

# NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 1 - 12

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Nehemiah

**Key-location:** Jerusalem

**Key-repetitions:**

- Prayers of Nehemiah (Neh 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:14).
- Opposition to rebuilding the city walls: ridicule (Neh 4:1-3); physical aggression (Neh 4:8); weariness (Neh 4:10); rumors (Neh 6:5-8); false prophets (Neh 6:10-14).

**Key-attitudes:**

- Nehemiah's sadness caused by pitiful conditions in Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah's dependence on God.
- Nehemiah's courage and determination.
- Nehemiah's anger and grief over the sins of fellow Jews.
- Nehemiah's indifference toward enemies who interfered with rebuilding the walls.
- Non-Jews' anger and arrogance toward Nehemiah.
- People's joyful celebrations when the walls were completed and dedicated.

**Initial-situation:**

The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the city and carried its citizens into exile. After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews lived as exiles in Babylon for seventy years. Then Cyrus, king of Persia, conquered Babylon. King Cyrus issued a proclamation permitting exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple for the Lord. The first group of Jews to return from exile to Jerusalem numbered 42,360. Eighty years after the first group of exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem (458 B.C.), Ezra led a second group of exiles to Jerusalem.

**Initial-problem:**

One of Nehemiah's brothers traveled from Judah and told Nehemiah, "Those who went back into Judah are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is still broken down, and its gates are still burned by fire."

**Final-situation:**

The rebuilt walls of Jerusalem were dedicated to God. The people rejoiced and offered sacrifices, because God had given them reasons to rejoice.

## BIBLE STORY

Fourteen years after Ezra went to Jerusalem (444 B.C.), one of Nehemiah's brothers traveled from Judah and saw Nehemiah. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king. *(Since many kings had been poisoned, the cupbearer tasted the wine and food in the king's presence before the king ate or drank.)*

Nehemiah's brother told him, "Those who went back into Judah are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is still broken down, and its gates are still burned by fire" (Neh 1:1-3).

Nehemiah heard the report and sat down and wept. For several days he mourned, fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven (Neh 1:4-11).

The king asked Nehemiah, "Why does your face look sad? Your heart must be sad."

Nehemiah was afraid, but he replied, "May the king live forever! My face is sad because the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins. Its gates are burned by fire."

The king asked Nehemiah, "What do you want?"

Nehemiah silently prayed to God, and then answered the king, "Send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it."

It pleased the king to send Nehemiah (Neh 2:1-9).

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and challenged the Jewish leaders to rebuild the city walls. They agreed. The surrounding non-Jews were angry that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Jews. Non-Jews interfered with the rebuilding of the walls.

The builders of the walls were organized. Each group was assigned the section, in front of their homes, to rebuild (Neh 3:1-32).

Non-Jews tried different tactics to interfere with the building. They ridiculed the builders, "What are those miserable Jews doing? If a fox walked on top of their wall, it would fall down."

Nehemiah prayed, "O God, turn their insults back on them. They've insulted you in front of these builders" (Neh 4:1-5).

The enemies plotted to attack Jerusalem, kill many workers, and bring the work to an end. Nehemiah prayed, and he set guards to protect the workers, and armed the workers with swords, spears, and bows (Neh 4:6-23).

The builders became discouraged because fellow Jews exploited them with high interest. Nehemiah became angry and prohibited the Jewish nobles and officials from charging interest. Nehemiah demanded that the Jewish nobles and officials return property and money (Neh 5:1-13). Nehemiah prayed, "Remember me, O God, for everything that I've done for these people" (Neh 5:19).

The non-Jewish enemies laid traps for Nehemiah and falsely accused him. They invited Nehemiah to meet with them outside of the city. Nehemiah answered, "I'm working on an important work and can't get away" (Neh 6:1-5).

The non-Jewish enemies prepared a letter falsely accusing Nehemiah of leading a rebellion against the king. Nehemiah denied the accusations but continued working (Neh 6:6-9).

A false prophet warned Nehemiah to enter the temple and lock the doors because men were coming at night to kill him. The false prophet wanted to give Nehemiah the reputation of a coward and discredit him. Nehemiah answered, "Should a man like me run away?"

Nehemiah prayed, "O God, remember what my enemies have done. Also, remember the false prophets who tried to intimidate me (Neh 6:10-14).

The wall was completed in fifty-two days. The non-Jewish enemies knew that the work had been done with the help of God (Neh 6:15-16).

The Israelites in Judah assembled in Jerusalem. Ezra the scribe (*Jewish scholar*) stood on a high wooden platform. Ezra opened the Book of the Law of God and all the people stood up. Ezra read aloud from daybreak till noon while all the people listened. While the people stood, the Levites (*priest's helpers*) explained the meaning so that the people could understand the Law of God. The people celebrated with great joy because they understood God's word (Neh 8:1-12).

The people rededicated the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem to God. The people rejoiced and offered sacrifices, because God had given them reasons to rejoice (Neh 12:27-43).

### GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

### SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Nehemiah react to the bad news his brother brought from Jerusalem?
2. What part did prayer play in Nehemiah's effort to rebuild the walls?
3. What were some barriers that Nehemiah had to overcome to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem?
4. How did Nehemiah face his barriers?
5. What did you learn from Nehemiah that can help you overcome barriers to the work that God wants you to do?
6. What were some of the reasons the Jews in Jerusalem celebrated and rejoiced?
7. What reasons do you have to rejoice?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Threats to God's work come from both outside and within.** Barriers for the construction of the walls came from enemies outside who attacked the workers (Neh 4:8), and from rich Jews within who exploited their fellow citizens (Neh 5:1-12).

2. **The enemies of the work of God are persistent and use many methods of attack.** Some of the methods used to stop the construction of the walls were: ridicule (Neh 4:1-3); physical aggression (Neh 4:8); exhaustion from work (Neh 4:10); rumors (Neh 6:5-8); false prophets (Neh 6:10-14); terror (Neh 6:1-14) and loyalty to ungodly family ties (Neh 6:17-19).
3. **A person needs to be both spiritual and practical.** Nehemiah faced the threats of aggression with prayer and guards (Neh 4:9, 17).
4. **Prayer should be prevalent in the life of the person who seeks to do a work for God.** Nehemiah prayed for guidance and to conquer barriers that were hindrances to rebuilding the city walls (Neh 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:14).
5. **Understanding God's word is a reason to rejoice.** The people rejoiced because they understood the words of God's Law that had been read to them (Neh 8:12).

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in "twitter" length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about the story.
- How they are similar to or different from Nehemiah.
- About barriers that cause difficulty in their doing God's work.