



God Uses Nehemiah to Rebuild Jerusalem's Wall

Nehemiah 1:1–4:23, 6:15–16



LESSON GOAL

Students will depend on God's strength to do God's will.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- Nehemiah was sad because Jerusalem was in ruin.
- Nehemiah depended on God.
- The people of Israel built Jerusalem's wall while the enemy was near.

KEY VERSE

"So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God" (Nehemiah 6:15–16).

APPLICATION

- Depend on God's strength to do God's will.
- Pray continually.
- Praise God for the blessing of being used by Him.

NEXT WEEK

God's Law Brings the Jews to Repentance
Read Nehemiah 8–10.

Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.... You shall teach them to your children" (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

Introduction

The Lord's faithfulness to the Jews, the temple, and Jerusalem is astounding. In 538 B.C., the Lord moved King Cyrus to decree that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt. The first group of exiles returned and began building the temple. When opposition arose from the surrounding nations, the Jews stopped building between 536 and 520 B.C. Although the Jews were unfaithful, God encouraged them through His prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The temple was finally finished in 516 B.C. Nearly 60 years later, the Lord sent another group of exiles back under the leadership of Ezra (458 B.C.). Because of Ezra's faithfulness, the Lord blessed him and gave him favor with King Artaxerxes. King Artaxerxes gave an incredible sum of money for the beautification of the temple and also gave permission for Ezra to teach and enforce God's Law. Seven years later, the Lord would again use King Artaxerxes to bless the Jews (445 B.C.). This time, the Lord demonstrated His faithfulness by directing Nehemiah to rebuild the walls and gates surrounding Jerusalem. Although he faced strong opposition, Nehemiah trusted in God to finish the work that He had given him to do.

The Need for Rebuilding (Neh. 1)

In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign (446 B.C.), Nehemiah's brother Hanani returned to Shushan, a Persian stronghold about 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf. Nehemiah was eager to find out about the situation in Jerusalem. When Nehemiah asked about the exiles who had left captivity to return to Jerusalem, Hanani told him that they were suffering "great distress and reproach" and that the "wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates burned with fire" (Neh. 1:3). Without walls, Jerusalem was an object of derision to the surrounding peoples. When Nehemiah heard the news, he "sat down and wept, and mourned for many days" (1:4). Nehemiah was horrified to think of the city that represented the one true God in its present condition. The city's weakness did not reflect God's strength. God could defend Jerusalem with or without walls, but the absence of walls suggested to the surrounding nations that God had rejected His people.

Nehemiah not only wept, but also fasted and prayed (Neh. 1:4). He began his prayer by praising God for keeping His covenant with those who love Him and keep His commandments (1:5). Nehemiah then confessed that Israel (including himself and his family) was guilty of breaking God's commandments (1:6–7). He next asked God to fulfill His promise, made through Moses, to return the exiled Jews to Israel when they repented (1:8–9). Because God had chosen Israel for Himself, had redeemed Israel with His power, and had made Jerusalem the dwelling of His name, Nehemiah requested that God hear his prayer and "grant him mercy in the sight of this man" (1:10–11). After recording his prayer,

Nehemiah finished with a note to the reader: "For I was the king's cupbearer" (1:11). Nehemiah's prayer of praise, confession, and claiming God's promises ended with Nehemiah asking that God would bless him before King Artaxerxes.

The Plan for Rebuilding (Neh. 2)

Four months after hearing of the situation in Israel, Nehemiah finally brought his request before the king. As the king's cupbearer, Nehemiah had the important job of tasting the king's wine to ensure that it was not poisoned. Normally, Nehemiah was happy in the king's presence. (The king expected happiness from his subjects when they were in his court.) But this day, Nehemiah let his concerns over the situation in Israel dictate his expression (Neh. 2:1–2). The king noticed his sad face and asked the reason for his "sorrow of heart." Nehemiah was "dreadfully afraid" (2:2), having already risked much by his sad expression and being about to risk even more. He told Artaxerxes he was sad because "the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire" (2:3). When the king asked what Nehemiah's request was, Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven" before answering (2:4). Nehemiah begged for God's wisdom and blessing before asking the king for permission to rebuild Jerusalem (2:5). The king granted Nehemiah's request (2:6), giving him letters that guaranteed his protection along the way and lumber for the gates, wall, and his house (2:7–8). Nehemiah gave God all the glory for the king's answer, attributing his success to the presence of "the good hand of my God upon me."

