is given a priority do you think teams function better? Why?

What are the ways you try to get the Bible into your life?

What do you find easier, reading God’s word or living God’s word?

As a group read Nehemiah 8:1-18

In these opening verses we notice that Nehemiah is happy to step out of the limelight and have appropriate leaders move into their public roles; yet another positive character quality of Nehemiah. Ezra is the key player in chapter eight. He is the author of the book of Ezra and served as both a scribe and priest, in Hebrew his name meant “help.” (Zondervan NIV. Exhaustive Concordance, Second Edition. Edward W. Goodrick & John R. Kohlenberger 111. Zondervan. Copyright 1999. Page 1463.)

1. Consider Nehemiah 8:1-3a. Wow, six hours straight of listening to God’s word. How important do you consider the public reading of Scripture, or quoting from the Bible? Why do you come to that conclusion?

2. Read 8:3b. How did the people respond to the reading of God’s word and how do we apply that today?

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 8

NATIONAL REVIVAL

Nehemiah Chapter 8

Introduction

As we have journeyed through this significant time in the life of Nehemiah, we have covered some fantastic principles. We observed a leader’s prayer life, examined methods Nehemiah used in leadership, his mobilizing of teams, the strategy he employed when facing external opposition or dealing with internal division, when all hell broke loose, he pushed on to victory. We witnessed his great generosity and how he motivated others to be the same. After an extraordinary offering of gold and silver for the temple ministry, we now witness an outbreak of spiritual revival!

Chapter eight is an appropriate climax to conclude our study in the life of Nehemiah. By the transforming power of God’s word Nehemiah leads his people into a wonderful national revival. People are up at dawn each morning to listen to the word of God being read and taught. Everybody stopped their regular work for over a week, and many camped around the temple. Thousands repented with tears as God’s word brought conviction. People responded to God with reverent worship, exuberant praise and celebrated His goodness together. A nation is transformed by the holy Scriptures. This week we learn 5 principles concerning sharing God’s word and 5 principles about responding to God’s word.

Opening Discussion Questions

3. Consider Nehemiah 3:5 & 9. Both references mention rulers or nobles, but their attitudes were quite different. Why do you think the Nobles of Tekoa wouldn’t work?

3a. We do not see Nehemiah insisting that the nobles of Tekoa do the work. What do we learn from Nehemiah here?

4. Survey Nehemiah 3:2, 7, 13, 14, 16, & 18. Make a list of the places people came from.

Many volunteers came from towns or districts outside of the walls of Jerusalem. They had their own fields to cultivate, livestock to protect, farms, workshops or trades to be maintained. It was of little direct or immediate benefit to them if the walls of Jerusalem were repaired. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 66. Copyright 1998.)

4a. What do we learn from the attitude of those who travelled to labour on the walls of Jerusalem?

5. Read Nehemiah 3:8. Hananiah was in the profession of making perfume. He would not have been used to roughing up his hands on bricks. Building a wall was not in keeping with his gifts. Does effective teamwork often require people to operate outside their area of gifting? Why?

5a. Is there an area of ministry that requires more volunteers at your local church? What are those ministries?

5b. Do you feel you need to be gifted in those areas before you would get involved? Why?

Study Notes:

8b. What was the final challenge to the people as to why they should tithe in the last part of verse 39, and who did these tithes support?

In conclusion, we have learnt from chapters 7 and 10 a whole variety of ways the Jews of Nehemiah's time practiced generosity; giving to the work of God and the ministries operating from the temple:

- A. God calls leaders to set the example of generous giving (Neh. 7:70).
- B. God calls his people at times to extraordinary levels of financial giving (Neh. 7:71-72).
- C. God calls people to a shekel offering, an annual offering to support the house of the Lord (Neh. 10:32-33).
- D. God calls people to a first fruits offering, when the Lord has blessed you with new resources (Neh. 10:35-37a).
- E. God calls people to tithe, to give 10% of their resources (Neh. 10:37b-39, Lev. 27:30-34).

You may be thinking, this is too complicated, all these different types of offerings. The most common one generous people commit to is the tithe. How challenged do you feel about putting Jesus first in your finances by tithing?

