



# God's Law Brings the Jews to Repentance

*Nehemiah 8–10*



## LESSON GOAL

Students will respond to God's Word by turning away from sin and humbly depending on Christ.

## BIBLE TRUTHS

- Ezra read God's Word to the people.
- The people were sad because they had disobeyed God's Word.
- The people promised to obey God's Word.

## KEY VERSE

"And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God" (Nehemiah 9:3).

## APPLICATION

- Rejoice that God has given us His Word.
- Mourn when you see your disobedience.
- Repent of your sins and commit to obey.
- Trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

### Symbol Key



Craft



Finger Play



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Center



Activity



Q & A



Age Group

4



## PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

*"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... You shall teach them to your children" (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).*

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

### Bible Background

#### Introduction

For nearly 80 years, the Lord blessed the Jewish exiles who had returned to Israel. First, He moved Cyrus and Darius to help them rebuild the temple. Then He moved Artaxerxes to beautify the temple and to send Ezra to teach the people the Law. Next, the Lord put it into Nehemiah's heart to rebuild the wall. The Lord continued to glorify Himself among the surrounding peoples as they saw His character in His care for His people. But still, Israel persisted in rebellion and wickedness. After initial reforms, they apparently either rejected or ignored Ezra's teaching. It wasn't until after Ezra had been in Israel for 13 years that the people finally were humbled by God's Word. When they came to be taught God's Word, they mourned over their wickedness, rejoiced over God's faithfulness, repented of their sin, and committed to obedience.

#### The People Hear God's Word (Neh. 8)

Less than a week after the wall was finished, the Israelites responded to God's blessing by requesting to hear His Word. They asked Ezra to bring and read the Law of Moses to them. The "assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding" gathered on the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23–25; Num. 29:1–6), the first day of the seventh month in 445 B.C. (Neh. 8:1–2). With the people gathered below, Ezra and 13 other men stood on a wooden platform from which the people could hear the Law being read (8:4–5). Ezra, along with several Levites, not only read the Law but also "helped the people to understand the Law" by explaining (and maybe translating) it for them (8:7–8).

From "morning until midday," the people eagerly listened to God's Word being read and explained (Neh. 8:3). When Ezra opened the Law before the people, they stood in respect. When Ezra praised God, the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" and worshiped the Lord. The people continued to listen with this attentive, humble attitude throughout the day. As more of the Law was read and explained, they couldn't help but weep as they realized how wicked they had been (8:9).

Although tears often may be a right response to sin, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites commanded the people not to weep. They explained that the day was "holy to the LORD" (Neh. 8:9). The reading of the Law had taken place during the Feast of Trumpets, a special Sabbath set aside for offering sacrifices to God. Although weeping would come later, on this day the people were commanded to enjoy a feast and not to sorrow, for the joy of the Lord was their strength (8:10). While the people had become aware of their wickedness, the Law also revealed God's grace. The people could rejoice in both the character of God and the fact that although their sin was great, they still could be restored to God. The Law had not only curses for disobedience but also blessings for obedience. If the people

would humble themselves unto obedience, they still could enjoy God's blessings. The people also had reason to "rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them" (8:12).

The next day, the leaders, priests, and Levites again came to Ezra to understand more of God's Law (Neh. 8:13). From the Law, they learned that Israel was commanded to live in "booths" (temporary dwellings) during the Feast of Tabernacles, from the fifteenth to the twenty-third of the seventh month (Lev. 23:33–43; Deut. 16:13–15). These booths were a reminder that Israel had dwelt in temporary shelters when God brought them out of Egypt (Lev. 23:43). Knowing the Lord's will, the leaders proclaimed that the people should gather branches and make booths in Jerusalem for the feast (Neh. 8:14–16). The Lord commanded in Deuteronomy 16:11 that the people should "rejoice before the LORD" during the feast. The people obeyed, and "there was very great gladness" as for the first time "since the days of Joshua" (8:17) they celebrated the feast as God intended. Throughout the feast, the people continued to listen to the Book of the Law of God being read (8:18).

### **The People Confess Their Sins (Neh. 9)**

Although their hearts were convicted by the reading of God's Word, the people obeyed God and rejoiced throughout the feast. Two days after the feast ended, "the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads" (Neh. 9:1). The time for confession had come. After three hours of listening to God's Law, the people spent three hours confessing their sins and worshiping the Lord (9:3). They were unified in their confession and even began dealing with sin by separating themselves from all foreigners (9:2). While all the people confessed their sin, the Levites led in the worship (9:4–5). The first group led the people in crying out to God (9:4), and the second group led them in praising Him (9:5).

Nehemiah 9:6–37 records the people's prayer of praise and confession. They first praised the Lord for His creation and sustenance of the universe (9:5–6) and then for His choice of Abraham and His covenant with him (9:7–8). Next, they praised Him for delivering Israel from slavery (9:9–12), giving them His Law (9:13–14), and taking care of them in the wilderness (9:15). The only thing that interrupted the people's praise was time for confession over Israel's rebellion and idolatry in the desert (9:16–18). Even though the people had been rebellious, the Lord had been gracious and merciful. The people again praised Him for leading, protecting, and providing for them until they reached the Promised Land and for giving them the land (9:19–25). Confession and praise were intermingled as the people reflected on Israel's history in the Promised Land. While they confessed the continual faithlessness of their fathers, they praised God for His faithfulness and mercy (9:26–31). After praising "the great, the mighty, and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy" (9:32), the people brought their present circumstances before the Lord. Since the days of the Assyrians (9:32) to the return from exile (9:36–37), Israel had been oppressed by foreign nations. Although they looked to God's mercy for relief, they also again confessed that God was just in all that had happened to them (9:33). Israel was completely guilty before God and had no defense (9:34–35). Their only hope was God's merciful character.

### **The People Commit to Obedience (Neh. 10)**

Sincere praise and confession always are accompanied by obedience. The people expressed their commitment to obedience by making and writing a covenant to obey God (Neh. 9:38). Leaders of the priests, Levites, and various families ratified

the covenant with their seal (Neh. 10:1–27). While only representatives of the population sealed the covenant, the rest of the community who had committed to obeying the Law of God “joined with their brethren, their nobles, 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 do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord” (10:28–29). The people swore to obey God’s Law and were willing to be cursed for disobedience. Whatever judgment the righteous Lord sent on His people for breaking the oath would be deserved. Nehemiah 10:30–39 includes various commitments the Israelites made to obey God’s Law and care for His temple. The people were not content to profess a general willingness to obey but specifically listed areas where obedience was a struggle. Many of the commitments made in 10:30–39 demonstrated willingness to obey the Lord in financial matters, a particular challenge due to the economic difficulties and oppression the Israelites faced.

### Conclusion

When the Israelites heard God’s Word explained to them, they both mourned over their sin and rejoiced over God’s goodness. Hearing God’s Law convicted them of their failure to obey. In brokenness, they praised God for His justness in punishing them and confessed their wickedness in not obeying Him. Although they were willing to obey in the future, they had no hope of being restored to a right relationship with God except by God’s mercy. Sinners today must come to God in the same way. They must respond to His Word by humbly accepting what it says about their sin, praising God for His justness and righteousness in punishing them, and obeying whatever He reveals in His Word. The sinner also must understand that he has no hope of reconciliation with God unless God has mercy on Him. God’s mercy is shown to us only through Jesus Christ. It is only by confessing Christ as Lord and trusting in Him as God’s appointed sacrifice for sin that the sinner has any hope of being forgiven. Christ has died and been resurrected, and believers must remember that the teaching of God’s Word, the confession of sin, and the commitment to obedience must center on the work and lordship of Jesus Christ.

## POINT TO THE TRUTH

*“Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth”  
(Psalm 78:1).*

This section includes questions to review last week’s lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week’s lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



### Review Questions

*Use these questions to review and reinforce key truths.*

What was Nehemiah’s job?

*Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king.*

Who told Nehemiah the bad news about the walls of Jerusalem?

*Nehemiah’s brother, Hanani, had just come back from Jerusalem and told him that the people were very sad and that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and the gates of the city were burned with fire.*

What did Nehemiah do when he heard the news?

*He was very sad and prayed to God for help. When the king saw that Nehemiah was upset, he asked what was wrong.*

What did the king say when Nehemiah explained about the walls?

*The king asked Nehemiah how he could help him rebuild the wall.*

Were Nehemiah's enemies happy that he was rebuilding the wall?

*No.*

How long did it take to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem?

