

How Do You Celebrate An Accomplishment?

Nehemiah 8

Nehemiah has rebuilt the walls and gates of Jerusalem.

What Does The Bible Say?

8:1 all the people assembled with a unified purpose at the square just inside the Water Gate. (Nehemiah 8:1 NLT)

Interestingly, the Water Gate is not mentioned as having to have any work done to it; there is a close tie between water and the Bible, God's Word.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. (Ephesians 5:25-26 ESV)

The Bible needs no repairs. We do not need to fix it. It does not change because our culture changes.

Why did God give us the Bible?

(Cont.) They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had given for Israel to obey.

(Nehemiah 8:1 NLT)

We have the Bible to obey.

2 So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. 3 He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:2–3 NLT)

Now that the people are safe from their enemies, they want God to direct their lives.

5 Ezra stood on the platform in full view of all the people. When they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet.

8 They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage. (Nehemiah 8:5 & 8 NLT)

We must read the Bible and make sure we understand it.

9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, “Don’t mourn or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the Lord your God.” For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

10 And Nehemiah continued, “Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!”

11 And the Levites, too, quieted the people, telling them, “Hush! Don’t weep! For this is a sacred day.”(Nehemiah 8:9–11 NLT)

Weeping suggests repentance. The people were sad that they were not living by what the Scriptures said.

12 So the people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God’s words and understood them. (Nehemiah 8:12 NLT)

Eventually, these people’s hearts turned to joy. Why?

Because they understood God’s instructions.

How Can We Obey

13 On October 9 the family leaders of all the people, together with the priests and Levites, met with Ezra the scribe to go over the Law in greater detail. 14 As they studied the Law, they discovered that the Lord had commanded through Moses that

the Israelites should live in shelters during the festival to be held that month. 15 He had said that a proclamation should be made throughout their towns and in Jerusalem, telling the people to go to the hills to get branches from olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees. They were to use these branches to make shelters in which they would live during the festival, as prescribed in the Law. 16 So the people went out and cut branches and used them to build shelters on the roofs of their houses, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of God's Temple, or in the squares just inside the Water Gate and the Ephraim Gate. 17 So everyone who had returned from captivity lived in these shelters during the festival, and they were all filled with great joy! The Israelites had not celebrated like this since the days of Joshua son of Nun. (Nehemiah 8:13–17 NLT)

They found something they were not doing in the Bible, and they then went and did it.

Is that how you approach Scripture?

Re-enacting traditions shapes our view of the world. The Festivals of Shelters tradition reminds the people how God saved them in the past and will save them in the future.

Ezra becomes the new Moses, and Nehemiah becomes the new Joshua; for a new conquest of the land.

Nehemiah is not claiming that this was the only Festival of Booths celebrated since the time of Joshua. Instead, he's hyperbolic, meaning they were highly sincere in their devotion to this celebration.

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Explore:

KEY TRUTHS:

- 1. God's People Gather for Corporate Worship and in Smaller Groups to Hear, Learn, and Apply God's Word (Nehemiah 8:1-15)**
- 2. Christian Parents Read God's Word for Themselves and Help Their Children Learn, Understand, and Obey It Daily (Nehemiah 8:16-18; Deuteronomy 6:4-9)**

HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the

Bible: The events of the book of Nehemiah took place just after those of the book of Ezra (445 BC—431 BC) with Nehemiah arriving in Jerusalem in 444 BC, 13 years after Ezra arrived.

Explore:

After the walls were completed in the sixth month (Nehemiah 6:15), all the people gathered in Jerusalem to hear the Scriptures read at the beginning of the seventh month. This had been commanded in Deuteronomy 31:10-13. Chapter 8 focuses on reading and teaching the Word and how people responded to it. We see the importance of gathering for corporate worship, small group study, and family discussion. Men discovered how they needed to lead their families in ways that would ultimately change generational sins and patterns for the nation.

