

# Daily Readings

*Please note: Next week, we begin a five week study of the journeys of Paul. We will be searching through the book of Acts and the Letters of Paul for insight to the traveling evangelist and how his life and words relate to the 21st century. Below we have chosen introductory passages from the letters of Paul and from the book of Acts as an introduction and as preparation for this series that begins on September 20th.*

**Monday, September 14** – Read Acts 21:37- 22:29. In this passage, Paul is defending himself before the Jewish High Counsel in Jerusalem. This passage includes his story from birth through the beginning of his ministry with the Gentiles. We see the hand of God leading and guiding Paul from the early years of his life through the dramatic change of conversion on the Damascus road. How is God shaping you for God’s work in this world? Can you see God’s hand?

**Tuesday, September 15** – Read I Corinthians 1: 10-17. Here Paul introduces this letter with an admonishment against quarreling. He is concerned about the church at Corinth for their lack of unity. Unity is a theme that he continues throughout this letter as he strives to encourage this church toward unity. What person do you need to seek out today and ask forgiveness? What person do you need to forgive? How can this forgiveness bring unity to the Church?

**Wednesday, September 16** – Read Philippians 1: 3-11. Paul begins this great letter written from prison with a prayer of thanks for the church at Philippi. This great letter of faith and promise starts out with the encouraging words, **“I am sure that the one who began a great work in you, shall bring it to completion.”** What work has God begun in you? How is God now moving to bring it to completion?

**Thursday, September 17** – Read Colossians 1: 9-14. Use this great passage as a prayer for the day. Pray for God’s strength. Give thanks for what God is doing and what God is going to do in your life.

**Friday, September 18** – Read Timothy 1: 3-7. Remember that God has a special plan for you and for this church. Claim what God is doing in your life and in the life of this church. Claim the “power, love and discipline” that is ours through Jesus Christ. Where do you need power to life more fully? Where do you need love? Where do you need discipline?



TRIETSCH

## STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, September 13, 2009

### Leaders Led By God

#### ***The Book of Nehemiah***

The book of Nehemiah contains primarily an account of the career of Nehemiah and the story of Ezra’s public reading of the Torah. Whereas the book of Ezra focuses on the rebuilding of the Temple, the book of Nehemiah provides an account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah 1-7 describes Nehemiah’s return to Palestine and his rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem; Nehemiah 8-10 depicts Ezra’s reading of the law and the responses to it; Nehemiah 11-13 reports additional acts of Nehemiah in restoring the community and nation of Israel.

Despite incredible obstacles, Nehemiah organizes the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, reestablishing the security of the nation. The task takes an incredibly short period of time – 52 days, not counting the Sabbath days that were faithfully observed by Nehemiah and Ezra.

Nehemiah, authorized by the Persian authorities led a group of Jewish exiles home and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem despite the persistent opposition of Sanballat of Samaria and his allies. Nehemiah corrected abuses dealing with loans and the charging of interest. He provided for other at his table with no help from the taxes enjoyed by former governors.

Nehemiah is a picture of the kind of leaders God uses to do God’s work. While we see the importance of intelligence, education, training and creativity, God sees the importance of prayer, thanksgiving, God-dependence, and commitment.

#### ***Nehemiah 1:1-3 — The Word from the Bible (Today’s New International Version)***

***The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.***

***They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”***

#### ***Nehemiah 1:1-3***

This introduces the writings of Nehemiah, one of the outstanding autobiographical masterpieces of the ancient world. His writing begins with an appeal to secure the support of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was an important official with access to the Persian king. An attempt to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem, which cannot be other than that noted in Ezr. 4:7-23, had ended disastrously and the Jews desperately needed a friend in high places. They saw Nehemiah as that friend.

Nehemiah was probably in close touch with the Jerusalem community and he may have known of the attempt to rebuild its wall. But there was a grave personal risk involved if he championed the cause of a distressed Jerusalem, since Artaxerxes, his master, considered Jerusalem a rebellious city. It was Artaxerxes who ordered the end to the illegal building operations referred to in Ezr. 4:17-22. Any request to Artaxerxes would involve asking him to rescind a decree made no more than a few years before. Like Ezra (Ezr. 9:6-15) and Daniel (Dn. 9:4-19), Nehemiah shows his complete identification with his people, accepting the rightness of God’s judgments (v.8) but recalling also the graciousness of the divine promises (v. 5, 9).

#### ***Nehemiah and Prayer***

Nehemiah spent four months praying for direction from God on how to approach Artaxerxes and begin the work of restoring Jerusalem. The prayer life of Nehemiah is itself an absorbing study (cf. 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4-9; 5:19; 6:9-14; 13:14-31). He obviously would not act until sufficient time had been spent in prayer and preparation before action. Nehemiah had given careful thought to what would be required, a characteristic feature of the man.

