



"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 8

In chapters 1-7, the focus was on the rebuilding of the wall, which was completed on the 25th day of the sixth month (6:15). But meeting the material needs of the city was not enough. Nehemiah understood that a city is not made by walls, but by people. He wanted to reconstruct the city, but even more importantly, reconstruct a spiritual community within those walls.

The second half of the book of Nehemiah begins on the first day of the seventh month (8:2), and its emphasis is now on the people of the city. It's time to stop building walls and start building spiritually. In chapters 8-13, we will learn about the reformation of God's people and their renewed dedication to Him!

Begin by spending time in prayer, asking God to reveal Himself to you personally through His Word by His Spirit. As you read this chapter, notice the importance of the Word of God. This chapter excites me every time I read it through. Notice the people's reaction to the Word, the reverence and love for it. Expect this chapter to challenge you in your own relationship with God's holy Word!

First Day

1. Read Nehemiah 8:1-18. What facts do you find? What's happening? When is it happening? Where is it happening? Read like a detective and note all the facts you find.
2. What new characters do we meet? Who is mentioned for the first time in this book in verse 1?

3. What would you say is the main point of this chapter?
4. What key verse would reflect that point?
5. How would you outline this chapter, or break it up into sections?
6. How many times is "understand" or "understanding" used in this chapter?
7. The first day of the seventh month was a holiday known as the **Feast of Trumpets**. The second half of this chapter deals more specifically with this feast, and we will discuss it in more depth then. But to get a better understanding at this point, read Leviticus 23:23-44 and briefly explain what it's all about.
8. If the people's hearts weren't changed towards God, the beauty of the walls certainly wouldn't matter much. What does Jesus say about this principle in Matthew 23:23-28? Write your thoughts. (How is the inside of your "city" doing?)
9. What application do you see for yourself in this chapter? What did the Lord already show you?

The people wept as the Word brought conviction to their hearts ... and then they rejoiced! Let's rejoice together because of His word, shall we?

Memory Verse of the Week: "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10b

Second Day

Review your memory verse. Is "His" joy your strength?

1. Read Nehemiah 8:1-18, focusing on verses 1-8. Who called this meeting?
2. What did they want to hear?

Verse 1 tells us that the people gathered together "as one man." They had a common desire to hear the Word of God. The Book of the Law of Moses was most likely the entire Pentateuch, which is the first five books of the Bible, written by Moses. (Many scholars think it may have been specifically the reading of Deuteronomy that brought them to repentance.) The law was written on a scroll at this time, rather than a bound book. This type of reading was supposed to be done every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles, even though it had been neglected since they had been under Babylonian captivity.

The people gathered in front of the Water Gate, which is on the east side of the city. This gate gave the people access to the Gihon Springs from the valley below. Having the Law of Moses read in front of the water Gate is significant because water speaks of the Word of God, which cleanses us.

3. What is Ezra's occupation, according to verses 1 and 2?

This is the first mention of Ezra in this book, but he had been in Jerusalem for about 13 years. (Ezra 7:6-9) Nehemiah was the political leader, while Ezra was the religious leader. The Life Application Bible notes that "A scribe in those days was a combination lawyer, notary public, scholar, and consultant. Scribes were among the most educated people, so they were teachers. No doubt the Jews would have liked to set up the kingdom again, as in the days of David, but this would have signaled rebellion against the king of Persia to whom they were subject. The best alternative was to divide the leadership between Nehemiah and Ezra."

4. Who gathered to hear the reading? (vs 2)
5. How many people stood with Ezra on the platform? (vs 4)
6. What did the men listed in verse 7 do?

It's not exactly clear how this functioned, but it seems like the men on the platform read out portions of the law, and then the men named in verse 7 moved among the people between readings, making sure they understood, explaining and expounding the words being spoken.

7. What words or phrases show us the attitude the people had concerning the Word of God?

God's Word is literally the words of God. The people listened attentively and carefully. They showed respect as it was read. They expected God to speak to them. Nehemiah and Ezra knew that the people needed His Word desperately in order to spiritually grow and flourish.

God's Word is our lifeline as well. Believers often neglect to spend time reading and meditating on the Word of God. We seem to forget that it is a privilege and blessing to have His Words available to us and His Spirit to help us understand what it means. Raymond Brown wrote, "Committed Christians who neglect the privilege and discipline of daily Bible reading are severing their links with vital spiritual resources. God speaks uniquely to us through His Word, and if we close our ears to this daily conversation, we cannot hope to develop into mature believers."

8. In your own words, explain why daily Bible reading is vital to a Christian.

A craving for the Word drove the people to gather at the Water Gate. Do you have that same craving to know and understand His Word? Do you have the same respect for His Word as they did?

