



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Lesson 10

In last week's lesson, the people of Israel cry out to the Lord in confession and repentance. Nehemiah 9:5-38 records one of the longest prayers of the Bible. But as we all know, it's easy to say "I'm sorry" and ask for forgiveness. It's much harder to make the commitment to change that behavior. We can all say we'll change, but it's the obedience that counts. Alexander Whyte said, "The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings." The Israelites knew it was time for them to have a new beginning, a "do-over." They proclaimed it to the Lord; now it was time to "seal the deal."

This chapter begins with a list of names. Again, don't get discouraged or bored as you read through it. There is some great stuff in this chapter. Pray for the Spirit to open your eyes, and then put on your detective glasses. Look for the nuggets He has for you this week.

First Day

1. Let's read Nehemiah 9:38-10:1-39. What facts do you find? What's happening?
2. Do you see any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts?
3. What's the main point of this chapter? What verse would support that?

4. Nehemiah is now calling the people to set their priorities straight. He's calling them to make some decisions. In what areas or "categories" does Nehemiah call them to order?

I'm sure Nehemiah has been praying about this moment. He has formulated a plan for the Israelites to follow to get back to a place that is pleasing to the Lord. I believe he is careful, thoughtful, and deliberate. He's setting goals and priorities for the people, along with reminding them that these laws and ideas came straight from God.

5. In 9:38, the people put down their rules and commitments in writing, and in 10:1, the leaders sealed their documents. Why was this such an important step for the Israelites?
6. The people were showing how serious they were about their commitments. Why does writing down our prayers, goals, and commitments help us keep them?
7. Are you a resolution maker? Did you write any for the New Year? Since studying Nehemiah, has He shown you any changes that He desires you to make? Take some time and write them down, review them, and post them somewhere so you can see them every day. Ask the Lord to help you move past the realization stage to the obedience stage.

I want to share a short story with you from Warren Wiersbe's commentary on Nehemiah that I really liked. He wrote, "In a certain church, there was a man who always ended his prayers with 'And Lord, clean the cobwebs out of my life!' One of the members of the church became weary of hearing this same sincere request week after week, because he saw no change in the parishioner's life. So the next time he heard the man pray, 'Lord, clean the cobwebs out of my life!' he interrupted with, 'And while You're at it, Lord, kill the spider!'"

8. Any "spiders" lurking in your life? Ask the Lord to open your eyes to any spiders that you've allowed to remain in your mind, heart, or life.

Memory Verse of the Week: "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matthew 6:33

Second Day

Work on your verse.

1. Read Nehemiah 10:1-27. What "categories" of people are listed? Whose name is first?
2. Why was signing this document so important?

Oaths and vows were not to be taken lightly. Numbers 30 tells us about the laws that govern oaths and vows. Verse 2 says, "When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said." For the Jews to sign and seal this document, they were declaring a radical commitment to the Lord and promising to keep their word.

3. What does Jesus say about oaths? Read Matthew 5:33-37 and 23:6-22.

Because New Testament believers don't live under the law, we aren't required to take oaths. But our word is supposed to be able to be counted on. When we commit to something, we should do it. Basically, our word is our "oath" before the Lord. You shouldn't have to say "I promise" to someone. Your word should be the promise.

4. Are you known for being someone who keeps your word? Can people trust when you say you will be somewhere, do something, or commit to something, that you will do it? Are you faithful to your word?

There are 84 names on this list, including "heads of homes" or family leaders. We notice that Ezra is not on the list. Since some on the list are names of families, he was included as a member of the family of Seraiah (Ezra 7:1-5).

5. How was this process similar to what Nehemiah did in Nehemiah 7:5?
6. Read Nehemiah 10:28-32. According to verse 28, who else signed this document? (Hint: There are two groups)
7. Did they make little children sign?
8. Basically, what were the people committing to do?
9. Why were the people called to separate "from"? What were they called to be separate "to"?