#### ***Nehemiah 8:13-18 — The Word from the Bible (Today’s New International Version)***

***On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around***

*Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths” -as it is written.*

*So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.*

*Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.*

## **The Celebration of the Feast of Booths – A Time of Thanksgiving**

Following the completion of the wall, Nehemiah and Ezra call the people to the ancient Feast of Booths. The essential character of this festival was thanksgiving. By the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the character of the festival had been corrupted by the influence of the neighboring pagan Canaanite tribe. Nehemiah and Ezra restore the festival to its original intent by putting focus on the reading of the law and thanksgiving to God.

The purpose of this festival was to give thanks to God and to refocus the people on the statutes of God. They were well aware of the human tendency to take credit for what God has done and is doing in the lives of God’s people. So we see Nehemiah beginning and ending this project with prayer and a consideration of what God wants.

### **Nehemiah 9:1-6 — The Word from the Bible (Today’s New International Version)**

*On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having ing dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God. Standing on the stairs were the Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani—who called with loud voices to the LORD their God. And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah—said: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.”*

*“Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.”*

### **God-Dependence**

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was only the beginning of the restoration for Israel. While the walls would provide safety for the people, Ezra and Nehemiah knew that the city was still spiritually and morally bankrupt. The leadership of God continues with Ezra’s prayer of confession. They want the people to remember the dark days of their existence and how God had not forsaken them. Ezra’s prayer (v. 5-38) opens with an acknowledgment of God’s majesty and then continues with a recital of the major turning-points of Israel’s history. The first of these is the call of Abraham (v. 7), which was virtually the beginning of history for the Hebrews. The next turning-point is the Exodus and the giving of the law (v. 9-14). In the wilderness period God’s gracious mercy contrasted with the waywardness of God’s people (v. 15-23). God’s favor was again shown in the conquest of Canaan (v. 24) but Israel continued to be rebellious, in spite of the warnings of the prophets and the deliverances wrought by the judges (v. 26, 27, 30). God had chastised His people through other nations, yet with a purpose (v. 30) This had produced the humility and repentance and trust that was an essential element in the covenant between God and Israel.

### **Nehemiah 9:38 — The Word from the Bible (Today’s New International Version)**

*In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.*

### **Commitment**

Nehemiah calls together the leaders of the people and asked for a sign of their commitment to the God’s law and provision. God-led leaders are going to create a tangible sign of their commitment. In marriage, we wear a ring. In parenting, we give our children our name. In organizations we sign an agreement. In the church, we say a vow and sign covenants of commitment.

### **Prayer Focus**

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God. We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying. Remember... someone is praying for you.

This morning, let the spirit of God lead you in your prayers. Some prayers will come immediately to mind because of a known need. Let other names come to mind, pray for these persons even if you do not know why God is leading you to pray for them. Spend time counting your blessings and giving thanks to God for all God’s good gifts. If there is a difficult situation in your life right now, we invite you to release it to God during this worship service. It will be there after the benediction.

*Please consider including these prayer concerns in your morning prayers:*

*The sick, the bereaved, the lost, the absent, and those in crisis;*

*Those who are out of work;*

*Those who are serving in our military;*

*Those who are serving our local, state and national government.*

*Please consider the following needs in our church:*

*The need for workers in our children’s area as we begin the new school year;*

*The call for those to offer their gifts of music through our choirs in worship;*

*That God will call our youth and young adults into full time Christian service;*

*That God will give our pastors and staff wisdom, courage and grace;*

*That will inspire our congregation to great levels of generosity in these difficult economic times;*

*Please join with others in our worship today by praying the following:*

*I pray for our Church –*

*That God will lead our church deeper into prayer*

*That God will lead each person here into a deeper relationship with Christ through worship and Bible study*

*That God will lead every participant into a deeper walk with Jesus.*

*Lord lead me closer to you in all I do. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

### **Sermon Focus and Guiding Questions**

All of us are leaders. Some are leading families. Some are leading schools, classes or students. Some are leading businesses. Some are leading our church. There are many places and many ways of leadership.

The question is: What kind of leader are we? Are we modeling and measuring ourselves by the standards of society? Is there a higher calling on us that transcends the values of this world?

While the cultural standards of leadership are helpful, as Christians we have a source for guidance and help that comes from above. Nehemiah was an example of that kind of leadership. His preparation was covered in prayer, his success was tempered by thanksgiving, and his future was governed by a confession of human need for God and a true visible, tangible commitment.

How often do you pray before you make decisions?

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Do you give thanks for God’s leadership and bounty?

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Are you willing to offer up confession of your need for God?

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How often do you review and reflect upon the commitment in your life?

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