

# SESSION 7

## READING OF THE WORD AND RESPONSE

### Nehemiah 8-9 / Personal Study

#### Opening Prayer

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

#### Introduction

Nehemiah 8-9 describes a remarkable revival in the life of Israel. With the wall completed, Nehemiah leads the people to respond to God's Word as read by Ezra. As the people gather together to hear the Law read aloud from daybreak to noon, the Scripture tells us they all "could understand what was being read." And the Holy Spirit leads them to respond powerfully and repent as a community. For seven days, the reading continues as godly leaders turn God's people to His Word. The public reading of God's own words leads the people to celebrate their God and to turn their attention to confession of sin and repentance. They praise Him by recalling His mighty works in their history and giving glory to God: "In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong" (Neh. 9:33).

#### Read Nehemiah 8-9 and answer the following questions.

1. What is the occasion for assembling the people on the first day of the seventh month (see also Lev. 23:23-25 and Num. 29:1-6)?
2. Why do the people assemble in the public square instead of the temple?
3. Ezra came to Jerusalem 13 years prior to teach the Law (Ezra 7:6-10). Why does it take so long for this general assembly to gather and hear him proclaim the truth of God's Law? What changes have made this assembly possible?
4. What is the makeup of this historic gathering of people? Who is helping these people understand the Scriptures clearly (8:2,7,9)?
5. What happens when the people truly understand God's Word? (8:9-11) Why do they respond in this way?
6. Look up 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. Based on this passage, what evidence do you find in Nehemiah 8-9 that genuine repentance is occurring?

7. Who is involved in the second day's reading (8:13)? What do these people discover and do?

8. Look up Leviticus 23:23-43 and note what the Feast of Booths was intended to help the Israelites remember. Having just completed the building of a permanent structure (Jerusalem's wall), how would living in an impermanent structure for a week remind the people of God's faithfulness?

9. In chapter 9 the people respond to what they have heard and learned with a time of corporate confession. In the recorded prayer, God's grace and power are reviewed throughout redemptive history. What key events are recorded? How are both the justice and mercy of God shown working in and through them (9:6-31)?

What do the Israelites recognize and ask in light of the faithfulness of God (9:32-37)?

What do the Israelites commit to do (9:38)?

10. Think back through your own history with God. What key times can you point to as evidence of His goodness? In light of His past faithfulness, what present difficulty can you entrust to Him?

### **Closing Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, I bless You for the beauty of Your Word. Your Word is good and right and pure. It is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Sanctify me by Your Word that I might more fully reflect Your great glory among the nations. I pray this through Your Son and by Your Spirit. Amen.*

# SESSION 7

## READING OF THE WORD AND RESPONSE

### Nehemiah 8-9 / group Study

#### **Answer the following questions:**

1. What thoughts do you have based upon this week's personal study?
2. What stood out to you? What challenged you? What prompted questions? Was there anything you wanted to study further?

#### **Read Nehemiah 8-9 and answer the following questions.**

3. In Nehemiah 8:7-8 we see the Word of God not just being read but also being taught. How has the reading of God's Word spurred you on in your spiritual renewal? What about the preaching and teaching of God's Word? Give examples.
4. Why is teaching an essential part of understanding the Scriptures? Why can't we just trust the Holy Spirit to teach us in our private times of study?
5. In this week's passage, the proclamation of the Word causes the people to mourn. What role does mourning play in genuine repentance? Is it possible to genuinely repent over sin that does not grieve us? Why or why not?
6. When you read your Bible or sit under someone's teaching, do you seek to mourn or be comforted? Explain.
7. As part of the Ceremonial Law, the Feast of Booths is no longer observed. How can modern-day believers stay mindful of the temporary nature of this life? What steps can we take to remind ourselves that God is preparing a permanent home for us beyond this impermanent life?
8. What is repentance? Is it a one-time event, a lifestyle or both? What role should God's Word play in our confession and repentance? What role should prayer play?
9. The people's repentant response is to return to faithful covenant with God (9:38). What sin have you grieved and repented of that still needs you to respond with renewed faithfulness? What one step can you take this week to not merely stop sinning but start obeying?

#### **Guide to Prayer**

- *Ask God to grant you, your group, the Benefice and the global Church a greater passion for and confidence in the Scriptures.*

- *Spend time confessing and asking the Lord to lead you to repentance in any areas that were revealed in your heart over the past week. Ask Him to show you what renewed faithfulness looks like.*
- *Thank God that He is faithful and just, through Christ, to forgive all unrighteousness that we bring before Him.*

# LEADER GUIDE

## SESSION 7

### Reading of the Word and Response / Nehemiah 8-9

1. Personal response

2. Personal response

3. Personal response

4. The Bible tells us that the spiritual gift of teaching has been given to some within the body (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:7-8). It follows that we must benefit from sitting under the teaching of others.

5. We do not turn from a sin we do not hate. We do not hate a sin that does not grieve us. Until our sin grieves us, we have not begun to properly understand our offence against a holy and perfect God.

6. Many times we seek only the comfort of what we want to hear. We look for passages or teachers that deal with topics other than those that confront our sin. We avoid passages or teachers that call out our sin.

7. Examples of ways to remember that this life is temporary might be visiting the sick/elderly, going to a museum exhibit of ancient artifacts, attending a funeral or visiting a churchyard.

8. Martin Luther's first of 95 theses nailed to the door of Wittenberg reads, "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ...willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." Repentance involves a turning from sin and turning toward the Lord in the heart, mind and actions of a believer. The Lord's Prayer modelled repentance as a key element of prayer. Prayer can be both a means of requesting that sin be revealed and of confessing sin that has come to mind.

9. Personal response