*The wall was finished in 52 days (6:15).*

What did Nehemiah's enemies realize as they watched how quickly the wall was built?

*They recognized that this work could have been done only with God's help (6:16).*



### Happy and Sad

Ask the children what makes them happy and what makes them sad. Tell them that the Israelites were happy to hear God's Word and sad when they were disobedient to God (sinful).



### The Bible Says

Tell the students that every time they hear a teacher say "the Bible says..." they should stand up. Intentionally say this phrase frequently. During the lesson, explain that the people stood up whenever the Book of the Law was read.



### Butcher-Paper Booth

Lay out a long strip of butcher paper, and allow the students to color it or glue palm branches to it. Set the paper on a table, or hang it so that the students can sit under it during snack time, imitating the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, which Israel celebrated.



### Build a Booth

Make a booth by draping blankets over tables. Real branches can be gathered to put on top of the blankets, or green branches can be made from construction paper and taped to the blankets. Tell the class, "Today, we will learn about how the Israelites listened to Bible stories for hours in the hot sun."



### Following the Bible

Divide the students into pairs, and give each pair a baseball cap with a Bible sticker on it. The student who wears the cap is the leader, and the other student should imitate whatever he does (while standing in one place). After a while, have the students switch. Explain that we are to do what the Bible says, following it with our actions. Tell the students that in today's lesson they will hear about some Israelites who followed the words of the Bible.

## PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

*"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4).*

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

### Bible Lesson

The Israelites were rejoicing in the many blessings God had given them. He had brought them back to Jerusalem, provided the money and supplies necessary to rebuild the temple, revealed their sin to them, and just recently helped them finish rebuilding the wall around the city. They were full of joy and wanted to worship God, and they also wanted to learn more about Him and about His Law. They did not have Bibles to read, because the whole Bible had not been written yet. They did have the Law of Moses, but there were only a few copies, so the people asked Ezra to bring out his copy and read it aloud to everyone. He agreed, and they all gathered in a great assembly. Ezra began reading the Law, and he read it from before breakfast until lunchtime!

There were a lot of people there, but they all could see and hear Ezra because they had built a special high platform for him to stand on. The people listened very carefully to every word that he read to them. Many of them cried as they heard God's words. They had never even heard some of the laws that were read. They wanted to obey God in all things, so they listened carefully to be sure they didn't miss anything. Ezra and the priests made explained what all the laws meant. They told the people to stop crying and said, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn nor weep" (8:9). Ezra then sent the people out to have their lunch, telling them to be sure to share their food with those who hadn't brought a lunch. The people went to eat and were full of joy because they had heard and understood God's Word.

They came back for another day of hearing Ezra read God's Word. This was during a special time of the year for the Israelites, the Feast of the Tabernacles. As they listened to the Law of Moses being read, the people learned some rules about the Feast of Tabernacles that they hadn't known before. They immediately set about obeying the rules they had just learned. They sat and listened to Ezra read and explain the Law of Moses for a week, and they were joyful to learn more about God.

After this, the Israelites bowed to worship God. They confessed their sin, the sins of their families, and the sins of the Israelites who had already died. A small group of the Levite priests stood before the whole assembly, and they praised and worshiped God aloud on behalf of everyone. In their prayer, they remembered ways in which God had been gracious to the nation. They remembered their father Abraham and how God had chosen him to begin this nation of God's chosen people. They remembered that God had saved their ancestors from the land of Egypt when Pharaoh was treating them badly. They remembered that God had come to Moses and shown him His glory and had given the commandments for them to live by. They remembered that God had been faithful to lead them out of

the wilderness and into the Promised Land. They remembered that God had gone before them and allowed them to defeat all their enemies and had prepared the land for them to live in.

The Israelites also remembered, however, how disobedient their nation had been to God. They saw that they had grumbled and complained. They saw that they, as a people, had been disobedient to God's Law and ungrateful for His graciousness. They were sad to see how badly they and their ancestors had behaved, and they determined not to behave that way anymore. They made a commitment to obey the Lord their God. They even wrote it down, listing the things that they knew were hard for them to do. They wanted to glorify God, so they determined that they would obey Him, especially in the ways that were hard for them. They asked God to curse them if they did not obey Him because they knew they would deserve it.

The Israelites had heard God's Word, and when they did, they saw the wickedness of their hearts. They repented of their sin and relied on the mercy of God to keep them in a right relationship with Him.



