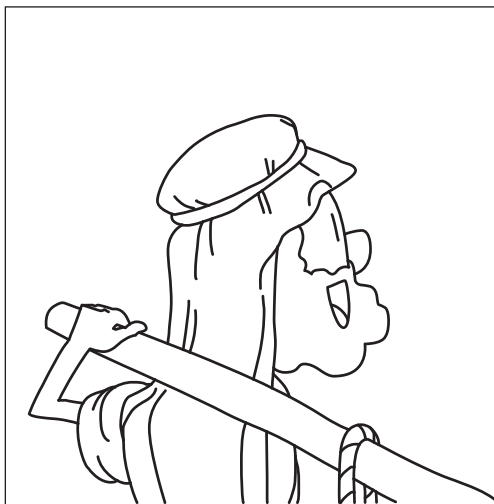


Nehemiah *goes to Jerusalem*



Colour me!



Nehemiah 2:1-8

Several years into the captivity, a Jewish man named Nehemiah who served in the court of the king, hears about the ruin of Jerusalem, the city of his ancestors who had been taken into captivity to Babylon and later Persia. This is a first-person account of what happened then.

During the month of Nisan in the twentieth year that Artaxerxes was king, I served him his wine, as I had done before. But this was the first time I had ever looked depressed. So the king said, "Why do you look so sad? You're not sick. Something must be bothering you."

Even though I was frightened, I answered, "Your Majesty, I hope you live for ever! I feel sad because the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and its gates have been burnt down." The king asked, "What do you want me to do?" I prayed to the God who rules from heaven. Then I told the king, "Sir, if it's all right with you, please send me back to Judah, so that I can rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried."

The queen was sitting beside the king when he asked me, "How long will it take, and when will you be back?" The king agreed to let me go, and I told him when I would return. Then I asked, "Your Majesty, would you be willing to give me letters to the governors of the provinces west of the River Euphrates, so that I can travel safely to Judah? I will need timber to rebuild the gates of the fortress near the temple and more timber to construct the city wall and to build a place for me to live. And so, I would appreciate a letter to Asaph, who is in charge of the royal forest." God was good to me, and the king did everything I asked.

Commentary

Nehemiah lived in an area known today as Iran, working as personal servant to the king of Persia. At this period in history, the Jewish people, who had been taken away as prisoners to live in exile some 70 years earlier, were being allowed to return to Judah, and in particular to settle back in the city of Jerusalem. Ezra had already taken one group home, but the reports of conditions in Judea were not good. The capital still lay in ruins and news about this broke Nehemiah's heart. As a God-fearing Jew he longed to do something, and in today's story he is given a rare opportunity to talk with the king about how he feels and to explain what he wants to do.

God answers Nehemiah's hasty prayer as he talks to the king, and amazingly he is given permission to return, both with a pass that guarantees safe passage and the promise of building materials. Nehemiah's courageous words at the right time were hugely blessed and led eventually to the rebuilding of the city walls and the re-establishment of a safe home for God's people, back in the promised land.

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Questions

- ▶ How do you think Nehemiah managed to remember his fellow Jews all through his years of exile?
- ▶ How did Nehemiah show boldness in his conversation with the king?
- ▶ What in the story makes you think that Nehemiah had already begun planning ahead?
- ▶ What did Nehemiah have to give up in order to do this new work for God?



Visual aid

Use a fine-looking drinking glass—maybe a goblet or cut-glass wine glass—to be your focus for this story. Pour out some drink and give everyone a little sip in turn. It was Nehemiah’s job to test the king’s drink like this.



Activity idea

Nehemiah goes through a range of emotions in the story, all of which must have expressed themselves on his face. Try miming some of his many moods, pretending in turn to be shocked, sad, depressed, fearful, hopeful, eager and amazed.



Prayer idea

Clearly Nehemiah had learned to pray in all situations, quickly and urgently. When his chance came, he prayed for the right words to say to the king, and God helped him. Talk about those times when your prayers have been simply ‘help’, ‘please’, ‘come’, ‘hear’ or ‘sorry’. Work on a five- or six-word prayer together about something facing your family.

Key verse

God was good to me (Nehemiah 2:8).

New Testament story link

Colossians 4:2-6: Paul advises his readers to be people of prayer and to use their opportunities to speak wisely.



Colour me!

