



God's Word Proclaimed

10

Key Theme

- God wants us to study His Word.

Key Passages

- Nehemiah 8:1–12, 9:1–38, 10:28–29

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how the Jews came to conviction of their sin.
- Describe the response of the Jews after hearing the Law read.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “Whom are you teaching?”

Students will practice the memory verse by working on a crossword puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend.

- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Studying God's Word

The people asked Ezra to read from God's Word. All who could understand listened and responded as Ezra read the Law of Moses out loud until midday. As they heard the Word of God, their hearts were changed. They recalled God's holiness, wept because of their sin, confessed their sins, and worshipped God.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.
- Read through the lesson key passages and Prepare to Share.



Activity 2: Exalt the Lord Game

During the Exalt the Lord Game, students will hear some of the blessings of God and the sins of the people of Israel as recorded in Nehemiah 9.

- Exalt (Bingo) Card for each student. Be sure to use all six different cards.
- Exalt the Lord Game Teacher Guide
- Call Out Cards in a jar
- Space covers for the cards—buttons, candy, beans, pennies, etc.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

In our last lesson, we learned about Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem under King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah succeeded in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem under the guiding hand of God, and he continued as the governor over Jerusalem and the surrounding area for 12 years until he returned to Persia in 442 BC (Nehemiah 13:6). During Nehemiah's time as governor, he was zealous to help the people return to a right view of God and to obey Him and worship Him rightly.

Ezra, who led the second return to Jerusalem, was still alive in Jerusalem during this time. As we heard earlier, Ezra was a priest and scribe who had studied God's Law extensively (Ezra 7:10). His desire was to teach the Law in Israel, but his efforts must have fallen short. He had trained some men in the Law, but the people as a whole were still ignorant of what God required of them.

In order that the Law could be taught to the people, a platform was built and the people assembled in Jerusalem to learn. Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Moses to all the people assembled from morning until noon (Nehemiah 8:1–6). As Ezra opened the scrolls, he blessed God, and the people bowed in reverence to their God. Many teachers shared in the responsibility of explaining what the words recorded meant for the people.

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. (Nehemiah 8:7–8)

Notice what these teachers did—they helped the people understand what was written and gave them the sense of the text. This had always been the

responsibility of the priests and elders of Israel, but it had been neglected for so long that nobody even knew what God expected of them. These teachers took the words recorded by Moses and broke them down to explain what they meant. With this help, the people were able to recognize their sinfulness and how they fell short of what God required of them. They wept and mourned over their sin (8:9).

But as the day was “holy to the Lord your God” (8:9), Nehemiah, Ezra, and the other leaders encouraged them to praise God and be thankful for all that God had done for them. They had so much to be thankful for. “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (8:10). The people were able to rejoice in their understanding of the words of God and the knowledge that He rewards obedience and pardons sin. That was reason to celebrate.

After this initial teaching event, the people found in the Law that they were to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, and so they celebrated in booths for the first time since the days of Joshua (8:13–18). The Jews continued to respond positively to the teaching of God's Law. Similar to Isaiah's proclamation (Isaiah 55:10–13), the word of the Lord was going out and accomplishing what He sent it for—to bring change to the hearts of those who hear the truth.

As the people learned more from the teaching of the Law, they continued to have a repentant attitude and to focus themselves on the right worship of God (Nehemiah 9:1–3). In response to God, the priests and teachers overflowed in a glorious tribute to God and all that He had done for the Jews in the past. In a sense, they were giving a history lesson through a poem proclaimed aloud to the people (9:4–38). The people repented, and God was glorified through the proclamation of His Word by the teachers who honored Him. All of this was sealed with an oath to walk in God's Law and to observe all of the commands that they now understood (10:28–29).

By way of application, it is so important for us to study God's Word so that we know what He desires of us and commands us to do. Jesus said, “Have you not

read . . . ?” in many different situations to remind the false teachers in Israel that what is set forth in the Scriptures, the Old Testament at that time, is the authority. It is the authority because it has come from God and, as His creatures, we must submit to His authority. Part of that submission is to study what God has said so that we can understand what God expects of us.

