

Tour of the Holy Lands - Above the City



Today, we promised you walls as well as water, so let's see what adventures we can get into by climbing up instead of down. First, we'll find a place to sit and learn a little about our wall-builder, whose name is Nehemiah. It all begins in a palace in the Persian Empire about 445 B.C.E. Our Jewish hero is working as cupbearer to the Persian king. It is his job to taste the wine to make sure it is safe before the king drinks it. News comes to Nehemiah that the walls of Jerusalem are still broken down, making it easy for enemies to enter and hurt the people. He becomes so sad that he mourns and fasts for four months. Why is he so sad? He has never been to Jerusalem, but his family had been taken from that land 140 years earlier. In fact, 10,000 Jews had been taken away at that time. And Jews who lived in other lands, like Nehemiah, still thought of Jerusalem as their hometown.



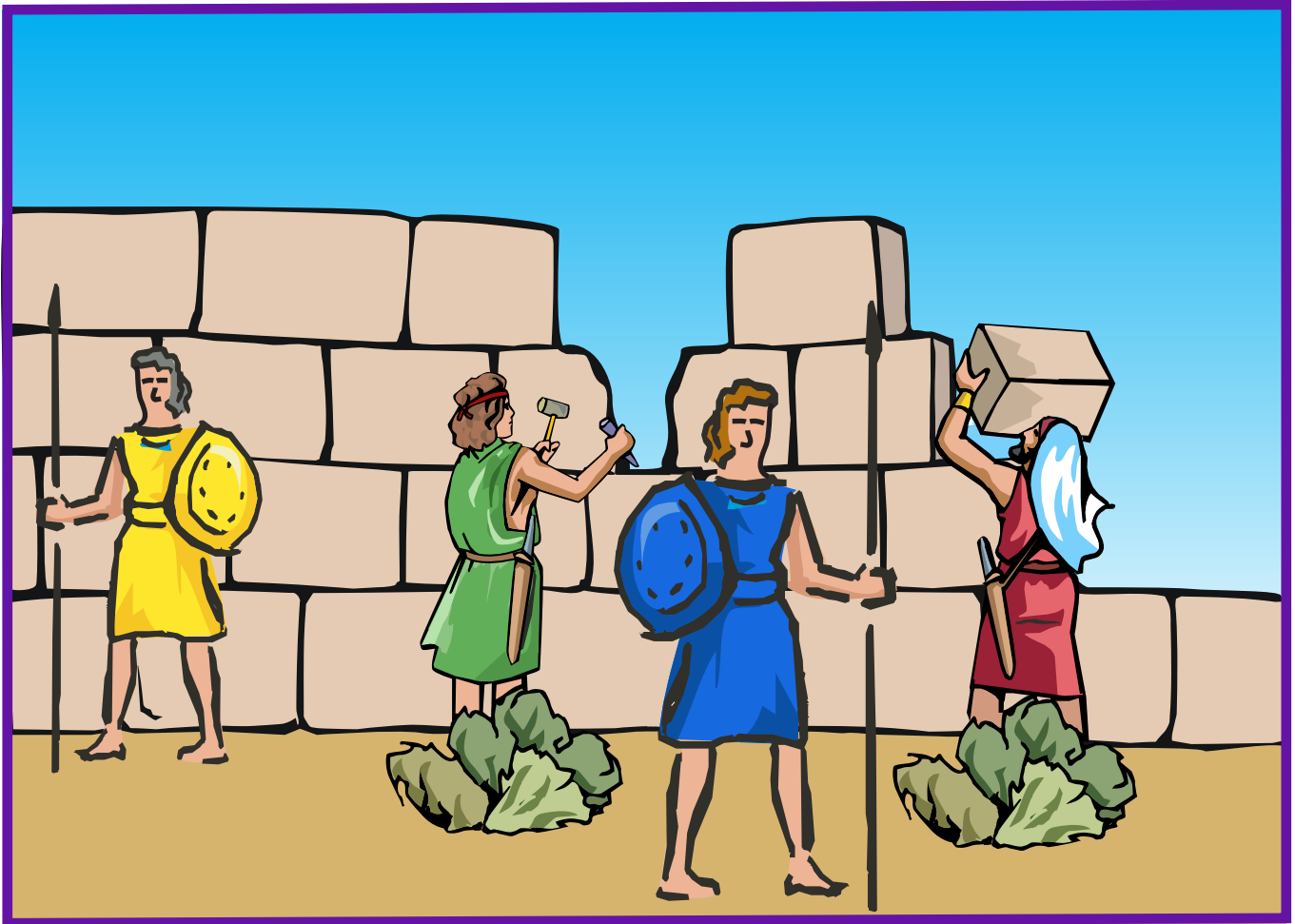
Nehemiah didn't know what he could possibly do to help the people in Jerusalem, but he knew he could trust God to show him the way. After praying one day, Nehemiah bravely asks the king to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.



