

# REBUILD

Date: 11.10.24 | Title: Re-dedicating Jerusalem | Scripture: Ezra 6-10 & Nehemiah 8-10

## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

### Middle School Students

The Bible is God's message about Himself and His salvation plan through Jesus.

God deserves respect, obedience, and honor.

God wants us to live for His glory.

God sent Jesus to be the atonement for our sins.

Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies and promises.

### High School Students

The Bible is God's message about Himself and His salvation plan through Jesus.

God deserves respect, obedience, and honor.

God wants us to live for His glory.

God is a righteous judge.

God sent Jesus to be the atonement for our sins.

Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies and promises.

Jesus gave His life for us on the cross and He is the only way for salvation.



### MEMORY VERSE

**“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” Lamentations 3:22-24**

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## BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Remember that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of God's people returning from exile and back to the land God had set apart for them. In Ezra 6:15-16, the temple was completed and dedicated. In Nehemiah 6:15, we read that with God's help, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people finished rebuilding the walls and the city gates in just 52 days. Now the narrative skips to a time 57 years later. Ezra has traveled from Babylon to Jerusalem with a group of returning exiles. He introduces himself through a genealogy that establishes his Levite lineage going all the way back to Aaron, Moses's brother (Ezra 7:1-5).

Ezra was a scribe, trained in reading, interpreting, translating, and copying Scripture. There was a science and a methodology to writing down the Word of God, counting the columns vertically and horizontally, and if everything didn't match precisely at the end of a page, the scribe would rip it up and start all over again. Their craft is one of the reasons the Scriptures have been passed down so exactly and faithfully through the ages, Jewish tradition says that Ezra founded the Great Synagogue, a group of scholars who met and decided which books would form the canon of Old Testament Scripture.

God was with Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 7:9, 7:28, 8:18, 8:22 and 8:31) and Ezra wanted to study God's law, obey it, and teach it to God's people (Ezra 7:10). During the time between the completion of Jerusalem's walls and city gate and Ezra's return to Jerusalem, the whole book of Esther took place in Persia, another picture of life for the Jews during these challenging years.

Although the temple has been rebuilt and the walls of Jerusalem have been erected, the nation is very weak. The people have not obeyed Yahweh as Lord. They must follow and obey the covenant stipulations in the Torah given by Moses. The temple worship must be carried out as the Lord mandates, and Israel must purify itself from uncleanness. The Israelites must renew their covenant with the Lord, because despite all of Israel's sin, He has not abandoned Israel. Yahweh will fulfill His covenant promises, but only to people who are submissive to His will.

In Ezra 9, leaders approach Ezra and declare to him the grim reality of the people of Israel who are caught up in devious behavior and lifestyles. Following the second return of exiles to Jerusalem, the men of Israel began to intermarry with foreign women again which was forbidden in the Torah (Deut.7:3-4 and Josh. 23:12). It was as if they had completely forgotten God. Ezra came unglued in a priestly sort of way, tearing his clothes and ripping out some of his hair and beard as signs of grief and mourning (Ezra 9:1-3). Ezra responds with honest confession before a holy God.

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## BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Ezra stood before God and the faithful of Israel and cried out before the Lord, confessing his sin to God, weeping and bowing down. It was Israel's sin that led to their exile in the first place, and Ezra feared the consequences of such sin. A large group of men, women, and children joined him, moved by his example. They were starting to feel the weight of their sin, and some came to him and confessed, asking for him to lead them in trying to put things right. "Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to [him]" (v. 4), and they spent the rest of the day fasting and praying, no doubt feeling desperate and helpless. Ezra challenged those who had married pagans to separate from them in order to get in line with God's commandments (Ezra 10:10-12). Ezra recognized the necessity of confession and then celebrated that God's grace was still enough, still active, and still effective toward His people (9:13).

Then, in Nehemiah 8, Ezra read the law. With the wall's construction completed, it was time for the people's consecration to the Mosaic Law. Trust in God and obedience to God's Word is essential in the life of the believer. Nehemiah recorded that Ezra the priest gathered everyone at the gate near the city water supply and read the Bible to them. Ezra had already been in Jerusalem for more than a dozen years, serving as Israel's spiritual leader. Here, he led everyone in an epic Bible study, from morning till midday, with the other priests serving to lead worship and explain the law so the people understood. Ezra blessed the Lord and the people praised the Lord, bowed their heads, and worshipped with their faces to the ground. (Nehemiah 8:1-8)

Nehemiah, who was the governor, joined Ezra and told everyone, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep. 'For all the people wept, when they heard the word of the Law'" (Nehemiah 8:9). They read that Moses had recorded not just the blessings for obeying God's commandments but the curses for disobedience. Though sorrow for sin was a positive response, joy at renewed relationship with God was the ultimate purpose and would be their strength.

