

Nehemiah chapters 7–8

CBC Equip Class on Aug 9

Post-Construction Seeking the Lord

- “My God put into my heart,” returnees
- Trumpets, Yom Teruah: listening to the Word
- Restoring Shabbat: insight into the Word
- Booths + assembly: rejoicing, temporary dwellings, we are the Lord’s

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Slide 1: Our main themes are (1) seeking and following the Lord’s wisdom and direction, (2) listening to His Word, (3) rejoicing in Him, and (4) loving and working with fellow worshippers of the Lord. **How does this apply to me/us? What can I/we do to facilitate this better?**

Neh 7:1–3 (~Sat, Aug 22, Elul 25, 444 BC)

^{7:1} Now when the wall was rebuilt and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed, ² then I put **Hanani my brother**, and **Hananiah the commander of the fortress**, in charge of Jerusalem, for **he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.** ³ Then I said to them, “Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors. Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post, and each in front of his own house.” (NASB-95)

Slide 2: **Choose trusted, capable, god-led people for the Lord’s critical work.**

Hanani was Nehemiah’s brother who reported the problems in Jerusalem to Nehemiah (1:2). Four of Jesus’ 12 apostles were brothers. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were siblings (John chapter 11). James and Judas, brothers of Jesus, wrote the books of James and Jude in the New Testament. **Why have family relationships played such a significant role in the Lord’s work?**

Neh 7:4–7a

⁴ Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built. ⁵ **Then my God put it into my heart** to assemble the nobles, the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogies. Then I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first in which I found the following record: ⁶ These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city, ⁷ **who came with Zerubbabel** ... (NASB-95 for all Scriptures)

Slide 3: In 538 BC, Zerubbabel led about 50,000 Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah regarding the restoration of Israel after 70 years of exile (Jeremiah 29:10).

See Haggai 2:4–5, Slide 5.

Compare this to the resurrected Jesus telling His 11 disciples to make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:18–20), slide 6.

The walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah’s time contained about 58 acres, ±.

Matt 7:7–8 (Jesus speaking at the sermon on the mountain in Galilee, ~Thurs–Sat, Apr 26–28, AD 31)

⁷ **“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”** ⁸ “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Slide 4: **If we want God to lead us, ask! Seek, and you will find, just like Nehemiah did!**

Haggai 2:4-5 (Tishri 21, October 17, 520 BC; addressed to those rebuilding the temple)

⁴ 'But now **take courage, Zerubbabel,**' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, **and all you people of the land take courage,**' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the LORD of hosts.

⁵ 'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!'

Slide 5: In 520 BC, 18 years after Zerubbabel led 50,000 Jews to return to Jerusalem, Haggai wrote this encouragement to those rebuilding the temple (Haggai 2:4-5), as they restarted construction after a 14-year pause. Zerubbabel means "**offspring of Babylon**", reflecting his birth during the exile. He is a descendant of King David in the kingly line.

Also, David gave a similar encouragement to Solomon when he committed the temple construction to Solomon: 1

Chron 28:10, 20: "Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; **be courageous and act.**"

²⁰ Then David said to his son Solomon, "**Be strong and courageous, and act;** do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished."

Do we have a similar charter? See the next slide.

Matt 28:18-20 (Jesus addressing His 11 apostles, and ultimately His church, at a mountain in Galilee after His resurrection)

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

Slide 6, above: Notice the similarity of the charter to Zerubbabel and the charter to Christ's church, to us!

Lists of Exile Returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7:8-62

- 18 family clans; 15,604; 16,817; vs. 8-25
- 14 towns ; 8,540; 8,589; vs. 26-38
- 4 priestly clans; 4,289; 4,289; vs. 39-42
- 5 other groups; 1,385; 1,394; vs. 43-62
- Subtotal (men); 29,818; 31,089; vs. 8-62
- Assembly** ; 42,360; 42,360; vs. 66
- Servants + singers; 7,537; 7,582; vs. 67
- Grand total ; 49,897; 49,942; vs. 66-69

** The whole assembly in ~538 BC may include Jews not exiled, women and children, Jews from the northern tribes, and/or priests who couldn't show genealogies.

Slide 7, above: This slide summarizes Neh 7:8-62 and compares it to the equivalent listings in Ezra chapter 2. About 50,000 people returned with Zerubbabel in 538 BC.

Neh 7:70-73

- Many freely gave to support the work: some of the heads of clans, the governor, the people
 - Gold, 5,700 troy ounces, ~\$24M today, ~\$470/person
 - Silver, 77,000 troy ounces, ~\$4.4M today
 - 50 basins, 597 priestly garments

2 Cor 9:6-7: Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one *must* do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, **for God loves a cheerful giver.**

Slide 8, above: No notes.

