

## Lesson 117

# Nehemiah Governs Jerusalem

Nehemiah trusted God to help him lead the Jews.

# Studying God's Word

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

## Introduction

Today we'll be learning about the man who led the people in Jerusalem as the governor. 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 people who are leaders? Allow answers. Coach, team captain, boss or supervisor at work, military general, police chief, teacher, principal, pastor, etc.

We're going to start our lesson with a leadership game. Have students stand in a circle. Choose a volunteer to be the first leader. He will stand in the middle and do any action he wants (e.g., jump up and down, run in place, pat head and rub tummy). The rest of the class must follow his actions for about 30 seconds. When time is up, tell the leader he must point to someone in the circle to be the new leader and switch places with him. The class should keep doing the old leader's motions until the new leader takes over with a new action. Explain that the leaders should switch quickly. If the chosen leader doesn't get into the middle and begin a new action within a few seconds, the previous leader must choose someone else. Play until several students have had a chance to lead.

What made it hard or easy to be a leader? Allow answers.

What made it hard or easy to be a follower? Allow answers.

What makes a good leader? 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.

Leaders do not have to be famous or popular, or even big and strong. God looks for people who are willing to serve and obey him because of their love for the Lord. Some of the great leaders in the Bible, like the judge Gideon or King David, came from humble beginnings and even doubted if they could lead at first. But when they trusted God rather than themselves, God used them for great things.

### Slide #3

Refer to Lesson 116 Theme Poster. Let's go back to the third group of Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city. Who led this group? Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was sad when he heard that the Jews in Jerusalem were in trouble because the city walls were broken down, leaving the people open to enemy attack. King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah organized the people to repair different sections of the wall. But there were enemies who didn't want to see the walls rebuilt.

They caused trouble and threatened to attack the Jews while they were spread out around the city working on the wall.

Nehemiah and the Jews prayed for God's protection but also armed themselves with weapons to be ready for an attack even while they were working. Their enemies didn't attack, and the work continued.

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

## Enemies Oppose Nehemiah

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

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

These men wanted the Jews in Jerusalem to be unprotected. But with the walls rebuilt and gates that could be shut, the Jews could work and trade without fear and begin to grow and prosper. Their enemies didn't want that. They started to send messages to Nehemiah, trying to distract him from the work on the wall and the gates.

Have the Nehemiah Cards taped underneath students' chairs. Everyone look underneath your chair. If you have a message taped there, be ready to read it when I call on you. The first message was from Sanballat and Geshem. Who has the first message on Card 1? Have student read Card 1.

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

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 back 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.

But Sanballat and Geshem kept trying. They sent the same message for Nehemiah to meet with them four times! And each time Nehemiah said no.

So Sanballat decided to send a fifth letter. Only this one was a threat. 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 things.

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

Did Nehemiah get scared when Sanballat accused him of rebelling? No.

Pass out the Class Notes.

Nehemiah knew that the accusations were just made-up lies. He knew the king had given him special permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, so he wasn't afraid of Sanballat's threats. Nehemiah had work to do for God and his people, and he was not going to allow himself to be distracted by the enemy.

Slide #4

Slide #5

Let's start the Class Notes. Write the correct words in the crossword puzzle.

Who will read #1 and tell us why Nehemiah wouldn't meet with Sanballat and Geshem? Choose a reader. Trap. Have students complete #1.

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

Poor Nehemiah! He was only trying to do his job, but these enemies wouldn't quit bothering him.

What do you think Nehemiah did? What should we do with our problems? Pray. Give them to God. Ask God for help.

## Nehemiah 6:9

Refer to the Books of the Bible Poster. Turn in your Bibles to Nehemiah 6. Nehemiah took the problem to the Lord. Who would like to read Nehemiah's prayer in verse 9? Assign a reader. What did Nehemiah ask from God? Strength.

Yes. When worries and troubles bother us, it can get tiring. Sometimes, we feel like giving up. Perhaps Nehemiah was discouraged, too. He asked God to strengthen his hands to keep doing the work God gave him to do.

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. This time, they hired a false prophet named Shemaiah. Because Shemaiah was a Jew, they hoped Nehemiah would fall for their trick.

Who will read the message Shemaiah gave Nehemiah from Card 5? Have student read the card.

Where did Shemaiah want Nehemiah to meet him? In the temple.

Why did Shemaiah say they needed to go into 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, wouldn't you try to hide somewhere safe?

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 #6

#### Slide #7

Nehemiah 6:12-14

Let's see what Nehemiah figured out. Who will read Nehemiah 6:12-14? 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 like he was afraid and didn't trust in God or respect God's house.

Who was Nehemiah talking to in verse 14? God.

Once again, Nehemiah took his troubles to God. He asked God to remember his enemies, including some prophets, who were trying to make him afraid. Nehemiah continued to turn to God in prayer and trust him for help. And God continued to protect him from his enemies.

#### Slide #8

Let's fill in some more Class Notes. Who will read #3 about Shemaiah's trap? Choose a reader. Temple. Have students complete #3.