God protected Nehemiah during the three- to four-month journey to Jerusalem. Because of the king's letters, Nehemiah had been given an armed escort for the journey. Both letters and guard were necessary since two officials, Sanballat the Horonite (who served as the governor of Samaria) and Tobiah the Ammonite (who perhaps governed in Ammon) "were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the wellbeing of the children of Israel" (Neh. 2:9–10). Although they hated the Jews and Jerusalem, because of the king's letters, the officials would not overtly attack Nehemiah.

After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah planned wisely for the rebuilding of the wall. Knowing that God had put it in his heart to rebuild the wall (Neh. 2:12) didn't justify his being rash. Perhaps in order to prevent opposition before building began, Nehemiah kept secret his intentions by surveying the wall at night (2:12–15). After his reconnaissance, Nehemiah called the people to rebuild the wall in order to escape distress and reproach (2:17). To encourage the people, Nehemiah explained how God's hand had already blessed him and how he had the king's support (2:18). The people were convinced and began rebuilding.

Opposition to the project grew quickly. As soon as Sanballat and Tobiah heard of the rebuilding, they mocked the Jews and accused them of rebelling against the king (Neh. 2:19). Nehemiah responded to their taunts by saying, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build" (2:20). Nehemiah needed no help from false worshipers of God. The Lord had blessed his plan so far, and he was confident that He would enable the Jews to rebuild the wall.

The Opposition to Rebuilding (Neh. 4)

After recording which family worked on each section of the wall (Neh. 3), Nehemiah continued his description of the opposition to the rebuilding. Unable to attack the Jews physically because of Artaxerxes' protection, Sanballat and Tobias reverted to psychological warfare. To intimidate the Jews, Sanballat mocked them in front of his Samaritan army (Neh. 4:2). He ridiculed their strength as a nation ("these feeble Jews"), the wisdom of the project ("Will they fortify them-

selves?"), their trust in God ("Will they offer sacrifices?"), and their ability to finish ("Will they complete in a day?"). He even ridiculed the usefulness of the stones (4:2)! Tobiah's attacks were equally brutal. He suggested that the wall would be so fragile that even a fox would crumble it (4:3). Nehemiah responded to their ridicule by turning to God in prayer (4:4–5). He prayed that God would judge Sanballat and Tobiah for their sin. Nehemiah passionately desired that God would be glorified, but Sanballat and Tobiah were publicly attacking God's ability to protect and strengthen His people. Despite the opposition, the Jews built the wall up to half its height (4:6).

The surrounding nations became angrier as "the gaps were beginning to be closed" (Neh. 4:7). The Samaritans to the north, the Arabs to the south, the Ammonites to the east, and the Ashdodites to the west "conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion" (4:8). The verbal threats were nearing physical reality. As with the previous threats, Nehemiah responded by turning to God in prayer. But he also responded by setting a "watch against them day and night" (4:9). Throughout Nehemiah's leadership in Jerusalem, he trusted God completely and took a wise course of action. Although Nehemiah remained steadfast, those building the walls began to doubt that the project could be finished. The builders complained that they did not have enough strength to finish (Neh. 4:10), the opponents threatened a surprise attack (4:11), and the Jews in the country surrounding Jerusalem warned of certain doom (4:12). To counter the low morale and pressing danger, Nehemiah wisely set guards where the wall was lowest and armed them with swords, spears, and bows (4:13). Nehemiah challenged the people: "Fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (4:14). But Israel's hope was in neither their wall nor their weapons. Nehemiah encouraged the people to look to and "remember the LORD, great and awesome" (4:14). He consistently admonished the people, both in his prayers to the Lord and in his direct exhortations, to trust the Lord for deliverance. When Israel's enemies realized that the Jews were ready for an attack, they realized that it was God who "had brought their plot to nothing" (Neh. 4:15). Even though the immediate danger had passed and the people could return to work, Nehemiah guarded against future problems. Half of his servants returned to construction, but the other half continued to guard in full armor (4:16). The people were also prepared for future conflicts. Those who hauled away rubble kept one hand on a weapon, and those who constructed the wall kept their swords at their sides (4:17–18). Because the people were spread out around the length of the city wall (4:19), Nehemiah planned for a trumpet to sound to rally the people to the point of attack (4:18–20). While armed men guarded the walls from daybreak until night (4:21), Nehemiah arranged for those who came into the city each day from the countryside to stay in Jerusalem and strengthen the city at night (4:22). The men, including Nehemiah and the leadership, were so vigilant that they even slept in their clothes (4:23). While planning for an attack, Nehemiah never trusted in the people's strength or his guards to defeat the enemy. Nehemiah told the people, "Our God will fight for us" (4:20). Nehemiah's confidence was continually in the Lord.

