

City of God Part 24 - A People of Pilgrimage (10-11-26)

Introduction: Nehemiah Chapter 8 - Realignment to the Word of the Law - 2 days that changed everything! Reading, reflection, celebration, study, obedience, culminating in the celebration of the Feast of Booths.

1) The Significance of Understanding God's Word

Nehemiah 8:1-3 (ESV)

[1] And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. [2] So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. [3] And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

Note: Gathered and attentive - giving the Word time and space to really penetrate

Nehemiah 8:5-6 (ESV)

[5] And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. [6] And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Note: Reading of the Word as an act of Worship

Nehemiah 8:7-8 (ESV)

[7] Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. [8] They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Note: The importance of gaining understanding

- **Understand** (H995) - consider, discern, perceive, understand.

From Brenner's: The pictograph is a picture of the tent and a sprouting seed. The combined meaning of these letters mean "the continuing of the house."

Elements: Approaching the Word of God in Worship - positions us to align ourselves to our God. A corporate gathering, which includes gaining understanding through reading, teaching, and conversation in the Word.

Myself - Corporate gathering around the Word, Living rooms digesting the Word, reading the Word as worship and communion with the Holy Spirit - and the Word came to life, and so did I.

2) Holiness and Joy!

Nehemiah 8:9-12 (ESV)

[9] And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and 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 or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. [10] Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." [11] So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." [12] And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Note: Holiness and festival joy!

- The Word is aligning and corrective, and when hearing all they had been missing, they weep!
- But, God doesn't correct us in order to shame us into submission.
- The Lord corrects us in order to bring us back into joyful communion!

Jesus is showing us this in the **parable of the prodigal son**. The son returns in submissive shame (unworthy to be called your son, take me as a servant), but the Father instead re-affirms sonship and throws a party!

3) Hearts set on Pilgrimage

Nehemiah 8:13-16 (ESV)

[13] On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law. [14] And they found it written in the Law that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, [15] and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, "Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written." [16] So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

Note: Feast of Booths - Living in Tents / Tabernacles

This isn't about a weekend camping trip.

This is the residence of a nomadic people, who live on pilgrimage

God brought them out of slavery, established them as a people and tabernacled with them.

Nehemiah 8:17-18 (ESV)

[17] And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. [18] And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.

Note: Even as the "City of God" is being re-established in Jerusalem, they are being reminded (as are we), that we are never really forming that city here.

As Alex taught last week - We are being formed as a people ready to receive that eternal city, who's builder and maker is God.

Conclusion: We are a pilgrim people called to dwell in communion . . . with our God who makes his home with us, and with one another, being formed together into a people made ready for a city that He's preparing!

Hebrews 11:9-10, 13-16 (ESV)

[9] By faith (Abraham) went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. [10] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. . . [13] These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. [14] For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. [15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.