

## NEHEMIAH – FACT SHEET 6



### Chapter 8:

In chapter 7, we saw the appointment of the key ministry groups of gatekeepers, singers and Levites (7:1). Nehemiah's new Jerusalem now had the structure, the set-up; all the elements to function and live as the covenant people of God. Yet many organisations can have a structure; but it has to be founded upon something, there has to be a mandate, a manifesto.

In chapter 8, we see the 'sure foundation' that the city was to be built upon – the Word of God. The chapter begins in the seventh month (Tishri – the first month in the Jewish civil calendar); and for the first time, introduces Ezra as a contemporary of Nehemiah and the people. Ezra's work had begun some 13 years previously (Ezra 7:8) when he had come to the 'city in ruins', with approval from Artaxerxes the Persian King, to re-establish the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:11-14).

Tishri was a significant month for God's people, this being the month that three of the seven festivals ordained by the Lord, were to be celebrated and observed (Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23).

Yahweh was doing something new, there was a real sense of a 'new beginning' and a new 'thirst' for God's things. God's restored people needed a sure foundation. The chapter reveals five stages, as the foundation is laid:

### A Need for God's Word:

In verse 1, we see the people do not have to be 'brow beaten' into reading God's Word, they ask Ezra to '*bring out the book*' (Neh 8:1). Using the opportune Feast of Trumpets (first day of Tishri – Lev 23:23) where God's people were commanded to present themselves before Him; the people gather before the Priest (Neh 8:2).

In addition to eagerly gathering, the people also eagerly listen; and so we see the **Need to hear & listen to God's Word:**

The mix of eager listeners was not restricted to men, adults or academics; but was, '*men and women and all who were able to understand*' (2). The people were so keen, perhaps through their previous neglect of God's Word, that they '*listened attentively*' as Ezra read the Word from '*day break till noon*' (Neh 8:3). Reading the Word as some academic exercise if not sufficient; it has to be 'listened' to (see Further Study).

In addition to hearing and listening to God's Word, there is a **Need to value it:**

Verses 4-8 of chapter 8 show the people demonstrating great respect for God's central Word. Despite the pressing practical needs of organising the city's defences and then the much bigger project of re-populating the city; time has been found to build a pulpit/platform, from which the Word can be proclaimed (Neh 8:4). The platform can hold several Priests, who each would take a turn at the public reading of God's blueprint for living. Such is the respect and expectation of the people that God is going to speak, that when Ezra opens the book, they stand up (Neh 8:5). The very presence of God's Word fuelled their subsequent worship (Neh 8:6). Although the people were gathered as 'one man' (Neh 8:1); it was not assumed they would all equally understand; so the Levites worked amongst the people, '*giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read*' (Neh 8:7-8).

Once understood, the next stage is to **Respond and apply God's Word:**

Firstly, this must always be to ourselves; our own lives. In verse 9, the people's initial response is one of sorrow; a pre-requisite to service when one first compares a Holy God to one's inadequate self. However, sorrow or guilt is not to be the motivation for service; but joy in the forgiveness and deliverance of Almighty God. So in verse 10, both Ezra and Nehemiah (assisted by the Levites), exhort the people to celebrate their restored faith. This will naturally then spill out into the lives of others; not only are the people to feast and celebrate; but they are to share with, '*those who have nothing*' (Neh 8:10). The previously turbulent lives of the people could now experience peace (Neh 8:11), joy and strength (Neh 8:10, 12).

In addition to their own lives, the lives of their families and others would also be affected. The heads of the families, taking the initiative, re-discovered wonderful truths as they studied God's Word (Neh: 13-15). As they read about the Feast of Tabernacles (see Exod 23/Lev 23 plus further study), they found a new appreciation of the deliverance of the Lord; and concluded that they should celebrate this with a fresh and rekindled enthusiasm.

They saw the **Need to live God's Word:**

Verses 16 to 19 reveal a revitalised community, lead by the Heads of the families. After reading about, then understanding how God wanted them to live; verse 16 tells us, '*so the people went out*'. In a very public and visible way, they would build 'booths' or tabernacles (tents); celebrating and remembering the Lord's deliverance and presence in the wilderness years; and a present day reminder that the earth was only their temporary dwelling. The booths were to be built, '*on their roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the House of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim*' (Neh 8:16). This public and visible witness had to impact every area of home (roofs), social life (courtyards), church (House of God) and business and trading life (by the Gates).

This new foundation had such an impact that, *'their joy was very great'* (Neh 8:17). Yet this was not to be a 'one-off' event; their new found zeal was to be renewed *'day after day'* (Neh 8:18).

### **For further study:**

Which Feasts and other Sacred days were the people commanded to observe? See the following verses: (\* seven main feasts):

Exodus 20:8-11, Lev 23:3  
Lev 25:1-7  
Lev 25:8-55  
Exodus 12:1-14, Lev 23:5 \*  
Exodus 12:15-20, Lev 23:6-8 \*  
Lev 23:9-14 \*  
Exodus 23:16, Lev 23:15-21 \*  
Lev 23:23-25 \*  
Lev 23:26-32 \*  
Exodus 23:16, Lev 23:33-36 \*  
Lev 23:36ff  
Esther 9:18-32

Scripture has many references to the importance of hearing and listening to God's Word. Look the following up and consider what they are saying:

Isaiah 6:8-10, Amos 8:10-12, Matthew 13:12-14, Luke 8:18, Mark 4:23-24

### **Further Reading/Bibliography – My thanks go to!**

- *The Holy Bible – (first of course!)*
- *The Message of Nehemiah, R Brown – IVP*
- *Overcoming challenges, B Hybels – Zondervan*
- *A Passion for Faithfulness, J Packer – Crossway*
- *Ezra & Nehemiah, D Kidner – IVP*

*"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word"*  
*Psalm 119:18*