## Lesson Questions

What did the people ask Ezra to do when they gathered at the square in front of the Water Gate?

*The people asked Ezra to read the Book of the Law of Moses, which God had given to Israel (8:1).*

What did the people do when Ezra read the Book of the Law?

*All the people stood up to show respect for the book and for God. Jeshua, Bani, and others explained and translated the Law for the people (8:7).*

What did the people do when they heard the Law read?

*They cried. They had realized their sin of breaking God's Law.*

What were the people told to do instead of crying?

*The people were told to celebrate because the day was holy.*

What promise did the people make?

*The people promised to obey God's Word.*

## Presentation Ideas



### A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



### Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



### Booths

Tell the Bible story inside a "booth," as the Israelites did, or sit in front of the booth you made for the lesson time. You can pretend to be Ezra reading the Book of the Law.



## Feast of Tents

Before the story, have the students arrange the tables in a row and sit underneath them as if camping out. Have them listen to today's Bible lesson to see what the Israelites did when Ezra read the Law.



## Reactions

Choose a group of students to act out the reactions of the Israelites when Ezra read from the Book of the Law (Neh. 8), confessed the Israelites' sin (Neh. 9), and committed them to obedience (Neh. 10).

## Praise and Worship

*Change Me Heart, Oh God*

*I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*

*Rejoice in the Lord Always*

*The B-I-B-L-E*

*Thy Word*

*Trust and Obey*



## An Oath of Obedience

At the people's request, Ezra opened God's Law  
*(Hold hands open like book.)*

And he read it from dawn to midday.  
*(Trace large arch like a clock's hands.)*

All the people were sad when they heard what it said,  
*(Make sad face; droop shoulders and head.)*

For they saw how they'd failed to obey.  
*(Shake head.)*

But they saw something else: that the Lord had been good  
*(Point up.)*

And shown mercy in spite of their sin.  
*(Open arms wide.)*

So, confessing their sin, they gave thanks to His name,  
*(Clasp hands together; bow head.)*

And they vowed to obey once again.  
*(Place hand over heart; nod head.)*

## PRACTICE THE TRUTH

*"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).*

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



3  
4

### Happy and Sad Masks

Materials: cardstock circles, wooden craft sticks, ribbon streamers

Directions: Give the students each two cardstock circles, and have them draw a happy face on one and a sad face on the other. Glue streamers to the back side of one mask, and then glue on a craft stick so that half protrudes from the bottom. Glue the masks together, back to back, forming a two-sided mask with a stick handle. Tell the students that the Word of God made the Israelites so sad that they cried. Why? Then tell them that Nehemiah told the people to be joyful and celebrate. Why?



### "People Respond to God's Word"

Materials: copies of the "People Respond to God's Word" craft pages, crayons, glue, scissors

Directions: Give the students each a copy of the craft pages, and have them color and cut out the ears, mouth, and feet from the first page. Then they should glue them to the appropriate places on the second page.



### Pray to Obey

Before class, cut a set of praying hands from a large piece of colored paper. (Fold the paper in half, and cut out the shape of a hand, with the pinky side along the folded edge.) Ask the students to name some ways they can be obedient to the parents and to God (to listen and obey, to do chores, to be kind and compassionate, to treat siblings kindly, to learn from the Bible, etc.). Write some of these things inside the praying hands, and pray with the students, asking God for help in doing these things.



### Three Hours

Materials: copies of the "Three Hours" craft page, brads, scissors, crayons, pencils

Directions: Before class, make a copy of the craft page for each student. Prepare the pages by using a razor to cut along the edge of the clock (from 9 to almost 12, and then from past 12 to 3). During class, give each student a page. Have the students cut off the bottom strip from the page and then cut out the arrows clock hands) and the two strips. Help them use pencils to punch holds through the clock hands, base sheet, and sliders. After the students color and decorate the clock and strips, they can use a brad to assemble them (pushing it through the two hands, the base sheet, and the two sliders). When the sliders, positioned underneath the clock (with the pictures showing through the edge of the clock), are moved three hours, the clock hands will rotate.

### Coloring Sheets

Give each student copies of the coloring sheets from the back of the lesson. Students can color the pages in class or at home.



**MEMORY VERSE**

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (Psalm 119:34).



