



Nehemiah



MEETING AIM

To see how God begins to gather his people back together after the 70 years of exile.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Nehemiah 1–2



BACKGROUND

After the 70 years in exile prophesied by Jeremiah, there is a new world power on the scene – Persia. At the very end of 2 Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra, we are told that: “The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia” (2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1) to let God’s people go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. This is a stop-start process, taking about 20 years. About 70 years after the temple is complete a second group of exiles return to Jerusalem – this includes Ezra – and about 13 years after this (in 445 BC), we meet Nehemiah for the first time and the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls is started.

+ CIRCLE TIME



As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and pass round a simple object. When a child has the object, they can share a story from their week. Sometimes it’s helpful to have a sand timer so that you have time for each person to share if they want to. If a child doesn’t want to say anything they can just pass on the object. Pray and thank God for all the stories shared and the stories that weren’t mentioned.

+ BUILDING WALLS



You will need: constructions toys

Show the children the construction toys you have gathered and ask them to build the biggest walls they can. If you have lots of space and can get hold of cardboard boxes (perhaps from the supermarket) you could build an enormous wall together.

Explain that in today’s story, God brought his people back from their enemies’ countries and they started to rebuild their most important city: Jerusalem.

+ BIBLE STORY



You will need: five cardboard boxes of similar sizes, each with a picture on from

youthandchildren.work/links

Remind the children that God’s people are away from home – they are being made to live in enemy countries. Ask if they remember the message that Jeremiah gave? It said that the people would be away for 70 years – that’s a long time! In fact, some of God’s family were away for a lot longer than that but God had a plan to bring them all back together and one of the people who helped make that happen was a man called Nehemiah.

(Put the first box in front of you, with the picture of a glass of wine.) Nehemiah was the man who gave the king his wine every day. This was an important job and meant that he could talk to the king. One day some people came to visit Nehemiah. They had been back to their city and it was a big mess. The walls and houses had all fallen down.

(Put the second box on top of the first, the box with an sad emoji face on it.) Nehemiah was very upset and he started talking to God and asking for some help to make the city OK again.

(Put the third box on the stack, the one with a picture of a crown on it.) The next time Nehemiah gave wine to the king, the king noticed how sad he looked and he asked him what was wrong. Nehemiah told the king about his city, Jerusalem, and how spoiled it was.

(Add box number four to the tower – with word “Help!” on it.) The king asked Nehemiah what he could do to help – point out that the word on the box says “help”. Nehemiah asked if he could go back to Jerusalem to help mend the walls and the houses. The king said yes! He even offered to help him.

(Place your final box on top – with a picture of a brick on it.) So, Nehemiah went back to Jerusalem and had a good look at all the broken walls and houses and made a plan to start building them again. It took a long time, but eventually God’s people could live in their city again.

+ CHATTING TOGETHER



Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- Can the children retell the story using the big box blocks to help them?
- What was surprising about the story?
- Do you think Nehemiah was worried about what a big job this was?
- How do you think God’s people felt about going back to their city?

- How do you think God felt about the people going home?

+ CREATIVE RESPONSE



You will need: sticky labels of an appropriate size; felt-tip pens; five stones, blocks or matchboxes for each child

The children are going to make five mini-boxes like your big story boxes. Depending on your size of group and budget, you could use a variety of things to pile up. Stones would be the cheapest option but may not stack very well. Pound shops often have cheap toy brick sets. If you are planning far enough in advance, you could collect small boxes such as matchboxes or even yoghurt pots. Alternatively you could cut toilet roll inner tubes in half and use them.

Let the children draw on five labels to match the pictures on your bigger boxes. As they do this, you can continue to talk about the story – what happened when? What order did things happen in? They can stick a label on each of their blocks or boxes and then they can tell the story themselves. This time of making is an ideal point for children to think about the story and start to come to some conclusions for themselves.

+ PRAYER



If you have plenty of adult helpers, get them to make a circle. Alternatively, split your group in half and have half of them form the circle and then swap over. Hold hands in the circle and hold them up in the air to make lots of archways. Invite the children to come through the archways into the centre and pray, thanking God that he brought his people home and invites us to make our home in him too.

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