

THE BEST BOOK HELPS US KNOW GOD

All Activity Sheets

KEY WORDS

BOOK OF THE LAW WORDS OF THE LAW LAW OF GOD

BIBLICAL REFERENCE

Nehemiah 8:1-9:3; 9:38-10:39

LESSON OBJECTIVE

To help the preadolescents understand that the Word of God shows us who God is, what he is like and what he expects from us

MEMORY VERSE

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV*).

PREPARE YOURSELF TO TEACH

When the Israelites rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, the people around them mocked them. When the people of God began to keep the Sabbath, again the people mocked them. They called them ridiculous, and tempted them to choose lifestyles that did not please God.

Worldly influences and jokes surround Christians today. It is possible that your preadolescents learn in school that believing in God as the Creator is an outdated idea. They listen to advertisements that say if something makes them feel good, they can do it. Receiving these mixed messages often confuses them. To help them avoid confusion, the Word of God should saturate and fill their lives. Help the preadolescents understand that God never changes, nor will his great love ever be exhausted or used up by them; and that following his instructions is the best option in life.

This lesson will help them make their decisions based on the Word of God and prayer. The Israelites heard the Word of God, and then they made decisions.

Your students will realize that God wants them to live in obedience and under biblical principles. As they develop their skills in reading the Bible, encourage them to apply those principles to their lives.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

After having been in exile for 70 years, the Israelites returned to Judah. Persia had conquered Babylon, making it possible for the exiles to return to their lands. The Israelites lived in conditions of poverty, in a nation in ruin.

Nehemiah, the cupbearer of the king of Persia, had heard about the poverty of his nation, and appealed to the king to allow him to return to Judah. The king agreed and sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem with officers and provisions.

When Nehemiah arrived, he organized the people to work on the walls of Jerusalem. Until the walls were raised, the people would be vulnerable to enemy attacks. Nehemiah organized them to work in specific areas. In just 52 days, the walls were rebuilt. In Nehemiah 6:16, we read: "When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God."

The Israelites were encouraged by the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem, and now they began to focus on the reconstruction of their spiritual life.

The men, women, and older children gathered in an open area near the Water Gate (8:1) to hear the reading of God's Word. Ezra began to read the "book of the law of Moses." All remained there from dawn until noon while Ezra read. Can you imagine what it would be like to be on your feet for that many hours? Evidently people were hungry to hear the Word of God and to have someone explain it to them.

As they understood what they were hearing, they became aware of their own disobedience. Soon everyone started crying. The leaders told them to not be sad, that they were there to celebrate that day with great joy.

Then they celebrated the feast of tabernacles, as God had instructed them to do. Afterwards, the people did three things through which they expressed their pain: (1) they fasted, (2) they dressed in coarse clothes, and (3) they covered themselves with dust (9:1). They listened to the Word of God, confessed their sins, confessed God's faithfulness, and worshiped him.

The Israelites had turned their lives around. They went from being those who had turned their backs on the Word of God, to now being those who, in repentance, presented themselves before God and worshiped him.

Many times in the past, the Israelites had repented before God and had promised to follow him, but gradually they returned to their old bad habits. However now, the exiled ones became aware of their disobedience of the past. In Nehemiah 9:38, we see how they made an agreement with God. The rulers signed the covenant and placed their legal seal on it, making the promise that they would be God's people, separated, living under his laws, and keeping the day of rest. They made plans to support their priests, repair the temple, and assume full responsibility for maintaining it.

This promise showed a great contrast with previous behavior. What a difference it makes when people listen to the Word of God with an obedient heart! They learn it and apply it to the situations in which they live. In the same way, we have the responsibility to put into practice the Word of God in our lives. God's position never changes. The fundamental call to his people is the same. We must love God, learn his Word, and live in obedience to his commandments.

INTRODUCE THE LESSON

Who is God?

Before the session, think about some things that communicate something about you. It can be a picture of you when you were a child, a book when you went to school, etc.

In the group, ask: Do you know who I am? What do you know about me? (They may say that you're a teacher or that you like children, etc.) Ask: What can you do to find out more about me? (Possible answers: spend more time with you, find out more about your life, or talk with you more.)

Show a picture of when you were young (if possible) and other objects that show your tastes or interests. As you show them these objects that you brought, ask them: "What do these objects have in common." (They help us know more about you.)

Say: "Today's lesson will help us know more about God."

