

JUNIOR

BIBLE SUNDAY INTRO, STORY, CHAT

INTRODUCTION:

The Covid-19 pandemic stopped us from being able to come together as a church community to worship. You may even be part of a church that still isn't able to meet. Many churches were able to stay in touch with Zoom or video conferencing, but we still missed being together in real life with our church friends. The good news is, we always knew that eventually, and not too far into the future, we would be together again. In maybe a few more weeks? Or maybe a few more months?

But imagine if you weren't going to meet with your church family and worship God with them for year upon year! More than 10 years! More than 25 years! More than 40 years! In fact, about 50 years! And imagine if you didn't have any way to stay in touch because everyone had moved away and you didn't know where they were. Worse still, imagine if you weren't able to hear or read the Bible for all that time except for the bits you had memorised.

Well, this really happened to God's people many, many years ago – long before Jesus was born. There was a war in their country. Their main city, Jerusalem, was destroyed, and most of the people had to leave to live somewhere else. But after about 50 years, they were allowed to return home. This is the story of the first time they came together after their return, to hear God's words to them as a community.

- *How do you think the people were feeling about being back together again?*
- *After all of the years away, what do you think they might have forgotten about God and how he wanted them to live?*

NOTES:

A JOYFUL DAY

I am Simeon. I am 10 years old and my family has just moved to a very old city called Jerusalem. It is the home town of my granddad, Ezra. But Granddad hasn't lived in Jerusalem in over 50 years and I've never lived here. Before we moved back, Granddad Ezra used to tell me about this beautiful place in the city called the Temple. The Temple had all of the writings of God to his people. Granddad used to go to this Temple place to meet friends and family and learn about God. But the longer Granddad was away from Jerusalem, the older he got – and he began to forget. His beard grew very long. His hair became very white. And his back became a little stooped. When I asked him questions about God, sometimes he had the answers. But, other times, he was tired and weak and sad, and he would say, 'I'm sorry, Simeon. I don't remember. I have forgotten.'

But now our whole family and many other families have moved back to Jerusalem and today is a very exciting day indeed. We are thrilled to be all gathering at the Temple together; all the men, all the women and all the children! We left our house early in the morning before even the sun was properly in the sky, and we walked down the stone road toward the centre of the city. Mum was carrying a brightly coloured rug and Dad carried a basket full of delicious things to eat for our lunch. Shortly, we arrived at the large wooden gates of the newly completed walls around the city that Dad's friend, Nehemiah, had built. Mum and Dad each took one of my hands and gave a little squeeze of excitement and together, we stepped through the giant gates and made our way into the crowd.

There were so many people, we could barely move! All of Granddad Ezra's friends were there, and their children, and their children's children, and their children's children's children! There was waving. There was hugging. And the noise! It was so loud with chatter and laughter and waving and hugging, I could barely hear Dad calling me over to where people were spreading their rugs to sit down. I squeezed past the press of bodies around me and

sat down next to Mum. Dad pointed to a tall wooden platform that had been built high above where we were sitting so that everyone could see. I noticed there was a man climbing the stairs to get up onto the platform. He looked familiar. He had a very long beard. He had very white hair. And his back was a little stooped. It was my Granddad Ezra climbing up onto the platform!

As Granddad Ezra picked up one of the scrolls, all the chatter, all the laughter, all the waving, and all the hugging stopped. Quite suddenly, every person stood up and turned toward the high wooden platform and we held our breath together, waiting for something to happen. Granddad Ezra stretched open the scroll and began to read God's word in a clear, strong voice. He read, and he read, and he continued reading! In fact, he read all the way until the sun was high in the sky and it was time for lunch. But we didn't eat lunch because we were already full – full of thankfulness. We had heard God's words and we knew how he wanted us to live our lives!

'Praise the Lord, the great God,' shouted Granddad in a loud voice.

'Amen! Amen!' all of the people called out together.

And then, young and old, we all bowed down onto the ground and worshipped God.

As we began to discuss and understand the words we had heard, some of the people began to feel sad because they realised they had not been living the way God wanted them too. But Granddad Ezra's friend Nehemiah (you know, the one who built the new wall around the city) stepped up beside Granddad and began to speak.

'Don't be sad. This is a day to celebrate for now you understand the words. Enjoy your picnics and share the food and drink with one other. This is a very special day. Don't be sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!'

And then Granddad Ezra went to the stairs at the edge of the high platform. He still had a long beard. He still had white hair. But his back was straight and strong and he went down the stairs with a hop, a skip and a jump for joy!

CHAT ABOUT IT

- Have you ever been in a large crowd like the one in this story? How did it make you feel? Did you enjoy it?
- Who do you know that is 50 years old, or older? How old will you be 50 years from now? What do you think might have happened in your life by the time you are that age?
- It says in the story that the people bowed down on the ground and worshipped God. Why do you think they did that? Do you do anything like that at your church?
- What about Grandad Ezra was different at the end of the story from the beginning of the story? What do you think happened that made that difference?

NOTES: