

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN NEHEMIAH

THE STORY OF NEHEMIAH – A JOURNEY IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

PART THREE – STRENGTHENING THE TRAVELERS

7. HE LETS THEM KNOW THEY BELONG TO GOD

7:1-73 There was a place for everyone who belonged to God's people.(Matt.11:28; Jn.7:37) This is one of those Bible chapters which contains a long list of names and numbers which we are inclined to skip over quickly. It reminds us how every human being is special to God who loves us and longs for our salvation.(I Tim.2:4) He knows us by name. He also knows us as families, the fundamental structure in our society. Once the wall was finished and the gates set up, the worship of God began at once. Music played an important role. Hanani who first alerted Nehemiah to the need in Jerusalem was put in charge of the city not because he was Nehemiah's brother but because he was faithful and outstanding in his relationship to God.(Acts 6:3-7) The city and its people were to be guarded.(I Pet.5:8,9; Acts 20:28,29) No name was included unless the leaders could be really sure that that person belonged. If in doubt they needed to know from God. We can have a confidence we belong to Christ.(II Tim.1:12) Some were very generous from what were likely to be their limited resources.

Question for discussion – Can we be certain we belong to the Lord? How can we help those who are uncertain?

8. HE HAS THE WORD OF GOD TAUGHT TO THEM AND THEY BELIEVE

8:1-18 He gave opportunity for them to be taught the word of God.(Matt.28:20, Jn.21:15-17) The city was secure, the temple was functioning, there was effective government but the question now was, how would the people live their lives? The only answer was a thorough knowledge of the word of God among the whole nation otherwise their world would quickly fall apart again. What must have been exciting for Ezra and Nehemiah was that it was the people who asked to be taught. Imagine Ezra's delight in being able to respond by reading for 6 hours. No-one fell asleep. No-one walked away. All the people responded in worship to what they heard. The word was not only read but explained and translated. The original language was Hebrew but the people had learned Aramaic in their time in Babylon. Their first reaction was tears as they realized how far they fell short of God's plan but the leaders explained forgiveness through sacrifice and how this was a time for celebration. They shared their meal and made sure no-one missed out. They discovered how the joy of the Lord could be their strength to live as God wanted. Next day they were back for more. Now they learned about living in tents for seven days as a picture of our present lives in temporary accommodation.(II Cor.5:1) Day by day for a whole week their Bible study continued.

Question for discussion – Why is thorough Bible teaching important in establishing people who have been struggling in their faith? Who should do this?

9. THE PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE STORY OF GOD'S DEALING WITH THEM THROUGHOUT HISTORY

9:1-4 They confessed and worshipped, and put the word into practice.(Acts 2:37-40)
Reading the word of God brought an understanding of sin which they confessed. They understood that they had to separate themselves from the nations around them by being different. They took three hours to read and another three hours to work the message through in their hearts. They were serious about their response.

9:5-38 They thanked God for all He had done, beginning with creation. They retraced the story of their salvation from Egypt, wandering in the wilderness and entering the Promised Land, recalling their unfaithfulness and its consequences, and God's forgiveness and grace.(Col.3:15-17) They recognized that the hardships of the past were always for the same reason – arrogance, rebellion and refusing to listen to God. They realized that though they were now back in their own country they were still ruled by the king of Persia. Change will only come about if wholeheartedly and consistently we trust the Lord who has always forgiven and blessed again those who truly depend on Him. To show how serious they were they even put their promise to trust Him in writing.

Question for discussion – What response does God want from us when we read His word? What mistakes are commonly made about Bible teaching?

10. THEIR SOCIETY CHANGES TOWARDS THE PLAN GOD SHOWS THEM

10:1-27 They organized their society according to God's word.(Acts 2:42-47) First there was a list of leaders appointed with Nehemiah for day to day administration, the Levites responsible for their spiritual lives and those chosen by the people to represent them.

10:28-39 What distinguished God's people from the nations around them was that they had 'separated themselves to the Law of God', their lives were obviously different, beginning in the family and based on a knowledge of God's plan as given, first through Moses, to which they were wholeheartedly committed. Consequently they were committed not to intermarry or to trade other than as God said.(II Cor.6:14-18) They were determined willingly to give the financial and practical means to keep the temple functioning as a place to know forgiveness and to worship God.

Question for discussion – How far can we expect our society to be affected if Christ-centred Bible teaching is an ongoing central feature of our lives?