

HARVEST of GOLD

TESSA AFSHAR

- 587–586 BC** Judah is captured by Babylon, and the Temple is destroyed.
- 559–530 BC** Cyrus the Great establishes the largest empire the world has ever known and founds the Achaemenid dynasty. In 538 Cyrus sets Israel free from its Babylonian captivity as foretold by Isaiah (44:24–45:5). He donates money from his own treasury toward the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- 530–522 BC** Cambyses, Cyrus’s eldest son, conquers Egypt. His reign is briefly followed by his younger brother, Bardia, who dies shortly thereafter under strange circumstances.
- 521–486 BC** Darius the Great expands the Persian Empire so that at its height it encompasses approximately eight million miles of territory. Next to Cyrus, he is the most admired Achaemenid king. He is probably not the king referred to in the book of Daniel 6:1–28, since Daniel would be quite old at this time.
- 486–465 BC** Xerxes takes over his father’s great dynasty. He is best known for his notorious attack on Greece and for choosing a simple Jewish girl named Esther as his queen. The date of this event is not known. For details, see the book of Esther.
- 465–424 BC** Artaxerxes is known as a benevolent king who replaces several harsh laws with more humane rulings. He sends his cupbearer, Nehemiah, back to Jerusalem in 445 in order to rebuild its ruined walls.
- 334 BC** Alexander the Great conquers Persia.
- Approx. 33 AD** Jesus of Nazareth is crucified.

CHARACTERS in order of appearance or mention

Sarah—former scribe to the queen; wife of Darius

Darius Pasargadae—Persian aristocrat; Sarah’s husband

Pari—handmaiden to Sarah

Damaspia—queen of Persia

Artaxerxes—king of Persia

Nehemiah—cupbearer to the king; relative of Sarah

Arta and Meres—members of Darius’s personal guard

Niq, Nassir—Babylonian brothers

Megabyzus—Persian general

Mardonius—member of the Immortals

Lysander—friend of Darius

Hanani—brother of Nehemiah

Pyrus—nephew of Megabyzus and a provincial governor

Zikir—high-ranking official from Damascus

Roxanna—daughter of a Persian aristocrat and woman of many talents

Sanballat the Horonite—leader of Samaria who opposes Nehemiah

Tobiah—Ammonite leader who opposes Nehemiah

Zenobia—daughter of Zikir

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Harvest of Gold

1. In the first two chapters of the novel, we glimpse certain strengths in Sarah and Darius's relationship. But we also become aware that this marriage is already in trouble. Identify some of the strengths and weaknesses you see in Sarah and Darius's relationship.
2. Most of the characters in *Harvest of Gold* seem to be engaged in a battle. The king is battling to save his life. The Babylonian brothers are trying to preserve their freedom. Nehemiah is striving to save Jerusalem. Sarah and Darius are desperate to keep their marriage intact. Where are the places you see a battle in your life?
3. What do you see in your life that is worth fighting for? What have you given up on?
4. What are some of the lessons we can learn from Nehemiah to help us overcome in the midst of the battles of life?
5. In Chapter 12 Sarah has a miscarriage and Nehemiah prays for her. How can *you* help and comfort others as they grieve? How do you personally cope with loss?

6. In Chapter 24, Nehemiah talks about Gideon. Are there places in your life where you are hiding in a metaphorical winepress? What are you afraid of? (For example, failure, disappointment, suffering, ending up alone . . .)

7. Gideon's perception of himself differed from the way God saw him. Do you think you are like Gideon in that respect? How do you think God sees you? In contrast, how do you see yourself?

8. Describe Darius. How do you think Darius's emotional distance affects his marriage? Can you relate?

9. What prevents Darius from placing his trust in the Lord? In the end, what causes him to change?

10. We sometimes build walls around our hearts that need to come down: walls of fear, defensiveness, pride, emotional distance. But there are also godly defensive walls that we should establish around our lives: walls that protect our relationship with God and with others, walls that safeguard our destiny and our soul. But like Jerusalem, many of us have allowed these walls to fall into ruin. Talk about areas of your life where the wrong walls have to come down, and areas where new protective structures have to be raised up.

11. Nehemiah has a special role in Sarah and Darius's lives. In your own words, describe their relationship. Do you have a Nehemiah in your life? Are you a Nehemiah in someone else's life?

12. What caused Nehemiah to overcome all the odds against him?

13. Who is your favorite character in this book? Why?

14. Which character can you identify with the most? Why?

15. What are some of the scenes in this story that touched your heart? Why?