

THE PEOPLE WORSHIPED GOD

NEHEMIAH 7-13



KEY PASSAGE: John 20:31

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is the Bible about? The Bible is the story of God's plan to save people through Jesus.

CHRIST CONNECTION: God's people remembered all He had done, and they promised to be faithful. God is gracious and compassionate. All along, God has been faithful to people who are unfaithful. We experience God's grace and compassion in Jesus, who gave His life so we can receive mercy and life forever.

STORY POINT: God's people confessed their sin and promised to faithfully obey Him.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

The second half of the book of Nehemiah shows a remarkable rededication of the Israelites to God and His law. As Ezra read from the book of the Law, the people were confronted with their sin and overwhelmed by God's faithfulness toward them despite their unfaithfulness. Nehemiah 9 tells us that the people stood and listened to the book of the Law for many hours. As they listened, they were reminded of the history of God's people. They recognized their ancestors' sinful patterns of unfaithfulness to God's covenant, and yet God was always faithful. They heard that, amid their rebellion, God always called them back.

In Nehemiah 9:17, we are reminded of a description of God that is found throughout the Old Testament. Nehemiah 9:17 says, "But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, and you did not abandon them." This description of God throughout the Old Testament reflected His unwavering commitment to Israel despite their repeated rebellion. Echoes of this description are found in Exodus 34, Psalm 103, and Jonah 4. As God's people declared this truth, they understood how God remained faithful to them, just as He had been faithful in the past. And because God's character is unchanging, His faithfulness remains true today.

One of the most beautiful descriptions of God in this passage is found in the word gracious. The Hebrew word used here conveys the idea of unmerited favor, such as a king stooping down to give favor to one of his subjects or an adult stooping down to comfort a child in need.

This concept of God's graciousness, however, finds its fullest expression in Jesus Christ coming to earth. Philippians 2 reminds us that Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be held on to; rather He descended to us. Jesus stooped down to our level to grant us something that we never deserved. Point kids to God's unchanging character and His faithfulness to His people. Help kids see how God's faithfulness to His people was a part of His gracious plan to send Jesus into the world.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10–15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25–30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Solve It" activity page

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ dry erase board
- ☐ dry erase marker



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- ☐ craft sticks, 2 per kid

Journal and Prayer

- ☐ Journal Page
- ☐ "Remember" activity page



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video
- ☐ Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "The People Worshiped God" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster
- ☐ past Bible Story Picture Posters or Small Group Timeline (optional)

Questions from Kids

- ☐ "Unit 18, Session 3" Questions from Kids video

Missions Moment

- ☐ "Bowman Family Photo" printable

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "Life in His Name (John 20:31)" song
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “How do you respond when someone shows you something you are doing wrong? Do you feel upset, offended, sad? How do you usually respond?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Solve It” activity page.

SAY “Today, we will see how **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM.**”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: DON'T FORGET



Lead kids to form a circle. Prompt kids to think about a word that describes them that also corresponds to the first letter of their name. For example, “Matthew” and “marvelous” or “Jessica” and “joyous.” Choose one kid to share his name and the descriptive word by saying, “I’m [name], and I’m [descriptive word].” Challenge the next kid to say the kid’s name before her and his descriptive word along with her name and her descriptive word. This process will repeat for each additional kid, until the last kid in the circle repeats all the names and words before him as well as his own. Offer hints as needed.

SAY “Was it challenging to remember everyone’s names and descriptive words? [Allow responses.] Today, we will see how God’s people were called to remember all God had done for them. Remembering God’s faithfulness encouraged them to trust Him and depend on Him. We’ll see that **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM.**”

☐ OPTION 2: FAITHFUL ALWAYS

Form kids into groups of three or four and provide each group with a Bible, pen, and paper. Write the following events on one side of a dry erase board: God called Abraham, God parted the Red Sea, God gave His people the law, God provided manna in the wilderness, God gave His people the promised land, God dwelt among His people in the temple. Then on the other side of the dry erase board, write the following Bible references: Judges 2:1; Genesis 12:1; 1 Kings 8:11; Deuteronomy 8:3; Exodus 31:18; Exodus 14:15-16.

Challenge groups to look up the references and match them to the correct description. Then review the answers. (God called Abraham, Genesis 12:1; God parted the Red Sea, Exodus 14:15-16; God gave His people the law, Exodus 31:18; God provided manna in the wilderness, Deuteronomy 8:3; God gave His people the promised land, Judges 2:1; God dwelt among His people in the temple; 1 Kings 8:11.)

SAY “God is faithful. All throughout the Bible, God kept His promises—even though His people were unfaithful and disobedient. Today, we’ll see how God’s people remembered His faithfulness and worshiped Him.”

Transition from **WELCOME** to **LEARN**





LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “ Welcome, kids! My name is [your name], and I’m excited to share our Bible story with you as we hear how God’s people remembered His faithfulness. Did you bring a Bible with you? If so, can you please take it out? [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.]