The people had been told to separate themselves from their pagan spouses, for religious, not racial, reasons. They were not to intermarry with any of the heathen nations that surrounded them. They would be tempted for many reasons, but they were called to stay pure and "separate." The other nations wanted them to become part of their business and social societies, but the Law of God forbade them to live like the Gentiles. They were called to love and serve them by being good neighbors, friends, and customers, but not to be "like" them. Separation is total devotion to God, no matter what the cost. That's exactly what the Jews were doing here in chapter 10, declaring their devotion to Him. Separating "from" the unbelieving world "to" the Word of God.

10. Have you separated yourself "from" the world and "to" God's Word? Why do we need both steps?

That's it for today. May you be refreshed today as you study His Word. May you see the areas He's calling you to be separate from.

Third Day

Work on your verse. After reading this chapter, how do you think this verse relates?

1. Read Nehemiah 10:28-39. What two words do you think reflect the main point of this section, from verse 29?

The rest of this chapter shows us the people desire to apply the Word to their everyday lives. They were called to straighten out their homes (vs 28-30), honor the commandments (vs 31), contribute to the house of God (vs 32-33), and serve God with tithes and offerings (34-39). They were called to "observe" and "do." They made a personal commitment, a public commitment, and then a practical commitment.

2. How were they supposed to straighten out their "homes"?

3. What can happen to a home when it doesn't choose to "observe" and "do"?

Charles Swindoll said, "When morals of a nation are under stress, the home is the first to suffer." God's people were called to be a witness to Him by living in a way that honored Him. At that time, parents controlled marriages, so this part of the covenant came from them. Again, it stressed the seriousness of marrying a heathen from an idolatrous people (Ezra 10). Malachi, Ezra, and Nehemiah all encountered this problem. Marrying foreigners led God's people into idolatry time and time again. There was a danger of the Jewish mate losing his faith (Exodus 34:10-17), ignoring the dietary laws and the annual festivals because there would be conflict, and being continually ceremonial unclean. Children would grow up in an environment where they would not be hearing God's Word, much less understand and obey it. Compromise would be a constant temptation to the Jew. God had a purpose to fulfill, and when the Jews sinned, it compromised the nation (Malachi 2:10-16). God was concerned with both the purity of their faith and the holiness of their lives.

Today, believers are still called to the same principle in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. Many who desire to marry an unbeliever think because they are in love, God would want them together, and it will work out. The question they should be asking is, "Will this marriage be blessed fully by God, honor Him, and fulfill His will?" God is still concerned with the purity of our faith and the holiness of our lives.

4. Read the following verses. What do they say about our relationship with the world?

- A. 1 Corinthians 15:33
- B. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
- C. 1 John 2:16
- D. James 4:4-5
- E. 1 Peter 1:17; 2:11, 16

5. Is your home one that honors the Lord? Have you chosen to "observe" and "do"? Have you allowed any worldly ideals or principles to sneak in and pollute or compromise your home?

In the book Here I Stand, Martin Luther made a statement concerning this principle that I thought was great. He said, "Temptations, of course, cannot be avoided, but because we cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, there is no need that we should let them nest in our hair."

6. In your own words, what was Luther saying?

In his book Hand Me Another Brick, Charles Swindoll gives a list of questions that he advises men to ask themselves as they come up with their "philosophies" on governing their homes. I know we are not the men, but I loved the questions and thought they would be helpful for you and me to share with our husbands, or pray through ourselves. Many of you are single moms, so these questions will be useful for you as well. So take a few minutes, read them, and think them through. A good leader prayerfully, carefully, deliberately, and thoughtfully leads their people. ☺

1. What are the goals of our home?
 2. What is the best way to inculcate our Christian convictions?
 3. Where shall we live? Why?
 4. How should we try to reach our friends and neighbors for Christ?
 5. Why do we want children?
 6. What can we do to help each child become confident and fulfilled?
 7. What methods of discipline should we use?
 8. What do we want to accomplish on our vacations?
 9. How involved should we be in the church? In civil affairs? In athletics?
 10. What are our convictions regarding music?
 11. How shall we cultivate a close relationship as husband and wife?
 12. What guidelines on teenage dating will we follow?
7. Have you neglected thinking through any of these questions? Which ones stirred your heart?
8. First and foremost, your faith should be lived out at home. What does Paul tell Timothy about men in leadership in 1 Timothy 3:4-5?

