

Weekend

The Jews had to learn to work together. They became united behind one leader and in a common task. Likewise Christ is our head and we are his body to carry out his will. Examine some of the passages which explain this and note down your feelings. Does today's church match up to the biblical picture? How can you play your part? (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31 ;Ephesians 4:1-16; Colossians 3:12-17.)

Notes



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Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Week 24: The book of Nehemiah (A detailed study)

With Jerusalem destroyed, and the Jews taken into exile in Babylon (587 BC), few of them believe that God still has a plan for the nation (2 Chronicles 36:15-23 tells the story). But God remains faithful to his promises. Babylon falls to Persia and the Jews are allowed to return. Ezra recounts the home-coming of the first two parties. Nehemiah tells the story of the third. It is under his dynamic leadership that the rebuilding of the city wall begins.

Day 1. Man of prayer, man of action

Nehemiah 1 & 2

Though Nehemiah is far from Jerusalem it is his homeland; so he is thunderstruck when his brother brings bad news from there. He grieves and prays for four months.

1. Chapter 1:6-11. Note down those aspects of God's character which he mentions. What expectations does he make of God? His prayer shows he is a man who knows God intimately. By what means has he got to know God so well?

Disagreement with the king could be costly and Artaxerxes had already halted the rebuilding once (Ezra 4:7-23). But when the opportunity for action arises, Nehemiah disregards himself and has a well-thought-out plan to put before the king.

Notes: 1:1 & 2:1 Kislev = November; Nisan = March, approximately. 2:1 King Artaxerxes I of Persia, 464-423 BC.

2. Chapter 2:1-10. What gives Nehemiah the confidence to be so forthright to the king? What new aspect of his prayer life do we see?
3. Chapter 2:11 -20. Because Nehemiah is a man of prayer and faith, he has his feet firmly on the ground. What practical measures does he take to begin the work?

Nehemiah knew the secret of long periods given to prayer, but also of constant communion with God. Consider your own prayer life. Pray that God will teach you both of these important sides to prayer.

Day 2. United they stand ...

Nehemiah 3 & 4

Remember the desolate scene from yesterday of Nehemiah walking alone through the rubble and charred ruins. Chapter 3 acts as a contrast to this as the walls come alive with activity.

1. Chapter 3. List the different occupations of the people who took part in the building. What makes them willing to work together despite their social differences?
2. Chapter 4. Why should Sanballat, Tobiah and the others oppose the rebuilding? See especially verses 1-3, 7-9.

Note: 4:1 Sanballat, Tobiah and Gesham - leaders among the Samaritans, and Governors of Persian colonies. 4:4-5 The prayer is motivated by zeal for God's honour, not personal revenge.

3. Chapter 4. Note down the steps Nehemiah takes when the builders come under threat. What hints from his actions will help us face opposition? Also see Ephesians 4:3, and 6:10-11.

You may have already experienced ridicule about your trust in God. Jesus tells us to expect problems. (John 15:18ff.) In what other ways might you meet opposition (e.g. at home, at work, union meetings, lectures, students' union)? Pray that God will teach you to give a clear but sensitive witness to those who oppose you.

Day 3. ... But what if they should be divided?

Nehemiah 5:1 - 7:4

While Nehemiah had been giving money to the poor and buying Jews out of slavery, rich Jews had been charging heavy interest to their countrymen. God clearly prohibited this (Exodus 22:25), and the onus was on Nehemiah to prevent division.

1. Chapter 5:6-13. What action does Nehemiah take to put the situation right?
2. Chapter 5:14-19. Nehemiah proves the strength of his leadership through the firm handling of this dispute. Note down the other qualities which make him such a good Governor.
3. The opposition now concentrates on Nehemiah. Summarize the two different approaches used, (a) in chapter 6:1-9; (b) in chapter 6:10-14. Why don't they succeed?
4. Chapter 6:15 - 7:4. The wall is built in a record time of two months! Even their enemies have to acknowledge God's hand in it. But this is not the end of the story. What further steps does Nehemiah take for the public good?

Make a list of all the things you have learnt about Nehemiah's character. Pray that God will help you develop similar strengths.

Day 4. Repentance & renewal

Nehemiah 8:1- 9:3; 10:28-39

Imagine how Ezra felt facing that massive crowd. How thankful to God he must have been, that such an assembly could take place. God had sent their fore-fathers into exile for persistent disobedience. Now the people were humbled and wanted to renew their covenant with their Almighty God. Significantly, their first action was to gather to hear God's Word.

1. What feelings do you think the people had on this solemn occasion (8:3, 9, 12; 9:1-2)?

The renewed covenant is signed by the leaders on behalf of all the people. (They pledge themselves to keep the law, specifically mentioning marriage, the sabbath debts and temple dues.

2. We are now under the new covenant, but God's holiness hasn't altered. What does he require of our lives (Philippians 1:27; 1 Peter 1:13-21)?

In spite of the way in which we've treated God, he continues to love and forgive us. Meditate on the fact of his love, maybe reading 9:15-21.

Memory verse: But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love (9:17b, NIV).

Find out more about God's holiness by reading *'The Knowledge of the Holy'*, by A. W. Tozer (Evangelical Press).

Day 5. The people rejoice

Nehemiah 12:27 - 13:31

Picture the joyful celebrations as the walls are dedicated. Two massive processions, each with a choir and musicians, march in opposite directions round the top of the wall. The two companies meet at the temple where they offer sacrifices.

1. List those things which Nehemiah did on his return to restore morality (chapter 13:1-3, 17-18, 27). What are the benefits of obedience? (12:43) Why must sin be dealt with so severely? (13:18)
2. Chapter 13 Nehemiah has been absent from Jerusalem (verse 6) and already standards are slipping. What things might have caused the people to slip into their old ways so quickly? (Jeremiah 10:23-24; Romans 7:14-25.)

Look over your notes for this week. What are the main lessons God was teaching the Jews? Which of them are relevant to you and to today's world? Pray God will help you not only to hear his Word, but to put it into action (James 1:22-25).