

## Aim of lesson

To learn from Nehemiah's example how to handle problems in a way that pleases God.

## Bible background

Nehemiah 1; 2; 4; 5; 6:1-14.

## Outline of lesson

### The setting

The class can see from Nehemiah 1:1 that Nehemiah, like Esther, was in exile in Susa, or Shushan. Nehemiah 2:1 gives the year. It is the 20th year of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes was the successor to Ahasuerus (or Xerxes). The class can see on the time chart that Nehemiah lived some years after Esther. The events begin in the year 444 B.C., approximately thirty years after the events of the book of Esther. For this reason it is possible that the reference to the queen in Nehemiah 2:6, is in fact the queen mother, Esther, although it is by no means certain. It is, however, likely that the influence of Esther and Mordecai would have brought more Jews into positions in the court, and this is where we find Nehemiah. He is cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah 1:11.

### The first problem

Read with the class Nehemiah 1:1-4 or 1-11, and discuss the first problem that confronts Nehemiah. It would appear that about 13 years before, some efforts had been made to start the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city wall and gates. Ezra had gone to Jerusalem at this time from Babylon, see Ezra 4:6-23 and chapters 7 to 10. However, now Nehemiah heard that all their work had been frustrated and destroyed. Nehemiah's reaction is to weep, mourn, fast and pray, v4. You may like to ask the class about their reaction to bad news. Weeping, mourning and even fasting might be a natural reaction, but do we reach the stage of praying as Nehemiah did? The class should notice that Nehemiah did pray only once. He prayed night and day, v6. He also seems to have thought about what he could do to help. At the end of the prayer he obviously has in mind to ask the king to let him go back to Jerusalem to build the city walls.

### The workbook

The workbook has spaces for nine different problems that Nehemiah faced. The references are at the top of the blocks and the references to the way he handles them are at the bottom. The example of persistent prayer and consideration of how to help solve the situation could be noted by the class in the first space on the sheet. In a similar way the narrative can be traced by the class, looking at the problems that occur and the way Nehemiah handles each. This could be done by different members looking at different problems and reporting back to the rest of the class. The fact that Nehemiah's solution often includes prayers should be noted.

Suggestions for the sort of notes they might make are as follows:

Bad news	He prays and plans what to do.
Being afraid of what might happen	He prays and bravely speaks to the king.
Too much rubbish	He asks others for help. He carries on working; removes it piece by piece.
Mocking and ridicule	He prays and answers without ridiculing back.
Poverty and injustice	He shows concern and anger; a personal example of caring, Nehemiah 5:15, and teaches others. Note that Nehemiah does not try to change the poverty or slavery in the whole land, but he does try to remove it where he is, with those who believe in the same things.
Friends giving up	In Nehemiah 4:10 the people say to Nehemiah 'We cannot rebuild the wall.' They had decided it was impossible. They were giving up. It would have been very easy for Nehemiah to give up also. There was not only opposition from outside, but now the people he was working with were saying 'We can't do it', 'We won't make it'. Nehemiah encouraged them. He was aware that his companion in building was God, and God had not given up.
Threats and violence	Again Nehemiah prays. He also takes measures to defend the work and the people. Note: these are not measures to attack the enemy.
Invitation to do wrong	Note from Nehemiah 6:13 that Nehemiah did consider it would be a sin to go to negotiate with those plotting the destruction of God's work and people. He just refuses to go and commits the situation to God, v14.
Being lied about	He replies that it is not true, without retaliating, and then he prays.

### Our reactions

All the situations in the workbook are problems which we may have to face as well. Too much rubbish may be seen as the state of our lives rather than a building project. Each of the situations could be discussed in turn. The class could suggest in what way we might face the same problem and how Nehemiah's reaction can be helpful for us too. Jesus' words in Matthew 6:19-34 may be useful in considering God's perspective on many of the things that concern us.

## **Digging deeper**

### **Samaritans**

This section looks at who the Samaritans were, and the attitude to them in the New Testament.

### **Relevance to our lives**

The class could make a note of any of the nine problems in the workbook which crop up during the next week. Discuss how they handle them before next week's lesson.

### **Prayer**

There are many examples of Nehemiah's prayers, the class could write a prayer for someone today facing one of the nine problems in the workbook.

### **Other suggestions for activities**

- A series of pictures and a script could be prepared by the class to make a 'TV documentary' on the life and work of Nehemiah. This could include an interview with Nehemiah.
- Different articles could be written for an edition of a newspaper produced in Nehemiah's time. This could be a newspaper produced in Jerusalem, or in Susa in Persia.
- The class could mark on a large map places they have learnt about over the last series of lessons eg. Babylon, Jerusalem and Susa (or Shushan). It could be used with next week's 'digging deeper' to review their work.