

Session 6

Nehemiah: Walls and hearts

Children learn about the story of Nehemiah

Scripture: Nehemiah

Supplies

- Moon sand: Mix 8 cups of flour and one cup baby oil in a big bowl until it's mixed well. (It can take up to ten minutes of mixing to get it right). Put the moon sand in an air tight container. (If moon sand is too expensive, use sea sand or maize meal.)
- Cat and mouse ears
- Small boxes and popsicle sticks
- Pieces of paper
- Copies of the maze



Welcome

Inspection: For a smaller group. Walk with the children around the building and see where a thief could come in. Walk around a second time and see where repairs or cleaning have to be done.

Cat and mouse: The mice are Nehemiah and Ezra and the cats are Sanballat and Tobiah. You can give them cat and mouse ears for fun.



Worship

Settle down ritual: Let the children close their eyes. Let them look at the dark and light patterns inside their eyelids. After 10 counts say in a quiet voice: "God's light shines over all of us, whether it's dark or light in our lives. Ask God to show you the dark things in your life and to help you get rid of them." Wait a few more seconds and then close with "Amen".



Word

Each child gets some moon sand (see recipe). While the leader is talking, let the children play with the sand and use it to portray parts of the story for themselves.

We've all heard/seen of places where thieves can get in to buildings (or is our security too good?) and we have seen where we could make some repairs or clean up a bit.

The Jews (the tribes of Juda and Benjamin) returned to their country after 70 years in Babylon. Now all the homes that were burnt down had to be repaired. Nehemiah couldn't go back with them because he worked for the king of Babylon. One day one of his friends came to visit and told him that Jerusalem wasn't looking very good, especially the wall. No one tried to repair the wall. Enemies and thieves could just walk in because the wall was the only thing that could keep them out.

Nehemiah was so sad that he started crying (*draw a sad face in the moon sand*). Nehemiah grieved for days. When he went back to work, the king saw that Nehemiah was upset. Nehemiah was always very cheerful and had a very positive attitude. That's why it was so strange to the king that he was upset.

"What's wrong?" the king asked him. Nehemiah was scared to answer, because he was actually the king's slave and if the king got angry at him, he could do anything to him. "Is there something you'd like to ask me?" the king asked. Nehemiah prayed to God in his thoughts and then answered: "Our city Jerusalem is destroyed. Please let me go there to help them rebuild."

What will the king say? (*Wipe the sad face away, and draw a happy one*)

The king let Nehemiah go to Jerusalem for a while. He also sent letters along with him so that anyone who wanted to stop him, would know that it was the king who sent him. The king also made sure that Nehemiah had enough materials to build the wall.

Then Nehemiah left (*walk with your fingers in the sand*).

Sanballat and his people were Horonites. They were angry that someone came to help the Jews in Jerusalem. (*Wipe the sand*)

In Jerusalem Nehemiah didn't tell anyone what he was doing for three days. He took his time seeing how things were first. In the night he and a few other people walked around Jerusalem and inspected the broken wall. Only when he knew exactly what to do, did he get the leaders of Jerusalem together and encouraged them to start working. The leaders were very excited and wanted to start immediately.

(*Pick up some sand and let it fall back down again*). Sanballat and Tobiah heard that they were going to rebuild and laughed at them. "You'll never manage it!" Nehemiah answered: "God of the heavens will help us. We will succeed!"

(*Pat the sand flat*). Nehemiah planned everything very well. People had to rebuild the part of the wall in front of their houses first. (*Build a wall in the sand*). He divided people into groups for the rest of the wall. Everyone, even their daughters, helped build. There were only a few people who were too proud and fancy to help build. Sanballat was furious. Tobiah said: "That wall is going to be so weak, a jackal could destroy it."

The people worked very hard and soon they were halfway. To keep Sanballat and his friends from damaging the wall, they guarded it at night. But it made everyone very tired. They couldn't build without sleep. Nehemiah chose some of the families to keep watch at night and gave them some weapons. Half of the men had to build during the day while wearing swords. The other half had spears, bows, and harnesses. The men who had to carry the building material, had to work with one hand and carry a weapon in the other hand.

(*Draw a sword or spear in the sand*)

Nehemiah encouraged the people: "Stay strong, God will help us!"

Sanballat and Tobiah set a trap for Nehemiah. They wanted Nehemiah to come out so that they could catch him. They pretended to have a meeting, but Nehemiah said he had to work and couldn't join them. They spread a story that Nehemiah was planning an uprising against the king. Nehemiah just kept on working and didn't think about them. Then they bribed a man to lie to Nehemiah so that they could trap him, but God helped him to see through the liar immediately.

The wall was built in 52 days. Sanballat saw that God helped Nehemiah and that nothing could stop them. People brought gifts: gold, silver, and clothes for the priests and workers. The big gates of the wall were locked and people were ready to celebrate. (*Wipe out the sword and draw people in the sand*). The people from other towns came to celebrate and the priest Ezra brought the law book. He read it to everyone. He read from the morning until lunch time. The people had a big fright when they heard the law. They had forgotten the law and did bad things. They were very sad and ashamed of their sins. They cried when they heard what the law said. (*Draw tears in the sand*).

Nehemiah said: "Don't cry. This is a good day. The Lord wants to be your God. Celebrate and give enough food to the poor." (*Dance with your fingers in the sand*). The wall was celebrated. They sang and played on harps, lyres, trumpets and cymbals. They prayed together and promised that they would serve the Lord. Choirs stood on the wall and sang. The cheerful music could be heard from far away.

Children reflect on the story:

1. I wonder how you would feel to ask a very strict person something.
2. I wonder what you do if someone keeps teasing you.
3. I wonder how it would feel to have a celebration with everyone in our town praising God.



Working and Playing

- Make a prayer wall. Write or draw prayer requests on small rectangular pieces of paper. Put them up like bricks against a wall or door. (Since this is the end of the year, you can write some thank you prayers). For smaller children, let them draw something they're grateful for and put it up against the wall.
- Hand out small boxes and popsicle sticks and challenge the children to build a complicated structure.
- Complete the maze (find the path from Nehemia to the top of the wall) and then colour the picture.

Closing prayer to end the session

"God chooses you to help people who are struggling, no matter who you are. Go now, don't be afraid. God is with you."

