

## 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  
ADVENTURE!**

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. As kids arrive, ask them if their parents ever watch the news. Ask them if they have ever watched the news.

**SAY** • Many adults watch television news programs to learn about what is happening in the world. In today’s Bible story, we will learn about a man who lived far away from Jerusalem but heard some sad news about his people who had returned there.

## Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “News for Nehemiah” activity page. Instruct them to complete the word search to find all the words from the Bible story.

**SAY** • Nehemiah worked as a cupbearer for the king in Persia. In today’s Bible story, we will learn of some sad news he heard about Jerusalem. What do you think Nehemiah did when he heard sad news about his home?

- “News for Nehemiah” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

## Session starter (10 minutes)

**OPTION 1:** Your face will surely show it

Before class, write simple emotion words on separate index cards. Invite a volunteer to draw a card and act out the emotion. Whoever guesses the emotion correctly first gets to act out the next emotion unless she has already had a turn.

Suggested emotions: happy, surprised, angry, confused, sad, tired, and so forth.

**SAY** • Our faces often show other people how we are feeling. We will learn that Nehemiah was so sad about Jerusalem that the king of Persia could tell just by looking at him. What do you think happened next?

**OPTION 2:** Wall builders

Provide kids with building blocks. Allow them to build a wall around a table or chair in the classroom. Talk to kids about the purpose of a wall. Ask them what would make a wall effective. Then, knock down portions of the wall they built and ask them if it could still work in its broken state.

**SAY** • Many of God's people had returned to their homes in Jerusalem, but the city walls had been destroyed, and no one had rebuilt them. Walls were very important to cities back then, and when Nehemiah heard about the broken walls, he was extremely sad. We will learn what Nehemiah did when he heard about Jerusalem's broken walls.



- index cards
- pens

- building blocks

## 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  
• sweatbands  
• swimming goggles  
• bike helmet

*[Large Group Leader enters wearing appropriate active wear, sweatbands, a pair of swimming goggles around his or her neck, and a bike helmet on his or her head. Leader begins to stretch and run in place.]*

**LEADER** • Hey, kids! Welcome back to the gym! Are you ready for another triathlon training session? I've been working hard this week and feel like I'm getting stronger! *[Strike a silly flexing pose.]* I look stronger, don't I? Unfortunately, I got some bad news yesterday. Part of the course I'll be running for the last leg of the triathlon was damaged in a big storm. They have to repair it before the race or it won't be safe to run. I have been praying that they can get it fixed before the event.

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 control!

I've been really encouraged by the story of Nehemiah and how he reacted when he received some bad news from men living in Judah. Would you like me to tell you about it? *[Allow responses.]*  
Awesome!

## Giant timeline (1 minute)

**LEADER** • We learned the last two weeks about Esther and how God used her to save His people. This week we will see God's faithfulness through Nehemiah. Nehemiah was living in Persia as a cupbearer. Our Bible story today is "Nehemiah Heard News of Jerusalem."

• Giant Timeline

## Big picture question (1 minute)

**LEADER** • Remember, to help us in our study of God this unit, we've been asking, ***Does God keep His promises?*** We have learned the answer from the stories we've heard so far. ***Yes, God is always faithful even when we are not.*** As you listen to today's Bible story, pay attention to ways 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 capital of Judah and the location of God's temple. When Nehemiah heard that the walls and gates were destroyed, he was sad.

Nehemiah knew that without the walls and gates,

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



God's people weren't protected from their enemies! Anyone who wanted to hurt them or steal from them could enter the city and cause problems.

Nehemiah started by going to God on behalf of all the Israelites. Nehemiah knew that none of the Israelites deserved God's blessings, but Nehemiah asked God to remember His promises to His people anyway. **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.***

In a similar way, 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. Jesus goes before God on our behalf just as Nehemiah went to God on behalf of Israel. When we trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, His righteousness is given to us. God looks at us and sees the perfect obedience of Jesus.

## **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.

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

## Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Lamentations 3:22-23. Take volunteers who think they can say it from memory. Encourage and congratulate all the kids who try, helping as needed.

**LEADER** • This passage was written by the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah had been sad about the destruction in Jerusalem, just as Nehemiah was, but he learned to praise God no matter what. God is faithful, and He always keeps His promises.

We can praise God for everything in our lives. Even bad things can be used for good in God's hands. Let's memorize Lamentations 3:22-23 so we can remember God's mercy and faithfulness, 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 kids to sing "Your Faithfulness."

## Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

**LEADER** • **Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem's walls.** When you hear about someone in need, how do you react? Think about that as you watch our discussion starter video.

Show the "Unit 18, Session 3" discussion starter video. Ask kids what makes it hard to help other people. Ask them if they know how they can be more willing to help those in need.

**LEADER** • God loves everyone, and that's why He wants us to love everyone too. One of the best ways to show we love the people God loves is to help them when

- Key Passage Poster
- "Your Faithfulness" song

- "Unit 18, Session 3" discussion starter video

they need it. Jesus died on the cross to save us and give us the help we needed, and when we trust in Him, He gives us the power to help others around us, too. A great way to help others is to tell them about Jesus' love for them, and how He died for their sins and rose again to defeat death.

