

Gleanings of Grace

Nehemiah 8

Lesson 17

As Ezra was sent to Jerusalem to bring the Book of the Law to the people, Nehemiah returned to the land to rebuild the wall around the city. After much opposition, the wall was completed. It was time for Ezra to again fulfill his calling by reading God's Word to the people. The people responded with mourning. Ezra and Nehemiah encouraged them that God was not calling them to sorrow, but to joy. May you join them in their discovery that *the joy of the LORD is your strength*.

OBSERVATION: Nehemiah 8

1. Read Nehemiah 8 using the Observation Worksheet (the last page of this homework). After reading through the chapter, what would you say to someone if they asked you what it is about?
2. Key words help us to better understand the verses. We have listed below key words. Mark each one in a distinctive way (either with a symbol, highlighting, or some form of boxing, circling, or underlining). Mark each of the key words each time they are used in the text. Remember to mark any personal pronouns that refer to the *LORD* and each of the people marked as key words.
Key Words: *LORD/God, Ezra, Nehemiah, the people, understand/understanding/understood, and the Law*
3. Scan through your markings of the words that related to the *people*. List a few of the words or phrases that described their attitude.

Background:

1. While in Persia, Nehemiah was the cup-bearer to the king. Hanani, and other Jews, came from Judah and gave Nehemiah an update on the conditions of the city of Jerusalem. According to Nehemiah 1:3, what did they report to Nehemiah?
 - a. *So it was, when I (Nehemiah) heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4)* Verses 5-11 record Nehemiah's prayer. List some of the components for his prayer that stand out to you.

2. The king of Persia not only granted Nehemiah permission to return to the land, he gave Nehemiah letters of permission to do so. The next six chapters recount the opposition Nehemiah and the people encountered in building the wall. Yet, the people prevailed and the wall was completed. According to Nehemiah 6:15, how long did it take?
 - a. Using verse 16, describe the response of their *enemies and the nations around them*.

3. Nehemiah became the *governor* of Judah. When opposed by their enemies, Nehemiah answered them confidently. What did he say to them? See Nehemiah 2:20
 - a. Although Nehemiah knew that God would *prosper* them, he encouraged the people to do their part in guarding against enemy attacks. What do Nehemiah 4:9 and 17 report that they did?
 - 1.) Explain, in practical terms, how this relates to our responsibility to guard against our enemy.

4. Nehemiah faithfully performed his duties beyond that of *other governors*. What does Nehemiah 5:14-18 reveal about him?
 - a. What example does this set for us?

Read Nehemiah 8:1-4

1. Nehemiah 7 records the 50,000 who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. Now in Nehemiah 8, it was time to celebrate. How was the gathering of the people described?
 - a. In what ways do fresh starts promote unity?

2. Consider the words of Psalm 133:1. What is *pleasant* about *unity*?

3. Using Romans 12:16 and Romans 14:10, list some attributes of *unity*.

4. Romans 15:5 calls for believers to be *like-minded*. What are some necessary components of *like-mindedness* for Christians?

5. Nehemiah 8:1 says, *the people gathered together and told Ezra to bring the Book of the Law of Moses*. Record the last six words of verse 1.
 - a. Why is it important to you to know that the Word of God is what God has *commanded* of His people?

6. Who did Ezra read the *Book of the Law* to? verses 2,3
 - a. Define the word *understand* as it applies in these verses.

7. How long did Ezra stand in *the open square* and read *the Law*?
 - a. Write in large capital letters the word used to describe how the people listened in verse 3.
 - 1.) List synonyms to define the word *attentive*.

 - b. What do you think was different in their circumstances that might cause them to be more *attentive* to the reading of the Word than many are to its reading today?
 - 1.) What helps you to be more *attentive* or block out distractions?

Read Nehemiah 8:5-8

1. Ezra *opened the book in the sight of all the people*. Using verses 4,5, list the peoples' response to the reading of the Word.

a. Notice that the people not only mentally grasped the Word as it was read, they physically responded. What are your thoughts about this?