The Result of Rebuilding (Neh. 6:15–16)

The Lord protected His people, and the rebuilding of the wall was a success. The massive undertaking took only 52 days (Neh. 6:15), a fact that was even more significant in light of the conditions under which the Jews had to work (Neh. 4). Although the Lord used a multitude of families who had been organized under the wise leadership of Nehemiah (Neh. 3), it was clear to the surrounding nations that the successful rebuilding of the wall could not be attributed to either the leader or the workers. Nehemiah said, "When all our enemies heard of it, and all the

nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God" (Neh. 6:16). Both people and leader had worked faithfully to accomplish God's will, but it was God who had strengthened their endeavors. In the end, He alone was glorified in the rebuilding of the wall.

Conclusion

Nehemiah and the Jews were committed to doing God's will. In the pursuit of pleasing and glorifying God, Nehemiah wept, fasted, prayed, put his job and life on the line, journeyed 700 miles, planned for the construction, encouraged the people, and led a defense of the wall. From beginning to end, Nehemiah trusted in and glorified the Lord (Neh. 1:11; 2:4, 8, 18, 20; 4:4, 14, 15, 20; 6:16). Because the Lord had revealed to him His will, Nehemiah worked with all his might and trusted in the Lord with all his heart. Believers today must work with all their strength to obey God's will while depending on Him for strength to obey (Eph. 1:19; 3:20; 6:10; Col. 1:11). Those who do not have the Lord are incapable of pleasing Him in their own strength. They must repent of their failure to obey, trust in the sacrifice of Christ, and rely on Him for strength to obey.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth" (Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



Review Questions

Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.

How did the king find a new queen?

The king had beautiful unmarried women from around his empire brought to him, and the one who pleased him the most would be queen instead of Vashti.

Who was chosen as the new queen?

A beautiful Jewish woman named Esther was chosen as the new queen.

What did Mordecai overhear while sitting at the king's gate?

He overheard two palace guards planning to kill King Ahasuerus.

Who became the king's assistant?

The king gave a man named Haman the job to rule over Persia.

What did Haman do when he discovered that Mordecai would not bow down?

Haman became very angry, and he wanted to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom.

What was Haman's plan to kill the Jews?

Haman told the king that the Jews disobeyed the king's laws. He asked permission to put them all to death.

What did Mordecai ask Esther to do?

Mordecai asked Esther to go into the presence of the king and ask him to save her people.

What did the king do when he found out what Haman had done?

The king was very angry and had Haman put to death.

Were the Jews saved from being killed?

Yes. The Jews were safe because the king protected them. God put Esther and Mordecai just where He wanted them so that they could be used to save His people.



Wall of Protection

To demonstrate the importance of a city wall, divide the students into three groups: one large group and two small groups. Have the large group hold hands and form a circle; they are the wall. Then have one small group stand inside the "wall"; they are the people in the city. Finally, have the other small group scatter around the wall; they are enemies trying to get inside the city. Explain to the students that a wall protects people in a city from enemies trying to enter.



