

BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Wednesday Noon Bible Study

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The Book of Nehemiah – Chapter 7 and 8

CHAPTER 7

The Wall Guarded

Watchmen provided for the walls.

(Nehemiah 7:1-2) The appointment of Hanani and Hananiah.

Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

Everything was in order — both practically (the wall... I hung the doors... the gatekeepers) and spiritually (the singers... the Levites); the work was completed and set right.

- The singers and the Levites were there to lead the people in worship; the walls were not rebuilt so the people of Jerusalem could look at nice walls. They were rebuilt so they could worship God with greater glory and freedom than ever before.
- Every victory in our life should take us deeper into praise. If we are not praising God more, and more deeply, with each passing year, are we really having much victory? Maybe we are making it through tough times — but coming out more bitter and sour than ever. That is not God's victory. His victory leads to a sweeter spirit and to deeper praise.

Nehemiah wasn't in this for political glory. He had done a work, and now he could let it go. God would still use him in Jerusalem, but he knew it wasn't his place to stay in authority.

Hanani: This was Nehemiah's brother, was the one who first told him about the sad state of affairs in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:2). His initiative and concern made him well qualified to govern.

- He was a faithful man and feared God more than many: This described Hananiah, who was the co-leader of Jerusalem. This is what God needs in a man or a woman to use them greatly.

Many folks who aren't all that gifted — they can't sing, they can't remember a bunch of Bible verses, they don't have a knack for teaching, and so forth — can still be used greatly of God if they are faithful and fear God. On the other hand, many terribly gifted people may always be frustrated in serving God if they are not faithful and fearing God.

(Nehemiah 7:3) A watch set on the walls.

And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

A tremendous victory had been won — the walls were rebuilt. Yet the walls would not protect themselves. Diligent watchmen must be appointed, and the walls had to be guarded.

List of the returned families.

(Nehemiah 7:4-5) The need to develop Jerusalem.

Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it:

Now that the walls were rebuilt, Nehemiah still wanted to see how he can be a blessing to the people of God and the city of God. He noticed that the population was low and there were many abandoned houses.

Nehemiah wanted Jerusalem to grow and prosper. But before that could happen he must first know who he had already. Just as when he toured the broken-down walls in 2:11-16, he needed to know the problem well. So, he took a census and looked at the registry first written by Ezra in Ezra 2:1-70.

(Nehemiah 7:6-73) The citizens of Jerusalem who returned from the Babylonian captivity.

These verses through verse 73 list the names and families of those who returned to Jerusalem.

This list was important because each of these people were important to God, in that they did what so few of their fellow Jews did — they took the trouble to return back to the promised land after they had already set down roots for seventy years in the Babylonian empire.

These are people who had a pioneer spirit; they were willing to endure hardship and discomfort, because they had a call from God that was more important than their own comfort. **Life was easier in Babylon, but it was better in Jerusalem!**

Some could not be priests until their lineage was determined. In the Old Testament, one could not be a priest unless it was established that they descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses, and the first high priest over Israel.

When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities: This list flows beautifully after the completion of the work, because it reminds us that the work was really all about these people.

- The walls weren't all that important; what was important was the benefit the walls could have in the lives of God's people (enabling them to live in peace and security).

CHAPTER 8

The Spirit of God, Working through the Word of God, Brings Revival

Hearing God's Word sparks revival.

(Nehemiah 8:1-3) The people gather and ask Ezra to read God's Word.

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

This demonstrates that the Spirit of God was at work even before the reading of God's Word. People do not gather together as one man for the things of God unless the Spirit of God has moved them, and they do not desire God's Word unless the Spirit of God has moved them.

- If you attend to the hearing of the Word of God, it is **evidence** the Spirit of God is working with you. But it is still important to cooperate with that work and to **not resist it**. We need to cooperate and flow with the work of God's Spirit if the Word of God is going to do its full work in us.

Ezra was the man responsible for having the temple rebuilt, and for returning God's people to worship. Nehemiah, in all his work of rebuilding the walls, just carried on the work Ezra had begun.