As you teach this lesson, you have the opportunity to proclaim the truths of God’s Word, as Ezra did, and then explain the meaning to your students, as the other teachers did. This is both a great opportunity and a great responsibility. God has established teachers within the church and given the gifts of the Spirit to build up the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11–16). As you teach this lesson, remind your students that while God does want us to obey His commands, Jesus Christ has already fulfilled those commands perfectly and His righteousness can be credited to our account. Recognizing sin is the first step toward repentance and celebrating the forgiveness that God offers through Jesus Christ. Proclaim that truth and help those listening to understand how God would have them respond.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Since the beginning of the world, God has called His creatures to obey His commands. In the garden, Adam and Eve were to tend to the plants and avoid eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They failed to keep that command and introduced sin into the world. Since that time, God has revealed His commands to the people of the earth. However, there is a clear pattern—people constantly fail to obey God’s commands. That disobedience is rooted in the sin nature that passed to all mankind from Adam.

But to those who have received the forgiveness available through Christ for sins, past and present, there is no condemnation for disobedience and no fear of punishment (Romans 8:1–4; 1 John 4:16–18). Christ has paid the penalty for those sins in full. Now

unshackled from our old natures, we are free to obey Him and keep His commandments. Many people, Christian or not, misunderstand this idea and think that Christians must be constantly obeying to earn God’s favor. But Christ has earned God’s favor for us, and we now have the joy of serving Him and obeying His commands in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8–10). We can surely block our fellowship with God through disobedience and grieve His Spirit, but His love for us remains, and as we turn to Him in repentance, that fellowship is restored.

One mark of a true Christian is to be obeying the commands of Christ (1 John 2:1–6). As Jesus was giving His disciples final instructions before He ascended to heaven, He called them to make disciples, teaching them to obey His commands (Matthew 28:18–20). As Christians continue in the work of making disciples, we must continue to teach the commands of Christ. But if we don’t know what those commands are, we can’t teach them to others. We must be diligent to study God’s Word so that the blind are not leading the blind and that we are able to fulfill Christ’s call to make disciples.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord, I join with the Israelites in saying Amen! Amen! Your Word is living and powerful. It is a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart. You speak to me through your Word each time I open its delicate pages and read. Your Words are a comfort and strength to me in times of trial. How precious are the times you bring them to my mind in joy and in sorrow. Please move in the hearts of my students to treasure your Word, study it, and memorize it, too.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.



Review

We are coming very near the end of our study through the Old Testament. We have moved through roughly 3,600 years of earth's history in our two-year study. Although the book of Nehemiah comes relatively early in the pages of the Bible, it is the last recorded historical narrative. Malachi may be the only book written after Nehemiah, but it is a prophetic book, not narrative.

- ? Who can give me a summary of the activity we talked about in last week's lesson, the account of Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem?
Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem with the blessing of the king. He organized the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem in the face of much opposition.
- ? What did we conclude about the connection between praying and acting by

examining Nehemiah's life? *Our prayers should not keep us from acting, nor should our actions keep us from praying. Both are demonstrations of our trust in God. God will accomplish His perfect plans through both.*

God was pleased to use Nehemiah as a tool to lead the Jews in the rebuilding effort, but Nehemiah was constantly seeking God in prayer. Nehemiah understood his dependence on God as he acted. Our responsibility does not preclude trusting in God, and our trust in God does not preclude fulfilling our responsibilities.

Today we are going to continue looking at Nehemiah's role in restoring Jerusalem. Rather than rebuilding the wall, our lesson today looks at his restoration of a reverence for the Word of God among the people of God.



- Write on the board, "Whom are you teaching?"



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Let's read Nehemiah 8:1–12 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **When did the events of chapter 8 take place?** *Looking back to the end of chapter 7, we see it was in the seventh month, Tishri (September/October). 8:2 also calls it the first day of the seventh month. Since the wall was completed on the 25th day of the sixth month, we have moved ahead three days (there are 28 days in the lunar month).*
- ? **As the people assembled, what did they ask of Ezra?** *They told Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses.*
- ? **Look ahead to 8:18 and 9:3. What other names are given for the Law?** *It is called The Book of the Law of God, and the Lord their God, rather than Moses. This is a strong argument for the inspiration of Scripture, God speaking through Moses.*

