

# SABBATH SCHOOL

## Preteen Sabbath Instruction Program — Teacher's Outline

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Level 4 • Unit 4 • Week 2

### GOD GIVES NEHEMIAH A SPECIAL JOB

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

To show that God's protection is a great blessing which is available to us by doing the will of God just as Nehemiah did.

#### **ATTENTION GETTER:**

Prepare in Advance: Find pictures of the following things that are symbolic of protection. Then mount on paper and add the comment and scripture.

Bow and arrows

David speaks of God's bow and arrows, "He bends His bow.... He makes His arrows fiery shafts" (Psalm 7:12-13).

Breastplate

Righteousness is obeying God's law. When we obey, we are wearing God's "breastplate of righteousness" (Ephesians 6:14).

Sling and rocks

David said, "The LORD is my rock" (Psalm 18:2).

Shield

God said to Abraham, "I am your shield" (Genesis 15:1).

Tower

David said, "The LORD [is]...my high tower" (Psalm 144:1-2).

Fortress

David said, "The LORD [is] ...my fortress" (Psalm 144:1-2).

Sword

"The sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17) is God's Word—the Bible . The Bible protects us better than any man-made sword could.

Helmet

Salvation belongs to God. Only He can save us. With "the helmet of salvation" (Ephesians 6:17), we have nothing to fear.

Make the pictures into large flash cards, preferably using heavier paper such as card stock. Adjust the number of copies in accordance with the number of children in the class. The pictures may have to be duplicated in the event of a large class.

- Do: Pass out the flash cards; one per child. In a large class, some kids will have the same sheet as some of the other kids. That's OK.
- Say: All these pictures symbolize protection of one type or another.
- Ask: Who would like to tell a little about the picture you are holding? How could the object protect you?
- Do: Discuss the various means of protection pictured on the cards and let the kids show their picture to each other so they will know the various protective devices mankind has used during Bible times.
- Say: Our cards show things people use for protection. These protective devices don't always work. Notice that on your card you also have a scripture and part of a Bible verse. Each scripture shows us that God is all of these things that are pictured on these flash cards. God is our helmet, sword, fortress, high tower, shield and our rock. Having God's protection is a great blessing. He is our true protection. Let's read our lesson and see how Nehemiah was blessed with God's protection when Nehemiah rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem during times of trouble. There were enemies who didn't want Nehemiah to succeed. So let's see if God was his fortress, shield and high tower of strength.

## **BIBLE LESSON:**

### **NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER**

The Israelites were in trouble. They had forgotten the laws and statutes of God. They had not kept God's Holy Days for a long time. Their enemies had taken them captive. The city of Jerusalem was in ruin from all the fighting. The city wall was broken and the gates had been burned with fire and destroyed.

When the prophet Nehemiah heard of the condition of the nation of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem he wept and mourned for days. He fasted and prayed for the Jews who remained in the city.

Nehemiah prayed, "Lord, God of heaven, You are the great God who is to be respected. You are loyal, and You keep Your agreement with those who love You and obey Your commands. Look and listen carefully. Hear the prayer that I, Your servant, am praying to You day and night for Your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we Israelites have done against You. My father's family and I have sinned against You. We have been wicked towards You and have not obeyed the commands, rules and laws You gave Your servant Moses.

"Remember what You taught your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among

the nations. But if you return to Me and obey My commands, I will gather your people from the far ends of the earth. And I will bring them from captivity to where I have chosen to be worshiped.'

"They are Your servants and Your people, whom You have saved with Your great strength and power. Lord, listen carefully to the prayer of Your servant and the prayers of Your servants who love to honor You. Give me, Your servant, success today; allow this king to show kindness to me." Nehemiah was the one who served wine to the king (Nehemiah 1: 4-11, The Youth Bible).

#### NEHEMIAH SEES THE KING

King Artaxerxes had ruled for 20 years when Nehemiah came to him with a cupful of wine. The king noticed Nehemiah looked sad and said, "I've never seen you so sad and I know you're not sick. Why do you look so sad?"

