



Reasons to Rejoice
BIBLE STUDY



THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

“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

ARISE AND REBUILD!

The Book of Nehemiah: Lesson 9

In our lesson last week, the people gathered together for the reading of the law. Ezra, the religious leader, opened the book and read, while the Levites helped the people to understand. The reading of the law brought repentance and worship. They also discovered they hadn't been celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles the way they should have been, so they followed the law and built booths, or tents, around the city. This was a reminder of God's faithfulness and protection during their wanderings.

Israel's spiritual hearts had been awakened, but their restoration and renewal was not complete. In Nehemiah 8, during the seventh month, Israel began by celebrating worship in the Festival of Trumpets (offerings to the Lord), forgiveness (the Day of Atonement), and trust (the week-long Feast of Tabernacles). Their celebration service had begun on the first day of the month, followed by seven days of reading God's Word. They ended with a “sacred assembly” according to the prescribed manner in Numbers 29:35.

After the booths had been dismantled, they met together again on the 24th day of the month to fast, pray, and meditate on God's Word. Our chapter this week is the detailed prayer by the people led by the Levites in a six-hour worship service.

As you read this week, notice all the references to “God” and “gave.” As Israel looked back on their history and remembered God's faithfulness and grace, may we be reminded of all that God has done for us in the past, as well as promises to do in the future.

First Day

1. Read Nehemiah 8:18 through 9:1-38. What's this chapter about? What are the facts? Who is speaking? When are they speaking? To whom are they speaking to?

2. Are there any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts?

3. What (or Who) is the main subject of this chapter?

4. Ultimately, what were the Israelites asking for?

5. Did you sense that the people were complaining of injustice? Do you get a sense of self-pity or more of self-acknowledgment?

6. Why are the people bringing up the past? Why was it so important for them to reflect on their history?

7. How did Israel respond to all that God had done for them? List the phrases that explain their actions and attitudes.

8. The word "give" is used in some form 16 times in this chapter. List some of the things God "gave" or "gives."

9. Write your first thoughts about this chapter. What is the Lord already showing you?

This will be an exciting chapter as we have the privilege of looking at God's grace, faithfulness, mercy, and love. God is very, very, great! He is so worthy to be praised!

Memory Verse of the Week: "You alone are the Lord; You have made Heaven, the Heaven of Heavens, with all their host, the earth and all the things on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The host of Heaven worships You." Nehemiah 9:6

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Read Nehemiah 9:1-6. Reading the law (ch. 8) moved them to repentance. According to verse 1, what were they doing?

2. What did the Israelites then do, in verse 2? (Read Leviticus 20:26)

Wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads was a public sign of sorrow and repentance. They were expressing the heaviness of their heart and the depth of their sorrow. The people also were confessing their sins publicly. This was a six-hour service (vs 3), consisting of confession and worship.

The Israelites were called by God to be separate and had violated that law. They now decided to obey that law and separated themselves from their Gentile neighbors. The people, as well as the priests, had also ignored the law forbidding mixed marriages. Thirteen years earlier, Ezra had confronted the Jews about this, but had only been partially successful (Ezra 9:1-2). It was time to be "altogether separate"!

3. Read 1 Peter 1:15, 2:9-10 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1. What do these verses tell us about being separate? What does that practically mean?

4. Have you “separated” yourself from the world? Have you made a commitment to the Lord to be “holy as He is holy”? In what areas do you struggle with being “**separate**”?

5. There appear to be two different functions of the group of men listed in verses 4 and 5. What did the men listed in verse 4 do?

6. What did the group in verse 5 seem to do?

The first group seemed to voice the distress and sorrow of God’s people, while the second group appeared to lead corporate prayer and praise. The Levites were calling the people to exalt God’s name above all blessings and praise!

The prayer that follows is a brief history lesson of the children of Israel. It’s a combination of praise and thankfulness for God’s provision, grace, faithfulness, and protection, while confessing their hardened hearts, rebellious attitudes, and disobedient actions. Israel had continually rejected God and His Word, but God had faithfully extended mercy and forgiveness to them. This prayer often recalls God’s loving nature and perfect character, His uniqueness, and the everlasting covenant of love He has with them. As they prayed, they contrasted God’s loyalty with their own disloyalty, His faithfulness with their unfaithfulness.

The prayer begins by praising God for being the Creator (vs 6). They move on and reflect on the covenant God made with Abraham (vs 7-8), God’s mercy and power in the Exodus (vs 9-12) the months at Mt. Sinai (vs 12-19), the 38 years of wandering in the wilderness (vs 19-21), the period of possessing the Promised Land (vs 22-25), and during the period from the Judges to the Assyrian deportation and Babylonian exile (vs 26-31).

