

Nehemiah 1-5

Aim of Lesson

To show how prayer guided Nehemiah's life.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The same as for the previous lesson.

Suggested outline of lesson

Ask the children about last week's lesson or set the background to Nehemiah. The Israelites often now called Jews, had been in captivity for seventy years when it was decreed that they could go back to the land that God had promised them. There were three companies of people who went. The first group had rebuilt the temple and the second group, led by Ezra, brought many precious gifts with them for the service of the temple. Since the return of Ezra, thirteen years had passed.

Explain to the children that there were still many people left behind who were anxious to hear news of their fellow countrymen who had gone back home. Nehemiah was one of these. His job was cupbearer to king Artaxerxes. Explain that this was an important job. He probably had to taste the wine before he brought it to the king in case it was poisoned. It was also expected that he remain cheerful in front of the king at all times.

Nehemiah heard distressing news from Judah. The people were in great trouble, and the walls and gates of Jerusalem were broken down and burned. This made him very upset; he wept and mourned, but there was not much he could do to help his friends. Ask the children if there is anything they can do if their friends are in trouble. Something like an illness of someone who lives a long way away. Encourage them to realise that they can pray for the person even when there is nothing else they can do. This is what Nehemiah did.

For many days he prayed, but when he had to go back to work he was still feeling sad. When the king saw his miserable face he asked Nehemiah what the matter was. Get the children to imagine how Nehemiah must have felt. He would have been scared about whether the king would be cross about his sadness, but he recognised that God was answering his prayers and giving him an opportunity to ask the king for help. He told the king why he was sad and asked if he could go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. He also felt bold enough to ask for letters to allow him a safe journey, and wood to do the building.

Talk to the children about whether this would have been a good time to say a prayer and help them to realise that there are different sorts of prayers and that they can pray at any time. Nehemiah had prayed quietly on his own many times and it was so much a habit to him that when faced with danger he was able to ask for God's help immediately with only a few words. Nehemiah's requests were granted and then he too went back to Judah with many more people.

Tell the story of how Nehemiah inspected the broken down walls of Jerusalem with his donkey at night and how everyone rallied to build them up again. Describe how when there was opposition half the people worked on building the walls and half had to be ready with weapons in case they were attacked. With everyone (not just the builders - see chapter 3) working together, the walls were built in fifty-two days. It would have been impossible if God had not been with them.

Relevance to the children's lives

All through the book of Nehemiah we can read how he prayed to God about the problem of the moment. How can we build prayer into our lives? When are some good times to pray? What sort of things might we want to say a quick prayer about?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to get into the habit of praying to you about everything in our lives and help us to know that you are always listening. Amen.

Memory verse

'The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven.' (Nehemiah 2:4).