

NEHEMIAH

pray plan build



Daily Worship Booklet

Week 10

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law, day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

Friday – Nehemiah 8:9-12 – Sin repented of, forgiveness owned.

The seventh-century Puritan preacher said he found it difficult to do two things when preaching: first ‘to make the wicked sad’, and second, ‘to make the ‘godly joyful’.

As Ezra read the Book of the Law and the Levites explained it, the assembly came under conviction of wrongdoing and was filled with grief. This should not be a surprise, for Paul writes to the church in Rome, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20). So, when the Law of God is preached, conviction is what is to be expected. In fact, it is well known that revivals have the preaching of God's Law as one of their preceding factors.

It is important that we understand what is being said in verse 9 when it is said: “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” It is not that Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites are seeking to countermand God's work in the lives of the men and women and all who could understand; far from it. Remember, this is the seventh month (chapter 7:73), meaning that the Jews had just observed the annual Day of Atonement in which God had dealt with their sins (Leviticus chapter 16). Now, they were in the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, as we shall see next week, which was to be a week of celebration, cleansing, and forgiveness, having been granted by the grace and provision of God. So it is not that Nehemiah, Erza and the Levites are telling the assembly not to mourn and weep for their sins, but rather that a sacrifice has been made for their sins. Therefore, they should receive the atonement granted, understand the forgiveness rendered, and prepare to receive the provision of the Lord with joy.

This is important because while we must identify and seriously mourn specific sins, we must not dwell on them. Instead, we must repent of them and be ready to acknowledge the reality of the freely available forgiveness to us as believers in Christ. It is that knowledge of what Christ astonishingly did whereby we can be forgiven by our heavenly Father, which is the root of the joy that Nehemiah and Ezra advocate here. So, just as the preparing to hear the Word is to be seriously undertaken, as is the listening and understanding of that Word, so must the grasping of forgiveness that comes from the one who is The Word.

- Q1. How did the people respond to the Word preached?
- Q2. Why did Nehemiah, Erza and the Levites tell them not to grieve?

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The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see Christ build his church.

Thursday – Nehemiah 8:1-8 – The people engaged with God!

The people's attitude was marked by reverent preparation.

In verse 6, we read that “Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands in reverent adoration before bowing down and worshipping the Lord with their faces to the ground. Each of these actions speaks of reverence for God; and taken together they show the seriousness of the reverence with which these people prepared their hearts to hear the Book of the Law of God.

Sadly, such reverence does not exist throughout the Church of Christ today. Regrettably, too many fail to comprehend the magnitude of what they are doing when they prepare, and then come into God's presence and sit under the preaching of His Word.

The people listened attentively.

When Ezra, the scribe, mounted the steps, scroll in hand, along with thirteen assistants, to read the Book of the Law, he was not engaging in some form or ritual routine. This is nothing like what occurs several times a year when people who ordinarily do not ‘go to church’, go for an unwarranted scriptural ‘celebration’. (By the way, the church is an ‘assembly’. It is something one is part of, not what you ‘go to’.) What these people were gathering to do was for real. We read in verse 3 that “the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.” They gave their undivided attention to what they were hearing. There was no drifting of the mind, no daydreaming, no wandering thought as to ‘what I’ll do when this is finished’. They were devoted to hearing the Word of God. Note that the reading took place from early morning to midday, with the people standing while the Law was read and explained, verse 7. Moreover, it went on day after day for a week, verse 18. Now, there must have been breaks and opportunities for the people to rest, but this was focused, attentive listening.

The people engaged intelligently and understood.

Verse 8: As the Word was read, it was also explained to the people by Levites. This was one of the ministries God assigned to the Levites (Deuteronomy 33:10; Malachi 2:7). Having prepared their hearts to hear the Book of Law being read and given themselves attentively to the hearing of it, the people of God were receptive not only to the hearing but to the understanding of it. They literally owned it. At what level is your desire to understand what you hear preached?

Q1. How did the people prepare for what they would hear?

Q2. How did they listen, and how much did they want to understand?

Monday – Nehemiah 8:1-8 – The people wanted the Word of God!

We are now in the seventh month of Tisri (around October) 444 BC. Jerusalem is packed with Jews who have gathered from all over Judah for a national assembly in the capital city. A wooden platform has been erected in the large square on the city's east side near the Water Gate. It is a platform that has been deliberately erected for a specific purpose. Ezra (for some background on who Ezra is, it would be helpful to read Ezra chapter 7) steps onto the platform with a scroll; it is the Law of Moses. Thirteen men surround him, and he begins to address the assembly with words that bless the Lord, the great God, and the response is instantaneous – all the people answered with shouts of “Amen, Amen” as they lift their hands. and then bow their heads and worship the Lord with their faces to the ground. Erza then begins to read the contents of the scroll. This is not a brief reading of a few chapters; this is hours of reading from God’s Law, from early morning until midday. Nor is it merely a form or ritual reading, for we read in verse 3 that “the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law”, and there were men among the assembly, verses 7 and 8, who “helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places.”

