

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 4TH - 5TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

THE RETURN (NEHEMIAH 7) FINISHING AND DEDICATING THE WALL

After the wall was completed, the last thing to do was install the doors and gates and dedicate the wall to God.

- Because Nehemiah was governor, he appointed some key leaders to help lead the city: Hanani, his brother, and Hananiah, the “commander of the fortress.”

CHARACTER MATTERS

The men named leaders of Jerusalem were men of integrity and sacrifice. They not only led with intelligence and wisdom but with a fear of God and living sacrificially for the people.

- **Good leaders place the people they lead before themselves. They also understand proper authority is only given to us by God.**

PREPARING A PEOPLE

Building the walls was just the first step in reestablishing a healthy society. The greater goal was to make Jerusalem a vibrant area filled with people that honored God and lived righteously.

- **We must create a safe place for people to grow in their relationship with God and others. Our “walls” are a genuine love for others and the truth of God’s Word.**

BRING THE EXILES HOME

V8-69 are important because they document the families and resources that were brought back into Jerusalem. This not only gave Nehemiah the knowledge he needed to build the city’s infrastructure it also gives this book historical validity.

- It was very common in this time to relocate people for the sake of strengthening capitals.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE REBUILDING

Nehemiah records different people and families that contributed financially to the rebuilding of the city and the temple.

- We must learn to be more open-handed with our finances. Yes, **we should be wise, but we should also be generous because ultimately, it all belongs to God anyways.**

THE WORD (NEHEMIAH 8:1-6)

A CAMEO APPEARANCE

Ezra and his caravan arrived in Jerusalem a couple of months before the Jews had settled into their towns near Jerusalem. Ezra had been sent by the Persian king to structure the Jewish community around God’s laws.

- **We learn that society has to be built upon biblical principles.** Even a pagan king realized that God’s laws work.

GATHERED TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD

Ezra and Nehemiah assembled the “men, women, and all who could listen with understanding” at the Water Gate to hear Ezra read the Torah (first 5 books of the OT).

- This happened in the 7th month, which would have been the most religious time of the year because of the feasts and Day of Atonement.

FROM MORNING TO NOON

Ezra read for 5-7 hours as people listened near the Water Gate away from the temple. His location was important because it showed that the laws of God are greater than the temple built to Him.

- **Going to a house of worship is vital, but if we’re not living by the principles of Christ, the building becomes irrelevant.**

RESPECT FOR THE WORD

When Ezra opened the Bible, the people **stood up in reverence**. After giving thanks to God (benediction), the people **lifted their hands** and **shouted “Amen!”** (so be it). Then in humility, they **put their faces on the ground** in praise.

- **The posture we take with God is important because it demonstrates how our heart feels about Him.**

A TIME TO LAUGH (NEHEMIAH 8:7-12)

HELPING TO UNDERSTAND THE WORD

The Levites were the ones who did religious work (essentially pastors) amongst the Jews. After Ezra read the Bible, the Levites would explain what the scripture was saying.

- This is what pastors should be doing still today: reading the Word and expounding on the spiritual and practical implications in our lives.

“THIS DAY IS HOLY TO THE LORD”

As Ezra and the Levites were explaining the Law, **the people began to weep and mourn because they felt they had neglected God’s instructions.** Though mournful repentance is good, it wasn’t the appropriate response here.

- **Sin should disturb us, but the hope of a new life in Jesus should give us hope and a reason to celebrate.**

CELEBRATING A FAITHFUL GOD

Ezra told the people to celebrate and to “not grieve because the joy of the Lord is [their] strength.” Again, **sin should grieve us, but we should celebrate God’s love, grace, gift of joy, and our invitation to a fresh start.**

- **We must also be cautious to not cheapen grace with unrepentant sin. Sin must be addressed.**

THE BIBLE BRINGS US COMFORT AND JOY

The people left and celebrated because the clarity of the Word from Ezra and the Levites brought them comfort and joy.

- **Even when the Bible offends, it does so in order to draw us closer to God and protect us. God is a good Father that has to call us out and even reprimand us at times, but it is out of love!**

THE FEAST (NEHEMIAH 8:13-18)

A SMALLER BIBLE STUDY

The next day, Ezra, the heads of the families, and the Levites gathered together to examine the Word in greater detail. During the study they discovered that the Law says they were to live in shelters during the “festival of the seventh month.”

- They already knew to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (or Shelters), but not this way.

WHAT IS THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES?

This is a 7-day festival found in Lev. 23:33-43 to remember the Jews’ deliverance from Egypt and foreshadow the Savior (Jesus). It is the last of 7 feasts/festivals that remind the Jewish people of God’s provision.

- Though we as Christians are not obligated to continue these festivals, there is nothing wrong with it.

THE BIBLE SAYS IT, WE DO IT

Once the new info was discovered in the Bible, they immediately spread the word and started to build temporary shelters and lived in them during the Feast of Tabernacles.

- Though the Jews had not practiced this instruction for quite some time, **once they recognized their negligence, they obeyed the Word. Do we do the same?**

THEIR OBEDIENCE USHERED IN CONTENTMENT

The reason for the festivals was to remind the people of God of their **identity**. When they obeyed and lived out the Word of God, **they received peace and joy because they better understood Who they were made in the image of.**

- **The path to true fulfillment is found when we live in our true identity in God.**

ARE WE BUILDING THE PROPER WALLS?

- People need an honest and safe environment in order to grow spiritually. Are we creating that space as individuals and as a church?
- Are we protecting ourselves and others with a **wall of prayer**? Do we **protect our minds with a wall of truth from the Word and obedience to His commands**?

OUR COMMITMENT TO THE WORD

- Is the Bible a priority in our lives? **Are we taking time to read, study, and meditate on God’s Word?**
- **How will we respond to the Word?** Will we be offended and defy its teachings if they contradict our desires? Or will we humble ourselves and submit to His higher authority and wisdom?

ADDRESSING SIN

- Does sin still bother us? Do we believe there are consequences to sin?
- Do we try to justify our sin or create a hierarchy of it that makes us look less evil?
- The realization of our depravity apart from God’s grace should encourage us! Why? **Because it is not on our merit but His that we are saved!**

WHO ARE WE?

- **Where do we find our identity?**
- Where we find our identity will also be where we derive our value. Is what we are identifying with eternal, immovable, or unchanging? Will it stand the test of time?
- There is one source of unshakable peace and fulfillment. **Do we live in the freedom that we’re made in God’s image?**