



LESSON 40

God led Nehemiah to reconstruct the wall

NEHEMIAH 1:1-7:73A



God helps His people accomplish His work.



“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” (Neh 6:15–16).

Supporting Truths

1. God helps His people.
2. God’s help encourages ordinary people to do God’s work.
3. God’s enemies cannot stop God from accomplishing His purpose.
4. God uses godly leaders to accomplish His purpose.
5. Godly people depend on God.

Objectives

1. List several ways God helped Nehemiah and the Jews rebuild the walls.
2. Describe the practical steps Nehemiah and the people took in doing God’s work.
3. List several ways Israel’s enemies tried to stop the walls from being rebuilt.
4. Identify several godly character traits seen in Nehemiah.
5. Count how many times Nehemiah expressed his dependence on God.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON



God led Nehemiah to reconstruct the wall • Nehemiah 1:1-7:73a

Lesson Summary

In the first two returns to Jerusalem the temple was rebuilt and worship was restored. But the city's walls were still in ruins. So Nehemiah led a third and final return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the city's walls and gates. This massive building project greatly upset Israel's neighbors, who felt threatened by Israel's growing presence in the area. But none of their opposition to the work succeeded, for God's good hand was upon His people to accomplish the work.

Spotlight on the Gospel

In this portion of Scripture, God used Nehemiah to accomplish His purpose in rebuilding the city's walls. Nehemiah was a godly leader, characterized by prayer, concern for God's people, and wisdom. These characteristics are seen in their fullest in the person of Jesus Christ. He was a man of prayer; He expressed deep concern for and compassion on Israel; and He is the perfection of all wisdom. In Jesus, God providentially worked to accomplish His purpose in redeeming His people from their sin.

LAST WEEK



God guided Israel to
repentance
Ezra 7:1-10:44

THIS WEEK



God led Nehemiah to
reconstruct the wall
Nehemiah 1:1-7:73a

NEXT WEEK



Israel refused to be
ruled by God
Nehemiah 7:73b-13:31

RETURN

Lesson Commentary

God helps His people accomplish His work.

The decree of Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to reestablish the worship of the LORD. God then used Persian kings to accomplish the purpose He had decreed long before (Jer 29:10–14). In the first return to Jerusalem, the LORD provided for the rebuilding of His temple (Ezra 1:1–6:22). In the second return, He guided the people to repentance (Ezra 7:1–10:44). But the city still lay in ruins, a shameful shell of what it once was. But how could a small band of refugees rebuild this city, especially with enemies all around them? Only by the gracious hand of God strengthening them (2:8, 12, 18, 20; 4:14, 20; 6:9, 16). That is what the third and final return is about.

Return	Event	Year
First	The people rebuild the temple, led by Zerubbabel	537 BC
Second	The people are reformed, led by Ezra	458 BC
Third	The people rebuild the wall, led by Nehemiah	445 BC

God prepared Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem (1:1–2:8)

The temple had been built, but Jerusalem's walls were still in ruins (Neh 1:3). This was the city where God had chosen to place His name (Deut 12:5; 2 Kgs 21:4), so Nehemiah was devastated (1:4). In his grief, he prayed on the basis of God's sovereignty (1:5) and promises (1:7–9). He confessed that Israel had deserved to be exiled because they had broken God's covenant (Deut 4:25–28). But now, through

the prayers of Daniel (Dan 9:1–19), Ezra (Ezra 9:6–15), Nehemiah (Neh 1:4–11), and other God-fearing Jews (1:11), a remnant at least had repented. So Nehemiah called upon God to remember His people, not because

they deserved it, but because God had made them His people (1:10) and promised to restore them (Deut 30:1–3).

Nehemiah's prayer was already the beginning of God's answer because God was at work in Nehemiah's heart. God then arranged the details at the royal court. As cupbearer, Nehemiah guarded the life of the king against poison, so he was already trusted by the king. So despite his fear, he told the king the reason for his grief (2:1–3). He mentioned graves and gates because these represented the spiritual and social life of the city. Graves honored the previous generation whose job it was to pass on their faith to their children. Gates represented the life of the city, since this is where the people gathered to conduct official business. During the conversation, Nehemiah continued to depend on God, showing us what it means to pray without ceasing (Neh 2:4; 1 Thess 5:17). When Artaxerxes chose to provide for all his needs (Neh 2:5–8), Nehemiah knew God had done it (2:8). God was sending the right man to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

THINK ABOUT IT
We should always be in a mindset of prayer.