# People Respond to God's Word

In Nehemiah 8–10, when the people heard  
God's Word read with their

glue ear  
here

glue ear  
here

they responded by confessing their sins with their

glue mouth here

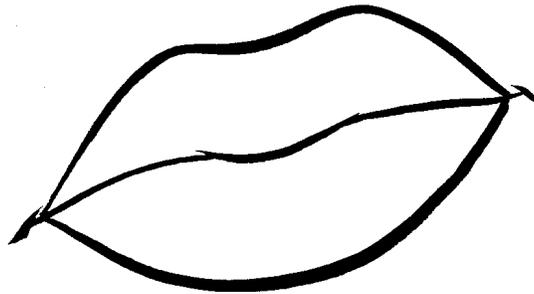
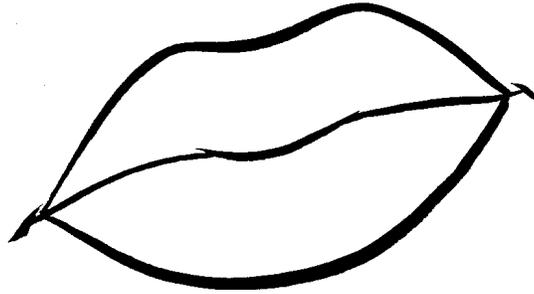
and obeying God's commands with their actions.

glue foot  
here

glue foot  
here



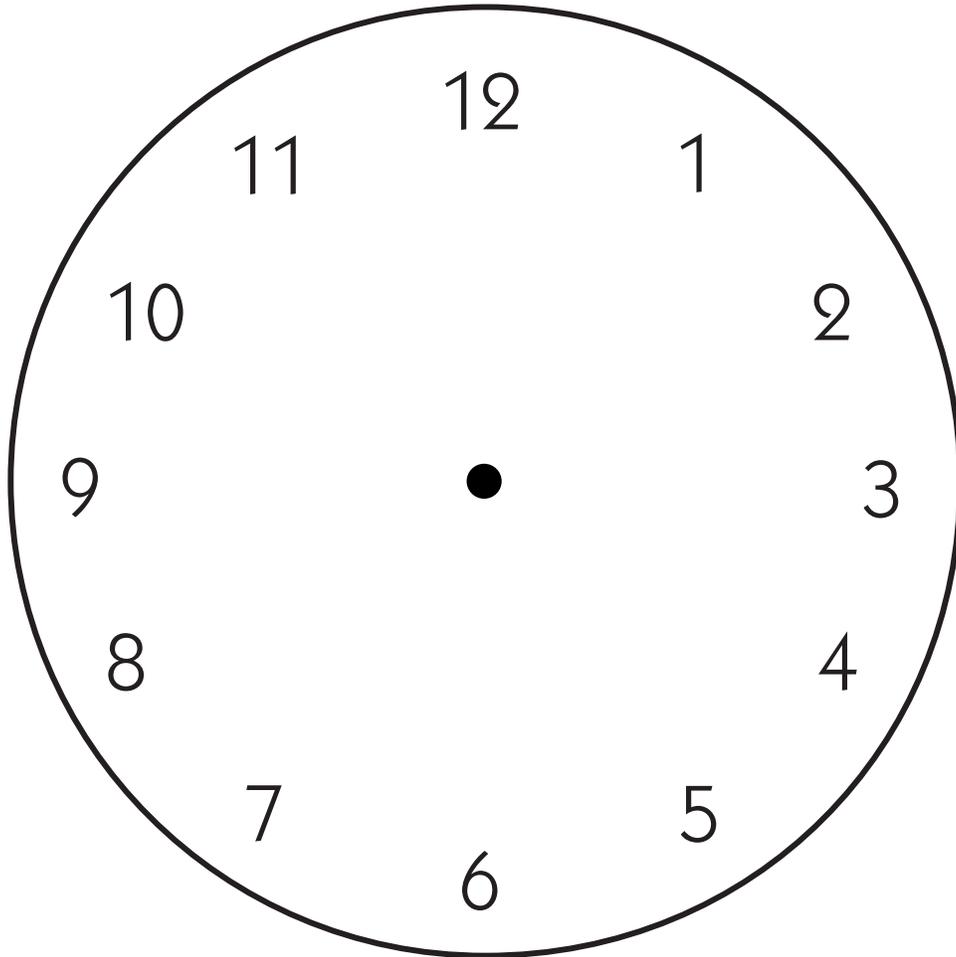
# People Respond to God's Word





# Three Hours

“And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God” (Nehemiah 9:3).

