

Transformative Bible Reading Study Notes for Nehemiah 8:1-10

Nehemiah 8:1-10 (Introduction)

Good bible reading goes beyond merely acquiring information. To read the bible properly, we need to do so transformatively, seeking application that leads us to action.

In Nehemiah 8:1-10, Ezra the priest called the Israelites together for worship. This worship was quite unlike anything we'd expect today. Rather than singing praise songs for an hour or listening to a 30 minute sermon, the Israelites heard Ezra read from the law for hours at a time. And they "listened attentively to the Book of the Law" (8:3).

The immediate result of listening to the law being read was worship (8:6). The people understood from the law that God was holy and they needed to be his servants. But they became self-absorbed with their worship. Perhaps they began to feel that they had accomplished a lot simply by worshiping God. Perhaps they dwelt too long on their sins.

Nehemiah noticed that the people did not properly understand the purpose of the bible study they were involved with. He reminded them that bible reading and study was not to result in prolonged introspection and weeping. Proper bible reading is to be transformative--it needs to result in action.

This is why Nehemiah commanded the people to stop mourning and weeping (8:9). They were not wrong to feel this way. But these feelings were not the goal of the bible study--action was. So he told them to stop mourning and weeping (8:9).

Instead, they were to feed themselves...and others. They were to "send [food] to those who have nothing prepared" (8:10). This is what all good, proper, transformative bible study does--it provokes us to action.

The Dangers of Bible Study

There are some dangers in bible study, however. The first danger is to simply stop reading. Bible study and reading can be difficult. We do well to read the bible, but because the bible is a large book that contains many different genres, we can become unsure how or what to read. The temptation is to stop. We need to overcome this temptation by pressing on, reading, learning, and doing.

The second danger of bible study is to focus on knowledge for its own sake. When we read the bible, we become excited about what we're learning. But we go wrong when our excitement flows over into merely acquiring knowledge. Our spiritual growth isn't about how much we know, but about how much we are being changed--by God, through his word.

The third danger of bible study is to become prideful because of the knowledge we are gaining. This is different from the second danger because that danger focused only on knowledge

acquisition. This danger is worse, because it causes us to look down on others who don't know as much as we do. We should never compare ourselves to others based on bible knowledge or how many bible studies we attend.

The Purpose of Bible Study

In contrast to these, proper bible study leads us to worship God. As we learn about the bible, we learn about God--who he is, what he's done, and what he's going to do. We learn about his plan of salvation. We learn about Jesus, and how we are to live like him. This leads us to worship, to be in awe of God.

Proper bible study should also lead us to good works. Just as Nehemiah encouraged the Israelites to ministry, we need to learn from our bible reading to be involved in ministry. This is merely an extension of Jesus' ministry, so as we learn about him, we learn what we need to do--serve and love others in his name.

Finally, proper bible study strengthens our faith in God. The motivation given to the Israelites for overcoming themselves and serving others is to allow the joy they have in God to be their strength. Bible reading should promote strong and growing faith in God. And as your faith increases, your joy does as well!

As Paul reminds in Romans 12:1-2, God desires for us to serve him. He transforms us as we allow him to. As we read the bible and seek to apply it, God teaches us how to serve him better. Proper bible study leads us to worship God, to good works, and to stronger faith in him.