

AUGUST 14

Nehemiah 7:61-9:21

Nehemiah 7:61-73

This concludes Nehemiah's research on who was true-blue. The last part of v. 73 is the intro into chapter 8.

Nehemiah 8

Ezra's teaching ministry to the people had been suspended during the two months of building the walls. I don't know if this was planned by anyone other than God, but now came the Feast of Trumpets and then the Day of Atonement and the Feast of the Tabernacles. With the walls being finished, this would all be an amazing way to focus this generation on their calling as the people of God in the world. Keep in mind that the dedication of the wall doesn't happen until chapter 12.

Vs. 1-10 Notice that the people gathered in unity. Notice, too, that there were leaders on the platform with Ezra, giving visual testimony to their unity with Ezra and the Word. Also, note that the "sermon" was longer than 45 minutes!

Vs. 7-8 So then, after all of this, there were these guys who apparently were given different sections to expound upon and apply. It could be that these all day events were broken into sections where, after the reading of the Book of the Law, people sat in groups in different parts of the city and had the Levites actually expound in depth on Scripture portions.

When I read this I'm not only amazed that the people willingly stood to hear all of this for hours upon hours, but I wonder if they had port-a-potties or something.

Vs. 9-12 At this point in the gathering Nehemiah and Ezra are standing side by side. There must have been power in this event and the people must have been very sensitive and open spiritually. As they heard the law, seeing all of God's favor and knowing how far they had fallen as a nation, they wept. They had to be encouraged and commanded to rejoice and be generous, in spite of being surrounded by enemies and not being an independent nation. Also, think of what it meant for these people to leave their farms and homes for this event and the week-long event that was to follow. What we are witnessing here is a miracle of restoration and spiritual renewal. It wouldn't last forever, but this was certainly a gift for this group of people.

All through Scripture, back then and today, the truth is the same for those who understand the Word: *The joy of the Lord is our strength.* We follow Christ in the harvest, working for Him, hoping in Him, but we never forget that we live in a lost world on a dying planet. We sense this death in our bodies and in the nature within us that still strains to dishonor our Lord. Yet with this full understanding, we can rejoice truly and greatly. Paul said it like this in Romans 15:13, *May the God of hope fill you with **all joy and peace in believing**, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.* Our strength and testimony spring from our joy in being saved and belonging to Christ.

Vs. 13-18 What blows me away here is the comment in v. 17. If I understand this correctly, this feast with people living near the tabernacle/temple in little home-made huts had not been held. It could be that the part of the feast that wasn't followed was that everyone lived outdoors in booths made from branches. These feast weeks in themselves were a challenge because all the men had to attend and they would have gone with their families, meaning their houses and property were unprotected. It would have taken a lot of faith. Finally here, the reason God had given this feast in the first place was experienced. The people rejoiced in God.

V. 18 Notice that Ezra taught all seven days. From the earlier verses we know how they did this. Ezra read and others were appointed to explain and apply the truth of various sections of Scripture.

Nehemiah 9

And now the final day. You can tell this was a special event orchestrated by God. What a way to give a generation a shot of spiritual vitality, hoping they would determine in their hearts to follow God.

Vs. 1-5 With the confession and fasting and prayer, this looks like a revival. By virtue of all we have read about the people weeping when Ezra read the Law, this was a time of unparalleled humility and brokenness in Israel. This is just amazing.

V. 5 It would appear that the guys mentioned here all led a part of the prayer of testimony and confession that follows.

Since I know how Nehemiah ends, it impresses me how important the leaders are to the walk of the people. The entire congregation is like a living thing. If one part dies or becomes corrupt, the entire body suffers. This would be true, too, of the NT teaching on the church.

Vs. 6-21 As you read this prayer, what stands out to you as a disciple? Isn't it amazing how important their history was to them in inspiring them to remember, to repent and to follow? God's love and forgiveness is woven through it all. As an exercise in Bible study, underline or mark all the occurrences of *you* and *they*. It tells you the story that is still going on today as God works through us to reach our fellow wrecks on this planet.

