

discover

NEHEMIAH



LEADER GUIDE

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CoffeeBreak





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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

Bible discovery leaders help people discover together what the Bible says and means. They are not teachers but guides, facilitators, and conversation leaders.

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader by coming alongside you in your own personal work. Always answer the study guide questions first, using the suggested basic steps of preparation. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage.

We encourage you to study ahead of time so that you do not have to rely on the leader guide during your Bible study group meeting. You don't want to give the impression that the leader guide is an answer book. The answers are in the Bible; you are a guide to help your group find the answers in God's Word.

This leader guide aims to include helpful ideas on the book of Nehemiah from a number of sources. Ideally you should use this information *only after* you have studied the text yourself. Read the passage and first ask your own questions. Allow God to speak to you through his Word. Look for answers in the text. What was God saying to the original listeners, and what is he saying to us today? Consult the glossary if there are names and places with which you are unfamiliar. In addition, the Historical Snapshot found at the beginning of this leader guide and in each study guide provides valuable information.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

The "Conversation" boxes in the study guide are for extra questions. The text of the leader guide includes many extra questions that you may wish to use to help build the group's conversation around the text. We also suggest that you write your own questions. You know the interests, personalities, and needs of your group members. You know what they will be curious about or when they will want to dig deeper into a Scripture passage. Put those extra conversation-building questions in the

“Conversation” boxes and use them during your group time to help get dialogue started.

Also, encourage group members to put their own questions and discoveries in the “Conversation” boxes. By doing this, they will also be preparing for the group discussion. You might want to start a group discussion by saying, “What is in your ‘Conversation’ box? What would you like to talk about together?”

If you are able to prepare and pray thoroughly before each group session, you will be able to lead without frequent references to your notes. This will free you to be more aware of the work of the Holy Spirit during your group discussion time and to focus more effectively on your facilitation and leadership responsibilities. You will also be able to keep better eye contact and listen more carefully.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions with smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others into truth by using questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Use the comments in this leader guide to help the discovery process of your group. You are leading a conversation on the text, and you want to help guide the conversation so that group members will hear the “big ideas” from the text rather than getting bogged down in small details. Avoid using this leader material to “teach” the lesson. In addition to observations by the authors of the leader guide, explanations from some commentaries are included.

Assume that you will not use all the information that is in this leader guide. Ask questions that will help you get at what the text says and means. *There are additional questions in bold that may help to clarify the discussion. However, do not feel that you have to answer all of these questions.* Members of your group may have their own questions. Use questions as well as the comments in the leader guide only when it is helpful to guide and clarify your group’s conversation on the text. The information is given to help you guide the discussion and answer some questions that may arise. *Do not bring up information simply because*

you find it interesting. Introduce it only if it will help the members of your group. In other words, tailor the questions to your particular group members. If some people in your group are new to the Bible, make certain that you help to clarify information. But do not use extra background material that may add confusion. Feel free to delve a bit deeper with groups who may be familiar with the Bible. However, keep in mind the evangelistic purpose of this study and make certain that you are being most sensitive to members who may be new to Bible study and may not yet be believers in Christ.

Should differences of opinion arise, allow members to disagree. Your purpose is not to win arguments or even to defend a particular idea. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of your group members.

Help to Apply

Ask God to guide you to ask application questions throughout the lesson when it seems appropriate for your group. As leader, pray that God will first teach you what he wants you to hear from his Word. Then ask God to guide you in helping others hear what he is saying to them. **Keep in mind that the purpose of this study is not to fill minds with facts but to change hearts as we learn what God is teaching us through his Word.**

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Holy Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take some time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do additional follow-up reflection at home.

Introduction

Some of the most well-known stories of the Old Testament take place during and after the exile of God's people to Babylon, following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Those stories include the near tragedy of Daniel being thrown into a den of lions; of Daniel's three friends being tossed into a fiery furnace; and of Esther, a young Jewish woman, becoming queen of Persia and courageously speaking up to spare her people from slaughter.

The story of Nehemiah takes place between 445 and 432 B.C., about forty years after the time of queen Esther. In 539 B.C. the Medes and Persians had conquered Babylon, and in 538 King Cyrus of Persia had begun allowing Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem to begin rebuilding and resettling in their homeland.

The Old Testament book of Ezra describes the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The returning exiles faced opposition from local people known as the Samaritans, but after twenty years the project was finally complete. The city wall, however, remained in ruin.

In the book of Nehemiah we see how God inspires and empowers Nehemiah to lead his people in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Despite the people's weaknesses and sin, God remains faithful and keeps his promises. Through Nehemiah's leadership, the Lord's purpose is to make the city safe for his people again and to refocus them on what it means to be the community of God.

As we study this book, we'll see that Nehemiah serves as a model for leaders still today. His intellect, courage, empathy, and ability to challenge and inspire others, along with his dependence on God and his steady resolve in the face of opposition, provide examples for everyone. In addition, throughout this story we'll see how the God of the Bible controls history and uses people like Nehemiah to carry out his purposes.

Historical Snapshot for Studying Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah is one of the historical books of the Old Testament. Because it covers a portion of the history of the Jewish people, it is important to understand where Nehemiah fits into that history.

Abraham was the father of God's chosen people, Israel. God called Abraham to trust and follow him, and Abraham was promised a land that his descendants would inhabit. That promise was not realized in Abraham's lifetime; instead, it was realized after the people of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years and God miraculously delivered them under the leadership of Moses. After establishing his covenant with the people at Sinai, in which they agreed to obey the law of God given through Moses (Ex. 19-24), God led the people to the land he had promised them, but most of the people's leaders were afraid to go in and drive out the nations that lived there, as God had commanded. For disobeying God, the people were punished to wander in the desert for forty years. After that time, Joshua led the next generation of Israelites into the "promised land." This was the land of Canaan, in the area of the present-day state of Israel. Members of the twelve tribes, named after the twelve sons of Jacob, Abraham's grandson (also called Israel), were allotted sections of the land.

Conquering the promised land was not an easy task, and it was made more difficult by the ongoing disobedience of the people and some of their leaders. Because the people were often unfaithful to their covenant with the Lord, God sometimes punished them by allowing other nations to oppress them. But when the people cried out for God's help, he raised up judges (spiritual and military leaders) to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors.

Because the nations around them had kings, the people of Israel wanted a king as well. Saul became the first king of Israel and initially led the nation to military victories. But he turned away from God, so God chose David, described as "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), to be king in Saul's place. Years later, after Saul died, David became king and led Israel in military victories and in establishing Jerusalem as the city where God's temple would be built. In the Old Testament David became regarded as the greatest king in Israel's history. Though he committed some grievous sins in his day, he confessed and repented of them before God, and the Lord forgave him. David was also a musician and wrote many psalms that show the close relationship he had with God. God promised David that the royal line in Israel would remain with his descendants (2 Sam. 7).

David's son Solomon succeeded him as king and built the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Solomon became renowned for the wisdom he asked for and received from God, but unfortunately he also violated many of God's commands. He made alliances with nations around him and built up a large harem of wives and concubines, falling into pagan religious practices in the process. Although Israel gained significant power and territory as a nation led by Solomon, the kingdom broke apart during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel split away to form a northern kingdom, and the remaining two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, became the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom continued to be called Israel (or sometimes Ephraim, after its leading tribe), and they adopted Samaria as their capital; the southern kingdom became known as Judah, and Jerusalem remained their capital. The kings of Judah tended to be more faithful to God than those of the northern kingdom (Israel, Ephraim), but eventually both kingdoms were punished for their unfaithfulness to God and sent into exile. The northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C., and the kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem, was overtaken and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The Babylonians took many of the people of Judah into captivity. Most of them were from the nobility and other leading families. It was the policy of conquering empires to take the best and brightest of a defeated population into captivity to prevent later insurrection. The people who were left behind in Judah were mainly poor and destitute and therefore unable to mount a rebellion. They gradually mixed with other captive peoples who were relocated into their area, and eventually they became known as Samaritans.

The Medes and Persians overthrew the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C., and during the reigns of Cyrus and later kings of the Persian Empire, several waves of Jewish exiles were allowed to return to Judah. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the priest (Ezra 3:2; 5:2), the temple of God was rebuilt.

