

God's People Rebuild Jerusalem after Painful Exile
About 8 minutes, from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah

Participants (*No need to memorize lines; the aim is to relive sacred events, not to perform*)

Nehemiah

Hanani

Sanballat

Prompter Shout a brief line, and Echoes repeat it.

Echoes Children and adults who want to take part. Echoes need no script.

Hanani Nehemiah, I have come to Babylon with both good and bad news.
Ezra the priest arrived safely in Jerusalem.
He brought back the priceless gold and silver items
that the Chaldeans had looted from Solomon's Temple 70 years ago.

Nehemiah It was a miracle that Ezra made it to Jerusalem safely.
He was ashamed to request troops for protection;
he had told King Cyrus that God would protect them.

Hanani King Cyrus gave up a vast treasure, Nehemiah.
That was another miracle! Why did he do it, Nehemiah?

Nehemiah Maybe because he had heard of brave Queen Esther's testimony,
or because of Daniel's faithful prayers.

Hanani The Jewish people cheered mightily to see God's temple rebuilt,
but the old folk who recalled the first temple wept,
as the new temple does not compare with the first one's splendor.

Prompter & Echoes And the bad news?

Hanani Jerusalem's walls remain broken down,
and the Jews who escaped captivity are in great distress;
they lack protection, and their enemies are powerful.

Prompter & Echoes How sad!

Hanani Stop weeping, Nehemiah. You can do something about it.
You are the Persian king's cupbearer; ask him to help us.

Nehemiah First, let me pray to the Holy One.
O Lord God of heaven, I plead on behalf of the sons of Israel.
We have sinned greatly. We beg for your mercy!
We have acted corruptly and broken your laws.

Prompter & Echoes Repentant confession!

Nehemiah Almighty God, you've done as you had warned us.
You cautioned us that if your people became unfaithful
you would scatter us among the gentiles.
You also told us that if we returned to you and kept your commands
you would restore us to where your name dwells.

- Prompter & Echoes Amen!
- Hanani Nehemiah, several days have passed.
Have you asked King Artaxerxes to help us?
- Nehemiah Yes, Hanani. He asked why I came before him looking so sad;
I was very afraid and asked, "How can I not be sad
when the city of my fathers' tombs lies desolate,
and its gates have been consumed by fire?"
- Prompter & Echoes Devastation!
- Nehemiah The king then asked what my request was.
I prayed quickly to the God of heaven.
- Hanani Now, months later, God has answered your prayer, Nehemiah.
The king let you return to Judah to rebuild Jerusalem.
Here we are!
- Nehemiah Look Hanani!
Jerusalem's walls are flattened! Let us rebuild them at once.
- Hanani Yes, but Sanballat and Tobiah will oppose us; they are powerful men.
- Nehemiah So, I will go at night alone on my mule around the city of Jerusalem,
to survey exactly what needs to be done.
- Sanballat I am Sanballat. That fool Nehemiah plans to rebuild the city.
We will stop him, Tobiah! Spread a rumor that he is
stirring rebellion against King Cyrus.
- Prompter & Echoes Treachery!
- Nehemiah Men of Israel, Jerusalem is desolate.
Each clan will rebuild a segment of the wall near where they live.
I will assign tasks according to your skills.
- Sanballat Tobiah, we must halt the Jews' work! Leaders of Samaria, listen.
These feeble Jews hope to restore the city and live in it.
We will attack them.
- Prompter & Echoes Look out!
- Hanani Nehemiah, the wall is halfway up; the people have a mind to work,
but Sanballat has stirred up our enemies; they plan to attack us.
- Nehemiah We will pray to our God, Hanani, and set up guards day and night.
Men, fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters,
and your wives.
- Hanani Look, Nehemiah.
The men carry burdens with one hand and a weapon in the other.
Sanballat sent word that they are coming to kill us and that
we had better hide in the temple with the doors locked.

Nehemiah That's what Sanballat wants us to do, Hanani, cage ourselves up!
God will fight for us if we obey His commands.
Have Ezra the priest read and explain God's Law to the entire
assembly, men, women, and children who can understand.

Prompter & Echoes Amen!

Hanani An exchange of letters proves that we do not rebel against the king.
Look now, Nehemiah. The people all stand
while Ezra reads the Book of the Law.
He blesses them, and they bow to the ground before God.

Nehemiah Listen, all of you. This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not weep.
God has forgiven us. Let there be rejoicing!
We will celebrate with a feast for seven days,
and Ezra will read from God's Law each day.

Hanani God is protecting us, Nehemiah! Our enemies fear to attack.

Sanballat Those cursed Jews! They've built their defenses.
They have defeated me!

Nehemiah Let us now dedicate the finished wall of Jerusalem.
Bring everyone from all the towns to celebrate
with thanksgiving, gladness and songs accompanied by
cymbals, harps and stringed instruments.

Hanani Nehemiah, for the first time in our history,
we have all finally turned away totally and forever from idols.
That is because God punished our idolatry
by letting cruel idolaters hold us captive for 70 years.
Now God lets us dwell peacefully in our own cities.

Prompter & Echoes Hallelujah!