

27.03 Nehemiah, the King's Cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:1–11; 2:1–8)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] Brackets indicate a remark to the teacher that will not be read aloud; they also show answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional needed materials. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print on colorful cardstock and cut apart.

- *cupbearer*: a person who tasted the king's food and drink before the king ate it in order to be sure it was not poisoned. Historical accounts tell us a cupbearer would pour some wine into his cupped left hand and, with fingers from his right hand, taste the drink. If the drink had been poisoned, the cupbearer, instead of the king, would die. Obviously, a cupbearer was one of the most trusted servants of a king. Could a cupbearer look sad while he did his job? [No,] Why not? [Because sadness might indicate to the king that something was wrong—like poison's being in his cup.]
- *to fast*: to go without food for a period of time because of concern about a problem
- *to request/a request*: to ask for something/the thing asked for
- *timber*: logs from trees to be used for construction

Scripture (ESV):

Nehemiah 1:1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, 2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

4 As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. 5 And I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. 8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ 10 They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. 11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” Now I was cupbearer to the king.

2:1 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. 2 And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. 3 I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” 4 Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.” 6 And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when

will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. 7 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, 8 and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Introduction/Review:

Commanded by King Artaxerxes of Babylon/Persia to go check out the condition of Jerusalem and to teach the people, Ezra, Jewish priest and scribe, and more than 4000 people went home to Jerusalem. All was not well in Jerusalem. Despite their knowledge of God's wrath against the worship of false gods, some of ✓the Jews living in Jerusalem had married pagan wives, a sure-fire way to turn their hearts from the true God to false gods. The book of Ezra records the putting away of these pagan wives.

Story:

A visit from Jerusalem

Fourteen years passed. Nehemiah, a Jew who had not gone back to Jerusalem, still lived in Shushan (Susa), the royal city of the Persians [locate]. He had a very trusted position in the palace, for he was the king's cupbearer.

One day some Jews arrived in Shushan from Judah. One of them was a relative of Nehemiah. Concerned about the situation back in his homeland, Nehemiah asked, "How are the Jews who went back to Jerusalem? What is the condition of the city?"

"Oh, the situation is quite bad. Those few people who have gone back are greatly bothered and shamed by enemies there. The city itself is a mess, for the city wall is still broken down, and the gates are burned up," answered the relative.

When Nehemiah heard these words, he sat down and wept. For several days he fasted as he grieved about the condition of Jerusalem and the Jews. But he also prayed.

A weeping and praying Nehemiah

Nehemiah's prayer is one of the great prayers recorded in the Bible. All of these great Bible prayers have some key elements. [Teacher, show chart that follows this lesson.] They are

- (1) Honoring God for His greatness
- (2) Confessing sin
- (3) Repenting and acknowledging God's right to punish
- (4) Asking a request for what God has promised or for His will to be done

[Teacher, if you do not wish to read Nehemiah's entire prayer, skip the following four paragraphs and refer to the points listed above, but be sure to include #4, Nehemiah's request to find favor in the sight of Artaxerxes.]

As I read Nehemiah's prayer today, listen for the four points just listed. Let's all bow our heads, close our eyes, and fold our hands as if we, too, were praying, for much of what Nehemiah prayed we could pray for ourselves and our nation too. Let's pray.

- (1) "LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open so that You may hear the prayer of Your servant that I pray, day and night, for the children of Israel.
- (2) "I confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

(3) “Remember, I pray, the word You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, I will gather you from there and bring you back to the land.’

(4) “O Lord, I pray, please listen to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name, and I pray that You let me prosper this day by granting me mercy in the sight of the king. Amen.”

Did you hear Nehemiah honor God? Did you hear him confess the sins of the people and admit the people deserved their punishment? Did you hear Nehemiah remind God of His promise to regather the people? Did you hear Nehemiah ask God to make King Artaxerxes favorable toward Nehemiah's request?

For three months Nehemiah grieved and prayed night and day. ✓ Surely he tried very hard never to show his heartache in the presence of the king, for if he did, that could mean big-time trouble.

A sad appearance before the king

However, one day while the queen was sitting beside Artaxerxes and he served the king, ✓ Nehemiah must have gotten to thinking about Jerusalem and its broken-down walls and gates. ✓ Despite his usual efforts to hide his grief, his face was sorrowful. The king asked, “Why is your face sad since you are not sick? This has to be sorrow of heart.”

When Artaxerxes asked this question, Nehemiah became terrified—✓ perhaps because of the king's possible response if he suspected Nehemiah was a traitor.

