

Grade 6—Unit 6

Neighbors

The post-Exile faith community was shaped by a strong desire to obey the Law of Moses. Exile, they believed, had come as a punishment for idolatry and disobedience. Now God Almighty had given them a second chance.

Approximately one century after the first group of exiles had returned to Judah, the walls of Jerusalem still lay in rubble. Most of the people lived outside the city. In the harsh realities of life after the return, some people had taken unfair advantage of others. Few people actually lived in the city of Jerusalem, because it was basically uninhabitable. During this time, God raised up Ezra and Nehemiah as leaders.

One of the most important issues had to do with relationships with neighboring peoples. The faith community lived as a minority in the midst of the powerful Persian empire. What kind of community would they be? How would they relate to neighboring peoples, especially those who claimed to worship the Lord God, but did not follow the Law of Moses? Ezra and Nehemiah emerged as leaders. They emphasized strict rules of separation from neighboring peoples, in order to keep the people from returning to idolatry. Others, as exhibited in the books of Jonah and Ruth, wanted to be less exclusive.

LESSONS

1. From Cupbearer to Wallbuilder
2. A Difference of Opinion

Unit 6: Neighbors

Unit Information

SUMMARY

When the Jews returned from exile, they had to decide how they would relate to other peoples who lived near Jerusalem. Ezra and Nehemiah promoted exclusivism, in order to protect the people from idolatry and amalgamation with those who did not worship the true God.

On the other hand, the writers of Ruth and Jonah argued for openness to foreigners. In the book of Ruth, the Law's provisions for widows and aliens drew Ruth into the faith community. In the book of Jonah, the cruel Assyrians of Nineveh heard God's warning and repented. God reprimanded Jonah's uncaring attitude toward the pagan Ninevites.

Is God's word a fence to keep people in, or is it a center around which to gather all who desire to follow? What should our attitude be toward people who try to hinder God's work? Should God's people share the Lord's compassion with others, or should they guard it for themselves? Can God's people welcome outsiders without following their evil ways? These were the important questions for the post-Exile community. Faith communities still ask these questions today.

KEY BIBLE TEXTS

Ezra 9

Nehemiah 1-7; 13:1-3, 23-27

Ruth

Jonah

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Building the Walls

Many Jews remained in Babylon, even after the Persians allowed them to return to Palestine. From time to time, new groups of exiles would make the trip back to Jerusalem. Nehemiah was among the exiles who went back to Jerusalem almost 100 years after the first group arrived.

Nehemiah had an important job in the royal court of Persia. He was cupbearer to the king. Jews in Babylon kept in touch with those in Jerusalem, and Nehemiah heard reports that much of Jerusalem lay in ruins.

Using his position of influence in the court, Nehemiah asked the king of Persia to grant him leave so he could go to Jerusalem and help rebuild the city. Nehemiah also asked the king to write letters to other peoples who lived near Jerusalem, asking them to give assistance in the effort. When the king allowed Nehemiah to go, he returned to Jerusalem and made an inspection of the broken-down walls. Nehemiah soon began a rebuilding project, and a latent tension resurfaced.

When the first Jews had returned from exile, they had to decide how they would relate to other peoples who lived near Jerusalem. Should they establish ties of friendship with their neighbors, or should they keep to themselves so they would not be influenced by the pagan customs and beliefs of other cultures? This question was difficult to answer. Some people living near Jerusalem claimed to

worship Yahweh, even though they also worshipped other gods or did not follow all aspects of the Law of Moses.

When the Jews started to rebuild the temple, some of these neighboring peoples offered to help (Ezra 4:1-4). The returned exiles rejected this assistance. They did not want to make friends with people who did not obey the Law as they understood it. The Jews' neighbors felt rejected. In reaction, they attempted to hinder Jewish resettlement.

Although many Jews had intermarried with peoples of the land, a century had not erased the hard feelings. The worst trouble for Nehemiah came from Samaritans, people who lived north of Jerusalem and also claimed to worship the LORD. The Samaritans were partly the descendants of Jews who had not been taken into exile by Babylon. These people had stayed behind in Palestine and had set up a center of Yahweh worship at Mt. Gerisim in Samaria. The governor of Samaria at the time of Nehemiah was a man named Sanballat. Sanballat was determined to keep Nehemiah from rebuilding the old Jewish capital of Jerusalem.

