

Nehemiah 8:9-18 – It Is Time for Renewal

Delitzsch, TSK, HebrewLexicon, Handfuls, Armstrong, Gill, JFB, Clarke, Geneva, Barnes, Expositor, Poole, Henry, Gaebelien, Trapp, Ps 19
Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **Not always, but sometimes couples renew their marriage vows because they realize they are just coasting along in their relationship, or they had some struggles, and want to do something to improve their marriage.**

So they head on a cruise or an all-inclusive vacation to do this. In doing this, couples remind each other of their mutual love and commitment to each other in the future.

This is similar to what God's people did. **They realized their relationship had soured and they were not passionate about their Lord.**

They were so alienated from the Lord they were even sent into captivity. Now 100 years later, they not only returned physically but spiritually as well.

You will remember from the last time **they asked for God to speak to them through his Word and they made a diligent effort to listen.** This is now their response.

Our headings are:

Renewal in their lives

Renewal in their laws

Renewal in the love

Our goals are: **That upon hearing the Word of God and learning of God's love for you, you will respond by loving God by following his laws, and so bring renewal to your life.**

Renewal in their Lives

9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; **do not mourn nor weep.**" For **all the people** wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

1. The Jews' first response on hearing of the Pentateuch was to cry outwardly and mourn inwardly for their sins.

They were convicted of their rebellion and they justified God in punishing them.

They brought shame to their God. They saw the danger they were in. They were coasting without commitment.

Then the Sword of the Spirit pierced their hearts!

They were convicted of their rebellion when they remembered how much God loved them but how they betrayed him.

10 Then he said to them, "**Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared;** for this day is holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, **for the joy of the LORD is your strength.**"

2. But Nehemiah and Ezra instructed the people to rejoice.

Was it wrong to tell the people not to weep and mourn?

No. *The forgiveness of sins does not make one sad, but puts a smile on the faces of the forgiven.*

3. What did their rejoicing that their sins were forgiven look like?

a. Eating and drinking special things – celebratory things.

b. Sharing those special things with those who were less fortunate.

Matthew 10: 8 ...**Freely you have received, freely give.**

Luke 14:13 "**But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.**

No one could be excluded in this great celebration.

Deuteronomy 16:11 "You shall **rejoice before the LORD your God,** you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you..."

c. Remembering satisfaction did not come from the delicious food and strong drinks but from the fact that they knew the Lord and he loved them in his coming Son.

11 So the Levites **quieted all the people,** saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And **all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly,** because they understood the words that were declared to them.

4. And the people obeyed; they stopped crying and went about rejoicing and sharing the goods God gave them.

Instead of being overwhelmed by their sins, they rejoiced in their salvation from their sins.

5. Lessons:

a. Reflect on this: Jesus bore all his children's sins when he died on the cross.

This is why he appointed the Sabbath for you to enjoy.

You eat of his Word and Sacraments, and you have fellowship with believers.

Stop all your busy-ness.

b. Rejoice! Celebrate.

Don't let the guilt and shame of sin crush you.

Let this **restore your strength.**

Holy joy is like oil to a rusty wheel. (Henry)

Joy in Christ is a most powerful protection against spiritual enemies.

c. Conviction of sin by the Sword of the Spirit is the best hurt you can get in this world. This conviction always leads to joy! Mourning for sin leads to the joy of salvation!

Share the Gospel with those still in sin.

Penance won't work. **Self-flagellation** won't work. They can't bear sins. Only Jesus paid for the price of sin!

Renewal in their Laws

13 Now on the second day **the heads of the fathers' houses** of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, **in order to understand the words of the Law.**

1. The Jews knew they couldn't renew their lives unless they had a renewal of God's laws, and so they worked to understand God's laws again.

They were **not satisfied with simply a peripheral view of the law.** They wanted details. They wanted to do it right, even though they were tired from almost a whole day of listening to preaching and then praying the day before.

What's interesting here is heads of the households were involved along with the other leaders. This was male leadership.

14 And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, **that the children of Israel should dwell in booths** during the feast of the seventh month, 15 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written."

2. One of the details about the law which they found was about one of the three great feasts God commanded.

This feast was the Feasts of Booths or the Feast of Ingathering.

3. The Feast of Booths was celebrated on the 7th month after the great ingathering of harvests and pictured the work of God the Father who will gather his elect to himself at the end of the world and pictured his people's temporary place in this world.

