

God Is Faithful...in Nehemiah 7, The emphasis shifts as *the focal point moves from reconstruction to reinstruction in the rest of the book.* **We move from rebuilding the Wall, to rebuilding the people.** **From being successful at the Work of God to learning what it looks like to be successful at being the People of God.....and the place that always starts is His Word...The Bible.**

Then in chapter 8...the people now have been hearing and learning and understanding the Word of God...they have been reinstructed on the ways of God and *they have set their hearts to know God and to obey His will...and one of the first things they reinstitute is a feast called the Feast of Booths:*

**Nehemiah 8:** <sup>2</sup> *So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand.*

- The word, “understanding” is used six times in this chapter, which shows that the Bible is not meant to be confusing, but to be understood.
- So they all come together on the first day of the seventh month, *which was the Jewish equivalent of our New Year’s Day.* During this month, the Israelites celebrated the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths, were a reminder that they were called as a people out of Egypt. When they got into the desert, God told them to collect branches and limbs of trees in order to have shelter. *God then told them to do this every year, even when they had their homes to dwell in. and they now had a home to dwell in...*

*And as the Word was opened and delivered They were locked in, focused, and ready to hear from their great God.*

**Nehemiah 8:** <sup>17</sup> *The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great. Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.*

- **God told them to live in shacks for a week. They were to go out, fetch some branches and sticks, and make booths for their families to live in.**

**I There were three main purposes for this festival:**

- 1. It helped them remember where they had come from and how far God had brought them. (Past) \*This Creates Humility**
- 2. A time for looking around at the harvest of blessings from the hand of God. (Present) \*This Creates Thanksgiving**

### 3. To look forward in anticipation and faith toward the great work that God would accomplish on their behalf and that this world was not their home. (Future) \*This Creates Faith

*Then something internal happens in chapter nine...we jump to the 24 day of the month...*

They had drawn close to God, and now He is drawing them even closer! and the closer one is drawn to God the more you realize your shortcomings... they now look at themselves...

*Neh 9:1 On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads.*

- A moment of clarity....The children of Israel were assembled again: **Assembled with fasting:** "we are so troubled by our sin, food seems unimportant."
- **In sackcloth:** This was wearing rough fabric, like a burlap bag. this was to show their complete poverty of spirit before God.... "we are so troubled by our sin, the normal comforts of life are unimportant."
- **With dust on their heads:** This meant they took little handfuls of dirt and cast them on their heads. This was also to show their lowly state before God, we recognize we are from dust... humble not only towards God, but also humble towards man. They did this publicly, and others would see them in this public state.
- Surely there were those among them who said, "I won't humiliate myself and join in." Others must have said, "I'll do it, just so others can see that I'm spiritual too." But there were many, if not most, who came to God with truly humble, repentant hearts.

*<sup>2</sup> Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. (A Fourth Step)<sup>3</sup> They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God.*

- Then those of Israelite lineage (Identity) separated themselves from all foreigners: That is the difference between the family of God and others in how they relate to God... Our identity gives rise to the way we think about ourselves...the way we think about ourselves governs our behavior.
- Notices that that the word does not command us to behave a certain way in order to become something were not. Rather it commands us to remember who we already are in Christ and to think and live accordingly.
- **The Word is not giving us a new set of ethical rules: it is calling people to live out our identity.** they came forth to confess their sins and the sins of their fathers in failing to live who they are.

- **Confessed their sins:** This was important. They had to realize and admit their missing of God's mark. And the sins of their fathers:
  - This was especially important in Israel, where there was a tradition of glorifying their forefathers.
  - This was also important, because they had to admit that not only they were sinners, but they came from sinful ancestors. sin permeated their beings...
  - And recognize that those raised in an environment of sin are damaged by that ...and may very well repeat those same sins.
- They stood and confessed publicly: they were in the best place they had ever been in their lives...the walls built, the city theirs, the people around them respecting their God's power... but yet they confess...Why? This shows that repentance isn't something we finish after coming to Jesus. It is something that grows as we grow closer to Jesus.
- "Repentance grows as faith grows. Repentance is the inseparable companion of faith." (the closer you get to Jesus the more you discover some new corruption in your heart. . . .
- **New seeds of Life can only be planted in the softness of a broken heart!.**
- They stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law: **The humble repentance and confession of sin would have been an incomplete work if it were not for hearing the Word and worship.**
- They confessed and worshipped the LORD their God: This *brokenness of heart* has led them to humbly come before God and hear His Word. **A sure first step of revival is this brokenness of heart.**

