

# Returning to the Promise

**Storyteller** *Stack the walls in the basket in order so that you can place them easily. Roll the map of Jerusalem starting at the South and ending at the North, and put it on top of the walls. Put the rolled-up map of Jerusalem and the dolls on top of the walls.*

**Nehemiah 8:1-10**

On the first day of the seventh month, the people came together in the open area in front of the Water Gate. Then they asked Ezra, who was a teacher of the Law of Moses, to read to them from this Law that the Lord had given his people. Ezra the priest came with the Law and stood before the crowd of men, women, and the children who were old enough to understand. From early morning till noon, he read the Law of Moses to them, and they listened carefully. Ezra stood on a high wooden platform that had been built for this occasion. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah were standing to his right, while Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash Baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam were standing to his left.

Ezra was up on the high platform, where he could be seen by everyone, and when he opened the book, they all stood up. Ezra praised the great Lord God, and the people shouted, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed with their faces to the ground and worshiped the Lord.

After this, the Levites Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah went among the people, explaining the meaning of what Ezra had read.

The people started crying when God's Law was read to them. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher, and the Levites who had been teaching the people all said, "This is a special day for the Lord your God. So don't be sad and don't cry!"

*Set down Xerxes and Esther close to you – you can lean them up against the basket so that they don't fall over.* When Xerxes was king of Persia, and Esther the Queen was sitting beside him, an Israelite named Nehemiah was the king's servant.

*Show Nehemiah to the children, and then put him down facing Xerxes and Esther.* Nehemiah looked depressed. So the king said, "Why do you look so sad?"

Nehemiah answered "I feel sad because the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins. Please send me back to Judah, so that I can rebuild the city."

The king agreed to let Nehemiah go, and sent with him timber for rebuilding, and soldiers to keep him safe.

*Unroll the underlay, with the map of Diaspora-era Jerusalem marked on it. The north border of the city, with the Sheep Gate, should be closest to you.* The walls of Jerusalem were crumbled, and the gates that had been torn down and burned. But when Nehemiah told the people what King had said, they replied, "Let's start building now!" So they got everything ready.

Nehemiah and the People of God worked rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem for 12 years. Men and women, rich and poor, each person did what they could. *Place each wall as you name it.*

**Story Materials**

- clay dolls:
  - Esther
  - Xerxes
  - Nehemiah
  - Ezra
  - People of God
- Torah
- Map of Jerusalem underlay
- Walls of Jerusalem blocks

Tray, basket or shallow open box to hold the story

They rebuilt:

- the Sheep Gate, and the wall with Hundred Tower and Hananel Tower

Nehemiah told the people, "Enjoy your good food and wine and share some with those who didn't have anything to bring. Don't be sad! This is a special day for the Lord, and he will make you happy and strong."

- Fish Gate and the wall up to Ancient Gate
- the wall past the Governor's House, including Broad Wall and Oven Tower
- Valley Gate, and the wall up to Garbage Gate,
  - Fountain Gate, and the wall past Shelah Pool, David's stairs, the royal cemetery, pool and barracks, houses and the tower of the upper palace
  - Water Gate, and the wall with the large tower past Ophel to Horse Gate,
  - East Gate and the wall up to the Gathering Gate, and
  - the last section of the wall, around the corner room all the way back to Sheep Gate.

*Put some people of God figures outside the walls near the Water Gate.* When King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and took God's People away into the Diaspora, some people were left behind. But Nebuchadnezzar took all the beautiful and precious things from the temple. The people who were left behind had nothing to comfort them. Even the tablets of God's law were taken away.

In the Diaspora, priests wrote down the law on scrolls, so that God's law would not be forgotten. But the people left behind were not part of the Diaspora: they did not have scrolls.

Xerxes sent Ezra, the priest, to return the temple's gold and silver to Jerusalem, but the ark of the covenant and the tablets of the law were not among the things that were sent back. Instead, Ezra brought the scroll of the Law from the Diaspora.

*Move the People of God figures inside the walls near the Water Gate.* When the walls were rebuilt, many People of God who had returned from exile came to live in Jerusalem.

*Set down Ezra and Nehemiah facing the people.* The people came together in the open area in front of the Water Gate. From early morning till noon, Ezra the priest read the Law of Moses to them, and they listened carefully.

*Hold up the torah scroll so the children can see it.* The people started crying when God's Law was read to them. Then Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and teacher told the people, "Enjoy your good food and wine and share some with those who didn't have anything to bring. Don't be sad! This is a special day for the Lord, and he will make you happy and strong."