



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers  
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 36**

**EZRA / NEHEMIAH**

**SEPTEMBER 3-7, 2007**

<b>DAY</b>	<b><i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i></b>	<b><i>ABBREVIATED STUDY</i></b>
<b>Monday</b>	Nehemiah 10-11, Psalm 26	Ezra 1:1-7, 5:1-5, 6:19-22, Zech 8:8, Psalm 26
<b>Tuesday</b>	Nehemiah 12, Psalm 27	Ezra 9 - 10:3, Psalm 27
<b>Wednesday</b>	Nehemiah 13, Psalm 28	Nehemiah 1:3-11; 6:3, Ps 28
<b>Thursday</b>	Malachi 1-2, Psalm 29	Neh 4:1-23; 6:15-16, Ps 29
<b>Friday</b>	Malachi 3-4, Psalm 30	Neh 8:1-11; 10:28-29; 12:43, Psalm 30



**READ**

Ezra 1:1-7, 5:1-5, 6:19-22

Zech 8:8

Psalms 26

**REFLECT**

Principle: God is faithful to His people.

The book of Ezra describes the events leading to the return of the Israelites from captivity in Babylon and the discouraging experiences of that small community in the hard world of the Promised Land. In every situation, God proved He is faithful. Through the leadership of Ezra and Zerubbabel, God fulfilled the promises announced by His prophets to restore Israel from Babylon, to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem, and to renew their hope that the Davidic kingdom (the Promised Messiah) would be restored.

The book of Ezra represents the story of exiles' returning in two time periods. Each includes prominent leaders: rebuilding the temple, under Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest (538-515 BC; Ezra 1-6); and restoring the worship of God and rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, under Ezra (Ch. 7-10). What we see during the first half of Ezra is the hand of God at work to fulfill His promise given through the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:14; 29:10). God's hand is seen in every aspect: from the heart-stirring of the pagan King Cyrus, the resettled Israelites and their neighbors in Babylon, in the journey's provisions; through the sending of prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) to renew hope in Temple-rebuilding. It is encouraging to see the sovereignty of God over the entire world no matter the circumstances. Returning to Jerusalem meant breaking from their comfortable environment and beginning a difficult trip to a desolate land inhabited by foreigners. God's people were placing their future in God's hand by faith.

Zerubbabel's leadership was by right and recognition (Ezra 2:2). Not only was he a descendant of David, he also had great leadership qualities. He led the equivalent to a stadium-size group (60,000), carefully listing genealogies, taking goods and animals over hundreds of miles and many months to Jerusalem. By constructing an altar upon their arrival, they revealed the priority of their relationship with God (3:2). Further, Zerubbabel led them in celebrating God's past and present goodness and setting the Temple's foundation. Zerubbabel, like many of us, knew how to start well but found it hard to keep going. The enemies of God's people persisted in efforts that stopped the rebuilding for more than a decade (Ezra 4). But God was at work. He prepared and sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, whose message stirred discouraged hearts to begin again. God's hand reversed the work of the enemy and His people finished celebrating the Passover with joy!

**RESPOND**

Worship is to be at the center of a believer's life. When you do a work for God, you will face opposition. God sends help to the discouraged to get them back on track. Today's study in Psalm 26 is David's declaration of loyalty to God. If we are genuinely committed to God, then we can stand up to opposition and examination.

What difficult task is God asking you to do for Him? How have you experienced God's hand over your work and life? When has God's Word given you encouragement? Who will you pray for and encourage this week while doing God's work in your church or on the mission field? When has opposition caused your ministry to suffer setbacks? How has this lesson caused you to change in response to unexpected and expected pressures and opposition?

**PRAY**

Lord, help me to discover the place I have in Your great work. Grant that I might be faithful in the assignment You have given me in cooperation with others in the body of Christ.

- C.M.

## READ

Ezra 9 - 10:3

Psalm 27

## REFLECT

Principle: Godly leaders pray (all the time).

Ezra was a priest, a scribe, and a great leader. His name means “help,” and his whole life was dedicated to serving God and God’s people. Accepted tradition says that Ezra wrote most of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah (one book in the Hebrew Bible), and Psalm 119, and that he led the council of 120 men who formed the Old Testament canon. The word of God was the cornerstone of Ezra’s life (Eph 2:20). He is known as the “second Moses” and led the second group of exiles back to Judah. God’s purpose was to use Ezra to help reform the nation and bring a spiritual revival. Ezra’s great concern was the ministry in the temple and the renewing of the covenant. He brought people and goods for temple services, including the scrolls of the Word of God, the most precious possession of all.