The story of Nehemiah takes place in 445-432 B.C. during the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes. Let's discover together how God worked through Nehemiah to accomplish amazing things for his people, and to see how Nehemiah's courage and leadership can serve as important examples for us today.

Glossary of Terms

Ammon, Ammonites—enemies of Israel to the east of the Jordan River, located where the land of Jordan is today.

Artaxerxes—King of Persia in Nehemiah’s day; Artaxerxes ruled from 465-424 B.C.

Assyria—a powerful empire known for its brutality in conquering many nations; the Assyrian Empire overtook the northern kingdom (ten tribes) of Israel in 722 B.C. It was later conquered by the Babylonian Empire, which was conquered by the Persians in 539 B.C.

Babylon—ancient capital of the Babylonian Empire, which conquered Jerusalem and Judah in 586 B.C. and took many of the people into exile.

book of the annals—a record of events pertaining to the temple; it included various lists of names.

Book of the Law of Moses—a book containing the law of God given to Moses, recorded mainly in Exodus and Leviticus; this term often also referred to the whole Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible.

City of David—a name for Jerusalem, also called Zion after the fortress David conquered on this site (see 2 Sam. 5:7); in Nehemiah’s day the southeast hill in Jerusalem was called “the City of David” (Neh. 3:15; 12:37).

covenant—a binding agreement between two parties; in the Old Testament era this term referred to God’s covenant with Israel.

cupbearer—a trusted official who would taste the king’s wine to see if it was poisonous before the king drank it.

daric—a gold coin used in Persia weighing 8.4 grams and apparently named for Darius I, a leading king in Persia.

Darius—the name of at least three kings of ancient Persia.

Elul—the sixth month on the ancient Jewish calendar, usually corresponding to portions of August-September on the Western calendar.

Ezra—a priest and teacher who led a group of exiles returning from Persia about twelve years before Nehemiah came to Jerusalem.

Gentiles—any people who were not Jewish.

holy—set apart, often for special service to God.

Jerusalem—Judah’s capital city, where God’s temple was located; it was supposed to be the spiritual center for the whole nation of God’s people.

Joshua son of Nun—the leader of Israel whom God used to bring his people into the promised land of Canaan (see Josh. 1).

Kislev—the ninth month on the ancient Jewish calendar, corresponding to portions of November-December on the Western calendar.

Levites—the tribe of Jewish people dedicated to the worship of God; priests were the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses (see Ex. 28-29), and all others were charged with maintaining the temple and other duties connected with worship.

LORD (with small capital letters)—In most English translations of the Bible, this name represents the Hebrew name *YHWH* (*Yahweh*), meaning “I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.” God identified himself by this name when he promised to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt and to fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation,” said God (Ex. 3:15).

mina—a unit of weight equivalent to 50 shekels (570 grams) in the ancient Middle East.

Moab—a territory southeast of Judah. Ruth, an ancestor of David, was from Moab (Ruth 1:4).

Nisan—the first month on the ancient Jewish calendar, corresponding to portions of March-April on the Western calendar.

plains of Ono—an area near the border of Samaria on the northwestern edge of Judah’s territory after the return from exile.

prophet—one who speaks God’s message; a term generally used to refer to Old Testament preachers of God’s Word; at times, prophets

also foretold the future as revealed to them by God's Spirit (see Deut. 18:21-22).

remnant—the people of God who survived the exile.

Sabbath—the seventh day of the Jewish week (Saturday); a day set aside for worship and rest.

sackcloth—worn (often with a dusting of ashes) to symbolize mourning and/or repentance.

Samaria—the territory to the north of Judah in Nehemiah's day; this was the area occupied by the northern kingdom of Israel before it was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C.; Samaria was also the name of its capital city.

Sanballat the Horonite—the governor or leading official of the territory of Samaria in Nehemiah's day.

shekel—a unit of weight equivalent to about 11.4 grams in ancient Judah.

temple—the center for worship for the Jewish people, first built by Solomon, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and rebuilt during Zerubbabel's time as governor after the exile.