The law showed the people how far they had fallen when God rescued them from their deserved captivity. The Bible convicted them, and they grieved for their sin and its effects. Nehemiah, however, reminded them that this was a day for celebration: "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). They "went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them" (v. 12).

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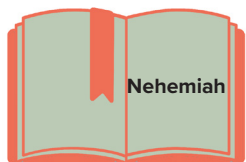
The time to grieve their sin came a few weeks later, and the “children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads” (Nehemiah 9:1), all signs of mourning and distress. They spent the next three hours reading the Scriptures, confessing their sins, and worshipping. They were declaring their dependence on God. Nehemiah 9:6-38 is the longest prayer recorded in Scripture (thirty-four lengthy verses). Ezra drew on his knowledge of the Bible, pulling history and teaching from all of it, Genesis through Chronicles. His appetite for God’s Word fed Israel, providing an example for us too to be reading Scripture every day, learning about God and preparing for whatever any given day might bring.

Ezra’s prayer ended with a promise to make and seal a covenant to follow God’s Law, and we are given a list of eighty-four men who signed it (Nehemiah 10:1-27). Beginning with Nehemiah and the priests, Levites, and leaders, they committed to following God, joined by everyone who could understand what was being required—wives, sons, daughters and “entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and to do all the commandments of the lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes” (v. 29). Their hearts had been moved to be holy — set apart as God’s people—and their promise became their practice as they established a tax to support the work and upkeep of the temple and a tithe of their very best to honor God. Israel turned back to God, and He resuscitated the people’s hearts, at least for a time.

Later as the book of Nehemiah concludes, we see that re-building the proper religious and social character of the nation is much more difficult than rebuilding the city walls or the temple. As the prophets had predicted, Israel is back in the promised land and Jerusalem and the temple have been rebuilt. However, Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate clearly that this is not the great, spectacular restoration that the prophets promised! A Davidic king does not sit on the throne; in fact, the Persians are still in control. Justice has not been established, and while idolatry has been eliminated, other sins of social injustice and religious ritualism have crept back into the society. Finally, and importantly, there is no mention anywhere of God’s presence returning to the temple. The blessing of living in the promised land with God in their midst, blessing them richly and making them strong politically, is no more. At the end of Nehemiah, the Israelites were still waiting on a Rescuer who will change things forever.

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## LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY



TELL  
THE  
STORY



**Tell the story:** Use the Background Info for Leaders to help tell the story.

All the people assembled in the square. Ezra the scribe brought out the book of the law of Moses and read it aloud while all the people listened carefully. The people raised their hands and said, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped with their faces to the ground. As Ezra read and the Levites translated and taught, people began to weep. But Nehemiah and the leaders told them not to weep because “this day is sacred to the Lord.” He told them to go and celebrate, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” So the people celebrated with great joy because they understood the words that had been read to them .

Read directly from Scripture, use the message, or the summary provided in the lesson

Several years later, he people in Jerusalem gathered together early in the morning at one of Jerusalem’s gates. Men, women and children- anyone who could understand- came to listen to the reading of God’s Word. As the sun was just coming up, Ezra brought out the book of the law of Moses that God had given to His people. God’s words were written on a scroll. Ezra stood on a high wooden platform and began to read.

Ezra read the law for hours, and all the people listened carefully. The people stood up; they had respect for God’s Word. Ezra praised God, and the people lifted up their hands. “Amen! Amen!” thy said. The people in the crowd bowed down with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped God.



Some of the leaders there- the Levites- explained the law to the people and helped them understand the words Ezra read. As the people heard the words of the law, they began to cry. The law was God’s rules for living and the people had disobeyed God. They realized they had sinned.

Put the events in order, draw a comic strip, build it with blocks or playdough, act it out, etc...

Ezra, the Levites, and Nehemiah the governor said, “This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad or cry.” Even though the people’s sin made them sad, this was a happy day. Then Ezra said to them, “Go home and prepare a feast! Eat rich food and drink sweet drinks. Share what you have prepared with those who have nothing prepared.’

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The people obeyed Ezra. They prepared a feast. They were glad because they understood the words of the law that were explained to them.

God's word is powerful. When Ezra read God's Word, the people loved God more and changed their ways. The Bible says that Jesus is "the Word". Jesus is God who came to live with people on earth. Jesus has the power to change our hearts.

Ezra met with some of the people of Israel. He learned that some of the people and their leaders had disobeyed God, ignoring His Word. Ezra tore his clothes and pulled out some of his hair. He sat down and was very upset. Ezra got on his knees and prayed to God, confessing the people's sin. As he did this, God's people began to gather around him. They cried too and offered sacrifices, promising to be faithful to God.

**Re-tell the Bible Story:** Have students tell the story as best they can.

**Attributes of God:** Determine the characteristics of God that we see in today's story. How can knowing these characteristics of God to be true change the way we live in Christ?

