

## Nehemiah Heard News of Jerusalem

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Nehemiah 1–2

**MAIN POINT:** Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Lamentations 3:22-23

**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** Does God keep His promises? Yes, God is always faithful even when we are not.

**SMALL GROUP OPENING**

(10–15 MINUTES)

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(25–30 MINUTES)

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(25–30 MINUTES)

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### Leader BIBLE STUDY

Nehemiah was a Jew living in Persia. He served as the king's cupbearer, a position of great trust; the cupbearer made sure no one poisoned the king's drink. Sometimes the cupbearer even tasted some of the drink himself to ensure it was safe.

When the Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians, King Cyrus allowed God's people to return to Judah. Two or three million Jews had originally been deported, but only a remnant—50,000 people—returned. They set up their homes and rebuilt God's temple in Jerusalem. Nehemiah's story takes place after Ezra led a second group of exiles back to Judah.

Nehemiah received word about God's people who had returned to Judah. They were in trouble and living in shame; the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, and the city gates were burned. They lived in fear, unprotected from their enemies. Nehemiah sat down and wept.

Nehemiah fasted and prayed for days. He remembered God's promise to His people. Their disobedience led to exile, but if they turned back to the Lord, their obedience would lead to blessing. God promised to restore their fortunes and give His people a home. (See Deut. 30:1-10.)

The king noticed Nehemiah's sadness, and Nehemiah was afraid. No one was supposed to be sad in the presence of the king; it was an insult to his greatness. Nehemiah explained the plight of his city. The king granted him leave and gave him letters to ensure his safe passage. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem. He encouraged the people to rebuild the walls and stood confidently against opposition.

This story is the beginning of Nehemiah's work to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. As you teach kids, point out that Nehemiah trusted God's promise to give His people a home. When we repent and trust in Jesus, we can trust His promise to prepare a place for us in His Father's house, where we will be with Him forever. (See John 14:3.)



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## Nehemiah Heard News of Jerusalem

*Nehemiah 1–2*

**Nehemiah** (NEE huh MIGH uh) was a Jew, one of God's people. God's people had lived in Babylon for many years until King Cyrus, the king of Persia, took over Babylon and let them go home. Some of God's people went home to Judah, but some of them stayed in Babylon. Nehemiah stayed and worked for the king of Persia.

One day, some men came from Judah. Nehemiah asked, "How are God's people doing in Jerusalem?"

The men had bad news. "The people are in trouble. The walls around Jerusalem are broken down, and the gates have been burned down."

Nehemiah sat down and cried. Then he prayed and fasted for several days. "Lord God," he prayed, "we have sinned against You. Please remember Your words to Moses: 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. But if you return to Me and obey Me, I will gather you from the ends of the earth and bring you to the place I have chosen.'"

Nehemiah went back to serving the king, but he was still sad. The king noticed Nehemiah's mood and asked him, "What's wrong? Why are you sad?"

Nehemiah was afraid; no one was supposed to be sad around the king. Nehemiah told the king, "The city where my ancestors are from is in trouble. It is in ruins, and the gates of the city have been burned down."

"What do you want to do?" the king asked.

Nehemiah prayed. Then he said, "Please send me to Jerusalem so I can rebuild the city."

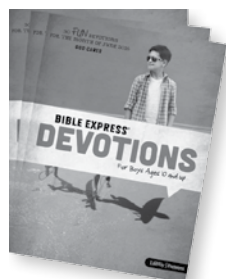
The king agreed. He gave Nehemiah letters to keep him

safe as he traveled. If anyone tried to stop him, Nehemiah could show that he had the king's permission to go to Jerusalem. **The king also made sure Nehemiah had wood to help rebuild the city gates and wall. He even sent some men from his army to protect Nehemiah.**

**Nehemiah arrived safely in Jerusalem.** After three days, Nehemiah got up in the middle of the night and **went to look at the city's walls. Then he told the people there,** "We are in trouble. The city is ruined, and the gates have been burned down. **Come, let's rebuild Jerusalem's wall."**

**Nehemiah told the people how God had helped him, and he told them everything the king had said and done. The people said, "Let's start building," and so they did.**

*Christ Connection: Nehemiah trusted that God would keep His promise to protect His people and give them a home. When we trust in Jesus, we believe God will keep His promise to give us—His people—a home. Jesus obeyed God perfectly. He died on the cross and rose again so we can have a home with Him forever.*



**WANT TO  
DISCOVER  
GOD'S WORD?  
GET  
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover Nehemiah remembered God's power and faithfulness when he asked God for help. (Neh. 1:5) God later sent Jesus to rescue us from sin. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out [www.lifeway.com/devotionals](http://www.lifeway.com/devotionals).

