



Mission Accomplished

BIBLE STUDY: NEHEMIAH 1-6

Historical Context

LEADER COMMENT: (Note: This information could be gleaned from Bible survey books and other Bible study helps.) After the reigns of David and Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel divided into separate kingdoms—the Northern Kingdom, consisting of ten Tribes and the Southern Kingdom consisting of two Tribes. Jerusalem was in the Tribe of Judah, which was in the Southern Kingdom. Immediately and consistently, the Northern Kingdom began to drift from God, committing spiritual adultery and growing more and more evil. After about 250 years, God finally had enough and finally allowed them to be conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. Because of the manner in which Assyria controlled its conquered territory, specifically by importing foreigners to dilute any sense of residual nationalism which might rebel, intermarriages naturally took place. This practice was strictly forbidden by God and led to the formation of a group of “half Jews” known as Samaritans, which we encounter in the New Testament during the time of Jesus.

The Southern Tribes survived about a century longer. They, too, committed spiritual adultery against God and committed evil practices, but had respites of reformation when good kings rediscovered God’s word and chose to live according to its laws and guidelines. However, in 605 B.C. the Babylonians, who had replaced Assyria as the regional power, began their conquest of the Southern Kingdom. It was during this period that young Daniel, of Daniel and the Lions Den fame, was taken off as a young captive. Eventually, most of Jerusalem and Judah were taken captive back to Babylon for the 70 years of captivity predicted by God. All of Jerusalem, to include the beautiful temple, was totally destroyed.

In 536 B.C., the Jews were allowed by the Medes and Persians (the new regional power) to return to Jerusalem. After much delay, the new but smaller temple was completed in 516 B.C. Around 460 B.C., Ezra, the priest, returned to Jerusalem to lead the worship, but the wall around the city had yet to be rebuilt. It was for this task that Nehemiah, a trusted servant, went back to Jerusalem around 445 B.C.—almost 90 years after the first Jewish exiles had returned. The book of Nehemiah tells the story of his return and how he was able to turn a “mission impossible” for 90 years into a “mission accomplished” in just 52 days!

In the final 7 chapters of Nehemiah, which will not be included in this study, an unknown period of time is covered—perhaps up to twelve years. With both the temple and wall now built, the people settle back into the routine of life. The Scriptures become central to the people, they confess sins, and reforms are instituted. The history of what we know as the Old Testament closes shortly thereafter, around 400 B.C.

LEADER QUESTION: Even before looking at the text, there are some lessons to be learned. Why was the wall so important? Why was it that its completion, even more so than the completion of the temple, contributed

significantly to the renewal/reformation which took place shortly after the completion of the wall?

In western culture, we tend to compartmentalize our lives. Society wants to relegate worship to the church building, primarily on Sunday. In eastern culture, which includes Israel as part of the Middle East, life and religion were integrated. The wall certainly provided security for the people and their way of life. The wall, with its gates, could also be closed, not just to keep the enemy out, but to keep the world out when shutting the world out was an aid to focusing on God. With the wall completed the people could live an integrated life. For Yahweh, the God of the Jews, God was to be Lord of all or not Lord at all. Without this approach to life, renewal, revival, reformation wouldn't have taken place then and will not take place today.

Leader Note: If the question appears to be too difficult or is not producing the desired answer, develop another question keyed to the answer. For instance, ask: "Is there a difference between Eastern and Western culture in the way they and we integrate everyday life and religion?" (Keep this procedure in mind for any question in the guide.)

LEADER QUESTION: What are your thoughts on integrating your profession of faith and your work profession?

Don't look for any specific answer other than that we should integrate our Christianity with everyday life. If this turns out to be a lively discussion, let it go for awhile, especially if it is headed in the direction of illustrating how this can be done.

LEADER QUESTION: In today's parlance, we speak of clergy and laity. While the distinction is valid with regard to certain roles and functions, it is improper if that distinction becomes a dichotomy—mutually exclusive. How would you classify Ezra and Nehemiah? What conclusion could you draw with regard to their effectiveness in re-establishing a climate where faith is integrated with everyday life?

Ezra would be classified as clergy while Nehemiah would be considered laity—a layman. It seems that both together, not simply one or the other, were necessary to create the climate where renewal/revival/reformation would flourish. The conclusion would be that it is not only improper but also impossible for revival to take place if believers leave the work only to the clergy.

LEADER QUESTION: What would be the analogy today of clergy-laity cooperation in the military?

The obvious answer is the partnership of believing officers with the chaplains. Local pastors might also be an extension of the basic principle.

