

# Ezra Reads The Law

Nehemiah 8:1-9:5

## **MEMORY VERSE**

NEHEMIAH 9:5

“Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!”

## **WHAT YOU WILL NEED:**

A small mirror.

A couple of large bed sheets and as an option, several sheets of green or brown construction paper for leaves and branches.

Enough copies of the Mini-Scrolls template to give one scripture strip to each child in your class, one straw for each child and tape.

## **ATTENTION GETTER!**

### **Looking In a Mirror**

Have your class sit down in a circle. Ask the children to remember when they woke up this morning and looked into a mirror, what did they see? Did anything need to be changed from what they saw? What did they do about what they saw in the mirror (maybe mom or dad helped)? What do mirrors help us to see?

Before class, set a small mirror in a Bible. Pass the Bible around from child to child and open it to the place where the mirror is. Tell each of them not to shout out what they see. When everyone has had an opportunity to see it, then ask the class as a whole what they saw (a mirror). Read James 1:22-25 and ask them how is the Word of God like a mirror. What kinds of things do we see? What can we do about those things we see in our lives that need changing?

## LESSON TIME!

In previous lessons, we have introduced Nehemiah and Ezra. We have recently been learning about Nehemiah and Ezra. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem almost 100 years after the decree went out from King Cyrus that the Jewish people could go back to their homeland and rebuild. Ezra and Nehemiah were good leaders. Ezra had already been in Jerusalem for a long time before Nehemiah got there. Together, because of their desire to serve the Lord, they they were able to lead the people back to worship. When they arrived, not much had been rebuilt, and there were not any walls or gates. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Many people were working against Nehemiah, but the Lord was with His people as they persevered.

Finally, the wall was rebuilt. The Lord had used Nehemiah and now the people were filled with joy.

In today's lesson, Nehemiah and the people are celebrating the completion of the city wall. During this time of celebration, Ezra reads God's Word.

What a great day for the people to recommit themselves to the Lord. Finally, they were able to celebrate their religious feasts in the temple. They had spent 70 years in captivity, but God was so faithful. We will learn about the power of God's Word and how **God's word should have an important place in our lives.**

NOTE: Have the children stand during this reading, it will illustrate verse 5!

## NEHEMIAH 8:1-8

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.

So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

The Israelites were settling back into their towns and all around the new wall of Jerusalem. When the seventh month came around, called Tishi, they knew from the book of the law that it was a day for a sacred assembly. They were ready to worship and assembled before the Water Gate. It is interesting that the gate had a name. There were 12 gates around Jerusalem and each one had a name? Did you learn any of their names when you studied Nehemiah chapter 3? Ten gates are mentioned in chapter 3 and two more in chapter 12.

So there they were, all who spoke and could understand Hebrew. They stood in the square from daybreak until noon listening to the Book of the Law. This would be the first five books of our Bible. That is a long time to stand up listening to someone read from the Scriptures.

In those days, all of the mothers had their young children with them everywhere they went. There were not any public schools or day care centers. There was no such thing as Sunday school or snack time, or craft time either. All of the children were with their parents, listening to God's Word being read.

The Scriptures say they listened very closely. They were focused, using their ears along with their mind so that they learned something. They let the words from the law soak in. The Levites were helping people to understand what was being read. Verse 8 says Ezra had helpers too. The men were fellow priests. We met some of them in chapter 3. Their sons were helping rebuild the gates and sections of the city wall.

As the people were standing before the gate, Ezra read and clearly explained God's Word. Just as Ezra and the people before the gate, we need to read God's Word and allow it to soak into our minds and heart. Today we have pastors and teachers like those in Ezra's time who help us to understand God's Word.

God's Word had a powerful effect on the people. They shouted "amen," which means, "so be it" or "I agree". God's Word also led them in praise and worship to the Lord. They desired to obey God and His Word. That is the effect that God's Word should have on us today. We should be excited to study God's Word and allow it to produce Christ's likeness in our lives. **God's Word should have an important place in our lives.**

### NEHEMIAH 8:9-12

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."