Tobiah the Ammonite—an official who may have been the governor of Transjordan in the Persian Empire; this territory was to the east of Judah, across the Jordan River, where present-day Jordan is located.

Urim and Thummim—the lots approved by God for use in Israel; they were placed in the breastpiece of the sacred ephod worn by the priest of God (Ex. 28:30), and they were used in times of crisis to discern the will of God.

1 Nehemiah 1:1-2:10

Longing for Home

Getting Started

Tim Keller in his book *Prodigal God* indicates the powerful influence that the concept of “home” places on all human beings. He states that one of the major themes of the Bible is exile and homecoming. All people are exiles, longing for their true home.

In Nehemiah 1 we will be introduced to the main character of the book, Nehemiah, whose name means “The LORD comforts.” Nehemiah had been born in captivity in a foreign land. His ancestors had been taken into exile by the Babylonian Empire, which was now ruled by Persia. As he grew up, Nehemiah became a trusted official in the court of Artaxerxes, king of Persia. News had just arrived from Jerusalem, Nehemiah’s ancestral home, and in chapter 1 we will see how Nehemiah responded to the news.

Optional Share Questions

Note: The optional share questions in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session, or they may fit better at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

When you returned as an adult to a place you went as a child, how was it changed?

or

What comes to mind when you hear the word “home”?

What Does It Say?

1. Nehemiah 1:1-4

a. *What do we learn about Nehemiah in these opening verses?*

- **Who was Nehemiah’s father? Where was Nehemiah living? What was the time frame of this story?**

The book of Nehemiah is a historical work, so it is not surprising to see historical references establishing the setting of this story. Nehemiah’s father, Hakaliah, is identified. We learn that it was the month of Kislev

(mid-November to mid-December on our Western calendar) and that Nehemiah was in Susa, one of Persia's capital cities. The citadel of Susa was the winter residence of the kings of Persia. We find also that it was "the twentieth year," a reference to the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, who reigned from 465-424 B.C. So the year was 445 B.C.

b. Who arrived, and what seemed foremost on Nehemiah's mind?

Note: It was about 765 miles (1,231 km) from Jerusalem to Susa.

The individuals who came to see Nehemiah had traveled a long distance.

- **Who was among the travelers, and what was his relationship to Nehemiah?**

Hanani, identified as Nehemiah's brother, arrived from Jerusalem along with some other men. Nehemiah asked them about the state of the Jewish people and Jerusalem. Though he lived and served in a foreign land, Nehemiah's heart longed for the restoration of his homeland.

c. What did Nehemiah learn about the state of affairs in his homeland, and how did he react?

Note: It may be helpful to refer to the Introduction regarding what was happening in Jerusalem and Judah at that time.

- **Who was in trouble? What had happened?**

Hanani reported on how things were going for the Jewish exiles who were freed to return earlier to rebuild the temple of the Lord. They were able to rebuild the temple, but due largely to opposition from the surrounding peoples (Samaritans) the wall of Jerusalem remained in ruin.

Nehemiah became overwhelmed with sadness at the news. Even though he had a comfortable life in Persia, he was very concerned for the people who were suffering in his homeland.

- **How long was he upset?**

Notice that he fasted and wept for days.

- **In his mourning, to whom did Nehemiah turn?**

Rather than turning inward, Nehemiah reached out to God. James Boice, in his commentary on Nehemiah, points out that a true leader recogniz-

es his need, humbles himself, and reaches out to the God of heaven, who is in control of all things.

2. Nehemiah 1:5-11a

a. What was the content of Nehemiah's prayer, and what do we learn about him by what and how he prayed?

Note: Pastor and theologian James Boice, in commenting on this prayer of Nehemiah, points out that it has all the elements of a prayer style taught in Scripture: **A**doration (praise), **C**onfession (of sin), **T**hanksgiving (for all God has done), and **S**upplication (request for God's help and ongoing provision)—often referred to as ACTS.

• How much did Nehemiah pray? What does this tell us about him?

Notice the phrase “day and night.” Nehemiah did not just pray occasionally or for short periods of time. Prayer was important to Nehemiah, and he recognized God's strength in comparison to his weakness. As we look at the prayer in more detail, we will also see that Nehemiah's prayer was not self-centered. He was concerned for others. Take note together that all of the ACTS elements are included (though not in the same order).