Nehemiah said immediately, “Let the king live forever!” His quick answer showed Artaxerxes he was not a traitor.

Nehemiah continued, “Why should not my face be sad, when Jerusalem, the home of my fathers, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”

✓ “So that's what's troubling you. What would you want from me?” asked Artaxerxes.

A request of the king

This was the moment for which Nehemiah had been praying for three months. Before he answered, he prayed quickly one more time. Then he said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers, that I may rebuild it.”

“Well, how long do expect to be gone?” asked the king. Ah! Nehemiah *had* found favor. The king *would* send him.

Nehemiah set the time of his return, but he had more to request: “If it pleases the king, give me letters to the governors of the regions where I will be traveling so that they permit me to pass through until I come to Judah. Also, may I have a letter to the keeper of the king's forest that says he must give me timber to make beams for the gates to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house where I will live?”

Nehemiah requested letters for what two things? (1) For governors to let him travel through their territories. (2) For the keeper of the forest to give him timber for building.

An answer from God

The king gave Nehemiah those letters. Did Nehemiah think he got his request because he himself was so important? No. This is what Nehemiah said: “The king granted them to me ‘according to the good hand of my God upon me.’”

Oh, here we see again “the good hand of God” on those who fear Him.

With the king's permission, Nehemiah prepared for his long journey to Jerusalem. What would he find when he got there? We'll find out in our next lesson.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:

Just as the king was sympathetic to Nehemiah, so Jesus cares for His own—for those who trust Him. First Peter 5:7 tells us, “Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

- Weep and pray about the sins of your nation. [Teacher, be judicious about the sins you mention, particularly abortion, homosexuality, and cohabitation, considering the age of your students.]
- After praying a long time, we may also pray quickly in time of need as did Nehemiah: “So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king.”
- When God answers prayer, give Him the credit. You, too, can say, “According to the good hand of my God upon me.”

Activities:

- Play dough: goblets or cups and pitchers; trees or wooden beams
- Snack: Fast by not having a snack or by cutting down the usual portions of a snack. On the other hand, maybe a snack of sour dill pickles would remind of the sorrow Nehemiah experienced.
- Have the students pretend to be cupbearers. Pour a little water into students’ cupped left hands, and have them dip their fingers into the water and taste it. Provide towels.
- Weep and pray about the sins of your nation.
- Watch the first 4 minutes and 42 seconds of the first Nehemiah video found at [Bible Stories for the Young : Stories](http://www.biblestoriesfortheyoung.com/stories/OT/2YR-78-Nehemiah.pdf). Scroll down about 3/5 of the page. Nehemiah’s story will be in the center column next to Ezra’s story.
- Have a cup relay. Divide the group into two lines for a relay. Fill a cup to overflowing with packing peanuts, cotton balls, or another light substance. The kids must run/walk to the other side and return. Then they hand their cup to the next person. People carrying a cup must not drop any packing peanuts. If they do, they must stop and pick up what has fallen before continuing. (idea from <http://www.missionarlinton.org/d/OT-2YR-78-Nehemiah.pdf>)
- Sing this song to the tune of “The Wise Men Built His House upon the Rock.” (idea from <http://www.missionarlinton.org/d/OT-2YR-78-Nehemiah.pdf>)

Nehemiah prayed to God for help. (sing 3x)

And God did hear his prayers.

Come let’s rebuild Jerusalem’s wall. (sing 3x)

And work until it’s done.

- Review questions: (Game: Have a box of tissues available. A student who answers a question correctly may take a tissue and demonstrate Nehemiah’s sorrow. It’s teacher’s choice as to how much silliness may be allowed in this activity, but if silliness has occurred, bring students back to seriousness at the end of the game.)
 1. What was Nehemiah’s job? [He was cupbearer.]
 2. Why was being a cupbearer a trusted job? [Because it protected the king from being poisoned.]
 3. Why did Nehemiah grieve, fast, weep, and pray? [He was sad because Jerusalem’s walls and gates were in ruins.]
 4. We talked about four elements of great prayers in the Bible. Name one of these elements. [(1) honoring God; (2) confessing sin; (3) repenting and acknowledging God’s right to punish; (4) asking for what God has promised or for His will to be done.]
 5. Nehemiah asked the king to write letters to two groups of people. Name one of these groups.

[Governors; keeper of the forest.]