Sanballat and the Samaritans joined with other nearby peoples to attack Jerusalem. These neighboring peoples were afraid that Jerusalem would again become strong. It might even threaten nearby nations. They accused the Jews of planning to rebel against their Persian overlords. Nehemiah had to divide his workers into two groups. One group did the building, while the other protected the city (Nehemiah 4:14-23). Under these stressful conditions, the walls around Jerusalem were finished.

Building Walls or Sharing Faith

Leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah were influenced by more than the longstanding animosity of the Samaritans and other neighboring peoples. They were also concerned that the small community of Jews in Jerusalem would forget that they were God's chosen people. They believed that the Jews deserved the punishment of exile (Ezra 9:6ff) and that God had given his people a second chance. They did not want the Jewish people to lose their religious and cultural identity by becoming close friends with their neighbors. They both felt strongly that Jews should not find their spouses from outside the Jewish community. Certain passages in the Law of Moses supported this viewpoint (Exodus 34:15, 16; Deuteronomy 23:3).

Many Jews in Jerusalem already had married people from nearby nations. Many of these couples had children. Nehemiah was incensed by this practice (Nehemiah 13:23-27). Ezra called intermarriage sin and instructed all Jews to leave their non-Jewish husbands or wives and their children (Ezra 9-10). Under Ezra's strict rules, anyone who was not a Jew was forced to leave Jerusalem. It must have been a sad time, with many families and friendships broken.

During this painful experience, some Jews in Jerusalem remembered old stories about people from non-Jewish backgrounds who became part of the nation of Israel. The book of Ruth was most likely recorded in writing at this time, partly as a protest against the strict exclusivism of Ezra. The story tells how, years before, a Moabite woman named Ruth married a Jewish man. When her husband died, Ruth traveled to Israel with her Jewish mother-in-law. The story shows how the laws protecting widows and aliens drew Ruth into the faith community. Far from drawing others away from God, Ruth became an example of faithfulness to the LORD. Ruth even became the great-grandmother of Israel's most revered king, David. Indirectly, the story of Ruth asks: What about the rule that said a descendant of a Moabite could not enter the assembly of the LORD? (Deuteronomy 23:3). Would that have excluded King David?

The same call for openness to foreigners is also evident in the story of Jonah. This old story was recorded in a way that provided an alternate viewpoint to the strict exclusivism of Ezra and Nehemiah. Jonah was sent to preach to the hated pagan city of Nineveh, capital of the cruel Assyrian empire. When Jonah refused, God punished him in a rather dramatic way.

The writer presents Jonah as a peevish, whining man who doesn't care if the entire city of Nineveh is destroyed. The story depicts the openness of people to worshipping God and presents the LORD God as a compassionate God who loves all peoples—even Israel's enemies (Jonah 4:6-11).

Though we may view Ezra and Nehemiah as extremely harsh and exclusive, we can appreciate the need for strong identity with a faith community. Without Ezra and Nehemiah's vigilance, the Jewish community might have been absorbed into the larger culture. On the other hand, we believe that God wants us to reach out to others. We need to include people outside the faith community without "selling out" to practices that draw us away from God.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- In spite of opposition, Nehemiah inspired the people to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.
- We do not need to fear. God is stronger than our enemies.
- God wants us to invite people into the faith community without "selling out" to the world.

WORSHIP

Use any of the following songs:

"Sweet hour of prayer" (Lesson 1), *Hymnal: A Worship Book* #11

"Healer of our every ill" (Lesson 1), HWB #377

"This little light of mine" (Lesson 2), HWB #401

Invite God's presence through prayer, as emphasized during Lesson 1 with the memory verses.

MEMORY PASSAGES

Nehemiah 1:5, 6a (Lesson 1)—main memory passage

James 5:13 (Lesson 1)

Ephesians 5:19-20 (Lesson 2)

Nehemiah 1:5, 6a

I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you."

James 5:13

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.

Ephesians 5:19-20

As you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

MEMORY VERSE CONNECTIONS

Nehemiah 1:5, 6a affirms that God keeps the covenant with God's people when they obey God's commands. This can be seen throughout the Jews' story in the Old Testament. Verse 6 introduces prayer as an important part of our relationship with God, as does James 5:13. When we are experiencing difficulty like the Jews did in Lesson 1, we bring our burdens to God through prayer. Ephesians 5:19-20 instructs us to use poetry and music to encourage one another, and to always give thanks. These elements are important in building bridges with one another.