Do you find yourself saying there is no way I could afford to tithe? You may already be tithing; do you feel the Holy Spirit could be prompting about also giving in one of the other listed formats?

Close your time praying for your churches' finances, ministry finances and missionary finances. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to have faith to be more generous in his work and for God's house.

6. Read Nehemiah 3:12. Do you think where possible it is good to involve family members in the same ministry team? Why?

6a. Can you think of examples in your local church of families that do this?

Dung Gate - "Sha'ar Ashpoth" is the Hebrew name for dung gate, which literally means 'Gate of Garbage'. When the first temple still existed in Jerusalem, all the garbage and ash from the sacrifices were taken out through this gate; it was also used for the removal of general waste from the city. It was located at the southernmost part of the wall of Jerusalem and therefore the furthest gate from the temple, which was in the north of the walled city.

7. Read Nehemiah 3:14. Repairing the dung gate was the least prestigious work to be involved in. What do we learn from Malkijah about teamwork?

8. Consider Nehemiah 3:20. Do you think zeal or enthusiasm helps build an effective team? Why?

9. Reflect upon Nehemiah 3:23, 28 & 30. Why did Nehemiah organise many of the people to reconstruct the walls of Jerusalem near where they lived?

In summary, we have learnt:

- A. Spiritual leaders should set the example of teamwork (Neh. 3:1a).
- B. When worship is given priority, teams function better (Neh. 3:1).
- C. Effective team leaders have realistic expectations (Neh. 3:5).
- D. Good teamwork may require people to operate outside of their area of gifting (Neh. 3:8).
- E. Where possible, involve family as a part of your team (Neh. 3:12).
- F. Humility makes a great team player (Neh. 3:14).
- G. Enthusiasm builds team energy (Neh. 3:20).

In a final time of prayer, consider one or two of the teamwork principles you would like the Holy Spirit to develop more in your life.

Ask the Lord to raise up volunteers for the various ministries in your church.

7. Read Nehemiah 10:35-37a. In brief how would you describe a first fruits offering, and where was it given?

7a. Most people in our cities today don't have crops or cattle but we are blessed by God with resources. I prayed for a young lady who deeply wanted a position she had applied for. She got the position and was so grateful to the Lord Jesus that she gave all her first month's pay in the church collection as what she called a "first fruits offering." Can you think of other examples that might match the concept of a first fruits offering?

8. Examine Nehemiah 10:37b-39. What percentage of a person's produce was a tithe? Check Leviticus 27:30-34 to confirm your answer.

8a. Were the Spiritual leaders the Levites, expected to tithe too?

5. What sort of examples of extravagant giving do we observe in the New Testament? (Acts 4:32-37.)

5a. How important is generosity in the church today? Are you committed to giving to the church offering and/or supporting overseas missions?

6. Read Nehemiah 10:32-33. A Shekel was an average month's wage. In 2019 in Australia the average salary was \$74,563 per annum, excluding overtime. (NIV Study Commentary. Zondervan. Page 710. www.livingin-australia.com.) This means the monthly income would be \$6,213. A third of this is \$2,071; equivalent to a third of a shekel offering. What did this Jewish annual offering go towards?

