

Return to Jerusalem- Rebuilding the Walls

Scripture Reference: [Nehemiah 1-8](#)

Suggested Theme: Continue to do what is right even if people try to stop us.



Memory Verse: “But you may suffer for doing right. Even if that happens, you are blessed.” [1 Peter 3:14, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

After nearly one hundred years in Jerusalem, the city walls were still in ruins. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes and successfully petitioned the king to go to Jerusalem and help. The neighbouring countries complained and threatened Nehemiah, trying to distract him, but he kept to his purpose and finished the job.

Background Study:

Nehemiah served in the court of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, in Susa. He was the one who served wine to the king. In times of treason and threat, the king’s cupbearer would often taste the wine to ensure it was not poisoned. This was a trusted position.

Nehemiah grieved when he heard news from his brother that the walls of Jerusalem had not been restored. Nehemiah’s desire to rebuild the walls was not primarily to end the city’s vulnerability. He wanted to end the disgrace to God caused by the holy city’s partly disrepair.

After pouring out his heart to God, Nehemiah’s prayers were answered when the king noticed his grief and asked about the cause. Nehemiah laid out a plan to the king, who granted him permission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. Knowing that the neighbouring tribes had often held up work, Nehemiah obtained letters from the king to show he had the authority to do the work. If others tried to stop him, they would be going against the king of Persia.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445 B.C., Jewish exiles from Babylonia had been there for nearly one hundred years. Some improvements had been made in the city. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a new temple had been built. Under the leadership of the scribe Ezra, the Law of Moses had been brought back into force. But the walls and gates of the city were much as the Babylonians had left them after sacking the city in 586 B.C.

Nehemiah’s moonlight inspection around the city’s south end confirmed what his brother Hanani had told him earlier: no one had yet assumed the leadership in repairing Jerusalem’s defences.

The Jews in Jerusalem readily agreed to cooperate with Nehemiah's plan. But the neighbouring tribes objected immediately, as expected. The opposition leader was Sanballat, governor of Samaria (north of Judah). Sanballat's main allies were Tobiah, governor of Ammon (east of Judah), and Geshem, leader of a league of Arab tribes that had occupied Moab and Edom (southeast of Judah).

Virtually surrounding Judah, these enemies did not ridicule Judah to be humorous. Their mocking was meant to threaten. They knew that rebuilt walls around Jerusalem might signal a rise in Judah's military might - and a danger to themselves.

Even though opposition to the rebuilding intensified, the Jews persevered. And in a remarkably short period, by early October 445 B.C., they made the defences whole again. Their success brought honour to God in the eyes of the very people who had been their opponents.

After the walls were completed, Nehemiah encouraged the people to settle in the city. Finally, all of the people assembled, and Ezra read the word of the Lord as they stood and listened. Many people wept on this sacred occasion, but

"Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy good food and sweet drinks. Send some to people who have none. Today is a holy day to the Lord. Don't be sad. The joy of the Lord will make you strong.'" [Nehemiah 8:10, ICB](#)

Way to Introduce the Story:

Play a version of "red light/green light. Tell the children that you will call out the name of a good activity (something that makes God happy). When you hold up the green light (a circle of green paper), they are to act out the good thing. When you hold up the red light (a circle of red paper) they are to "freeze" and stop doing the good thing until you hold the green light up again. "Good things" might include sweeping the floor to help mom, washing the dishes, picking flowers for someone, writing a note of encouragement on the computer, etc. After a few rounds, talk about the fact that God likes us to do good things, but sometimes people try to stop us. It's like they are the red light.

The Story:

Nehemiah was a Jew, but he did not live in Jerusalem. He lived in Persia, where he worked in the palace. Nehemiah had a very important job: He was the king's cupbearer. Sometimes, bad people put poison in the king's drinking cup. Nehemiah's job was always to taste the drink first to make sure there was no poison.

Even though Nehemiah had never been to Jerusalem, he really wanted to go. His brother had been there and had told Nehemiah all about it. Nehemiah's brother said that even though the temple had been built in Jerusalem, something very important was still missing. The big wall that used to surround Jerusalem still needed to be fixed. It was falling down and crumbling.

One day, the king noticed that Nehemiah looked sad. Nehemiah told him he was sad because Jerusalem's city walls were broken. The king asked Nehemiah what he wanted, and Nehemiah said that he would like to go to Jerusalem and repair the city walls. The king was happy to give him permission to go. He gave Nehemiah a letter to show all of the Jews and all of the neighbours around Jerusalem. The letter said that Nehemiah was in charge of the walls. The king also sent marching soldiers and soldiers on horses along with Nehemiah.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he made a special trip around the city to inspect the walls. He wanted to see things himself without anyone else nearby, so he went alone at night. He rode a horse all around the walls and saw everything that needed to be fixed.