ASSESSING TEACHING / LEARNING

In Lesson 2, students analyze situations where responses of exclusion or inclusion could be possible. Ensure that students exercise sensitivity in these situations, no matter what they decide. The key is being faithful to God, neither judging others nor misinterpreting exclusion as an all-negative option. The Unit 6 quiz assesses the memory work and analytical concepts of this unit.



I said, "O Lord God of heaven,
the great and awesome God
who keeps covenant and steadfast love
with those who love him
and keep his commandments;
let your ear be attentive and your eyes
open to hear the prayer of your servant
that I now pray before you day and
night for your servants, the people of Israel,
confessing the sins of the people of Israel,
which we have sinned against you."

Nehemiah 1:5, 6a

Neighbors

LESSON 1: FROM CUPBEARER TO WALLBUILDER

Objective

Students will discover the story of Nehemiah, see how God was present as the Jews faced opposition in building the Jerusalem Wall, and consider modern-day situations where God encourages those facing opposition.

Text: Nehemiah 1–7

Key Concepts

- Nehemiah gave up a prestigious position as the king’s cupbearer in order to build a wall around Jerusalem.
- In spite of opposition, Nehemiah led the people, and they completed the wall in just 52 days.
- God is with God’s people as they face opposition from others.

Essential Questions

- Why did Nehemiah quit his job?
- How did God sustain the Jews as they built the wall?
- How does God sustain people today who face opposition because of their faith?

Estimated Lesson Time: 45 minutes *(If you have time, this lesson may work better as 2 class periods. See Extend the Lesson.)*

Materials

- “Nehemiah” play (pp. 213-215)
- “Jerusalem Wall Blueprint” (p. 216)
- Costumes
- 20 or more small- to medium-size boxes

Teacher Preparation

- Make copies of “Nehemiah” script and “Jerusalem Wall Blueprint,” one per student.
- Collect costumes, if available, and 20+ boxes for props.
- Invite other classes, parents, and other interested persons to view the play.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Ask students to think of someone who has a profitable and important job. What do they think people would say if this person suddenly quit his/her job and became a missionary or church planter? Explain that the character in today’s story did this, but built walls for God’s people rather than being a missionary. As you read this play, see if you think the comparison fits.

LESSON STEPS

1. Distribute the play, “Nehemiah,” and invite students to volunteer for parts. If costumes are available, use them, as well as the assortment of boxes. Students may

double up on main parts, if necessary. Those without speaking parts may help build the wall. Read through the play once.

2. Distribute copies of the “Jerusalem Wall Blueprint.” Explain that this is what Nehemiah’s wall would have looked like. We know that it took 52 days to build such a wall.

The book of Nehemiah doesn’t tell us the exact dimensions of the wall. How high, thick, or long might it have been, considering the amount of time Nehemiah had? How many houses might the Jews have been able to build inside the walls for people to live in?

Think about a wall in the school building. How long would it take us today to build that wall, using only the tools of that time? Nehemiah 11 states that one-tenth of the people would be chosen to live inside the wall. Some of the people would be chosen by lot, and some would volunteer to live inside the walls. Would any of the students volunteer to live inside the walls? Why or why not? What would be advantages or disadvantages to living inside the wall? *(This discussion doesn’t necessarily have any “right” answers. Accept student speculation, but help them try to find reasons for their thinking or back up their reasons in some way.)*

3. If you are giving the play for another class, use the remainder of the class period to practice the play. Lines should become familiar, so students do not have to rely heavily on the script.

4. Assign the following question as homework, or to work on in class: How does your character rely on God throughout the play? Students should write a one-paragraph response to hand in the next time. If you want to extend this lesson to a second day, then the students will not hand in the response, but will share it after the play is finished.

5. Read Nehemiah 1:5, 6a and James 5:13 aloud, as a class. Emphasize the importance of calling out to God when in need of help. Finish the lesson with a prayer for students to feel God’s presence in the difficult situations that were mentioned in the discussion. Nehemiah 1:5, 6a is the main memory work for this unit. If there is time, allow students to work on memorizing with a partner.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(This activity will extend the lesson to longer than 45 minutes.)

