

BIBLE TIMELINE ASSEMBLIES

57. NEHEMIAH

Bible Base: Nehemiah 1-6

Key Christian Belief: In a hostile world, God wants us to make a difference.

Aim: To help children understand that God wants us to respond to others in need.

You will need:

- the attached PowerPoint presentation;
- the backing track, attached, for the song.

Introduction

Show the picture of Bob the Builder from the attached PowerPoint presentation and ask the children if they know who this is.

It's Bob the Builder, of course! Can he fix it? (Yes, he can!)

I didn't hear that. Can he fix it? (YES HE CAN!)

Now ask the children if they can remember the names of any of his helpers. (Scoop, Muck, Dizzy, Roly, Wendy, Pilchard, Bird, Travis, Spud)

In the Bob the Builder stories, 'Bob and the gang have so much fun. Working together they...? (Get the job done!)

Explain that in the Bible there is someone who reminds you of Bob the Builder. He is famous for some building work he did - and like Bob the Builder, he had a gang who helped him get the job done!

Bible Story

The people of Israel had been taken prisoner by the Babylonians. But then, as we heard last week, the Persians had taken over from them and moved many of them to their capital city in Susa. That was where Esther and her uncle Mordecai lived.

Soon after he had defeated the Babylonians, the King of Persia gave all the people of Israel who wished to do so permission to return to their own country again and many of them decided to do so.

Others, however, chose to remain in Susa where they were comfortable. One of them, called Nehemiah, had an important job working for the king. It was his job to look after the king's wine and to see that he and his guests had plenty to drink whenever they needed it. And as the king liked having parties - that was nearly every day!

One day a relative of Nehemiah's called to see him. He had been to Jerusalem and had now come back with news of how the people there were getting on.

'It's not good news' he told Nehemiah. 'The people there have managed to build houses for themselves, but the city is in ruins. Its walls have been broken down and its gates destroyed by fire. The people are in great danger and people from other nations are making fun of them.'

Nehemiah was upset when he heard this. He thought about what life must be like for the people who had gone back to Jerusalem. He knew it would be difficult for them to get food until the land was ready for farming again. He knew the streams, rivers and wells would be blocked up and it would be hard to find water to drink. He thought of them trying to sleep at night in a city with no walls - where bandits could break in any time and steal from them. He imagined their enemies laughing and making fun of them.

He tried to forget about it but he couldn't get the pictures out of his head. 'If only there was something I could do!' he thought.

For three whole days he shut himself in his room, praying for his friends and asking God to be with them and to help them. Then, finally, an idea came to him. Maybe he could go to Jerusalem to help them? But it would mean asking the king for time off and that would not be easy. He could be in big trouble if the king thought he was just being lazy.

So he began to pray again, this time asking God for an opportunity to talk to the king about it and maybe explain to him what it was he wanted to do.

Some months later, Nehemiah was standing in the dining room one day, deep in thought.

'What are you thinking about?' asked the king. 'You look very worried about something. What is the matter?'

Nehemiah knew that this was his chance. God had answered his prayer and given him an opportunity to speak to the king. Without closing his eyes or moving his lips, Nehemiah said a quick prayer in his heart asking God to help him find words that would help the king to understand what it was he wanted to do.

So he told the king all about the danger his people were in and about how much he wanted to go back and help them.

'Well of course you must!' said the king to Nehemiah's relief. And what's more, I'll send letters with you so that any time you are crossing a border from one country into the next, the guards at the checkpoint will let you past. And I'll order the royal timber yards to have all the wood you need sent to Jerusalem for you.

Nehemiah was overjoyed, thanked the king profusely and was soon on his way.

When he arrived in Jerusalem he rested for a few days and did not tell anyone what he planned to do. Then one night when it was dark, he travelled on horseback right round the city walls, noting the damage and what would need to be done to fix it.

Next day he got the leaders of all the people together and told them that it was time to start building. He told them about how God had answered his prayer and how the king had allowed him to take time off work to do the job.

