

Devotion 19:

Our Father Makes All Things New Again

Nehemiah 1—13

There is something nice about starting over anew. The vast majority of my life has been lived around the school calendar of August to June. Each August brings a new start, for teachers, for students. Reconciled relationships are nice. Spring following winter enlivens and refreshes. There is something touched and energized deep within the soul when we get to start something over, especially something that has been lost or destroyed. Just read Nehemiah.

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and led the project to rebuild the city's walls. By the grace and power of God, it was completed in only 52 days. *"When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God."* (Neh. 6:15-16)

The Book of the Law was read and explained by the Levites. And the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated. It is noteworthy what Nehemiah says about it:

"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." 8:17b

This feast had been celebrated in the time since Joshua. It was celebrated after the dedication of Solomon's temple and after the exiles first returned to Jerusalem. But this time the celebration, the joy, was different. It was *"very great."* It is reminiscent of Ezra 3:12 that reads: *"But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy."*

The Law had prescribed that special festivals be observed from time to time, often connected somehow to the number 7: every seventh day was a Sabbath; every seventh month; every seventh year. The Passover and The Feast of Tabernacles both extended over seven days. These two festivals plus Pentecost were the big three annual celebrations for the children of Israel.

The Feast of Tabernacles occurred in the seventh month, after the harvest had been gathered. Each Israelite was to make and live in booths for the week as a reminder of the protection and provision by God during the 40 years of the wilderness wandering. These booths were constructed of branches of fruit and palm trees. Such booths sheltered the Israelites after they left Egypt. No secular work was to be done during the week and the Law was read on the first day.

It is difficult to write about this feast and not think about heaven, our ultimate celebration after the harvest of all saved souls has been gathered, when we get to enter our eternal Sabbath rest. In reading Nehemiah, it is clear that our Father wants to start over and

make all things new again. He has given us a new name (Is. 62:2); He has made a new covenant (Jer. 31:31); He has given us a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26); He has made us into a new creation (II Cor. 5:17); He will make a new heaven and a new earth (Is. 65:17); and He will make a new Jerusalem (Rev. 3:12).

What would you like to be new again? A body? Pristine health? A relationship? A home? Praise God, our Father is in the business of making all things new again. And, although we don't often feel it, if we read Scripture carefully, we will see that the reconstruction project has already begun in us. The Day is coming when we will have new and glorified bodies, when all our relationships will be renewed, and when creation itself will be new again. Even though we have celebrated many Church festivals and worshipped often in our lifetime, Nehemiah tells us that then our joy will be very great! Thank you, Father, for making all things new again.