• **Present the play for an audience.** Extend this lesson to a second day and practice to present the play for an audience. If you have two casts, select a different audience for each performance. After the play is finished, each actor should share how his/her character relied on God during the story.

Invite the students and audience to share ways that God has encouraged them in the face of opposition. Then broaden the discussion to include situations around the world where God’s followers face opposition.

Nehemiah

Based on Nehemiah 1-7

Characters: Nehemiah, Miriam, Jacob, Glen or Glenda (modern-day person), people (workers)

Props: 20 or more boxes, drum (*optional*), The Jerusalem Wall Blueprint

Costumes: All characters, except Glen, dress in Bible times costumes.

Scene One

Blocks (boxes) are strewn over the stage to represent a brokendown wall. Nehemiah and Jacob are talking quietly, pointing to the blueprint and gesturing at the blocks. Miriam, almost hidden by darkness, watches to find out what they are doing.

Miriam: *(Steps out and calls to Nehemiah.)* Say, what are you doing? You're a stranger to me—although you look vaguely familiar.

Nehemiah: My name is Nehemiah. I've recently arrived from Susa, the Persian capital.

Miriam: *(Smugly)* Ah, yes, I must have seen you there. I traveled to Susa two years ago to visit rich relatives who are of some importance in the government.

Nehemiah: I, too, work in the service of the king. I am his cupbearer.

Miriam: *(Obviously impressed)* Oooh, impressive! My name is Miriam. I work for the city leaders of Jerusalem.

Glen: *(From somewhere off to the side of the stage. As he speaks, other players freeze.)* Hold it! Stop the action! *(Looks at audience.)* Obviously you are not nearly as impressed as this woman. You might be thinking: a *cupbearer*, whoopee! What's he do, set the table? You do that yourself, at home, unless you can find a way to get out of it. Does he take out the garbage, too? Impressive indeed!

Well, let me educate you on what it means to be cupbearer to the king of Persia. First off, to be the king means to be absolute top dog. You get what you want, when you want it—any house you want, any food you want, any horse you want. *(There weren't any red sport cars then.)* Now lots of people wanted to be king. But you couldn't wait for the next election, buy some TV commercials, kiss some babies, and hope people would vote you in as king. No, the only way to get a shot at being king was: One, wait till the present king died; or two: kill him. Now you can't shoot him, because you don't have guns. You can't blow him up, because you don't have bombs. The best way to get rid of a king in those days was to poison him. Not as messy as a sword or knife, and you could be sneaky about it. And the best place to put the poison was . . . Are you catching on yet? That's right! In his drink. So any king who wants to stick around has to pick someone he totally trusts to take care of his cup and serve him his drink. Nehemiah and King Artaxerxes are like that *(crosses fingers)*. All right, back to Nehemiah and Miriam.

Miriam: What on earth are you doing here? In Jerusalem, at midnight, out amid the rubble of the walls—one of the more depressing places in our rather down-and-out city.

Nehemiah: That's precisely why I've come. My brother visited me in Susa and told me the condition of the walls. He also reminded me that a number of years ago the neighboring rulers had convinced the king that the Jews were not to be trusted. When I heard this, I was so depressed it affected the performance of my duties for the king. The king pressed me for the reason behind my deep sadness. I prayed desperately to God as I answered.

"May the king live forever," I said. "How can I help looking sad when the city of my ancestors, Jerusalem, is in ruins and its gates have been burned down?" The king replied, "What do you want from me?" Now here is where I stuck out my neck. It's true the king and I are like this (*crosses fingers*), but there are limits, and he is king, after all. I said, "Let me go to Jerusalem, O King, so I may rebuild the walls." I know he was thinking, "Who is going to serve me my wine?" But I went on, "And if it please the king, give me letters for the governors of the provinces, ordering them to help me by giving me timber and other supplies." So now you can see how gracious God has been since the king granted me all that I asked.

Miriam: Fantastic! People will be overjoyed when they hear this.

Nehemiah: All this must be kept quiet right now. There are enemies, even in the king's court, who will try to prevent the rebuilding of the city. We must be careful. However, since you are working for the Jewish leaders, set up a meeting where I can present myself and my plan, so we can move ahead and succeed in rebuilding the city. (*Miriam leaves.*)

Come, Jacob. I think the plans are complete.