'Now' he said. 'Let's get started!'

And so the work began. Each family or group worked on the wall nearest to where they lived and Nehemiah told them what to do. When the other nations around them heard about this, their leaders, Sanballat and Tobiah, came to see for themselves.

'You are wasting your time' said Sanballat. 'You'll never be able to build those walls up again. There's far too much damage.'

'If a fox were to climb on to that' said Tobiah, pointing to a section of the wall that had been started 'it would all come crashing down again!'

Even so, the people of Israel all joined in the work with willing hearts and soon the walls had reached half their height.

When Sanballat and Tobiah heard this they were furious and planned to gather their armies together to attack the people of Israel and stop them from building any further.

But Nehemiah heard about it and posted guards all around the walls, wherever there were gaps. From then on, half the people kept watch with swords and bows while the other half continued to work.

It was long, hard work. The people had to work every day from dawn until sunset and they were tired. After a while some of them began to argue and fight with each other and the work stopped. Nehemiah got the two sides together. 'We will never get these walls built unless we all work together' he said. 'Our enemies are making it hard enough for us as it is. Now what is this argument all about?'

So they talked together and with Nehemiah's help they were able to reach an agreement. They shook hands and the work started again.

Sanballat and Tobiah continued to make trouble. Several times they invited Nehemiah to leave the walls and come out to meet them. They were planning to get him on his own so they could assassinate him. But Nehemiah knew what they were up to.

'The work I'm doing is far too important' he said. 'I can't leave until it is finished.'

And so they kept going and at last, 52 days after they had started, the work was done. The city now had strong, sturdy walls again and brand new gates made out of the wood that had been supplied by the king.

Everyone knew it was because God had been with them that the work had been done so quickly. Their enemies knew it too and decided to leave them alone after that.

'Let's have a celebration' said Nehemiah. And, of course, they did!

Exploring Christian Belief

So, just like Bob the Builder and his gang, Nehemiah and the people of Israel worked together to get the job done.

But notice how the story started. Nehemiah heard the news that the people of Israel were finding things tough back in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a long way away and the trouble they were in didn't affect him. He could easily have said 'It's nothing to do with me' and just forgotten all about it.

But instead, he began to imagine what life was like for them and the more he did that, putting himself in their shoes, the more he wanted to do something to help.

Then he began to talk to God about it, asking God to show him if there was anything he could do. Once he had an idea, he asked God to help him put his plan into action and before long he found himself in Jerusalem helping the people to build their walls.

These days we hear many stories of people in different parts of the world - and some even here on our doorstep - who are suffering. As in Nehemiah's day, there are some who have had their homes, towns and villages destroyed by war and are having to rebuild them. Some are refugees a long way from home. Some are starving because the crops have failed - again. Some are ill, perhaps because they cannot get clean water to drink, and they cannot get the medicine they need to make them well again.

What do we do when we hear these stories and see these pictures on TV? Do we just forget about them - or do we do what Nehemiah did and talk to God about the people involved, asking Him to be with them and to help them - and asking Him to show us if there is anything we can do to help?

We cannot help everyone, of course, but every now and then you may hear a story or see a picture from the news that you will not be able to get out of your mind. The more you think about what life must be like for the people involved, the more you want to do something to help. That may be God's way of telling you that these are the people He wants you to do something about. So ask Him to show what it is He wants you to do.

There may be lots that you are able to do to make a difference. (If possible share some stories - e.g. from the Tear Fund or Open Doors websites - of things that children have done to make a difference to others around the world.)

Once you have an idea, talk to others about it and ask God to help you do it!

Then, if you keep on talking to God about the stories you hear and the pictures you see, who knows, maybe someday He might send you to another part of the world to build walls, dig wells or teach people how to grow their own food.

There are lots of people all over the world who need our help in one way or another. What will you do to make a difference?

Prayer

Father, help us to care about others in different parts of the world who are suffering and show us what we can do to help. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.