Ezra was a man of prayer, and because he prayed, God worked. Like the apostles, Ezra balanced the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4). There are several significant instances of the hand of the Lord in Ezra’s story (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Before the Jews started on their long journey to Jerusalem, they paused to fast and pray. When they arrived at their destination, Ezra soon discovered that many of the Jewish men had married pagan wives, and this had to be dealt with quickly. Ezra fasted and prayed (Ezra 9), and the Lord enabled him and the elders to solve the problem. Ezra’s prayer in chapter 9 should be compared to Daniel 9 and Nehemiah’s prayer in Nehemiah 9. Each of these humble prayers of confession was based on the promise given in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Opposition to mixed marriage was not racial prejudice because

Jews and non-Jewish of this area were of the same Semitic background. The reasons were strictly spiritual. A person who married a pagan was inclined to adopt that person’s pagan beliefs and practices. If the Israelites were insensitive enough to disobey God in something as important as marriage, they wouldn’t be strong enough to stand firm against their spouse’s idolatry (proven since the days of the Judges). God was protecting the lineage of the Messiah. Don’t get stuck here; Paul has already addressed this issue of “mixed” marriages in 1 Corinthians 7:12-14. The issue at hand is sin. Ezra’s brokenness (10:1) over these sins caused the people to confess their sin and reaffirm their obedience to the covenant of the Lord. The people feared the Lord and His commandments (10:3). True repentance does not end with confession – that is lip service. It must lead to changed attitudes and behavior. When Paul listed the sins of both Jews and Gentiles in Roman 3:9-20, the climax of the list is, “there is no fear of God before their eyes.” This is the sin that makes it easy for us to commit other sins. When you fear God, you need not fear anyone or anything else, for God is on your side.

## RESPOND

We have the promise of God’s forgiveness in 1 John 1:8-9! As we mature in our Christian faith, and as God’s Word lovingly reminds us, obedience is not an option. What sin do you need to turn from? How have you experienced God’s blessing following repentance? Standards for discipleship are set by Jesus (Matt 16:24; Luke 14:26-27) and remember Zechariah 4:6. What changes would you need to make to model Ezra’s prayer life?

## PRAY

Psalm 27: Lord you are my light and my salvation . . . (continue)

- C.M.

**READ**

Nehemiah 1:3-11; 6:3

Psalms 28

**REFLECT**

Principle: When God wants to bless us and make us a blessing to others, He usually starts by putting a burden on our hearts.

“Nehemiah was a true man of faith who sees the invisible, chooses the imperishable, and does the impossible” – Vance Havner. Nehemiah wasn’t a scholarly priest like Ezra or a gifted prophet like Ezekiel or Daniel. He was what we today call a “layman.” As a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, he held a responsible office and enjoyed the intimate confidence of the king. It was Nehemiah’s job to see that the king’s food and wine were safe for him to eat and drink but he also had responsibilities relating to the management of the palace. He had to be a person of integrity and dependability, and Nehemiah proved himself qualified. Being so close to the king, he could have used his influence for personal gain, but Nehemiah was a man of God who rejected the political intrigue that operated in most Near Eastern palaces. He lived to serve God.

God called on Nehemiah to leave the comfort of the palace for the dangers and difficulties of rebuilding the walls and restoring the gates of Jerusalem. What led Nehemiah to volunteer began when he received the news “the returnees suffered trouble and disgrace, Jerusalem’s gates were burned, and the city’s wall in ruins” (1:3). God’s people were in serious trouble. They were disgraced before the Gentiles. Jehovah God was not being glorified in Zion, the city of the Great King. How did this recitation of bad news affect the cupbearer of the king? It broke his heart and he sat down and wept. Nehemiah had a comfortable situation in the palace, but he identified with the plight of his people and wept over it. He

could have said, “Well, it’s their fault!” – or, “They’re a thousand miles from here, so what can I do about it?”

Nehemiah then knelt down and prayed (1:4-11). It is through faith in prayer that God turns our burdens and battles into blessings. When Nehemiah considered the plight of the Jews, he didn’t see calamity; he saw OPPORTUNITY. Things in Judah might have been bad, but there was no reason that they had to stay that way. Nehemiah’s prayer reveals a trust that God would fulfill the covenant promise He made to them.

Knowing that he was involved in a great work kept Nehemiah going. Most people would have thought that his being cupbearer to the king was much greater work than fitting stones into a wall, but Nehemiah had a different viewpoint, God’s viewpoint.

**RESPOND**

If we don’t accept our responsibilities from the Lord and see them as great opportunities to glorify Him, we will eventually get discouraged and quit. Any work God gives us to do is a great work, whether keeping house, raising children, running a machine, managing a farm, driving a truck, or rebuilding a war-torn city; knowing this will help to continue our work. As Paul wrote to the Christian slaves in Colosse, “It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col 3:24). Jeremiah’s words can stir our hearts to be burdened: “Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem (Africa, single mom, etc.)? Who will mourn for you? Who will stop and ask how you are?” (15:5). How does Nehemiah’s prayer model a high view of God?

**PRAY**

O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of unending love with those who love Him and obey His commands, hear my prayer!

- C.M.

**READ**

Nehemiah 4: 1-23; 6:15-16

Psalms 29

**REFLECT**

Principle: Kingdom building requires perseverance, prayer and partners.

The wall around the city of Jerusalem was finished in 52 days! Nehemiah did a great work for God and faced tremendous problems and opposition that required prayer and action. Nehemiah kept his eyes on the goal: rebuilding the walls and restoring the gates so that the Lord would be honored and the city would be secure. He modeled facing obstacles courageously and trusting God to help him and the people overcome them.