God encouraged Nehemiah to work responsibly (2:9–4:17)

Encouraged by God's gracious power, Nehemiah got to work. He first traveled to Jerusalem, protected along the way by God's power. He realized the opposition he would face (2:9–10). Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite were leaders of Israel's Samaritan neighbors to the north and the east, and they felt threatened by the resettlement of Jerusalem. What should Nehemiah do? Did his trust in God cause him to do nothing or act foolishly? No. Nehemiah shows us that God's power motivates God's people to act responsibly. Nehemiah acted wisely, inspecting the city's walls under the cover of darkness before revealing his plan (2:11–18). He also wisely reminded his enemies that the Jews had the king's permission and God's protection, while Israel's enemies had neither (2:20).



THINK ABOUT IT
We can have every confidence that God is ready, willing, and able to forgive our sin when we confess it before Him (1 John 1:9).

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

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God's gracious power also encouraged the people both to work hard (2:18; 3:1–32) and to stand guard. They had to be on guard because Sanballat and Israel's enemies were busy disrupting the work (4:1–3, 7–8, 11). Israel faced opposition on every side: the Samaritans to the north; the Arabs to the south; the Ammonites to the east; and the Ashdodites to the west. In response, the people prayed and put their trust in God to fight for them (4:4–5, 14, 20). After all, God had done this for His people many times before (Exod 14:14; Josh 10:14, 42; 23:10). At the same time, they also stood guard (4:9, 16–17) and prepared in advance in case of attack (4:18–23). They illustrate how true faith in God's power does not undermine human responsibility. Rather, it empowers God's people to do their duty by giving them confidence of success.



THINK ABOUT IT

Because Christians trust the LORD, they also prepare diligently for whatever situation they may face.

Like Nehemiah and the Jews with him, believers today can trust the LORD to sustain them (Ps 55:22). At the same time, like them, we too must remain alert, although we fight a spiritual battle (Eph 6:12). In order to stand firm against our enemy, the devil, we must employ all the spiritual resources God has left at our disposal (6:14–17). So we cast all our anxieties on God, and at the same time we resist the devil (1 Pet 5:7–9). We depend upon God's power at work in us, so we find confidence to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12–13). God's mighty power and the believer's confident action go together.

God protected Nehemiah until the wall was completed (5:1–7:73a)

Truth faith is what empowers believers to successfully do God's work. Thus, those who live as if God doesn't matter undermine God's work. So Nehemiah was right to be extremely angry when he found out that his fellow Jews were mistreating other Jews. The rich were loaning money to the poor, then enslaving them when they could no longer pay the exorbitant interest

(5:1–5). The Mosaic Law made interest illegal on loans to fellow Jews (Lev 25:36–37), but these wealthy Jewish leaders ignored the law because they did not **fear** God (Neh 5:9). So Nehemiah urged them: with enemies all around, wasn't this a time more than ever to be in awe of God, be afraid of just punishment, and give God the honor He deserves? They could say nothing against Nehemiah (5:8), for he spoke with integrity. His life of generosity (5:8, 10) and selflessness (5:14–15) gave weight to his words.

As Nehemiah lived before God, God continued to graciously help Nehemiah. He kept Nehemiah from falling into Sanballat's trap

to lure him away to kill him (6:1–4). He strengthened Nehemiah by the truth when Sanballat spread lies that Nehemiah was revolting against Persia (6:5–9). He enabled Nehemiah to discern the false prophecies designed to discredit him (6:10–13). If Nehemiah had listened to the prophecy and gone into the Holy Place, he would have sinned, since Nehemiah was not a priest. But because he lived by faith in God, Nehemiah never gave his enemies an opportunity to slander his character or question his courage. He was **above reproach** in all he did, free from any accusation of wrongdoing. So too must be all those who desire to lead God's people (1 Tim 3:2).

Nehemiah's enemies could not prevent God from accomplishing His purpose. When the wall was completed in just 52 days, the confidence of Nehemiah's enemies crumbled. Even they realized that God's sovereign hand had helped Nehemiah accomplish His purpose (Neh 6:15–16). This is what God still does today for His people. He is their help and shield (Ps 33:20), their rock, salvation, and fortress (62:2). Those who fear Him and trust Him will never be shaken (62:6). The sovereign God is with His children wherever they go (28:20), empowering them to accomplish the good works that He has prepared for them (Eph 2:10).

THINK ABOUT IT

A godly leader is a man of integrity, because he fears God.



Lesson Outline

God helps His people accomplish His work.



AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

God helps His people...

1. By giving them godly leaders (1:1–2:8).
2. By encouraging them to work hard (2:9–3:32).
3. By guarding them from physical attack (4:1–4:23).
4. By stopping unkindness among His people (5:1–19).
5. By protecting them from lies (6:1–19).



AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. God prepared Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem (1:1–2:8).
 - Nehemiah received the bad news about Jerusalem (1:1–3).
 - Nehemiah mourned, prayed, and depended on God (1:4–11).
 - Nehemiah received a commission from Artaxerxes (2:1–8).
2. God encouraged Nehemiah to work responsibly (2:9–4:23).
 - Nehemiah wisely inspected the walls (2:9–20).
 - The people diligently worked on the wall (3:1–32).
 - The builders vigilantly guarded against opposition (4:1–23).
3. God protected Nehemiah until the wall was completed (5:1–7:73a).
 - Nehemiah ended the injustice of the Jewish nobles (5:1–19).
 - Nehemiah resisted the schemes of Sanballat, Geshem and Tobiah (6:1–14).
 - The people finished the wall and filled the city (6:15–7:73a).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What was wrong with Jerusalem?**
Its walls were still knocked down.
- 2. Who was the man God sent to rebuild the walls?**
Nehemiah.
- 3. How long did it take to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem?**
The wall was finished in 52 days.
- 4. What did Nehemiah's enemies realize as they watched how quickly the walls were built?**
That this work had been done with God's help.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What did Nehemiah do when he heard the news about Jerusalem?**
He was very sad, confessed sin, and prayed to God for help.
- 2. Why were Nehemiah and the Jews encouraged to rebuild the walls?**
They knew God was with them and would help them succeed.
- 3. What did Nehemiah's enemies think about the walls being rebuilt?**
They were furious.
- 4. How did Israel's enemies first try to stop the walls from being rebuilt?**
They planned to join together and fight against Jerusalem.
- 5. How did the people respond to Sanballat's mocking and threat of attack?**
They trusted God to fight for them, and they also stood guard.
- 6. How did the rich Jews undermine the work?**
They were oppressing the poor Jews by making them pay high interest.
- 7. How did Nehemiah stop the rich Jews from sinning?**
He rebuked them, called them to fear God, and proved it by his integrity.
- 8. How else did Nehemiah's enemies try to stop the wall?**
They tried to trap Nehemiah, they spread lies, and they tried to ruin his character. But God protected Nehemiah because he stayed true to God.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



THE CUPBEARER

Bring in a plate full of apple chunks, with a few potato chunks mixed in (remove the skins). Explain that one main duty of a cupbearer was to be the king's food taster, ensuring that no one was trying to poison the king. Have each child pretend to be a cupbearer and choose a chunk from the plate to taste. If the cupbearer chooses an apple chunk, the king "lives," and the food is safe for the king. If he chooses a potato chunk, the king is poisoned, and the food is not safe for the king. Ask the cupbearers whether they like their job. It is an important one, but one that can prove dangerous!

GROUP COOPERATION

To illustrate the efficiency of working as a group, arrange large blocks in a circle (not stacked). Tell the children that today's lesson will focus on Nehemiah leading the Israelites to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. Select a child to build up the wall by himself. Then take down the wall. This time, select several children (so that each child is only responsible for the blocks in front of him) to build the wall together.



NIGHT RECONNAISSANCE

Lead the children in pretending, like Nehemiah, to walk around Jerusalem's wall at night, inspecting the damage. Allow various children to lead, carrying a flashlight. Ask the children, "Is the wall burned and black? Is it broken down? Are the stones broken? What would it take to rebuild the wall?" Use rulers and measuring tapes to measure the stones that need replacing. How many people and how long would it take to clear away the rubble?

THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH

Bring some weights or dumbbells to class, and let the children take turns lifting them. Ask the children if this—the ability to lift weights—is where a believer's strength lies. No. A believer's strength is found in the Lord! In today's lesson, Nehemiah's prayed to God to strengthen his hands.



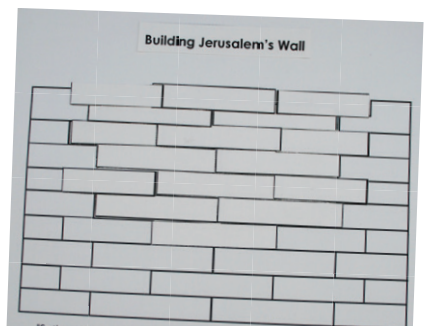
BUILDING JERUSALEM'S WALL

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheets, glue, and scissors.

Directions: Pre-cut individual bricks from the craft sheet. Direct the students to finish building Jerusalem's wall by gluing the bricks into position on the other craft sheet.

Building Jerusalem's Wall
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*



*So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. 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 the God of Israel. Nehemiah 6:15-16

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

WHY THE WALL?

Show the children pictures of a police officer, a firefighter, or a soldier. (You also could bring in a uniform, if you have access to one.) Officers wear uniforms for protection (bulletproof vests, fire-retardant coats, etc.) and identification (showing other people whom/what they represent). A uniform must look nice and well-kept because the person wearing it represents something or someone. Rebuilding Jerusalem's walls was important for similar reasons. First, the walls were important for the city's protection. Rebuilding the walls was the first step toward restoring the city as a whole. Second, the walls were an important symbol of the state of the city. Rebuilding the walls told the surrounding nations that Israel was reestablishing itself as God's representative in the land.

