

NEHEMIAH – FACT SHEET 7



Chapters 9 & 10:

The people have come a long way since the early chapters of devastating report (1:2), initial survey (2:13-15), then sheer hard work (3:1-6:15). Having now 're-discovered' God's Word and utilised the timely celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (8:14) as a springboard for re-dedication; we now reach the personal and 'business end' of Nehemiah. It has been a slow return, with some 150 years since the original Babylonian exile (587bc); there is a great need for the people to re-connect as the covenant people of God; to remind themselves of just who they are and just as important, of whom God is.

Up to now, the people have been encouraged to celebrate (8:9-10), having found their new found zeal for the Lord. However, in an unusual reverse, the focus is now to be on repentance; the people need to demonstrate that they mean business with God.

Chapter's 9 and 10 can be considered under FIVE headers:

Firstly – The people gather to Worship: 9:1-5:

Within the first 5 verses, we see a half day worship service take place. The Feast of Tabernacles will have finished on the 22nd day of Tishri, and two days later, the people gather (9:1). Their mood has changed; having reflected on how they got this far, they are visibly changed. Wearing sackcloth, with dust on their heads, whilst fasting – their outward appearance is a symbol of the inward response to God's Word and subsequent changes taking place. Having been informed and instructed by the Levites in God's Word (8:7); their priorities are beginning to change. In order to focus on the Lord, they have also separated themselves from the 'foreigners' (9:2) who would only serve to detract them. Their first priority is confession, bringing before God, 'their sins and the wickedness of their fathers'. Following a quarter day Bible study, their response is one of worship and confession (9:3) for a further quarter day! Overseeing the whole service were the Levites (9:4), those set aside to minister to the people.

Second – the people remember just WHO IT IS they stand before:5ff-6:

As the people worship, the Levites call them to, 'stand up and praise the Lord' (9:5ff); not just any God, but He who is, 'from everlasting to everlasting' (9:5ff). Whilst their circumstances may have changed; the Lord has not. He is also unrivalled, so the Levites can proclaim, 'You alone are the Lord' (9:6). Having been oppressed under Babylonian rule, that promoted a polytheistic, multi-god religion; the people need to proclaim the original Sinai mandate of, 'no other gods' (Exod 20:3). As the people worshipped and studied God's Word, they were reminded of the eternal truths, that He 'made the heavens and all their starry host' and gives, 'life to everything' (9:6).

Thirdly – The people remember God's activity in the past: 9:7-31:

The people are soaking up the scriptures and delighting in discovering God's timeless truths and promises. They start with God's covenant promise to Abram (9:7 – See Gen17:3-5), then appeal to the Exodus narratives of Egyptian oppression and subsequent redemption (9:9-12 – See Exod 5-14), then recall the Law giving accounts (9:13-14 – see Exod 20-24); inferring the regulations of Leviticus (9:13) and desert wanderings of Numbers (9:15), then Judges and Kings (9:16-28). God's activity and warnings through His prophets, with the subsequent exile (9:29-31) bring the present day covenant people up to speed –they now have the 'baton' of faith. As a result, they:

Fourthly, Appeal to God as His covenant people today: 9:32-37:

Verse 32 starts with, 'now therefore' – in the light of God's promises, in the light of God's redemptive plan, they can appeal to Him to work in their very own and personal situation. Not as an incapable, powerless, unreliable deity; but as, 'the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love' (9:32). They make the link as His people, acknowledging their faithlessness and spiritual downturn since, 'the days of...Assyria until today' (9:32). Whilst acknowledging that they are 'slaves' in the land God had promised and given them (9:36); they are quick to not blame God, but admit their spiritual poverty to be, 'because of our sins' (9:37). This leads to:

Fifth – the pledge to serve God wholeheartedly: 9:38-10.39:

Commencing with the leaders (9:38), there follows an impressive list of people willing to stand up and be counted (10:1-28), from leaders, Levites, Priests, the Governor Nehemiah himself, and, 'the rest of the people' (10:28). Their first priority is to God's Word, to, 'follow the Law of God' (10:29). This then spills out into their relationships (10:30), business activity (10:31) and indeed their whole attitude to possessions (10:32-39). Central to their new found zeal are the appointed feasts and offerings – embracing sacrifice, atonement, repentance, worship, and service (see Leviticus 1-7, 16, 23-25). A consecrated people, bring God and His Word back in the centre and worship Him in acknowledgment and praise of His redemptive act of sacrifice and atonement; and reflect this in every area of life.

For further study:

Sacrifices:

Which sacrifices had the people re-discovered? See the following verses: (Five main offerings): Write down their purpose – how do they give us a 'shadow' of Christ? (read Hebrews 10:1-10).

- Leviticus 1, 6:8-13, 8:18-21, 16:24
- Leviticus 2, 6:14-23
- Leviticus 3, 7:11-34
- Leviticus 4:1-5:13, 6:24-30, 8:14-17, 16:3-22
- Leviticus 5:14-6:7, 7:1-6

Sackcloth:

Out of approximately 47 references to 'sackcloth' in the Bible – 43 are in the Old Testament. Look up the following and answer the related question:

- 2 Sam 3:31 – why is sackcloth commanded by David to be worn?
- Psalm 30:11 - What does the Lord give to replace our 'sackcloth'?
- Jonah 3 – Was sackcloth a tradition of Israel only?

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