

Lesson 116

Nehemiah Rebuilds the Walls

God used Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Studying God's Word

Don't forget! Review the Optional Supplements and determine where you can use them.

Introduction

Have game supplies ready.

We're going to start today with a game that tests your ability to do two things at the same time—stack cups and defend yourself from flying pom-poms! Bring out bag of pom-poms, ping-pong paddle (or fly swatter), cups, and timer. You must stack the cups in a pyramid. Start with 8 cups as the first row, then stack up from there as fast as you can. (You may build a wall as a demonstration with 8 cups in the first row, then 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 stacked on top in each successive row. For a faster option, have fewer cups in the starting row, if desired.) But, here's the hard part—you'll only be able to use one hand because you'll be holding the ping-pong paddle in the other and using it to defend yourself from a pom-pom attack coming from your classmates! I need one brave volunteer to go first and several students to be the pom-pom throwers for the first round. Choose volunteers. Place cups in one stack on a table and give one student the ping-pong paddle. Position pom-pom throwers a reasonable distance from the table. Start the timer and have the student build a wall (pyramid style) with the cups while using the paddle to block pom-poms that are being thrown at him. When the wall is completed, restack the cups and have the throwers pick up the pom-poms for the next round. Choose new volunteers and play as time permits.

Those of you who built walls, how did it feel to have people throwing pom-poms at you while you were working? Allow answers. What would have made it easier to build? Allow answers. Being able to use both hands. Not having to hold the paddle or worry about blocking pom-poms.

In today's lesson, we'll see how the Jews were forced to do a similar task, but they were building a city wall instead of stacking cups. And their enemies were coming against them with real weapons, not pom-poms!

Slide #3

Slide #4

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. We've been learning about the Jews returning to Judah after living 70 years in captivity in Babylon, later called Persia.

Refer to Lesson 113 Theme Poster. The first group who returned was led by Zerubbabel who came home to rebuild the temple.

Refer to Lesson 115 Theme Poster. The second group of Jews came back with Ezra who was skilled in the Law of God and wanted to teach it to the people.

What sin did Ezra discover the Jews in Judah had been committing? The Jews had married people from the foreign nations around them, and they were worshipping their false gods.

Ezra prayed and told the people they were doing wrong. They confessed their sin to God and separated themselves from their wives and children who worshipped false gods.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. Today, we'll learn about a third group of Jews who returned to Jerusalem. About 13 years after Ezra's return, God used Nehemiah to lead these Jews home.

Nehemiah Travels to Jerusalem

Let's see how God led Nehemiah back to Judah. Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Turn to Nehemiah 1. The book of Nehemiah is after Ezra and before Esther. They are books of history.

Slide #5

Slide #6

Nehemiah 1:3-4

While Nehemiah was still in Persia, he received some bad news from his brother and others who had just been in Judah. Who will read Nehemiah 1:3-4? Choose readers.

What was the bad news about the remnant, or small amount, of Jews who had gone back and were living in Jerusalem? Why were they in great trouble and shame? The wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates destroyed.

Cities back in those days had walls to protect the people inside from enemies. Having broken walls and burned gates meant the people could be attacked at any time.

What did Nehemiah do when he heard this distressing news? Look in verse 4. He wept and mourned for days, fasted (refused to eat), and prayed.

Nehemiah was upset to learn that his people in Jerusalem were in trouble. He immediately prayed to God. You see, Nehemiah served King Artaxerxes, the same king who gave Ezra permission to return to Judah. Nehemiah knew he couldn't do anything about this problem without the king's permission, so he asked God to grant him success as he spoke to the king.

Pass out the Class Notes.

Let's start the Class Notes. Today you'll find the answers at the bottom of the page and write them in the blanks.

Slide #7

Who will read #1? What bad news did Nehemiah hear? Choose a reader. Trouble. Have students complete #1.

Why were the people in danger? Someone read #2. Choose a reader. Walls. Have students complete #2.

What about #3? What did Nehemiah do? Choose a reader. Prayed. Have students complete #3.

Nehemiah was very close to the king; he was the cupbearer. That meant he tasted all the drinks before the king drank them to make sure they weren't poisoned. One day, the king noticed that Nehemiah looked sad, and he wanted to know why. Nehemiah explained the news he had heard about Jerusalem's walls.

Slide #8

Slide #9

Nehemiah 2:4-6

Would the king help Nehemiah? Let's find out in Nehemiah 2. We'll read verses 4-6. Assign readers.

When the king asked Nehemiah his request, or what he wanted to do, what did Nehemiah do before he answered? He prayed to God.

Nehemiah prayed, then what did he ask for? To go to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem.

Did the king allow Nehemiah to go? Yes, it pleased the king to send him.

Just as God worked in the hearts of King Cyrus and King Artaxerxes to allow Zerubbabel and Ezra to return to Judah, God granted Nehemiah favor with Artaxerxes so he could return to Jerusalem, too.

Nehemiah left Persia with a group of other Jews heading to Jerusalem. The king gave Nehemiah letters with permission to travel through the land and to use the trees in Judah to rebuild the gates and walls. And he even sent soldiers with the group for protection.

Slide #10

Let's fill in some more answers now. Who will read #4? Choose a reader.

Cupbearer. Have students complete #4.

And #5? How did Nehemiah look when he served the king's wine? Choose a reader. Sad. Have students complete #5.

How did the king respond in #6? Choose a reader. Permission. Have students complete #6.

The Jews Rebuild the Walls

When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem, he wanted to get to work on the walls right away. But there were enemies also living in Judah who weren't happy that Nehemiah had come. They would try to stop Nehemiah from rebuilding the walls.

Nehemiah needed to see how bad the walls and gates were to know where to start, but he couldn't let the enemies see him. So, he got up in the night, took a few men with him, and inspected the walls. Things were as bad as he'd heard! The walls were broken, and the gates had been burned. In some places, the rubble (loose stones and broken wood) from the walls was so bad that Nehemiah couldn't get past the mess and had to go another way!

Slide #11

Slide #12

Nehemiah 2:17-18

No one knew Nehemiah's plans until he was finally ready to tell the Jews. Who will read Nehemiah 2:17–18? Choose readers. What did Nehemiah call the people to do in verse 17? Build the wall of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah knew other people were mocking them and the Lord because of the broken-down walls. He helped the people understand that this was the right thing to do by telling them how God had granted him favor with the king to return and do this work.

What did the Jews say to this? Look in verse 18. Let us rise up and build.

The people of Jerusalem agreed to help Nehemiah rebuild, and they prepared themselves for the work. But there were three men who were determined to keep the work from happening. These three enemies, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, were leaders from the area, but they were not Jews.

First, they tried accusing Nehemiah and the others, asking, "What do you think you're doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

But Nehemiah was confident that God had allowed him to come this far and wouldn't let him down now. "We are God's servants," Nehemiah replied, "and he will help us rise up and build. But you, who are not Jews, have no part in this."

Although their threats and accusations didn't work this time, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem would not give up easily—they would be back.

Slide #13

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. In the meantime, the Jews got to work! Nehemiah assigned sections of the wall and gates to different groups and families. Everyone helped—noblemen, priests, Levites, merchants, tradesmen such as goldsmiths, and families including women all did their part. They cleared away rubble, replaced wooden beams for the gates and set the doors in place, and rebuilt the stone wall. Many of them took care of repairs on the section of wall near their homes.

Wouldn't you work hard, too, if you were building protection around your home? Allow discussion.

When the troublemakers heard that the rebuilding was going well, they tried to discourage and scare the Jews to stop the work. "Look at these weak and feeble Jews!" Sanballat jeered. "How will they ever finish their wall with nothing but broken stones—and burned ones at that?"

Tobiah the Ammonite made fun of them too, saying, "Even a little fox would break down their wall if he were to climb it!"

Sanballat and Tobiah were leaders among the other people now living in Judah. These people included Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites. They didn't want to see the Jews protecting their city from them. They wanted the Jews to be weak and afraid.

Nehemiah didn't say anything mean back to these men. Instead, he prayed to God and asked him to deal with those bullies. And the Jews kept working until the wall was joined together all the way around, although it was still only half its full height! They still had a long way to go.

Slide #14

Nehemiah 4:8–9

The enemies didn't like seeing the wall come together so well. Let's read about what they did in Nehemiah 4. Who will read verses 8–9? Choose readers.

Sanballat and Tobiah plotted with the other people living in Judah who were not Jews. Together, they planned to attack the city of Jerusalem so that the Jews would have to stop building and defend themselves and their families.

When Nehemiah heard about this plot, he and the Jews did two things: they prayed, and they acted in faith. They asked God for help and protection, but they also set a guard to watch for their enemies so they could be ready to fight.

Nehemiah acted in faith. Some people think we should only pray, while others think we should only act to help ourselves. But God wants us to do both! We should turn to him in prayer and rely on him for help. At the same time, we are also responsible to act in faith and do what God calls us to do. In this case, it was wise for Nehemiah to set a guard on watch and make sure the people were ready for anything.

Slide #15

What was the job Nehemiah came to do? Someone read #7 on the Class Notes for us. Choose a reader. Rebuilding. Have students complete #7. How will you complete #8 about the enemies' plan? Choose a reader. Attack. Have students complete #8.

When these men heard that the Jews knew about their attack, they called it off. God had frustrated their plans. The Jews went back to their work but knew they should be ready in case their enemies decided to try again.

Slide #16

Slide #17

Slide #18

Slide #19

Nehemiah 4:16–20

Let's read what they did in Nehemiah 4:16–20. Choose readers, or you read the passage and have students follow along.

This was a good plan! How did Nehemiah split up the workers? Look at verse 16. Half worked on construction (building), and half held weapons, shields, and coats of mail.

What does this say those who carried burdens, or supplies, did? Look in verse 17. They worked with one hand and carried a sword in the other.

What about the builders working on the wall? Look at verse 18. What did they have strapped at their sides? A sword.

Everyone did their work, but they were always ready with a weapon nearby.

Who stood beside Nehemiah to sound the alarm if any enemies were seen? A man with a trumpet.

What were the people supposed to do when they heard the trumpet? Rally (come to) the place where they heard the trumpet to defend each other.

What did Nehemiah trust God would do? Look in verse 20. Fight for them.

Slide #20

Slide #21

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. God gave Nehemiah the wisdom to come up with a good plan to be ready for an attack while continuing the work on the wall. Nehemiah had some men standing ready for battle with weapons, while others continued the work with a sword strapped to their side. Even people who were carrying supplies or taking the rubble out of the way were always prepared. If an attack came, the trumpet would sound the alarm, and all the Jews would stop their work, grab their weapons, and run toward the trumpet to fight the enemy together.

Show the Illustration. This is an outline of the walls of Jerusalem during Nehemiah's time. The wall was long, and the people were spread out working in different sections. Nehemiah's plan to use a trumpet call would work to quickly gather the people wherever they were needed along the wall.

Nehemiah knew that God would fight for the people as they tried to defend their work on the wall against their enemies. He prayed to God for wisdom, guidance, and protection and trusted God to help him. And God answered Nehemiah's prayers! Thanks to God's protection and Nehemiah's plan, the threat of attack and plots against the rebuilding were stopped. The work continued. God protected the people, and the wall was finished in just 52 days!

However, Nehemiah's enemies weren't ready to give up yet. We'll learn more about Nehemiah, the Jews, and the evil plots of their enemies in our next lesson.

Slide #22

Let's finish the Class Notes now. Who will read #9 about Nehemiah's plan? Choose a reader. Fight. Complete #9.

And the last one, #10? Choose a reader. Days. Complete #10.

Application

Slide #23

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. Prayer and action go together. We trust God to give us wisdom and protection, and then we do what we have to do in order to complete our jobs. Trusting God and acting in faith go hand in hand. In the

book of Nehemiah, we saw a man who prayed and trusted God AND took action in a very real way to protect his work. He told his people to bring their weapons with them and be ready to go if the trumpet sounded. The work was finished with the Lord's help and protection.

God called Nehemiah to do something special for him—to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And God is still using people—even you! Obeying God's call now while you are young will prepare you to follow him when you are older. If you are praying to God, reading your Bible, and trusting him, you'll know when God is calling you to do something. And, just as he did for Nehemiah, he will give you the strength, the plan, and the way to get it done!

What might be a situation where God wants you to pray AND to act? Allow discussion or share a personal example.

It's easy to focus on either just praying or just acting and forgetting to pray. Jesus gave us the perfect example by praying to know his Father's will and then acting on it. He often spent time in prayer then did those things he was called to do. Jesus always did what pleased the Father—even when it meant going to the cross to die for sinners. When God calls us to do something, it can seem like something easy, or it could seem scary. We may have to trust him in ways we haven't before, praying for wisdom and asking for power and guidance from the Holy Spirit. But like Nehemiah, we can send up quick prayers for help and then trust God to help us do what he says. That is acting in faith!

Lesson Review

We all learn best with review and repetition! We encourage you to play a lesson review game.

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