ONLY 52 DAYS

Divide the class into teams of 3–4 children. Give each team a pile of interlocking building blocks, and tell them to build a wall as best they can in only 52 seconds. Today they will hear about how the Jews built a wall in only 52 days. God blessed their hard work because they depended on Him.



ILLUSTRATE

DEPENDENCE

Sometimes we are aware of our dependence on something (for instance, a person who wears glasses). Other times, however, we are completely oblivious to how much we need something (for instance, the air we breathe, which keeps us alive though we rarely are aware of it). Ask the children to hold their breath to see how well they can get along without air. We are even more dependent on God than we are on air. We could not live for one second without God's sustaining power (Col 1:16–17). God wants us to consciously depend on Him. This means that we must rely on Him for strength, pray to Him, and read His Word for guidance.

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Bring a glove to class. Hold it up and ask the children how useful a glove is without a hand. It cannot accomplish any work on its own. However, when filled with a hand, a glove can accomplish all kinds of work. The same is true of a Christian when he is filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). Only when God's Spirit fills His children are they ready and able to accomplish His work



APPLY

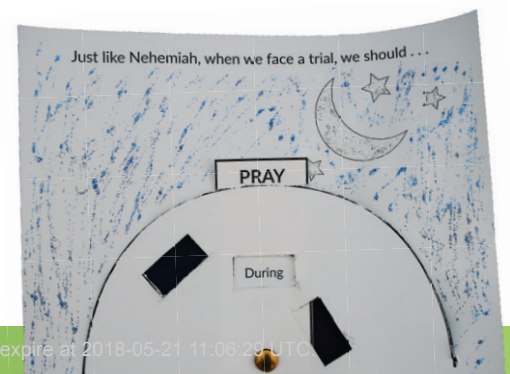
BEFORE, DURING, AFTER

See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheets, scissors, brads, and glitter glue or crayons.

Directions: To prepare the pages, use a razor to cut along the arch and cut out the three rectangles. During class, have the students cut out the strip with words and use a brad to attach it to the back of the arch. Pull the top part of the strip through the slit. Have the students color the sun, moon, and stars with glitter glue or crayons.

Before, During, After
See *Year 2 Craft Book, Book 2*



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

WHAT MAKES YOU SAD?

Ask the children to name things that make them sad. Talk about why these things make them sad and how the situation could change so that they no longer would be sad. Explain that Nehemiah was very sad because the walls of Jerusalem were ruined and because that gave God a bad reputation. Nehemiah did not want God or His people to be viewed in a bad way by other nations, so he wanted to rebuild Jerusalem's wall.

REPUTATION

Bring in some extremely worn/tattered personal items—clothing, books, etc. Ask the children if it appears that you have taken care of your belongings. So what would be your reputation? Tell the children that in today's lesson Nehemiah was very sad because the walls of Jerusalem had fallen down and the gates had been burned. Jerusalem represented God because it was where His chosen people lived. When people saw the walls fallen and the city in ruins, they saw it as a sign that God was not taking care of His people. It gave God a bad reputation in the eyes of the people who saw its condition.



ILLUSTRATE

ESTABLISHING AN ATTITUDE OF PRAYER

Ask the children to identify some things that take a little time to warm up or turn on before they can be used (oven, computer, etc.). However, once they're warmed up or on, these items can be used immediately all throughout the day. Use this illustration to help the children understand the value of beginning the day with prayer. Beginning each day with prayer establishes a pattern of prayer that prepares us to return to it all day long as needs and opportunities arise (1 Thess 5:17).

GOD DELIGHTS TO USE THE ORDINARY

Ask the children what the following biblical characters have in common: David, Rahab, Ruth, Esther, Zechariah and Elizabeth (John the Baptist's parents), Mary and Joseph, and the disciples. Answer: They are all ordinary people that God used to accomplish extraordinary things. Then ask the children why these people were able to accomplish so much. Answer: They all submitted to God's will for their lives and trusted in Him. Finally, ask the children if they know of any ordinary people in their lives that God has used to accomplish great things for Him.



APPLY

THE BLESSINGS OF SERVING GOD

In today's lesson we saw Nehemiah serving God by rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. This was a blessing both to Nehemiah and to the people of Jerusalem. When you think of blessings from God, what comes to mind? Do you think of God giving you things that you don't deserve? Do you consider your family and friends as blessings? Well, God blesses those who love Him in many ways. One of those ways is to allow them to serve Him in ministry. Some may think of serving as a burden or a responsibility. But the truth is that serving God is an amazing blessing. When God gives believers the privilege of serving Him, they should praise Him. How can you serve God this week? Be sure to praise Him for the gift of being able to serve Him.