7. How do they praise God as the Creator? Did He just create everything and leave it alone? (John 5:17, Matthew 10:29, Psalm 147:9, Luke 12:7, Psalm 145:16)

8. Why is starting your prayer time by reflecting on creation such a great idea? What does it do to your perspective?

**Our praises are echoed in the Heavens by the angelic beings.
That's amazing!**

9. Read Exodus 20:1-6. In light of this, why was Nehemiah 9:6 significant? What were they remembering and acknowledging? (Deuteronomy 6:4)

10. Have you put any other "gods" before Him? Have you allowed any person, circumstance, or thing to be first in your life, before Him? Is He the Lord "alone" in your life?

Tomorrow we'll pick it up by remembering God's covenant with Abraham. Spend some time today exalting His name above all blessings and praise!

Third Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Read Nehemiah 9:1-38, focusing on verses 7-8. Also, read Genesis 11:31-12:3 and 17:1-8. Explain the covenant God had with Abraham.

2. From verse 8, what was Abraham commended for?

God had promised to make Abraham a great nation, and He kept His promise. Although Abraham certainly wasn't perfect, he trusted God and obeyed His will. His faith was proven to be great when he was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar (Genesis 22, Hebrews 11:17-19).

The Levites are praising God for keeping His promises. God chose an unlikely man (Hebrews 11:11-12) to fulfill His plans. God changed the man from Abram to Abraham (father of multitudes). God knew his heart, and God used him, becoming a good example to his descendants. They looked back on Abraham as a testimony to God's faithfulness. He always does what He says He'll do: "You have performed Your words, for You are righteous." (vs 8)

3. How does knowing that God will ALWAYS do what He says He will do encourage you today in some situation you may be facing?

4. Read Nehemiah 9:9-12. The prayer now jumps from remembering Abraham to Moses. How do these verses focus on God's love and power?

Exodus 1-17 tells us the story of Israel's severe affliction in Egypt, their cries to the Lord, the choosing of Moses as their leader, the deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh, the crossing of the Red Sea, and their wandering experiences through the desert, being led by clouds and fire.

5. How did God make a name for Himself? (vs 10) What does that mean?

They began by praising Him for being the Creator, then remembering God's faithfulness to His Word by the example of Abraham: now they are acknowledging God's amazing love and power by their deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh. Their reflection on history reminds them of what God has done, continues to do, and what He can do in the future!

6. Can you give some examples from your past of how you can see God's love and power working in your life?

7. Read Nehemiah 9:13-15. The Israelites were chosen to receive the law and know God's will (Exodus 20:1-18). What else did God do for them? Read Exodus 16:14-17 and 17:6 and briefly explain the story.

8. Now read 9:16-18. How did the Israelites respond to what God had done for them?

9. When did they try to appoint another leader? (vs 17) Read Numbers 14:1-5.

Let's not be quick to judge the Israelites because we, too, have done the same. We have been guilty of stubborn pride, of arrogance, of disloyalty, of refusing to listen, ingratitude, and idolatry.

10. Do you find that any of these phrases describe you, either in the past or present? Have you refused to obey? Have you forgotten to remember His wonders? Have you ever hardened your heart, or stiffened your neck?

11. What about "returning to your bondage"? Has the Lord changed your life or delivered you from something in your past, or maybe an old habitual sin, and you find yourself tempted to go back? Don't be like the Israelites -- repent now; going back will lead you to destruction!

12. According to verse 17b, how did God demonstrate His great mercy?

13. How has God shown you mercy, just this year? This week? This day?

Praise God for His wonderful mercy. We are so prone to sin, yet He is so ready to pardon. When we repent, He is gracious and kind. What a wonderful God we serve. Are we that gracious when someone comes to us and repents? Hmmm....

Fourth Day

Your verse was a little longer this week. Did you learn it? Use it?

1. Read Nehemiah 9, focusing on verses 18-21. Even after the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:4-8, 31), what did God do?

2. What does the word “manifold” mean? How does that describe God’s mercy?

3. Why did the fact that their clothes didn’t wear out and their feet didn’t swell attest to God’s mercy? (Deut. 2:7, 29:5)

Verse 21 has a special meaning for me. On one of my first trips to Israel, I was having ankle and feet problems. I’ve had 3 ankle surgeries, but I don’t remember where I was on that series at the time. All I remember was that I was really worried about all the walking we were going to do. I was afraid that I would be in pain the entire time, while holding up the whole team. One night the Lord took me to this verse and told me I would “lack nothing” and my feet “wouldn’t swell.” Guess what? I had no problem the whole time! Kind of silly, but I’ve always remembered His tender love and care for me, using this verse to speak to me. He’s awesome! (Even cares about my feet!)

4. Read Nehemiah 9:22-25. What’s the main point of this section?

5. How does this section reveal God’s generosity?

A nation of offspring was another aspect of the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). God told him that his seed would be like the stars of heaven (Genesis 15:5). The Jews multiplication while they were in Egypt was a miracle from God (Exodus 1:1-3). Verse 25 ends this section with an undeserved but promised inheritance.