(The Feast of Unleavened Bread (accompanied by the Passover) pictured the work of Christ. The Feast of Pentecost pictured the work of the Holy Spirit.) This Feast of Booths was also called the Feast of Tabernacles.

Deuteronomy 16:13 "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress.

4. The people then responded and started to obey the laws of God, starting with the Feast of Booths.

What good would it do if one renewed his marriage vows after going through troubles and never changed his way of life?

5. Lessons:

a. Regularly reflect on the 10 laws.

They are not 10 suggestions.

See if there is an area that is lacking and fix it.

Examples:

We may not have perfect understanding of all nuances of the **Sabbath law**, but God help you if you think there are only 9 laws.

Remind yourself of the importance of **church membership**.

Don't forget there are **2 sacraments** you must not ignore but look forward to.

Learn of ceremonial laws that pictured the work of Christ.

Learn of the national laws for Israel from which you can learn principles.

Learn of the 10 commands that are permanent.

Focus on the word and obedience will follow.

b. Start teaching these laws to your children! Preempt the false teachings of the world.

Don't be satisfied with understanding the Scriptures well. Understand them better!

c. Laws concerning worship are the most important laws in the Bible.

Laws against murder, theft, or perversion are important laws, but they are only more important as far as men are concerned.

Laws against worship are more important because they directly regulate the worship of God, which is man's most important duty.

d. Look forward to that time when this world will no longer be your home.

Renewal in their Love

16 Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. 17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

1. The Jews couldn't renew their lives until they renewed Gods laws, and they couldn't have a renewal of God's laws unless they had a renewal of their love for God.

Love was found in the keeping of God's law.

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

2. So the Jews, in the midst of their busy-ness, renewed their love by building booths

and worshiping God.

They obeyed even the details. Even though finding branches to build would have been difficult (date palms, olive, and myrtle branches), they made the sacrifice.

They had not done this for a long time, but that did not stop them from rekindling their love for God and spending time with him.

3. This rekindling of their relationship with the Lord in worship resulted in “very great gladness.”

They learned what God had promised them in Christ. This was the ground of their great gladness. It wasn't the fun of living in a tent. It was hot there. (Learning about the law was wonderful, but obeying the law was even more wonderful!)

It is sad that this wonderful ceremony had fallen by the wayside. Even though they celebrated it after Joshua, they never did it with such zeal and joy. That was the point of our text.

18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, **he read from the Book of the Law of God.** And they **kept the feast seven days;** and on the eighth day there was a **sacred assembly,** according to the prescribed manner.

4. Central to rekindling of their relationship with God in their worship was the reading and explanation of God's law so they did that for 7 days. (They needed law to love!)

And at the end of the weeklong celebration, they had a great worship service!

5. Lessons:

a. Worship is to be done in the way God commands, not after the desires of men. The **focus of worship is to please God.** The **result of worship is that you are blessed.** Ask: Is God glorified in my worship?

b. Worship of God and fellowship with his people are two of the most wonderful things this side of eternity. They ought to bring you the most joy.

c. Be willing to give up anything to worship God! That is true love. Worship must be a priority in your life...not your job, your education, your friendships, or your creature comforts. Anything that hinders you from properly worshipping God must change!

d. This feast was part of the work of evangelism.

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Conclusion:

God's people **started to renew their lives** before God, though they were estranged from him for many years.

That renewal **caused them to go back to his Word** for directions of what to believe and how to live.

That willingness to go back to his Word to **learn how to live was grounded in love** – God's love in Christ.

Brothers in the Lord Jesus:

1. It is time for renewal of the church's relationship with God.

The **church has strayed for a long time** and must return.

What the church has been **preaching** has not been good.

The church has not been faithful in **discipline**.

The **Sacraments** have been treated with disdain.

Evangelism has been lacking.

God's law is treated with contempt.

People don't give as they should.

Membership is scorned as "cramping my freedom."

People have focused on **other priorities**. The Savior is not being glorified.

2. To know how to repent you need to go back to God's Word and know the law...know what God commands his children.

3. Love for God, seen in the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross, is expressed in obedience to God's law.

Finally: Being far from God is horrible and hopeless. I urge you, come near to God! You can come near to God and have that sweet gladness if your sins are removed. Your sins are removed when you ask God to take them away because Jesus died on the cross for sinners.