As disciples, our own personal history is important in that same way. Think of what the Lord has done, what He has forgiven and the times when He has restored; and remember that His love and forgiveness are woven through all of it. Our strength and joy are not in us, but in Him and in what He has done in us. Add to that, the fact that we are standing at the end of all of this redemptive history that we are reading about, having been saved to follow Christ in this time of harvest.

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

This is another one of those portions where Paul gets emotional. Read this portion out loud about three times, putting a little emotion into it and you'll understand what Paul was feeling when he wrote it. The climax comes in vs. 19-23, with 24-27 being a call to imitate Paul in following the Lord.

Vs. 1-2 In chapters 6 and 8 Paul addressed the Corinthians' exercise and misuse of freedom. This chapter will have an ironic twist to it. In chapter 8 the weak were those who were not able to eat meat, for fear that it had been offered in sacrifice. In this chapter Paul shows that the weak and spiritually immature are really many of those "strong" people in the Corinthian church who complained about Paul. Here, Paul is defending his position as an apostle of the Lord.

Vs. 3-7 It is evident here, and we'll see this again in 2 Corinthians 11, that Paul was spoken against as trying to take advantage of this church's resources. Apparently familiarity bred contempt. Paul, the founder of the church in Corinth, and his buddy Barnabas were looked upon suspiciously; but all the other heroes of the faith were fawned upon and given special privilege.

V. 7 These are all pictures of Paul's work among them as a servant. That goes for us also, as disciples.

Vs. 8-12 Notice how Paul used the law to prove his point. These people knew the law and would respect the evidence. Paul is not only showing scriptural authority; look at vs. 11 and 12. Paul had labored to plant this church, but many of these people had been led to distrust and disrespect him.

V. 12 This is where Paul illustrates what he mentioned to them in chapter 8. The stronger believer sacrifices, until the weaker believer is mature enough to understand and not violate their conscience. By now the Corinthians should have been supporting Paul in his ministry, like the

Philippians were doing. But we know from chapter 3, that this "gifted" church was in protracted infancy. So then, Paul had to keep treating them as weak and not offend them so he could nurture them to maturity.

Vs. 13-15 More proof, straight from the OT and then Jesus, that supporting the work of the Lord was not only supported by Scripture; but it was also a sign of maturity.

Vs. 16-18 Can you sense the irony in Paul's words here? Since Paul is inspired by the Spirit, it has to be coming from God too. You might have to read these a few times to get Paul's meaning. Paul never thought he'd be rewarded for preaching the gospel, because preaching the gospel was his obligation. That reminds me of Jesus' teaching on faith to His disciples in Luke 17:10, *"So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"* Disciples understand this.

Read the rest of the chapter and you'll get the punch of where Paul is going with this. Paul was free, but made himself a slave to Christ and to "the weak" in order to work in the harvest for Christ. The Corinthians should have been humbled, but judging by 2 Corinthians 11, I don't think they had the type of humility that the people in Nehemiah's day had.

A leader sacrifices for his master. Nehemiah sacrificed his personal comfort out of love for God, serving the people of God. A disciple sacrifices for the sake of his Lord to reach others with this message and to bring them to maturity as disciples. These are words from the heart of an amazing disciple.

Psalm 33:12-22

V. 12 Here David is declaring that it is a privilege to be that nation that has given itself to the Lord.

Vs. 13-17 I find it interesting that David mentions God's watchfulness and interest as being global, and not limited to Israel. God watches all nations and all men, and the affairs of men are ultimately in His hands as He works His plan of redemption. Did David understand some of God's redemptive purpose in Israel? The Spirit certainly did.

Vs. 18-22 is the crescendo of this psalm. Notice how God's watchful care, steadfast love, and deliverance are on all those who fear Him and wait on Him. It is common in all followers of the Lord to hope and trust and wait on Him.

Proverbs 21:11-12

Verse 11 is similar to a proverb we had before, and here the meaning is clear. The scoffer doesn't learn from his punishment, but the simple learn when the scoffer is rebuked. So, it is worth it to rebuke the scoffer. The wise don't need to be punished; they are shown and they learn.

The last clause of v. 12 is interpreted differently in different translations. If it is put together with v. 11, it might mean that the wise person observes and learns from the wicked, and what they learn is that God brings the wicked to ruin. So, it isn't worth it to imitate or envy the wicked.