In our story, we’ll see how God’s people remembered how God had been faithful, even when they sinned against Him. Today, we will learn that **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM.** [Display the Story Point Poster.] Let’s pray together: ‘Dear God, we are thankful for Your faithfulness to us, even when we are unfaithful. We confess our need for You and ask You to help us obey You. In Jesus’ name, amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “ What is the Bible about? What is the answer? [Allow responses.] **The Bible is the story of God’s plan to save people through Jesus.** Let’s say the answer one more time: **The Bible is the story of God’s plan to save people through Jesus.**

Because all people sin, we need a Savior. Out of His love for us, God formed a plan to rescue people from sin. We cannot save ourselves because no one obeys God perfectly or lives up to His perfect standards. Even in our story today, we’ll learn how God’s people recognized how they and their ancestors had sinned against God. Jesus is the Savior God planned to send so that people’s sins can be forgiven. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “ When God’s people returned to Jerusalem from exile, Nehemiah led the rebuilding of the wall. God protected His people and provided for them as they completed this task. God also sent Ezra to read His law. As he did, God’s people realized they had sinned against God. The people were saddened by their sin and repented. Today, we will see that Ezra continued to read the law, and **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM.** ”



LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Nehemiah 7:1; 8:2; 9; 10:29; 11:1-2; 12:27-28; 13:1-3. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The People Worshiped God.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

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“After Ezra read the law, the people gathered together. They fasted, wore sackcloth, and put dust on their heads. **They confessed their sins, read from the book of the law of the Lord, and worshiped all day. The Levites led the people in a prayer, saying:**

“Blessed be your name, God. You are the only God. You created the heavens with all their stars, **the earth and all that is in it, the seas and all that is in them.”**

As they prayed, the people remembered how God chose Abram and changed his name to Abraham. God made a covenant with Abraham and gave the Promised Land to his descendants. God kept His promise because He is righteous.

The people also praised God for rescuing His people from slavery in Egypt. God parted the Red Sea and led His people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. **God came down to His people at Mount Sinai and gave them His good commands. All through their wilderness journey, God provided for His people and told them to go to the Promised Land. In the people’s prayer, they remembered how their ancestors did not obey God.** Their ancestors made idols and forgot God’s works. **But God did not leave them.** He is forgiving, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love.

God’s people prayed: “You gave our ancestors the land, giving them victory over the people who lived there. But they were disobedient and ignored your prophets. So, you handed them over to your enemies, who oppressed them. But in your compassion, you did not destroy or abandon your people.”

Then the people said, “Here we are today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors. We are in trouble.” **The people recognized they needed God, and so they promised to follow the law of God and to obey all His commands.** Then the leaders and some of the people stayed in Jerusalem, and everyone else went to live in the nearby cities. **Later, the people gathered to dedicate the wall around Jerusalem. They celebrated with music and gave thanks to God. Then God’s law was read to the people, and they were reminded to keep His commands.**

Christ Connection: God’s people remembered all He had done, and they promised to be faithful. God is gracious and compassionate. All along, God has been faithful to people who are unfaithful. We experience God’s grace and compassion in Jesus, who gave His life so we can receive mercy and life forever. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Remember: Listen to see how many times the people remembered something God did. Kids can keep a tally on their fingers or with a pencil and paper. After the story, compare results and see how many different things the kids can name.

Review it: Point to past Bible Story Posters mentioned in the story or refer to the Small Group Timeline.



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “Ezra led God’s people in a day full of worship. The people prayed to God and confessed their sins to Him. As the people worshiped God what did they remember? [Allow responses.] The people began to recall all the different ways God had remained faithful to them. They remembered how God chose Abraham and promised to bless him and make him into a great nation. They remembered how God freed their ancestors from slavery in Egypt, parted the Red Sea, and led them through the wilderness. Over and over again, God was helping His people. God’s people had promised to remain faithful to God, but they continued to turn away from Him and disobey His commands. But God was always faithful to His people. He showed them mercy and provided for them, even in their unfaithfulness.

What did the people remember about God’s character? Look at Nehemiah 9:17. [Ask a volunteer to read Nehemiah 9:17 aloud.] God is forgiving, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love. His people did not earn or deserve His faithfulness. But God will remain true to His promises, and He always acts for His glory. God’s faithful character is unchanging. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Because of His faithfulness, God did not abandon His people, even when they abandoned Him.

GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM. They experienced His mercy and faithfulness and it motivated them to obey God. . If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful to forgive us and make us clean. Even while we were lost in our sin, God sent Jesus as our Savior. Through Jesus, we can experience God’s mercy and find the grace we need to obey Him. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “All along, God has been faithful to people who are unfaithful. God loves us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to be our Savior. God is full of mercy and grace and is ready to forgive our sins. When we trust in Jesus, we experience God’s grace and receive forgiveness. Have you confessed your sins and trusted in Jesus? ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 18, Session 3” Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. How do we know we love God? How do we know we’re going to heaven?
2. God loved us before we ever loved Him. How has God proved His love for you?