Group Cooperation

To illustrate the efficiency of working as a group, arrange large blocks in a circle (not stacked). Tell the students that today's lesson will focus on Nehemiah leading the Israelites to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. Select a student to build up the wall by himself. Then take down the wall. This time, select several students (so that each student is only responsible for the blocks in front of him) to build the wall together.



Building the Wall

Tape a long, horizontal piece of butcher paper on the wall at waist level. Have the students choose partners and work together to draw on their sections of the wall. They could draw blocks, gates, and archways. The teams on the ends could draw watchtowers.

Variation: Have the students build a wall with blocks, using only one hand. Tell them that the builders in today's story have to work with one hand because they are holding something in the other hand. What was it? Why were they holding it?

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

The Lord had been faithful to the Israelites. Though they had been scattered among the nations for many years, He had brought them back together in the city of Jerusalem. He had blessed them by allowing and helping them to rebuild the temple and to again teach and enforce the Law. And now the Lord had another blessing for the Israelites. He would use a man named Nehemiah to help make Jerusalem a strong city, again able to defend itself.

Nehemiah was a faithful servant of God, and he was concerned about how the Israelites in Jerusalem were doing. One day, one of his brothers came home with a group of Israelites, and Nehemiah asked how their brothers in Jerusalem were doing. They did not have good news for Nehemiah. They said, "[They] are in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire" (1:3). Nehemiah was very sad when he heard this, and he cried for many days. He prayed and fasted before the Lord, confessing his own sin, the sin of his family, and the sin of the Israelites. He prayed that God would be merciful to the Israelites and would use him to help them be strong again.

Four months later, God showed Nehemiah how his prayer would be answered. Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer, which meant that he saw King Artaxerxes every day. One day, the king noticed that Nehemiah looked very sad. This was unusual because everyone who was with the king was supposed to have a happy face. A sad face might make the king angry. But Nehemiah didn't hide the sadness in his heart; he let it show on his face. The king asked, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick?" (2:2). Nehemiah was terrified! He knew that the king could punish him severely for being unhappy in his presence. But the Lord gave Nehemiah great courage, and he answered, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" (2:3).

"What do you request?" King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah (2:4). This was amazing! The king was not angry with Nehemiah, but instead offered to help him. Before responding to the king, Nehemiah prayed to the Lord. Then he asked the king to send him to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. It was a brave request. God moved in the heart of King Artaxerxes, and he agreed to send Nehemiah. He even agreed to send guards and letters with Nehemiah to guarantee his safety, and he provided the materials that the Israelites would need to rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

When he arrived in Jerusalem, Nehemiah spent three days looking around the city to see how badly it had been damaged and to decide what work needed to be done. When he finished, he went to the leaders of the city and said, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire.

Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach" (2:17). He went on to tell them how God had used him to gain the blessing of the king and what the king had provided for them to help rebuild the city.

The Israelites were convinced and agreed to begin the hard work right away. Not everyone was happy about this, though. Leaders from the areas surrounding Jerusalem laughed at the Israelites, saying that they were rebelling against the king. They didn't know that the king had given his blessing, and they hated to see the Israelites prospering. Nehemiah boldly defended the Israelites, saying to those who opposed them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build."

The Israelites drew together and worked hard. The fathers set their sons and daughters to work on different parts of the walls and gates. They were getting a lot done! They continued to face opposition, though. When the people of the areas surrounding Jerusalem saw how well the walls were being built, they became very angry and made a plan to attack the city and stop the building of the wall. However, the Israelites found out about this plan, and they prayed to God for help. They set guards at each of the weakest areas, and Nehemiah gave the Israelites a battle plan. He said to them, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (4:14).

When their enemies learned that the Israelites knew of their plan to attack and were ready to fight back, they gave up and decided not to attack. The Israelites continued to work, all the while ready to defend themselves in battle if necessary. God honored the Israelites' faithfulness, and the wall of the city was completed in less than three months. None of their enemies attacked them while they were building. In fact, their enemies became very discouraged when they saw that the Israelites had completed the wall. They knew that the God of the Israelites was blessing His children.