So what is happening here, and what can we learn from it?

- *Nehemiah and the people were not content with just a physical restoration of the city walls.*

Certainly, the reconstruction of the city walls and the hanging of the city gates provided huge security and, in time, financial benefits, but that is not what this was about. This is the city of God, and the people in this city were about more than availing of security and financial prosperity; they were the people of God and needed to live as such. For that to happen, they needed to know or be reacquainted with the Law of God. They could not be satisfied with simply playing the part of being the people of God. They needed to be the people of God. How do we see ourselves as a church?

- *It is the people who demand to hear the Word of God.*

The prominent character in this book so far has been Nehemiah; but it is interesting that the people gather for this assembly and insist that Erza, the retired priest, bring the Law of God to the square and read it. Now, there is no doubt that Nehemiah’s leadership of the people in the previous several months has had a huge impact on them, and the teaching of Ezra in the city for many years had left an indelible mark (Ezra 7:10). Nonetheless, the people wanted it for themselves. How much do we want the Word of God?

Q1. Were the people content with merely security and financial prosperity?

Q2. What did the people want more than anything else?

Tuesday – Nehemiah 8:1-8 – The people stood as one!

Picking up where we left off yesterday, that is, considering the people who gathered in an assembly in the square before the Water Gate in Jerusalem and what they were doing, we find the following:

They shared a collective desire to hear God’s Law read, verse one: “All the people gathered as one man.”

It was not just that a large crowd gathered in the square; ‘all the people did so’, men and women and all who could understand, which means children as well, to hear the Book of the Law read. (We should never underestimate a child’s ability to comprehend what they hear, even if they appear to be doodling on the church bulletin as the Word of God is being preached.)

These people were collectively the ‘people’ of the Book. All together, as one, they tell Ezra to bring the Book of the Law to the square. French author Victor Hugo said, “England had two books. The Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England.” When a nation is a nation of the ‘Book’, that nation will be exalted in her humility before God. We are in untold chaos in our nation today, with laws that seek to destroy the vulnerable and innocent for one reason and one reason alone – there is no desire to hear either the ‘Book’ read or expounded. Our nation is a nation of ‘anything but the Book!’ – we must stand as ‘one’ as a faithful remnant in steadfast opposition to that. We must call for the reading and preaching of God’s Word in our nation and do all we can to see that happen. That will cost us, but there isn’t another option on the table if the people in this nation are to be blessed by the Lord.

The people wanted to hear just the Law of God read and explained.

It may be so obvious that it doesn’t merit comment, but note that the people tell Ezra to bring the Book of the Law of Moses of God – my point? They want to hear the Word of God, nothing else. They do not ask Nehemiah, the man who has proven himself to be a phenomenal leader, to share with them what he thinks they should do to live as the people of God. No, they bypass him, and, knowing what we know of Nehemiah, we can be sure he is delighted at that, for he knows and has taught them that what is essential in life is knowing and doing what God commands. Nehemiah would have agreed with their desire to know only what God would have them do.

Whatever you do in your life, be wholly unaccepting of anything less than hearing the Word Of God.

Q1. Was it - some, a large number, or all of the people who wanted to hear?

Q2. Who did the people not want to hear from?

Wednesday – Nehemiah 8:1-8 – They want to hear because they don’t know.

Continuing with our study of the events of this morning in Jerusalem, when all the people gathered in an assembly in the square before the Water Gate to hear Ezra read the Law of God, we find the following:

The people asked to hear the Word of God because they wanted to know what God required of them.

Why did all the people, as one, tell Ezra, the scribe, to bring the Book of the Law of God to the square? They did so because the people knew enough to know that they did not know everything. They knew they needed to understand what God required of them, and the only way that would happen was if they heard it from God through the reading of His Law.

One of the greatest challenges, if not the greatest, we face as believers is our pride, for it tells us every day that we do not need to ingest God’s Word and meditate on it because we know enough of it. Being aware of one’s ignorance is a great blessing in life. Knowing that you can only fill that void in your knowledge through God and His Word is a wonderful gift from the Lord, for when you know that, then you will seek to find it in God’s Word. Oh, that God would give us a sight of our ignorance regarding our knowledge of Him, His truth and His ways. How much better off we would be if we had an appreciation of our needs, as it would lead us to seek to have them addressed.

Interestingly, the gathering takes place at the Water Gate; some would say it is because this is the largest available square in the city, but there may be more to it than that, in the providence of God. In the Scriptures, the Word of God is frequently referred to as the means of cleansing from sin, just as water is for cleansing from physical filth. Hear the words of Jesus – “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” (John 15:3); “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17); and of Paul, writing of Christ’s love for His Bride, having given “himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself with splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

We have to understand and appreciate that it is not just about receiving God’s commands from His Word regarding how we are to live, but grasping the truth that there is a power in the Scriptures that we cannot live without.

Q1. What motivated their desire to hear from God through His Word?

Q2. What power does God’s word have?