LEADER COMMENT: While we will have a lot of freedom to design the local OCF fellowship here, these lessons are key guidelines for the OCF philosophy of ministry. OCF seeks to help believing officers and spouses integrate their profession of faith with their everyday life in the military. OCF also seeks to create a climate within the military where spiritual renewal, revival, reformation and transformation can take place. It is our belief that this will happen as military Christian laymen (both active duty and retired) and military chaplains and pastors work together.



Catching the Vision

NEHEMIAH 1:1-2:10

Leader Note: Have an individual in the group (or perhaps two) read the text.

LEADER QUESTION: As we get into the immediate story now, it seems as though things started rather innocently. How did it all start?

With a question.

LEADER QUESTION: What was the question and what does it tell us?

The question was simple, posed to some visitors from Jerusalem: How are things going? The answer was not the standard, “fine” answer. Two things were communicated: 1) Nehemiah cared enough to ask; and 2) the visitors were concerned enough to not simply give the response “fine.” Nehemiah’s care would immediately become a burden.

LEADER QUESTION: Going only as far as our reading of the passage, where and what did this simple question lead to?

It led all the way to the King’s attention, with Nehemiah envisioning the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt. The beginnings of a plan were unfolding.

LEADER QUESTION: How did Nehemiah go from the natural concern he had, to a heart-felt burden, to a vision for change and ultimately to a plan?

Through prayer

LEADER QUESTION: Someone has said that if you really care about something or someone, you will be willing to be distracted or diverted from your routine in order to get involved. What evidence do we have that Nehemiah’s concern was genuine?

He wept—verse 1:4; he mourned and fasted for some days—verse 1:4; he was willing to approach the King with his concern—verse 2:3; his enemies sensed that he did not come to Jerusalem just to build a wall, but he came to promote the welfare of the people—verse 2:10.

LEADER COMMENT: Let me point out two facts that may not be readily apparent to all: 1) as Cupbearer to the King, Nehemiah was not your average servant. He had stood out from the rest for some reason. He was at least perceived to be a man of integrity, one who could be trusted. He was the person put in charge to insure that the

King was not poisoned; and 2) the period of time between the month of Kislev (1:1) and the month Nisan (2:1) was about four months.

LEADER QUESTION: Look briefly at the prayer given to us. This, most likely, is not a rote prayer that Nehemiah prayed for four months, but a sample of how he prayed during that time. What do you notice about how he prayed?

He acknowledged/revered God—both God’s person and character; he pleaded with God; he confessed the sins of his people, even though he may or may not have been personally guilty; he recalled God’s words and promises; he asked for God’s favor upon him.

LEADER QUESTION: Let’s begin to build a character sketch of this guy, Nehemiah. What characteristics are worth noting?

Caring; man of prayer; professional; man of integrity

LEADER QUESTION: What bearing do you think Nehemiah’s character had upon his request being granted? Explain.

Prayer—God listened to his contrite heart and answered his prayer by giving him favor with the King; Professionalism—gave the King a natural reason to honor his request; Caring—God tells us to love our neighbor and Nehemiah’s concern demonstrated his love.

LEADER COMMENT: The OCF vision statement reads, “To be a dynamic community of Christian military leaders, integrating faith and profession, serving with a passion for God and a calling to the military.”

LEADER QUESTION: What similarities do you see between Nehemiah’s character and the type of military leader OCF is looking for?

Nehemiah was an ambassador, a professional in the service of another [God], in a foreign land; God worked powerfully through Nehemiah, first in the development of a vision and a plan, then through his professionalism to gain favor with the King and ultimately to get the people motivated to accomplish the mission; his love for God is shown in his prayer—in the words and even in the act of praying [someone said, in essence, that we don’t pray because we love praying; we pray because we love God]; his love for others was shown in his willingness to leave off his routine to demonstrate that he really cared—he loved in action, not just in words.

LEADER COMMENT: In a few weeks, we will be having what OCF calls a “Pray, Discover and Obey.” This is OCF’s means of drawing near to God to gain His heart for the people at our installation and to watch that concern turn into a vision and a plan for action. We won’t pray necessarily for four months, but we will certainly spend a season in prayer together. We will be trusting God to meet with us and to begin to lay out His plan for us here.

LEADER QUESTION: As we conclude this session, let’s talk about how we assess our love for God and our love for our military neighbor. How are you doing? How am I doing? Allow some discussion as long as time permits and it is meaningful. To conclude, have a brief time of prayer where people acknowledged their love [or lack thereof] for God and for others in the military.



Communicating the Vision

NEHEMIAH 2:11-3:32

LEADER COMMENT: So far, we have discovered four major principles. The first had to do with the importance of the wall and from that noted that God expects us to integrate our Christianity with the affairs of every day life. Only then will we get to the point of renewal/revival/reformation so that the witness of believers will be a major part of the spiritual transformation we hope to see within the military. The second principle was drawn from the teamwork of Ezra and Nehemiah—one was clergy and the other was a layman, or laity. The lesson learned was that it will take the partnership of both clergy and laity to accomplish this mission. OCF has as one of its primary tasks to motivate and equip the lay Christian officer in the military to participate in the ministry.

The third principle is that ministry opportunities begin with a concern for people—a concern where sincerity is demonstrated in a willingness to be distracted from our routine. The fourth principle we observed was that prayer was the milieu—the environment; the medium; the setting—in which God takes our concern/burden and changes it into a vision of what He wants done, then begins to lay out the next steps for us to obediently take. In OCF, this is done through a “Pray and Obey” which we will hold in the near future.

Leader Note: Have a volunteer read Nehemiah 2:11-20.

LEADER COMMENT: The key observation in this passage is that finally, after nearly 90 years of walking through the rubble of broken down walls, the people say in the end of verse 18, “Let us start rebuilding” and they began to do so!

LEADER QUESTION: From the verse we just read, let’s pick out what we see as the important factors that contributed to the motivation of the people. What do you see and why do you think that was important?

Nehemiah arrived and did his homework, scouting out the situation—verses 11-16; people would see that he was not simply a visionary with no idea of the implications of what he was asking the people to do, but was well informed and armed with a realistic plan. People want to follow someone who knows where he is going. Nehemiah shared his vision with the people and asked them to join him—verse 17. Nehemiah also shared how God’s hand was upon him for this task—verse 18; people would see that there was someone even bigger than Nehemiah behind this project and that gave them hope of success. In fact, there were already amazing “success stories” being told. They didn’t have to expect God to work; He was already working! Nehemiah keeps in front of the people that God is the One who will bring about the success—verse 20.

Leader Note: Have the people read silently all of chapter three. Ask them to make note of 1) the different occupations of the people who joined in the building of the wall, 2) what percentage of the people joined in, and 3) the differing repair portions undertaken by the people. Allow about 5 minutes for this.

LEADER QUESTION: What different occupations/groupings did you see working on the wall?

Priests and even the high priest; family groups, rulers; goldsmiths; perfume-makers; merchants; daughters; Levites and temple servants—religious workers.

LEADER QUESTION: Who refused to help?

Only the nobles of one district; it appears that most everyone else participated!

LEADER QUESTION: Did everyone do the same amount of work?

It doesn't appear so; some did major sections like gates and towers used by the whole community; some did sections as long as a quarter of a mile; some only did that portion right outside their house—probably to insure that if the enemy came, they wouldn't come through their front door!

LEADER QUESTION: What conclusions can we draw from these observations regarding participation?

The key to accomplishing a mission such as this is to get as many people as possible to own the vision, as demonstrated by their involvement in action, not just in word. Utilize people where they are willing to be used.

LEADER COMMENT: When we have our “Pray, Discover and Obey” we will expect God to reveal where the OCF ministry here should focus. It will be important that we not think that the vision is only for those who met to pray and plan. It will be our responsibility to share this vision with others and invite and encourage them to find a way to tie in with each other for its accomplishment.



Sustaining the Vision

NEHEMIAH 4:1-6:15

LEADER COMMENT: There is usually a lot of excitement as a project begins. Somewhere in the process, often around the halfway mark, things can begin to drag. Perhaps the problems wear us down; maybe Murphy's Law kicks in—everything takes longer than you expect; if anything can go wrong, it will.

There may even be real, lice opposition. Nehemiah encountered this and our lengthy passage details the different forms of “opposition.” The primary thrust of this section will be to identify different types of opposition and notice the technique Nehemiah used to overcome this “opposition” and press forward to “Mission Accomplishment.”

Leader Note: Proceed chapter by chapter and look for the type of opposition and the means of dealing with each. Each chapter will take approximately 3 minutes to read. Take the time to read each chapter out loud.

LEADER QUESTION: Look at Nehemiah 4. What forms of opposition or threats to the rebuilding of the wall do you see in this chapter?

Ridicule; physical threats; discouragement

LEADER QUESTION: The ridicule and physical threats are obvious to see. Lets look closer at verse 10 and identify the nature of the discouragement. Can you find three means of discouragement?

Running out of strength; focus on the rubble, not the half-built wall; loss of confidence in themselves.