- ? **Who was in the audience?** *Men and women from Israel as well as the children who could understand the teaching gathered together.*
- ? **Why was Ezra asked to do this?** *Ezra had trained and studied to teach the law (Ezra 7:10) and was sent by Artaxerxes to do this. He was also a priest and had the responsibility of leading and teaching the people.*
- ? **How long did Ezra teach?** *From morning to midday, so about 6 hours.*
- ? **From where did he teach?** *They had built a raised wooden platform for him to speak from.*
- ? **How did the people behave during the reading?** *They were attentive.*
- ? **How did the people respond to Ezra's blessing of God?** *They offered worship to God, lifting their hands and bowing their heads.*
- ? **What was the role of the other men mentioned in the passage?** *These other men assisted the people in understanding what had been read from the Law. They may have been bringing specific applications or just explaining the passages for the aid of the understanding of the people. They also may have been translating from Hebrew to Aramaic for some who had lived their whole lives in captivity.*
- ? **How did the people respond to the reading of the Law?** *They wept and mourned.*
- ? **Why did they respond this way?** *They were convicted of their sin and were saddened by having violated God's Law.*
- ? **How did the priests instruct them to act?** *They told them to stop mourning and to enjoy the feast that had been prepared.*
- ? **How is it that the teachers could tell them to stop mourning and to celebrate?** *Even in the face of their sin, God was faithful and they could find joy in knowing that He was their strength. They had heard of the ways that they had violated God's Law, but they had also heard of the promises of God to reward those who obey His Law. They celebrated God's goodness with a feast.*

Discover the Truth

Turn back to Deuteronomy 31 and listen as I read verses 10 to 13. *Read the passage after the students turn there.*

Deuteronomy 31:10–13

What Ezra had just done was to fulfill the command of God given through Moses almost 1,000 years earlier. He read the Book of the Law of Moses to the people in the seventh month. The men, women, and children were taught to fear the Lord and obey His commands. This coincided with the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles as described in 8:13–18, and Ezra continued to read from the Book of the Law and teach the people. The people celebrated all that God had done for them and offered the sacrifices for their sins that God had commanded of them.

God had been faithful to the people. He had brought them out of the captivity just as He had said He would. Knowing what God had done in the past gave the people hope for the future. They had wept over their sin, but they rejoiced in the Lord who was their strength.

FAITHFUL

READ THE WORD

After hearing and being taught the Law of God for many days, the people continued to recognize their sinfulness before God. We are going to read the opening part of chapter 9 and then a portion of chapter 10.

Nehemiah 9:1–8

Will someone read 9:1–8 for us? *Comment that the rest of chapter 9 recounts the mighty deeds God had done in Israel's history, and then read 9:38.*

Nehemiah 10:28–29

Now will someone please read Nehemiah 10:28–29? *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

► If time allows, read all of chapter 9 as a glorious acknowledgement of God's provision.

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **How had the hearing and understanding of God's Law affected the people?** *They confessed their sins before God and repented of them, separating themselves from the foreigners to worship God as He had prescribed.*
- ? **What clues from the text point to the honesty of their confessions?** *They clothed themselves in sackcloth and put dust on their heads. There was also an extended period of confession and worship.*
- ? **After the glorious prayer of praise to God and more confession of sin, what did the leaders of the people do?** *They signed a covenant to walk in God's Law and observe and do all of the commandments, ordinances, and statutes.*
- ? **How did the people respond?** *They joined with the leaders in accepting the covenant.*
- ? **What does the phrase "entered into a curse and an oath" mean in verse 10:29?** *This idea of receiving God's blessing for obeying His covenant was an important part of Old Testament theology. The language in this passage is very similar to Deuteronomy 30:15–20, words the Israelites would have been recently reminded of as they studied over the last month. If the Israelites obeyed God in the Promised Land, they would be blessed; if they disobeyed, they would be cursed. The Jews were reaffirming the covenant God had made with them.*

Discover the Truth

The people in Jerusalem heard the truth of God's Word proclaimed and had it taught to them, so they repented of their ignorance and their sin and reaffirmed their commitment to and reliance upon God and the truth revealed in His Word. The Book of the Law of God was now fresh in the minds of the people, and the leaders were teaching God's truth rather than man's ideas. God wants us to study His Word so that we might better know Him and worship Him.



Deuteronomy 30:15–20



Exalt the Lord Game

MATERIALS

- Exalt (Bingo) Cards
- Exalt the Lord Game Teacher Guide
- Call Out Cards in a jar
- Space covers for the cards— buttons, candy, beans, pennies, etc.