And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

God's Word had such an effect on the people that many of them began to weep. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the Word of God is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword". God uses His Word to convict us of sin, point out areas of our lives that need changing, and encourages us to holiness. The people no doubt were confronted with their sin and then desired to turn away from their sin and renew their commitment to God.

The Bible is so important for us to study and become familiar with. James says in his epistle that God's Word is like a mirror. We can look into God's Word and see ourselves as God sees us. Then we can either ignore what we see or do something about it. We can make changes and commit ourselves to following God's ways. The people in our story heard God's Word; they were sad when they realized their sin, and they decided to do something about it. **God's Word should have an important place in our lives.**

But God was not angry at the people. He was compassionate and forgiving. Ezra tells them, "Do not grieve. This day is sacred to the Lord, it's time to rejoice! It's a day to eat, drink and be merry for the Lord has shown mercy and favor on us once again...Let's celebrate. The joy of the Lord is our strength." God was blessed by the people's hearts. He wanted this day to be a day of celebration, not sadness. God loves us so much and He is so pleased when we turn our lives to Him and follow His instructions. When we obey God's Word, there are always such blessings and even celebration!

## Making a Booth

Bring a couple of large bedsheets to class with you. Using chairs or other items in your classroom allow the children to set up a booth. Just tell the children to work together to make a “fort” and they will know exactly what to do. Try to make it large enough for all of the children to go into. (As an option you can allow the children to make leaves or palm branches from construction paper to place over their booth).

Use this time to share with the children the section of scripture talking about the “booths.” For further study read Leviticus 23 and Nehemiah 8:14.

### NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month,

and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written."

Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim.

So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

As the people heard the law once again they discovered something very important. They had been neglecting a feast that God had commanded in His Word. It was one of three main feasts called the feast of tabernacles, or booths. God established this feast so the Israelites could remember the years of wandering in the wilderness before coming into the Promised Land. The tabernacle or booth (a tent) represented the temporary dwelling places the Israelites lived in before settling down permanently in the new land.

The Israelites were commanded to live in the tents for seven days. They made the tents from branches. They cooked in them and they slept under them. The story of this feast and its regulations is found in Leviticus 23.

Verse 17 from our reading says all the people (perhaps thousands) who had returned from exile built the booths and lived in them for these seven days. Just think if all the families in our church went out and had such a camp meeting, reading God's Word together every day for eight days. What an interesting week that would be! The Scripture says that the feast had not been celebrated like that for a long time. They were very joyful. When we obey God's Word, it produces joy in our lives. **God's Word should have an important place in our lives.**

## NEHEMIAH 9:1-5

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.

Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said: "Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! "Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

Next we see the Israelites turning from feasting to fasting. God's Word had done some amazing things in their lives. They are truly being changed. The people wanted to please the Lord and do all His Word said. They were truly sorry for their past sins and wanted to change. God was doing some wonderful things in the people's lives.

God's Word can produce the same things in our lives. We need to read God's Word and make it a priority in our lives. God's Word is a living and powerful book. We should always pray before we read the Bible, asking the Lord to help us to understand it. He promises that He will help us understand it through the Holy Spirit. Then we need to commit to obey His Word. We need to be willing to make any changes that might be necessary in our lives and do everything that God's Word says.

If we have sinned, we need to confess it. If we have forgotten something important about the Lord, we need to remember it. If we have neglected our relationship with Him we need to get back to where we need to be with Him. God has given us His Word for our benefit. **God's Word should have an important place in our lives.**

## **Mini-Scrolls**

In our story today, Ezra read the law from scrolls. Using the enclosed template cut out the scripture strips of Deuteronomy 30:8-10. Make as many copies as the number of children in your class (you can request tan paper ahead of time).

Using one straw for each child have them cut it in half. At the ends of each scripture strip tape the straw placing one half of the straw at each end. Write for them or allow the children to write their name on the back of the scroll. Roll both ends to make a scroll

Reinforce the importance of God's Word and how God wants us to make the Word of God important in our lives.

## **PRAYER**

Lead the children in prayer. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.

“And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all his commandments, which I command you today. The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as he rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

*Deuteronomy 30:8-10*

“And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all his commandments, which I command you today. The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as he rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

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*Deuteronomy 30:8-10*