

# 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? 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. 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 past lessons, we introduced Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem almost 100 years after the decree went out from King Cyrus permitting the Jewish people to go back to their homeland and rebuild. Nehemiah led the children of Israel in the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. Do you remember Ezra? He was a skilled scribe in the law of Moses. He had led a small group to Babylon several years before Nehemiah came on the scene. The Bible says, “Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Upon his return to Jerusalem, he found the people of Judah were, once more, disobeying God. He led the nation in repentance and renewal.

At this time, the wall around Jerusalem had been completed. The Israelites were settling back into their towns and all around the new wall of Jerusalem. When the seventh month came around, called Tishi, the people gathered in front of the Water Gate for a day of sacred assembly. During this time of celebration, Ezra stood on a wood platform and began to read God’s Word.

*Note:* You may want to ask the children to 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.

So, the people who had gathered at the Water Gate listened as Ezra read—all who could understand. They stood in the square from daybreak until noon (about 5 or 6 hours) listening to the Book of the Law (the first five books of our Bible)—that’s a long time to stand!

The Scriptures say they listened very closely. They were focused! They let the words from the law soak in. The Levites were helping people to understand what was being read. Ezra had helpers too--men who were fellow priests.

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 hearts. 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.” They desired to obey God and His Word. Hearing God’s Word led them to respond in praise and worship to the Lord. God’s Word should have such an effect on us today! May we always 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 encourage us to holiness. The people no doubt were confronted with their sin—they desired to turn away from their sin and renew their commitment to God.

How important it is to study the Bible and really know it! 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--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.**

God was not angry at the people. God is compassionate and forgiving. In Ezra 8:9-11, Ezra addressed the people, "Do not mourn nor weep...this day is holy to the Lord." It was to be a time of

rejoicing and celebration—to eat the fat, drink the sweet.” “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” It was a day to celebrate their restoration with God. God desires that the His children be filled with joy!

## Making a Booth

Bring a couple of large bed sheets to class with you. Using chairs or other items in your classroom allow the children to set up a booth. Tell the children to work together to make a “fort.” 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--“the feast of tabernacles,” or booths. It was one of the seven feasts God commanded the children of Israel to observe. 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. (See Leviticus 23 for more details on this feast.)

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 a week. 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. In Psalm 19:8 we read, “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart...” 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 were truly being changed. The people wanted to please the Lord and do all He commanded. They were truly sorry for their past sins and wanted to change.

Let us commit to making God's Word—reading the Bible—a priority in our lives! God's Word is living and powerful. God's Word can produce changes in our lives. God has promised He will help us understand His Word through the help of the Holy Spirit. (Remember to pray for understanding each time you read.) God has given us pastors and teachers to expound on God's Word, helping us grow in the knowledge of Christ.

Let us also commit to obey God's Word, as did the people of Israel. May we, upon hearing the Word, be willing to make any changes necessary to obey the Word. If we have sinned, we need to confess and forsake our sin. If we have neglected our relationship with God, we need to renew our commitment to Him. Let us be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22). God has given us His Word for our benefit and blessing. **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.

Using one straw for each child, instruct them to 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. The study of God's Word should be a priority.

## PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to read God's Word and do what it says. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.

“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.”

*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.”

*Deuteronomy 30:8-10*