

Revelation Leads to Celebration

RECAP

Focus: Obedience to God's Word produces great joy!

In Nehemiah 6, we read that the walls of Jerusalem are complete and were rebuilt in Fifty-two days. Nehemiah is now having to organize and plan on how to reinstitute worship and the adherence to God's Law. Nehemiah knows that the work was never about the walls. If that were the case, this book could have easily ended in chapter 6. Building the walls was the groundwork for something much bigger.

REBUILDING the walls led to **RESTORING** worship back in Jerusalem and **RENEWING** the nation of Israel and returning their hearts back to God. No wall could secure the future of a nation. The most needed repair was the spiritual life of the people. Many of the exiles had returned to Jerusalem, but they had not necessarily returned to God. Nehemiah recognized that for the people of Jerusalem to truly be restored and protected, they must also be in right relationship with God. He took steps to ensure that the people can worship God and follow the Laws of Moses.

In chapter 8, all the people gather, united as one, asking Ezra the priest to read from the Law of Moses. As Ezra reads, the priests are going around and explaining everything so that the people understood what was being read to them. For six hours Ezra read from the Law of Moses, from daybreak to noon, and all the people listened attentively. When Ezra opened the Book of the Law of Moses, all the people stood up, lifted their hands, and responded "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

The people wept when they heard the Words from the Law of Moses. They wept because of the guilt they felt, and they knew that they were the ones being spoken of. They were the stubborn people who provoked the Lord to wrath. They realized their sin, everything they had done, how far away from God they had been. But Nehemiah, Ezra, and the other leaders told them to stop weeping and to celebrate because the joy of the Lord is your strength. They could rejoice because God would bring His people back. Their story was not over. God had not left them condemned, God was not done with them, but rather He delighted in them.

They learned of the Feast of Tabernacles, and everyone went out and brought back palm and olive branches to build their booths/huts to live in for seven days. This was a reminder of their days of living in tents during the time of wandering in the wilderness. They all celebrated and did exactly what they were told. They obeyed with all their heart and there was great joy. This feast had not been celebrated like that since the days of Joshua when they lived in those tents.

Perhaps, you are not experiencing the joy and the presence of God in your life. This chapter shows you that if you give time to be in His Word, obey it, apply it to your life, and it won't be something you read about. It is something you can and will experience. Obedience to God's Word is key to experience God's joy and presence.

Nehemiah
REBUILD, RESTORE, RENEW

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SHARE (5-10 min)

Icebreaker: What is your favorite holiday or special occasion to celebrate? Why?

STUDY (about 30 min) Read Nehemiah 7-8

1. What stood out to you about the message on Sunday? Is there anything that was unclear, or that you have questions about?
2. "On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 meaning "I never do that!" and 10 meaning "I do that almost non-stop!") evaluate your relationship to the written Word of God in the following areas." Then, share with one another your evaluation and encourage each other in areas where attention is needed. Be sure to share some affective disciplines/habits that you have developed.

a. ___Hearing the Bible being preached or taught.	e. ___Memorizing the Word of God.
b. ___ Reading the Bible.	f. ___Obeying the Word of God.
c. ___ Studying God's Word.	g. ___Teaching the truth of God's Word to others.
d. ___ Understanding the Bible.	
3. Read 8:1-12. What is the response to the reading of God's Word? How can you mirror the response and/or attitude of the Israelites in your own life?
4. How would you respond to a six-hour service like the one in Nehemiah? Why do you think they were able to pay attention for so long? What are some reasons that make it difficult to sit and listen to the Word?
5. What did the Israelites do when they experienced the great JOY of the Lord?
6. What is the connection between obedience and JOY? Is there any area of your life that you are not walking in obedience to God's Word and His heart? How would that impact your joy? What does it look like to turn back to God?
7. When have you experienced the true JOY of the Lord? Share your experience and describe what that was like. Describe the difference between happiness and joy.
8. What specific changes in your relationship to the Word of God do you feel the need to change this week? How will you implement those changes?"

SUPPORT (15 min)

Pray for each other. Pray that God would give each person in your life group the same hunger and thirst for His Word as you read in Nehemiah 8 and the obedience that results in joy.