

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, all while being timed! Bring out bag of pom-poms, ping-pong paddle (or fly swatter), cups, and timer. The challenge is to make a pyramid-style wall using the stacked cups. Your wall will be 8 rows high with 8 cups as the first level base. (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.) I'll be timing how long it takes you, so stack as fast as you can. 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. Stop the timer when the wall is completed and record the student's name and time on the board. Restack the cups and have the throwers pick up the pom-poms for the next round. Choose new volunteers and play several rounds, recording the time for each one. At the end, recognize the student with the fastest time and award a prize/treat if you brought it.

Those of you who stacked cups, 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. Be able to use both hands. Not have 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

Slide #5

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. We've been learning about the Jews' return to Israel after their 70 years in captivity.

Refer to Lesson 113 Theme Poster. The first return came under the leadership of Zerubbabel when God moved King Cyrus to allow the Jews to go home and rebuild the temple.

Refer to Lesson 114 Theme Poster. The Jews who were still in Persia were threatened by Haman's plot to kill them all.

Who did God raise up to become queen and save the people from Haman's plot? Esther.

Esther and her cousin Mordecai were used by God to protect the Jews living in Persia.

Refer to Lesson 115 Theme Poster. The second return of Jews came during the reign of King Artaxerxes, and he allowed Ezra the priest to lead more people back to Jerusalem. Ezra was skilled in the Law of God and wanted to teach it to the people.

But what sin did Ezra discover the Jews in Judah were committing, including the priests and leaders? The Jews had married people of the foreign nations around them, and they were worshipping their false gods.

God honored Ezra's prayers and brought the people to repentance. They confessed their sin to God and separated themselves from the people of the land.

Refer to the Exodus to Malachi Timeline. Today, we'll see that God brought a third group of Jews back to Jerusalem. About 13 years after Ezra's return, in 454 BC, God used Nehemiah to lead these Jews home. Let's see how God led Nehemiah back to Judah.

Nehemiah Travels to Jerusalem

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 #6

Slide #7

Slide #8

Slide #9

Slide #10

Nehemiah 1:3-7

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 1:3-7? Choose readers.

What was the bad news about the Jewish exiles 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.

Why would broken down walls cause trouble and shame? Allow answers.

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? He wept (mourned), fasted (refused to eat), and prayed.

What did Nehemiah say in his prayer to God? He praised God (great and awesome God) and confessed his sins, his family's sins, and the people of Israel's sins.

What sins did Nehemiah confess in verse 7? Acting corruptly and not keeping God's commandments, statutes, and rules.

Nehemiah was upset to learn that his people in Jerusalem were in trouble. He immediately prayed and confessed his sins and the sins of the people. He knew they had broken God's commands. Then he asked God to give him mercy in the eyes of the king. You see, Nehemiah served King Artaxerxes, the same king who gave Ezra permission to return to Judah. But Nehemiah couldn't do anything without the king's permission.

Pass out the Class Notes.

Let's start the Class Notes. Today you'll write the missing word from each sentence in the crossword puzzle.

Slide #11

Who will read #1 and give the answer from the word bank? Choose a reader. Jerusalem. Have students complete #1.

Who will read #2 about the bad news Nehemiah received? Choose a reader. Walls. Have students complete #2.

Who will read what Nehemiah did when he heard the news? That's #3. Choose a reader. Prayed. Have students complete #3.

Slide #12

Slide #13

Slide #14

Slide #15

Slide #16

Nehemiah 2:1-6

Would the king help Nehemiah? Turn to Nehemiah 2. We'll read verses 1-6. Assign readers.

What was Nehemiah bringing to the king? Wine.

Nehemiah was very close to the king. He was the king's cupbearer. That meant he tasted all the drinks before the king drank them to make sure they weren't poisoned.

What did the king notice about Nehemiah? He looked sad.

Why do you think Nehemiah was afraid when the king asked him why he was sad? Allow answers. Looking sad in front of the king was probably not proper behavior for a servant. He could get in trouble.

When the king asked, why did Nehemiah say he was sad? The city (Jerusalem), the place of his fathers, was in ruins and its gates were destroyed by fire.

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 gave a quick prayer to God before he answered. 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 in the eyes of King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem. The king gave Nehemiah letters with permission to journey through the land and to use the trees in Judah to rebuild the gates and walls.

Nehemiah journeyed with a small group from Persia to Jerusalem. The king even sent soldiers with them for protection.

Slide #17

Let's complete some more of the crossword. Who will read #4? Choose a reader. King. 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.

Nehemiah prayed then told the king why he was upset. What did the king do for #6? Choose a reader. Permission. Have students complete #6.

The Jews Rebuild the Walls

Nehemiah wanted to get to work rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. But there were people, enemies of the Jews, who weren't happy that Nehemiah had come. They would oppose, or try to stop, Nehemiah rebuilding the walls.

Nehemiah needed to see how bad the walls and gates were to know where to start, but he couldn't let his 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 were 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! He had to go another way.

Slide #18

Slide #19

Slide #20

Slide #21

Nehemiah 2:17-20

No one knew what Nehemiah had in his heart to do, but he was finally ready to tell the Jews his plan. Who will read Nehemiah 2:17-20?

Choose readers.

What did Nehemiah call the people to do in verse 17? Build the wall of Jerusalem.