Scene Two

Two weeks later

Nehemiah: (*With four or five people gathered around.*) O people of Jerusalem, gather around. (*People gather at rubble of walls.*) You see the trouble we're in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, its gates destroyed by fire. We are ashamed as a people. Has our God abandoned us? NO! I am Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer. (*Pauses as people ooh and aah.*) God has been with me and blessed me. The king has granted me leave and the materials to rebuild the wall and the city. Let's end this disgraceful situation! Go to your relatives and your friends. Encourage them to come and work unceasingly until our city is secure once more.

(People go out and get two more each and bring them back to get instructions from Nehemiah. Nehemiah points out places where they are to work. The work of building the wall begins. Some people can use the boxes. Others can mime building actions.)

Miriam: (*Coming in breathless*) Nehemiah, information has come to me that our enemies are planning to attack us while we work on the wall. (*People who are working spread the news among themselves.*)

Nehemiah: How did you come by this information?

Miriam: Some Jews living near the Samaritans overheard them plotting with the Ammonites and the Edomites.

Worker: Oh, great! Just what we need. The work itself is hard enough, and now we'll be attacked. We're sitting ducks!

Glen: *(Again emerging from side of stage)* Whoa! Let's stop for just a bit. *(Actors freeze.)* Actually, Nehemiah and the Jews have been lucky so far. The three rulers of the surrounding lands, Sanballat of the Samaritans, Tobiah of the Ammonites, and Geshem of the Edomites, didn't take Nehemiah seriously at first. They made fun of the rebuilding effort. "What do they think they're doing? Can they make building stones out of heaps of burnt rubble? Ha! Let them build. Whatever flimsy sort of wall they put up, a fox will knock down!" The walls were about half done before they began to worry. Okay. Back to the action.

Nehemiah: Don't be afraid. The Lord is stronger than our enemies! Take up your weapons. One half will stand guard, while the other half of you work. Then we'll trade. Miriam, you stand on the wall and watch. Bang the drum as a warning, if our enemies approach. When you hear the drum, all of you gather here as quickly as possible. Don't worry! Our God will fight for us. Do not go home at night, but stay inside the city so our enemies can't sneak up on us in the dark. Let us redouble our efforts. Carry your weapons at all times.

Glen: *(Talks as workers continue to build wall.)* When Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem realized they couldn't safely attack the Jews, they decided to try and trick Nehemiah into meeting them. They planned to kidnap him and stop the work. But Nehemiah was no dummy. He was the king's cupbearer, after all. He and the Jews stuck with the work in spite of all the problems. Yep! They kept at it until the wall was finished.