Direct your students to the first activity (Who is God?) in Student Activity Sheet #368-A. Ask them to answer the first question. If they could draw a picture of God, what would they draw? Then read the second question on the activity sheet: "What would you like to know about God?" Let your students answer. Ask: "Where can we find the answers to questions about God?" (The Bible is the best place.) Say: "Today's lesson will help us know more about God."

TEACH THE LESSON

Today's Bible story is in Nehemiah 8:1-9:3 and 9:38-10:39. It follows the time after our lesson last week. Emphasize the rebuilt walls. In that story, the Israelites stood for six hours while Ezra read the Word of God!

Say: "Today we'll stand up for the reading of God's Word. Please remain standing in silence until I finish reading God's Word and our story." If you're asked why they should stand, tell them: "The Israelites remained standing from dawn until noon to hear the Word of God that Ezra read, which means that they were standing for six hours. Listen to today's Bible story, it will help us know better the experience of the Israelites, even though we will not be standing for six hours!"

Read or tell the story from Nehemiah 8:1-9:3 and 9:38-10:39.

After 70 long years of captivity in a very distant land, the people of Judah finally returned to their home in Jerusalem. They rebuilt the walls of their city and began to live in their own homes. Soon the time for celebrating came. They celebrated the beginning of a new year with the Feast of Trumpets. They also celebrated the autumn harvest with the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a time when they remembered how God always took care of his people. On the first day of the month, on the Feast of Trumpets, all the Israelites gathered in the plaza near one of the gates of the city, which was called the Water Gate.

Ezra, the priest and teacher of the Law, brought out the Book of the Law of Moses and began to read it. He was standing on a high platform, and read all morning, from sunrise to noon. The people listened attentively, while the Levites explained the meaning of the Word of God. Suddenly, the people began to cry. Upon hearing the commandments and laws of God, they realized that they had not obeyed God. They had acted very badly.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Don't mourn or weep." Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Don't grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

The people obeyed. The next day, they came together again to hear the Word of God. This time, Ezra read God's instructions on how to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. "Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters, as it is written." With great enthusiasm, they searched for the branches of the trees and built the shelters on the flat roofs of their houses. For seven days they lived in those shelters, and they remembered God's kindness to them in the past. Every day they met and listened to Ezra read and explain the Word of God. Not even the oldest people remembered a joyous celebration like this one!

Later in the same month, the town met again. This time they didn't celebrate, but they fasted and dressed in sackcloth. They put dust on their heads to show how sorry they were for having sinned against God. Standing where they were, they read the book of the Law of God, their God, a quarter of the day, and for another quarter of the day they confessed their sins and worshiped the Lord their God. The people were sorry for having disobeyed God for so many years. They wanted to change. So together, they made a promise to fulfill the laws that God had given Moses. They promised to obey all the commands that God had given them. This time they were determined to obey God.

CONNECT THE LESSON

Review

Distribute Student Activity Sheet #368-B and #368-C and help the students review the lesson. How can I know God better?

Direct your students to Student Activity Sheet #368-D that relates to this activity. Ask: "What do we use keys for?" (to open doors) "What can these keys open or help us discover about God?" Allow students to express their ideas (make sure they mention the Bible). Ask them to write their ideas in the blanks inside the keys.

Ask: "How can you know more about a famous person? (Read a book about that person.) In what way can you know more about God? (Bible reading)"

When you love someone, you want to know that person better. When we love God, we want to know him better, the Bible helps us to know God better. Allow students to complete the sentences that appear after the keys on that same sheet, whose slogan is: "Write a prayer of praise to God, and another to thank Him for His Word."

PRACTICE THE MEMORY VERSE

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Write the memory verse on the board. Let everyone repeat it. Delete one word at a time. Make a contest between boys and girls to see who wins. You can give them a bookmark for their Bible to those who say the whole verse without any mistakes.

WRAP-UP

Pray

Pray for the students, praying that they love the Word of God and that they treasure it in their minds and hearts. You might say: "Dear God, thank You for telling us this story in Nehemiah about how the people listened to Your Word and promised to follow the Book of the Law. God, sometimes we know that it is hard to follow your law today but please help us to remember Your Word and obey it every day. In Jesus' name, Amen." Also ask someone to pray for those who have needs, or health problems.

Encourage

Encourage the group to review a few verses from the Bible each day and to read the Bible each day if they have one.

Invite

Say something interesting about the next session to encourage them to attend. Ask them to invite others to also come.