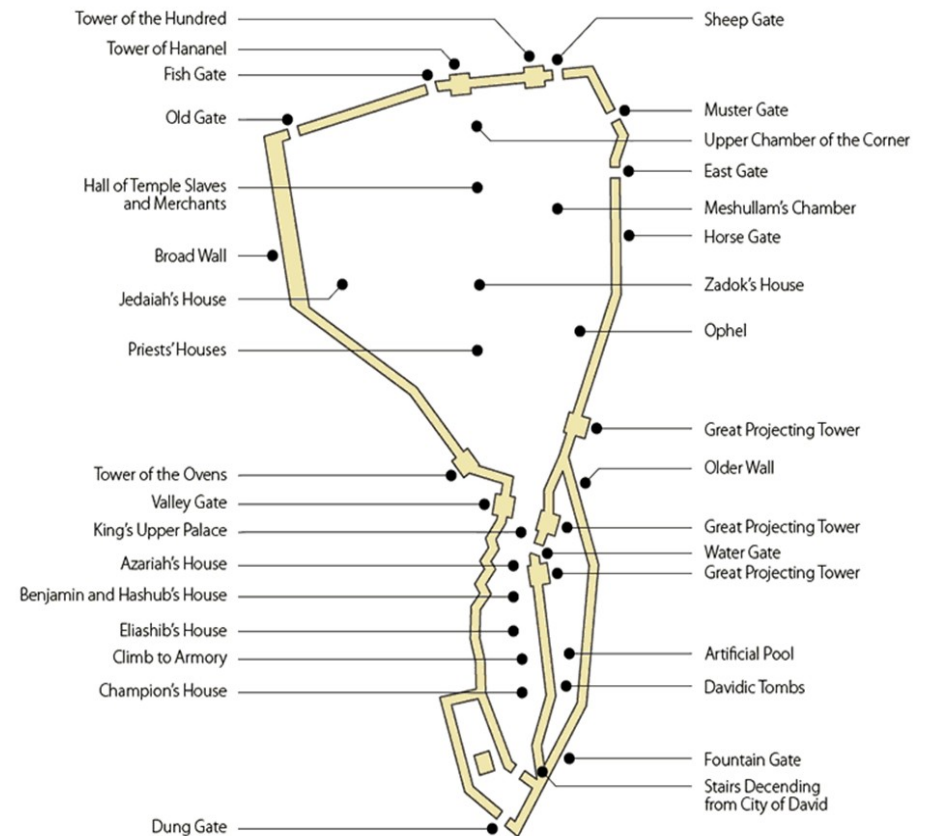
6a. For many years I gave my whole tax return as an "annual shekels offering". Can you think of something else that may fit the category of a shekels offering?

Does your church have a list of team ministries that you could be involved in?

Would you be willing to prayerfully consider becoming a team player and joining a ministry group?

Is there a team leader you should talk to about this next Sunday?

Jerusalem's Wall in Nehemiah's Day



Study Notes:

3. Nehemiah was a wealthy man, but this level of giving was extraordinary! Why is it important that leaders set the example of generous giving?

3a. Nehemiah also paid for many golden bowls to be used at the temple and hundreds of priest's garments. What does this tell us about Nehemiah?

Silver per kilogram in Australia 2019 Perth Mint would buy for \$680.

4,200 minas of silver = 2,300 Kilos

2,300 kg of silver x 680 = \$1,564, 000

(Perth Mint Website.)

40, 000 drachmas of gold = 344 kg

344 kg x 65,000 = \$22,360,000

(Gold Eagle Empowering Investors Website. NIV Study Bible Commentary. Zondervan. Page 677.)

4. Examine Nehemiah 7:71-72. According to the above research the Jewish community, including the governor's offering, gave approximately \$24,483,000. Over 24 million you might say in a single special offering! This money was for the ministries of the temple and maintenance thereof. What does this tell about the Jewish community?

Can you think of an occasion when you gave a generous gift? How did it make you feel?

As a group, read Nehemiah 7:1-5, 66-73, 10:32-39.

1. Read Nehemiah 7:1-5. Now that the city's defensive walls are complete, what are Nehemiah's next priorities?

2. Read Nehemiah 7:5-7 & 66-69 (verses 8-65 are purely a genealogical record). Why was this record important at the time, and why would God choose to include this in the Bible?

Consider Nehemiah 7:70. 1,000 drachmas of gold is equivalent to 8.6 kilograms. 24 karat gold in Australia in 2019 was valued at \$65,000 per kg. multiplied by 8.6 = \$559,000. (Gold Eagle Empowering Investors Website. NIV Study Bible Commentary. Zondervan. Page 677.)