**God's People Gather for Corporate Worship and in
Smaller Groups to Hear, Learn, and Apply God's Word**

(Nehemiah 8:1-15)

On the first day of the seventh month, everyone gathered to hear Ezra read from Scripture (verses 1-3). The whole Bible had not yet been written and compiled, but they had the Book of the Law, which would have been the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), and the Old Testament was completed during Nehemiah's life or shortly thereafter by 430 BC. Before their captivity, priests customarily read from these books and one passage, in particular, would have been quoted daily in many homes, the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

The Shema passage began with the words "Hear O Israel." Similarly, Ezra may have called for the people to listen as he began to read from Scripture. People of all ages and tribes

assembled that day. We can compare this gathering to people gathering for church today. We gather at the beginning of each week just like they assembled that day to hear Ezra preach.

Encourage your learners to imagine they were there in the crowd listening to Ezra. They see him perched high on a unique platform (verse 4-5), helping his voice project through the crowd. They hear him read Scripture for hours, suggesting he covered Creation, the early patriarchs of Israel, their stories, the Ten Commandments, and the detailed rules for living. Despite how long this was taking, the people listened attentively (verse 3). Perhaps what they heard made them think of God as a parent loving and caring for His earthly children by setting protection boundaries.

While hearing Ezra, their eyes tracked along the lines of the recently restored walls, observing some old worn stones and some newly chiseled ones to fit the gaps. The walls reminded

them of their lives— a little worn but standing because of the grace of God and people who helped piece things back together.

Ezra went on into the day, but they didn't mind because they had missed hearing God's Word. It sounded refreshing, and they had compelling reasons to want to follow Scripture as their rule and truth to live by, knowing the wonderful benefits. They heard Ezra bless the Lord and they bowed in worship (verse 6). They wept as they heard and understood God's Word, sensing a need to repent of sin and put God's Word into practice (verse 9). Then they heard Nehemiah, Ezra, and the other teachers tell them not to weep but to make this a day of joy and celebration (verses 10-12). It was a blessing to be able to gather and hear the preaching of God's Word!

In addition to Ezra's reading of the Word to the entire congregation, we also see the importance of learning and teaching in smaller groups like Lifegroups or Sunday School.

Other teachers helped the people understand the Word they were hearing. They explained the meaning of the Scriptures (verses 7-8). They apparently moved through the crowds helping smaller groups understand what they were hearing.

And note what happened the next day. The heads of families, along with the priests and Levites, gathered in a smaller group for more teaching from Ezra (verse 13). They learned about the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) and why it was practiced. They saw that they should instruct the people to celebrate the feast and how they should do it (verses 14-15).

Smaller groups provide opportunities for learning and care that cannot be found in our corporate worship gatherings. Discussion can take place. Questions can be asked and answered. People's needs can be discovered and addressed. People can pray for one another. Friendships can be formed. Nehemiah 8 demonstrates

the need for God's people to gather for corporate worship and for smaller group interaction.

Explore:

Nehemiah 8:8 provides a model for teachers and preachers to read Scripture aloud to people, explain the meaning, and make it clear and easy to understand (for all ages listening). Compare Nehemiah 8:8 to Ezra 7:10, which says that Ezra studied the Word, obeyed the Word, and taught the Word. Each leads to the next. Reading and explaining causes obedience, and modeling obedience creates authentic teaching.

Explore:

Christian Parents Read the Bible for Themselves and Help Their Children Learn, Understand, and Obey God's Word Daily

(Nehemiah 8:16-18; Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The Feast of Tabernacles reenacted the Hebrew children living in tents while in the desert headed to the Promised Land. The people had not practiced this feast for generations. After reading and studying God's Word, the families in Nehemiah's day constructed shelters from leafy branches (verses 16-17). They lived in them for a week and taught their kids the lessons of God. They assembled these "booths" in the courtyards or on their flat clay rooftops. The kids probably thought it was the most fantastic activity to do with mom and dad.

While living in the booths, parents would tell the story of Exodus. Children would hear about Moses leading the Hebrews out of Egypt and through the Red Sea on dry ground. They would hear how God fed them, provided water, and ensured their clothing did not wear out for 40 years. Everyone participated in

this tent city as parents led their families in the Word of God.

How did parents know what to say? They retold what they learned from Ezra and the priests or teachers.

Encourage parents in your group to talk about each week's lesson with their children or teens. If every age in your church uses D6 Curriculum, the conversations around God's Word flow naturally by sharing what everyone in the family learned about that week as you all studied the same biblical theme. Model for your children by saying something like, "Based on this week's lesson, I am learning . . ." or "God is leading me to work on. . . ." and then ask your kids to share something similar.