9. Read Nehemiah 10:31. What is the principle being taught? Why couldn't they buy merchandise on the Sabbath? (Read Exodus 20:8-11; 30:12-18).

Observing the Sabbath was only a Jewish practice. On the Sabbath, the Gentiles around them would want to do business and trading, and Nehemiah was calling them to make a commitment to keep that day as a day of rest. It was supposed to be a day the Jews would contemplate spiritual matters and rest from the week's activities. It was instituted as a day to honor God, set apart from the other days and given to God so they could worship Him. It was also a day to enjoy rest. God set a pattern for them by resting "on the seventh day" (Exodus 20:8-11). If they did business, they could be tempted to put money and business before the Lord. The Sabbath was a reminder to them that they were called by God and separate from the world. Jews were the only ones who "closed up shop" on the Sabbath, showing their neighbors that they had an allegiance to God. They were declaring to others that God came first.

New Testament believers are not called to keep the Sabbath Day holy in the same sense. In fact, we have a higher calling to honor God "every day." However, Christians traditionally have set aside Sunday as the day to honor the Lord in public praise and worship. The principle that Nehemiah is reminding them of is the same for us today. We are to put God first in our work practices and business dealings, honoring Him in all we do. We face the same temptation of putting money and work before God as the Jews did back then. We, too, must make a commitment to honor Him first.

10. Do you honor God in your work habits? Are you ethical? Honest? Do you put Him and His reputation first before anything else?
11. Have you made public worship a practice in your home? How does that teach your children that God comes first? How do you balance making that commitment without being legalistic?

Lots to think about. This is where our memory verse comes in, in case you haven't figured it out yet! Seek His Kingdom first, before anything else. Honor Him, and He will honor you. (Matthew 6:33, 1 Samuel 2:30)

Fourth Day

What's your verse?

1. Let's begin by reading Nehemiah 10:28-39 again. What command are they committing to observe in 31b? (Read Exodus 23:10; Leviticus 25:1-7, 18-23; Deuteronomy 15:1-11)

The Jews were called to observe the Sabbatical Year. This meant that every seventh year, their fields could not be sown. They were to let their land be idle and replenish itself. It wasn't only people and animals that needed rest, their land did as well. This called for a great amount of faith and trust in God to provide for them during that year. God promised He would send "such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years." (Leviticus 25:18-22) Obeying this law was a great example of our memory verse, Matthew 6:33. Cancelling debts every seventh year was also part of the law (Exodus 23:10)

2. Nehemiah now discusses their commitment to honor the house of God. Read 10:32-39. (Also, read Matthew 17:24) According to verse 39, what's the main point?

Their promise included four specific areas. The first was the temple tax. They were making a commitment to put God first by giving of their money for the upkeep of the Temple, for the provision of its offerings, the arrangements of the festivals, and the duties of the house of God. God had blessed them, and by agreeing to follow His Law, they would generously give back to Him. It was time to restore temple taxes and offerings.

In Exodus 30:11-16, everyone over 20 was charged half a shekel as a "ransom for himself," and this money was used for the service of the tent meeting. John MacArthur writes, "What the people were committing themselves to do by covenant turned into law requiring one-third shekel temple tax. The Mosaic ordinance required one-half of a shekel, but the severe economic straits of the

time led to the reduced amount. By the time of Christ, the people had returned to the Mosaic stipulation of one-half a shekel."