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 4

FACING EXTERNAL OPPOSITION

Nehemiah Chapter 4

Introduction

In Chapter one of the book we observed Nehemiah gain victory through prayer. In chapter two we learnt seven principles in leadership and saw Nehemiah motivate the nation of the Jews to get behind his God given vision. In chapter three we read of the mobilization of many teams to achieve the vision. In the first three chapters Nehemiah gained great victory with relative ease. Now in chapter four he faces considerable opposition. As we examine Nehemiah's actions and attitudes when facing external opposition; we will glean contemporary application for our modern circumstance.

Opening Discussion Questions

What are the issues the world is using to attack the church today? The gay marriage issue? The gender issue? "Although I am female, I feel like a boy, so I need the freedom to be a boy" or vice versa. (Even if they have only just started high school.)

Because Jesus taught principles that are not in keeping with the ever-changing world view, the church feels under attack. How do you feel about these issues?

Not interested?

Not empowered to say anything?

Under attack?

As a group read Nehemiah 4:1-23

Sanballat: who was governor over Samaria hoped to extend his governorship to include Judah; he saw Nehemiah's leadership as a threat to this.

Tobiah: was governor of Trans Jordan which included the Ammonite territory, he saw the re-establishment of the Jewish nation as a threat; there was a long history of conflict between the Ammonites and Israelites.

Both Sanballat and Tobiah had authority over armies so they were a genuine threat. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Pages 18. Copyright 1979 .)

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 7

THE GENEROUS LEADER

Nehemiah Chapter 7 & 10

Introduction

In this study we see another tremendous attribute of Nehemiah; his generosity. Bible commentator Raymond Brown writes of Nehemiah, "He knows how wrong it would be for a leader to expect from others, that which he had not already done himself. Generous giving can inspire others to loosen their purse strings; it is a practical testimony to a believer's gratitude as well as an expression of love, obedience and trust that the Lord will meet our needs."

Chapter seven is mostly a genealogical record and so limited in information for a whole study, however some related themes in this chapter are also in chapter ten, therefore we will examine both chapters in this study. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press, Norton Street Nottingham NG7 3HR, England. Page 125. Copyright 1998.)

Opening Discussion Questions

Can you recall a time somebody blessed you financially when you were in a moment of need? How did it make you feel?

Focus on the above principles; as a group pray them over your church and ministries perhaps choosing one principle per person.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be a discerning people.

If a member of the group feels they are under spiritual attack give them the chance to share and pray for them.

Study Notes:

1. Consider Nehemiah 4:1-3. What do you think Sanballat and Tobiah are trying to do?

1a. Do you think Nehemiah and the Jews were expecting opposition? Why?

2. Read Nehemiah 4:4-5. What was Nehemiah's immediate response to the opposition?

3. Read Nehemiah 4:6. How did the workers respond when ridiculed by Sanballat and Tobiah?

Peruse Nehemiah 4:7-8. Sanballat the Samaritan has an Israelite heritage, yet is deeply opposed to what the Jews are trying to achieve.

History of the Northern Kingdom Exile:

About 300 years before Nehemiah's time the Northern Kingdom of Israel was invaded by the Assyrians. Various Assyrian kings had the Northern Kingdom of Israel repopulated with people from other nations; particularly Samaria.

The new populace of nations intermarried with the few remaining Israelites of Samaria resulting in a mixed race. (Not so much in the Nazareth area, nor were exiles taken from Nazareth according to Unger's Bible dictionary, so the populace there was still largely Israelite.)

It is extraordinary to think that it was the Samaritan army, who are part Israelite, were opposing the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem! The hatred the Jews had towards the Samaritans in the New Testament is rooted in these events. (Unger's Bible Dictionary. Merrill F. Unger. Moody Press. Page 786,787. Copyright 1957. Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)

4. Examine Nehemiah 4:9, 13 & 21. When Nehemiah hears of the anger and plots of Sanballat, Tobiah and the Arabs, what does he and the Jews do?

When the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem, they not only broke down the walls but set the city aflame (2 Kings 8-10). Apparently when bricks are heated to extreme temperatures, they become brittle. Many of the bricks were probably unusable and no doubt made up much of the "rubble" referred to in Nehemiah 4:10.

5. Reflect upon Nehemiah 4:10-12. Do you think it is purely the physical work that is draining the strength of the Jews? Why?

