

Week 38

September 17 - September 23

1 Chronicles 9:1b-34; Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 1-13; Joel 1-3; Malachi 1-4

"Think of—

Stepping on shore, and finding it Heaven!

Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God's hand.

Of breathing a new air, and finding it celestial air.

Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality.

Of passing from storm and tempest to an unknown calm.

Of waking up, and finding it Home."

--Hazel Felleman

This week's passages describe a period after the exiles have returned home. Interestingly, Christians today are also referred to as exiles, strangers, aliens and sojourners. 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." Like the Israelites, we will one day complete our days of travel and return home.

September 17th

Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 1-2. "Thinking of Home"

From the chapters in Ezra we read that he wept. From the chapters in Nehemiah we read that he also wept. It was not just Ezra and Nehemiah that wept but the people as well. Ezra and the people wept over their sins. Nehemiah wept over the trouble and condition of Jerusalem. All of these prayers were due to an emotional connection they had with their home. And more than their home, Israel was also that spiritual connection with God: A spiritually healthy Israel meant a spiritually healthy relationship with God. Ezra, Nehemiah and the people wanted everything about their home to be just right and everything about their relationship with the Father of that home to be just right.

Fellow believer, because of Christ you have a clear title to a bit of property. Perhaps you've had it for a few years. You have to walk through a valley of deep shadow before you arrive there, but when you do... How does the way you live now display your anticipation of arriving home and seeing your Father?

September 18th

Nehemiah 3:1-7:3. "Working Together"

Nehemiah, like Daniel held a prominent position in the kingdom where he had been exiled, but he was burdened for a need at home in Jerusalem. He had a plan for rebuilding the wall around the city which "God had up in his heart" (2:11). Nehemiah organized an enormous undertaking. Men, women, and those from every profession worked together to fortify their home. In doing so they encountered opposition from the enemy. In spite of the resistance the wall was completed in good time and the opposition was silenced.

The church is described as a body with many different parts working together with a common purpose. God has put the body together and asks for "harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other equally" (1 Cor. 12:25). "God's men and women, joined together for special tasks, can solve huge problems and accomplish great goals. Don't let the size of a task or the length of time needed to accomplish it keep you from doing it. With God's help it can be done" (L.App.).

September 19th

Nehemiah 7:4-8:12. "Starting Off Right"

Often we appreciate something more when we go without it for a time. When the people returned home they took it seriously. They took advantage of a fresh start and made the best of it. Their response to getting serious about their relationship with God through the reading of His Word was terrific. "All the people assembled together as one person... and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given for Israel to obey... from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people paid close attention... when they saw him open the book, they all rose to their feet. Then Ezra praised the LORD... all the people chanted, "Amen!"... they bowed and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground... The Levites read from the Book and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read... All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law."

Paul told Timothy to "focus on reading the Scriptures to the church" (1 Tim. 4:13).

September 20th

Nehemiah 8:13-10:39. "Balance"

Today's passage is a continuation of the people's commitment to start things right. God's Word continued to be read. It was then followed by the people confessing their sins to one another. Then they stood praising the Lord for who He is and what He has done. Following that they made vows of obedience to the Lord.

That is a great process for us to follow and in that order. It starts with reading and studying God's Word. In that we learn of God's desires and of our position before Him. Confession amongst one another is done with a sincere transparent heart. Worship takes place after our heart is bared and pure before God. As we worship we are reminded of God's power and provisions. We then understand our place before Him and vow to follow and obey.

As you reflect on your typical process you may discover you have it backwards, or are maybe missing some steps, or focus much more on one phase than the others. We should do our best to stay as balanced as possible.

September 21st

1 Chronicles 9:1b-34; Nehemiah 11:1-12:26. "Imagine"

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "To arrive is better than to travel hopefully." I can't imagine the joy as the exiles arrived and occupied Jerusalem. They were essentially POW's in a foreign land for 70 years and now they had returned home. Can you imagine that kind of delight? It is more than just delight. It is security, rest, peace, comfort, relief, etc.

Can you imagine what it will be like when you go Home? Or maybe I should ask do you imagine what it will be like. God wants us to think about Home. Col. 3:1-2, "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth" (Col. 3:1-2). "And the enemies of the cross of Christ think only about this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior" (Phil. 3:19-20).

September 22nd

Nehemiah 5:14-19; 12:27-13:31; Malachi 1:1-2:9. "If You Can't Beat Them... Infiltrate"

"If you can't beat them join them." This was apparently Tobiah's motto. Early in the book of Nehemiah we read of the opposition that had to be dealt with while the wall was being rebuilt. That strong opposition came from two men, Tobiah and Sanballat. The wall was rebuilt in spite of their constant resistance. Yet, now Tobiah found an inside lead.

Eliashib the priest had a close relationship with Tobiah, even by relation. Not only had Tobiah been an opponent but he was also an Ammonite which meant he was never to be allowed in the Temple, but now he was living in one of the rooms in the Temple normally set aside to store tithes and other offerings.

And it shouldn't come as a surprise that all this was done while Nehemiah was away. We've read enough about Nehemiah and his "take charge" kind of attitude that it's not surprising that when he showed up he "threw all of Tobiah's things out."

Don't let little things sneak into your life that have no place there.

September 23rd

Joel 1-3; Malachi 2:10-4:6. "Opening the Windows of Heaven"

Many believe that once we become a Christian we can just float along; because they believe, they are convinced that in Heaven we will all receive the same generic stamp of approval. That is not the case. Your eternal destination is based on your belief, but how you spend eternity is reflective of how you lived on earth. Even the actions of believers will be judged (see 2 Cor. 5:10).

As Jesus taught the Beatitudes, known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made clear certain rewards for "doing." In Luke 6:23 Jesus declared that "a great reward awaits you in Heaven." He is not describing a reward for believing but a reward for doing. The topic of rewards in Heaven is also mentioned in Matt. 16:27, "He will reward each according to his works," and Matt. 19:21, "You will have treasure in Heaven," and Luke 14:14, "You will be blessed...for you shall be repaid at the resurrection."

The passage in Malachi three describes the actions of what our heart really feels. My Grandpa believed; "You can't out-give God." Think beyond the temporary and material to the eternal. You will receive if you give.

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General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

As honestly and thoroughly as possible, reflect on what you believe about Heaven. Are all your beliefs Biblical or are some based on traditional thinking?

What are your top 10 reasons you want to go to Heaven?

Like it or not there are some who have serious concerns about Heaven. What are just one or two reasons/issues that would keep you from wanting to go to Heaven? (perhaps things you are hesitant about)

What do your emotions do when you think of Home/Heaven? How does the way you live now display your anticipation of arriving home and seeing your Father?

When have you ever felt like you needed a fresh start? Have you ever felt ready to recommit with all your heart? What brought you there and what kept you from staying there?

Consider the process mentioned September 20th. Reading and studying God's Word, followed by confession amongst one another, which is then followed by worship and praise, lastly followed by committing to follow and obey Him.

Tobiah found a "backdoor." Do you have things that don't belong in your life that have come in through the backdoor?

Personal application: Does the idea of rewards affect how an athlete runs the course? Should the idea of rewards affect how we run the course of life?