6. Fill in the blank. “The good hand of my _____ was upon Nehemiah.” [God.]

Memory Verse[s]:

Start memorizing Psalm 1:3 and review verses 1 and 2. The video at [Bing Videos](#) is a great aid in learning this psalm. Song sheet is below.

Ask the question, does a tree have a good chance of thriving if it has a dependable source of water? A believer who delights in and meditates on God’s Word is sure to thrive just as a tree beside streams of water thrives and brings forth fruit.

Review definitions: *Blessed* is the condition of joy that is free from evil. *Counsel* is advice. The three words—*wicked*, *sinners*, and *scoffers*—all describe someone in rebellion against God and His ways. The *law of the Lord* is the Bible, the Word of God. To *meditate* is to think with deep study.

- **1** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.
4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Handwork:

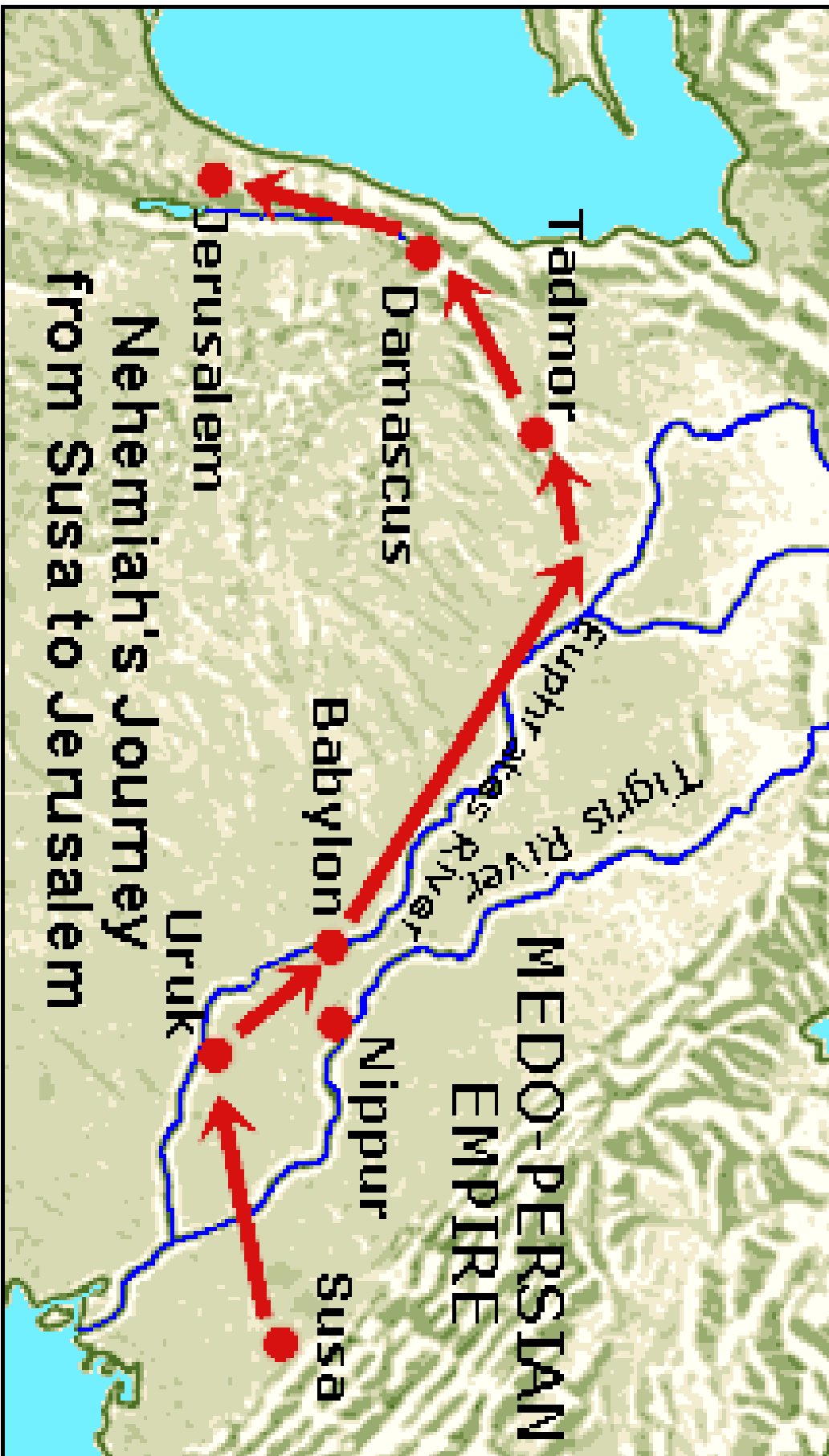
- Color the line art picture below of “Artaxerxes and Cupbearer Nehemiah.”
- An alternative is to color the smiley-frowny face found at the end of this lesson. Turn the image upside-down for the opposite emotion.