8a. Who did Nehemiah's enemies attribute the Jewish people's success to?

In conclusion, we have observed Nehemiah come under serious attacks which we understand Satan was ultimately behind. Today we can learn from the way Nehemiah responded each time:

1. (A) When active in the work of God Satan will distract!
(B) Our response: stay focused on the vision (Neh. 6:1-4).
2. (A) When active in the work of God, Satan will try and turn people against you.
(B) Our response: simply speak the truth (Neh. 6:5-8).
3. (A) When active in the work of God, Satan will try to cause you to sin and discredit you.
(B) Our response: know the word of God and practice spiritual discernment (Neh. 6:10-13)
4. (A) When active in the work of God understand that Satan can manipulate believers to oppose the kingdom of God.
(B) Our response: make sure you never become one of them! (Neh. 6:14, 17-19).
5. (A) When active in the work of God, Satan will bring his greatest opposition when you are close to victory.
(B) Our response: persevere to the completion of what God has called you to do (Neh. 6: 15-16).

6a. Nehemiah had left a prestigious and lucrative position in Susa, travelled a vast distance to help the Jews be re-established as a nation. How do you think he felt about his fellow Jews praising one of his greatest opponents?

6b. Many of the Jews that were now supportive of Tobiah the Ammonite were believers in God. Do you think Satan can use people to manipulate Christians to oppose the very work God wants done? Explain your conclusion or give an example in your answer.

7. Clarify how the following N.T. Scripture 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 sheds light on what may be taking place in Nehemiah chapter 6.

8. Read Nehemiah 6:15-16, 7:1-2. What happened to Nehemiah's enemies when Jerusalem's fortified walls were so rapidly completed?

5a. How are some of the Jews being affected by this? (Neh. 4:12).

5b. Do you think Satan uses similar tactics when coming against a church or a ministry? Can you think of an example?

6. Read Nehemiah 4:14-15. What was Nehemiah's advice to his people in response to the fear tactics they were facing?

6a. Do you feel under spiritual attack in your workplace, university or extended family? Is it causing you anxiety?

Take a moment to share and have your group or mentor pray for you.

7. Meditate on Nehemiah 4:16-17. Notice the passage states of the Jews they "did their work with one hand and held a weapon with another." Could this be used as a spiritual analogy? What is a Christian's sword? (Eph. 6:17)

7a. What is a Christian's work? (1 Cor. 15:58)

7b. Why should we combine serving God in ministry and fighting with the sword of the Spirit?

8. Read Nehemiah 4:18-20. Here Nehemiah gives further strategic military instruction. But where is his primary confidence for victory placed?

Chapter 4 of Nehemiah teaches us some tremendous principles to put into practice when faced with opposition:

- A. When attacked, prayer is your first weapon (Neh. 4:4-5).
- B. When attacked, persevere with all your heart (Neh. 4:6).
- C. When attacked, take strategic action (Neh. 4: 9, 13, 21).
- D. Know that Satan wants to drain your strength for ministry (Neh. 4:10).
- E. Know that Satan uses verbal attacks to discourage you (Neh. 4:11-12).
- F. Victory comes when we push aside fear and focus on God (Neh. 4:14-15).

4a. What did Nehemiah mean when he referred to committing a sin in verse 13? Consider Numbers 18:22-23a to assist with the answer.

4b. When active in the work of God there will be times that Satan will try to cause you to sin and discredit you. What do we learn from Nehemiah in this passage?

Tobiah the Ammonite had numerous binding agreements "by oath" (Neh. 6:18) within the Jewish community; these were probably trading contracts facilitated by his marriage connections. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Copyright 1979. Pages 110-111).

5. Read Nehemiah 4:2-3. What had Tobiah's attitude been towards the Jews as they tried to reconstruct the city walls?

6. Reflect upon Nehemiah 6:14, 17-19. Why would the nobles of Judah be speaking positively about Tobiah, reporting to Nehemiah "his good deeds?"

2a. What is Sanballat aiming to do with the information contained in the letter?

2b. What do we learn from Nehemiah's response?

2c. How can we apply the themes of this passage to our own lives?

