

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 to 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

- ☐ “Memories Maze” activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- ☐ copies of past Bible Story Posters, 8
- ☐ painter’s tape

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ dry erase board and marker



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set (optional)



LIVE

Reflection and Prayer

- ☐ Bible story coloring 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)
- ☐ 2-by-5-inch cardstock strips, 1 per kid
- ☐ stickers (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 “Do you ever think back to old memories and retell them to anyone? Maybe you remember a past sports game that you won. Or maybe you think about a funny event that happened. Why do you think we retell old memories?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Memories Maze” activity page.

SAY “Today, we will learn how the people worshiped God and remembered everything He had done for His people.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: ORDER THE EVENTS

Print copies of eight past Bible Story Posters, such as Abram Followed God, Moses Confronted Pharaoh, Moses Parted the Red Sea, God Provided for His People, Moses Led the Israelites, The Ten Commandments, The People Doubted, and Conquering Jericho. Choose a picture (in any order) and hold it up. Ask kids if they remember the Bible story. Offer hints as needed. Then tape the picture to a wall. Then hold up another picture, again asking if kids remember the story. Then challenge kids to tell you if the story came before or after the previous picture. Tape it to the wall as directed by the kids. Repeat this process, shuffling pictures around until they are in the correct order.

SAY “God is faithful. All throughout the Bible, God was with His people, helping them, providing for them, and keeping His promises. In our story today, we’ll see how God’s people remembered all He had done, and this caused them to celebrate and give thanks. We’ll see how we can remember all the ways God has shown His love toward us and we can thank Him as well.”

☐ OPTION 2: PRAYER PROMPTS



On a dry erase board, write the words Praise, Confess, Thanks, and Ask at the top of the board. Insure that kids understand how these words describe types of prayer. For example, “confess” means to tell or admit something to God. Invite kids to raise their hands and provide examples of how they have prayed one of these prompts. For example, kids may share how they prayed to God praising Him for healing a sick friend. Or kids may share how they have confessed a sin to God in prayer. Write their responses under each prompt. Discuss how God hears our prayers, and that when we pray, we are showing how much we need Him.

SAY “In our story, we’ll learn how God’s people spent time praying to Him. We’ll see how **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM**. We can remember that because of Jesus, God promises to forgive believers and help them obey Him.”

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





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. Did you bring a Bible with you? If so, can you please take it out? [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.] Today, we will be in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah.

The Bible helps us remember what God has done and what He will do for His people. 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 our big picture question? [Allow responses.] **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.**

As we read the Bible, we see how all people sin. Even in our story today, we’ll learn how God’s people recognized their sin and confessed it to the Lord. Because all people sin, we need a Savior. 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 Worshipped God.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

THE PEOPLE WORSHIPPED GOD

“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

Vary your tone: Alter your voice so the kids can differentiate between the people’s prayer and the rest of the story.

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



2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ After Ezra read the law, the people gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth to show they were sorry for their sins. They confessed their sins and worshiped God, remembering that He is the only true God who created the heavens and the earth. What did the Levites lead the people in? **[Allow responses.]** The Levites led the people in prayer, reminding them of God’s faithfulness to His people and how He kept His promises. Even though God’s people continually turned away from God, He never left them. His plan to fulfill all the promises He made would not fail.

The people continued praying and praising God for all the ways He had shown His faithfulness. What were some of the events they mentioned in their prayer? **[Allow responses.]** They praised God for rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. They remembered how God parted the Red Sea, guided them with a pillar of fire and cloud, and gave them His good commands at Mount Sinai. Even though their ancestors disobeyed God by worshiping idols and forgetting His works, God never abandoned them. He is forgiving, gracious, and full of love.

At the end of their prayer, the people recognized their need for God. **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM.** What did the people do next? **[Allow responses.]** The people dedicated the wall of Jerusalem with celebration, music, and thanksgiving. They listened to the law being read again to remind them to follow God’s commands. We also need to hear God’s words and confess our sins, remembering that through faith in Jesus, we can receive forgiveness of sins. When we trust in Jesus, God will help us to obey Him. He gives us the Holy Spirit so we can follow His ways. ”

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. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

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



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

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.