9. Read the following verses and write what they say about the Word of God.

A. Jeremiah 15:16

B. Psalm 119:103

C. Psalm 119:127

D. Psalm 119:131

10. What did Jesus say in Luke 11:28 about the Word of God?

John MacArthur asks, "If you were not a Christian and you continually met believers who had never read the entire Bible and were largely ignorant of its content, what would you think of them? What would you think of Christianity in general?"

11. Write your thoughts on the above quote. (Quite challenging, don't you think?)

12. Spend some time thinking about the relationship you have with God's Word. Is it strong? Is it respectful? Is it a priority? Ask the Holy Spirit to stir your heart and fill you with an insatiable desire to know Him more fully through His Word.

Third Day

Meditate on your memory verse, letting it sink deep into your heart.

Today we will continue looking at our desire and response to the Word of God. It's fun to be exhorted and challenged in His Word, to study His Word!

1. Read Nehemiah 8:1-8 again. What does it mean to read the Word "attentively"? (Do you take the time to do this?)
2. The people seemed to listen "expectantly" to God's Word. When you read His Word, do you expect Him to speak to you? How do we do this?
3. Do you read the Word regularly? Read Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 119:97, 148; and Joshua 1:8. Why is this important?

We've already read verses that attribute joy to the Word of God. Psalm 119:165 tells us that those who love the law will have great peace. Peace and joy are two of the blessings we receive by being in the Word.

The Levites helped explain what was being read, which was part of the ministry God had given them (Deut. 33:10; Malachi 2:7). We have teachers and pastors who expound on God's Word, but we also have the Holy Spirit as our teacher who will "guide us into all truth," according to John 16:7-15. It's important to read the Word with the purpose of obeying what it says. The Spirit can help us take what we read and apply it to our lives.

4. The people were teachable. When you read His Word, do you have a teachable heart, ready to make the changes in attitude and action that are necessary?
5. What effect did reading the Word have on the people, according to verse 6? Does the Word of God have the same effect on you? Does it ever move you to "radical" worship?

Notice that the people "worshipped" the "Great God," not the Word. They didn't make the law an idol but respected it because it contained the words of God. Calvin said, "We owe to the Scripture the same reverence as we owe to God, since it has its only source in Him." Brown wrote, "We do not worship the Book, but we adore the God of the Book who addresses us uniquely through it."

6. Is the Bible applicable for today? What does Hebrews 4:12 say about that?

7. Read James 1:21-25. What does he say about the Word?

Wiersbe wrote, "Verse 8 describes a perfect church gathering: the people all assembled to listen; the Word was exalted; the preacher read and explained the Word so people could understand it." It's also interesting to note how long the people were willing to stand to hear the Word of God expounded on. In contrast, the mindset of today's world seems to be "the shorter the sermon, the better!" Let's get to lunch!

8. Do you enjoy gathering together with other believers to hear the Word and worship the Lord? Why is it so important to gather together to do this? Why is "corporate worship" so vital to the body of Christ?

9. Have you made regular church attendance a priority in your life and the life of your family?

10. In his reading of the law, Ezra made time to "bless God." In your daily devotion time, do you take time to praise and bless the Lord, just for who He is, before anything else?

**We'll end here for today. I pray His Word is the
"joy and rejoicing of your heart!"**

Fourth Day

Work on your memory verse.

1. Today let's read Nehemiah 8 again, focusing on verses 9-12. The reading of the Word obviously had brought the people to tears. Why?

God's Word was like a mirror, exposing their sinful attitudes and hearts. They knew they had broken their covenant of total love and loyalty to God. Their lifestyles were unholy, their actions contrary to God's law. Every one of them knew they were guilty of sin.

2. Read Romans 3:23. What does this tell us?

It seemed like the Levites had to "calm the people" because they were so distressed over their sins. Perhaps the Levites were trying to remind them that no matter how great their sin, God's grace and forgiveness were greater. Paul reminds us that we "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1-2). We can "be still" because we can be totally and completely forgiven.

3. Do you still carry the guilt of certain things you've done, feeling like they were "too bad" to be forgiven? How does this encourage you? Are you ready to accept His forgiveness and "be still"?
4. As you read the Word, are you quick to see your own sin rather than the sins of others? Does God's Word move you to repentance when you read and apply it to your life?
5. What were they told to do in verses 10-12? Why?

Although the seriousness of their sin was great, they were told to dry their tears. The Day of Atonement was coming in ten days. The Day of Atonement was definitely holy (Leviticus 23:27), but it was the day set aside to clear the air, to declare God's mercy. On that day, the atoning sacrifice was offered; the scapegoat would "carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place." (Leviticus 16:16, 20-22, 29-30, 34). This was in anticipation of what was to come. "Each year the Levitical scapegoat anticipated a greater atonement by far. The day came when, on that first Good Friday, God's Son carried our sins to the cross in His sinless body. By that unique sacrifice, those who repent and believe are eternally forgiven. They too hear the reassuring words, 'Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.' Theirs is the joy of prayer heard, God's promises fulfilled, sins cleansed and strength renewed."