Nehemiah received great blessings from God, as did the Israelites. God had made it possible for them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah and the Israelites honored the Lord by working hard and remaining faithful to Him, even when faced with their enemies.



Lesson Questions

What was Nehemiah's job?

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king.

Who told Nehemiah the bad news about the walls of Jerusalem?

Nehemiah's brother Hanani had just come back from Jerusalem. He told Nehemiah that the people were very sad, that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and that the gates of the city were burned with fire.

What did Nehemiah do when he heard the news?

He was very sad and prayed to God for help. When the king saw that Nehemiah was upset, he asked what was wrong.

What did the king say when Nehemiah explained about the walls?

The king asked Nehemiah how he could help him rebuild the wall.

How long did it take to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem?

The wall was finished in 52 days (6:15).

What did Nehemiah's enemies realize as they watched how quickly the wall was built?

They recognized that this work could have been done only with God's help (6:16).

Presentation Ideas



A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Night Reconnaissance

(This could be used in conjunction with the wall crafts made during the Point time.) Lead the students in pretending, like Nehemiah, to walk around Jerusalem's wall at night, inspecting the damage. Allow various students to lead, carrying a flashlight. Ask the students, "Is the wall burned and black? Is it broken down? Are the stones broken? What would it take to rebuild the wall?" Use rulers and measuring tapes to measure the stones that need replacing. How many people and how long would it take to clear away the rubble?



Act It Out

Act out today's Bible story. Assign students to be the king, Nehemiah, some of the Israelites, Sanballat, and Tobiah.



Safe and Secure

Tell the students that you would like to make your story area secure and safe, and one good way to do that is to build a stronghold around it. Build a "wall" around the teaching area using classroom furniture. Turn tables on their sides, stack chairs, etc. Discuss with the class what purposes walls served in Old Testament times. What about today?

Praise and Worship

Give Me Oil in My Lamp

God Is So Good

I Will Call upon the Lord

Make Me a Servant

Praise Him, All Ye Little Children



Nehemiah and the Wall

Nehemiah was at work

(Bow low as though serving a king.)

Within the royal court

(Hold hands at head to indicate crown.)

But his face was very sad;

(Make sad face.)

He'd heard a bad report:
(Cup hand at ear; frown.)

The wall around Jerusalem
(Draw a large imaginary circle around self.)

Was burned and crumbled down.
(Move hands downward while wiggling fingers like flames.)

The king saw Nehemiah's face
(Hold hands at head to indicate crown.)

And asked what made him frown.
(Hold hands out at sides, palms up.)

Nehemiah told the news
(Cup hands at sides of mouth.)

And guess what God did then:
(Hold hands out at sides, palms up.)

He moved the king to say, "Go back—
(Hold hand over hear; nod head.)

"Go build your wall again!"
(Pretend to hammer.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



The Lord Is Our Strength

Bring some weights or dumbbells to class, and let the students take turns lifting them. Ask the students if this—the ability to lift weights—is where a believer's strength lies. No. A believer's strength is found in the Lord! In today's lesson, Nehemiah's prayed to God to strengthen his hands. Read Nehemiah 8:10, and have the students sing "The Joy of the Lord Is My Strength."



Wall Relay Game

Place an equal number of cardboard bricks in two garbage cans. Divide the class into two teams, and have them stand at one end of the room, each team lining up single-file behind a garbage can. When you say "go," the first student from each team should take a brick, run to the other end of the room, lay down the brick, and return to the line. Then the next student in line goes, and so on. The first team to finish building its "wall" wins.



"Building Jerusalem's Wall"

Materials: copies of the "Building Jerusalem's Wall" craft pages, glue, scissors, crayons

Directions: Give each student a copy of the craft pages. Direct the students to finish building Jerusalem's wall by cutting out the bricks containing words from the key verse and setting them on the wall in the correct order. After all the words are situated correctly, the students can glue them to the page.