Nehemiah replied, "I am sad to see the city where my father is buried. It is destroyed and its protecting gates are totally burned up."

The king asked, "What is it that you want?"

Nehemiah didn't answer immediately. First he said a silent prayer to God. He then replied, "I wish that the king would grant permission for me to return to Judah that I may rebuild the city of Jerusalem."

"And how long will you be gone and when will you return?" the king wanted to know.

The king set a time that they both agreed on and let Nehemiah go. The king also drafted letters for Nehemiah. One letter was given to the governors beyond the Euphrates River so that they would let Nehemiah pass through the area of Judah. Another letter was given to Asaph, the keeper of the king's parks and forests. This letter was a request for wood for making beams for the city's walls, gates and Nehemiah's living quarters. These letters were an answer to Nehemiah's prayers. Nehemiah was given captains of the army and horsemen to take along for the journey. God had inspired the king to give Nehemiah this extra protection although Nehemiah knew God was with him and would protect him (Nehemiah 2:1-9).

#### NEHEMIAH PLANS TO REBUILD

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he hadn't told anyone of the plan that God had put in his mind. He made his first tour of the city secretly at night. Along with a few men, he inspected the city's broken walls and burned gates. Nehemiah made a list of the work that needed to be done. Soon he organized work parties by calling together the priests, the nobles, the officials and more people from the city and nearby settlements.

Nehemiah said, "Look at our situation. Our gates are burned down and the wall is ruined. Together let's rebuild the city." The people agreed to help him.

Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, heard rumors of Nehemiah's plans to rebuild. Sanballat was upset and told his wealthy friend Tobiah. Together they laughed at the Jews. Geshem, an Arabian prince,

accused Nehemiah and his group of wanting to start a revolt against the Persian rulers once the rebuilding was finished.

Nehemiah boldly replied, "God will prosper us. We have the right to be here. That right has not been given to you. God's servants will rebuild" (Nehemiah 2:10-20).

The servants of God certainly had a right to be there. God had placed his name in the city of Jerusalem, and He offered shelter and protection as long as the people followed His laws.

#### THE BUILDING BEGINS

Little by little Nehemiah and his helpers started to rebuild the city walls, the gates and some of their houses within the wall. Sanballat laughed at the Jews again and flew into a rage when he heard that the wall was actually being built. His friend Tobiah tried to comfort Sanballat and said, "Don't worry, they don't know what they are doing. If a fox jumps on the wall, it will fall apart."

The more work that was accomplished, the madder Sanballat and his friends became. Soon they were plotting to start a war against the Israelites because they didn't want Nehemiah's work to succeed.

Now more than ever, Nehemiah had to rely on God for protection and safety. Nehemiah and his men were in danger. Again Nehemiah prayed to God saying how hard it was for the builders to put up with Sanballat's threats. Nehemiah continued to pray as the work went on. Nehemiah set armed men behind the wall in places where it was least protected. He armed the people with swords, spears, shields, bows and coats of chain. Nehemiah encouraged them by saying, "Do not be afraid of the enemy. Remember the Lord and place Him in your hearts. Ask Him for courage to fight for our city, homes and our families."

God heard Nehemiah's prayers and the enemy was upset to see the people continue the construction work while being armed. Some worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other. The builders had their sword strapped by their side as they worked. Since the workers were so spread apart, Nehemiah had a trumpet man at his side and if the trumpet sounded everyone was gathered at that spot. At night they stayed within Jerusalem's half-finished walls with certain men standing guard. All the workers slept in their clothes and kept a weapon in their hands (Nehemiah 3 and 4).

Ask: Does God give courage to those who ask for it?

Read: Acts 28:15 (last part) "...he thanked God and took courage."

Say: God expects us to do our part. Once we do our part, is the rest up to Him?

Read: 2 Chronicles 32:5-7.