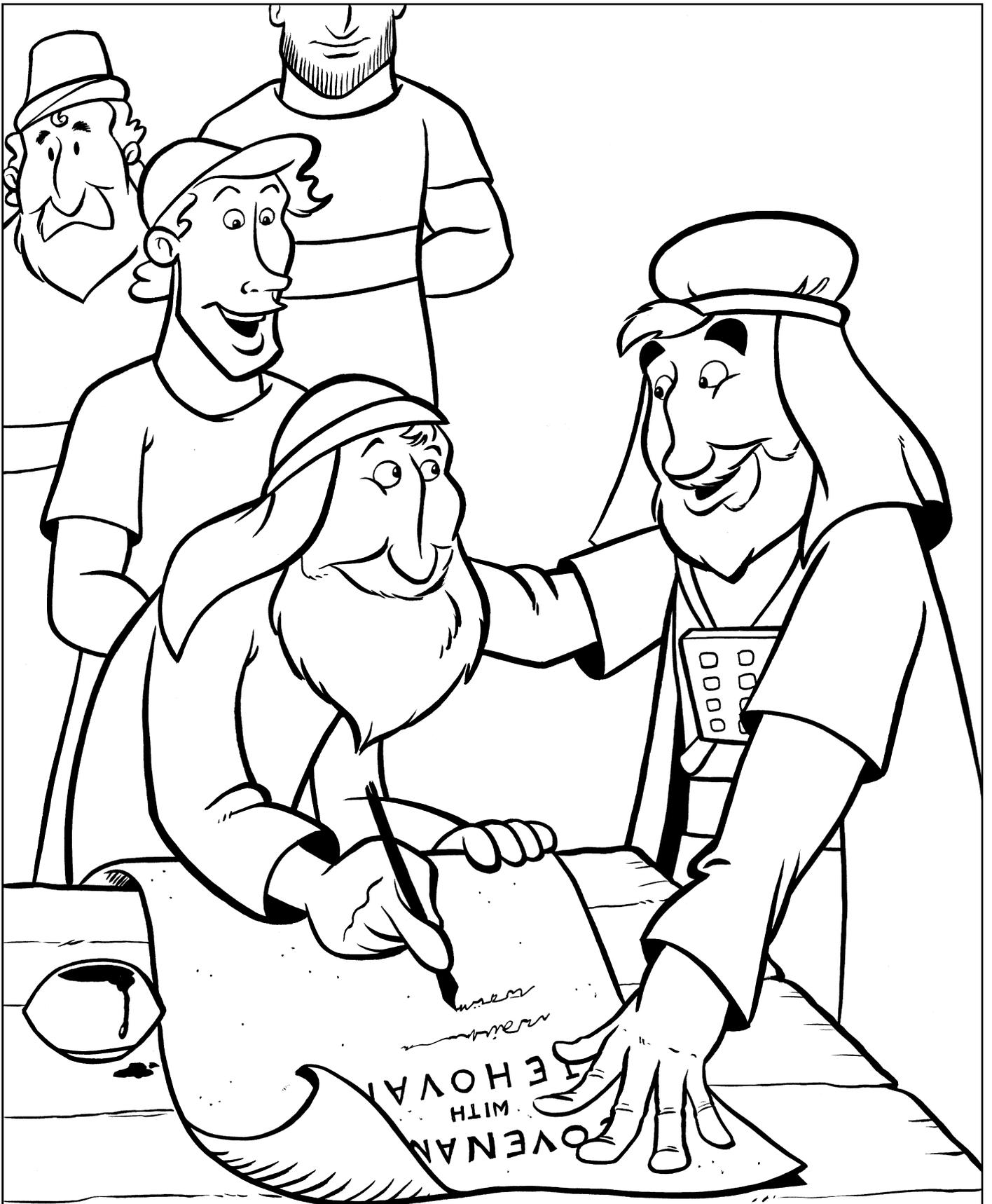






**Ezra read the Law to the people (Ezra 8:1-12).**





The Jews made a covenant to obey God's Word (Neh. 10:1-38).