Encourage parents to model what they found important in the lesson.

Help your learners understand how to begin similar practices around the dinner table or in the living room with no distractions. Suggest the benefits of using teachable moments all

through the day to encourage one another and teach kids and grandkids.

This may have been the first time many of the parents in Nehemiah's day had led such activities. The feast had not been practiced since the days of Joshua before they had kings (verse 17b). They probably struggled with some details, and there were awkward moments. Dads and moms will not get it exactly right each time but can tell their children that they love them enough to model this routine, even if it's a bit awkward initially. The goal is to talk about God's involvement in your daily lives.

We cannot thrive by reading Scripture only on Sunday.

Nehemiah 8:18 says they continued reading the Word daily.

Most North American Christian parents enjoy the blessing of having their own copy of God's Word and can read it and share it with their children as often as they like. Scripture connects us with God and guides us in living out our faith, especially when

interacting with others. After reading Scripture daily, notice how you speak more gently, appreciate what you have, guard against pride, or show more compassion. Encourage your learners to utilize the D6 devotional study guides as they practice the principles of Nehemiah 8. They can use the questions in the devotional study guides to provide for their kids' tent-like experiences, modeling conversations around God's Word.

Notice the pattern in Nehemiah 8: hear the Word preached, study the Bible in small groups, read the Word daily, share insights with your family, and then return next week for worship. On Sunday, Christians gather for church to worship, hear God's Word preached, participate in small groups, and meet with other believers. We then read the Word for ourselves and look for teachable moments with our children and others all through each day.

After Nehemiah 8, we see no idol worship among God's people. Instead, we see generations teaching generations: priests to people and parents to kids, all studying and talking about the Word of God daily. They replaced the baggage of bondage with the power of parents under tents. They went from captivity to being captive to God. While idol worship still existed around them, it was no longer their enslaving sin. The New Testament depicts idolatry mainly in areas like greed, lust, or legalism.

Parents today can create similar generational change through a process of teaching their kids the Word and ways of God. When Nehemiah's people quoted the Shema, they said the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Why did God place emphasis on these verses? Because He knew if they practiced the principles of Deuteronomy 6, kids would take a biblical worldview with them, not the family baggage. Parents were to love God and highly

value His Word themselves. If you want to change your family's legacy and break generational cycles of sin, give your children the tools to love and follow God, read and practice God's Word yourself, and make the discussion of Scripture part of routine conversations. Let's establish new family traditions by setting up some tent-like experiences and looking for teachable moments like those found in Deuteronomy 6 and Nehemiah 8.

Explore:

History indicates Nehemiah 8 was a significant turning point for God's people. Before the Babylonian exile, the Bible shows God's people constantly falling into the sin of idolatry (worship of idols). While those in Western civilization today rarely worship graven images, they can still fall into idolatry. Having an idol is having anything that is more important to us than God. It is giving any person, idea, or thing the position that only God

should have—first place. Anything we spend a lot of time, attention, or money on could become our idol if we are not careful. The Jewish people in the Old Testament constantly struggled with idolatry after leaving Egypt. While Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, Aaron helped fashion a golden calf for people to worship (Exodus 32). Having lived in Egypt for generations, the baggage of a polytheistic (worshiping many gods) worldview followed them into the land of Canaan. Because the people wanted to be like the culture around them, various kings of Israel allowed pagan images to be set up and worshiped. God repeatedly said how much He hated idolatry and warned they would fall into captivity if the practice did not stop. Due to their sin of idol worship, the nations of Israel and Judah suffered the judgment of captivity. Now, Nehemiah, Ezra, and Zerrubabel led Jewish exiles out of captivity to begin rebuilding.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ-followers. When they do,

Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 4

Give examples of how you remember and celebrate important days and events. Examples might include taking holidays, celebrating Christmas, taking the Lord's Supper, going out for a nice meal for our anniversary, etc.

Question 2 of 4

Why do you think that Nehemiah was so successful in getting the walls rebuilt so quickly in Jerusalem? What can we learn from him?

Question 3 of 4

How can you better understand the Bible?

Question 4 of 4

Do you tend to interpret your life through the lens of the Bible or the Bible through the lens of your life?

Question 5 of 5

Why is it important to confess your sins daily and ask for forgiveness when praying?