Say: Hezekiah also made weapons and shields (verse 5). That was his part, but he depended on God to do the rest just as Nehemiah did (verse 7).

## NEHEMIAH HELPS THE POOR

The Persian king was heavily taxing the Israelite people who lived in Jerusalem. Some of the poor Israelites had to borrow money from the richer Israelites. The rich Israelites required large amounts of interest on the borrowed money. The poor sometimes sold their land and homes to the rich for food. When they were in real need, the poor would also sell some of their children into slavery. Nehemiah heard about the trials of the poor and he became angry. He said to the rich, "You should be ashamed of yourselves for charging your own relatives."

Nehemiah made the rich Israelites promise to stop charging the forbidden interest and ordered them to return the land, vineyards, olive groves, houses and children to their rightful owners (Nehemiah 5:1-13).

Ask: Did God forbid usury (charging excessive interest on borrowed money)?

Read: Exodus 22:25.

## NEHEMIAH IS RULER

During the rebuilding of the wall, Nehemiah was appointed to be the governor of Judah. He ruled for 12 years. During that time he lived and ate with the common people even though he could have lived like the rich. But because the former governors had lived at the expense of the people, Nehemiah decided he wouldn't do that. He cared about the people and knew God does not like it when people take advantage of the poor (Nehemiah 5:18).

Nehemiah respected God's wishes to treat the people right. He had a duty to protect the people from those who were abusing them.

## THE WALL IS COMPLETED

Sanballat and his friends continually tried to stop the rebuilding project. Four times they tried to get Nehemiah to agree to come to one of their meetings. Nehemiah was smart enough to know they wanted to hurt him, so he refused to go each time, saying he had work to do. When Sanballat realized Nehemiah wasn't coming to the meetings, he sent him a letter accusing Nehemiah and his men of building the wall so they could start a war. Nehemiah denied the plan to start a war. Sanballat was trying to intimidate Nehemiah, but it didn't work. God had given Nehemiah courage. A man named Shemaiah was afraid. He urged Nehemiah to go into the temple for protection, saying the enemies were coming to kill him that night.

"Why should I flee?" Nehemiah replied. "Why should I go into the temple? It is a place where only the priests are allowed. Wouldn't it mean death for me if I entered there? I won't go there for protection. God is my fortress. He will protect me."

Nehemiah found out that God had not sent Shemaiah, but Sanballat and his men had hired him. It was another one of Sanballat's attempts to scare Nehemiah.

Nehemiah continued his work. The wall was finished in a fast 52 days. All the nations around Jerusalem began to fear the Jews because they knew God had helped them. Nehemiah continued to receive threatening letters from Tobiah, but they did not frighten him. With God on his side who could be against him (Nehemiah 5 and 6)? Nehemiah regularly asked God for help (Nehemiah 5:9; 6:9, 14).

Read: Romans 8:31 "...if God is for us who can be against us?"

#### GOD'S LAW RESTORED

After the wall was completed, Ezra, the scribe (secretary) and priest, brought out the books that contained the law of Moses, which God had given to Israel. With 13 leading men, Ezra stood in front of the congregation on an elevated wooden platform, which they had made for the occasion. The Levites were there to help the people understand the law and when Ezra opened the books, everyone stood up. Ezra blessed the great God, and all the people bowed their heads in prayerful worship and said amen.

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Levites told the people that that day was the first Holy Day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Ezra asked the people who were weeping to stop weeping and to rejoice and celebrate. He told them to eat and drink because God's joy was there to strengthen them.

The second day all the heads of household gathered with Ezra and the Levites again for the purpose of studying God's Word. They learned that it was written in the law that the Israelites should be staying in tents or booths during the Feast of Tabernacles. They proclaimed this in Jerusalem and ordered the people to bring branches of olive trees, palm trees and other leafy trees to make the booths. So the people did this and made themselves booths on the roofs of their houses, in their courtyards or wherever they could find a place.