Scene Two

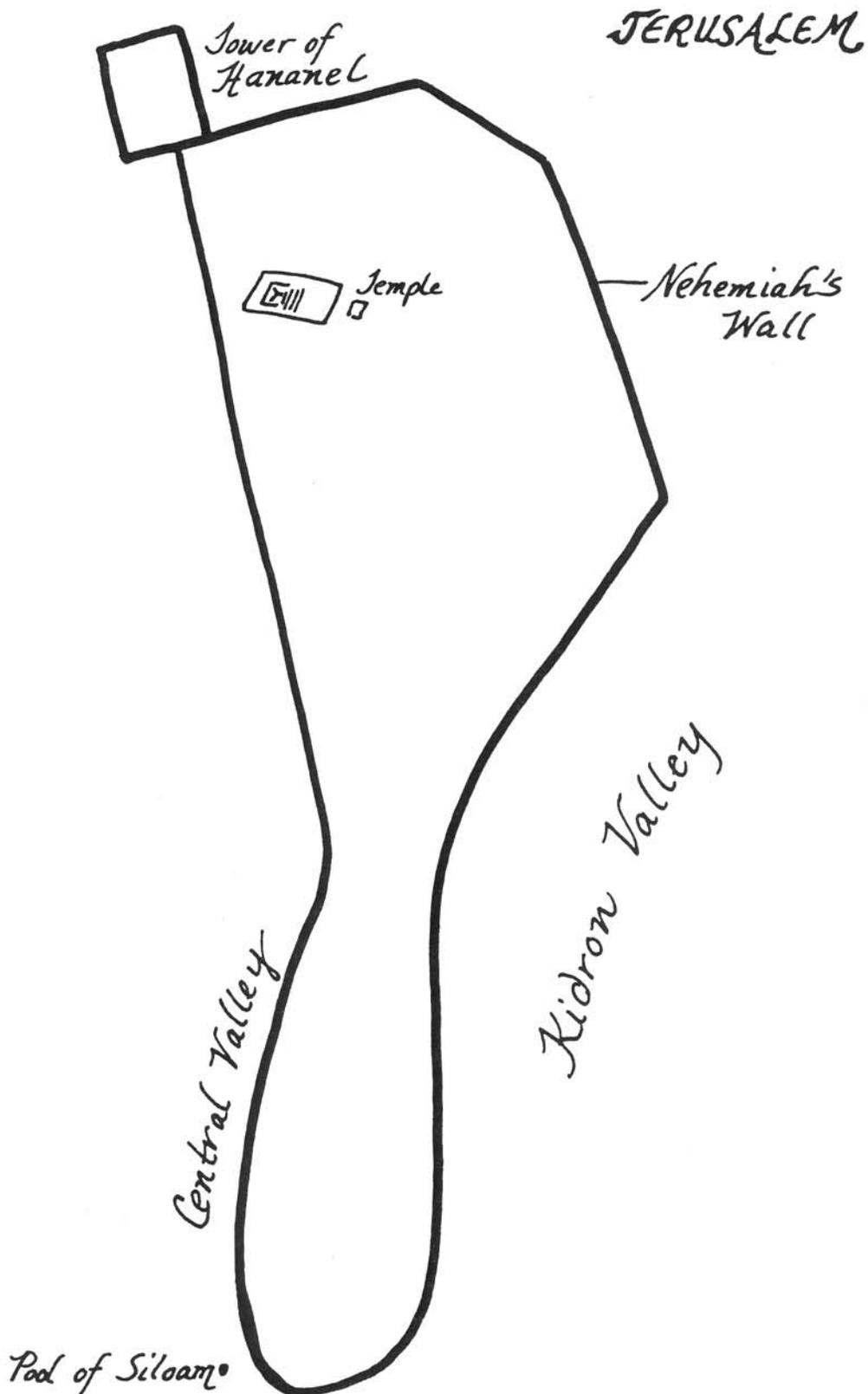
Two weeks later

Nehemiah: *(with all the people gathered around him)* O people of Israel, God's chosen people, let us celebrate the rebuilding of the wall. Come! Let's march through our city, playing our instruments and singing praises to our God who has blessed us and given us life.

Glen: Tell you what. Let's give them a hand. Let's turn to *(hymn name and number from your school hymnal)*. Now the Jews wouldn't have sung these exact words or this tune. But it's a great tune, and it's the same God almighty now as back then.

Note: Your choice of hymn will vary with your audience and the hymnal available. Some possibilities: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," refrain from "The King of Glory comes," "O come, loud anthems let us sing" or "Praise Him, praise Him, all ye little children."

JERUSALEM WALL BLUEPRINT



Neighbors

LESSON 2: A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

Objective

Students will identify the perspectives of Ezra, Nehemiah, Boaz, and Jonah, regarding outsiders.

Text: Passages from Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, and Jonah

Key Concepts

- Ezra and Nehemiah excluded foreigners so that God’s people would not follow the evil ways of the neighboring peoples.
- The stories of Jonah and Ruth both show that God loves and accepted foreigners.
- God wants God’s people to befriend unbelievers without becoming involved in the destructive attitudes and practices of evil.

Essential Questions

- Why did Ezra and Nehemiah advocate exclusion of foreigners?
- How can we include outsiders as in the stories of Ruth and Jonah?

Estimated Lesson Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- Bibles
- Student pages: “Group 1” (p. 219), “Group 2,” (p. 220), “Group 3,” (p. 221), “Group 4” (p. 222)
- For Extend the Lesson: “The Law: A Fence or a Family Welcome?” (p. 223), sheets of paper

Teacher Preparation

- Copy student pages: one scenario for each group, four groups total. (*One or two copies for each group should be enough.*)
- If using Extend the Lesson, option one, make one copy per student of “The Law: A Fence or a Family Welcome?”

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Ask this question: Do you think you should be friends with non-Christians or those who do some bad things, so you can help lead them to becoming Christians? Explain that today you will be exploring this question and learning about two different biblical perspectives on this issue.

