

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
DECEMBER07 2024

hungry for more

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 7–13.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 56; 57.
Key Text: Nehemiah 8:8.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This week's lesson is focused on a day of worship on which the people gathered to hear the reading of God's law and sought to understand its meaning. The walls had been repaired and the gates restored, but much of the city still lay in ruins. The work of restoration done by Nehemiah and the people demonstrated a visual symbol of the renewal that was taking place in the lives of the Jewish people: hopeful progress, yet still work to be done.

As the congregation gathered, the aged prophet Ezra read the law to the people. But the law was not simply *read;* it was *explained*. Unfamiliar with God's law and His will for them, the throng gathered hungry for instruction. Their knowledge of God was thin and they were starving to hear and know. On their feet they stood, listened, and responded with an emphatic, "Amen, amen!" Clearly the language of the law was foreign, but the spirit of God's enduring message through the feasts and services of the Temple still stirred them to respond. "All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law" (Nehemiah 8:9, NIV). But Nehemiah, sensing their conviction, longed for them to enjoy the grace of God, so he challenged them to be joyful about the good news they had heard. Of course, the Levites agreed, but added, "be still." Not as a contradiction, but to add to Nehemiah's encouragement a way to make the joy stay: "Be still, let this great message of God's mercy and plan sink in deep."

If this story reminds us of our spiritual journey, then it is appropriate that the story of Nehemiah include a day of worship that celebrates God's grace as the source of our spiritual growth.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the role of worship in our relationship with God. *(Know)*
- Sense the joy and grace of God in worship. *(Feel)*
- Choose to seize sacred moments as a time for reminders, rebirth, renewal. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Law of God, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 19: "The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God's covenant with His people and the standard in God's judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, and its fruit is obedience to the Commandments. This obedience develops Christian character and results in a sense of well-being. It is evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow human beings. The obedience of faith demonstrates the power of Christ to transform lives, and

therefore strengthens Christian witness." (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Psalm 19:7-14; 40:7, 8; Matthew 5:17-20; 22:36-40; John 14:15; 15:7-10; Romans 8:3, 4; Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 8:8-10; 1 John 2:3; 5:3; Revelation 12:17; 14:12.)

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

This week the *What Do You Think?* activity invites students to rank the kind of activities that are most meaningful to them in worship. These items are more general, but they capture principles of worship that are essential to our spiritual growth. As students indicate which are more meaningful, invite them to explore why the other expressions are not. In some cases, it is because they simply don't try it or have experience with that form. You might ask: "Which of these expressions of worship would you like to experience more than you do now? Why?"

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Fifty thousand people gathered for the event: a regular season football game. The sights, the sounds, the smells were quite normal for such an event. Even the opening ceremonies followed the standard operating procedure: introductions and the national anthem. During the national anthem I noticed the mood of the crowd shift slightly, more reflectively, as the big TV screens showed close-up shots of people in the crowd who recognized the reverence of the moment. A man stood next to me and my son who stood attentive and fixed on the flag, tears welling up in his eyes. Throughout the course of the game I spoke with him about many things, but his demeanor during the opening ceremony made sense when he informed me that he had served in the United States Marines. Everything clicked at that point. His posture. His story. His values. I asked him what goes through his mind when the national anthem is played and people aren't paying attention. He smiled and said, "At first I would get angry. Now I just hope and pray that everyone will someday get a chance to feel the pride and respect I have for my country."

Sometimes we hear people describe a significant experience as "having a moment." In this week's lesson the people of God stop and "have a moment" together, learning, crying, shouting for joy, and feasting in celebration of God's amazing love and care for His children. How would you describe those moments with God? Are they few and far between?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

As you think about your national pride and the feelings you have for your country, how does your national pride compare to the respect and emotion you feel toward God? As you read the story for this week's lesson and note the dynamics, the genuine desire to hear, and the overall experience of God's presence, think about your own worship experiences and the moments you have been reminded of God's grace and have been reborn.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- *Circle* the word "understand" throughout this passage. How many times is there a phrase that refers to the teachers or hearers as being able to understand what was read? Why do you think there is much emphasis on the phrase "able to understand"?
- What other key verses or phrases emerge as you read this story?
- How would you characterize the worshippers gathered at this sacred service?
- What is their attitude toward the Word of God? How long are they engaged in worship?
- What is the one verse in this story that you think is central to understanding what is happening in the passage?
- In this story is there a
  — truth to believe?
  — promise to claim?
  — behavior to adopt?
- What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?

- Nehemiah tells the people to eat and drink and rejoice, while the Levites tell them to "be still." What do you think that interchange is about?

Extra Teacher's Questions

- What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?
- What part of this story really arrests your attention today? Why?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Acts 2; Luke 19:38-40; Psalm 98:4; Isaiah 49:13; Psalm 46:10.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The lesson for this week is a storied celebration of worship occurring at the time of the Feast of Trumpets, as Ellen White describes it: "It was the time of the Feast of Trumpets. Many were gathered at Jerusalem. The scene was one of mournful interest. The wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and the gates set up, but a large part of the city was still in ruins" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 661).

