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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2353 ~ Nehemiah's Night Visit.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

This *Bible Adventure* starts looking at Nehemiah's work with the Jewish exiles after they'd returned to Jerusalem with the blessing of the different Babylon kings. Zerubbabel had led the 1st group of exiles back with the mission of building the Temple of God again. About 80 years later, Ezra the Scribe then led a small group back, with the mission of bringing reform to the people of Judah. Then 13 years later again, Nehemiah set out from Babylon for Jerusalem to rebuild the city's walls.

The Bible book of Nehemiah was written by Nehemiah himself. Although he was a Jew, he was also a trusted servant of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, and had the official title of the king's 'cupbearer.' Nehemiah's job included making sure that no one tried to poison the king's food or drink.

Nehemiah had a very different personality from Ezra. While Ezra was a scholarly man who had devoted much of his time to prayer, study, writing and teaching, Nehemiah was a man of action and had a gift for motivating people to work for the good of the whole community. The Bible books of Ezra and Nehemiah should be studied together, as they record the single story of the re-establishment of the Jewish people in Judah after their exile.

One day some years after Ezra had left for Jerusalem, one of Nehemiah's brothers came with a group of men to visit Nehemiah in the royal palace at Susa. They told Nehemiah about the rebuilding difficulties that the returned exiles were facing. They also reported that the walls and gates of Jerusalem had not yet been rebuilt. This news really upset Nehemiah and he fasted and prayed for several days. Although the walls of the city had been destroyed 140 years earlier by King Nebuchadnezzar, there'd been a recent attempt to rebuild them early in King Artaxerxes' reign. But the king's own officials had written to the king, asking him to order that the rebuilding be stopped in case the Jews established themselves in opposition to the king and the king did so. This had been a great setback to the Jews, who were left defenceless and open to attack from hostile neighbours.

Nehemiah lived in comfort in the palace of the king of Persia and could have ignored this bad news. But Nehemiah wasn't that kind of man. He prayed and praised God for His faithfulness to His covenant with His people with this condition: that God only keeps His covenant with those who love Him and obey His commands. Nehemiah prayed long and hard about the broken-down walls of Jerusalem, before asking God to give him success and favour with the king. Since the king himself had ordered that the work on the walls be stopped, it took great courage on Nehemiah's part to ask for the king's permission to rebuild them again!

Nehemiah started his most important life work with prayer, and that's where all believers in Christ must start if we are to achieve a useful work for God. Four months had now passed before Nehemiah found the right opportunity to speak to the king about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The king was sympathetic to the plight of Jerusalem and pleased to send Nehemiah as its governor to rebuild the walls. Four months seems a long time to wait for God's answer to Nehemiah's prayer, but doing things at the right time is so important in spiritual matters. We can ruin things by impulsiveness and haste. We must seek God's timing in everything we do. A right action can turn out wrong simply because it's mistimed. God's timing is always perfect yet ours isn't.

The king asked Nehemiah how long he would be away, and this turned out to be 12 years. Nehemiah was a man with considerable administrative ability but he placed his trust in God and not in himself. Soon after reaching Judah, he met his two chief opponents, Sanballat, the governor of Samaria and Tobiah, the Ammonite official and descendant of Abraham's nephew, Lot. These men weren't Jewish and they feared that a strong leader in Jerusalem would undermine their own political authority and influence. Nehemiah kept his mission a secret from them at first until he'd had time to inspect the walls of the city and see what needed to be done. He did this inspection at night time when his trip around the walls wouldn't attract attention.

In the Bible book of Nehemiah, Chapter 2, Nehemiah spoke first to the city officials and encouraged them to set their minds on rebuilding the city walls, to which they agreed. At first, the people said the rebuilding couldn't be done because they'd already tried before and it was hopeless. Their enemies had done everything they could to stop the building work and so far had succeeded.

When Sanballat and Tobiah heard about Nehemiah's plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they scoffed and suggested that Nehemiah was rebelling against King Artaxerxes. But Nehemiah told them that the God of heaven would help the Judeans succeed. But he made it clear to them that they had no share, legal right or historic claim to any part of Jerusalem.

