



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

DECEMBER 05 2020

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 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 Savior. 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:



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.

5. The Feast of Trumpets, for 10 days
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

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.

gathering to learn more about a God they had almost forgotten. *The SDA 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 the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.