

NEXTUP

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WEEK OF JANUARY 23-29

Series Title: NEXTUP

Message Title: NEXTUP VISION

INTRODUCTION:

This week we begin our Next Up Series which correlates with our Next Up Initiative.

CAV's Next Up initiative will create more space for our Children and Student Ministries as well as our hospitality experience. This initiative is Church at Viera's next step towards reaching our vision of equipping thousands to influence tens of thousands in Brevard County and beyond. We recognize that God has planted us in a growing community. Our next Faith Step as a church is to invest deeply in the younger generation. To do so, we need to expand our Family Ministry areas so that we can reach more families for Christ.

Over the next several weeks you will be inspired and challenged by God on how you can participate in this initiative and more importantly the legacy you can leave for future generations.

Before Your Small Group Meeting:

- Watch Pastor Mark's Message
- Read Nehemiah 1:3-4; 2:12-18; 4:13-14; 13:14,31
- Encourage your group members to participate in the weekly devotions and prayer

DISCUSSION

1. What jumped out at you the most from Pastor Mark's message this weekend?

2. What burdens you about the next generation?

3. As your group discussed the burdens and fears you have for the culture our next generation will grow up in, what are some ways you can prepare them for what they are going to encounter?
4. Do you have anyone in your family who is currently in this next generation (high school and younger)? Maybe it is a child, a grandchild, a great grandchild, a niece or a nephew. Discuss ways you can “fight” for your families going forward.

RESPOND IN PRAYER

Spend time in praying for a passion to fight for our next generation.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Nehemiah:

Nehemiah’s Prayer (1:1–11). Nehemiah received a delegation of Jews led by Hanani in modern southwestern Iran, the winter palace of the Persian kings (Esth. 1:2, 5; Dan. 8:2). The visit was made in the month of Kislev (Nov.–Dec.) in the twentieth year (445 B.C.) of Artaxerxes I (464–424 B.C.; Neh. 1:1–3). When Nehemiah heard Jerusalem was unprotected, he sought God’s help through fasting and prayer. His appeal was based on God’s covenant with Israel as given in Deuteronomy. There the Lord threatened the unfaithful but also promised to assist the repentant (see Deut. 9:29; 28:14; 30:1–4). As the king’s cupbearer, Nehemiah ended his petition by anticipating an audience with Artaxerxes (“this man,” 1:11). Nehemiah’s burden for Jerusalem required his personal involvement. The “cupbearer” was a personal butler who functioned as the king’s wine taster.

Nehemiah’s Preparations (2:1–20). After four months of prayer and preparation, Nehemiah was ready to answer the king’s inquiries about his sad demeanor. Nehemiah feared the king’s response, but with God’s help he courageously petitioned the king for the authority to rebuild Jerusalem’s defenses. The Lord favored the cupbearer so that the king granted his petition by giving him letters of authority and royal protection. Sanballat’s and Tobiah’s displeasure was an early omen of trouble (4:1–2; 6:1–7). Sanballat is named in the Elephantine papyri (407 B.C.) as “governor of Samaria.” The Elephantine papyri are Aramaic documents of the fifth century B.C. recovered from a Jewish military colony stationed at modern Aswan at the southern border of Egypt.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah quietly reviewed the condition of the city in preparing to meet with the Jewish leaders. The people accepted the challenge of rebuilding the walls. Sanballat and Tobiah, joined by Geshem the Arab, scoffed at them, accusing them of sedition. The same tactic had been effective against Zerubbabel (Ezra 4:4). Nehemiah answered by asserting that the true authority for his actions came from God.

Restoring Gates and Walls (3:1–32). The high priest Eliashib (12:10, 22; 13:4) led the work by reconstructing the Sheep Gate. The Fish Gate and wall followed. Workers on the Jeshanah (“Old”) Gate and wall included rulers, perfume makers, and women. The Valley Gate and Dung Gate, leading to the city’s dumpsite, were next. The restorers of the Fountain Gate and wall included nobility and Levites. Temple servants worked at the Water Gate and wall, and the priests repaired the Horse Gate. The residents near the East Gate and wall repaired it. Among those laboring at and nearby the Inspection Gate were a goldsmith and merchants. People of all occupations participated, including whole families. Despite opposition, they cooperated in their common goal to do the Lord’s work.