LESSON STEPS

1. Distribute the student pages. In four groups, students will read a modern-day scenario. Each group should discuss their scenario and decide how they would respond. When the groups are ready, each should read their scenario aloud and share their response. Discuss the pros and cons of each response. Finally, transition

to the biblical stories (*at the bottom of each group's student page*) by explaining that the Jews faced a similar dilemma: Should they include or exclude non-Jews?

2. Now each group will read a biblical story, following the instructions on the student page. They should summarize the story for the class and offer their analysis of the situation. Be sure students can see the value in both protecting oneself from negative outside influences, and reaching out to others and inviting them to experience God, too. The “in the world but not of the world” concept is key.

3. Discuss “wall building” and “bridge building.” How did Ezra and Nehemiah build walls, and Boaz and Jonah build bridges? Invite the students to share times in their own lives when they felt it was necessary to build a wall, and other times when they built bridges.

4. Read Ephesians 5:19-20. This passage instructs us to encourage each other and be joyful in all situations. These two elements are important in bridge building; we must point others towards God while keeping our own personal focus on God.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 45 minutes.)

- **“The Law: A Fence or a Family Welcome?”** Do this active Scripture reading as a class. Continue the discussion from the earlier class period about reasons for or against being inclusive or exclusive.

- **Memory work.** Give time for students to work on the main memory passage (Nehemiah 1:5, 6a) before the end-of-unit quiz. Students may choose to work on bonus memory work as well.

Group 1

Discuss the following situation with your group. What would you do?

Your older sister is 17 and in 12th grade. Your parents have been very clear that she may only date guys that they approve first. While your sister thinks your parents are being unreasonable, you see that your parents are just trying to protect her from a bad relationship.

Last Friday night you got up at 11:00 p.m. for a drink of water and saw her sneaking out the front door. You looked out the window and saw a pickup truck parked along the street. Your sister jumped into it, and it drove away. You were so worried about her that you waited on the couch to see when she would come home. At 3:30 a.m. you were awakened by the sound of the front door opening. Your sister was surprised to see you sitting there!

You confronted her about sneaking out. “Who was in the pickup truck?” you asked. She was honest with you and told you about this wonderful guy she met. He is in his second year of college and is interested in her. He treats her well, your sister says; the only problem is, he isn’t a Christian. She’s tried to talk to him about God, but he doesn’t really care. She knows your parents would never approve, which is why she has to sneak out to see him. Your sister tells you she knows she can trust you to keep a secret.

What would you do? Be prepared to explain your response to the class.

Now read Ezra 9:1-15; 10:1-4. Summarize why Ezra was upset with the people, and how they responded.

Group 2

Discuss the following situation with your group. What would you do?

Your best friend attended church regularly with his mother, until last year. Last year, his parents became separated and then filed for divorce. His father received custody of the children. A few months later, his father began dating a woman who was part of a newfangled spiritual movement.

Recently your friend has been telling you he doesn't need to go to church anymore. His father's girlfriend has introduced him to new ways of spirituality, he says, through practices that are unfamiliar to you. Now your friend doubts that Jesus is even important; he thinks everyone can find peace in their own way.

You are concerned, because your friend used to be a strong Christian, and now he is losing his faith.

What would you do? Be prepared to explain your response to the class.

Now read Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-27. Summarize the situation for the class and explain why Nehemiah did not want the people to associate with foreigners.

Group 3

Discuss the following situation with your group. What would you do?

Today in school, a new student joined your class. Your class is made up of people of similar backgrounds. You all grew up in the area, attend churches in town, and have known each other for years. This new student just moved to your community from another part of the United States, and before that she lived in another country.

The girl's family has lived in the U.S. for three years, and you can tell she would like to fit into this school and community. She asked to sit with your friends at lunch today, and as you talked with her, you found out that you both like to play soccer. You are feeling like you want to be her friend, but you just aren't sure how well she will fit in.

What would you do? Be prepared to explain your response to the class.

Now read Ruth 1:3-5, 22; 2:1-2, 14-16; 3:1-11; 4:13-17. Summarize the situation for the class and explain how Ruth was accepted even though she was a foreigner.

Group 4

Discuss the following situation with your group. What would you do?

All through elementary school a bully in your neighborhood tormented you and your friends at the bus stop. He would spit in your hair when you weren't looking, steal things out of your backpack, and make you give him your gloves in the winter. You told your teachers and parents, but they were never able to stop him from finding new ways to hassle you.