With the help of Ezra and the Levites, Nehemiah reestablished the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. During this time, the people were protected and blessed because they had returned to keeping the Feasts of the Lord (Nehemiah 7 and 8).

Say: Nehemiah was very courageous. He didn't allow anyone to stop him from accomplishing God's will of rebuilding the wall and keeping God's Holy Days. He was in the middle of a lot of opposition and danger, but he was a courageous leader. He took the responsibility he was given and did everything he could to complete his tasks. The rest he left to God. Nehemiah protected his people as much as humanly possible, but he knew the people's real source of safety was God. Nehemiah had God's protection because he wanted to keep God's Feast of Tabernacles and because he cared about others. God's protection is a great blessing that is available to all of us who obey His Laws.

#### LESSON APPLICATION:

Prepare in Advance: Buy beige- or buff-colored card stock paper. Copy the city wall dotted line sample on to this paper. Make a copy of "front view of completed project" (city wall and gate) on regular white paper to show how the completed project should look. Bring scissors and crayons or colored pencils (or have kids bring them).

Directions:

1. Cut along all solid lines
2. Fold paper along all dotted lines
3. Once the wall is cut and folded correctly, unfold again and use crayons or colored pencils to draw the windows, doors, bricks and other wall and gate features.
4. Once the wall is colored and windows and other features added, fold along dotted lines again and let them stand the wall upon a table surface.

**MUSIC:**

Sing "God Is My Rock, My Salvation," page 60 of the United Church of God hymnal.

**MEMORY VERSE:**

Psalm 18:2 "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."

Say: After reading our lesson we realize that even though Nehemiah and his workers had weapons in their hands they depended on the Lord who was their fortress, their shield, their high tower and their deliverer. He was also their friend, and He later became the God of the New Testament known as Jesus Christ.

Ask: Can anyone think of a time in your life or your family members' lives that you felt God protected you and those you love in a special way?

Discuss: Let the kids express their thoughts.

Have class repeat memory verse together several times.

# *family activity*

## **THE POINT:**

To show that God's protection is a great blessing which is available to us by doing the will of God just as Nehemiah did.

## **ASK ME...**

1. What was Nehemiah's job in his captivity?
2. What was the name of the king whom Nehemiah served during his captivity?
3. What favor did Nehemiah ask of his king?
4. How did Nehemiah receive courage to make his request to the king?
5. What did the king give to Nehemiah to help him on his way?
6. Who were "grieved" when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem?
7. When did Nehemiah inspect the wall of Jerusalem?
8. How did Nehemiah guard against surprise attacks from his enemies while the walls were being built?
9. How long did it take to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem?
10. Who read from the book of the law of Moses to the people?
11. Where did he stand to read from the book?

## **FAMILY TOGETHER TIME:**

With your family visit an old fort in your area or in another city. Notice the way the walls and gates were built on the fort and learn about how the walls protected the soldiers. If there is not a fort near you, visit a museum. Look for items that were used for protection back in the old days.

Visit the local library and check out some books about forts and armor. Learn about the things that mankind has created for protection because they have not relied on God. Remember God is the only source of real protection and safety. Put your trust in Him.

## **MEMORY VERSE:**

Psalm 18:2 "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."

## FAMILY ACTIVITY SHEET ANSWERS

1. He was cupbearer to the king.
2. Artaxerxes.
3. Nehemiah asked to be allowed to go to Judah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.
4. He prayed to the God of heaven about it.
5. He gave letters to the governors beyond the river.
6. Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite.
7. He inspected it at night.
8. He set up armed guards and had the workers work with weapons strapped to their sides.
9. It took 52 days.
10. Ezra the scribe.
11. A wooden platform.

Cut and Fold Art Activity: City Wall and Gate

- Cut along all solid lines
- Fold paper along all dotted lines
- Once the wall is cut and folded correctly, unfold again and use crayons or colored pencils to draw the Windows, doors, bricks, and other wall and gate features.
- Once the wall is colored and windows and other features added, fold along dotted lines again and let them stand the wall upon a table surface.

