

NEHEMIAH

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: NEHEMIAH 1-6



God works through men to accomplish His redemptive plan.

The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

Nehemiah was aroused to pray – The walls of Jerusalem, originally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, remained broken in spite of the fact that the altar and temple were rebuilt. Because the walls were broken the city was open to attack. Once again, God aroused a man to accomplish His redemptive plan. This time the man was Nehemiah. After hearing about the walls, Nehemiah mourns, prays and fasts for days. What we have in chapter one is likely the consolidation of Nehemiah's prayer.

Nehemiah repented for the sins of Israel and asks God for favor. But what could one man do? If he is the right man, God's man, he can do much. Nehemiah, we learn, was the cupbearer to the King! Nothing would stop the plan of God. Earlier in Israel's history, God spoke to King Cyrus and then later to King Darius. Here God selects another king to use for His purposes. King Artaxerxes would be used to bless the work of restoring Jerusalem.

God gave Nehemiah favor with the king – The king could see that Nehemiah was sad, perhaps he was even aware of Nehemiah's mourning. Knowing that Nehemiah had not been sick and had been absent the King inquired. Though Nehemiah was afraid, God gave him grace to bring an explanation to the king and God gave him boldness to make very detailed requests to rebuild the city. Why should a king grant such an expensive request from his cupbearer of all people? No need for us to speculate – we are given the answer at the end of Nehemiah 1:8, "And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me".

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The rebuilding began in faith – The work of rebuilding the walls was not the crazed idea of one lonely cupbearer but work directed by God, see Nehemiah 2:11. Nehemiah began immediately with a covert inspection of the walls at night. After the inspection he motivated the people with the testimony of what God had done through the king. Sanballat, governor of Samaria to the north and Tobiah, an Ammonite official, first mocked the effort. Later when they heard the work of rebuilding was going well and that the gaps are being closed, they thought up a plot to stop the work, see Nehemiah 4:7-8. The people of God prayed for protection against these adversaries day and night, see Nehemiah 4:9, and posted guards.

The rebuilding continued in faith despite opposition – Sanballat received word that God had frustrated his plan. From that day on, the work of rebuilding continued, half the servants worked on the wall while the other half stood with bows, spears, and shields, wearing coats of armor. With each stone moved in place the city became more easily defensible. Those who carried supplies also carried spears. Those who worked with one hand had a spear in the other, see Nehemiah 4:15-20. The work continued until all the wall was finished. In chapter 6 we read,

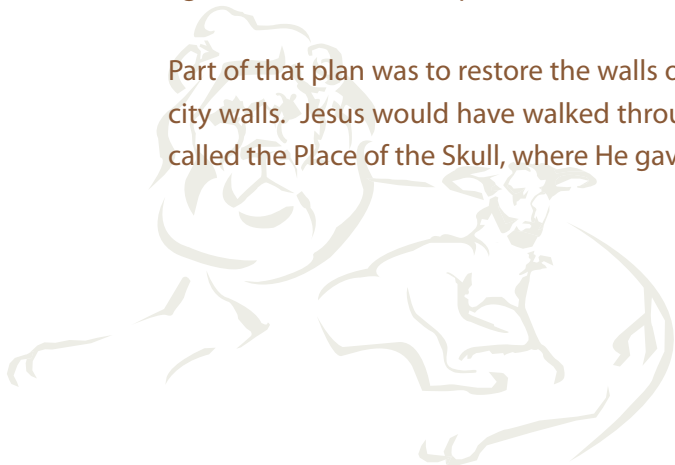
So the wall was finished ... and when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. (Nehemiah 6:16).

Where Is Jesus?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

One day Jesus would minister in the restored city of Jerusalem. Although the people of Israel rebelled against God, God had a plan to redeem His people through Christ.

Part of that plan was to restore the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus was crucified just outside those city walls. Jesus would have walked through the Judgment Gate in the wall that led to Golgotha, also called the Place of the Skull, where He gave His life for the atonement of our sins.



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ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Zechariah 3:6-10

Connecting the passage to Christ:

The promised "Branch" that God will give His people is none other than Jesus. This title of branch appears again in Zechariah 6:12. It is actually a proper name and was first used by Isaiah as a name for the Messiah, see Isaiah 4:2. Jeremiah uses the name to describe the descendant of David who would take the throne, see Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15-16.

Questions for reflection:

- How does this use of "branch" compare with Jeremiah's use of branch in Jeremiah 23:5 and Isaiah's use of "branch" in Isaiah 4:2? (They all point to the one whom God will send. We learn from Isaiah that He is a Branch of the Lord and from Jeremiah, a man in the line of David.)
- What do we learn from Zechariah 6:13 about what this branch will do? (We learn that he shall build the temple of the Lord. Jesus said "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), which we learn is the body of Christ: the fulfilled expression of the temple of the Lord.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.



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ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

WHAT A LITTLE OPPOSITION WILL DO

Supplies

- two large packages of foam coffee cups
- masking tape
- 8-foot table

The object of this exercise is to help the children visualize the rebuilding of the wall and how opposition can thwart the work.

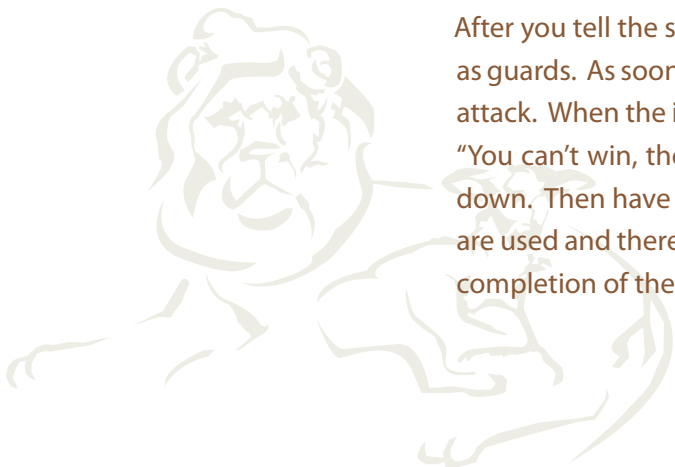
Tape a line across one eight-foot table to indicate the location where the wall should be rebuilt. Scatter the cups all around in front and behind the tables. The cups represent the stones needed to rebuild the walls.

Choose eight volunteers to be the workers to rebuild the walls. Assign one of the eight to be Nehemiah to direct the work. Workers can only carry one cup at a time and must work to rebuild the wall.

While you are explaining the work to the eight, have another teacher or helper choose two others to represent Sanballat and Tobiah. Tell them to go up to the table and one by one (not more than one cup at a time) knock the wall down again.

Start the exercise and just as the builders get real frustrated stop the exercise and then tell the story of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The whole story is over five chapters long so you will need to plan ahead of time which parts to read and which parts to consolidate. You may want photocopy the first six chapters and highlight the text you want to read.

After you tell the story try the exercise again but this time post four of the workers as guards. As soon as the intruders approach the table, have the guards cut off their attack. When the intruders have been opposed, tap them on the shoulder and say, "You can't win, they have weapons to defend themselves". Have the intruders sit down. Then have the class encourage the rebuilding to continue until all the cups are used and there are no gaps in the wall. Then have the whole class celebrate the completion of the wall through their applause.



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LOOK FOR GOD

Supplies

Bibles for everyone in the class

God so often works behind the scenes through the lives of people like Nehemiah. Take time after you read and tell the story to the class to search out the work of God behind the scenes.

God works in ways that are obvious, like Nehemiah obviously knew God and prayed to Him, but God worked in ways a little more subtle as well such as just the fact that Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king and not a farmer with no access to the king.

Then ask the class the following questions:

Look though Nehemiah chapters 1-6 and tell me everywhere God is at work behind the scenes to accomplish His plan.

Nehemiah prayed to God who heard his prayer and gave him favor with the king

God put the plan to rebuild into Nehemiah's heart (2:12)

the hand of God had been on Nehemiah for good (2:18)

the God of heaven will make the work prosper (2:20)

they pray to God in chapter 4 (4:4,14)

God frustrated their enemies' plan (4:15)

• How else did God work to arrange circumstances to ensure His plan would succeed?

Nehemiah found out about the condition of the wall when he could have just gone on unaware

Nehemiah was in a close position to the king as cup bearer

The king was willing to allow Nehemiah to go when he could have been greedy and even imprisoned Nehemiah for his downcast service

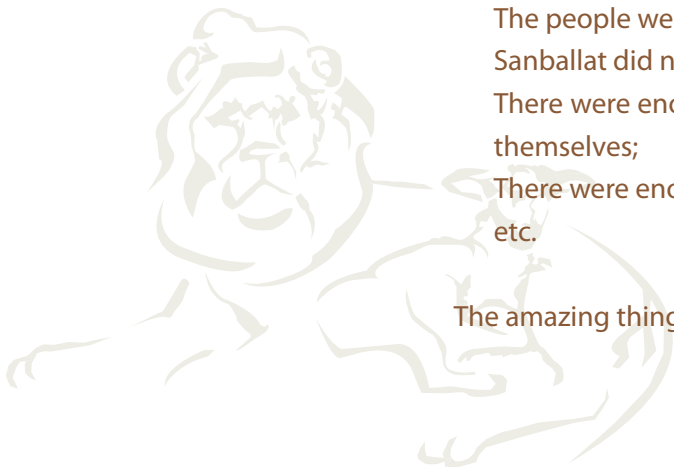
The people were willing to rebuild the wall;

Sanballat did not immediately oppose the rebuilding of the wall with force;

There were enough weapons around to allow for the people of God to defend themselves;

There were enough supplies to complete the rebuilding of the wall;
etc.

The amazing thing is that God worked it out for the wall to be completed!



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GOD'S LARGER PLAN

Supplies

Bibles for everyone in the class

Look up the following verses and connect what God did in Nehemiah's time with God's larger plan to use Jerusalem in His redemptive plan.

Luke 2:22-30

Luke 2:41

Luke 4:9

John 2:23

John 5:1-9

Matthew 16:21

Matthew 20:17

Mark 11:1-11

Luke 24:33-47

Acts 1:4-5

Acts 6:7

Acts 8:1

Revelation 3:12

Then ask the class the following questions:

- After hearing all these passages, how does it affect your view of what God did to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in the days of Nehemiah? (Hearing all those verses helps us to see God's future plan that He had in mind all along.)
- How much of God's plan did Nehemiah understand? (Nehemiah did not know all of what God was going to do. In fact, he knew very little.)
- Knowing how little Nehemiah knew of God's plan, how can that encourage us to obey God and what He is calling us to do? (We know so little of how God will use the good works we do for His glory and His kingdom. We never know if the next person we share the gospel with will become a great leader in the church or a great evangelist. We, like Nehemiah, need to remain faithful knowing God is working all that we do in accordance with His great plan of redemption.)

PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.



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IN CLASS PROJECT

The first and second grade children can use the preschool coloring sheet and questions. Have the older children draw a picture of the rebuilding of the wall.

FOR OLDER GRADES

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pencil
- a large supply of newspaper and packing tape

The story of the rebuilding of the wall starts in chapter one and finishes with chapter six and the completion of the wall.

Divide the class up into six groups and have each group act out their chapter. They should first read the chapter, then decide who will play the roles. Give them newspaper to make costumes.

Give them 10 minutes to read their story and then 10 minutes to make costumes. Then give each team five minutes to put on their skit of the chapter.

When the acting is complete, read Mark 16:21-28 and share with the class that the greater purpose of God was that Jerusalem would be complete so that it could act as the city in which the Son of God would be crucified. God so loved us that He arranged for this city to be restored as a setting for the killing of His Son.

Share the gospel with the class and help them understand that when we read about the restoration of Jerusalem in Nehemiah, we cannot separate that from the cross.



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A LITTLE BIT MORE

Jerusalem – Jerusalem was a Canaanite city prior to Joshua's conquest and became the dwelling place for God from the time of David onward. Psalm 87:1-3 tells us that it is the most favored city by God because it is His dwelling place. When the people of God disobeyed, Jerusalem was sacked and its people taken captive. Jerusalem was rebuilt in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. It continued to be the central location of worship for the Israelites until the time of Jesus.

Jerusalem, as the place where God dwells with His people, has a greater significance than an earthly city. In Revelation 21:10 we learn that the city of heaven, where God will live with His redeemed people is called Jerusalem. So, the earthly Jerusalem is a shadow of that greater heavenly reality.

