

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 5TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

THE CENSUS (NEHEMIAH 7:1-73) PRESERVATION OF THE COMPLETED WORK

The walls were completed, and the doors installed, but Nehemiah did not sit back and marvel at the work completed.

- To preserve the work that was completed, he appointed gatekeepers as practical overseers to operate and guard the gates and Levites (law) and singers (worship) as spiritual overseers.

FOCUSING ON THE PEOPLE

Now that the walls were rebuilt, Nehemiah turns his focus on rebuilding the people of Jerusalem. This refocusing was inspired by God as v.5 says, "God put it on [his] mind" to repopulate the vacated homes.

- He starts with a census that was compiled in Ezra 2, to see who all had returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile.

IT WAS NEVER ABOUT THE WALLS

What this census (list of names) shows us, is that **the work was really about the people.**

- The walls benefited the people, **enabling them to live in peace and security.** The work **taught them to work together, work through opposition, and work to completion.** They were "pioneers of faith" that would restore the Jewish nation.

READING THE WORD (NEHEMIAH 8:1-6) PERFECT TIME FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Nehemiah and the people requested that Ezra bring the law of Moses (Torah – the first 5 books) and read it before an assembly of all "who could understand."

- This would have taken place on the first day of the seventh month, which was the Jewish equivalent of our New Year's Day. It was a perfect time to realign with the Lord.

SCRIBE AND PRIEST

Ezra was the right choice to deliver God's Word. He had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

- He would have come to Jerusalem about 14 years before Nehemiah to rebuild the temple and bring God's people back to worship.

REVERENCE FOR THE WORD

Ezra read God's Word from daylight to mid-day. Every day for a week, for about 6 hours each day, the people of God desired to hear from God.

- They knew that they were not just hearing a mere man speak of his own ideas, but they would be hearing the very Word of God (1 Thes. 2:13).

V.5 tells us that "as he opened it, all the people stood up." It's not about the action of standing, but more about the heart behind the action.

- Standing for the reading of the Word was out of a genuine reverence for hearing God's word. **We need to have the same posture in our hearts for the Word!**

With their hands lifted up the people said, "Amen, Amen," meaning "So be it!" They were a united front that was devoted to hearing the Word. They even "knelt low and **worshiped the Lord** with their faces to ground."

- **They didn't worship the Book**, but instead **they worshiped the Lord who spoke to them from the Book.**

HEARING THE WORD (NEHEMIAH 8:7-12) APPLICATION OF THE WORD

Most people were not able to own a copy of the scriptures, so they would have been excited for the chance to hear someone read and explain the Word of God.

- The Levites would have assisted Ezra in translating and explaining the Word in a way that the people could **apply it their own lives.**

THE LAW CONVICTS

The people's initial reaction to the reading and explanation of the Word was one of conviction and grief. The law had pointed out how sinful and rebellious they were.

- Though we don't stay there, we should be grieved by the "knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20) revealed by the law.

"DON'T GRIEVE"

In observance of Jewish rituals, they had just observed the Day of Atonement, and the Lord had dealt with their sins, so they should have been rejoicing in His forgiveness.

- If we repent (turn away) and our sins are atoned (covered) for by Jesus then we too have reason to celebrate.

CELEBRATION

Nehemiah, along with Ezra and the Levites, convinced the people to stop mourning and start Celebrating.

- If we repent (turn away) and our sins are atoned (covered) for by Jesus then we too have reason to celebrate. "It is as wrong to mourn when God had forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us. (Wiersbe)"

"THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH"

While urging the people to stop grieving he brings the focus to God's graciousness.

- They had sinned and neglected the Word of God, but He is to be celebrated for He "does not deal with us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, great is His faithful love toward those who fear him" (Ps.103:10-11).

OBEYING THE WORD (NEHEMIAH 8:13-18) FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The Day Atonement would have been celebrated on the 10th day of the month and the Feast of Tabernacles (Festival of Shelters) would be from the 15th to the 21st.

- During the seven days of the feast, they would live in these booths on their roofs, as a reminder of their 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

V17 says that they "had not celebrated like this since the days of Joshua." This doesn't mean that they ignored the feast but that they had not celebrated with tremendous joy in a long time.

- Focusing on the harvest and construction of the temporary shelters for the celebration had overshadowed the reason for celebrating.

The festival reminded them of how God blessed and provided for Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus.

- Seeing the parallel of God's provision through the Exodus (past) and to their exile from Babylon (present), the "whole community" responded to what was being read.

REALIGNMENT

- The same way that Nehemiah started off the New Year focusing on the Word of God to realign their hearts with God, we too need to be intentional with unplugging and refocusing.
- **We need to be praying and reading the Word daily.**
- **We need to fast regularly.**

At the beginning of every year, we will do a 40 day fast together as a church.

- **We have Daily Scripture reading and devotionals.**
- **We will seek the Lord through prayer.**
- **We learn to be still and wait on the Lord.**
- **We expect the Lord to move (2 Chron. 7:14).**

REVERENCE

- It is not enough to just read the word, and it's not even enough to know the word. **We must understand and apply it!**
- **Do we connect what we read in the Word as being relevant to us now? Does it give us hope for the future?**
- **What is our heart posture towards the Word?**

REVIVAL

- Revival is not a scheduled event or something you attend.
- **Revival is when we realize our need to be spiritually restored and revitalized in our walk with Jesus!**
- It starts with a desire for the Word! **"I lie in the dust; revive me by word"** (Psalm 119:25)