1.) In your mind, what are some important guidelines that should be set to physical responses to the reading of God's Word (or do you think there is no need for guidelines)?

b. What do the following verses encourage regarding physical expressions of worship?

Psalm 47:1

Psalm 95:6

Psalm 134:2

Lamentations 3:41

3. According to Nehemiah 8:7,8, what did some of the men and the *Levites* do?

a. In what ways have you benefitted from others helping you to understand *God's Word*?

b. After Jesus rose from the dead, He met two men walking along the road to Emmaus. They were saddened at the death of Jesus and were not aware that it was Jesus Himself who was speaking to them. According to Luke 24:27, what did Jesus do?

1.) What was their response?

2.) We not only have access to those who help us *understand*, we also have the Holy Spirit. According to John 16:13-15, what is His role in the life of a believer?

a.) Explain, as you would to a new Christian, your experience of times when the Holy Spirit gives you understanding of God's Word.

Read Nehemiah 8:9-12

1. The people not only responded in praise; verse 9 tells us that the reading of the *Law* provoked another response. What was it?
 - a. Referring to verse 9, record the words of *Nehemiah*, *Ezra*, and the *Levites to the people*, explaining why they should not *mourn* or *weep*.
 - 1.) This *holy* day was a day set aside for celebration. The Word of God often convicts us of sin. The feast set aside for mourning over sin, the Day of Atonement, precedes the Feast of Tabernacles. The people were told that this time, was a time of celebration. Why are we in error to mourn over our sins once God has forgiven them?
Challenge: Use Scripture to support your answer.
2. Using Nehemiah 8:10, list the instructions that were given to the people.
 - a. Record the reasoning behind these instructions.
 - 1.) The process of returning to the Lord, often begins with conviction, then repentance, then the receiving of God's forgiveness which God intends to produce *joy*. Using your own words, describe what it has been like for you to arrive at the experience of *the joy of the LORD*.
 - 2.) In what ways have you discovered the *joy of the LORD* to be a *strength* to you?
 - 3.) What prevents a person from encountering the *joy of the LORD*?
3. The phrase *send portions* occurs in verses 10 and 12. This speaks of sending food. Who were they to *send portions* to?
 - a. In what ways does this instruction challenge you, when you consider celebrating a holiday?
 - 1.) Commit to one action that you will do as it relates to *sending portions*.
4. The people had misunderstood the reading of the *Law* and thought that it should provoke them to *sorrow*. How might misunderstanding the intents and character of God lead to actions that are not in line with His intentions?
 - a. Using verse 12, describe what the people did when they *understood the words that were declared to them*.

Read Nehemiah 8:13-18

1. This final section of Nehemiah 8 recounts the celebration of the *Feast of Tabernacles*. Using verses 13-17, summarize what the *people* did.

2. The last phrase of verse 17 describes the mood of the people. What does it say?
 - a. The people had failed to celebrate God's ordained feasts for many years. We can be like the Jews and neglect to appreciate or celebrate God in some way. As a result, what do you think can happen?
 - 1.) Why do you think that *gladness* is often the result of returning to living life as God ordains?

3. The last phrase of the last verse in Nehemiah 8 tell us how the people *kept the feast*. What are those words?
 - a. What does it mean to keep something *according to the prescribed manner*?
 - 1.) Why is it important to keep something *according to the prescribed manner* when it relates to God's instructions?

REVIEW: Nehemiah 8

1. What prompts you to praise and worship the LORD?

2. In what way were you challenged by this lesson?

And Moses commanded them, saying: "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess."

- Deuteronomy 31:10-13

Observation Worksheet

Nehemiah 8

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ³ Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. ⁸ So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. ⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." ¹¹ So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. ¹³ Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. ¹⁴ And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, ¹⁵ and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." ¹⁶ Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷ So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. ¹⁸ Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.