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

What did the Jews say? Let us rise up and build.

Three enemies of the Jews are named in verse 19. Who were these men?

What were their names? Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.

Each of these men were leaders from the area, but they were not Jews.

What did they accuse the Jews of doing that could get them in trouble?

Rebelling against the king.

How did Nehemiah respond to these enemies? Who did he say would help them succeed? God of heaven.

Why did Nehemiah say those three men had no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem? Because they weren't Jews, God's chosen people.

Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were mocking and threatening Nehemiah and the Jews. They were saying that rebuilding the walls was rebellion against the Persian King Artaxerxes. But Nehemiah said God would help them succeed.

Slide #22

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. Nehemiah divided up the wall and gates and assigned sections to different groups and families. Then the Jews got to work! Noblemen, priests, Levites, merchants, tradesmen like goldsmiths, and families including women all helped with the work. They cleared away rubble, replaced wooden beams for the gates and set the doors, and rebuilt the wall. Many of them repaired the section of wall near their homes.

Slide #23

What is the answer for #7 on the Class Notes? Choose a reader. Rebuilding. Have students complete #7.

Wouldn't you work hard, too, if you were protecting your home?

Allow discussion.

When the troublemakers heard that the rebuilding was going well, they tried to discourage and scare the Jews and stop the work. Sanballat called the Jews feeble and weak and made fun of the amount of rubble and burned stones at the wall. Then Tobiah the Ammonite made fun of them too, saying, "If a fox goes up on their wall, he will break it down!"

Nehemiah didn't say anything mean back to them. Instead, he prayed to God and asked him to deal with those bad guys. And the Jews kept working until the whole wall was joined together at half its height!

Slide #24

Slide #25

Nehemiah 4:7-9

Let's see what their enemies did next. Who will read Nehemiah 4:7-9?

Assign readers.

Which people were angry that the repairs were going so well for the Jews? Sanballat, Tobiah, Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites.

Sanballat and Tobiah were leaders among the other peoples 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 remain weak and vulnerable.

What did they plan to do in verse 8? Come and fight against Jerusalem and cause confusion.

These enemies planned to attack the city so the Jews would have to stop the rebuilding and defend themselves and their people.

What did Nehemiah and the Jews do about this problem? They prayed and set a guard day and night.

Nehemiah 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 defend themselves.

Do you think they should have done just one of these things? Why or why not? Allow discussion.

Some people think we should only pray and other people think we should only act to help ourselves. But God wants us to do both! We must turn to him in prayer, relying on him for help. But we are also responsible to act in faith and do what God calls us to do. In this case, it was wise to set a guard.

Slide #26

How will you complete #8 on the Class Notes about what Sanballat and Tobiah had planned? Choose a reader. Attack. Have students complete #8.

When these men heard that the Jews knew about their attack and God frustrated their plan, they called off their attack. The Jews returned to their work, but they needed a plan in case their enemies decided to attack again.

Slide #27

Slide #28

Slide #29

Slide #30

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? Half worked on construction (building), and half held weapons and coats of mail. What did those who carried burdens, or supplies, do? Look in verse 17. They worked with one hand and carried a sword in the other.

Sound familiar? This is kind of like what you were doing in our game, working with one hand and holding a paddle in the other!

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

Who stood beside Nehemiah to sound the alarm if any enemies were spotted? 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 #31

Slide #32

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 working and some ready for battle with weapons. Some people who were carrying supplies or removing rubble had to work with one hand and hold a sword in the other so they were always prepared. Even the builders on the wall had a sword at their sides. If an attack came, the trumpet would sound the alarm, and all the Jews would stop their work, grab their weapons, and run to the attack to help defend their people.

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 trusted God to help him. He knew that God would fight for the people as they defended the rebuilding of the wall against their enemies. Nehemiah prayed to God for wisdom, guidance, and protection. And he got it! Thanks to God's protection and Nehemiah's plan, the threats and plots against the Jews were stopped. The rebuilding continued. God protected the work, and the wall was finished in just 52 days! We'll learn more about Nehemiah, the Jews, and the plots of their enemies in our next lesson.

Slide #33

Let's finish the crossword puzzle. 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

In the book of Nehemiah, we see a man who prayed and trusted God AND took action in a very real way to protect his work. 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.

Slide #34

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. The people in Nehemiah's day did both. They knew God would fight for them, but they were prepared to defend the rebuilding of the wall. They brought their weapons with them and were ready to respond to the sound of the trumpet. Their enemies saw that they couldn't surprise them with an attack, so the work continued with the Lord's help and protection.

God called Nehemiah to do something special for him—to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He used Nehemiah to accomplish his will. And God is still using people—even you! There will be times when you know that God is calling you to do something. He may want you to buy a gift for someone or visit someone who is sick or lonely. God may want you to be more kind to your family or your neighbors or to be a friend to someone. He may even want you to volunteer at church or at school.

Obedying 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 one of these two things. For example, if God calls you to tell someone about him, you may be tempted to just say, "Oh, I'll pray for that person." Praying for the salvation of someone is great, but God may be calling you to actually speak to that person and share the gospel.

Jesus set the example for us when he prayed to know his Father's will and then acted on it. He often spent time in prayer while he was on earth and then carried out 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 be 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 do what God 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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