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

Display the “Bowman Family Photo” printable. Remind kids that Brian Bowman is the pastor of Valley Life Church in Phoenix, Arizona. Share how he and his wife, Brooke, desire Valley Life to be a church that reaches the people of Phoenix with the hope of the gospel by starting



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more churches. Tell kids that Valley Life Church has faced some difficulties over the years, including a few robberies and damage to the church building. Despite these challenges, Pastor Brian Bowman and the church members continue their mission of starting new churches.

SAY “Valley Life Church wants to start many small neighborhood churches across the Phoenix area. Valley Life Church trains every person who is interested in being a church leader so they can be ready to start new churches and disciple new members. Valley Life Church wants everyone to use their gifts—whether it be hospitality, music, teaching kids, providing acts of service, and so forth—to help more people know about Jesus.”

Pray, thanking God for Valley Life Church and leaders who are starting new churches to help more people know about God’s love through His Son, Jesus.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud John 20:31 together.

SAY “The whole Bible reminds us that God planned to send Jesus into the world to save sinful people. When we trust in Jesus, we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.”

Say the key passage aloud but replace a word with an incorrect word, such as “life” with “strife.” Challenge kids to raise their hand and share the correct word. Repeat as time allows.

Lead kids to sing “Life in His Name (John 20:31).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “Lord, we confess our sin, knowing we have fallen short of Your perfection. We ask You for forgiveness because of Your mercy and grace shown to us through Jesus. Help us obey You and worship You with all we say and do. Amen.”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Kingdoms Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Nehemiah 9. Explain that the first half of Nehemiah focuses on the people rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, while the second half focuses on Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

Consider pointing out Jerusalem (H5) on the Old Testament Kingdoms Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Nehemiah 9:33 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

SAY “ The people recognized that God was right to judge them and their ancestors for their sinful disobedience. God’s people did not deserve His mercy and forgiveness. Yet, because He is faithful to His promises, He did not abandon them.

Even when His people sinned, God remained faithful because He had chosen them to be the family through whom the Messiah would come. And God kept His promise! Like Israel, we sin and need a Savior. God sent Jesus to save us from our sin. ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “ Why is it important to learn and remember what God has done? ”

Tell kids that as we read about God’s character and actions in the Bible, we begin to learn more about who He is and how He loves, cares, and provides for His people. Not only does this lead us to praise Him and look at our lives with thankfulness, but it also helps us when we face hard times. Knowing God is always faithful gives us courage, hope, and endurance as we live for Him. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Deut. 31:7-8.)

SAY “ Why is it important for us to confess our sins to God? ”

Remind kids that before we can respond to Jesus as Savior we must first see our need for Jesus. Explain that when we confess our sins, we are recognizing how we have sinned against God and need Him to save us from our sin. We repent of sin and trust in Jesus to be saved. Share how we continue to confess sin because we are admitting our continual need of Jesus and asking Him to help us grow in holiness. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read 1 John 1:10.)

SAY “ The people promised to obey God’s commands after remembering all He had done for them. What is one way you can show obedience to God this week? ”

Answers will vary. Discuss how we don’t obey God to earn favor or forgiveness. Instead, our obedience shows that we love God and have been saved. Through our obedience, we are declaring that God is most important and that we trust His ways are better than our own. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read 1 John 5:2.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: READY, STEADY, OBEY

Direct kids to line up on one side of the room. Provide each kid with a craft stick. Challenge kids to balance the craft stick on their pointer finger. On your start, lead them to walk across the room without the craft stick falling off their finger. As they are walking, call out a command to obey such as “stop” or “slow down” or “tip toe.” If the craft stick falls, kids must sit down at the spot it fell. Award the kid(s) who made it the farthest as the winner(s). Repeat the challenge, but this time provide each kid with two craft sticks to balance on each pointer finger as they walk across the room.

SAY “It was challenging to keep the craft stick steady while obeying the commands, wasn’t it? This reminds me of how all people fail to obey God’s commands. Today, we learned that **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM**. But no one can obey God perfectly. We need Jesus to save us from sin and help us obey God.”

☐ OPTION 2: ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE



Provide each kid with a piece of paper and markers. Prompt kids to think about God’s faithfulness to His people, even when they disobeyed Him. Guide kids to think about ways God has been faithful to them. Then direct kids to draw a picture of how God has shown His faithfulness to them, such as through answered prayer, salvation, meeting a specific need, or helping them with a certain situation. Invite kids to share their pictures and express gratitude for all God has done for them.

SAY “God is always faithful. He was faithful to His people in the Bible, and He is faithful to His people today. Over and over again, the Bible tells us to remember God’s faithfulness because it encourages us to keep trusting Him and remain thankful for all He has done. Most of all, we can thank God for how He was faithful to send Jesus into the world to save people from sin.”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, thanking God for His faithfulness to care for His people and for sending Jesus as our Savior. As time allows, lead kids to complete “Remember” on the activity page.