Now that you're in 6th grade, you have noticed that he hasn't been bothering you recently. You wondered why and, in your curiosity, slowly passed his locker at school. He was there and thankfully didn't seem to notice you. But as you walked by, you caught a glimpse of an "I Love Jesus" sticker on his locker door. *What!* you thought. *How could this bully love Jesus?*

You told your friends about the sticker, and they said they overheard him telling another student that he started going to church. Now you are noticing changes in his behavior; yesterday he even let you get on the bus ahead of him. And just this afternoon he gave you a birthday party invitation, saying, "I know I haven't been a real great friend before, but I'd like to try again. I hope you can come to my party."

You aren't sure if you trust him, or if you can forgive all the stuff he did to you.

What would you do? Be prepared to explain your response to the class.

Now read Jonah 1:1-6, 11-17; 2:10-3:5, 10; 4:1-4, 11. Summarize the situation for the class and explain how God treated the foreign nation of Nineveh when the people repented.

The Law: A Fence or a Family Welcome?

An Active Scripture Reading

Everyone writes *THE LAW* in large letters on a sheet of paper. Choose two readers to read the following:

Reader 1: *(Sternly)* This is the word of the law. “No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:2-3).

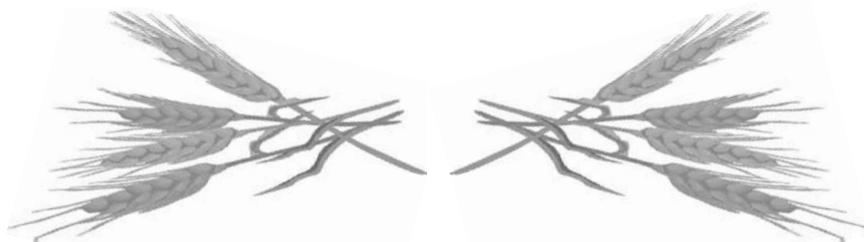
Reader 2: Many years later: “The book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God. . . . When the people heard this law they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent” (Nehemiah 13:1-3).

Hold up THE LAW signs and stand to form a fence. Each student uses body language in some way to demonstrate keeping someone out.

Reader 1: This is the word of the law. “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:9).

Reader 2: Many years later: “So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. . . . So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. ‘The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,’ she said. . . . Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, ‘Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife. . . . So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. . . . and she gave birth to a son. . . . And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David” (Ruth 1:22; 2:17, 19b; 4:9, 10a, 13, 17).

Form a circle and place THE LAW signs in a stack in the center. Find a way to demonstrate the message of inclusiveness. Think about how the gleaning law affected at least one Moabitess.



Name _____

Neighbors: Unit 6 Quiz

Part 1: Memory Passage

Recite aloud to your teacher or write down the main memory passage from this unit. Be sure to include the reference. You may write down the bonus memory work also for extra points.

Part 2: Multiple Choice

Circle the phrase that best completes each statement.

1. Nehemiah quit his job as cupbearer to the king of Persia because
 - a. It wasn't paying enough money.
 - b. The king was slowly turning Nehemiah away from God.
 - c. Nehemiah received a call to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.
2. When the Jews faced opposition from the army of Samaria,
 - a. They cooperated so that some carried weapons while the rest continued to work.
 - b. They rose up against Samaria and defeated the army in one night.
 - c. They were overthrown, and the Samaritans took them into exile.
3. Ezra was upset with the Jewish people because
 - a. They were not working hard and rebuilding Jerusalem fast enough.
 - b. They married foreigners and were becoming just like the nations around them.
 - c. They had made a golden idol and were worshipping it.
4. Nehemiah punished the Jewish people because
 - a. They had married foreigners and their children were losing the Jewish culture.
 - b. They had married foreigners and were all moving away from Jerusalem.
 - c. They were fighting among themselves and not rebuilding the wall.
5. When Ruth the Moabitess came to Bethlehem, she
 - a. Was not welcomed because she was a foreigner
 - b. Entered a competition and became the Israelites' queen
 - c. Was looked after by a local farm owner and later became his wife
6. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh because
 - a. He was afraid of the Ninevites and didn't think they deserved God's forgiveness.
 - b. He had been in the fish's belly for so long he no longer had strength to travel.
 - c. After he was thrown off the ship, he no longer wanted to follow God's instructions.

ANSWER KEY

Neighbors: Unit 6 Quiz

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