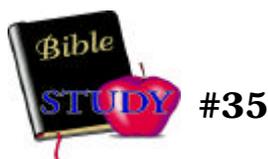


## **Journey Into God's Word**



**Nehemiah**

**Micah**

**1 John**

### **When the Bottom Drops Out**

When the bottom drops out – whether it is through the death of a loved one, your wife or husband suddenly leaving you, job loss, or unexpected illness—you find yourself in a free fall into the uncertainty of a future you do not want to face. At that time you don't need a lot of God or Jesus talk, you need Jesus. It's His perfect love that drives out the fear of the future. I John 4:18 says, "There's no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." As you join me this week in studying I John, Nehemiah and Micah, my prayer is that together we may discover not only what this perfect love is but also how to apply it to our lives.

When I am in the midst of darkness, confusion, and uncertainty I must be aware there is light. God is light. This reality of His presence is evident in the tangible all around you and me. From the rising of the sun to the rest of creation the evidence of God's presence is everywhere. But that's not all. He made His presence much more personal by coming amongst us as the Word of Life. It's this reality that I John testify of, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim the Word of Life. This life appeared; we have seen it and testify of it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."(I John 1:1,2) I John says that in the midst of the darkness and uncertainty of life we can know Christ because "God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all."(I John 1:5) The critical issue is that you and I are in Him. God is the only one who can guide us out of the darkness and He is that perfect love that can fill the vacuum in our lives at a time of loss.

When we lose a loved one, the fellowship and support of caring brothers and sisters is so essential. People who are letting God's grace and light flow through them provide that hope that is necessary in times of difficulty. That's why it is important we walk in the light. As I John 1:7 says, "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." What hope this provides as our world falls out from

under us and we come face to face with the sin in our life. It's so much easier to go through life in denial. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."(I John 1:8) Why is it so easy to live in denial of our sins while we see them in others? Honesty and confession are essential if we are going to be whole. A promise is given. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9

Honesty about who we are and what God wants to change within us is absolutely essential. In addition to honesty, obedience is also critical. "The one who says, 'I know Him,' but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him."(I John 2:4) Walking in obedience to God is walking in the light. What does I John 2:8-14 say are the results of walking in this light?

Walking in the light of Jesus Christ involves being set free from a love for the things of this world. "For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."(I John 2:16,17)

As pain strikes from every direction I must know that the will of God, includes remaining in Him (I John 2:27), realizing God loves me, and that I am a child of God. (I John 3:1) As God's children, "we should love one another." (I John 3:11)

According to I John 3:16-24 how is this love to be expressed? I John 4:8,9 says, "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him."(I John 4:8,9) This means there is nothing we have to be afraid of. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."(I John 4:18) You and I should not be afraid of the future. Instead we should strive to abide in His perfect love.

I am learning that this striving is not something I can do myself. In fact it involves having the outer shell broken to the extent that I discover I am not in control, it is "God" who I John 4:16 says "is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him." Love is not just an attribute of God. The scripture clearly says that everything about God is love, "God is love."(I John 4:8) Turning loose of my fears and worries and doubts and abiding in the love of God in turn frees me to live. I am seeing that this involves living a life of faith. We talk about it but living

in peace when our world seems out of control involves going on in the faith and knowledge that the God who is love is in control. “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”(I John 5:4,5) Why Jesus? The answer is because, “anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart.”(I John 5:10)” And this is the testimony: God has given eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”(I John 5:11)

Oh dear God, I need life. I need Jesus and if you look closely at your life you will see that you need Jesus. In John 15:5,6 Jesus declares, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.” As we abide in Christ we are told, “this is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”(I John 5:14,15) Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ you and I can also arise from the ash heaps of life with a new found confidence that as we pray according to His will revealed in the Word, we can be assured we will see the answer. Remember I John 5:4,5, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God”... Yes, He is the Son of God! “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true—even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and Eternal Life.” (I John 5:20)

Such belief propels us to action. We may feel the bottom has fallen out as a result of situations beyond our control but the fact is God is still in control. Nehemiah believed this. As a result when he got word of the troubles that those in Jerusalem were facing, Nehemiah reports, “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”(Neh. 1:4) Nehemiah saw a need to rebuild the wall. There are walls of love, security in Christ, and peace that need to be rebuilt in our lives and in our relationships with others. These are not walls that isolate but walls that embrace and protect. When the need is thrust before us we must take the initial steps that Nehemiah did when he was confronted with the need and that is to personalize and feel the need until we are free to mourn. Then fast and pray before the God of heaven. Please read and describe Nehemiah’s prayer found in verses 5-11 of chapter 1.