# Small Group OPENING

**SESSION TITLE:** Nehemiah Heard News of Jerusalem

**BIBLE PASSAGE:** Nehemiah 1–2

**MAIN POINT:** Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem's walls.

**KEY PASSAGE:** Lamentations 3:22-23

**BIG PICTURE QUESTION:** Does God keep His promises? Yes, God is always faithful even when we are not.

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## Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Ask kids to describe something they would be sad to see broken or destroyed.

**SAY** • Today we will hear the story of a man named Nehemiah. The city he loved, Jerusalem, was in ruins, and it broke Nehemiah's heart that his home was not a safe place for his people.

## Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete "Breaking News!" on the activity page. Each kid should use the provided questions to interview a friend about a real or imaginary event. Then she should write the answers in the blanks to complete the breaking news story.

**SAY** • Was the story you wrote good news or bad news? [*Allow a couple of volunteers to read their silly news stories aloud.*] Our Bible story today is about some news that Nehemiah heard. Sadly, it was *not* good news!

- "Breaking News!" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

## Session starter (10 minutes)

### OPTION 1: True messages

Invite the kids to stand in a line. Whisper a message to the first kid. She should whisper what she heard to the second kid. The second kid will whisper to the third kid, and so on. When the message gets to the end of the line, ask the last player to announce what he heard.

Suggested messages:

- *God is always faithful even when we are not.*
- Nehemiah heard news of Jerusalem.
- *Nehemiah* is spelled N-E-H-E-M-I-A-H.

**SAY** • Sometimes when a message is relayed from one person to another and another, the details get mixed up. We will hear how Nehemiah heard a message about the city of Jerusalem. He went to check out the city for himself to see if the news was true.

### OPTION 2: Build a wall

Form groups of four to six kids and distribute the building materials to each group. Instruct the kids to build a wall using the dry spaghetti and marshmallows. Allow time for each group to share its creation with the rest of the class.

**SAY** • How sturdy are your walls? Would they hold up against an enemy army? Thankfully, the people in our story today had better building materials than just spaghetti and marshmallows! We are going to hear how **Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem's walls**, and the king of Persia gave them the materials they needed.



- dry spaghetti
- mini marshmallows
- Allergy Alert download

## Transition to large group

# Large Group LEADER

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## Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

## Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire  
• large gym bag

*[Large Group Leader enters wearing a track suit and carrying a large gym bag. Leader sets the gym bag on the floor and stretches his or her arms.]*

**LEADER** • Hey, kids! It's great to see you all today, and I'm so glad you are joining me for another triathlon training session. I've been working hard this week and feel like I'm getting stronger! Unfortunately, I got some bad news this week that part of the course I'll be running for the triathlon was damaged in a big storm and needs to be repaired! I hope it will be ready in time for the big race!

Have you ever gotten some bad news like that? It's easy to get discouraged when bad things happen, but thankfully we can trust that God is still in charge!

***Does God keep His promises? Yes, God is always faithful even when we are not.***

That reminds me of the story we will hear today

about some bad news that Nehemiah got from some men from Judah.

## Giant timeline (1 minute)

Point to the giant timeline or big story circle to review previous Bible stories. Point to the stories about Esther and remind kids that God had used Esther to save the Jews in Persia from being killed by the king's evil helper, Haman.

• Giant Timeline or  
Big Story Circle

**LEADER** • Nehemiah was a Jew living in Persia. Many years before, the Jews had been taken into exile by the Babylonians. When the Persians invaded Babylon, the king of Persia decided to allow the Jews to return to their homeland. Some Jews returned, but many others continued living in Persia.

Nehemiah worked for the king as his cupbearer. That meant he made sure that no one poisoned the king's drinks. Sometimes he even had to taste the drinks to be sure they were safe!