And #4. Who will read that? Choose a reader. Enemies. Have students complete #4.

What did Nehemiah do about his troubles in #5? Choose a reader. Prayed. Have students complete #5.

### **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 stayed in Jerusalem for 12 years as the governor and continued to help the people. He didn't just help them build walls and gates but also helped with another problem that had caused great trouble for many Jews.

#### Slide #9

Slide #10Slide #11

## Nehemiah 5:1–4

Let's find out what was going on in Nehemiah chapter 5. Who will read Nehemiah 5:1–4? 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? What did they want to get? Grain to eat and stay alive.

What were the people mortgaging, or selling, to get grain in verse 3? Their fields, vineyards, and houses.

Show the Lesson Theme Poster. Things seemed hopeless for many of the Jews in Jerusalem. Since they were busy working on the wall, they couldn't work in the fields, vineyards, and olive orchards to grow food. They were forced to sell their houses and land to get food and pay their taxes. When they had nothing left to sell, they were forced to sell their own children into slavery. If someone borrowed money from the officials, they charged extra money when the person tried to pay them back. The people had no way to pay back the money they owed or to free their children. Plus, the officials were taking part of everything the people were growing from the land—their grain, oil, and wine.

When he heard what was happening, Nehemiah was furious. He called together all the Jewish nobles and officials, the ones responsible for these problems. Nehemiah told them that what they were doing was wrong. The Jews were just now coming home from being held captive in Babylon, and here they were taking their own people captive as slaves. This wasn't right at all. It needed to stop.

The wealthy people listened to Nehemiah. They agreed to do as Nehemiah had said. They returned the houses and land and other things they had taken from their own people.

Nehemiah wanted to lead the people as their governor in a way that pleased the Lord. He knew it was hard for them to start over after their return to Judah, and he gave generously to the people and helped them get their homes and land back.

Slide #12

Let's go back to the Class Notes. Who will read #6? Choose a reader. Food. Have students complete #6.

What was happening in some Jewish families to answer #7? Choose a reader. Children. Have students complete #7.

Nehemiah not only cared about the people's physical needs, like food and homes, but he also cared about their spiritual growth. He knew this group of Jews had not been taught the law of God. So, Nehemiah gathered all the

people together and asked Ezra to read the Book of the Law to them. This is the same Ezra who came back to Judah with the second group of Jews. Remember, he wanted to teach the people about God's laws.

Slide #13

Slide #14

Slide #15

Nehemiah 8:8–10

Let's read what happened in Nehemiah 8:8–10. Assign readers.

What did Ezra and the Levites help the people do in verse 8? Understand the reading.

What did the people do when they heard God's Word and understood it?

Look at the end of verse 9. They wept.

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

Allow discussion.

When the people heard God's laws, they understood that they were sinners and that God was holy. They felt bad for disobeying God. But they had responded correctly to the Lord, so Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people not to mourn or weep.

What did Nehemiah 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.

Now that they knew what God commanded and had confessed their sin, they could celebrate and worship God together with joy.

Slide #16

Let's finish the Class Notes. Who will read #8? Choose a reader. Law. Have students complete #8.

## Application

God gave Nehemiah the responsibility to lead the Jews in Jerusalem. He helped them rebuild the walls even though his enemies kept trying to distract him from the work and make him look bad as a leader. Nehemiah continued to pray and trust in the Lord and did not fall for the traps set for him.

Slide #17

Refer to the Lesson Theme Poster. As governor, Nehemiah also helped the Jews who were selling their children into slavery to get money for food and to pay their taxes. And with Ezra's help, he also made sure the people were taught the law of God.

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

Nehemiah relied on God for help and protection. He was always praying when he faced troubling situations. Nehemiah was also selfless. He gave his own money to the Jews who needed help.

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 and 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.



## Limited License to Reproduce

A limited, non-exclusive, non-transferable, nonsublicensable license is hereby granted to a single local church or organization to print copies of the PDF materials in the Teacher Digital Resources if 1) you are the original purchaser; 2) you are using the copies for noncommercial purposes (such as for teaching in class) exclusively within your single local church or organization (multi-campus churches, and national/regional denominations are not covered under this license); and 3) you follow the instructions provided in the curriculum pertaining to the printable materials.

This license is for the specific purchaser of the product and does not include affiliated groups or organizations, or other churches or groups in the same denomination as the purchaser, not identified as the actual purchaser. There is no limit to the number of printed copies for use within the single local church or organization which is the actual purchaser. None of the material in this curriculum may be reproduced for any commercial promotion, advertising, or sale of a product or service, or to share with any other persons, churches, groups, or organizations.

The media (audio/video) portions are copyrighted and duplication is prohibited. This license is for materials in the Teacher Digital Resources only and does NOT include reproduction rights for pre-printed teacher books, student guides, student take home sheets, or posters, except on an emergency basis when purchased quantities are not sufficient for a given week.

## Bible Version

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.