Distribute a 2-by-5-inch strip of cardstock to each kid. Provide kids with a Bible and direct them to look up John 20:31. Then lead kids to copy the verse onto their cardstock, creating a bookmark. Invite kids to use markers and stickers to decorate their bookmark.

SAY “Not only does the book of John share how Jesus gives people life, but the whole Bible tells the story of God’s plan to save sinners through Jesus. Keep your bookmark as a reminder of how the whole Bible shares the good news of salvation!”

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 “We praise You, Lord, for Your faithfulness, even when we turn away from You. Help us be quick to confess our sins and help us follow You, while also sharing the good news of Jesus with others. 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 name used most often for God in Nehemiah and Ezra is “God of heaven.” Tell kids that this name reminds us that God is not limited to just one place. God is in all places at all times. He is over all.

Consider pointing out Jerusalem (H5) on the Old Testament Kingdoms Map. Choose a volunteer to read aloud Nehemiah 9:31 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verse aloud.

SAY “As God’s people remembered all that He had done, they praised God for His great mercy toward them even when they were disobedient. God’s people did nothing to earn His favor, in fact, God provided for them during times when they had strayed from Him. The same is true for us. God displayed His mercy towards us by sending Jesus to take the punishment our sin deserves. The Bible tells us that even when we were lost in our sin, God sent Jesus to be our Savior (Romans 5:8). Through Jesus, God provided all we need to experience forgiveness and eternal life.”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “In the people’s prayer, they remembered what God had done for them. When you pray, do you praise God for what He’s done for you? How?”

Remind kids that when we pray, not only can we ask God for help, but we also express our praise for who He is and what He has done. Prayers are a way to worship God as we give Him thanks and tell Him how much we love Him for who He is.

SAY “In their prayer, the people recognized their need for God. Why do we all need God?”

Discuss how the people’s prayer was a confession and recognition that they needed God because He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. We all need God because we were created to know Him and love Him. He gives us purpose, meaning, and identity. Only God provides the way for our sin to be forgiven through faith in Jesus. And God continues to provide us with what we need daily, both physical needs and spiritual needs. Remind kids that we depend on God for everything!

SAY “The people promised to be faithful to God. Do you think they would keep this promise? Why or why not?”

Share how God’s people would not remain perfectly faithful. They would disobey God and turn away from Him. No one can perfectly follow God and remain faithful. But God is faithful to us despite our unfaithfulness. God provided the way for us to have new hearts that desire to obey Him. Through faith in Jesus, God changes our hearts and helps us follow Him.

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





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: NAME IT



Form kids into two teams. Invite a kid from the first team to stand in front of the group. Whisper an object to her, such as a banana, a pillow, a paperclip, etc. Tell her that she needs to describe the object to her team without saying the object's name. Allow 30 seconds for her team to guess what the object is. If they get it right, award the team a point. Play, alternately between teams, until every kid has had a turn. The team with the most points wins.

SAY “ To help your team guess the object, you needed to describe the object to them. You gave specific information so they would know what the object was. When we confess our sins, we are naming our sins and describing them to God. Today, we saw how **GOD’S PEOPLE CONFESSED THEIR SIN AND PROMISED TO FAITHFULLY OBEY HIM.** They told God what they did wrong: they ignored His prophets, made idols, and forgot His laws. By telling God all about our sins, we are acknowledging that we are sorry and need His forgiveness. God will forgive believers’ sins, and He will help them to follow Him. ”

☐ OPTION 2: OLD OR NEW?



Gather kids in the center of the room. Challenge kids to listen closely as you call out the name of a Bible book. Direct kids to run to the left side of the room if that book is found in the Old Testament. Lead kids to run to the right side of the room if the book is found in the New Testament. If a kid runs to the wrong side of the room, he must sit out one turn. Repeat, as time allows.

For an added challenge, after kids run to the appropriate side of the room, invite two volunteers to find the book you called out in a Bible.

SAY “ Before the people prayed to God, Ezra led the people in reading God’s law. Reading God’s words helped them understand how they had sinned against God and His ways. As we read the Bible, we also see how we don’t live up to God’s perfect standards. However, we also see how God offers forgiveness for our sin. When we trust in Jesus, God forgives us. He also gives believers the Holy Spirit who helps them follow God. Living a life of obedience is only accomplished by God’s help and His power. ”

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.