3. Read Nehemiah 6:8. Nehemiah seems consistently discerning of people's true motives, why?

4: Consider Nehemiah 6:10-13. It seems a very spiritual thing to go and meet in the temple. Why was Nehemiah opposed to this?

- G. Victory comes when we combine ministry and the sword of the Spirit (Neh. 4:16-17, Eph 6:17, 1 Cor. 15:58).
- H. Victory comes when we have faith that God will fight for us! (Neh. 4:20).

Focus on one or two of these areas each and pray for your church, protecting it from spiritual attack and asking the Holy Spirit for victory.

If anyone in the group wants prayer regarding one of these principles in their life take some to let them explain and as a group pray for them.

Study Notes:

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 5

DEALING WITH INTERNAL DIVISION

Nehemiah Chapter 5

Introduction

The Jewish community have made an impressive start to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. But the task is enormous! If completed the circumference of the wall is over four kilometres. The average height is 12 meters and the average thickness is over 2.5 meters. The walls included many watch towers which, were taller and larger sections of the structure. Ten fortified gates are listed in chapter three of Nehemiah for reconstruction; the Sheep Gate, Fish Gate, Old Gate, Valley Gate, Dung Gate, Fountain Gate, Water Gate, Horse Gate, East Gate and Muster Gate.

They also had to deal with external opposition! The last thing they need is internal division; Jews disputing with Jews. But when people find themselves pressured with an ambitious project often disunity occurs. From chapter 5 of Nehemiah we will discern some practical principles of how to deal with internal division. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 73. Copyright 1998. Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 93. Copyright 1979. Also, Online Bible Commentaries.)

Opening Discussion Questions

Some people state, “I enjoy a good argument!”

1. Examine Nehemiah 6:1-4. Why wouldn’t Nehemiah go to meet with these leaders?

1a. What can we learn from Nehemiah’s response?

Sanballat probably realises this is his last chance. The walls are complete, the fortified gates are in place, only the smaller doors within the gates are not yet hung. He knows it would be very unwise to mount a heavy militarised siege against the city once the cities’ defences are fully complete. Word would get back to King Artaxerxes; Nehemiah and the Jews are part of his Empire and so under his protection. Far better to assassinate Nehemiah and fabricate a plausible story, “Killed by bandits when travelling to negotiate” for instance. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Christ Centred Exposition. James M. Hamilton Jr. Holman Reference. Nashville Tennessee. Copyright 2014. Page 136).

2. Read Nehemiah 6:5-8. What is the significance of an unsealed letter?

Opening Discussion Questions

Have you ever felt that everything is against you?

Have ever been falsely accused?

How did it make you feel?

What did you do about it?

As a group read Nehemiah 6:1-19

Geshem, who is mentioned more in this chapter than any others, may have been in charge of a north Arabian confederacy that controlled vast areas from northern Arabia and southern Palestine. Geshem could have been opposed to Nehemiah's development of an independent kingdom because he feared that it might interfere with his lucrative spice trade. The requested meeting at the plain of Ono (Neh.1:2) is about halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria; but a one-day Journey for Nehemiah. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Copyright 1979. Page 107).

Do you enjoy conflict?

If somebody has hurt you, how easy do you find it to talk with them about it?

Do you prefer to talk with others about it?

As a group, read Nehemiah 5:1-19.

1. Consider Nehemiah 5:1-5. List the difficulties some of the Jewish people were facing.

Greek historian Herodotus who lived during the reign of King Artaxerxes records that Darius the 1st introduced a taxation system for all the nations in the Persian Empire and this remained in place during the time of Artaxerxes and beyond. Persian rule, during this period was draining away local resources from the provinces to finance the imperial court and the building of magnificent palaces. The Persian people were exempt from paying taxes.

When the Greek, Alexander the Great conquered the capital city of Susa in 331 B.C. in Susa alone 9,000 talents (340 tons) of gold were found stored and 40,000 talents (1,500 tons) of silver. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 87. Copyright 1998. Also, NIV study notes.)