"Before, During, After"

Materials: copies of the "Before, During, After" craft page, scissors, brads, crayons

Directions: Before class, make a copy of the craft page for each student. To prepare the pages, use a razor to cut along the arch and cut out the three rectangles. During class, have the students cut out the strip with words and use a brad to attach it to the back of the arch. Pull the top part of the strip through the slit. When the students move the strip along the arch, they will see the words "before," "during," and "after" appear in the rectangles. Have the students color the sun, moon, and stars.

Coloring Sheets

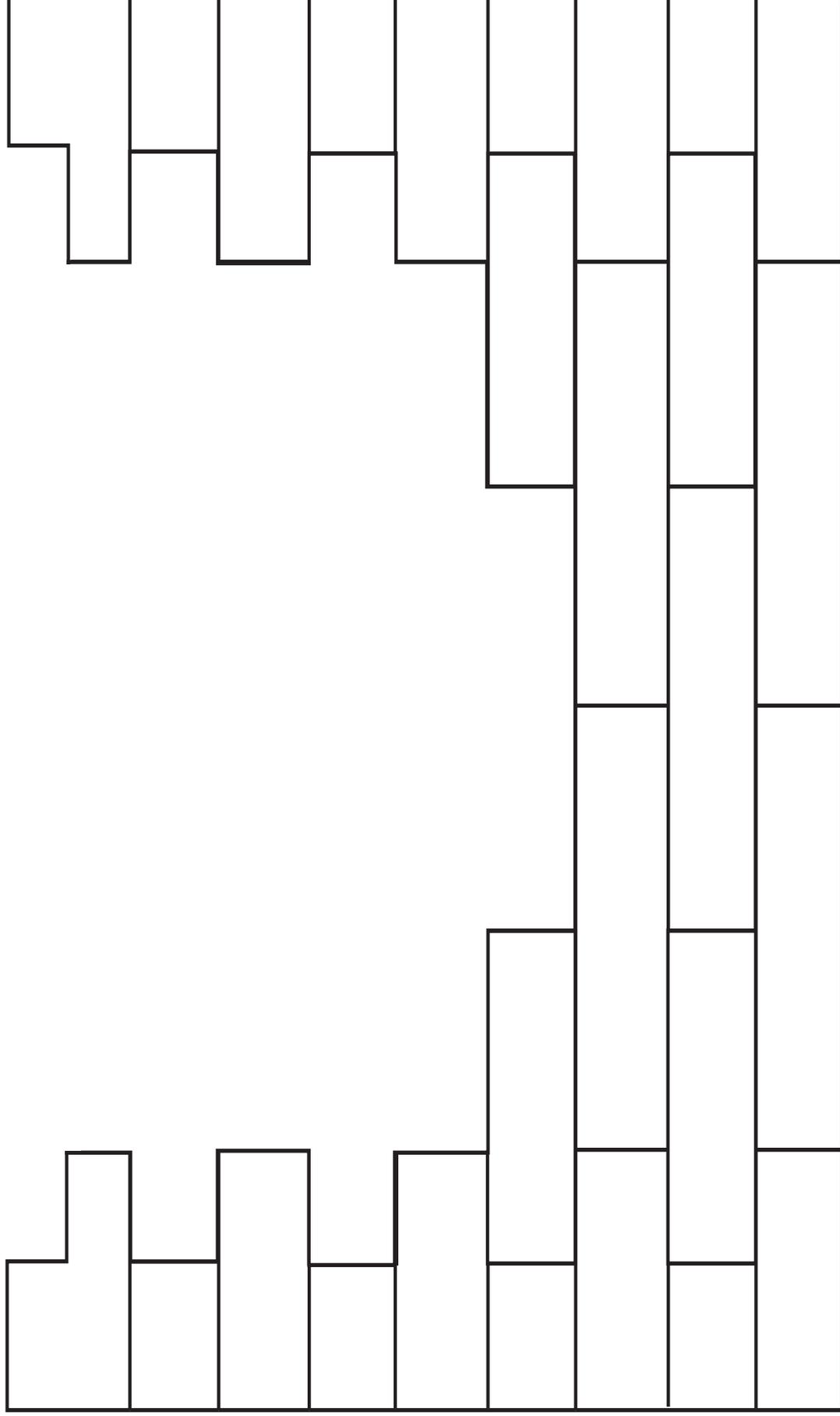
Give each student copies of the coloring sheets at the back of the lesson. Students can color the pages in class or at home.



