

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
NOVEMBER16 2024

Nehemiah, the praying prophet

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 1.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 52.
Key Text: Nehemiah 1:11.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This week's lesson is the first of four studies covering the faithful work of Nehemiah.

Now that the exile in Babylon was over, the Jews were dispersed in every direction. The news came to Nehemiah describing the terrible condition of the city walls and gates of the once-glorious city of Jerusalem. The disrepair of the walls is symbolic of the spirit and faith of the Jews, which caused Nehemiah to weep. While some Jews simply accepted their situation and sought to fit in to their surroundings, Nehemiah felt a deep conviction for the glory and pride of God's people.

As an exile, Nehemiah served the Persian king with skill and wisdom, and emerged as a person of influence for the king. Ellen White observed of Nehemiah: "The recipient of royal favor, however, though surrounded by pomp and splendor, did not forget his God nor his people" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 628). Of all the admirable qualities he possessed, Nehemiah's greatest attribute is displayed in his initial response of turning to pray first to God as the source of redemption and hope.

Nehemiah recalls his first response: "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4, NIV). But even as his prayer was lifted up and the tears poured out, his strength, courage, and insight as a leader stirred within him. His corporate prayer for repentance and the return of God's glory is a prayer to be prayed today. Even now, if young people begin to pray, courage and insight will fill their hearts, and new opportunities will emerge to do great things for God again.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discern that the first step to any challenge is to pray. *(Know)*
- Sense genuine concern for broken people and the broken perception people have of God. *(Feel)*
- Choose to work hard for God's cause in the world. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

Growing in Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 11: "As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience." (1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalm 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Matthew 20:25-28; 25:31-46; Luke 10:17-20; John 20:21; Romans 8:38, 39; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; Philippians 3:7-14; Colossians 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 23; Hebrews 10:25; James 1:27; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 1 John 4:4.)

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

This week's *Either/Or* activity challenges young people to choose one response or the other and explain their answer. Both answers are good, but the exercise urges them to flesh out their experience. When students describe which is more meaningful, praying with others or praying alone, you might ask after they respond: "What are the different reasons we might pray alone versus with others? How is praying for another person (individual) different from praying on behalf of them (corporate)?" Discuss the reasons why you think God wants us to pray for the big problems in the world?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The story is told of a man who was taking a morning walk when a garbage truck roared up beside him, stopped, and the driver jumped out to speak with him. The man walking thought maybe the garbage man needed directions, but then he reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and showed him a picture of a sweet little 5-year-old boy. "This is my grandson," the driver said with tears choking up in his voice, "He's on life support in a hospital across the country." The walker then thought the driver was going to ask him for money to help with the hospital bills, but the driver wanted something much more valuable than money. He implored, "I'm asking everybody I can to say a prayer for him. Would you say one for him, please?" The driver believed that if his grandson's cause became an item of prayer, perhaps God would work a miracle on his behalf.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Many people believe in prayer. Praying first and acting next is what makes Nehemiah such a great leader. The prayer of Nehemiah is like the desperate prayer of the grandfather mentioned in this story.

Someone has to make the first move when it comes to prayer. Nehemiah's first response to the problems at Jerusalem was not to examine the theological ramifications of the problem, but to do what he could do—pray. You might say Nehemiah is more of a "kneeologian" than theologian. Examine each word and phrase in this story to capture a sense of the sadness and hope that stirs in the heart of Nehemiah for God's people.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- What is the key problem that prompts Nehemiah to pray?
- Who are the "remnant" in this passage, and why are they described this way?
- *Underline* the words and phrases that convey the emotions that Nehemiah felt.
- What other characters in Scripture might understand Nehemiah's burden? Explain.
- Examine the prayer of Nehemiah and *identify* key parts that you think might be important.
- What do you think is the "covenant of love" referred to in Nehemiah 1:5 (NIV)?
- In verse 11, what specifically does Nehemiah pray for? (You may have to read ahead in your Bible.)
- Why do you think this passage is in the Bible?
- What is the message God has for you in this story?