6. They were told to celebrate!! Who were they told to include in their feasting?
7. Why do you think they would be more sensitive to this after the reading of the law? Read Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 15:1-11, 24:10-22.

Their celebrating was supposed to include those less fortunate than themselves. They were supposed to be "givers." God's Word was supposed to move their faith into action. They were called to "put feet to their faith" so to speak. Our faith is more than just intellectual knowledge. Faith without works is dead, according to James 2:20.

8. Is your faith accompanied by works? When the Word tells you to be concerned about the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the fatherless, and those "who are without," are you moved into action? Do you ask God what you should do about it?
9. How is the joy of the Lord our strength? What exactly does that mean?

Joy seems to be one of the themes of this chapter (10, 12, 17). The people learned that they could find joy in acknowledging God's greatness (6), appreciating His Word (8-9, 12) and helping His people (10-12). Joy isn't found in perfect circumstances, money, success, or popularity. Our joy should be in the Lord. Our joy is derived "from the knowledge of who He is, what He does, what He says, and what He gives." (Brown) We can find joy by focusing on His nature, His attributes, His miracles, His promises, His blessings, and His gifts. Brown wrote, "The word 'strength' was used by the Hebrew people to describe a fortress or well-protected stronghold. When they are in trouble, God's people know of the place of their secure refuge: it is in the Lord Himself, His character, works, Word, and gifts."

10. What do you find your strength in? Is it in money or material things? Is it in your family or other relationships? Or is it in the Lord? Where do you find joy?

12. What words in verse 12 probably made Nehemiah very happy?

That's all for today. I pray that His Word would always convict me of my sin. I pray that I would mourn and repent of my sin. I pray I would rejoice in the forgiveness that He offers me through the blood of Jesus. And I pray I would move forward, obeying what He shows me by putting my faith into action. Guess what? I'm praying the same for you! 😊

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Let's finish up by reading Nehemiah 8 again, focusing on verses 13-18. Why were the leaders meeting again?

We see them holding another Bible study! This time the meeting was for the leaders who would be expounding on the Scriptures to their families, clans, etc.

This was more of an intensive study. The teaching of God's Word could not just be left to the priests and the Levites. The head of the homes were responsible for knowing and teaching the Scriptures.

2. As they studied, what law did they come across?

It seems that although the feast itself may not have been forgotten, the actual rules and instructions about living in tents had been overlooked or ignored. The feast had a double meaning: it was the ingathering at the year's end (Exodus 34:22) and a memorial of the wilderness when God made the people dwell in booths (Leviticus 23:43). It was a memorial of what God had brought their forefathers through as they traveled through the wilderness on their journey from Egypt to Canaan. As they traveled, they had lived in booths or simple tents made from leaves and branches. There was a constant threat to their safety, but God had protected them and brought them to the land He had promised them.

Derek Kidner writes, "The strange blend of settled and unsettled life, presented by the incongruous sight of shanties perched on the roofs of houses and filling the city squares, was a forcible reminder, experienced for a whole week, of pilgrim conditions and the miraculous journey to the promised land."

On one trip to Israel, we had the opportunity to witness these tents or booths. They were lined up on the road, on rooftops, and in fields. It was kind of exciting, especially when you spent time reflecting on the meaning behind this feast.

3. Why is it so important to take time to remember what God has done for you in the past? How is it helpful as you look to the future?

4. Do you have any visible reminders around you of things God has done for you? What are some practical ways you can take time to "remember"?

5. Can you describe how they made their "booths"?

I read something that was really amazing. When you read these verses, notice the four areas they set up the booths: their own roofs, in their courtyards, courts of the house of God, and in the square by the Water Gate. Some scholars believe that those are the four opportunities we can be a witness of our faith. Their "own roofs" symbolized their family life. "In their courtyards" symbolized their social life, for this was where they welcomed guests. "The courts of the house of God" represented their religious life, and the "squares by the Water Gate" represented their business life, because that was where they sold their produce. We are called to testify to God's greatness and faithfulness in every area of our life!

6. Do you use every opportunity you can to tell others of God's faithfulness? Let's ask God for more opportunities this week to declare Him.

The most exciting thing to me about this section is that when they found something in the law they weren't doing, they did it. They took what it said and decided right then to apply it to their lives.

When we read Scripture, there should always be a response. After reading, always stop and ask yourself questions such as, "What should I do with this knowledge? How should my life change? What did I learn about God? What did I learn about myself?" Write these and a few other questions on a piece of paper and put them in your Bible. Train yourself to use them each time you study. Let's stop and ask them right now.

7. After reading this chapter of Nehemiah, what did I learn?

8. What should I do with what I learned?

9. How should my life change?

10. What did I learn about God? About myself?