Soon, Nehemiah organized everyone to work on the wall. The Jews wanted to have a wall around their city, so lots of people volunteered to help. At first, everyone worked very hard, but soon, their work was interrupted. Neighbours from other cities came and started bothering the workers. They made fun of them and said that they did not know how to build walls. But the workers did not stop. Nehemiah kept praying that God would help them keep on doing the right thing even if people made fun of them.

Next, the neighbours decided to attack the workers to stop them. When Nehemiah heard about that plan, he started making sure that there were always guards (all day and all night) to protect the workers when they were busy at the walls.

Even some of the Jews made the workers want to stop rebuilding the walls. Some of the rich Jews started cheating some of the poor Jews. The workers wanted to stop and help the poor people. But Nehemiah called all of the cheaters together and told them that they had to give back the money. Soon, everyone got back to work.

When the neighbours saw that the wall was getting taller daily, they tried to hurt Nehemiah. They sent him messages telling him to meet them alone, outside of the town. Nehemiah told them that he would not stop working on the walls.

No matter what people did to try to stop Nehemiah, he just kept on working. He knew it was the right thing to do. Finally, the wall was finished. Nehemiah had never stopped doing the right thing – even when people tried to stop him.

All of the Jews celebrated a special day. Ezra, the priest, stood on a high wooden platform and read from the Book of the Law of God. As soon as he began reading, the people stood up to show respect for the Word of God. Ezra read from the law from sunrise until noon. Everyone was thankful to God for what He had done for them.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

[Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.](#)

View this slideshow and download it from the original source:

<https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/nehemiah-1/>

View this slideshow and download it from the original source:

<https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/nehemiah-2/>

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

- Who was the cupbearer to the king? (Nehemiah)
- Why did the king let Nehemiah go to Jerusalem? (He noticed Nehemiah was sad, and he was happy to let Nehemiah go and start the project)
- What part of Jerusalem did Nehemiah rebuild? (The city walls)
- What did Nehemiah ask the king to give him so that Jerusalem's neighbours would give them less trouble? (Documents saying the king was making Nehemiah in charge of rebuilding the walls)
- Why did the neighbours make fun of the workers? (To try to get them to stop working on the city walls)
- What is one reason why the neighbours didn't want Jerusalem's wall repaired? (Jerusalem could then better protect itself and have a stronger military)
- When the wall was completed, what did Ezra stand on a platform and do from sunrise until noon? (He read out loud from the Law of God)
- What did this story teach you about God?
- What did this story teach you about people?

Reflection:

- What question do you have for God about this story?
- What do you think the walls of Jerusalem looked like before Nehemiah helped rebuild them?
- How do you think Nehemiah felt when he first saw the broken walls of Jerusalem?
- What do you think the people used to make the walls? What tools or supplies did they need?
- Would you have liked to help rebuild the walls or guard the people who were building the walls?
- Why do you think Jerusalem's neighbours wanted to stop the people from building the wall?
- Why did Nehemiah and the people continue building the walls, even though their neighbours tried to make them stop?
- Has anyone tried to stop you from doing something good or loving?
- The Bible says that sometimes we will suffer for doing what is right, but even then, we are blessed. Why are we blessed for suffering when doing what is right?
- Did Jesus ever suffer for doing good? How can he help us when we suffer?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [Oh, Be Careful Song](#)
- [I'm in the Lord's Army Song](#)

- [Books of the Old Testament Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- [How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.](#)
- [Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.](#)

Activities:

- You can use wooden blocks to build or rebuild the walls surrounding Jerusalem. Older children could use a deck of cards to build their walls.
- Write brief descriptions of situations on cards (or tell non-readers) and let the children draw cards and act out the situations using their own endings. They could try good and bad endings and let the others guess what it is. Example: "The new girl in class drops all her books in front of everyone. You begin to help her pick them up, and then everyone laughs at you and tells you to stop being friends with a 'loser'. The child who draws that card can call on others to help him/her act it out.
- Use bible encyclopaedias and commentaries to learn about city walls.
- Play a simple word game, [Bible Wordz](#). This adaptable game allows children to form words from letter tiles related to words in the Bible lesson.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Decorate bricks or building blocks.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. [Free printables for this story.](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-Nehemiah's Prayer and Reviewing of the Wall \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page with text \(Ministry Spark\)](#)
- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets-Ezra reads the law \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Chart: Chronology of Judah's Return \(Bible charts\)](#)

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Date

2026/06/15