• "He Rescues and Delivers" song

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

**LEADER** • Our God is so good and faithful. He shows us mercy and helps us live for Him. He sent us Jesus to save us! Let's worship Him for all He has done.

Sing together "He Rescues and Delivers."

### **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. You show us Your faithfulness to Your people, and we praise You for it. Thank You for sending Jesus to rescue us so we can be Your people, too. Thank You 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 activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- blocks
- markers
- stop watch or timer

Write each word of the key passage on a separate block. Make two sets of key passage blocks. Form two teams and give each team a set of key passage blocks. Time them to see which team can place the blocks in order to make a wall faster. Play again as time allows, shooting for faster times.

**SAY** • Nehemiah trusted in God's love and believed that God's plan included helping His people rebuild their wall. Our key passage reminds us that God's mercy is new every morning; that means it never runs out! God loves His people and desires to preserve and protect them. That's why He sent Jesus! Jesus died on the cross and rose again to rescue us and protect us from sin. That is the most important protection we could ask for!

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

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- tumbling tower block game

Set up a tumbling tower block game. Form two teams of kids. Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help kids find Nehemiah 1–2. Alternate between teams, asking questions of each player. If the kid answers correctly, he may attempt to remove a block from a tier of the tower. If he is incorrect,

the other team may answer for a chance to remove a block from the tower. When the tower falls, the game ends, and the player who was removing a block when it fell does not keep the block she was removing. The team that removed the most blocks at the time the tower falls wins.

Questions:

1. What was Nehemiah's job? (*cupbearer for the king, Neh. 1:11*)
2. What news did Nehemiah hear? (*Jerusalem's walls and gates were destroyed, Neh. 1:3*)
3. How did Nehemiah react to this news at first?  
**(Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem's walls, Neh. 1:4)**
4. What did the king notice about Nehemiah?  
(*Nehemiah was sad, Neh. 2:2*)
5. What did Nehemiah ask the king? (*for permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall, Neh. 2:5*)
6. What did the king provide for Nehemiah to help him with the building? (*letters that said Nehemiah could travel safely to Jerusalem and take wood from the king's forest, Neh. 2:7-8*)
7. What did Nehemiah do when he arrived in Jerusalem? (*Nehemiah inspected the walls and told the other Jews that they would rebuild the wall, Neh. 2:17-18*)
8. ***Does God keep His promises? Yes, God is always faithful, even when we are not.***

**SAY** • Nehemiah heard bad news and prayed for God's help almost immediately. God gave him courage to ask the king of Persia to provide supplies and safe passage. Nehemiah knew that God is always faithful, and he trusted that God would help them rebuild

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

their walls. We can see God’s faithfulness in Jesus, who died on the cross and rose again. He is the Rescuer God promised so long ago! God kept His promise to send Jesus.

### Activity choice (10 minutes)

**OPTION 1:** Follow the leader

Select one child to be the leader. In secret, select two kids to represent the enemies of God’s people. The leader will walk around the room. She may gesture or walk in any way she chooses. Other kids will follow her and mimic her movements. The two other kids will refuse to follow and stand off to the side, insisting that the other kids stop following the leader. After a few moments, see which kids are still following the leader. Consider playing with flashlights and the lights off.

**SAY** • When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he convinced God’s people to follow him and rebuild the wall. However, God’s people had enemies who tried to convince them not to rebuild the wall. The people followed Nehemiah and wanted to rebuild the wall anyway. In our lives, there will be people who try to convince us not to follow God. However, when we trust in Jesus, our hearts are transformed so that we can be faithful to God. ***God is always faithful even when we are not.***

**OPTION 2:** Inspection hunt

Hide a number of small stones or blocks around the room. Provide each kid with a flashlight and turn the lights of the classroom off. Instruct the kids to search for the stones or blocks and gather them in the center of the room. Once all



• flashlights (optional)

• stones or blocks  
• flashlights, 1 per kid

the stones or blocks have been gathered, guide the kids to sit in a circle and build a wall or other structure with them.

**SAY** • Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and inspected the walls at night. He found them broken, just as he had heard they would be. However, **Nehemiah prayed that God would help His people rebuild Jerusalem's walls.** Nehemiah trusted that God would remain faithful to them and help them. God showed His faithfulness by sending Jesus, too. Jesus is the Messiah that God promised to send. ***God is always faithful even when we are not.***

### Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture of a situation where she could stop to pray for God's help before taking action. Ask how this might help her.

**SAY** • Before Nehemiah talked to the king about Jerusalem's walls, he prayed to God about it. Jesus also prayed to God for help before He went to the cross to pay for sin. It is easy to think we can do things without taking time to pray to God for help, but He loves us and wants what is best for us. We can trust God and pray to Him for help and wisdom.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, thanking God for helping Nehemiah and sending Jesus to rescue us from sin.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring 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.