

Kids' Chronicle

THURSDAY, September 24, 1993

Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem

Nehemiah, whose name means "God's compassion," was the chief wine steward of Artaxerxes, the emperor of Persia. Several men from Judah had arrived in Susa, the capital of Persia to visit Nehemiah. One of them, Hanani, was Nehemiah's brother and he was happy to see all of his friends from home.

"How are things in Judah?" asked Nehemiah.

"Life is very hard for our people," Hanani replied. "We are treated like beggars in our own country, and strangers live in the homes that were once ours."

"And what of the great city of Jerusalem?" asked Nehemiah.

Again Hanani spoke. "The walls of the city lie in ruins, and the gates that were burned down have never been rebuilt."

Nehemiah covered his face with his hands and wept. For several days he fasted and prayed.

Once, as he prayed, he said, "Lord, hear me as I pray for myself and my people of Israel. We have all sinned and broken your commandments. Have mercy on us and rescue us by your great power and strength. Let the emperor have mercy on me when I go before him on behalf of my people."

Later, when Nehemiah was pouring wine for the emperor, Artaxerxes said, "My friend, why is it you look so sad? You are usually cheerful. Are you sick?"

Nehemiah answered, "Your Majesty, how could I hide my sadness? The city of my ancestors is in ruin, and its gates were destroyed by fire."

"What can I do to help?"

Nehemiah said a quick, silent prayer and said, "I would like to return to the land of Judah to see if I can rebuild the city."



Illustrations by Kathy Walsh

"I will make you governor of Judah and anything that is mine is yours to use," the emperor said. He then wrote letters to all of his officials ordering them to help Nehemiah. He also provided a company of soldiers to go with him.

Nehemiah had no trouble persuading the people of Judah to rebuild Jerusalem. Each person was assigned a particular task and the city began to rise from the pile of rubble.

The Jewish people did not proceed without criticism. Sanballat, a Gentile official, laughed at both the work and the workers. "What do you people think you're doing? Are you trying to turn a pile of rubble into a city in a single day?"

Another Gentile joined in. "Why, I'll bet if a fox jumped on that wall, the whole thing would crumble to the ground."

Nehemiah said another silent prayer as he and the others continued to work.

Sanballat was a very mean man

and he schemed with some of his friends to have a small army attack Jerusalem and destroy it before it could be rebuilt. However, the Jews had friends everywhere and they always knew when their enemies were coming. The people were given weapons and the emperor's soldiers took turns standing guard.

Nehemiah spent twelve years building the city. In that time he did not collect the high salary most governors received. He shared whatever he had with those who were poor but continued to work.

Again Sanballat tried to defeat Nehemiah. He sent a message that there was a rumor that Nehemiah was planning a rebellion against the emperor. Nehemiah sent a reply saying, "None of these things are true. You have made them up yourself."

So Nehemiah finished building the city of Jerusalem. Even his enemies knew it had been done with God's help and there was nothing they could have done to prevent it.

Read more about it: Nehemiah chapters 1-6

Q & A

1. What news made Nehemiah unhappy?
2. What was the name of the city Nehemiah rebuilt?

Saint Stephen — first Christian martyr

Stephen is remembered as the first Christian martyr. He was killed by people who threw stones at him until he died. The Book of Acts describes him as "richly blessed by God and full of power" (6, 8). He served God faithfully, but his enemies mocked him.

Stephen is also remembered for the speech he gave in his own defense. He spoke the words God gave him, but the people did not want to listen. Before Stephen died, he looked up and saw Jesus standing in heaven.

And he was such a forgiving and compassionate person that his last words were, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." We honor St. Stephen on December 26.

Match the Bible lands and cities

Draw a line to match the Bible stories to the lands and cities where they took place. Answers can be found on page 11.

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| 1. Adam's garden. (Genesis 2) | Bethlehem |
| 2. Country where Moses was born. (Exodus 1 & 2) | Galilee |
| 3. City Joshua conquered. (Joshua 6) | Egypt |
| 4. City rebuilt by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1) | Damascus |
| 5. Saul was this country's first king. (1 Samuel 10) | Rome |
| 6. City where Jesus was born. (Matthew 2) | Jerusalem |
| 7. Peter finished on this sea. (Matthew 4) | Jerusalem |
| 8. Paul was blinded here. (Acts 9) | Eden |
| 9. Where Paul met Caesar. (Acts 28) | Jericho |
| 10. The city John saw in a vision. (Revelations 21) | Israel |

Bible Accent

Jerusalem was in the land of Judah, which takes its name from one of Jacob's sons.

The land of Judah was part of Canaan, the promised land. After the death of Solomon, Canaan was divided into the kingdom of Israel in the north, and the kingdom of Judah in the south. People living in the south became known as Judeans, and later as Jews.

Jacob called his son Judah, "the lion's cub." From that description, the lion became the symbol of the descendants of Judah. Even today, the Lions of Judah are an important symbol in Jewish traditions. In some pictures, two lions are shown holding the tablets of Moses.

Jerusalem was also the city into which Jesus rode on what we now celebrate as Palm Sunday. If it were not for Nehemiah's faith, our lives as Christians might be very different today.

Bible Trivia

What is the name of Judah's brother who was sold as a slave to the Egyptians? (Genesis 37)

Send answers to: Catholic Courier Bible Trivia, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your name, address and school name with your entry.

All entries must be received by October 14, 1993. A winner will be selected at random from all the correct entries submitted. The winner will be notified by mail and receive a gift.

Last month's winner was Courtney Stewart from Honeoye Falls, who correctly identified the dove and the raven as the two kinds of birds Noah sent out of the ark.

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