**\*\*\*\*\*This is immediately followed by the healing prayer..and also the longest prayer in the Bible – it meets their needs to know God is faithful to restore**

<sup>5</sup> And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah—said: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting” “Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. <sup>6</sup> You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

- **So the Levites and cried out with a loud voice:** Obviously, all eight of these men did not pray the following prayer at the same time. Perhaps it was written out and they took turns, perhaps it was spontaneously prayed in succession, or perhaps (and according to tradition), Ezra prayed this prayer.

- **This mentions those Levites and leaders gathered to lead the people in their humble confession. It shouldn't surprise us, or make us feel judged or like failures, if we must be led into confession and repentance.**
- **You have made heaven:** After the encouragement to praise, Ezra gave a reason to praise - because this is the great God who made it all. Looking at the glory of God's creation gives us a reason to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him.
- **The beings of heaven worships You:** God wants us to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him - but He gives us good reason to. We sometimes want our own reasons, but God gives us plenty of His own reasons.
- **You have performed Your words:** This says to God, "Lord, You promised this land to Abraham and his descendants, and now here we are! Your promise is indeed true."

**And then the leaders recount the history of God's faithfulness and the Israelites lack of it...he most assuredly deserves to be praised....**

<sup>7</sup> *"You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. <sup>8</sup> You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.*

- **Now they recount his promises. And righteousness, in keeping them...because of his covenant to Abraham...**

<sup>9</sup> *"You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. <sup>10</sup> You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. <sup>11</sup> You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. <sup>12</sup> By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.*

<sup>13</sup> *"You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. <sup>14</sup> You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. <sup>15</sup> In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.*

<sup>16</sup> “But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. <sup>17</sup> They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them, <sup>18</sup> even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, ‘This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,’ or when they committed awful blasphemies.

<sup>19</sup> “Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. <sup>20</sup> You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. <sup>21</sup> For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.

<sup>22</sup> “You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. <sup>23</sup> You made their children as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their parents to enter and possess. <sup>24</sup> Their children went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you gave the Canaanites into their hands, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. <sup>25</sup> They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness.

<sup>26</sup> “But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. <sup>27</sup> So you delivered them into the hands of their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

<sup>28</sup> “But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time. <sup>29</sup> “You warned them in order to turn them back to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, of which you said, ‘The person who obeys them will live by them.’ Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. <sup>30</sup> For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no

attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.<sup>31</sup> *But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.*

<sup>32</sup> *“Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our priests and prophets, on our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today.”*<sup>33</sup> *In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly.*<sup>34</sup> *Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our ancestors did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep.*<sup>35</sup> *Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.*

- **Though our situation is not as bad as theirs ... They plea to the faithfulness of God to intervene help us ! we must remove the social evil which threatened the most disastrous consequences to the character and prosperity of the chosen people.**

<sup>36</sup> *“But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces.”*<sup>37</sup> *Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.*

## **The Agreement of the People**

<sup>38</sup> *“In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.*

- *In view of all this... We come to a place of decision ...after reflection on God's goodness, after recognition of our sinfulness, your righteousness and our failures...we will make another binding agreement... a renewal of our obedience.* We come to a place of decision, we come back to you so that our future will be formed by obedience ...

**Now the truth is...they will fail...but God wont! He made a covenant with Abraham...a solemn promise to deliver his people...and it holds for us too!!**

**Galatians 3:18** *For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.*

**Galatians 3:8** *Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”*

**Galatians 3:29** *If you belong to Christ, then you are **Abraham**'s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

**Galatians 3:7** *Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of **Abraham**.*

**Galatians 3:9** *So those who rely on faith are blessed along with **Abraham**, the man of faith.*

- ***Understand obedience is a response to faith...not the means of faith...God is Faithful ...so I should obey***

Conclusion: a point of decision.

And because of all this, we make a sure *promise*, and write *it*; our leaders, our Levites, *and* our priests seal *it*.