Raymond Brown notes, "The promise recognized the necessity of obligatory giving. There was nothing remotely optional about the support of God's work. Everyone was required to give in one form or another. Everybody would benefit from the ministry of the temple and everyone must support it."

2. According to verse 33, how will the money be spent?
3. In verse 34, what aspect of the house of God was mentioned? Read Leviticus 6:12-13.
4. Did you have to be a priest to do it?
5. Such a seemingly unimportant job has a huge place in the ministry. Why is this so significant? How does it speak to your heart?

The third area Nehemiah discusses is the "first fruits." The Jewish people were taught to give God the first and the best of everything. (Proverbs 3:9; Exodus 13:1-2, 12-14; Exodus 23:19, 34:26; Numbers 3:40-51.) This declared three things: Number one, that the Lord is the giver and creator of all things. Next, that everything belongs to Him. And thirdly, that He is worthy of the best they can offer. The custom in Israel was that a "redemptive price" had to be paid to the priest as a sacrifice because that child belonged to God (Numbers 18:12-19, Exodus 34:19-20, Luke 2:22-24).

6. Do you offer the Lord your "first fruits" of everything? That could be your money, your time, or your talents? Do you give Him the "best" time of day, your "best" effort, the percent of the top of your check rather than what's left over? Ponder this question for a bit...
7. The last category is the "tithes" in verses 37-39. What were they supposed to tithe? Why?

The word "tithe" means a tenth. For instance, the tithe of the people's crops was for the maintenance of the Levites. But notice something interesting. The Levites themselves also had to tithe to the "rooms of the storerooms." The Lord's servants had the same rules to follow; they were also called to give. The leaders and the people had the message!

8. This was all for the "upkeep" of the house of God. Today, what do your tithes and offerings go towards? (If you don't know, you should find out!) Why is tithing so important?

9. Are you doing your part in supporting the "house of God," which would be your church? Are you investing in and supporting the work of the Lord?

In a previous lesson we discussed the aspect of giving. If you remember, we looked at the fact that although there is no "command" in the New Testament about specifically "tithing" ten percent, God's people are told to give generously, proportionally, and cheerfully. God owns all our money; it belongs to Him. We should be giving of our money, time, and talents because He has generously given to us! In Haggai 1:4, the prophet rebuked the people because they were so busy taking care of their own houses that they neglected the house of God. Let's not make that same mistake.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

In today's lesson, we will be reviewing some of the main principles we found in this chapter. We'll start with the principle of commitment.

1. The Israelites were making a commitment to the Lord to "change." After studying this chapter, are there any commitments that you are willing to make to the Lord?

2. The Jews were committed to "do" the law of God. Are you committed to studying God's Word and then obeying what He says? How serious are you about obeying His Word?
3. The Jews were called to "separate" themselves. Are you separate, or are you conforming to this world? Look at your life, your home, your work, and your worship. Can people see Jesus in me? Am I "distinct" and "separate"?
4. The Jews were committed to taking care of the house of God. Are you doing your part, or are you shirking your responsibility, hoping that others will do your share? (This question kind of hurts ... ☹)

Raymond Brown gives a few principles that he sees about giving and taking care of the house of God in these chapters. Let's take a look.

5. The Israelites recognized the necessity of *responsible* giving (vs 32-35). Are you giving responsibly? (What does that practically mean?)
6. They responded to God's Word by *obedient* giving. Are you giving obediently?
7. They saw their *obligation* of giving. Do you understand the concept of everyone doing their part?
8. The people understood *systematic* giving. It was all carefully planned and ordered. Have you prayed, thought through, and planned how to give?
9. Their giving was *proportionate*. Do you give according to what you have and what the Lord shows you and not compare your giving with that of others?
10. Their giving was *sacrificial*. Do you give your first fruits or only what's left over?
11. Their giving was *comprehensive*. They understood what it was for and where it was going. Do you give with "understanding"?
12. They understood God was supposed to be in control of *"all"* of their lives. Does He have control of yours?

