

Nehemiah Discerns Falsehood

(Nehemiah 6)

Introduction

Has anyone ever tried to bully you into doing something wrong? Or, have you ever had a “friend” tempt you to disobey? Today we will learn how Nehemiah handled the bullies he had to deal with.

Opening Prayer

Father, help us to take a stand for You to do the right thing even when others are making fun of us. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

“For with God nothing will be impossible.” (Luke 1:37)

Lesson

We have been learning about Nehemiah. Even though he was a Jew, he had been born in the land of Persia, where he lived in the royal palace serving the king as a slave. Does anyone remember what his job was? He was the cupbearer. Who remembers what that was? His job was to taste test the king’s food and drink to make sure it wasn’t poisonous. That made Nehemiah the king’s most trusted servant.

One day his brother came from Israel and gave him the bad news that the people of Jerusalem were in trouble and that the city was still laying in ruins. This broke Nehemiah’s heart; he wanted to go back to his homeland to help God’s people.

We learned that prayer is powerful and has wonderful results: the king not only gave him permission to return to Jerusalem, but he gave Nehemiah letters of introduction and a royal escort so that they could travel in safety.

Once Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, Nehemiah was shocked by what he saw. Such utter ruin! Such awful desolation! Soon he began the huge job of rebuilding the walls.

But no sooner had Nehemiah gotten all the people working on the job that they were met with hostile resistance. There were three men (Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab) who were angry that anyone would want to help the Jews rebuild Jerusalem.

When these three men gathered an army to attack the city and knock the wall down again, Nehemiah acted at once. He ordered everybody to drop their building tools and stand out on the wall with swords, spears, and bows ready to meet the attackers.

Last week we learned that Nehemiah was not afraid because he knew that God had the power to take care of this problem situation. And just as God was right there to help Nehemiah, He is with us to help us with our problems, too. God will give you peace in your heart even when you have problems.

We pick up the story today when the children of Israel had finished building the wall around Jerusalem. The whole city was enclosed. There was nothing left to do but hang the gates on their hinges. But, who should turn up to give them a hard time again? Let’s see...

Nehemiah 6:1-2

Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies found out that I had finished rebuilding the wall and that no gaps remained—though we had not yet set up the doors in the gates. (2) So Sanballat and Geshem sent a message asking me to meet them at one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But I realized they were plotting to harm me,

These three enemies of the children of Israel invited Nehemiah to meet with them in a village some distance from Jerusalem. But, Nehemiah was not that easily taken in. He knew they were trying to get him to leave the building project so that they could knock the wall down again while he was away. So he sent back this word:

Nehemiah 6:3

so I replied by sending this message to them: “I am engaged in a great work, so I can’t come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?”

Nehemiah knew that he was doing what God had called him to do and nothing was going to get him off the track.

Four times Sanballat sent his messengers asking Nehemiah to come down to the plain of Ono, and four times Nehemiah said, "I can't do it!"

When God gives you a job to do, you need to stick to it no matter what other people say or do. When you are tempted to do wrong, you should say what Nehemiah said, "I can't do it!"

Then Sanballat's messengers came a fifth time. This time they brought a very nasty message.

Nehemiah 6:5-7

The fifth time, Sanballat's servant came with an open letter in his hand, (6) and this is what it said: "There is a rumor among the surrounding nations, and Geshem tells me it is true, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are building the wall. According to his reports, you plan to be their king. (7) He also reports that you have appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim about you, 'Look! There is a king in Judah!' "You can be very sure that this report will get back to the king, so I suggest that you come and talk it over with me."

Sanballat's letter said that if he didn't come down to the plain of Ono he would tell the king of Persia that the children of Israel were planning a rebellion against him and were going to set Nehemiah up as king in Jerusalem. These were bold-faced lies about Nehemiah! And they were threatening to report them to the king of Persia, the very man that Nehemiah was so faithful to as his cupbearer.

These enemies would do almost anything to keep Nehemiah from doing what God wanted him to do in Jerusalem.

Our enemy, Satan, tries to keep us from obeying God, too. But if you are part of God's family, the Holy Spirit gives you power to say "No" to Satan. Sometimes Satan uses other people to try to discourage us from following Jesus. They might try to get you to do or say things that are not pleasing to God, or they might tease you for wanting to obey God and do the right things. Satan will try over and over again to get you and me to sin. But the Bible says, "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37) God has much more power than Satan.

Remember, He is always there to help you say "No" to sin. He wants you to follow His ways.

The enemies continued to try to stop Nehemiah from doing what God wanted him to do. But God was with Nehemiah to give him strength and wisdom. Nehemiah refused to meet with them; he would not turn from the work God had given him to do.

Nehemiah 6:8-9

I replied, "There is no truth in any part of your story. You are making up the whole thing." (9) They were just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could discourage us and stop the work. So I continued the work with even greater determination.

Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab were telling lies. They were going against God. Nehemiah boldly rebuked them and told the people they were just trying to frighten them.

Then another guy tried to trick him. This time it was supposedly a "friend" of Nehemiah's.

Nehemiah 6:10

Later I went to visit Shemaiah son of Delaiah and grandson of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home. He said, "Let us meet together inside the Temple of God and bolt the doors shut. Your enemies are coming to kill you tonight."

Shemaiah pretended to be Nehemiah's friend. He said he wanted to protect him from the enemies who planned to attack him during the night so he suggested they go hide in the Most Holy Place in the temple. But, only a priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place in the temple. Anyone that went into the Most Holy Place of the temple who was *not* a priest would surely die (Numbers 18:7). And Nehemiah was not a priest. But Nehemiah knew it was a trick. He knew they were just trying to scare him and he refused to give into fear by running and hiding.