There are seven Jewish feasts given by God to be celebrated each year, notwithstanding the seventh-day Sabbath occurring every week.

The first four feasts come in the spring (April or May) together in succession:

1. The Passover
2. Unleavened Bread, for 7 days after the Passover
3. Firstfruits, the last day of Unleavened Bread
4. Pentecost, 50 days after Passover

Then there is a break until fall (September or October) and three more feasts occur in succession:

5. The Feast of Trumpets, for 10 days

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Active Participation and Reflection

There are two teaching techniques that are actually demonstrated in this week's lesson. One tool is the active participation and celebration of new knowledge—affirmation. Whenever a student says something or does something in class that enriches the experience, affirmation is crucial. To acknowledge a skill learned or a concept understood deepens the students' desire to try again. Simply watch how children respond to people who affirm them—they are drawn to them. The other tool is a reflective piece in this story. The Levites ask the people to "be still" because reflection is key to the learning process as well. Both are done in joy, but are two different activities that need to be fostered in classrooms and churches.

RABBI 101

cornerstoneconnections

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Prophets and Kings. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

6. The Day of Atonement, at the end, 10 days later
7. The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, five days later

The people gathered to celebrate the great feasts of the seventh month as well as seize the time for religious instruction. The title of this lesson is "Hungry for More," which captures the earnest spirit of this gathering to learn more about a God they had almost forgotten. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* comments: "Not content with existing conditions, they desired to reach a higher level in their spiritual experience and were convinced that the hearing of God's Word would benefit them" (vol. 3, p. 425).

The time of corporate worship has arrived. The walls are rebuilt, but the city is still broken. The people are clearly ignorant of so much of their heritage and identity as Hebrews. But in spite of their lack of understanding and experience, they are hungry to know, to experience, and to obey God, which is portrayed in this wonderful story. Ezra's work has not gone on in vain. Nehemiah's efforts have been a success. The people of God are postured to renewed growth and obedience to God's plan for their life. The worship ends in seasons of feasting, joy, and somber reflection of what this all might mean to them.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have the students think of events in their lives in which they were so impacted by a worship experience that they felt compelled to respond in some way. Challenge them to think of an example, share their experiences with the person sitting next to them, and again with the rest of the class if they want.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

This story is a classic demonstration of our hunger to learn and grow once we discover the truth of God's amazing mercy and plan for our lives. We are deeply affected by what God has done for us and so determined to know more that we must respond. What is so beautiful about what we learn in this story is that as broken and unfinished as we might be, there is joy, confidence, peace, and safety in our knowledge of Christ. What an awesome picture to see broken people with new construction all around them be so joyful about the possibilities of new growth. Perhaps this is why Paul writes: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, NIV). So when you, like those people in Nehemiah's day, finally understand God's message in His Word, you will rejoice and respond with gratitude for God's ability to save you and make you whole.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Prophets and Kings* (or *Royalty and Ruin*),* chapters 56; 57.

*A special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
DECEMBER07 2024

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 7–13.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 56; 57.

hungry for more



THINKSTOCK

flashlight

"Every true turning to the Lord brings abiding joy into the life. When a sinner yields to the influence of the Holy Spirit, he sees his own guilt and defilement in contrast with the holiness of the great Searcher of hearts. . . . It is God's glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 668).

key text

"They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read."

(Nehemiah 8:8, NIV)

what do you think?

Rank the statements below according to which you think are the most meaningful ways to respond to God's mercy in worship.

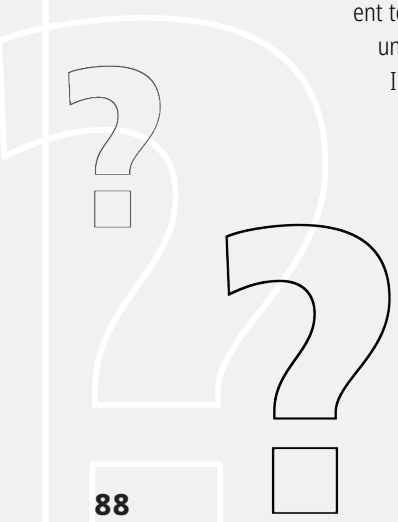
The best way to show gratitude and commitment to God for His grace is . . .

___ joyful celebration
___ thoughtful reflection
___ faithful obedience
___ frequent retelling of the story of redemption
___ excellence in worship, praise, and music

did you know?

The people of God lost sight of the importance of keeping His law. Judah had intermarried and become mixed with other nations so much that they had lost their connection with the language of the law of God. This is why there were people present to help the people understand.

In Jewish thought, the people's standing is understood to reflect complete silence.



INTO THE STORY

"So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

"Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

"Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

"The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understand what was being read.

"Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.' For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

"Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.'

