

GOD'S COVENANT IN RESTORED JUDAH**Nehemiah 1–2; 4; 6; 8–10**

Memory Verse: *He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!* (Ps. 111:9 ESV).

Background Helps:

In the last two week's readings, we saw that both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) were carried away into exile (2 Kings 17:6, 23; 18:9-12; 2 Chron. 36:17-21). Does this exile mean the end of God's covenant story? Will the LORD prove to be untrue to his covenant promises? By no means!

The last two verses of 2 Chronicles 36 (vv. 22-23) include a proclamation of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, urging the Jews to return from Jerusalem and rebuild the house (temple) of the LORD. God's covenant story continues! The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the return of Judah from exile in three stages:

1. The rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6)
2. The “rebuilding” of the Law under Ezra (Ezra 7–10)
3. The rebuilding of the wall under Nehemiah (Neh. 1–13)

Our lesson this week will focus on this third stage, the rebuilding of the wall in 445 B. C., as a further testimony of God's covenant faithfulness.

You will find three explicit references to God's covenant in our readings:

1. In Nehemiah 1:5 Nehemiah prays to the “LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God *who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments*” (italics added). Compare this verse to Deuteronomy 7:9, 12.
2. In Israel's prayer of confession in Nehemiah 9, the Levites recall the covenant that God made with Abraham “to give to his offspring the land of” Canaan (v. 8).
3. Later in the prayer (Neh. 9:32), the Levites petition “our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, *who keeps covenant and steadfast love,*” echoing the words of Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1.

Lesson Helps:

A possible lesson aim: My students will learn about the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership, so that they will trust the covenant-keeping God to restore their own relationship to God.

A few tips for your lesson:

- Use the information in Background Helps above to quickly review the story of Israel and Judah's exile and the three-stage restoration of Judah.

- Use storytelling techniques to sketch the rebuilding of the wall under Nehemiah's leadership.
- Emphasize the references to God's covenant in Nehemiah 1 and 9 (see above).
- Apply all this to the lives of your students:
 - Have you gone into "exile" (or, are you now in "exile") from God?
 - He is a God who "keeps covenant and steadfast love." He wants to restore his relationship with you. Will you be restored?
 - Help your students, through prayer, to come back into relationship with the Lord.
- Use the memory verse (Ps. 111:9): The God of redemption, who has commanded his covenant forever and who is truly an awesome God, will receive you back to himself!

Home Assignment:

 Read Psalm 25; 74; 103; 111.

 Memorize Psalm 103:17-18 ESV.