Neh 8:1-3 (Friday, Aug 28, Tishri 1, 6 days after finishing)

¹ And all the people gathered **as one man** at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and **they asked Ezra** the scribe to bring **the book of the law of Moses** which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and **all who could listen with understanding**, on the **first day of the seventh month**. ³ He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and **all the people were attentive to**

Slide 9, above: "The book of the law of Moses" (8:1) is probably Deuteronomy. Ezra read for about six hours as the people attentively listened!

Neh8:3-6 (same day, Day of Trumpets, 444 BC)

^{3 (cont.)} **the book of the law.** ⁴ Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and **when he opened it, all the people stood up.** ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, **“Amen, Amen!”** while lifting up their hands; then **they bowed low and**

Slide 10, above: Now that the wall was completed, all could see the Lord was and is with them and, accordingly, responded by worshipping the Lord.

Neh8:9-11 (same day)

⁹ Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and 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 or weep.” For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. **Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.**” ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.”

Slide 12, above: No notes.

Neh 4:20 (Nehemiah's instructions during construction)

“At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet (Shophar), rally to us there. **Our God will fight for us.**”

Gen 22:13 (~2056 BC, predecessor to Yom Teruah, Christ's conception and crucifixion)

Gen 22:13 **Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. ...**



Shofar

The Lord will deliver us



His servant” (Luke 1:68-69).

Neh8:6-8 (same day)

^{6 (cont.)} **worshiped the LORD** with *their* faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, **explained the law to the people** while the people *remained* in their place. ⁸ They read from the book, from the law of God, **translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.**

Slide 11, above: 13 men, all Levites, worked to translate and explain so all could understand.

Neh 8:12 (same day, Tishri 1)

¹² All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate **a great festival**, because they understood the words which had been made known to them. (Yom Teruah, day of shouting/blasting the shofar, a ram's horn trumpet, as a “reminder of you before your God,” Lev 23:24; Num 10:10; 29:1)

- Yom Teruah likely commemorates God delivering Abraham and Isaac with the ram caught in the thicket, Gen 22:13.
- Jesus was conceived, “caught in the thicket of humanity,” on Yom Teruah in 3 BC.

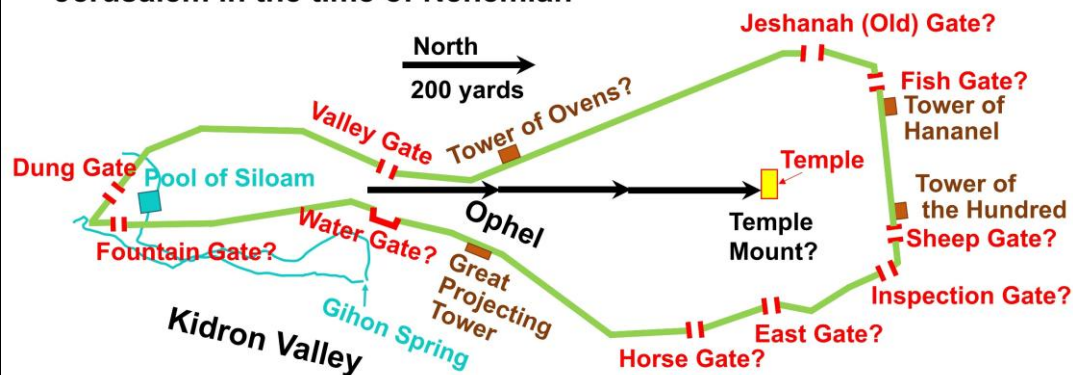
Slide 13, above: Notice, the first act of worshipping the Lord after completing the wall occurred on the day commemorating that God would provide deliverance, symbolized by the blowing of the shofar, the ram's horn. As they built, blowing the ram's horn was their rallying call to fight and that **the Lord would fight for them** (Neh 4:20, next slide).

Slide 14, left: **The builders and all of Israel knew the Lord protected them as they built the wall!**

Slide 15, left: In my opinion, Gen 22:13 likely occurred in rut season, when rams sharpen their horns in the fall; specifically, Tishri 1, the first day of the seventh month, which the Lord later designated as the day of blowing the ram's horn, symbolizing that the Lord would deliver.

Zacharias (the father of John the Baptist who along with his wife Elizabeth hosted Mary for the first 3 months of her pregnancy) spoke of the connection between Christ and the shofar when his speech returned just after John was born — “Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, And has raised up a **horn of salvation** for us In the house of David

Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah*



* Dimensions and labels from The Bible Knowledge Commentary, except Gihon Spring and stream

Slide 16: My picture of Gen 22:13, my opinion, is that Abraham was at the location of the future temple when he planned to sacrifice Isaac (compare Gen 22:2 and 2 Chron 3:1). The ram caught in the thicket probably was near the location of the Gihon Spring, where there would be plenty of water to grow a thicket.