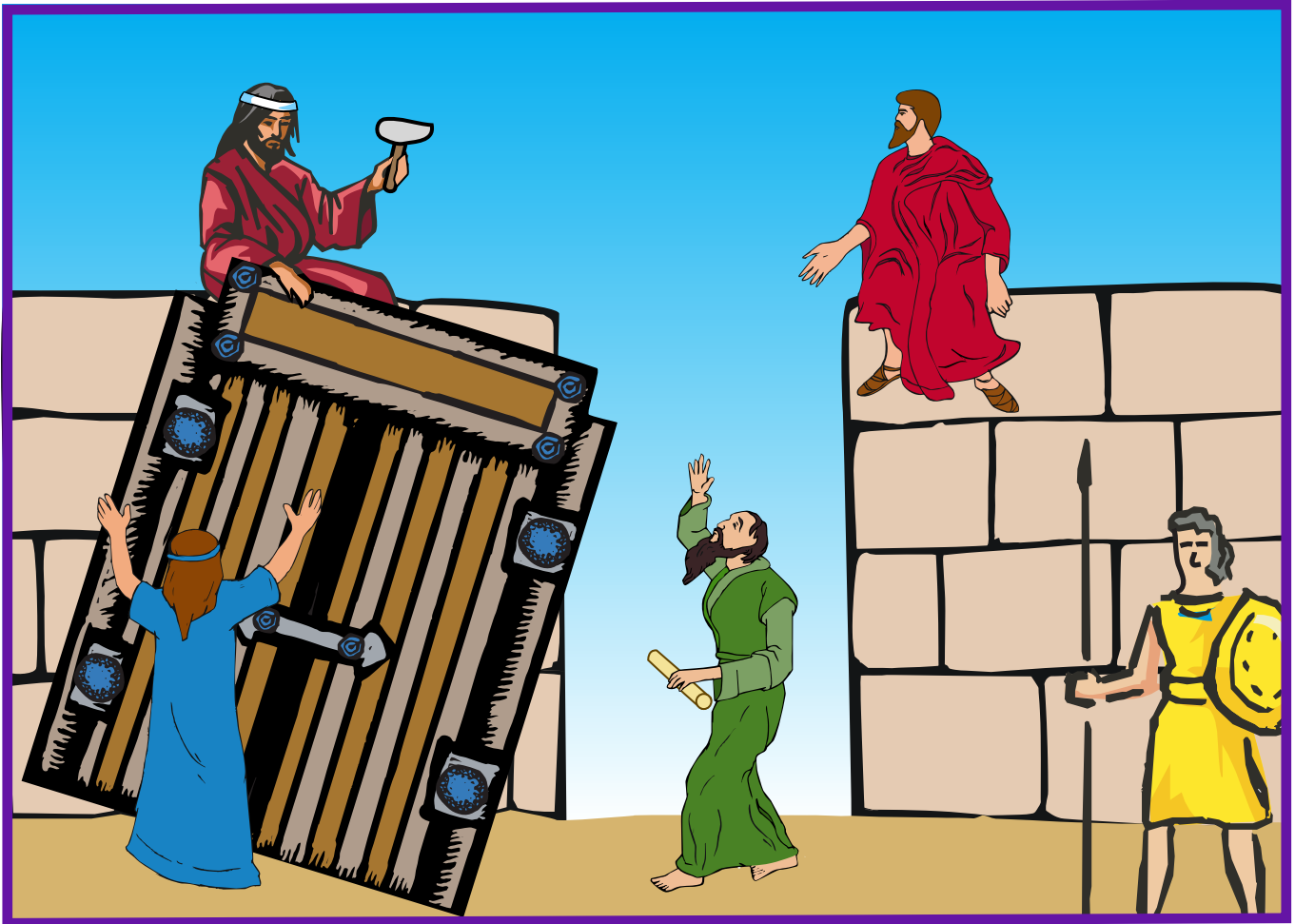
Not only does the king give him permission, but he also gives him orders to pick up lumber on the way, and he gives him guards to keep him safe on the journey.



God guides Nehemiah every step of the way in rebuilding the walls. When he arrives in Jerusalem, the first thing Nehemiah does is inspect the walls, but not during the daylight hours. He does it at night when his enemies are not watching. Their names are Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites. They live in a circle around Jerusalem. Nehemiah knows these enemies want to keep the walls broken down so they can enter the city any time. The next day he tells the Jewish rulers what he found on his tour of the walls. And they say, "Let us rise up and build."



When the walls are halfway up, the enemies are so angry that they are ready to fight. But the builders pray to God and discover the enemies' plan. From then on, some of the workers continue to build, some stand guard, and others work and hold a weapon at the same time. They are spread out along the wall. If Nehemiah gives a signal to the trumpeter, they will gather in one spot and trust God to support and protect them. At night, the workers stay on guard. They even sleep in their clothes so they will be ready to work or fight at any time.



Soon, except for the gates, they are almost finished building the wall. The enemies try new tricks. First Sanballat and Geshem send Nehemiah a message. "Come and meet with us in the plain of Ono." But he knows they plan to do mischief. Besides, Ono is a whole day's journey away. Nehemiah sends this answer back: "I'm doing a great work, I can't come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" The tricks didn't stop, but Nehemiah is ready for them all. The wall is finished in 52 days, and the enemies know that God has been behind the entire building project.



Let's go and see an example of Nehemiah's wall. I know you are going to be very surprised when you see how thick his walls are.



Now for some climbing. Let's see what the city looks like from the top of the walls. These walls are not from Nehemiah's day, but they're lots of fun. See these slits in them? They are for bows and arrows. Today, we've learned the importance of both water and walls to protect cities during Bible times.

