

Nehemiah and Rebuilding

Study 6 – New vision, new ways for the people of God: Chapters 8-9

Welcome

Do you feel confident to share any occasions when you have made a lifestyle change in response to God's word to you personally?

Worship

In the sequence of these Scripture readings, the people's worship comes after their listening and understanding of God's word. So that is the order we adopt today.

Word – Study 6 – The impact of God's word

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, there were broken city walls. There was also a broken people. We have studied the story of the rebuilding of the walls. Now let us look at Nehemiah's leadership of the people. The reading of God's word had an impact. God was speaking to them again. Perhaps they had experienced a terrible silence or sense of distance during the years of exile. In Chapter 8, can you pick out their initial emotion, and the thread of renewed feeling? A special memory verse is tucked inside as well.

Day 1 – Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-12

Ezra the priest reads the covenant. Which things stand out for you in this record?

Day 2 – Nehemiah 8.13-18.

The people renew the 7-day feast of Tabernacles. It was intended as a reminder of their rescue from Egypt * but had been forgotten. This is celebrated today as Sukkot, and by Jesus in John's Gospel, chapter 7.

What do you think is the significance of all the names in Chapter 7? If you would like to read the interim verses aloud, enjoy the wonderful names, Nehemiah 8.4,7.

Three weeks later – Nehemiah 9.1

The people return for a season of true repentance. Describe the outward signs. Why do you think this was necessary? How would you describe and explain repentance? Do you have any experience to share that might encourage others?

Re-telling of God's goodness – Nehemiah 9.6-31

How can we renew and stimulate our flagging faith? Share what works for you! The approach of 'remembering' is key to the Jewish faith: to remind the whole community of what God has done for his people. Read the steps of the story below and notice the journey. Can you now take this to a more personal level, and consider whether God has met you in these steps, either as an individual or as a group, or as a church? For example, specific times of guidance when your life seemed like a complete desert?

- 1) Creation. Nehemiah 9 v 6
- 2) God's call of Abram v 7-8
- 3) God's deliverance from Egypt v 9-11
- 4) God's guidance in the desert v 12
- 5) God's gift of the Law v 13-14
- 6) God's provision during seasons of hunger and thirst v 15
- 7) Sadly remembering their resistance to God v 16-18
- 8) God's faithfulness anyway v 17, 19
- 9) God's provision, material and spiritual v 20-21
- 10) God's deliverance from enemies (during the time of Joshua) v 22-23
- 11) God's gift of land v 25 (*note that we cannot discuss the ethics of conquering the land in this study, but can come back to it another time if it helps*)
- 12) God's forgiveness and help in difficulties created by their own sinfulness v 26-31

Confession – Nehemiah 9.32-37

How do the people describe their own journey? Share any new insights.

A new commitment to follow God – Nehemiah 9.38 and 10.1ff

What do you notice about the first signature? How does this speak about leadership?

Worship

The people responded to God's word with a wide range of emotions and actions.

How is God speaking to you?

How will you respond to him together?

Witness

I wonder whether any of the stories you have read today have given you a new story to tell that has the freshness of re-discovery, or renewal, or even repentance.

Who will you share this with?

How can you help a friend to discover the joy of the Lord? Nehemiah 8.10

Footnote

*Leviticus 23.33-43