"The Levites calmed all the people, saying, 'Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.'

"Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

"On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. They found written in the Law, which the LORD

had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: 'Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters'—as it is written."

(Nehemiah 8:2-15, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Circle the word "understand" throughout this passage. How many times is there a phrase that refers to the teachers or hearers as being able to understand what was read? Why do you think there is much emphasis on the phrase "able to understand"?

_____

How would you characterize the worshippers gathered at this sacred service? What is their attitude toward the Word of God? How long are they engaged in worship?

_____

In this story is there a . . .
truth to believe?
promise to claim?
behavior to adopt?

What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?

_____

Ezra and Nehemiah warned the Israelites about the dangers of intermarriages with the surrounding nations who were idolaters. According to Ezra 9:12, 14, how were the people required to keep God's law if they were to receive His blessings?

_____

Similar to Ezra, what caused Nehemiah distress based on the account from Nehemiah 13:23-25? What aspect of Solomon's life led to his downfall and illustrates the consequences of intermarriages (see Nehemiah 13:26)? Since the principles of God's law are eternal, how will you use this understanding from the Bible to guide your decisions when choosing a spouse?

_____

_____

punch lines

"Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" **(Psalm 103:1-5, NIV).**

"This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it' " **(Isaiah 30:15, NIV).**

"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess" **(Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, NIV).**

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few" **(Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2, NIV).**

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" **(Acts 3:19, NIV).**

further insight

"Nehemiah's efforts to restore the worship of the true God had been crowned with success. As long as the people were true to the oath they had taken, as long as they were obedient to God's word, so long would the Lord fulfill His promise by pouring rich blessings upon them."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 668

(Use the Notes section in the back of this journal to record your answers to this week's questions.)

Sabbath

Read Hebrews 5:12.

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age" (Fundamental Belief 19, The Law of God).

The people of Judah met to be reintroduced to God and His law, but many of those present had been slaves and were bought back to freedom by Nehemiah and others. Sadly, some were unfamiliar with God, His law, and even the language, so that the worship leaders had to explain the message in plain, simple language. Describe the similarities between the Hebrews in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament based on today's Bible text.

Sunday

Read Nehemiah 8:5, 6.

Read the passage in the *Into the Story* section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. As you survey the spectacular day of worship and renewal you may notice the genuine heartfelt response of the people to God. The walls are up but much of the city is in disrepair, which is symbolic of where the people are as well. Their hearts are sincere, but their understanding of God and His will has a long way to go. What part of this story inspires you personally, and why?

Monday

Read Nehemiah 8:8.

How many times have you opened God's Word and struggled to understand the meaning or the point of the passage? Some feel as if the Bible is a magic book, that if you only open the pages then something should happen. But more often than not, Bible study and your devotion to God come as a result of simple, consistent conversation and communion. Take a moment to think about what you can do to connect with God in a more regular way so that the Word of God and your overall experience is familiar instead of awkward.

Tuesday

Read Luke 15:7, 10.

In this week's *Flashlight* quote from *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White reminds people how much God waits to restore and rejoice with the sinner who comes to God in faith. She states: "It is God's glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation" (p. 668). How does this picture of God match with your perception? How often have you resisted praying or coming close to God because of the distance that has grown between you and Him? Even though it seems awkward, consider how much God wants to reconcile! Maybe you know someone who is distant and doesn't feel like they can return to God or even speak to Him because of their shame. Begin today by praying for them and perhaps gently sharing with them this insight.

Wednesday

Read Deuteronomy 30:15, 16.

The *Punch Lines* in this week's lesson represent an array of themes in this story. *Repentance*, *worship*, and *consecration* are a few examples you may notice in the texts given. Which text speaks to you personally? Which text captures the essence of the worship service taking place in this week's story? When in your life has a worship experience made an indelible mark on your spiritual growth? What key elements of the service do you remember the most? Why?

Thursday

Read Nehemiah 8:10-12; Psalm 95:6, 7; Psalm 100:1, 2; and Luke 19:46.

In this week's lesson we view a worship service filled with beautiful images of God's people reconnecting with Him and reconsecrating their lives to His purpose. So many good things happen in this worship service that the people are not sure how to react. Knowing how to respond to God's grace is not something that should be legislated or manufactured. The exercise of being still and quiet is extremely helpful to your soul, but so is praising God out of a grateful heart. Do both this week. Find ways to express your joy and find ways to be still and let your praise sink in and internally transform you from the inside out.

Friday

Read Psalm 33:1; Psalm 46:10; Psalm 109:30; and James 5:13.

Have you ever clapped out of praise when no one else clapped or said "Amen" all by yourself? Think about how God feels when we come to Him in worship and how glad He is that we are there. It is hard to imagine God finally getting our attention only to inform us of the correct posture and program that He prefers us to praise Him with. If this story gives us anything to think about, it is the simple way God calls us to return to Him and the personal way in which we freely worship and show our gratitude.

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapters 56; 57.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.