INSTRUCTIONS

Pass out the Exalt the Lord Game (Bingo) Cards and space covers. We are going to play a game like Bingo. But instead of matching numbers, you will be matching the statements I read to you. The statements are from the Bible. Some statements are promises from God. The others are the sins of the people. The first one to match 5 statements in a row can call out exalt the Lord."

- ? Before we start, take a look at what is written on your card. Can one of you read a square that names a blessing from God? *Call on a student to read one of the blessing squares.*
- ? And who can find a square that names a sin that the people committed? *Have a student read one of the squares that names a sin.*

The people were sorry when they heard the Word and were reminded of God's blessings.

Let's play! Listen carefully to what I read and try to quickly find it on your cards. *Read the Call Out Cards one at a time. Give the students time to find the proper square on their game cards.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Nehemiah 9 records many of God's blessings. It also contains some reminders of sins that the people committed. As you know, the children of Israel weren't always faithful. Many times they turned away from God. But when they heard the Word of the Lord read out loud, they understood what it said, and their hearts were changed. They wanted to confess their sins and remember the mercies of God. They had a renewed desire to live lives that would be pleasing to God. And it all started by hearing and believing the Word of God!



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Throughout our study of the Old Testament we have seen a cycle of people hearing of God and seeing His great acts and then forgetting them, only to slide into idolatry and eventual repentance. This cycle continued for over 1,000 years. Nehemiah was just another of the people God chose to use to bring His people to repentance for neglecting their duty to follow Him. Likewise, Ezra had studied and prepared himself to teach

and live God's Law. These men, along with the others who helped them, played an instrumental role in reacquainting the Jews with God's words and commands and teaching them the meaning of the text.

God wants us to study His Word today, just as He wanted the Jews to study it throughout history. It is the neglect of the careful and diligent study of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, that leads to many errors, and to much sin. We see this demonstrated over and over again in Western culture as what God has clearly revealed in the Bible is ignored, and men continue to seek after their own version of the truth.

As students of God's Word, we must be proclaiming and explaining God's Word to all who will listen. Even though we live in a culture that had many Christian influences, that influence is fading quickly. We need to be like Ezra and set our minds and hearts to studying God's Word that we might live it and teach it to everyone we can influence. This means different things for different people, but we can all be excited to teach someone the things we know about God from His Word and by His Spirit.

But we can't stop at calling people to obey the outward commands, we must call them to repent of their sin and trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. He has offered the perfect sacrifice for sin, and we can use the truths of God's Word to help people understand their miserable state and the glorious Savior. We can only hope to see people weeping at their sinfulness, but then turning to worship God as they understand His goodness in sending Jesus to rescue us.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **What can we learn from the failure of the leaders and priests of Israel to teach God's Word as they had been called to?** *While we cannot remove the responsibility of the common people, God had clearly charged the leaders and the priests with the teaching and proclamation of God's Word. We are all called to be making disciples. Different people within the body will fill different roles, but we must all be fulfilling our roles so that the body can be healthy and functioning in a way that honors Christ.*
- ? **How have you experienced repentance as a result of hearing or reading God's Word?** *As we hear the truths of God's commands in Scripture, the Holy Spirit works to convince us of the sinfulness of our actions and calls us to repent.*

? **What is the importance of using the words of Scripture to help people understand their sinfulness before a holy God?** *As Paul describes in Romans 7:7, the Law helps us understand sin so that we might repent of it. Paul uses the example of covetousness, one of the Ten Commandments, to show how the Law condemns us under our own sin and points us to our need for a Savior. The bad news of our violation of God's commands helps us to appreciate the need for the good news of our penalty being paid by Christ's death on the Cross.*

? **What factors have contributed to the ignorance of God and His laws in our society? What can we do to help change those things?** *Discuss various answers, but make sure to point to the authority of Scripture and the hope of the gospel as the remedy, not simply changing laws and reforming the government systems.*

? **What are we, as a local body, doing well to live out the truths of this lesson? Where can we improve?** *Discuss various answers.*



MEMORY VERSE

Nehemiah 9:6 You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for revealing Himself to us in His Word.
- Praise God for His faithfulness to forgive us of our sins in Christ.
- Ask God for wisdom in making disciples and teaching His truths by the power of the Holy Spirit.