After he prayed Nehemiah continued his duties waiting for just the right opportunity for action. It came when the King asks, “Why does your face look so

sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”(Neh 2:2) Nehemiah then shares the problem and the King asks him what he wants. Note the action taken before the response.” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the King.” (Neh. 2:4,5) Prayer for Nehemiah came first, then the response and finally the action. What action took place as explained in vs. 4-19 of chapter 2? Now the time has come for us to submit our lives, families and ministries unto the Lord so that the rebuilding can take place. May the love of God heal the deep wounds that keep our walls of faith from being rebuilt. I want a new work of the Lord in my life. How about you? As you desire to let the Living God work through you to rebuild the walls do not be surprised if you encounter opposition. What kind of opposition did Nehemiah encounter as explained in Neh. 2:10-Neh.6? How did he respond to this opposition?

Good leaders care about those in need. When Nehemiah heard of the injustices that the poor were experiencing he responded, “When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.”(Neh. 5:6) What positive results came out of Nehemiah’s anger as he spoke the truth in love and demanded reform? (See Neh. 5:7-16)

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he found more than broken walls; he discovered broken lives. In order to solve this problem he gathers the people together to hear God’s law. In response to the hearing of God’s Word the people repented and promise to live in obedience to God. We read of this revival in Nehemiah 8:1-13:31.

During the pass two weeks I have encountered struggles that have caused me to cry out to the Lord earnestly. In the midst of these struggles I have been reminded of these words of Nehemiah where he told the people, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”(Neh. 8:10) In light of our study of I John, how do you think this joy of the Lord can provide strength for you now in your time of need?

Please look at the powerful prayer of confession in Neh. 9:5-37. This prayer begins by declaring, “Stand up and praise the Lord your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, 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 starrng 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.” From this acknowledgment of the Living God please go on and study this powerful prayer noting the faith builders listed, examples of God’s great

compassion, the rebelliousness of His people, God's mercy, and the confession of the people.

Please note Nehemiah's final reforms in chapter 13. What radical actions did he take? As you examine your life what changes do you believe need to be taken? "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."(Micah 6:8)

The book of Micah is a book whose purpose it is to warn God's people that judgment is coming and to offer pardon to all who repent. This book of classic Hebrew poetry is made up of three parts, each beginning with "Hear" or "Listen" (1:2; 3:1, 6:1) and closes with a promise, In Micah 5:2 the greatest promise of all is shared that Jesus, whose origins are from old, from ancient times" (meaning He is the Son of God) will be born in Bethlehem. This wonderful promise was given hundred of years before Jesus was born.

With the reality that Christ has come we can now in this time of uncertainty do as Micah did when he proclaimed, "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light."(Micah 7:7,8) Oh, how I want to do the same thing. "Watch in hope for the Lord." I don't know what the future may bring but I know God is in control and as I John 4:8 says, "God is love." Knowing that God who is love is in control I am now free to "wait for God my Savior." With that certainty in mind I can know that "my God will hear me." Yes, I may have many questions about the future as the dark night of the soul overtakes me but "though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my Light." With this certainty in mind we don't have to keep looking back at our losses. The Light of the Lord enables us to look forward knowing in the midst of darkness that there is hope for Christ is Risen. "Though I have fallen, I will arise."(Micah 7:8)

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea."(Micah 7:18-19) Praise God we have been set free. Let us now go forth in freedom from sin and bondage to the past remembering as "we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin,"(I John 1:7)

Please join me in the journey into the Word of God by reading Esther 1-10, Nahum 1-3, Habakkuk 1-3, II John and III John. “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who true—even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”(I John 5:18-21)

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice