

Lesson 117

Nehemiah Governs Jerusalem

Nehemiah trusted God to help him lead the Jews.

Studying God's Word

Studying God's Word

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

Introduction

You may want to play the Cup Game to start the lesson and get the students thinking about leadership.

Today we'll be learning about a man who governed the people in Jerusalem. What are the titles for people that govern, or rule over, us today? Allow answers. President, prime minister, kings, queens, mayors, state governors, etc.

Government isn't the only area we have leaders. Can you think of other positions or people who are leaders? Allow answers. Coach, team captain, boss or supervisor at work, military general, police chief, teacher, principal, pastor, etc.

What qualities do you think are important for a leader to have?

Allow discussion.

What do you think God looks for in a leader, and how might his list be different from what people think is important? Allow discussion.

God looks for people who are willing to serve and obey. Some of the great leaders in the Bible, like the judge Gideon or King David, came from humble beginnings or even doubted their leadership ability at first. But when they trusted God rather than themselves, God used them for great things.

Slide #3

Slide #4

Slide #5

Refer to Lesson 113 Theme Poster. We've been learning about the exiled Jews who were taken from Judah to live in Babylon for 70 years. Then God moved in the heart of King Cyrus of Persia to write a law giving the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Who led this first group of Jews back to Jerusalem? Zerubbabel.

Under Zerubbabel's leadership, the Jews laid the foundation of the temple, but there were enemies who caused trouble and delayed the work. Finally, after 21 years, the temple was completed, and the people celebrated.

Refer to Lesson 115 Theme Poster. The second group to return to Jerusalem was led by Ezra, the scribe and priest. He studied the law of God and wanted to teach it to the people. The exiles who had returned with Zerubbabel had married non-Jewish people who worshipped false gods. When the people saw how Ezra grieved over their sin and confessed it to God, they wept and turned from their sinful ways.

Refer to Lesson 116 Theme Poster. The third group of Jews to return to Jerusalem was led by Nehemiah, who was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah was sad when he heard that the Jews in Jerusalem were in trouble because the city walls were broken down, leaving the people defenseless. The king gave him permission to return to Jerusalem, and Nehemiah organized the people to repair different sections of the wall. But just like the enemies in the land opposed Zerubbabel rebuilding the temple, there were enemies who didn't want to see the walls rebuilt. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem caused trouble for Nehemiah and threatened to attack the Jews while they were spread out working on the wall. What plan did Nehemiah come up with to protect the Jews and continue the work? He had people ready with weapons to fight and armed workers on the wall. He used a trumpet call that would alert the Jews of an attack so they could gather to defend themselves.

Nehemiah and the Jews prayed for God's protection, and they also armed themselves to be ready for an attack. Their enemies didn't attack because the Jews were prepared. The work continued, and the walls were finished in just 52 days!

Nehemiah became the governor of Jerusalem. In today's lesson, we'll see how God protected Nehemiah from his enemies and how Nehemiah helped the Jews in Jerusalem.

Enemies Oppose Nehemiah

Pass out the Nehemiah Cards.

I have some cards based on Nehemiah chapter 6, which describes several ways that the enemies of the Jews tried to distract and discredit Nehemiah. If I give you a card, be ready to read it when I call on you. Pass out the cards.

Remember the three bad guys from the last lesson? Well, they're still up to no good. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were concerned when they saw the walls being rebuilt so quickly.

Why do you think they didn't want the walls rebuilt? Allow discussion.

These men wanted the Jews in Jerusalem to remain unprotected. But with the walls rebuilt, the Jews could work and trade without fear and begin to prosper. Their enemies didn't want that.

Sanballat and Geshem wanted to distract Nehemiah from the work, so they sent a messenger to him. Who will read their message from Card 1? Have student read Card 1.

What did they want Nehemiah to do? Come meet with them.

But Nehemiah knew it was a trap! His enemies wanted to lure him away from the work to do him harm.

Who will read the message Nehemiah sent to Sanballat and Geshem from Card 2? Have student read Card 2.

What reason did Nehemiah give when he refused to meet with them? The work would stop if he left.

Pass out the Class Notes.

But Sanballat and Geshem kept trying. They sent the same message for Nehemiah to meet with him FOUR times! And each time Nehemiah refused.
Slide #6

Let's start the Class Notes. Who will read #1 and give the number of times Sanballat and Geshem sent messages to Nehemiah? Choose a reader. Four. Have students complete #1.

And what's the answer for #2? Who will read that? Choose a reader. Trap. Have students complete #2.

The fifth time, Sanballat sent a messenger with a letter. Who will read what it said from Card 3? Have student read Card 3.

Why did Sanballat say the Jews were rebuilding the wall? To rebel.

What did Sanballat accuse Nehemiah of wanting to be? King in Judah.

And who would hear about this? The king of Persia.

Sanballat was threatening to tell the king of Persia that the Jews were going to rebel against him and that Nehemiah was making himself king. He hoped that Nehemiah would be scared and come meet with him to discuss these accusations.

But Nehemiah knew his enemies were trying to frighten him and stop his work on the wall. Who will read Nehemiah's response to the letter from Card 4? Have student read Card 4.

Did Nehemiah get scared and meet with Sanballat? No.

Nehemiah knew that the accusations were just made-up lies. He had returned to Jerusalem with the king's permission, so he didn't fear Sanballat's threats. Nehemiah had work to do for God's glory, and he was not going to allow himself to be distracted.

Slide #7

Who will read #3 on the Class Notes about Sanballat's threatening letter? Choose a reader. King. Have students complete #3.

Well, Sanballat and Geshem and the other enemies of the Jews were getting frustrated. They couldn't get Nehemiah to leave the city to meet with them, no matter what they threatened to say or do. So, they set a sneaky trap for Nehemiah using a false prophet named Shemaiah. Because Shemaiah was a Jew, they hoped he'd be able to trick Nehemiah.

Who will read what Shemaiah said from Card 5? Have student read the card.

Where did Shemaiah want Nehemiah to meet him? In the house of God, the temple.

Why did Shemaiah say they needed to go to the temple and close the doors? Because enemies were coming to kill Nehemiah by night.

This may have sounded like a good idea. If you knew people were coming to kill you, you would most likely try to hide somewhere safe, right?

Let's see what Nehemiah said about this idea. Who will read Card 6? Have student read the card.

Did Nehemiah fall for this trap and run to hide in the temple? No.

Why did Nehemiah say that he could not enter the temple and live? He's the governor of the city! Why can't he go into the temple? Allow guesses. Who was allowed to enter the Holy Place of the temple? Priests.

According to God's laws, only priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place. Nehemiah was not a priest, so it would be wrong for him to go there to save his life.

Slide #8

Slide #9

Nehemiah 6:12-14

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah 6. Let's see what Nehemiah figured out. Who will read verses 12-14? Choose readers.

What did Nehemiah understand about Shemaiah? His message was not from God but from Tobiah and Sanballat.

Shemaiah had been hired by Sanballat and Tobiah to give this false message to Nehemiah.

What were Nehemiah's enemies hoping he would do to give him a bad name? Be afraid and sin by hiding in the temple.

His enemies knew that if Nehemiah hid in the temple it would make him look afraid and show a lack of trust in God and lack of respect for God's house.

Who was Nehemiah talking to in verse 14? God.

Nehemiah asked God to remember his enemies, including some prophets, who were trying to make him afraid. Nehemiah continued to quickly turn to God in prayer, trusting him for help. And God continued to protect him from his enemies.

Slide #10

Let's fill in some more Class Notes. Who will read #4 about Shemaiah's attempt to trap Nehemiah? Choose a reader. Temple. Have students complete #4.

And #5? Who will read that? Choose a reader. Enemies. Have students complete #5.

Who was Nehemiah trusting in for #6? Choose a reader. God. Have students complete #6.

Nehemiah Governs in Jerusalem

God was faithful to help Nehemiah and the Jews complete the rebuilding of the walls while protecting them from their enemies. Nehemiah didn't return to the king in Persia right away but stayed in Jerusalem for 12 years as the governor and continued to help the people.

Slide #11Slide #12Slide #13

Nehemiah 5:1–5

Many of the Jews found themselves in a desperate situation. Nehemiah chapter 5 describes what was happening. Who will read Nehemiah 5:1–5? Choose readers.

Who was the outcry against in verse 1? Jewish brothers.

Not only were the Jews in Jerusalem under attack by enemies from other nations, but they were also being oppressed and mistreated by their Jewish brothers, the wealthy officials and nobles.

What did the people need in verse 2? Grain to eat and stay alive.

What were the people doing to get grain in verse 3? Mortgaging their fields, vineyards, and houses.

The people had sold their land and houses to wealthy Jews to get money for food and the king's tax. Then when that wasn't enough, what were they having to do with their children? Sell them as slaves.

Slide #14Slide #15

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. Things were desperate for many of the Jews in Jerusalem. Since they were working on the wall rather than working in the fields, vineyards, and orchards, they were forced to sell their houses and land for food and taxes. But when they had no more land or possessions left to sell, they were forced to sell their own children into slavery! Because they didn't own their land, they had no way to pay back their debts or free their children.

Who will read #7 on the Class Notes? Choose a reader. Food. Have students complete #7.

What was happening to the children to answer #8? Choose a reader. Slavery. Have students complete #8.

Nehemiah was furious when he heard what was happening. He called together all the Jewish nobles and officials, the ones responsible for keeping their fellow Jews in debt and slavery. He asked them how they could buy and sell their own people as slaves when they had just been brought back to Judah.

Slide #16Slide #17Slide #18

Nehemiah 5:9–12

Let's read what Nehemiah said next in chapter 5, verses 9–12. Assign readers.

What reasons did Nehemiah give for them to stop their actions in verse 9? They should fear God. They were causing their enemies to taunt (mock) them.

What were Nehemiah and his brothers and servants doing to help the people? Lending them money and grain.

What did Nehemiah say the nobles and officials needed to do to make this right? Stop exacting (charging) interest. Return the people's land and houses. Return the percentage of money, grain, oil, and wine they were exacting (taking).

The nobles and officials were charging their own people interest, or extra money, on their debts (the money they owed). Plus, they were taking a portion of everything the people were producing from the land—their grain, oil, and wine.

How did the nobles and officials respond to Nehemiah? They said they'd do what he said. They'd return the land and everything they had taken.

The nobles and officials listened to Nehemiah. They returned the houses and land and other things they had taken from their own people. But Nehemiah had to confront them with their sin and greed before this happened.

Slide #19

What will you fill in for #9 on the Class Notes? Choose a reader. Right. Have students complete #9.

Nehemiah wasn't like the other governors or officials of Judah who took money and food from the people. Nehemiah provided food for himself and his 150 servants. He was generous to the people and wanted to help them regain their homes and land to support themselves. He knew it was hard for them to start over back in Judah. Nehemiah sought to govern the people in a way that pleased the Lord.

Not only did Nehemiah care about the people's physical needs, like food and housing, but he also cared about their spiritual needs. And this group of Jews had not been taught the law of God. So, Nehemiah gathered all the people together and had Ezra read the Book of the Law.

Slide #20

Slide #21

Slide #22

Nehemiah 8:8–10

Let's read about that in Nehemiah 8:8–10. Assign readers.

What did Ezra and the Levites help the people do? Understand the reading. What did the people do when they heard God's Word and understood it? They wept.

What did Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites tell the people to do instead of weeping? To eat and drink and give to others. Not to mourn or weep but to be joyful.

Why do you think the people wept when they heard the law?

Allow discussion.

They were convicted of their sin when they heard God's laws and recognized God's holiness. They mourned for the ways they had disobeyed God. But Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people not to mourn.

They had heard and responded correctly to the Lord. Now that they knew what God commanded and confessed their sin, they could celebrate and worship God together with joy.

Slide #23

Let's finish the Class Notes. Who will read #10? Choose a reader. Law of God. Have students complete #10.

Application

God gave Nehemiah the responsibility to govern the Jews in Jerusalem. He organized the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in spite of fierce opposition. His enemies tried to distract him from the work and discredit him as a leader, but Nehemiah trusted in the Lord and avoided the traps they set for him.

Slide #24

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. He helped the Jews who were selling their children into slavery to get money for food and to pay their taxes and debts. He also wanted to teach the people the law of God. And that's what he and Ezra did!

How is Nehemiah a good example of a leader? Allow discussion.

Nehemiah relied on God for help and protection. He was always praying as he faced difficult situations or decisions. Nehemiah was also selfless, giving his own money to help the Jews who were in trouble.

The greatest example of a servant leader is Jesus Christ. He put other people's needs before his own and even washed his disciples' feet! When his disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, Jesus told them that a leader should be one who serves (Luke 22:25-26).

What are some ways you can serve or help others? Allow discussion.

When we serve others in love, we are following Christ's example. Let's look for ways to serve this week.

Lesson Review

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

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