His first challenge was overcoming the indifference of the people. Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, and the first Jewish exiles returned in 538. They completed rebuilding the temple in 516 and probably made minor repairs to the city to make it a better place to live. Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 444, which means that the inhabitants had been content to live without gates and walls for almost 150 years! But God gave Nehemiah a band of burdened people who agreed to lead the way and get to work (Neh 2:11-20).

Whenever God's people start to serve Him, the enemy fights back and tries to stop the work. Sanballat, Tabiah, and Geshem, who ran the local anti-Semitic organization, accused them of rebelling against the king (Neh 2:19-20), and when that didn't stop the progress, they began to laugh at them and ridiculed them (Neh 4:1-3). The Jews prayed and kept on working (shoulder to shoulder), which is a good example for us to follow. But the three men weren't easily stopped, because they enlisted more help and threatened to attack Jerusalem. Nehemiah armed the men and posted guards. Everybody prayed, and the enemy

backed off. "Fear may waken us," said Charles Spurgeon, "but it must never be allowed to weaken us."

If the enemy can't stop us by attacking from the outside, he will start working from the inside. First, some of the workers became discouraged and decided they just couldn't clean up the mess (Neh 4:10). The economic situation was tough, and some of the wealthier Jews were exploiting their fellow citizens by loaning money at very high interest rates. Crops had not been plentiful and a famine was in the offing. The poorer Jews cried out for relief and Nehemiah had to deal with the problem (Neh 5).

The final opposition is towards Nehemiah directly. They tried to get Nehemiah to compromise and stop the work, but he rejected their offer (Neh 6:1-4). Then his enemies started a rumor that Nehemiah's life was in danger, and they suggested he meet them at the temple so they could protect him. Nehemiah's response was, "Should a man like me run away?" (6:11). Nehemiah was a faithful shepherd and not a hireling (John 10:12-13).

**RESPOND**

How has Nehemiah inspired you to finish a work for the Lord? What character traits do you want to take on from Nehemiah? What does your prayer life say about your priorities? Nehemiah called God's people by name to work side by side, day and night prepared to fight the good fight; how have you responded to God's call to build His kingdom? How can this lesson change your strategy when attacked? (1 Peter 2:23).

**PRAY**

LORD, thank You for those You have placed around me for support and encouragement. Teach me that not only do I need You, but I need others if I am to have the impact You want me to have. For you, LORD reign as king forever, giving strength to Your people and blessing them with peace.

- C.M.

**READ**

Nehemiah 8:1-11; 10:28-29; 12:43

Psalm 30

**REFLECT**

Principle: You can't live without your Bible.

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem finding broken walls and lives. Now, the city walls are rebuilt, the gates re-hung and the community restored. God's people turn to their leaders for direction with a deep spiritual hunger. Ezra the priest appears for the first time in the book of Nehemiah as he is called to come and read the Word of God aloud to all the people. Thirteen years earlier, Ezra led a return from Persia to rebuild the temple and teach the law of God. We assume he had been occupied with teaching during the reconstruction. The people gather, including men, women and children at the square. They stand from daybreak to noon listening attentively to the reading of God's law (probably the first five books of the Bible – the Pentateuch). When the people received a clear explanation of each passage they began to weep over their sin. They experienced what all believers feel as they are exposed to the truth from Scripture – conviction of sin. Though weeping is necessary, it is not the final message God has for us; to show this, Nehemiah and Ezra speak up and correct the people, exhorting them that “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (8:10). When people understand God's Word, it brings joy. What a great word for all grieving people who see the evil in their lives and the lives of those around them, mourning over what it has produced. The word that brings joy is that of forgiveness. God can forgive, He does and He will restore. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt 5:4). When you see the hurt, pain and despair that

sin can produce and you grieve over it, then you are ready for the comfort of forgiveness.

The process of spiritual reconstruction for Israel begins with daily Bible study, prayer (ch 9) and a recommitment to the covenant of God (ch 10). So committed were the people for the changes that they signed a public agreement to preserve and perpetuate it. Nehemiah establishes policies: populating Jerusalem, Sabbath rest and provision for temple worship. Nehemiah's book opens with “great trouble” (1:3) but closes with “great joy” because their great God had enabled them to finish the work in fifty-two days “the sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (12:43).

What happens at the close of Nehemiah? After an absence of 12 years (returned to Persia), he finds the people have been unfaithful. Again with great perseverance, Nehemiah calls the people back to holy living and PRAYS! (ch 13).

**RESPOND**

How has the Bible helped you to see your and others' sin? What sin or habit do you need to remove? How has the joy of the Lord been your strength this week? How are you making time to study the Bible? Glenkirk offers many classes for your spiritual reconstruction. What steps will you take to build a better “spiritual you” this year? Do you need to renew or recommit to the Lord in some way: Bible study, Sabbath, tithing, or relationships? What steps do you take to keep the Sabbath? What words would you use to describe your typical Sunday or Sabbath day?

**PRAY**

I praise you, Lord, for you have rescued me and restored my health. Sing to the Lord all you godly ones! Praise his holy name. His anger lasts for a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may go on all night, but JOY comes with the morning. Psalm 30

- Carole Mathews