2. Read Nehemiah 5:6-7. How did Nehemiah respond after he had listened to the people's concerns?

2a. Nehemiah seemed to have a solid knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, what had particularly angered him? Read Leviticus 25:42-43.

2b. What three things did Nehemiah do about the situation?

3. What are Christians called to do amongst one another when somebody has been wronged in some way? Consider Matthew 18:15-17.

NEHEMIAH—BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

STUDY 6

WHEN ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

Nehemiah Chapter 6

Introduction

What's in a name? It is interesting to contrast the meaning of the name Nehemiah and that with his chief opposer Sanballat. Nehemiah means "YAHWEH comforts" in Hebrew, derived from נָחַם (nacham) meaning "to comfort" and יָה (yah) referring to the Hebrew God.

Sanballat: A Babylonian name, meaning "Sin (the moon-god) has given life." He most probably came from either Upper or Lower Beth Horon, two key cities 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem, which guarded the main road to Jerusalem. These roads will feature in the account of this study.

It is reasonable to deduce that the Lord has had some providence in the meanings of these names. It could be said it is a dead giveaway that Sanballat, with a name that means "Sin has given life" is clearly the sort of individual that will oppose the purposes of the one true God. Yet we observe in this passage that some of the Jewish people actually side with him and his supporters Tobiah and Gesham.

In chapter four we observed strong external opposition taking place and in chapter five internal division was apparent. Now in chapter six all hell breaks loose as Nehemiah has to face both external opposition and internal division! (Zondervan Niv. Exhaustive Concordance Second Edition. Edward W. Goodrick & John R. Kohlenberger 111. Zondervan. Copyright 1999. Pages 1452 & 1459).

Perhaps it seems too confronting or potentially painful to approach them. Ask for some prayer from your group or the person who is discipling you, that the Holy Spirit may help and guide you.

Study Notes:

3a. Can you recall an occasion that you have put this model into practice? How did it go?

3b. Why is it important to talk about the issue with the person first, before involving others?

In the next passage Nehemiah calls for “the exacting of usury to stop.” Who were the Jews exercising usury?

- a. Jews who had become wealthy whilst away in exile and had returned with the wealth.
- b. Those that had returned almost a century earlier under the leadership of Zerubbabel and had established lucrative businesses.

“These people would lend large sums of money; then when the debtors missed a payment, they would take over their fields. Left with no means of income, the debtors were forced to sell their children into slavery, a common practice of this time.” (NIV Life Application Bible commentary. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois And Zondervan Grand Rapids, Michigan. Page 701.)

4. Read Nehemiah 5:8-10. In the Persian culture, what the wealthy Jews were doing was perfectly acceptable, it's just business. Why did Nehemiah have an issue with it? Consider Exodus 22:25 in giving your answer.

4a. As Nehemiah deals with internal division, he seems to clarify the issue in the light of Scripture. Why is this important?

5. How did Nehemiah proceed in dealing with the internal division? (Neh. 5:11)

6. How did the wealthy Jews and nobles respond? (Neh. 5:12)

7. When the solution had been agreed upon, how did the large assembly of people respond? (Neh. 5:13)

8. Reflect upon Nehemiah 5:14-18. Nehemiah as the governor, and those officials working with him were also prepared to make a financial sacrifice for the good of the nation and not require as much as previous governments. Why was this important?

In conclusion; when dealing with internal division we have learnt some very practical principles from Nehemiah that can be summarized as follows:

- A. Listen to the people's concerns (Neh. 5:1-6).
- B. Consider the problem, confront those involved and call a meeting (Neh. 5:7).
- C. Clarify the issue in the light of Scripture (Neh. 5:8-10, Lev. 25:24-43, Ex. 22:25).
- D. Create a solution, act on that solution, remain faithful to that solution (Neh. 5:11-13).
- E. If the solution involves a cost, model a similar example of sacrifice in your own life (Neh. 5: 14-18).

Is there division between you and another person at the moment?

- A member of your extended family?
- An old friend you don't get along with anymore?
- A work associate?
- A Church member?

Does God want you to take any of the previous steps learnt in Nehemiah to restore that relationship?