- We know Ezra cared about God's Word, because he was a scribe — someone who copied the Bible by hand. We know he was a man devoted to God Himself, because he was a godly priest.

Ezra read God's Word from daylight to mid-day. For some six hours he read God's Word and the people listened.

- This was a move of the Spirit of God. People who will be attentive to the Book of the Law for some six hours are people touched by the Spirit of God.
- From morning is literally, "from the light." These people gathered from dawn to hear God's Word. They were willing to sacrifice something to hear it — they wanted it, and like Jacob they would not let go until they had their blessing.

(Nehemiah 8:4-6) How God's Word was received.

So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

So Ezra... stood on a platform: They had taken the time to build a wooden platform, so the Word of God could be heard. They did practical things, so God's Word would have the greatest effect.

- There are practical things we can do also to help God's Word have the greatest effect; when a room is comfortable, low in distractions, and the preacher is clearly heard, it helps God's Word have the greatest effect.
- But by far, the greatest preparation must happen **in the heart**. We must come, willing to forget about ourselves and our own agenda, and submit ourselves to God's Word — not the preacher's word, but God's Word.

When he opened it, all the people stood up: They had a respect for God's Word. They recognized it for what it was — the Word of God, not the word of man. They honored it.

IS IT MANDATORY TO STAND WHEN SCRIPTURE IS BEING READ?

Standing to hear the Bible read is certainly a sign of respect. Just as we stand when reciting the pledge of allegiance to show respect for the flag, and we stand when the national anthem is played to show respect for our country, many Christians stand for the reading of the Bible. However, there is no biblical command that teaches people must stand when Scripture is read.

Like the people of Judah during Ezra's day, we should always show respect for the Word of God. Standing while it's read is one way to show respect, but there are other ways. The best way to show respect for God's Word is to heed it and allow it to change our lives. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

Then all the people answered: This work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God had three immediate results.

- The people thanked God (by saying Amen when Ezra blessed the LORD).
- They prayed (by lifting up their hands).
- They worshipped (by bowing down before Him).

Thanksgiving, prayer, and praise are all good measures of how the Spirit of God and Word of God are working in us.

(Nehemiah 8:7-8) God's Word is presented so the people may understand.

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

Special men were appointed to help the people understand God's Word. After the reading they needed to understand it because if they did not understand it, it would do little good.

- Understanding needs to be the first goal of any preacher or teacher.

The preacher must speak in a clear, easy-to-understand way. His main goal is to make the people understand, not to impress or entertain them.

- They gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading: The preacher must communicate the sense of the passage of Scripture, and not his own agenda or favorite personal topics. The people must leave understanding God's Word better, not understanding the preacher's opinions better.

Response to God's Word prompts revival.

(Nehemiah 8:9-11) The people respond with weeping.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."

The Word of God was doing its intended work. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us two things the Word of God is profitable for: reproof and correction. Sometimes it hurts to be reproofed and corrected, and these tears were evidence of some of that pain.

Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength: The people felt sad, because they were aware of their own sin. But they could walk in joy because God was doing a great work. Our emotions are not beyond our control; we can do God's will even when we don't feel like it.

(Nehemiah 8:12) The people choose to rejoice.

And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

They went away praising God, because understanding God's Word brings such a sweet sense of joy.

(Nehemiah 8:13) The leaders gather for more study of God's Word.

Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

Leaders have a special need to understand and walk in God's Word. Their ignorance or disobedience affects far more than themselves — it affects everyone they have an influence on.

(Nehemiah 8:14-18) The people keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

This was beautiful, simple obedience. Their attitude was that **God said it, so we will do it**. Even though tradition did not tell them to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (it had not been done since the days of Joshua), but they relied on God's Word, not on tradition.

The Feast of Tabernacles was all about remembering how God had blessed and provided for Israel in the wilderness during the Exodus. They could see God's blessing and provision for them right then, and it made something old seem brand new to them.

Day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God: This revival began by the Spirit of God working through the Word of God; it continued that way also.