Opposition to God’s Work (4:1–23). Sanballat’s conspiracy included taunts and threats. Nehemiah prayed for God’s intervention, and the people labored “with all their heart” (4:6). The opposition broadened and intensified, but the people

responded again with prayer. Rumors weakened their resistance, but Nehemiah organized a civil defense. He exhorted the Jews to remember their “great and awesome” God, who stood able to confound their enemy and fight their battles.

Economic Oppression (5:1–19). Internal dissent threatened the building project as much as the threat of war. The absence of food caused the poorer Jews to mortgage their homes and even sell their children into servitude in order to pay indebtedness. They complained that their oppressive creditors were fellow Jews. Nehemiah convened a hearing and charged the creditors with exacting usury (see Deut. 23:19–20). He considered their actions a reproach in the eyes of their Gentile enemies since the community was already struggling to buy back enslaved Jews from the Gentiles. Nehemiah acknowledged he had made loans but not unfairly. The guilty agreed to return the confiscated possessions.

This incident led Nehemiah to defend his conduct during the twelve years of his term as governor. Unlike his predecessors, he did not govern out of greed but placed the building of the wall above his personal interests. By sharing his wealth with many on a daily basis, he set an example for the people.

Final Intimidation (6:1–19). With the work near completion, out of desperation Nehemiah’s enemies entreated him four times to meet them at Ono, a site located between Judah and Samaria at the southern end of the Plain of Sharon. He refused on the grounds that the Lord’s work was more important. Sanballat, frustrated by Nehemiah’s refusals, stepped up his intimidation by charging him with sedition. Nehemiah responded with prayer as he had in the past. Sanballat hired Shemaiah and the prophetess Noadiah to give false counsel as though it were from the Lord. Shemaiah advised Nehemiah to take refuge in the temple because he might be assassinated that night. Nehemiah, however, saw the plot for what it was. He did not want such an act of cowardice to discredit him before the people. Again Nehemiah prayed for God’s justice.

The wall was completed after only fifty-two days because of the Lord’s help. Ironically, the nations became intimidated by the success of the Jews, realizing that they had accomplished an impossible task. Nevertheless, Tobiah convinced some of the Jews to act treacherously by pressuring Nehemiah. Tobiah had close ties with Eliashib the high priest (see 13:4) and also had financial dealings among the Jews.

Protecting Jerusalem (7:1–73). Nehemiah charged Hanani with the security of the city because he was able and pious. The city was now secure for new residents (see 11:1–36). God impressed upon Nehemiah the need to keep genealogical records. Therefore Nehemiah began by reciting the first record of the exiles under Zerubbabel’s tenure (see Ezra 2:1–70).¹

Ezra Reads the Law (8:1–18). The last half of 7:73 introduces chapter 8. The seventh month was the most important month of the ceremonial calendar (see Lev. 23). On the first day of the month (see Num. 29:1), the people assembled and called for Ezra to read the law. The purpose of the reading was so they could understand the law. The people stood in reverence when the law was read; and their response included praise, tears, and joy. The Levites interpreted the law for those who did not understand its meaning.

After hearing the law, the elders urged Ezra to call for a general assembly of all the Jews to observe the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). Tabernacles was traditionally celebrated for seven days at the time of harvest ingathering (Exod. 34:22). It commemorated God’s provision during the wilderness when Israel lived in temporary shelters or booths (see Lev. 23:33–43). For these exiles, this festival was particularly meaningful because they had experienced the second “Exodus” from Babylon. The booths, made of tree branches, were constructed in the city. Not since Joshua’s time had the feast been celebrated in this way. The law was carefully followed. The Jews set aside the eighth day (Lev. 23:36) for special assembly.

Israel Confesses Its Sin (9:1–38). On the twenty-fourth of the month, two days after the feast, the exiles fasted while dressed in the clothing of contrition. They prepared for confession by sanctification, reading the law of Moses, and worship.