6. Read verses 26-31. How is God's patience revealed in this section?

7. What are some repeated words and phrases in this section?

This part of their prayer refers to the time period recorded in the Book of Judges. A new generation of leaders in Israel (after Joshua) turned away from the Lord (Judges 2:6-15). It was a time period that ran in a cycle: God disciplined them: they cried out for help: God delivered them. They would follow Him for a bit, fall back into sin, and the cycle repeated itself. Sin abounds; grace "superabounds." We see a sharp contrast between man and God. Brown wrote, "This time period is a sad story of lovelessness towards God and indifference to His Word. They did not merely ignore what God had said but took steps to ensure that they would not have to listen to it again; they ridiculed and killed those who proclaimed it (2 Chron. 24:20-22, 36:15-16; Matthew 23:34-37; Acts 7:51-52). The repeated cyclic pattern of prosperity, arrogance, apostasy, judgment, penitence, and restoration, typical of the stories in Judges, is recited in this honest prayer."

"God patiently absorbed their disloyalty." This quote broke my heart. He knew that the only way to bring them back to Him was to "give them over to the hands of their enemies." Only while they were experiencing extreme suffering would they realize how much they needed Him. He forgave them and delivered them over and over again.

8. In what ways is God "absorbing your disloyalty"? Is there some reoccurring sin in your life? What can you do to stop the cycle?

9. Often times we don't realize how much we need God until we are in trouble. Why is that? Has some "trouble" or trial in your life reminded you of how much you need to depend on God?

- 10.** Wiersbe said, “The Father is never as close to us as when He is chastening us.”
Read Hebrews 12:1-11 and Psalm 119:67. What does he mean?

Tomorrow we’ll wrap up this chapter by looking at the grace of God. It’s amazing that even when the Israelites were in a period of chastisement, God still cared for their every need. Doesn’t He do the same for us? We are so privileged to be chosen by God to be one of His kids. With that comes great responsibility but great privileges and blessings!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

- 1.** Read Nehemiah 9:1-38 again, focusing on verses 32-38. What transition does the word “now” make?

- 2.** What is the main point of this section?

- 3.** Did they believe that God was “just” in punishing them?

- 4.** Did they identify with the sins of their forefathers, or did they blame them for the punishment?

Israel's sin had affected every part of their society: kings, leaders, priests, prophets, fathers, people. (vs 32) Sadly, sin spreads like wildfire. A little leaven affects the whole lump! (1 Corinthians 5:6) Sins can be passed down from generation to generation.

In verse 32, the phrase "king of Assyria" refers to a summary of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian dominance of their nation for almost four centuries until that time. They are praising God for all their blessings but grieved that they are still ruled by another nation, which gets to enjoy all the blessings that Israel should be receiving (vs 37) and isn't, because of their sin. They continually broke their end of the bargain, but God never broke His.

5. Is there some sin you struggle with that could easily be passed down to another generation? Ask the Lord to show you if there is some type of sin or habit that He wants you to stop before your children, grandchildren, or friends pick it up.

6. Israel knew what their greatest sin was. What do they say it is, according to verse 34?

History didn't just point to their unfaithfulness, it screamed of God's goodness. Raymond Brown points out twenty blessings that are a result of His mercy. "He has given Himself to the work of creating (6), choosing (7), encouraging (8), hearing (9), delivering (10-11), guiding (12), meeting (13a), teaching (13b), protecting (14), feeding (15), forgiving (17), loving (17), accompanying (19), clothing (21), empowering (22), sustaining (21), multiplying (23), prospering (25), correcting (26-27), and rescuing them (27)." Amazing!!

7. After much praise, they bring their request and desire before Him. What are they looking for, according to verse 38?

8. Over and over, Moses had exhorted them not to forget God (Deuteronomy 8), but they did! And here they were again, wanting a new beginning, a fresh start. On what merit were they asking? Why did they think they could even ask Him again? Did they think they deserved it?

The prayer of the people no doubt enlarged their vision of God, reminding them of their need for Him, reminding them of how powerful, strong, and merciful He was. They were ready to make a new commitment. They wanted to start over, and they knew they needed to repent and receive His mercy for a new beginning.

- 9.** Are you ready for a new beginning? Have you been taking God's mercy and goodness for granted? Do you need to repent and ask Him for His gracious pardon? Write a prayer of confession and repentance to Him. Then thank Him for His faithfulness.

- 10.** It's exciting to remember that God takes unlikely people and uses them for His divine purposes. What He promised to Israel, He promises to do for you and I as well. What does Galatians 3:29 say about that?

- 11.** Take some time and chart your spiritual journey as the Israelites did in this chapter. Be as general or specific as you want.

- 12.** Many times our blessings make us forget God. Instead of being thankful, we become forgetful. Take some time and thank God for the blessings He has graciously given you.

- 13.** What are some of the lessons you learned from this chapter? How did you apply this chapter to your life?