End ☺

a. **We make a sure covenant:** Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is, and knowing who they are, they come and make a *covenant* with God - even writing it down - to commit themselves to His ways.

b. **We make a sure covenant, and write it:** The fourth sure sign of revival - after brokenness of heart, after reflection on God's goodness, after recognition of our sinfulness, is *a renewal of our obedience*. We come to a place of decision, so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience, but something that shapes our future.

i. God's work in us often must come to a place of decision - where He wants us to make a stand for Him, and against some other things. If *you* need a point of decision, Alan Redpath gave these self-examination questions, to give an idea how:

They prayed the truth... and they remembered It is impossible for us to despair if we Remember that our helper is God!

## Psalm

The world wants your best ...God wants YOU!

You are worth so much to God that he wants to forgive you of all your wrongs so that you can be with him...always in a love relationship separated from all wrong doing against him.



*JN 8:31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**"*

- The key is holding on to his teaching....
  - Then the truth will become clear, and you will be set free from the lies you believe... (for a lie is the opposite of the truth.)
  - Think of a combination lock...there are thousands of combination which you can try to use to open the lock...but there is only one true combination.
  - And the true combination is only worthwhile if you hold on...(remember it).
  - To use it one time and forget it avails you one time usefulness.

Or as James the Lord's half brother puts it...

*JAS 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.*

Our identity gives rise to the way we think about ourselves...the way we think about ourselves governs our behavior. Notices that that the word does not command us to behave a certain way in order to become something were not. Rather it commands us to remember who we already are in Christ and to think and live accordingly. Paul is not giving us a new set of ethical rules: he is calling people to live out a new identity.

*RO 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*

<sup>10: 28</sup> “The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—<sup>29</sup> **all these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an**

oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.

They misunderstood it...because we have a new identity we have a new way to live. Not that we have a new identity we live the old way.

Jesus the one who made creation says in John 15:1-4

*JN 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He **cuts off** every branch in me **that bears no fruit**, while every branch **that does bear fruit he prunes** so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

- In Gods forming of you into something Solid
- Separating you unto himself
- Making you fruitful and fulfilled

He will cut off that which is dead...it will be taken away

And this is the really maturing part...which also makes it the hardest ..

Is he will cut and prune back that which has been productive and good...

Just like a tree...it is the growing productive parts that get pruned. The dead just gets cut off.

Conclusion: a point of decision.

And because of all this, we make a sure *covenant*, and write *it*; our leaders, our Levites, *and* our priests seal *it*.

a. **We make a sure covenant:** Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is, and knowing who they are, they come and make a *covenant* with God - even writing it down - to commit themselves to His ways.

b. **We make a sure covenant, and write it:** The fourth sure sign of revival - after brokenness of heart, after reflection on God's goodness, after recognition of our sinfulness, is *a renewal of our obedience*. We come to a place of decision, so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience, but something that shapes our future.

i. God's work in us often must come to a place of decision - where He wants us to make a stand for Him, and against some other things. If *you* need a point of decision, Alan Redpath gave these self-examination questions, to give an idea how:

*What about my relationship with men?*

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am? Is there the least suspicion of hypocrisy in my life? Am I honest in all my words and acts? Do I exaggerate?

Am I reliable? Can I be trusted? Do I confidentially pass on what was told to me in confidence? Do I grumble and complain in the church?

Am I jealous, impure, irritable, touchy, distrustful? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Am I proud? Do I thank God I am not as other people? Is there anyone I fear, or dislike, or criticize, or resent? If so, what am I doing about it?

*What about my devotion to God?*

Does the Bible live to me? Do I give it time to speak to me? Do I go to bed in time and do I get up in time?

Am I enjoying my prayer life today? Did I enjoy it this morning? When I am involved in a problem in life, do I talk about it or pray about it?

Am I disobeying God in anything, or insisting upon doing something about which my conscience is very uneasy?

When did I last speak to someone else with the object of trying to win him for Christ?

Am I a slave to books, dress, friends, work, or what others think? How do I spend my spare time?

@@@@

This great, humble gathering of God's people took place only two days after the end of the joyful celebration of the feast of tabernacles. They had drawn close to God, and now He is drawing them even closer! and the closer one is drawn to God the more you realize your short comings... they now look at themselves...