

SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 41

Israel refused to be ruled by God
Nehemiah 7:73b–13:31



DAY 1

*The people recognized their own sinfulness •
Nehemiah 7:73b–9:37*

READ 

Nehemiah 7:73b–9:37

EXPLAIN 

The truth of Nehemiah 7:73b–9:37

When you read the Bible, does it cause you to feel pain or joy? When Ezra read God's word to the people, it did both. Less than one week after finishing the walls, Ezra read from morning till noon (Neh 8:2–3). The people wept because they realized that they had broken God's law (8:9). But since Jewish feast days were joyful events (Deut 12:12; 16:11), the people were encouraged to rejoice that day and not weep (Neh 8:9). And they did rejoice, because even when it convicts of sin, God's law also fills the heart with joy (Neh 8:12; Ps 19:8). So they joyfully celebrated the Feast of Booths (Neh 8:13–14). But after the celebration, the people were heartbroken over their sin (9:1). After another three hours reading the law, they spent three more hours worshiping and confessing (9:3). When they remembered how gracious and righteous God, they realized how great their rebellion was (9:32–35). But it also gave them hope to turn once again to God for mercy (9:36–37). So God's word brings pain by exposing sin, but it gives joy by offering forgiveness (1 John 1:8–9).

ASK 

1. What did Ezra read to the people on the holy day?
He read God's word.
2. How long did Ezra read?
For four hours! Then later for three more, plus three more hours of worship and confession!
3. What did the people do when they heard the Law read?
They cried. They realized they had broken God's Law and despised God's mercy.
4. Why did the people rejoice?
Because it was a feast day celebrating God's power to deliver.

DISCUSS 

1. Do you spend significant time reading God's word? How does God's word make you feel? What do you do about it?
2. Do you feel the same way as God does about your sin?

DAY 2

The people reaffirmed the Mosaic Covenant •
Nehemiah 9:38–13:3

READ

Nehemiah 10:28–11:2; 12:27–13:3

EXPLAIN

The truth of Nehemiah 9:38–13:3

God restores those who repent. We already saw the first two parts of repentance: grief and confession of sin (Neh 8:9; 9:3). Now we see the next two: turning from sin and turning to God. They did this by recommitting themselves to the Mosaic Covenant (Neh 9:38). They specifically turned away from sins that they were prone to and instead committed to honoring God. First, they rejected foreign marriage to guard the holiness of God's people (Neh 10:30). Second, they honored the Sabbath to trust and rest in God alone (10:31). Third, they provided for the temple to worship God by atoning for sin and serving Him (10:32–39). Because they repented, God restored them. He completed the settlement of the land, just as He had promised (Neh 11; Deut 30:2–3). This was the final stage of the return from exile. Now the altar, temple, and Jerusalem were rebuilt, the people were reformed, and the land was resettled. The story ends with celebration, showing that repentance results in joyful restoration (Neh 12:27–43) and a right relationship to God (12:44–13:3).

ASK

1. What does the people's recommitment to the covenant show about repentance? *Repentance is not just being sad or even just admitting sin. It is also choosing to turn away from wrong and turn toward right.*
2. What three commitments did they make? *To separate from foreigners to guard pure worship. To keep the Sabbath to guard true faith. To give for the temple to guard ongoing worship.*
3. What was the result of their repentance? *Joy and restoration to a right relationship with God.*

DISCUSS

1. When your parents discipline you for disobedience, do you just go through the motions, or do you choose to radically turn away from sin?
2. Can you describe a time when you repented? Did it lead to joy?

DAY 3

The people returned to their sin • Nehemiah 13:4–31

READ

Nehemiah 13:4–31

EXPLAIN

The truth of Nehemiah 13:4–31

How could the people so quickly do exactly what they said they would not do? During Nehemiah's absence in Persia (Neh 13:6; 2:6), they turned from God. First, they neglected the temple (13:10). Second, they violated the Sabbath (13:15–16). Third, they intermarried with foreigners (13:23–24). Nehemiah's rebuke was violent. He threw out Tobiah's things (13:8), closed the gates on the Sabbath and threatened to attack the foreign merchants (13:19–21), and

physically beat men who had married foreigners (13:25). Does this seem too harsh? Nehemiah was motivated by faithful love for God and God's people; he understood the deadly danger of these sins (13:14). While Nehemiah was faithful to the end, the people were not. Though the people had committed to turn away from sin, they showed their repentance was false when they broke their promise. Nehemiah had led the people to rebuild the city's walls, but he could not give them new hearts. So the last recorded portion of Old Testament Scripture—Nehemiah 13—shows that Israel still desperately needed the new hearts promised in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34).