MEMORY VERSE

"The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2).

Building Jerusalem's Wall

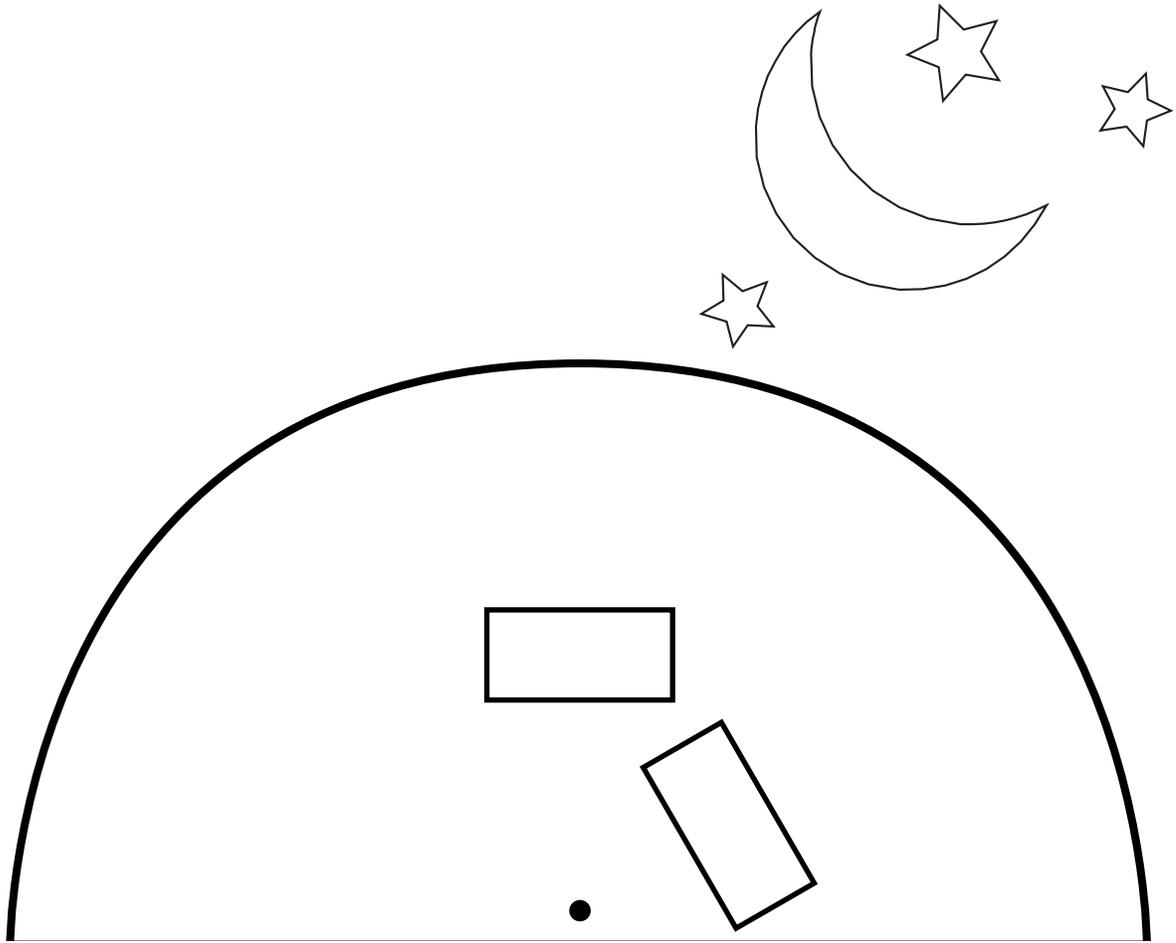


“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God” (Nehemiah 6:15–16).

