

“REBUILDING BROKEN PLACES”
STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND HAGGAI
Nehemiah Chapters 7 & 8
“HOW TO KEEP THE WORK GOING AND THE PEOPLE GROWING”

INTRODUCTION: There is a certain excitement that accompanies the completion of an important goal or project. Building a house, buying a car, getting married and starting a family are a few that come to mind. However, if no one does the work of maintenance after these accomplishments, things will soon break down and become a burden rather than a continued blessing.

BACKGROUND: Despite overwhelming odds and opposition of all kinds, Nehemiah has led the people to rebuild the walls around the city. However, the work of maintaining security and repopulating the city that was now safe to live in was yet to be done. Who was going to be put in charge when Nehemiah had to go back to Persia? How would the spiritual vitality of the congregation be restored?

I. A PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY OF A LEADER IS TO PREPARE OTHER LEADERS SO THE WORK CONTINUES. (Nehemiah 7:1-)

A. Nehemiah made sure qualified people would take responsibility for safeguarding what had just been built. While someone may accuse him of “nepotism,” his brother had already proven how much he cared about completing the work.

B. Leaders define reality, help set realistic goals, evaluate progress, anticipate the next moves. They help the work continue in spite of obstacles, objection, and opposition. Good leaders choose others who are capable of doing certain tasks, then stay out of their way enough to allow them to do their jobs. The Levites guarded the gates, and the people kept watch in close proximity to their homes.

C. The census was taken for various reasons. Always pause and reflect “why” God recorded the names of these seemingly irrelevant people. **NO ONE ESCAPES HIS ATTENTION, and EVERY MOVE WE MAKE IS KNOWN TO HIM.** Those who were to be priests had to prove their relationship to the priestly family line. Some had violated Scripture by marrying pagans and disqualified themselves from serving as priests. Leaders have the difficult assignment to discern who should not be in leadership roles.

II. SOME CHURCHES DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT BIBLICAL PREACHING REALLY IS. THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PREACHING “FROM THE BIBLE” AND “PREACHING THE BIBLE!” (Nehemiah 8)

A. Notice the corporate hunger for the Word of God that demonstrated by the people in this passage. They **WANTED** to hear the Scripture because they knew they **NEEDED** to hear from the Lord and **OBEY** Him. Many churches do not have a real hunger for the Word as they have been conditioned to have their emotions stirred and to feel good.

B. Appetites are developed over time and tastes tested. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” People need to follow the example from Nehemiah 8. Ezra and his team stood in front of the people to make themselves visible to make the Word of God the focal point of attention. Notice the reverence for Scripture as they praised the Lord and bowed in worship. We have become a nation that ignores the Bible that was once respected by believers and unbelievers.

C. The Levites were moving among the people to help them understand the Scriptures. Many had grown up in Babylon, some under two different cultures, so they may not have understood Hebrew as well as their ancestors. We help people understand what God has said with clear explanations and Holy Spirit dependence to give comprehension that leads to application.

III. EXPOSITORY PREACHING IS DESIGNED TO CHANGE LIVES, BECAUSE TO GET TO THE HEART OF OUR PROBLEMS, THE WORD OF GOD MUST REACH THE HUMAN HEART. (Nehemiah 8: 8-18)

A. They read God's Words distinctly. Practice reading the Word the way it was written, learning to emphasize what the writer emphasizes. Good preachers become a mouthpiece for the text! (Nehemiah 8:8)

B. They clearly explained the meaning of the text. What did the writer mean when he made the statement? (Adam, where are you?) God was not asking where Adam was hiding!

C. They helped the people understand how to apply the Scriptures to their lives. The goal is to indoctrinate (baptize, immerse) them and teach them to OBEY everything the Lord has said. (Matt. 28:19-20)

1. God, through Scripture, makes an appeal to the human MIND or INTELLECT. A challenge is issued to the THOUGHT processes to get a RESPONSE.

2. Next, the EMOTIONS need to become involved. My SENSES become engaged. CONVICTION? HEARTFELT REPENTANCE? GRIEF? DESPAIR? JOY? HOPE?

3. Finally, the WILL of a human being must be committed to doing what the Lord has said. SUBMIT your will to the will of God (LOVE RESPONSE or FORCED OBEDIENCE). Every fiber of your humanity needs to respond to the Word of God if you want to see lasting life change.

D. Effective preaching does not stop with having people broken over their sins and weeping as though all hope is lost. When God's word of grace and forgiveness is properly received and obeyed, mourning can be turned into dancing, weeping can be changed to praise. The JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH! Don't settle for temporary happiness when the Lord wants you to have joy! (John 15)

E. True believers do not wait until Christmas to give gifts with one another! Those who understand the Word of God, which is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in a human heart, know how to share with one another. (Nehemiah 8: 10-12)

F. When the people are really growing, they will come back for more learning just as we enjoy going back for good food! The people discovered they had disobeyed God's command for centuries! They spend a few days living in tents to be reminded of the Exodus and living life in the wilderness. (Nehemiah 8: 13-17)

1. The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles, Sukkot) was held in the Fall (September-October) and was one of the three Feasts that required the people to present themselves before the Lord. (Deuteronomy 16:16) It was held five days after the Day of Atonement and was to be a time of celebration, commemorating how the Lord provided for the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness.

G. Ezra read the word every day for a week. Remember, few people had access to a copy of Scripture. On the eighth day the people responded in obedience by holding a solemn assembly. May we never lose sight of all of the reasons we come together for worship, instruction, and mutual edification.

ARE YOU READING AND STUDYING THE BIBLE REGULARLY? WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCRIPTURE? DO YOU LOVE THE WORDS OF GOD TO YOUR HEART? HAS YOUR STUDY RESULTED IN A CHANGED LIFE? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Dr. Ronald J. Morrison, December 10, 2023