Nehemiah 6:11-13

But I replied, "Should someone in my position run from danger? Should someone in my position enter the Temple to save his life? No, I won't do

it!” (12) I realized that God had not spoken to him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. (13) They were hoping to intimidate me and make me sin. Then they would be able to accuse and discredit me.

God helped Nehemiah to see that it was a trick, and he refused to give into the fear and stop the work God had given him to do. He carried on with the task trusting that God would protect him. At last the wall was finished and the gates were all set in place.

Nehemiah 6:15-16

So on October 2 the wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun. (16) When our enemies and the surrounding nations heard about it, they were frightened and humiliated. They realized this work had been done with the help of our God.

Our enemy, Satan, attacks and tries to get us to do wrong and to get us off the track of following God, but we can win against Satan by refusing to sin. Nehemiah finished the work in 52 days all because he had the faith and courage to keep on doing the good work God had given him to do.

Nehemiah prayed when he was unsure, when he was scared, and when he needed God’s strength. What can we pray for today?

Closing Prayer

Jesus, help us to call upon You for the strength and power of the Holy Spirit so that we can trust You even when life is hard. We want to please You by following Your ways and bringing Your name honor. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Make construction paper “brick” shapes and have the children write one word of the Memory Verse on each “brick”. Let them glue their “bricks” onto another sheet of construction paper or card stock to “build” a wall that will help them remember this week’s verse.

Encourage the children to decorate their “wall” by drawing pictures of Nehemiah and the Israelites working together.

Activity Center

Yummy Wall Building Project

Allow the children to construct a “wall” with Graham crackers and frosting or peanut butter. Have fun working together, then enjoy eating it!

Memory Verse Activity

Bring actual tools, or make paper “tools”, and write a word of the Memory verse on each tool. Let the kids arrange the tools in order to form the memory verse. Share how Nehemiah and God’s people did something that everyone else thought was impossible.

Game Center

Lesson Story Wall

Preparation:

- Make “bricks” out of paper bags. Fill the “bricks” with crumpled newspaper and fold down the tops and tape shut. (Or, use shoeboxes.) Make one “brick” for each story strip.
- Make story strips using the sentences below.
- Tape or glue each story strips onto the front of a “brick”.

Procedure:

- Give each student a “brick” and have them read their story strip out loud.
- Have students work together stacking the “bricks” in order.

Do not make this a race against other students. They need to work together to accomplish the task. After they have done it the first time, you can have them try it again, racing against the clock. Or, you can

challenge them to see how many times they can stack all the “bricks” in the right order within a certain time period, such as 5 minutes. Or, find out how long it takes to stack all the “bricks” without any falling down.

Story Strips:

- The Children of Israel were rescued from slavery in Egypt by Moses.
- Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land.
- The Israelites were unfaithful to God and began to worship other gods.
- The Israelites were captured by Nebuchadnezzar and marched 900 miles to Babylon into slavery.
- King Cyrus of Persia told Ezra and the rest of the Israelites they could leave Persia.
- 42,000 Israelites went back to Jerusalem with Ezra to rebuild the temple of God.
- Jerusalem’s walls were torn down in a fight and Nehemiah was very sad about it.
- The King of Persia sent Nehemiah and the supplies he would need to fix the walls in Jerusalem.
- Some people in Jerusalem didn’t want to help the Israelites rebuild the walls and tried to cause trouble.
- Nehemiah organized the people who wanted to rebuild the walls and had them always ready for any trouble.
- The people rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem in 52 days because they all worked together.

Or, use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. Who was Nehemiah? (He was Jew, born in Persia, who worked at the royal palace as the king’s cupbearer.)
2. What did Nehemiah come to Jerusalem to do? (Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.)
3. What did Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab do to the children of Israel as they worked on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem? (They opposed the work; mustered an army to attack the people and knock down the wall.)
4. What invitation did Sanballat extend to Nehemiah? (To come meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono to talk.)
5. What was the nasty message Sanballat’s messenger’s came with fifth time? (Sanballat’s letter said that if he didn’t come down to the plain of Ono he would tell the king of Persia that the children of Israel were planning a rebellion against him and were going to set Nehemiah up as king in Jerusalem.)
6. What does our enemy, Satan, try to get us to do? (Sin against God by not following His ways and thinking, saying, and doing things that displease God.)
7. What helps us to say “No!” to sin? (The power of the Holy Spirit.)
8. How do you get the power of the Holy Spirit? (You ask God for it.)
9. How did Nehemiah’s so-called “friend” try to trick him? (He said that the enemies were trying to kill him and suggested that he run into the Most Holy Place of the temple to hide.)
10. What would have happened to Nehemiah if he had run into the Most Holy Place of the temple to hide? (Anyone that went into the Most Holy Place of the temple who was not a priest would surely die.)
11. How did God help Nehemiah to know that Shemaiah, his so-called “friend” was trying to trick him? (God gave Nehemiah wisdom and understanding.)

12. How long did it take the children of Israel to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem? (52 days.)
13. What was it about Nehemiah that kept him on task to finish the job? (Faith and courage to not fall into sin and get derailed from the good work God had given him to do.)
14. What can we learn from the way Nehemiah responded to his enemies? What should you do when people say bad things about you or try to get you to stop following God's ways?
15. How do we need to be like those who helped Nehemiah rebuild the wall around Jerusalem?

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