Neh8:13-15 (Sat, Aug 29, Tishri 2, 7 days after finishing)

¹³ Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were **gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.** ¹⁴ They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. ¹⁵ So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy

Slide 17, above: No notes.

Neh8:15 (same day, Sat, Aug 29, Tishri 2)

¹⁵ (cont.) trees, to make booths (*sukkah*), as it is written."

- This Saturday, Aug 29, Tishri 2, was the first Shabbat (seventh-day Sabbath) for the construction workers in 63 days. They worked every day, including 8 Shabbats during construction, finishing construction on Shabbat (Saturday, Elul 25, 444 BC; Neh 6:15).
- Skipping these Shabbats aligns with Jesus' statements that preservation of life is of greater priority than laws in the Mosaic Law (Mark 2:25-26 cf. Levi 24:9), and that **"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"** (Mark 2:27).

Slide 18, above: No notes.

Shabbat (seventh-day Sabbath)

- The Lord rested on the seventh day of creation, after six days of work (Ex 31:17).
- Noah apparently rested on the seventh day, the last day before boarding the Ark (Gen 7:4, 11; Sat, May 28, 2464 BC**), and offered sacrifices on the first seven-day Sabbath after exiting the Ark (Gen 8:20; Sat, June 3, 2463 BC**).

** See section 10.6.4 in *Finding the Messiah, What the Magi Saw and Much More*.

Slide 19, above: No notes.

Shabbat (seventh-day Sabbath)

- The Lord forever forbade Israel from working on Shabbat (Levi 23:3; Ex 31:16-17), mandating capital punishment for the first documented violation (Num 15:32-36).
- Jesus customarily attended synagogues and taught on Shabbat (Luke 4:16, 31; 6:6; 13:10-16; Matt 12:1-12).
- Paul customarily taught both Jews and Gentiles on Shabbat (Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:13, 17:2; 18:4)
- In Jerusalem, in His kingdom, **"from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me,"** says the LORD." (Isa 66:23).

Slide 20, above: No notes.

Shabbat (seventh-day Sabbath)

- In His kingdom, Gentiles who love the Lord and keep from profaning the Sabbath will be accepted in the Lord's holy mountain and house of prayer (Isa 56:6-8).

Slide 21, left: Thought prompts: **What was the purpose of the seventh-day Sabbath? Does it have a purpose today? Will the seventh-day Sabbath be practiced in the Lord's kingdom on earth? If so, by whom?**

Neh8:16-17 (preparing for the Feast of Booths)

¹⁶ So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷ The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. **And there was great rejoicing.**

Slide 22, above: This was like “family camp” on steroids. Most likely, people grouped by family and friends, with many groupings. Likely more than 10,000 people. This had to be a great bonding experience with each other and with the Lord.

Neh8:18 (Booths + closure, Thurs sunset, Sept 10, start of Tishri 15 to Friday sunset, Sept 18, end of Tishri 22)

¹⁸ **He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day.** And they celebrated the feast **seven days**, and **on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.**

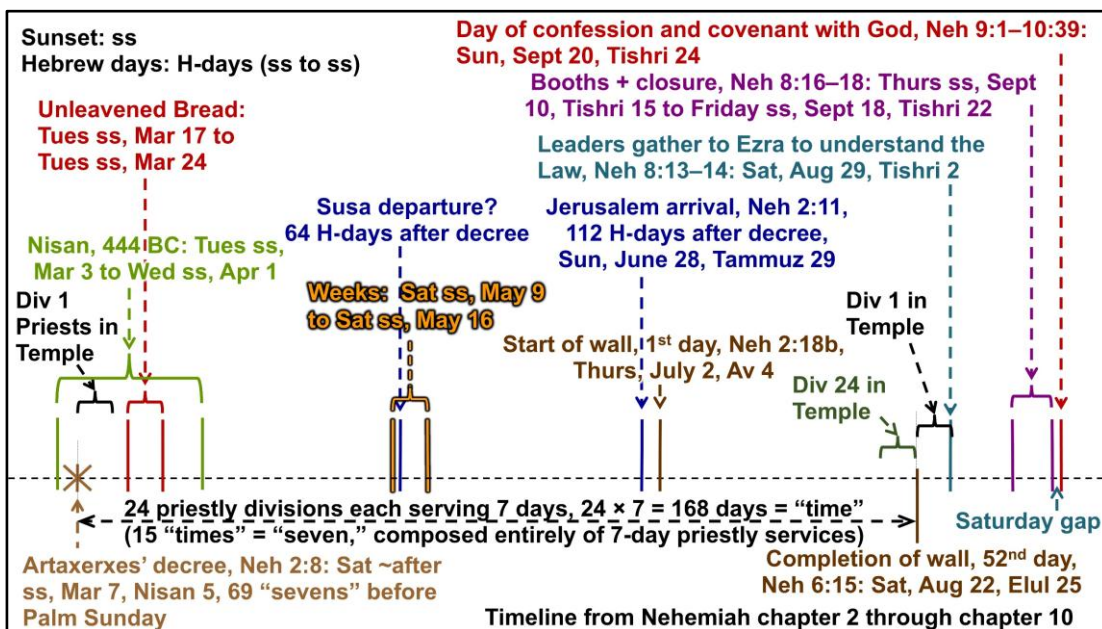
Slide 23, above: This certainly was one of the greatest spiritual revivals ever. Preceded by prayer and opposition, but accompanied by the whole population working together for one goal as they sought the Lord’s help. **Can/will this happen in our time?**

