

The people hear and understand

Lesson Overview

Distinguish reading, explaining and responding in Nehemiah's account. Use verses 8–12 to explain why the people celebrate and share, and improve a plain-language explanation after listening to another pair.



Passage

Nehemiah 8:1–12



Focus statement

God gives His Word to be understood, so we should listen, seek its meaning and respond to Him with trust, joy and care for others.



Age-focused objective

Distinguish reading, explaining and responding in Nehemiah's account. Use verses 8–12 to explain why the people celebrate and share, and improve a plain-language explanation after listening to another pair.



Memory verse

They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

Nehemiah 8:8, CSB

Before learners arrive

Work through Teacher preparation and its checklist. Have the existing pack and materials ready as listed there, keep the Bible open and choose one illustration below. Neither illustration requires learners to disclose personal experiences.

Practise the names in verses 4 and 7 and prepare the short explanation of holy below. Allow 40 minutes: welcome 2; interactive teaching 18; memory 3; activity 15; prayer and tidy 2. Supporting questions help repair a missing connection; they are not additional required discussions.

How the lesson unfolds

Follow the account's connected movements, then help the children explain and respond.



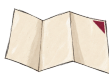
A gathered people listen to God

The people ask for God's law and receive it with attention and worship.



Explanation serves understanding

The Levites help the people grasp the meaning of what is read.



Understanding directs a fitting response

The people celebrate and share because they understand the instruction.

Welcome and connection

2 minutes. Welcome everyone. Invite one brief answer: "Why might someone who loves God's Word still need forgiveness?" Supply the connection for newcomers.



SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING):

Last time we heard David praise God's good instruction and ask God to cleanse his sin. Today we meet a whole crowd listening to God's Word. These people lived in Jerusalem long before Jesus came. Many had returned from exile, when God's people had been taken away from their homeland. Their city wall had been rebuilt. But a wall could not teach them how to live before God. They needed to hear Him.

When words need explaining

Interactive teaching: 18 minutes. Allow 2 minutes for the opening, 5 for the gathering, 3 for explanation, 5 for response and 3 for the gospel. This includes every reading, transition and brief answer.

Choose one teaching illustration

Choose one option, taking no more than 2 minutes within the existing opening. Hear one brief answer, then continue. The options replace one another.

Option A • Words that need explaining – recommended

Say, “Imagine hearing: put the objects in ascending order. Now hear the explanation: start with the smallest, then put each larger one next.” Ask, “What did the explanation add?” No child needs to perform or admit difficulty.

Listen for: The words can reach our ears before we understand their meaning; a plain explanation helps.

Option B • A direction with a missing meaning

On scrap paper write “Place the book adjacent to the pencil.” Read it, then explain, “Put the book next to the pencil.” Ask what changed. Keep the illustration spoken if a learner cannot see the writing.

Listen for: The instruction did not change; an unfamiliar word became understandable.

Return to Scripture: Neither example measures intelligence or faith. Find Nehemiah 8 and notice how reading and explanation serve understanding, then how understanding shapes the people’s response.

Help the children find Nehemiah 8. Introduce Ezra as a priest and scribe who studied and taught God’s law, Nehemiah as the governor, and the Levites as helpers who explained the law. The law of Moses is God’s instruction given through Moses.

Explore the Bible passage

1. A gathered people listen to God

Listen for what the people want to hear and how they receive it.



READ ALOUD

- ¹ all the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses that the LORD had given Israel.
- ² On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding.
- ³ While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law.
- ⁴ The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.
- ⁵ Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up.
- ⁶ Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, “Amen, Amen!” Then they knelt low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 8:1–6, CSB



Ask

What did the people ask Ezra to bring? Why was it worth listening to?



Listen for

They asked for the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given Israel. They were listening to God's instruction, not just the ideas of a popular speaker.



If needed

Return to verse 1. Scribe means someone trained in studying and handling the written law.



SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING):

The platform helped the crowd see Ezra. The people listened for a long time, and they worshipped the great God whose Word they heard. Ezra blessed God: he praised Him. Their “Amen” expressed agreement. This was a serious, glad opportunity to hear from God. But something else mattered too. Would they understand what they heard?

2. Explanation serves understanding



READ ALOUD

⁷ Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places.

⁸ They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

Nehemiah 8:7–8, CSB



Ask

What did the Levites add to hearing the words read aloud?



Listen for

They explained the law and gave its meaning so the people could understand.



If needed

Ask whether simply repeating an unfamiliar word always tells us what it means.



SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING):

Suppose you hear that a day is “holy”. Saying “holy” more loudly does not explain it. Holy means set apart for God. A good explanation helps us understand what the Bible actually says. It does not let the teacher make up a different message. You can ask what a word means, and we can look at the passage together. God’s Word is worth understanding.

3. Understanding directs a fitting response

The people's response may surprise us. Listen for their tears, the leaders' direction and the reason given at the end.

READ ALOUD

⁹ Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law.

¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because the joy of the LORD is your strength."

¹¹ And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, since today is holy. Don't grieve."

¹² Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them.

Nehemiah 8:9–12, CSB



Ask

What did the leaders tell the people to do on this holy day?



Listen for

Celebrate with food and drink, share portions with those who had nothing prepared, and stop mourning on this day.



If needed

Point to verse 10. Sharing belongs to the instructed celebration.

SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING):

The people were crying as they heard God's law. Hearing what is right can show us where we have gone wrong. The account does not tell us every person's thoughts. The leaders explained that this particular day was set apart for the Lord and called them to celebrate. God's holiness did not make grateful joy wrong. And the celebration was to include people who had nothing prepared.



Ask

Verse 12 tells us why they celebrated. What had happened?



Listen for

They had understood the words explained to them. Their response grew from understanding the instruction.



If needed

Find the word “because” in verse 12. Do not stop at “they felt happy”.



SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING):

The joy of the LORD was their strength. Their hope and gladness belonged with Him and His good instruction. This does not mean God forbids sadness. Later in Nehemiah, the people gather to confess sin. We can bring grief to God too. Here, understanding led these people to celebrate and share. The right response comes from listening to what God actually says.

Understanding the good news



SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING):

We need help to understand God’s Word too. But understanding a rule cannot remove the wrong we have done. We need forgiveness. The Scriptures tell us about Jesus, God’s eternal Son, fully God, who became truly human to rescue sinners. Listen to the good news the apostle Paul passed on.



READ ALOUD

³ For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

1 Corinthians 15:3–4, CSB



SAY (SUGGESTED WORDING):

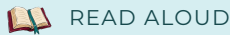
Jesus bore the judgement our sins deserve and rose bodily from death. Forgiveness is His gift, received by turning from sin and trusting Him. We cannot earn it by giving a clever answer or sharing enough things. When we trust Jesus, we have good reason to thank Him, listen to His Word and care for other people. Grace gives us a reason to respond.

Lesson focus: God gives His Word to be understood, so we should listen, seek its meaning and respond to Him with trust, joy and care for others.

Invite quiet thought: “When a Bible word is unclear, will you ask for help with its meaning?” Children may bring questions about trusting Christ to an appropriate leader within the church’s safeguarding arrangements. No personal confession or public profession is required.

Memory verse — Nehemiah 8:8

3 minutes. Display page 3 and read the whole verse.



⁸ They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

Nehemiah 8:8, CSB

Ask what the reading and explanation were meant to achieve. Practise in three phrases: “They read out of the book of the law of God”; “translating and giving the meaning”; “so that the people could understand what was read.” Join the complete verse with its reference. Children may read along or point to the purpose phrase. Repetition supports understanding; it does not replace it.

Help another pair understand

15 minutes. Pairs prepare and improve an explanation of the account. Join two pairs into a group of four. Give each pair pages 1 and 2. Partners share verse-finding and explaining; a child may point, dictate or use adult reading. In an odd group, add a listener who points to the supporting verse. No one needs to address the whole class.

- 1. Model and distribute — 2 minutes.** Point to “holy” in verse 9 on page 1. Explain, “This day belongs especially to the Lord; it is set apart for Him.” Ask one listener to tell back the meaning. Contrast that explanation with merely repeating “holy means holy”. Show the three prompts on page 2. The task is to explain the account, not pretend to be Ezra or a Levite.
- 2. Prepare, teach, listen and revise — 8 minutes.** Give pairs 3 minutes to prepare a short explanation covering verse 8 and verses 9–12. Each partner takes a part. Use page 2 to connect reading, explanation and response; words or pointing are enough, with optional notes. Pair A then has 1 minute to explain to Pair B. Pair B has 1 minute to tell back what it understood and identify anything unclear. Swap those two roles for 2 minutes. In the final minute both pairs use the passage to improve one unclear connection or confirm an explanation already supported by the text.
- 3. Share the improved explanation — 3 minutes.** Each pair gives its improved explanation to the other pair, allowing about 1 minute each. Listeners use the final minute to point to the verse supporting the reason for joy and sharing. Ask one willing group for a brief example of a clearer explanation; other children need not perform publicly.

4. **Apply and check — 2 minutes.** Use the question below. Then ask, “If a friend can repeat a Bible sentence but does not understand it, what could help?” Look for patient explanation, a look at the passage and an invitation to tell back the meaning. Do not make a child’s difficulty the example.



Ask

Someone says, “The people only needed to hear the words. The celebration had nothing to do with understanding.” Use the passage to help them.



Listen for

Verse 8 says the explanation helped them understand; verse 12 says they celebrated because they understood. Their instructed response included sharing with those who had nothing prepared.



If needed

Point to “so that” in verse 8 and “because” in verse 12. Connect purpose and result.

A possible complete explanation: “The Levites helped people understand God’s law, rather than only hear its words (v.8). The leaders said this holy day was a time to celebrate and share (vv.9–11). The people did that because they understood what had been explained (v.12). Understanding helped them respond to God.” Accept different faithful wording. This is a model for the teacher, not a script for children to copy.

Prayer and tidy

2 minutes. Collect the shared sheets and any pencils. Invite quiet reflection or voluntary prayer without asking for private disclosures.

Suggested prayer

Lord, thank You for speaking to us. Help us listen, ask when we do not understand and receive Your truth. Thank You for forgiveness through Jesus. Teach us to respond with trust, gratitude and care for others. Amen.

Reflect after teaching

Could children distinguish hearing from understanding and explain verse 12's reason for celebration? Did listeners' responses help pairs improve their explanations? Record actual timing and any vocabulary needing another explanation. Note whether every child had an accessible role. Do not record private disclosures in shared lesson notes. Next time, recall why explanation matters before introducing Jesus' conversation on the road to Emmaus.

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