

Devotion 1

Nehemiah – reading the journal of a man whose heart was focused for God

Background

About 400 years before Jesus lived, a Jewish man named Nehemiah was living in Persia. He and his family ended up there because their country of Israel was overrun by the Babylonian Empire that were later beaten by the Persian Empire. Nehemiah grew up in Persia and as his story begins he is living in Susa, the capital city, and in the Citadel, the fortified palace of the king. He is the king's cupbearer who tastes all the wine and food the king will eat, to make sure it isn't poisoned. If something was poisoned, then he'd die instead of the king. So, he is a deeply trusted man who is doing a very dangerous job.



rebuild the city walls.

This book of the Bible is a personal journal of the man Nehemiah, where he writes down his thoughts, experiences, memories, plans and prayers. So, we're kind of reading over his shoulder as he writes. This story is about the return of the Jewish people to Jerusalem and to Israel. Nehemiah is alongside another leader, Ezra, who went back to rebuild the temple of God. Their work combines as the temple is finished and Nehemiah leads the people to

Words and Ideas to Know

Kislev – a month that would be somewhere around November to December
Fast – stop eating for a while to focus or pay more attention to your thoughts
Ancestors – the people of my family who lived long before me
Sin – stuff people do that breaks their relationship with God and other people.

Scripture (from The Message)

Nehemiah 1

The memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. It was the month of Kislev in the twentieth year. At the time I was in the palace complex at Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, had just arrived from Judah with some fellow Jews. I asked them about the conditions among the Jews there who had survived the exile, and about Jerusalem.

They told me, "The exile survivors who are left there in the province are in bad shape. Conditions are



appalling. The wall of Jerusalem is still rubble; the city gates are still cinders.”
When I heard this, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God-of-Heaven.

I said, “GOD, God-of-Heaven, the great and awesome God, loyal to his covenant and faithful to those who love him and obey his commands: Look at me, listen to me. Pay attention to this prayer of your servant that I’m praying day and night in intercession for your servants, the People of Israel, confessing the sins of the People of Israel. And I’m including myself, I and my ancestors, among those who have sinned against you.

“We’ve treated you like dirt: We haven’t done what you told us, haven’t followed your commands, and haven’t respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant. All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: ‘If you betray me, I’ll scatter you to the four winds, but if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I’ll gather up all these scattered peoples from wherever they ended up and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.’
“Well, there they are—your servants, your people whom you so powerfully and impressively redeemed. O Master, listen to me, listen to your servant’s prayer—and yes, to all your servants who delight in honoring you—and make me successful



today so that I get what I want from the king.”

I was cupbearer to the king.

Imagine

I wonder what would it be like to live in a country with a king – a person who was so important that everyone had to do that person said?

I wonder what do we do when we hear sad news?

I wonder what would it be like to live in a city that had a wall around it, where all the gates were closed at night time, so a lot of people could sleep inside safe and sound?

I wonder what would it be like to take a bite of someone else’s food to see if it’s poisoned?

Play

Names – Do the names of Nehemiah’s Dad and brother sound funny? What would it be like if you always said your name as _____ son of _____ or daughter of _____? Do you think your name could sound funny to someone from another country?

Cupbearer – pretend to be the cupbearer who has to take a sip or take a bite of someone else’s food to see if it is poisoned

City – create a walled city in a computer game like Minecraft or in a room with blankets and chairs

Pray

Lord, we call you “Lord” because you are so important to us. Thank you for the place where we get to live and for friends. Thanks for our family and that we get to go places and do things together. Help us to love other people like you do. Amen.