Extra Teacher's Questions

- As Nehemiah is praying, how often does he refer to "we"? What do you think is significant about praying from the viewpoint of "we" versus "I"?
- What are some things we should pray about corporately as opposed to individually? Why?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Exodus 4–6; John 17; Philippians 1; 2; Daniel 6; Acts 4; 5.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Word Pictures

Word pictures are powerful tools that often are filled with emotions, actions, or colorful meaning contained in a word or phrase. Christ said, "I am the light of the world" or "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed." This is why we have the students examine the words and phrases in the story because when they discover these words that create vivid pictures in our minds, they simply learn better because more of their senses are engaged.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Essentially, Ezra and Nehemiah pick up where the history in Chronicles ends. In the Hebrew Bible the books of Ezra and Nehemiah form one book, whereas in the English Bible the book of Nehemiah is separate, as it is the "memoirs of Nehemiah." The English Bible places the book of Nehemiah with the historical books, but the story of Nehemiah starts after the exile of the Jews in Babylon. There was no exodus from Babylon as there was from Egypt. In fact, most of the Jews dispersed around the surrounding country, and very few, comparatively, even went back to Jerusalem or the Judean countryside.

Post-Exile

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary states that "aside from Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah are the only historical books of the postexilic period, and are of great importance for a reconstruction of the history of postexilic Jewry. However, they do not record the history of the people of God in unbroken sequence for the period covered by the two books, but only certain parts of it" (vol. 3, p. 320). The basic time period of Nehemiah begins after the fall of Babylon to the Persian Empire as noted in Ezra 1:1.

The mood of the Persians that ruled during this time can be characterized as open-minded and often kindhearted toward the Jews. Upon their release, the Jews were enabled to begin the process of rebuilding their Temple in Jerusalem. But the walls and the gates of Jerusalem had been utterly destroyed throughout the captivity in Babylon, and the rubble and holes in the walls really spoke symbolically of the spirit and faith of the Jewish people.

Another historical feature that contributed to the goodwill Persia extended to the Jews had to do with where Jerusalem was on the map. Jerusalem

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

and the surrounding area stood in the middle of the highways that went east and west; and the more amicable influence a king had with people in that region, the better commerce, trade, and security were enhanced. So it was good for Artaxerxes to extend goodwill to Jews and assist them in their social and religious endeavors.

The name Nehemiah means "God has comforted," which attests to the seasons of sadness and despair while in exile. In this lesson Nehemiah needed comfort because his brother brought news of the tattered walls of his homeland and the spiritual brokenness that marked Jerusalem. Herein lies the setting for Nehemiah's deep sadness for his people. Nehemiah's first response to fast and pray is key to understanding his leadership role in such a pivotal time of Jewish history. The people needed leaders who would cooperate with God, instead of moving ahead with their own plans or cowardly sitting on their hands as some kings had done in the past.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Describe how the broken gates and holey walls of Jerusalem portrayed a visual symbol of the spiritual condition of the people during that season of disorientation after the exile in Babylon. Invite them to get together in twos or threes and think of some modern symbols around them today of the spiritual condition of the church or their personal spiritual lives. Urge them to come up with positive symbols (if the tendency is to be more negative). Have the students debrief by sharing their symbols with the class and explaining their meanings.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The Bible is filled with heroes of all sorts. Some are mighty and brave, others are wise and inspiring, still others are faithful and caring hard workers, such as Nehemiah. His attention to details and faithfulness to duty caused him to become a very influential person in the court of Artaxerxes. You don't get where he got by being incompetent. When he faced a challenge, he met the challenge by cooperating with God in prayer and work. His passion for his people was remarkable, but many can get weepy when bad things happen. Nehemiah not only demonstrated deep concern, but he moved to enlist the help of God to fix the problem. His example is one we should follow today. Ellen White says:

"Again, worldly wisdom teaches that prayer is not essential. . . . The same compassionate Saviour lives today, and He is as willing to listen to the prayer of faith as when He walked visibly among men. The natural cooperates with the supernatural. It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 525).



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*),* chapter 52.

