

# WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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## STUDY NOTES ON NEHEMIAH

### Chapter 8: The Great Revival

Now that the wall was completed, the people turned to restoring their spiritual service in the city. The law had commanded that the Scripture be read to the people from time to time (Deuteronomy 3:11, 12; Joshua 8:34, 35; 2 Kings 23:2), and a failure to do this in the past can be seen as part of the broken-walls experience. The reading was led by Ezra the scribe (see Ezra 7:6). He read from the Book of the Law from morning till noon. Those who assembled were men and women and all who could hear and understand what was taught and the people listened attentively to what was read.

The fact that the people requested Ezra to read God's Word demonstrates that the Spirit of God was at work even before the reading of God's Word. People do not desire God's Word unless the Spirit of God has moved them. But it is still important to cooperate with that work of God's Spirit if the Word of God is going to do its full work in us.

J. Edwin Orr defined revival as: "*The Spirit of God working through the Word of God, in the lives of the people of God.*" This chapter is a great example of this. Nearly every verse lends itself to the importance of the Word, the desire for the Word, teaching of the Word, and the application of the Word.

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

The people stood in their place, and were helped by the Levites to understand the law as it was read. This is the plain simple essence of gospel teaching and preaching. Proper teaching requires appeal to the Bible as the source or basis of our teaching and our only authority. We should not use human ideas as our foundation. Note also that helping people understand the meaning of Scripture is authorized by God. What is not authorized is changing the meaning or adding our own human ideas that differ from it.

#### **Verses 4-6. The people give their attention to God's Word.**

The people had taken the time to build a wooden platform so the Word of God could be heard. They did practical things so that God's Word would have the greatest effect. There are practical things we can do also to ensure that God's Word has 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.

The people had a *respect* for God's Word. They recognized it for what it was - the Word of God, not the word of man. This is evidence of two things. First, that the Spirit of God is at work; second, that something good is going to happen.

So, what effect did the message have on the people? The people *thanked God*, they prayed and they worshipped Him. Thanksgiving, prayer, and praise are all good measures of how the Spirit of God and Word of God are working in us.

### **Verses 7-8. God's Word is presented so the people may understand.**

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.

Understanding isn't only necessary for those who haven't become familiar with the Bible, it is beneficial to those who have heard it ten times over, especially when it is being handled by a Spirit-filled, trained teacher. It is like when an art restorer cleans a painting, he reveals things that were always there, but the colours weren't as bright and the details weren't as clear, because they were obscured. It is then that the real impact of the painter's work can be seen.

### **Verses 9-11. Response to God's Word makes revival flow.**

The people responded with weeping. They saw how God has been gracious and faithful and how unworthy they were of Him and they wept. 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 reproved and corrected, and these tears were evidence of some of that pain.

It was not the poetic voice of a gifted public speaker. It was not because the book contained a sad story of lovers kept apart. No, it was because the people were cut to the heart about their sin. Hebrews 4:12-13: For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It pierced their souls and exposed their sins. They wept because they saw their ugliness in the mirror of the Word. They did not do as so many do today, hearing the Word and refusing to let it impact their lives. James said that someone who does this, James 1:23-24 NASB, "...is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for **once** he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was". But James goes on to say in verse 25 that: "...one who looks intently at the perfect law, the **law** of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does." If we humble ourselves in the presence of the Lord, He will exalt us.

Nehemiah told them not to mourn or weep. This day was for rejoicing. Ecclesiastes 3:1,4: "There is an appointed time for everything, and there is a time for every event under heaven:... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." It was a time to laugh and dance, not to weep and mourn. Why? Because the day was holy and, though it is a good thing to be sad under the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, if the sense of conviction is greater than the sense that God is doing a good and holy work, then tears are not good. We are great sinners, but He is a greater Saviour. Our knowledge of

our sin should never be bigger than our knowledge of Jesus as our Saviour. Our emotions are not beyond our control; we can do God's will even when we don't feel like it.

That day was not a day for weeping, but was a time for joy. It was a holy day, the Feast of Trumpets – compare v2 with Leviticus 23:24. This was expressly commanded to be a time for eating and drinking, and giving food to those who had none – Deuteronomy 16:14; cf. Deuteronomy 26:11-13; The people did as told in the Scriptures.

### **Verse 13. The leaders gather for more study of God's Word.**

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. This was the case in this situation as the leaders with Ezra discovered what God had commanded through Moses about the feast of Tabernacles or Booths. What did they do? They set out to obey it.

**Verses 14-18.** 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. And because of their great obedience to God's Word, there was "very great gladness" (v.17, KJV). We often are deceived into thinking the path of gladness is in doing our own thing, but gladness and freedom come only through obedience.

### **FOR FURTHER STUDY**

When Ezra praised the Lord, all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" Now, that might sound odd if you were raised to think that "Amen" is short for, 'Thanks for listening to my prayer God. It's over now.' No, in reality, the word "Amen," means more than that. This is an expression of agreement meaning, "so be it." It affirms that the hearer agrees that the message spoken is true. When it comes at the beginning of a statement, it means, "What I'm about to say is absolutely as true as true can be!" When it comes at the end of a statement, it means, "I agree wholeheartedly with what has been spoken!" It is absolutely biblical to agree with something that is being taught by saying, "Amen." They said "Amen," and they lifted their hands. But then they bowed low. They prostrated themselves, lying down on their faces in worship, as a sign of God's complete superiority.

**The Day Is Holy.** The day that was holy was the Feast of Trumpets. If you are a student of the Old Testament, you know that there were seven feasts given by the Lord: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, The Feast of Weeks (called Pentecost), The Feast of Trumpets, The Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Each of these feasts was called a "convocation," which means "assembly," or "rehearsal." As it turns out, each of these were rehearsals - holidays that prophetically pointed to a work of Jesus Christ, and celebrated on the very days that they were - or would be - fulfilled. Passover pointed to the Lamb of God being killed, His blood preventing the judgment of God from coming upon all those who were covered by it.

As Passover ended, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began, telling of the sinless, broken, body of Jesus Christ being buried. The Sunday after, the Feast of Firstfruits was celebrated, foretelling of the resurrection of Jesus, the firstfruits from among the dead. Fifty days later, the Feast of Weeks spoke of Jesus giving birth to the church - the day of Pentecost.

A long period passes in the calendar without any holidays then all of a sudden comes the Feast of Trumpets. The Feast of Trumpets was a Sabbath day - a day when trumpets are blown and workers cease from their labours. But interestingly, there is little more information given about it. Of the seven feasts, it is the deepest mystery. At least it was a mystery until it was unveiled by the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is talking about new bodies that we will receive at death - bodies that are glorified, resurrected, and changed. But then he tells us that not everyone will die to get these bodies: 1 Cor. 15:51-52: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." Could the second coming of Jesus and our transformation be the reality that the Feast of Trumpets foreshadows?