Adoration

• What are Nehemiah's words of praise? How does he address God?

Notice that Nehemiah uses three different expressions for God: “God of heaven,” “LORD,” and “the great and awesome God.”

Nehemiah is asking God to act in history.

• Why does he call God “LORD”?

In Hebrew, this name of God is spelled with four consonants, **YHWH**. This is the name God revealed to Moses before bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt; it means “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:13-17), and it became significant as a reference to Israel's holy, ever-faithful, covenant-keeping God. The word “LORD” (with large and small capital letters) is used in our Bibles wherever this name occurs in the Hebrew text. Nehemiah begins his prayer by using this name for God, acknowledging that **YHWH** (*Yahweh*) is the one, true, faithful God in control of everything.

Thanksgiving

Nehemiah comes before God with a thankful heart. He does not come with demands but with a humility that shows he knows the greatness of God. Whenever the name “LORD” is used, it’s a reminder of God’s special covenant relationship with his people. God is also the “great and awesome” God because of the great things he has done in the history of Israel.

- **How would you address God if you spoke to him? How does it help to know he is over all things? When we pray, is it helpful to remember what God has done in the past? Explain.**
- **Why does God’s keeping “his covenant of love” lead to a grateful heart?**

If you pursue this question, it may be helpful to have the group look at the glossary description of “covenant.” A covenant relationship is reciprocal with privileges and responsibilities. Marriage is a contemporary example of a “covenant of love.” Nehemiah’s prayer shows that he is well aware of the concept of covenant embedded deeply in Israel’s history. Some references to this can be found in Genesis 15:18; 17:4-21; Exodus 2:24; 19:5-6; Deut. 29-30).

- **What, according to verse 5, is the responsibility of the people who have covenanted with God?**
- **How do we show our love to God? How do we “keep his commandments”?**

Confession

Having acknowledged who God is, Nehemiah recognizes his own sinfulness in comparison to the awesome God.

- **What sins does Nehemiah confess? Why is it important for a person to admit personal faults? The faults of one’s people? Can you think of some examples of corporate sins?**

Notice that as a leader Nehemiah does not shift blame or “pass the buck.” He takes responsibility for the sins of his people, even though he was not even born when Jerusalem fell and the people were taken into captivity.

- **In what ways might we ask forgiveness for corporate sin?**

We can ask God’s forgiveness for the sins of our nation when there is injustice or when we trust in something other than God. Even if we have not committed the specific wrongdoing, we are “part of the system” that has done something wrong.

b. What request does Nehemiah make, and what promise does he claim?

Supplication

Nehemiah now pleads with God to remember his covenant with his people. They have been scattered because of their sin, but Nehemiah remembers God’s promise to bring them back if they return to him and obey his commands. God is the one who has redeemed them in the past, and Nehemiah asks God to help him in the future.

• What will bring Nehemiah success?

Nehemiah knows it is all up to God. What Nehemiah requests is something he would not be able to do in his own strength.

3. Nehemiah 1:11b

Why does Nehemiah identify himself as the cupbearer of the king? What were the duties of a cupbearer? (Consult the glossary.)

It is interesting that almost as an aside Nehemiah mentions his position in the royal palace.

• What would be some reasons for giving this information? Was Nehemiah saying how important he was? Why or why not?

A contemporary illustration of a cupbearer might be that of a Secret Service person who guards the President of the United States. A cupbearer was to choose and drink the wine before the king in order to make certain that the king was not poisoned. This was a dangerous position, because Nehemiah could lose his life for the sake of the king. But it was also a very trusted position. In fact, some commentators think that being called a cupbearer could have been synonymous with being a high official close to the king.

4. Nehemiah 2:1-10

Note: It was the month of Nisan (consult glossary). Four months had passed since Nehemiah had received the bad news about Jerusalem.

a. *What do we learn about the relationship between Nehemiah and the king?*

- **What did King Artaxerxes notice one day as Nehemiah brought him wine?**

Somehow the king was aware that Nehemiah was not himself; the look on his face indicated that he was sad. People around the king were expected to show a cheerful disposition. In fact, it was against Persian law to show a sorrowful face in the presence of the king (Gene Getz). Perhaps the king could have responded with punishment or demotion, but instead he asked what was bothering Nehemiah. This shows there may have been a close relationship of trust between the two.

- **How did Nehemiah respond to the king?**

The honest answer that Nehemiah gave is an indicator of the level of trust between them.

b. *What questions did the king ask, and how did Nehemiah respond?*

- **What emotions did Nehemiah experience here? In what ways did he show boldness?**

The king asked why Nehemiah was sad, and with some trepidation Nehemiah told about the plight in his homeland. Nehemiah recognized that his request could have implications. Persian kings had absolute power, and despite his close relationship with the king, Nehemiah could not be certain how the king would react. Nehemiah wisely presented himself humbly to the king, aware that the cupbearer could not presume upon the monarch. When the king asked a second question, “What do you want?” Nehemiah silently prayed to God (something he had been doing all along), knowing that it was God who was ultimately in control. The God of heaven could move the heart of a king. It was a sensitive matter to request that the wall of Jerusalem be rebuilt. There could easily be suspicion of an independence movement or even rebellion. But, being sure of God’s help, Nehemiah boldly spelled out his vision.

- **How do you think Nehemiah felt when the king asked how long his journey would take and when he would be back?**

God answered in support of Nehemiah’s prayer, and the king looked favorably on his request. Now Nehemiah could begin to set a time to leave.

c. What did Nehemiah ask of the king, and why were those requests important?

Nehemiah was even so bold as to ask for letters to officials in the lands he would travel through so that he could have safe passage.

- **To whom did Nehemiah give credit for his success?**

Notice that when everything came together for Nehemiah, he did not give credit to his careful planning or his good relationship with the king. Rather, he indicated that it was the Lord's doing.

- **What did Nehemiah do upon arriving in Trans-Euphrates?**

Nehemiah was very thorough in securing permission and documentation for his task. He also went through the proper channels to secure the supplies and other resources the king had granted for rebuilding the wall. In addition to letters of permission to the governors, the king sent army officers and cavalry with Nehemiah for protection. Trans-Euphrates was the largest of the twenty Persian provinces, a massive region west of the Euphrates River, extending all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. It included the areas that had once been Israel and Judah.

d. How did the regional leaders respond to the king's letters?

Not everyone was as supportive of Nehemiah's plan as the king was.

- **Why might Sanballat and Tobiah be “very much disturbed” by Nehemiah's plan?**

Sanballat was probably the governor of Samaria, the region just north of Jerusalem, and Tobiah was an Ammonite official, representing the region east of Jerusalem across the Jordan River. These officials, though under the rule of Persia, apparently felt threatened by Nehemiah's intrusion into their area.

- **How did Nehemiah's planning ahead help circumvent his opponents?**

By anticipating obstacles and planning the details needed to succeed, Nehemiah prevented his opponents from derailing his mission before he got started.

- **What leadership principles did he model?**

Pray, but in God's strength and wisdom, prepare and plan too!

Taking It Home

- a. *How do praying and preparing fit together?*
- b. *Describe a time when prayer made a difference in your preparation for a task.*

It will be helpful to observe that Nehemiah both prayed and planned. Note also that prayer was the first thing Nehemiah did once he heard the news from Jerusalem. When we're in tune with God and we know we depend on him, the Lord will guide our thoughts and actions and provide for us. "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. The LORD works out everything to its proper end. . . ." (Prov. 16:3-4).

In the book of Nehemiah we see how God inspires and empowers Nehemiah to lead his people in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Through Nehemiah's leadership, God's purpose is to make the city safe for his people again and to refocus them on what it means to be the community of God.

As we study this book, we'll see that Nehemiah serves as a model for leaders still today. His intellect, courage, empathy, and ability to challenge and inspire others, along with his dependence on God and his steady resolve in the face of opposition, provide examples for everyone. And throughout this story we'll see how the God of the Bible controls history and uses people like Nehemiah to carry out his purposes.

Discover Nehemiah features 8 lessons from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and group members are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God's Word.

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