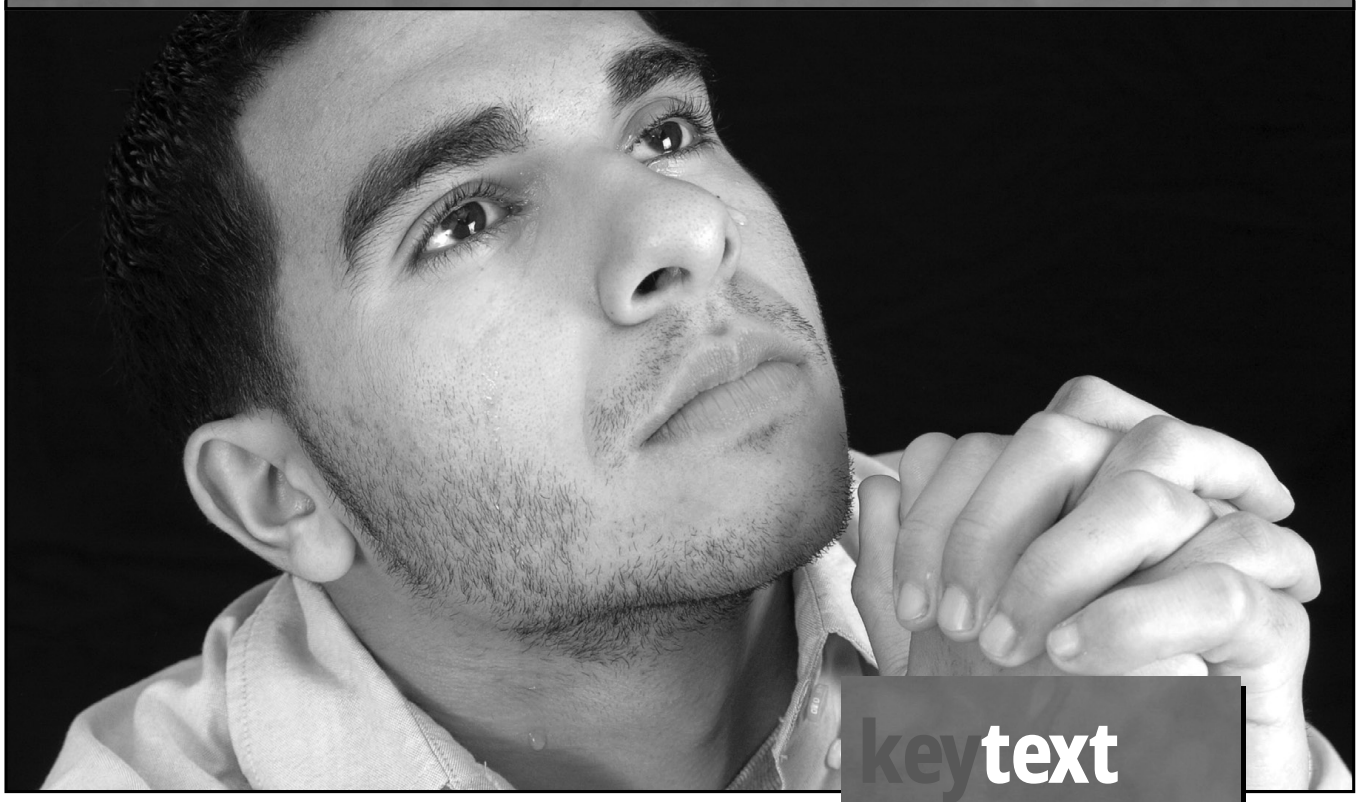
*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 1.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapter 52.

Nehemiah, the praying prophet



JACQUIJANETZKO

key text

"Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

(Nehemiah 1:11, NIV)

flashlight

"To pray as Nehemiah prayed in his hour of need is a resource at the command of the Christian under circumstances when other forms of prayer may be impossible. Toilers in the busy walks of life, crowded and almost overwhelmed with perplexity, can send up a petition to God for divine guidance" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 631).

what do you think?

Either/Or

The experience of praying is more meaningful to me when I pray . . . individually or with others.

What do you think are the kinds of things we ought to pray for individually in contrast to the things we should pray for corporately?

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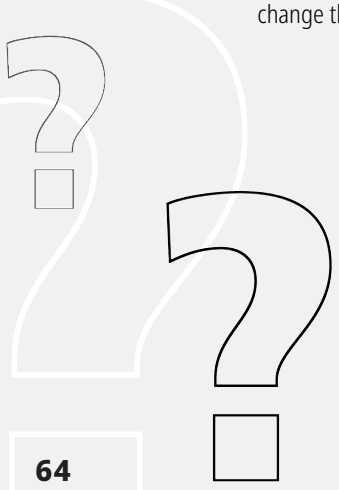
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did you know?