cupbearer

to fast

to request / a request

timber

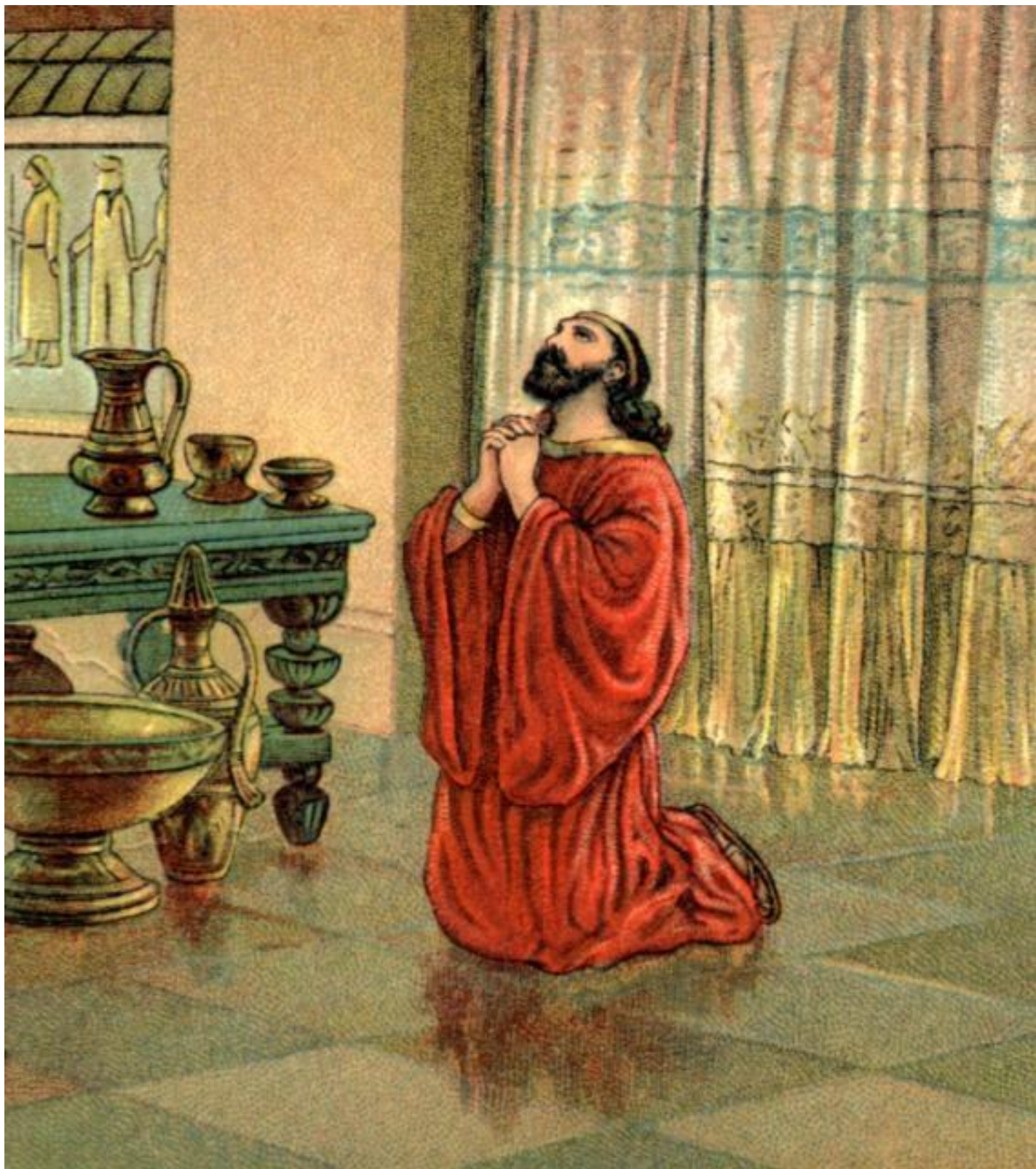


Bible Praying

- 1) Honor God
- 2) Confess sins
- 3) Repent and admit God's punishment is just
- 4) Recall God's promises and make a request



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<http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/Pictures/StandardBibleStoryReadersBook5/images/scan.jpg>



Psalm 1 - Blessed Is the Man

Psalm 1 - ESV

Betsy James



1 Bless-ed is the man who walks not in the coun-sel of the wick-ed, nor

5 stands in the way of sin-ners, nor sits in the seat of scof-fers; 2 but his de -

10 light is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he med - i - tates day and

15 night. (tick, tick, tick) 3 He is like a tree plant-ed by streams of wat-er that

20 yields its fruit in its sea-son and its leaf does not with-er (with-er) In

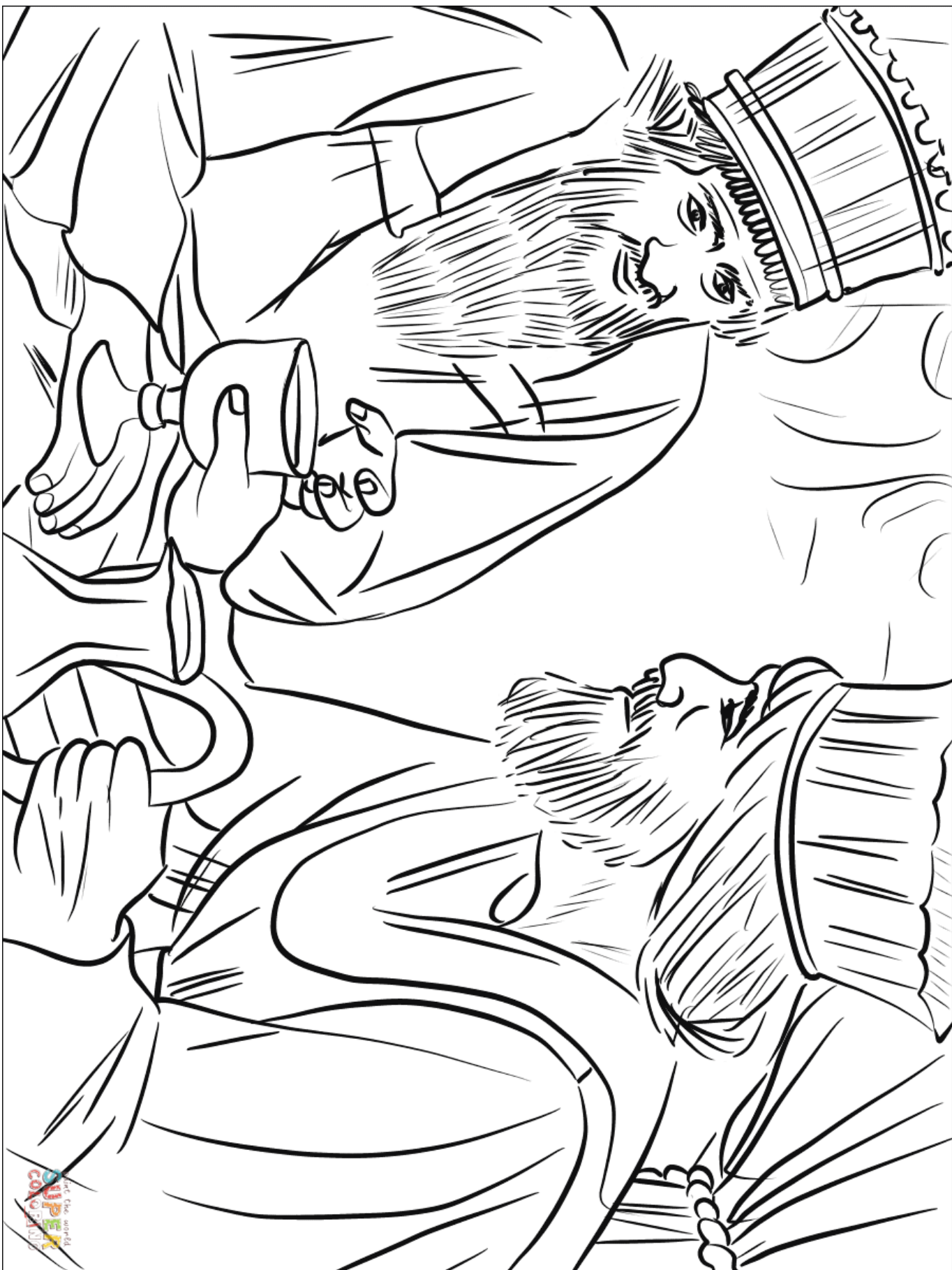
25 all that he does he pros-pers. (pros-pers!) 4 The wick-ed are not so, but are like

30 chaff that the wind drives a - way. 5 There - fore the wick-ed will not stand in the judg-ment,

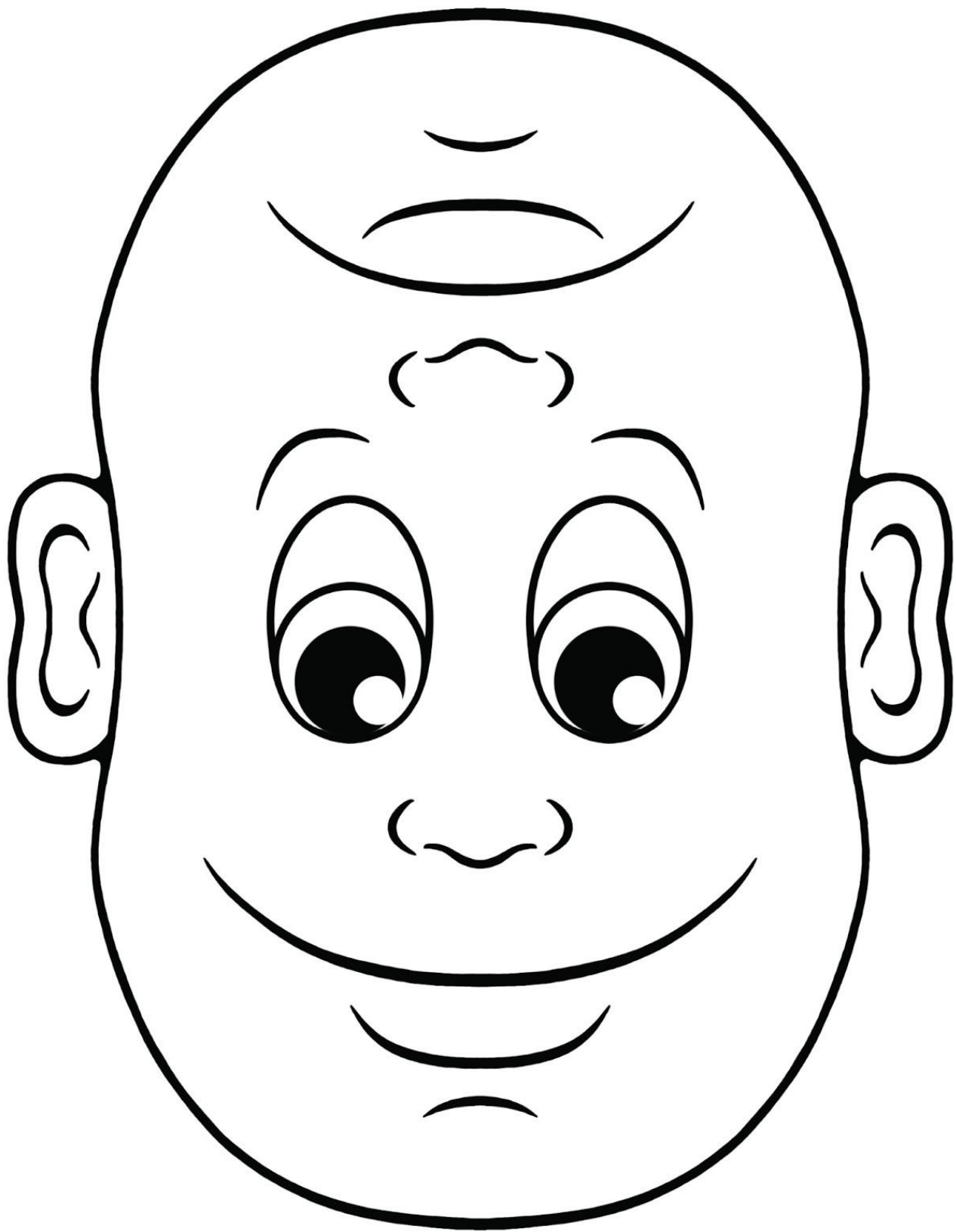
34 nor sin-ners in the con - gre - ga - tion of the righ - teous. 6 for the Lord knows the

40 way of the righ - eous, but the way of the wick-ed will per-ish. (per-ish,)

Artaxerxes and His Cupbearer, Nehemiah



Nehemiah was sad because the walls and gates of Jerusalem were in ruins.



Turn page upside down.

Nehemiah was happy because the good hand of God was upon him.