Ezra appropriately chose Moses’ writings, though they weren’t mandatory at this feast until the next Sabbatical year started in 443 BC (Deut 31:10-11).

Heb 11:13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Isa 40:6-8 A voice says, “Call out.” Then he answered, “What shall I call out?” All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

Slide 24, left: Our time here is fleeting. **Seek the Lord!**



Slide 25: Timeline considerations for Nehemiah chapters 7 and 8:

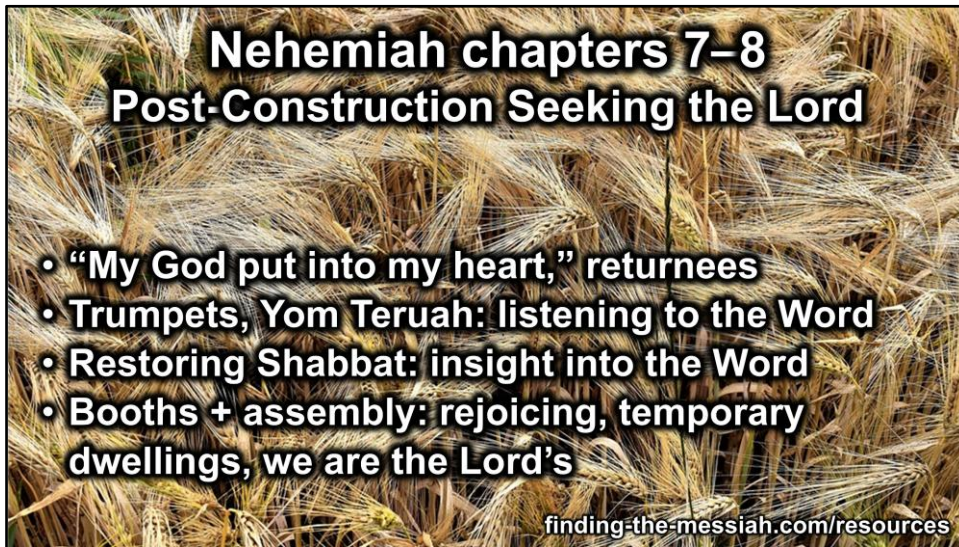
1. The workers had to see that they finished the wall (6:15) on the same day as the 24 division of priests finished their last week of service: the good hand of God was with them.
2. They all had to see that the first appointed post-construction gathering was on the day

celebrating that the Lord would deliver (8:1-12; Yom Teruah), just as He delivered them!

3. The next day, the first seventh-day Sabbath they kept since construction started (8:13-14), the leaders gathered to understand the Law: certainly, an appropriate response to what had happened.

4. Responding to the leaders' proclamation, the whole population celebrated the Feast of Booths with great rejoicing, unity, seeking the Lord, and spiritual revival (8:16–18).
5. The one-day gap to chapter 9 was a Shabbat, where they would apply their newfound love of the Lord before commencing the arduous day of confession to and covenanting with God in chapters 9 and 10.

This timeline starts with the Nisan spring lunar cycle in Artaxerxes' 20th year, when counted in the Jewish civil calendar as Nehemiah had done (compare 1:1 and 2:1). Spring comes earlier in Persia than near Jerusalem. Harvesting or eating the spring crop is prohibited before the Nisan Wave Offering (Lev 23:10–14). Consequently, the March 3 to April 1, 444 BC, lunar cycle was Nisan. Labeling the next lunar cycle as Nisan would result in a highly unlikely Saturday start of construction (2:18), a mismatched Sunday Tishri 2 for gaining insight into the Law (8:13–14), and a mismatched Sunday Tishri 23 for breaking the large gathering (gap between 8:18 and 9:1).



Slide 26: Seek, follow, listen, rejoice, love, and work.

What should I/we change to do this better?