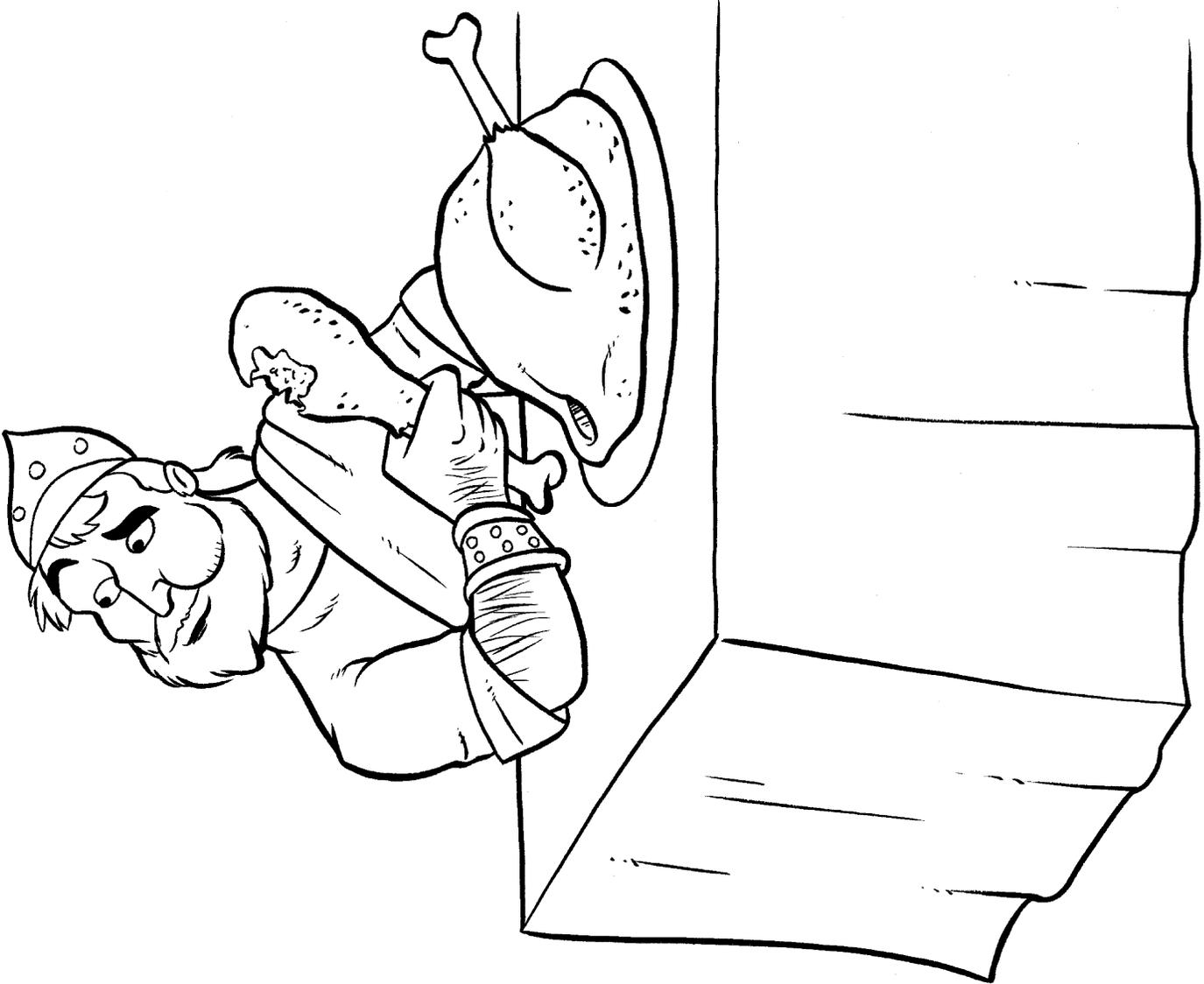
Building Jerusalem's Wall

Before, During, After

Just like Nehemiah, when we face a trial, we should...



Pray	Before	During	After	•
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Nehemiah asked the king for permission to rebuild Jerusalem's wall (Neh. 2:5).



Nehemiah and the Jews were prepared to defend the people as they rebuilt Jerusalem's wall (Neh. 4:7-18).