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. Did the people keep their promise?
No. When Nehemiah was in Persia, the people returned to the exact sins they had promised to avoid.
2. How did Nehemiah respond to the people's sin?
Violently. He understood the deadly dangers of their sin.
3. What does the people's failure in the end show about repentance?
True repentance requires God Himself, by the Holy Spirit, to change our hearts.

DISCUSS 

1. Why did the people return to their sin (Jer 31:31-34)? Is there a pattern of sin in your life without any long term progress? What do you need (John 3:3)?
2. Those who love God rightly hate whatever is opposed to God. Out of love for God and His people, do you hate and oppose sin in yourself, your family, your church, and your community?

DAY 4*God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins • 1 John 1:6-9***READ** 

1 John 1:1-10

EXPLAIN **The truth of 1 John 1:6-9**

So long as you are engaged in sin, you cannot enjoy fellowship with God or with other Christians (1 John 1:6-7). But we sin so often! How can we enjoy any fellowship? The solution is not to deny or hide your sin (1 John 1:8). If you refuse to recognize your sin, you will only deceive yourself. So what should you do to have fellowship? Confess your sin, often and regularly. Confession is saying the same thing about your sin as God does. You confess when you agree with God concerning the guilt and offense of our sin. This is what you do to be saved in the first place (Matt 19:16-22), and this is what you continue to do. Your life must be a life of ongoing repentance. So don't try to hide the wrong things you have done. Instead, seek God's forgiveness by admitting how you have violated God's law (Ps 32:5). When you do, you will receive God's mercy (Prov 28:13), for God is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you (1 John 1:9). So confess, and you will enjoy walking in God's light.

ASK 

1. What do you lose when you are sinning?
Fellowship with God and other Christians.
2. Is anyone on earth sinless?
No. Only Jesus was sinless on earth.
3. What do all genuine Christians do?
Continually confess sin.
4. What does it mean to "confess" sin?
To say the same thing about sin that God does.
5. Why is it worth it to confess?
Because those who do are forgiven and washed clean.

DISCUSS 

1. What are some ways you make excuses for your sin or try to make it seem not so bad?
2. When you feel like you have sinned again and again, how does this passage give you hope?

DAY 5

Those who walk according to the Spirit • Romans 8:4

READ

Romans 8:1–11

EXPLAIN

The truth of Romans 8:1–11

This passage is the hope we need after seeing Israel's repeated failure to repent! After Nehemiah 13, we wonder, "Is it possible for anyone to change?" But now Nehemiah's sadness can end! The New Covenant has come through the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20). So what the Law or Nehemiah could not do—save people from their sin—God did. When He came to earth as a man, He became a sin offering to end sin's power over everyone who comes to Christ (Rom 8:1, 3). If Jesus has freed you from the condemnation of sin, He has also freed you from the power of sin, so that you are now able to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law (8:4). How can you keep the law? Not by your strength, but by depending on the power of the Holy Spirit living in you. The Spirit has changed your heart. He has written God's law on your heart, giving you the inclination and ability to obey (Jer 31:33–34; John 3:1–8). Now you can enjoy the lasting repentance and faith that come as a gift from God (Eph 2:8; 2 Tim 2:25).

ASK

1. What was the Law powerless to do?
Save people from their sin (Rom 3:20).
2. How was the New Covenant established?
By the blood of Jesus.
3. How can you fulfill the righteous requirement of the law?
By walking according to the Spirit.
4. What does the Spirit do for all who come to Christ?
He gives them a new heart, one that has the desire and ability to obey..

DISCUSS

1. What would you say to someone who claims to be a Christian but shows no lasting desire to obey God?
2. What would you say to a Christian who is discouraged and feels like he is unable to grow in holiness?