The Levites led a prayer of confession, calling the pilgrims to arise. They praised God as great and gracious. From Abraham’s call to Moses’ experience at Sinai, God protected and provided for Israel. In contrast to the longsuffering of God, Israel was stiffnecked and rebellious throughout its history. Still, the Lord remained merciful. The prayer concluded with supplications. They admitted that God had justly chastened them by Gentile oppression, but now they prayed that

¹ Mathews, K. A. (1998). [The Historical Books](#). In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (pp. 184–186). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God might see their economic distress and rescue them from oppression. Their prayer of confession concluded with the nation entering an oath of commitment to obey the law of Moses.

Signing of the Covenant (10:1–39). The chapter lists those who signed the oath, beginning with the governor. Also priests, Levites, and rulers are noted. The features of the covenant included (1) submission to the law, (2) separation from foreign marriages, (3) Sabbath observance as the sign of the Mosaic covenant, and (4) service to God through tithes and offerings. They agreed to fulfill what the law required of them. They would pay the temple tax (Exod. 30:11–16) contribute wood for the continual burnt offerings (Lev. 6:12). They would dedicate their firstfruits and firstborn (Exod. 23:19a; Num. 18:17–19) and pay tithes for the Levites and priests (Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:21–32; Deut. 12:5–18; 14:22–29).²

Settling the Cities (11:1–36). The exiles organized their society by lot and by volunteers who migrated to the Holy City. While descendants of all of Israel's tribes returned to Judah, Jerusalem would be comprised particularly of those whose ancestors had populated the city in the days of David's kingdom—Judah, Benjamin, and Levi.

Dedicating the Walls (12:1–47). Nehemiah's memoirs are taken up with the continuing account of the walls. The elaborate festivities planned included Levitical singers and orchestra. The people, aware of their standing before God, cleansed themselves to prepare for the celebration. Ezra and Nehemiah led the two processions. After marching around the city on its wall, the two parades convened at the temple to offer God thanksgiving. Provisions for the Levites and priests were restored and the choirs David had ordered were reestablished.

Renewing the People (13:1–31). Another line of defense constructed by Nehemiah was the community's spiritual life. The basis for the reforms Nehemiah enforced was the Mosaic law. He attempted to reflect the Mosaic ideal that Ezra's reading of the law had set before the people (chaps. 8–10). The people segregated themselves from foreign influences that would jeopardize their spiritual commitment (see Deut. 23:3–5).

However, Eliashib the high priest (Neh. 3:1, 20; 12:22; Ezra 10:6) had already compromised the holiness of God's temple. He cleared the storerooms for the Ammonite Tobiah (Neh. 6:18) to occupy. Nehemiah explained that he was in Persia when Tobiah occupied the temple. Upon his return, he immediately expelled Tobiah and cleansed and restored the storerooms for service. He reinstated the Levitical offerings, which had ceased during his absence, and charged the people with breaking their oath (13:10–14; 10:39; see Mal. 2:8–12). He took further steps against merchants who violated the Sabbath by selling goods to the Jews. He charged the Jews with repeating their fathers' sins and threatened the merchants' lives.

Nehemiah's final action addressed the continued problem of intermarriage (see Ezra 9:1–10:44). To Nehemiah, the different languages he heard spoken by Judah's children indicated that the Jews were losing their distinctive identity as God's people. The problem was the foreigners' religion, not their ethnicity. He argued that the Jews were reviving the sins of Solomon, whose unfaithfulness caused Israel to sin and suffer God's judgment. Nehemiah took drastic action because of the severe threat. He physically chastened those married to foreigners and forced them to abstain from such marriages. So sordid was the situation that even Sanballat's daughter (2:10, 19) had married into the priestly line.

Nehemiah concluded his reforms by caring for the needs of the priesthood. Nehemiah was conscious that he was carrying out God's mandates and not his own. With each reform he prayed for God's blessing on his faithful service.³

² Mathews, K. A. (1998). [The Historical Books](#). In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (pp. 186–187). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³ Mathews, K. A. (1998). [The Historical Books](#). In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (pp. 187–188). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.