

## Studies In Nehemiah 7

### **Weeping Turns To Celebration**

Neh. 8:9-9:38

#### Introduction:

1. In our previous study in Nehemiah we left the people in the first part of chapter 8 with Ezra reading from the book of the law.
2. Ezra was standing on a wooden podium. Alongside of him were the leaders of the people. When Ezra opened the book all the people stood up.
3. As Ezra read explanation was given so that the people understood the reading.
4. It was in this context that the people began to weep and mourn, but their weeping was turned into rejoicing, the Feast of Booths was celebrated, the people confessed their sins, and made an agreement--in writing--to be loyal to the Lord from this point forward.
5. It was the dawning of a new day in Jerusalem. As we survey their history there are many relevancies and applications to be made to us. We will observe some of these as we proceed.
6. Reading Neh. 8:9-12.

#### Discussion:

- I. The reading of the law produces both mourning and comfort for the people of God.
  - A. For those who fail to consider the revelation of God there is neither mourning nor comfort.
    1. They continue on in their ignorance, not knowing what they are missing.
    2. Their plight is described in various places in Scripture.
      - a. "Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful" (Rom. 1:29-31).
      - b. Peter described the Gentiles as, "having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolaters. They run in the excesses of dissipation" (1 Pet. 4:3).
      - c. Paul described those who "were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending their lives in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (Titus 3:2-3).
    3. It is not a pleasant picture.
  - B. But if we consider the revelation of God, but do not understand it we are not much better off.
    1. If we do not understand it we cannot experience the benefits that it has to offer.
    2. For these people there was reading and "translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading."
    3. "Yes," the word of God can be understood and "No," not just any "understanding" is O.K. God intends a particular meaning and we need to understand what He intended.

4. In N.T. days God helped the Ethiopian, by sending him Philip (Acts 8:26ff). He helped Cornelius by sending Peter (Acts 10 and 11). He helped the Gentiles by sending them Paul (Acts 9:15). He has given us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11).
  5. He had brought the law, Ezra and Nehemiah and the Levites to the people to give them understanding (Neh. 8:9).
- C. When the people understood they began weeping.
1. They were made aware of their sin.
  2. The purpose of the law was to reveal sin (Rom. 7:7: "I would not have known about coveting if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'").
  3. So when they read the law and understood its meaning they wept.
- D. Their teachers transformed the weeping into a celebration.
1. They said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength."
  2. They are communicating about the mighty power of God who provided for their forgiveness.
  3. The law of the Lord condemns of sin, but it is the law of the Lord that also communicates the exercise of God's power to forgive.
  4. How do I know that is what is being communicated here? There are three major evidences.
    - a. First, there could be no rejoicing if this were not the case.
      - 1) Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).
      - 2) Isaiah had prophesied of the coming of the Messiah as both "a day of vengeance and a time of comfort for those who mourn, to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of the spirit of fainting" (61:2-3; Matt. 11:5; Lk. 4:18; 7:22). The good news involves comfort for those who mourn because of their sin.
    - b. Second, they celebrated the Feast of Booths.
    - c. Third, this is what was communicated by the Levites in 9:5ff.

II. The leaders of the people of God drew attention to the Feast of Booths (8:11ff).

- A. Why this feast rather than some other feast? Was it this feast that was coming up on the religious calendar? Why not Passover, Pentecost or some other?
- B. Lev. 23:33-43 describes the Feast of Booths.
  1. God made Israel dwell in booths when He brought them out of Egypt.
  2. The celebration brought to remembrance God's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. It was the only festival associated with the specific commandment to rejoice.
  3. If God delivered them from Egyptian bondage would He not deliver them from their bondage of sin? Besides that He had delivered them from Babylonian captivity. Would He deliver them these two times only to abandon them in their sin?
  4. If He did, they would have no reason for rejoicing, BUT if He was willing to forgive then there was every reason to rejoice.
  5. In 2 Cor. 6:16 Paul brings these deliverances together as he calls the Corinthians

to

separate themselves from sinners. In 6:1-2 he had reminded them of Isa. 49:8 where God said, "I listened to you and on the day of salvation I helped you." "Now," said Paul, "is the day of salvation."

6. The Feast of Booths was a time of rejoicing for the covenant people of God because it celebrated God's delivering them from their suffering (Ex. 3:7).
- C. "The sons of Israel had not done so from the days of Joshua to that day."
  1. The feast had been celebrated in the days Solomon at the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 7:9; 1 Kings 8:65).
  2. And Ezra 3:4 indicates that those who returned from captivity celebrated it in the first year of their return.
  3. C. F. Keil says that the language says, "the whole community had not SO celebrated it" as it was now being celebrated.
- D. The celebration involved reading from the book of the law daily for the entire seven days of the feast.
- E. The feast was celebrated from the 15-21 of the seventh month. Three days later they fasted and confessed their sins (9:1-3).

III. Following this the Levites praised the Lord (9:5ff). A prayer that was sung???

- A. It extols the greatness of God (5b-6).
- B. Reflects on God's making a covenant with Abraham (7-8).
- C. It reminds of God's response to their affliction in Egypt and His delivering them at the Red Sea and communicating with them at Sinai, and providing them food and water in the wilderness, and then telling them to enter into the land that He had sworn to give them (9-15).
- D. BUT, they acted arrogantly and refused to listen (16-17a).
- E. "BUT YOU ARE A GOD OF FORGIVENESS, GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE, SLOW TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING IN LOVINGKINDNESS; AND YOU DID NOT FORSAKE THEM."
- F. They made a calf of molten metal.
- G. "YOU, IN YOUR GREAT COMPASSION, DID NOT FORSAKE THEM IN THE WILDERNESS. YOU GAVE YOUR GOOD SPIRIT TO INSTRUCT THEM. MANNA AND WATER YOU GAVE THEM. YOU PROVIDED FOR THEM FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS. YOU GAVE THEM KINGDOMS, PEOPLES, LAND, FORTIFIED CITIES, CISTERNS, VINEYARDS . . . THEY REVELED IN YOUR GREATNESS" (19-25).
- H. BUT they became disobedient and rebelled (26).
- I. Back and forth it goes. They did evil BUT YOU RESCUED THEM ACCORDING TO YOUR COMPASSION, YOU BORE WITH THEM FOR MANY YEARS, ADMONISHED THEM THROUGH YOUR PROPHETS. Yet they would not give ear. YET IN YOUR GREAT COMPASSION YOU DID NOT FORSAKE THEM FOR YOU ARE A GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE GOD.
- J. Confession (32-37). Note the shift in pronouns from "they" to "us."

IV. It was out of this context that they wrote up an agreement promising loyalty to God from this point forward.

Conclusion:

1. Do you avoid the law because you know you are in violation? Do you not realize that it is in the law that you learn of God's willingness to forgive?
2. Are you like Israel of old? Unwilling to listen?
3. Are you like these? Mourning your sins and yet rejoicing in the forgiveness of God?
4. Will you make a covenant to be loyal to Him today? He always acts faithfully!!!