CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
DECEMBER07 2024

Scripture Story: Nehemiah 7–13.
Commentary: *Prophets and Kings*, chapters 56; 57.

hungry for more



THINKSTOCK

flashlight

"Every true turning to the Lord brings abiding joy into the life. When a sinner yields to the influence of the Holy Spirit, he sees his own guilt and defilement in contrast with the holiness of the great Searcher of hearts. . . . It is God's glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation" (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 668).

keytext

"They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read."

(Nehemiah 8:8, NIV)

what do you think?

Rank the statements below according to which you think are the most meaningful ways to respond to God's mercy in worship.

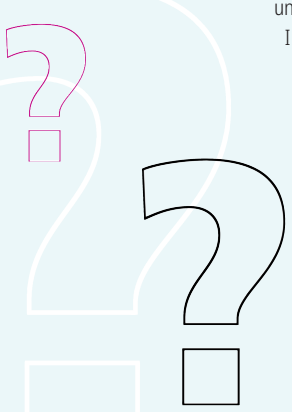
The best way to show gratitude and commitment to God for His grace is . . .

___ joyful celebration
___ thoughtful reflection
___ faithful obedience
___ frequent retelling of the story of redemption
___ excellence in worship, praise, and music

did you know?

The people of God lost sight of the importance of keeping His law. Judah had intermarried and become mixed with other nations so much that they had lost their connection with the language of the law of God. This is why there were people present to help the people understand.

In Jewish thought, the people's standing is understood to reflect complete silence.



INTO THE STORY

"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. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

"Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

"Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

"The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understand what was being read.

"Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.' For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

"Nehemiah said, 'Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.'

"The Levites calmed all the people, saying, 'Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.'

"Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

"On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. They found written in the Law, which the LORD

had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: 'Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters'—as it is written."

(Nehemiah 8:2-15, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Circle the word "understand" throughout this passage. How many times is there a phrase that refers to the teachers or hearers as being able to understand what was read? Why do you think there is much emphasis on the phrase "able to understand"?

How would you characterize the worshippers gathered at this sacred service? What is their attitude toward the Word of God? How long are they engaged in worship?

In this story is there a . . .
- truth to believe?
- promise to claim?
- behavior to adopt?

What other stories or events in Scripture does this passage remind you of? In what way(s)?

Ezra and Nehemiah warned the Israelites about the dangers of intermarriages with the surrounding nations who were idolaters. According to Ezra 9:12, 14, how were the people required to keep God's law if they were to receive His blessings?

Similar to Ezra, what caused Nehemiah distress based on the account from Nehemiah 13:23-25? What aspect of Solomon's life led to his downfall and illustrates the consequences of intermarriages (see Nehemiah 13:26)? Since the principles of God's law are eternal, how will you use this understanding from the Bible to guide your decisions when choosing a spouse?

punch lines

"Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" **(Psalm 103:1-5, NIV).**

"This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it' " **(Isaiah 30:15, NIV).**

"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess" **(Deuteronomy 30:15, 16, NIV).**

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few" **(Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2, NIV).**

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" **(Acts 3:19, NIV).**

further insight

"Nehemiah's efforts to restore the worship of the true God had been crowned with success. As long as the people were true to the oath they had taken, as long as they were obedient to God's word, so long would the Lord fulfill His promise by pouring rich blessings upon them."—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 668

(Use the Notes section in the back of this journal to record your answers to this week's questions.)

Sabbath

Read Hebrews 5:12.

The great principles of God's law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God's love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age" (Fundamental Belief 19, The Law of God).

The people of Judah met to be reintroduced to God and His law, but many of those present had been slaves and were bought back to freedom by Nehemiah and others. Sadly, some were unfamiliar with God, His law, and even the language, so that the worship leaders had to explain the message in plain, simple language. Describe the similarities between the Hebrews in the Old Testament and those in the New Testament based on today's Bible text.

Sunday

Read Nehemiah 8:5, 6.

Read the passage in the *Into the Story* section of the student lesson and respond to the study questions provided. As you survey the spectacular day of worship and renewal you may notice the genuine heartfelt response of the people to God. The walls are up but much of the city is in disrepair, which is symbolic of where the people are as well. Their hearts are sincere, but their understanding of God and His will has a long way to go. What part of this story inspires you personally, and why?

Monday

Read Nehemiah 8:8.

How many times have you opened God's Word and struggled to understand the meaning or the point of the passage? Some feel as if the Bible is a magic book, that if you only open the pages then something should happen. But more often than not, Bible study and your devotion to God come as a result of simple, consistent conversation and communion. Take a moment to think about what you can do to connect with God in a more regular way so that the Word of God and your overall experience is familiar instead of awkward.

Tuesday

Read Luke 15:7, 10.

In this week's *Flashlight* quote from *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White reminds people how much God waits to restore and rejoice with the sinner who comes to God in faith. She states: "It is God's glory to encircle sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, to bind up their wounds, to cleanse them from sin, and to clothe them with the garments of salvation" (p. 668). How does this picture of God match with your perception? How often have you resisted praying or coming close to God because of the distance that has grown between you and Him? Even though it seems awkward, consider how much God wants to reconcile! Maybe you know someone who is distant and doesn't feel like they can return to God or even speak to Him because of their shame. Begin today by praying for them and perhaps gently sharing with them this insight.

Wednesday

Read Deuteronomy 30:15, 16.

The *Punch Lines* in this week's lesson represent an array of themes in this story. *Repentance*, *worship*, and *consecration* are a few examples you may notice in the texts given. Which text speaks to you personally? Which text captures the essence of the worship service taking place in this week's story? When in your life has a worship experience made an indelible mark on your spiritual growth? What key elements of the service do you remember the most? Why?

Thursday

Read Nehemiah 8:10-12; Psalm 95:6, 7; Psalm 100:1, 2; and Luke 19:46.

In this week's lesson we view a worship service filled with beautiful images of God's people reconnecting with Him and reconsecrating their lives to His purpose. So many good things happen in this worship service that the people are not sure how to react. Knowing how to respond to God's grace is not something that should be legislated or manufactured. The exercise of being still and quiet is extremely helpful to your soul, but so is praising God out of a grateful heart. Do both this week. Find ways to express your joy and find ways to be still and let your praise sink in and internally transform you from the inside out.

Friday

Read Psalm 33:1; Psalm 46:10; Psalm 109:30; and James 5:13.

Have you ever clapped out of praise when no one else clapped or said "Amen" all by yourself? Think about how God feels when we come to Him in worship and how glad He is that we are there. It is hard to imagine God finally getting our attention only to inform us of the correct posture and program that He prefers us to praise Him with. If this story gives us anything to think about, it is the simple way God calls us to return to Him and the personal way in which we freely worship and show our gratitude.

this week's reading*

Prophets and Kings, chapters 56; 57.

**Royalty and Ruin* is a special adaptation of *Prophets and Kings*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it by going to www.cornerstoneconnections.net and clicking on "Conflict of the Ages series." By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.