## Big picture question (1 minute)

**LEADER** • The last few weeks we have asked ourselves, *Does God keep His promises?* We heard stories that show us that *yes, God is always faithful even when we are not.* As you listen to today's Bible story, see if you can notice how God was faithful to His people.

## Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Nehemiah 1–2. Tell the Bible story in your own words, or show the Bible story video “Nehemiah Heard News of Jerusalem.”

**LEADER** • Jerusalem was a special city because it was the home of God's people, the Jews. How did Nehemiah

• Bibles  
• “Nehemiah Heard News of Jerusalem” video  
• Big Picture Question Poster  
• Bible Story Picture Poster



feel when he heard that the city's walls and gates were broken down? (*Nehemiah was sad.*)

Without the walls and gates, God's people weren't protected from their enemies!

Nehemiah asked God to remember His promises to His people. **Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem's walls.** Nehemiah trusted that God would keep His promise to protect His people and give them a home. ***Does God keep His promises? Yes, God is always faithful even when we are not.***

When we trust in Jesus, God adopts us into His family. We are His people, and we believe God will keep His promise to give us a home. Jesus obeyed God perfectly. He died on the cross and rose again so we can have a home with Him forever.

## **The Gospel: God's Plan for Me (optional)**

Use Scripture and the guide provided with this session to explain to boys and girls how to become a Christian. Assign individuals to meet with kids who have more questions.

Encourage boys and girls to ask their parents, small group leaders, or other Christian adults any questions they may have about becoming a Christian.

## **Key passage (5 minutes)**

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Lamentations 3:22-23.

**LEADER** • These verses were written by the prophet

Jeremiah. Jeremiah had been sad, but he learned to praise God no matter what because God is faithful, and He always keeps His promises.

Tip: Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

- Key Passage Poster
- "Your Faithfulness" song

We can praise God that we are alive. We live because He is good. God never stops loving His people. Let's work on memorizing Lamentations 3:22-23 so we can remember what is true about God, even when we are sad or suffering. Every morning when you wake up, you can think about these words and remember that God is good. Let's sing our key passage song.

Lead boys and girls to sing "Your Faithfulness."

### **Discussion starter video (4 minutes)**

**LEADER • Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuilt Jerusalem's walls.** What do you do when you see someone in need? Think about that as we watch this video.

Show the "Unit 18, Session 3" discussion starter video.

Guide kids to discuss what makes it hard to help others.

How can kids be more willing to help those in need?

**LEADER •** God wants us to care about people who need help. He cares about us, and He sent His only Son to die on the cross for our sins because we needed help! We can pray for others and care for them as we share the good news about what Jesus has done.

• "Unit 18, Session 3"  
discussion starter  
video

### **Sing (4 minutes)**

**LEADER •** Remembering that *God is always faithful even when we are not* makes me want to sing praises to Him. We can trust that God is who He says He is and that He will do what He says He will do. God deserves all our worship, so let's stand up and sing! Sing together "He Rescues and Delivers."

• "He Rescues and  
Delivers" song

## **Pray (2 minutes)**

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

**LEADER** • God, thank You for Your Word and for the story of Nehemiah. Through this story, You show us Your faithfulness to Your people. Thank You for calling us Your people, too, and for providing a home for those who trust in Jesus. We know that You are with us, and we pray that You would continue to make us more like Jesus every day. Amen.

## **Dismiss to small groups**

## The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



**God rules.** Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



**We sinned.** Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



**God provided.** Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



**Jesus gives.** Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



**We respond.** Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus.

# Small Group LEADER

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- Key Passage Poster
- heavyweight paper
- scissors
- ziplock bags
- permanent marker

## Key passage activity (5 minutes)

Print copies of the key passage poster on heavyweight paper, one copy per kid. Guide kids to cut up their posters into several puzzle pieces.

Instruct them to trade puzzles with a friend and practice putting the puzzles back together. Kids should read the key passage aloud when they finish the puzzle.

Provide ziplock bags for kids to put the puzzle pieces in. Use a permanent marker to write kids' names on the bags. Encourage kids to take home the puzzle pieces and use them to practice memorizing the key passage.

**SAY** • Just like your puzzles, the walls of Jerusalem were in pieces. Nehemiah wanted to help his people put the walls back together!

Our key passage is a reminder of God's faithfulness—not only to His people through the Bible, but to us! God is so merciful, and He will never grow tired of loving us.