**Share the GOSPEL:**

After the exile, God is renewing His people in the land, to carry out what He promised to Abraham. God's people must renew their commitment to covenant faithfulness, being forgiven of sin and recognizing that everything depends on God's grace and steadfast commitment to His promises.

God's Word is powerful. When Ezra read God's Word, the people loved God more and changed their ways. The Bible says that Jesus "is the Word." Jesus is God who came to live with people on earth. Jesus has the power to change our hearts.

God's people remembered all He had done and promised to be faithful. God is gracious and compassionate. He is faithful to people who aren't. We experience God's grace and compassion in Jesus, who gave His life so we can receive mercy and life forever. True confession of sin will never come before genuine recognition of the holiness of God.

God's people (us included) have never been able to faithfully obey Him, but that never stopped God from continuing to be faithful. God cannot be anything but faithful because His faithfulness is directly tied to His character.

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**“Storying” Questions:** As you ask these questions, have your students find the answers in the actual verses of scripture instead of recalling them from your re-telling of the story. We always want to encourage all of our students to go directly to God’s Word over a commentary on or summary of scripture. Use the Bible Study Bookmark Questions as well as these questions to help students understand the text:

1. How did the people respond when they heard God’s Word?
2. Why is understanding an important part of interaction with God’s Word? What are some tools we can use to understand scripture?
3. What is confession and why is it an important part of worship?
4. Does it matter if we read all of the Bible or just certain parts? Why?
5. How can we make reading God’s word a habit in our lives?
6. How does God speak to us through His Word? God’s Word reveals His character and His promises. God uses His Word to teach truth and to show us how to be saved from sin and live in righteousness.
7. What does it mean that God’s word is powerful? The Bible has the power to point out our sin, show us our need for Jesus, and change us to live for the glory of God. Salvation comes through hearing the word and believing it’s message about Jesus.
8. Why did God give the law? The law is not a means to be justified but was used by God to reveal sin. It is by faith in Jesus we are saved.
9. How does remembering God’s faithfulness help us when we sin? If we are saved by faith in Jesus, we can trust that God will be faithful to His promise to forgive our sin. Remind students that Jesus died once for all of our sin, and we are not guilty before God because of Jesus’ righteousness given to us by faith.
- 10 Why is it important to confess our sin? Confession of sin shows our need for Jesus
11. How have you experienced God’s faithfulness in your own life?
13. Has God’s Word ever challenged you toward change?
14. What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
15. What does this story teach me about myself?
16. Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
17. Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
18. How does this story help me live on mission better?

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## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

**ATTENTIVE** - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

**COMPASSIONATE** - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

**CREATOR** - God made everything. He is uncreated.

**DELIVERER** - God rescues and saves his children.

**ETERNAL** - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

**FAITHFUL** - God always keeps his promises.

**GENEROUS** - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

**GLORIOUS** - God displays His greatness and worth.

**GOOD** - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

**HOLY** - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

**IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING** - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

**INCOMPREHENSIBLE** - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

**INFINITE** - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

**JEALOUS** - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

**JUST** - god is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

**LOVING** - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

**MERCIFUL** - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

**OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY** - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.



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## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

**OMNIPRESENT** - God is fully present everywhere.

**OMNISCIENT** - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

**PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING** - God is untiring and bears with His children.

**PROVIDER** - God meets the needs of his children.

**REFUGE** - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

**RIGHTEOUS** - God is always good and right.

**SELF-EXISTENT** - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

**SELF-SUFFICIENT** - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

**SOVEREIGN** - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

**TRANSCENDENT** - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

**TRUTHFUL** - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

**WISE** - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

**WORTHY** - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

**WRATHFUL** - God hates all unrighteousness.

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## PRAYER PROMPTS

God thank You for Your Word and the way You help us know You through it. Help us feel sorry for our sin and to turn to Jesus. Thank You for sending Jesus to change our hearts!

## IF TIME ALLOWS:

Help the students in your group practice memorizing the books of the Bible:

- Torah: Genesis-Deuteronomy
- History: Joshua-Esther
- Poetry: Job-Song of Solomon
- Major Prophets: Isaiah-Daniel
- Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi
- Gospels: Matthew-John
- Paul's Letters: Romans-Philemon
- General Letters: Hebrews-Revelation

## MISSIONS EMPHASIS:

For the months of November and December Creek Families will be collecting money for the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. Encourage your class to collect money in the jars we will pass out today at the end of service. Students can donate with their families as they arrive, or you can go together as a class on the way back to the Worship Center at the end of SS. Money can be donated each week, or at the end of December.

## REVIEW UNIT VERSE:

Work on memorizing this weeks verse with the students in your group. You can use the first letter of each word in the verse to help with this. For example, the unit verse would look like this:

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## Application Questions

### LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

### LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

### LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?

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## Application Questions

### LOOK OUTWARD

- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and in the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

### LOOK FORWARD

- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?