When Nehemiah forcefully rejected Sanballat and Tobiah having a part in Jerusalem's economic future, it seems that his resolve became stronger. Although Nehemiah had many natural abilities, they were soon tested and refined. We never know what we're capable of until we're put to the test. If we're truly doing God's work in God's way, God will use the opposition we face to 'make' us, not 'break' us.

When Nehemiah was certain that the walls would be rebuilt, he had to convey that same faith and trust in God to the discouraged people. They were mentally defeated and believed it was impossible as they looked at the mountains of rubble still lying in the streets of the city. The people had a sense of hopelessness and were resigned to leaving things the way they were. Nehemiah had to first change the people's mental attitude from being so negative before he could rally them into a reliable workforce.

What we do in life all depends on what type of thoughts we dwell on. The best antidote for sad and negative thoughts is the advice of Scripture given in Philippians, Chapter 4, Verse 8: "Fix your thoughts on what is true and honourable and right and pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise."

Did you know that you can totally change your life by changing your thoughts? If you fill your mind with moral, positive, good and praiseworthy thoughts, you'll grow closer to God each passing day. The reason for this is that our thought life forms the basis for what is largely revealed in our actions and words. Of course, there will still be bad or unfavourable things that happen in life and to those around you, but they won't be so hard to pray about and leave in the Lord's capable hands to do His good and pleasing will in the situation.

What can we learn from Nehemiah and his situation? When Nehemiah first heard about the distress of the returned exiles living in Jerusalem, he didn't pretend to be disinterested in the news of disaster back home. Misfortune and loss in life have to be faced; not repressed. Integrity requires that whatever is true must also be faced. And bad news like what Nehemiah heard, brings about a desire to help. Nehemiah brought the problems he'd heard to God in prayer in humility and great respect over 4 months while waiting for God's timing to speak to the king.

We, too, must come to God with the right attitude when we pray. The humble will lay their requests at God's feet with faith, praise, confession and expectation. Where there is no reverence for God, there will be few answers from God. Nehemiah's detailed answer to the king's question meant that he had completely thought through and persistently prayed about his proposed plan of action. There must never be any substitute for fervent believing prayer. Some rewards in prayer come only in proportion to the time put into praying.

God chose Nehemiah to be His leader to go to Jerusalem and start fixing the problems. The king confirmed this by allowing Nehemiah to leave his court and helped him to get ready for the journey, even by providing a military escort to protect him as he travelled. When the king granted his request, Nehemiah didn't take the credit for what he'd just achieved but rather, saw it as evidence of the Lord's gracious hand on him. When God answers our prayers in the way we desire, we mustn't take any of the glory of God for ourselves. For in Isaiah, Chapter 42, God says: "I will not give my glory to anyone else, nor share my praise with carved idols."

After Nehemiah had travelled to Jerusalem and spoken to the people about rebuilding the walls of the city again, they all came to realise that someone needed to organise them into teams of workers to accomplish the task. The people then chose Nehemiah to oversee them; and this meant that they were ready to obey his leadership and work as he instructed them to do.

But not every leader chosen by God is also chosen and accepted by the people around them. Consider the Lord Jesus: He was chosen by God for a very special mission and sent by God to earth to accomplish God's task. Jesus taught the people about God and the right way to live life so as to please God. Jesus performed many miracles and wherever He went, crowds of people followed Him. But the religious leaders, the very ones who spent their days studying the Old Testament Scriptures which spoke of the coming Messiah, rejected Him. Why? Were they jealous of His seeming popularity? Jesus told the religious leaders that what was in their hearts was coming out of their mouths in hostile attacks against Him. He told them parables or special stories, from which the leaders realized that He was showing them as Christ's enemies. In Matthew, Chapter 12, Verse 30, Jesus said: "Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me."

Whose side are you on? You can't take a neutral position between Christ and Satan, as there are only two choices: either you are for Jesus or for Satan. You don't have to do anything to remain under Satan's leadership. But if you want to be united with your Heavenly Father and Jesus in paradise, you need to respect Christ as the Son of God and ask for His substitutionary sin sacrifice for you to be applied to your life. This is God's only way to make amends for all your wrongdoing and sinful inclinations. Can you believe in this and say with the songwriter: "No one ever cared for me like Jesus?"

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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