The Lord's faithfulness is great! Let's say our big picture question and answer. ***Does God always keep His promises? Yes, God is always faithful even when we are not.***

## Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

Print and cut apart the Nehemiah sentence strips. Mix up the strips and scatter them on the floor or a table. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Nehemiah 1–2. Invite the group to work together to arrange them in the correct order.

When kids finish, guide them to take turns reading the sentences, one strip at a time, to retell the Bible story.

Correct order of sentences:

1. One day, some men came from Judah. Nehemiah asked, “How are God’s people doing in Jerusalem?”
2. The men had bad news. “The people are in trouble. The walls around Jerusalem are broken down, and the gates have been burned.”
3. Nehemiah sat down and cried. Then he prayed and fasted for several days.
4. The king asked Nehemiah why he was sad and what he wanted to do.
5. Nehemiah prayed. Then he said, “Please send me to Jerusalem so I can rebuild the city.”
6. The king agreed. He gave Nehemiah letters to keep him safe as he traveled.
7. Nehemiah arrived safely in Jerusalem.
8. After three days, Nehemiah got up in the middle of the night to look at the city’s walls.
9. Nehemiah told the people, “We are in trouble. Let’s rebuild Jerusalem’s wall.”
10. The people said, “Let’s start building,” and so they did.

**SAY** • Great job remembering our story! **Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem’s walls**, and God answered his prayer. Next time, we will hear the rest of Nehemiah’s story!

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- “Nehemiah Sentence Strips” printable

Tip: To develop Bible skills, ask kids to list the corresponding Scripture reference on each sentence strip.



LOW PREP

• “Missions Prayer Cards”  
printable

## Activity choice (10 minutes)

**OPTION 1:** Pray for people groups

Before small group, print copies of the missions prayer cards printable so each kid can take home a card.

**SAY** • Nehemiah cared about the people in Jerusalem. He asked how they were doing. When he heard bad news, he cried. Then **Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem’s walls.**

Finally, Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem to help.

Distribute the prayer cards and allow volunteers to read each card aloud. Encourage kids to pray this week for the people on the cards. Remind kids that we can show care for others by praying and asking God for help.

**OPTION 2:** Classroom hunt

Before small group, hide several objects throughout the room: a cup, a paper crown, a newspaper, a box of tissues, a paper scroll, a flashlight, and a toolbox.

Challenge the kids to hunt through the classroom to find some items. Announce the items one at a time. When kids find the item, they should bring it to you. Encourage kids to explain how the item might relate to the Bible story.

1. *cup*—Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer.
2. *crown*—Nehemiah served the king of Persia.
3. *newspaper*—Nehemiah heard news of Jerusalem.
4. *tissues*—Nehemiah sat down and cried.
5. *scroll*—The king gave Nehemiah letters to keep him safe as he traveled.
6. *flashlight*—Nehemiah inspected the walls at night.
7. *toolbox*—The people started to rebuild the walls.

**SAY** • **Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem’s walls.** God’s people needed

- cup
- paper crown
- newspaper
- box of tissues
- paper scroll
- flashlight
- toolbox

strong walls to be safe, and Nehemiah trusted that God would keep His promise to protect His people and give them a home.

When we trust in Jesus, we believe God will keep His promise to give us—His people—a home. Jesus obeyed God perfectly. He died on the cross and rose again so we can have a home with Him forever.

### Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Encourage each kid to write about something in her life that she can ask God to help her with.

**SAY • Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem’s walls.** He knew that God’s people wouldn’t be able to complete this big job on their own. They needed God’s help!

Like Nehemiah, we need God’s help too. We all have things in our lives that are impossible to accomplish without God’s help. I encourage you to pray this week and ask God to help you!

Pray that God would help kids this week in doing the things that are difficult for them. Praise Him for His faithfulness and thank Him for the ways that He is already working in each of their lives.

As time allows, lead kids to complete “Yes or No?” on the activity page. Kids will color in the even numbers to find part of the answer to the big picture question. (*Yes*)

Guide kids to write out the big picture question and answer. Then prompt them to recall what promise Nehemiah trusted God to keep. (*Nehemiah trusted that God would keep His promise to protect His people and give them a home.*)

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- “Yes or No?” activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week’s *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.