There are two types of "ask" used in the Greek language: Ask *(aiteo)* refers to asking as an inferior to a superior. Ask *(eratao)* refers to asking as an equal with authority.

What difference does it make? Read John 14:14 *(aiteo)* and 16 *(eratao)*, and think about how this might change the way you pray.



INTO THE STORY

"The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

"In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

"They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.'

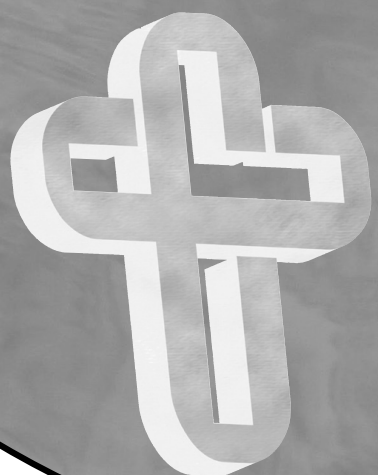
"When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

" 'LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

" 'Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, "If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name."

"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.' "

(Nehemiah 1:1-11, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

What is the key problem that prompts Nehemiah to pray?

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Who are the "remnant" in this passage? Why are they described this way?

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Underline the words and phrases that convey the emotions that Nehemiah felt.

What other characters in Scripture might understand Nehemiah's burden? Explain.

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Examine the prayer of Nehemiah and identify key parts that you think might be important.

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What do you think is the "covenant of love" referred to in verse 5?

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In verse 11, what specifically does Nehemiah pray for? (You may have to read ahead in your Bible.)

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What is the message God has for you in this story?

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punch lines

"But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath" **(Deuteronomy 4:29-31, NIV).**

"Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you" **(Jeremiah 29:12, NIV).**

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" **(Matthew 7:7, 8, NIV).**

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" **(James 5:16, NIV).**

"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" **(Romans 8:31, NIV).**

further insight

"Nehemiah did not regard his duty done when he had wept and prayed before the Lord. He united his petitions with holy endeavor, putting forth earnest, prayerful efforts for the success of the enterprise in which he was engaged."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 633

"God's children are not only to pray in faith but to work with diligent and wise care."—Ellen G. White, *Royalty and Ruin*, p. 223

Sabbath

Read Philippians 1:3-5.

As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience" (Fundamental Belief 11, Growing in Christ).

As you respond to the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson, consider today's Bible passage which is taken from one of Paul's letters. How does Nehemiah's prayer for help for his people compare with Paul's? How are they alike? How are they different? What do you think it is easier to pray for, mundane ordinary things or great and miraculous events? Why?

Sunday

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11.

Read the passage in the *Into the Story* section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. What parts of this story are new to you and what insights have you gained from this passage? As Nehemiah prays fervently for help to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, what would this prayer sound like today? What key things would a leader be praying for?

Monday

Read Nehemiah 1:11.

The *Key Text* in this week's lesson is a specific request to God: "Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man" (NIV). When in your life have you prayed for specific outcomes? How did that work out? When have you prayed more generally?

Tuesday

Read Jeremiah 29:12.

In this week's *Flashlight* quote from *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White encourages Christians to pray in whatever way is feasible to have a conversation with God. Whom do you know that is a champion of prayer? How have you seen their prayer life impact the well-being of others?

Wednesday

Read Psalm 91:15.

Read the *Punch Lines* in this week's lesson. Which passage, if acted on, would transform your spiritual life the most? Why? Choose one verse in the *Punch Lines* and talk to God about how you might live out that message today.

Thursday

Read Matthew 7:7, 8.

In this week's lesson Nehemiah prays to God for help from a king. Throughout history God has used many who don't even believe in Him to be instruments in His plan. How do you see God using various events, people, and situations around the world to continue His work throughout the world? Nehemiah's desire is earnest and single-minded. What three things do you think God would have us be "single-minded" about as a church? Why are they important? Begin to pray deliberately and specifically for these things to happen, and be willing to do whatever it takes to be part of the answer.

Friday

Read Isaiah 65:24.

Think about the times in your life that prayer has been especially helpful. There are times God brings comfort and peace, but there are also times God helps you get good things done in His name. Take time to thank God for His actions in the past as well as for His promises in the future.

Thank You, Lord, for the times in the past that You answered my prayers by

Thank You, Lord, for Your promises for the future that You will

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapter 52.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.