LEADER QUESTION: How did Nehemiah address each of these forms of opposition?

Ridicule—prayer, verse 4; physical threats—prayer, a guard, weapons, an alarm, a pep talk, verses 9,16, 20, 14; discouragement—work as families, living in the city at night, reminder that God is the one to look to for strength—verses 13, 22, plus the whole chapter is about what God will do.

LEADER QUESTION: Notice the inclusion of the family in verse 13. How did Nehemiah use the family to help deal with concerns and discouragement?

Nehemiah did not disregard the family and the concern that the worker would have for his family. He did not ask for the wall to be built at the expense of the family. Neither does OCF want you to disregard the family. There are often creative ways to involve the family with you, which will restore strength, and help with the ministry.

LEADER COMMENT: There were two enemies in chapter 4—the enemies in the land, who ridiculed and threatened; and Satan, who sought to discourage. In chapter 5, we see another enemy.

LEADER QUESTION: Read chapter 5. Who is perceived to be the enemy now, and how did it happen?

Their fellow Jewish countrymen, especially those in the nobility and the higher official; their taxation of the people under precious governors, so that they could live a life of ease, had placed great hardship on the people and caused bitterness and division.

LEADER QUESTION: How did Nehemiah handle this threat to the mission?

He confronted their wrong doing and demanded that they repent of it by ceasing the practices and returning what they had improperly taken. He set a persona; example by not only refusing to engage in such practices, but by seeking to alleviate some of the hardship through his own generosity.

LEADER QUESTION: As you compare the form of opposition in chapter four with that of chapter 5, what can we learn about Satan's tactics? If Satan cannot succeed with threats from the outside, he will seek to destroy from within.

LEADER QUESTION: What are some ways in which Christians can act, perhaps even toward other Christians, which cause disruption of the mission within the Body of Christ? Let this be an open ended discussion for a short period of time.

Some answers you might hear are: a critical, unaccepting attitude of others; questionable actions which bring discredit upon God and other believers; a boastful attitude about ones Christian walk or situation while others are struggling, perhaps not.

LEADER INSTRUCTION: The purpose in these three chapters is not to dwell too long on the opposition, but to be aware that it will likely be present in one or all of the forms chronicled here. Christians need to realize it so that they will correctly identify it and work to resolve it so that Satan will not have the victory after a successful start. If the discussion bogs down on the opposition, you may have to interject some of these thoughts to keep the study upbeat at this point and moving forward.

LEADER QUESTION: Ask for a volunteer to read Nehemiah 6:1-14. With Satan having failed to discourage and distract the Jews from their work on the wall, what is his next tactic? He attacks the leader, Nehemiah, first through a plot to kill him, then through false accusations, and finally through intimidation.

LEADER QUESTION: What strikes you about Nehemiah's response and resistance to these attacks? His wisdom to foresee what they were doing, his continual taking of these attacks to God, and his ability to stay focused.

LEADER COMMENT: Although some may not see the connection with New Testament teaching about praying for those in leadership. It certainly would be very appropriate for you to mention/allude to it here. Passages you might reference are: 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and James 1:5.

LEADER COMMENT: Have someone read Nehemiah 6:15. "Mission Accomplished"—in an amazing way!

Leader Note: Review/remind the people of the first four principles that were drawn from the Historical Context and the first section of study.

LEADER QUESTION: In these last few chapters, additional principles should have become obvious. Let's try to put them into words. How would you state them? (Don't be afraid of silence as they think back through the material and formulate their responses.)

It is important to communicate the vision God has given you to others and to motivate and invite them to join you. It is also important to involve as many people as you can in the mission, allowing for as many levels and areas of participation as possible. Expect opposition but don't become preoccupied with it—be able to recognize it in its many forms and deal with it through spiritual leadership.

LEADER COMMENT: As we conclude this study, it should be obvious that the next step for us to take is to prepare ourselves by taking an inward look at our passion for God and compassion for others in the military. Then, we ought to conduct a "Pray, Discover and Obey" and discern how God wants to take that love for Him and loving concern for other in the military and give us a vision for what he wants to accomplish through us (OCF) here. As that plan emerges, we will need to press ahead obediently, sharing that vision with others, encouraging as many as possible to participate, and not allowing the opposition, all of which is spearheaded by Satan, to keep us from the mission of reclaiming territory for Christ in the military.

All this needs to be done for God's glory, not ours individually or for OCF's, so that we will one day be able to rejoice at seeing a spiritual transformation within the military and perhaps throughout all of America. All this even as God is doing the same thing throughout the world!