

The People Rejoice

(Nehemiah 8:1—12:43)

Pre-Session Warm Up

What do you do when you are happy? Smile? Jump up and down? Shout? One thing I like to do is sing. But whether I sing or not, the people around me know when I am happy. They can see it on my face and by the way I act.

As our lesson begins today, the people are very happy. Something special is happening.

Opening Prayer

Father, give us thankful hearts today as we consider the many ways You have blessed us. We want to show You our appreciation for all You have done for us. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Let them praise the LORD for His great love and for the wonderful things He has done for them. (Psalm 107:8 NLT)

Lesson

We have been learning about Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah continued the story that began in Ezra. The Israelites had been carried to Babylon because they had stopped worshipping God and started following after false gods. After 70 years of captivity, the people were finally allowed to come back to their home land.

They were so thankful to God for letting them come back to Israel, the first thing they did when they got back, was rebuild the temple so they would have a place to praise and worship God.

Ezra was a pastor and had a heart to study the scriptures and to teach the people the ways of the Lord. He came to Jerusalem right after the Temple had been rebuilt because he had a heart to help rebuild the people spiritually.

Meanwhile the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins. Then, some 13 years later, Nehemiah came to Jerusalem from Babylon to help rebuild the city walls. Jerusalem needed the walls to protect all the Israelites from their enemies.

Many times as Nehemiah led the building project, the enemies of God's people tried to get him distracted from the job so they could come in and tear the walls down again.

Today we pick up the story after the last stone had been laid and the last gate hung in place.

The people gathered together in the street and asked Ezra to read to them from the scriptures, the Word of God. Everyone stood and listened as Ezra read from the scriptures.

Nehemiah 8:5

Ezra stood on the platform in full view of all the people. When they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet.

These people were thankful to hear God's Word. The Bible tells us that God created a beautiful world for us to live in, that He sent His Son to die on the cross, that He forgives sins and that He is preparing a place—heaven—where we will live. We all need to remember to thank God often for giving us His Word because it reminds us of all He has done for us. The Bible says, "*Let them praise the LORD for His great love and for the wonderful things He has done for them.*" (Psalm 107:8). Don't you think that God has been good to you? Each and every day we should thank God for what He has done for us.

Ezra and the people praised and worshiped the Lord as they heard His Word.

Nehemiah 8:6

Then Ezra praised the LORD, the great God, and all the people chanted, "Amen! Amen!" as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

As they heard His Word, they bowed down and worshiped Him. How thankful they were to God for His goodness to them.

It says that as the Word was read to them, that the priests moved among the people to explain it to them.

Nehemiah 8:8

They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage.

That's like I do. We read the Word together and I help you understand what it means.

Suddenly something strange happened. Many people began to cry.

When they heard God's Word read, they were reminded of their sin and the many times they had disobeyed God's Law. They felt so bad some began to weep.

How do you feel way down in your heart when you know that you have sinned? It was because of sin that Jesus died on the cross. Because He loves you and me, He came and took the punishment for our sins. He gave His blood when He died so that you and I could be forgiven. Sin is a very serious thing to God. When these people realized the seriousness of disobeying God's laws, they cried.

But Nehemiah encouraged them to go home, eat, give to the needy, and rejoice. This was not a day for sadness; it was a day to celebrate the goodness of God!

Nehemiah 8:10

And Nehemiah continued, "Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!"

Then Nehemiah made plans for a special dedication of the wall. Invitations were sent to the people in all the nearby villages. Nehemiah wanted everybody who could sing, or play musical instruments to be there for it was going to be a day of great rejoicing.

And what a day it was! Everybody was there. Men, women, and children from far and near poured into the city. With pride and joy they gazed up at the newly built wall and the beautiful new gates.

Then the procession began. Priests and Levites walked ahead. After them went two great companies of princes giving thanks. They went up to the top of the wall of the city. Half of the people marched one way and the other half went the other way.

While some people were on top of the wall, others were at the bottom. When all were in their right places the priests lifted their trumpets and blew a triumphant blast. Then the singers began. And how they sang! They all joined together, praising God and thanking Him for what He had done for them.

The Bible says the children of Israel rejoiced.

Nehemiah 12:43

Many sacrifices were offered on that joyous day, for God had given the people cause for great joy. The women and children also participated in the celebration, and the joy of the people of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

The people on top of the wall and those on the bottom were praising God together. This verse reminds us that you boys and girls are not too young to praise Him. We should all remember to thank God often for what He has done.

Can you think of something God has done for you? [Teacher, let the children share things they are thankful for—answers to prayer, parents, country, friends, God's Word, church, teachers.] You should think about what God has done for you and then take time each day to pray and thank Him. You can also show your thanks to God by telling other people about the good things God has done for you. God's Word says we are to offer praise to God continually (Hebrews 13:5).

Let's thank Him right now for one special thing He has done for you.

Closing Prayer

[Teacher, allow each child to say “Thank You” to God for something.]

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Have each child make a “Thank You” card to God, writing about or drawing a picture of several things for which they are thankful. They can take the card home as a reminder to praise God each day.

Game Center

Memory Verse Review

Preparation:

- Make “bricks” out of brown paper lunch bags by stuffing a piece of newspaper into a bag, folding the opening of the bag closed, stapling it shut and securing with packing tape.
- Using the Memory Verses from all four lessons in Nehemiah, make seven “bricks” for each verse, including a brick with the scripture reference.
- Write each of the verses in a different colored marking pen onto the seven “bricks”. So, for example, you would have a red verse, green verse, blue verse, and a purple verse.

Play:

- Before you begin, review the memory verses.
- Divide the class into four teams according to the colors. So, for example, you would have a red team, green team, and so forth.
- Scramble the “bricks” into a big pile in the middle of the room.
- On “Go!” have the teams find their verse and put it into the correct order.

- The first group to complete their verse is the winning team.
- Re-scramble the “bricks,” give the teams a new color and try it again, playing the game four times, so that each group of kids has an opportunity to work with all four of the verses.
- Add to the challenge by timing teams to see if they can work faster each time.

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

1. Who was Ezra? (He was a pastor and had a heart to study the scriptures and to teach the people the ways of the Lord. He came to Jerusalem right after the Temple had been rebuilt because he had a heart to help rebuild the people spiritually.)
2. What did Ezra read to the people? (Ezra read to them from the scriptures.)
3. What did all the people do when they heard God’s Word? (They praised and worshiped the Lord.)
4. Why should we be thankful to God for the Bible? (Because it reminds us of all He has done for us; about His goodness. It tells us all about His plan of salvation—that He forgives sins and that He is preparing a place—heaven—where we will live.)
5. What did the priests do as Ezra read the scriptures to the people? (They moved among the people and explained it to them.)
6. What did the people suddenly do when they heard Ezra read? (They cried because they were reminded of their sin and how often they had disobeyed God. They felt so bad they began to weep.)
7. How does it make you feel way down in your heart when you know that you have sinned?
8. When Nehemiah saw the people crying what did he tell them to do? (Go home, eat, and give to the needy and to rejoice. He told

them that this was not a day for sadness; it was a day to celebrate the goodness of God.)

9. Nehemiah made plans for a big celebration to dedicate the wall. Tell me about that day. (Everybody who could sing, or play musical instruments was there to lead the people in rejoicing and celebrating. They had a parade around the wall—half the people went one way and the other half of the people went the other way. They all began to praise the Lord together with trumpets and singing.)
10. What is one thing that you are thankful to God for?