

Nehemiah Lesson 08

Nehemiah Chapter 8

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Memory verses for this week: *Psa 60:7 Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver; Psa 60:8 Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe: Philistia, triumph thou because of me.*

Introduction: In last weeks lesson, we studied about the city of Jerusalem being committed to Hananiah and then went through dozens of the names of the genealogy of those people from the tribes that had returned back to the land after the captivity in Babylon.

In this week's lesson, Ezra the priest gathered the restoration Jews together and read to them the Word of God and reinstated the Feast of Tabernacles altogether. The subdivisions of the chapter are: (1) the reading and exposition of the Law in verses 1-8; (2) the people called upon to be joyful in verses 9-13; and, (3) the Feast of Tabernacles reinstated in verses 13-18.

I. Reading and Exposition of the Law

Neh 8:1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

Neh 8:2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

Neh 8:3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

Neh 8:4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

The latter portion of Ezra's ministry overlapped with the initial work of Nehemiah.

The wall was done. The Temple worship had been restored and the Levites returned to their ministries. It was the first of the seventh month of the year. Therefore the people requested Ezra to come forth and publicly read the Word of God to them from "the book of the law of Moses." It is important as New Testament Christians that we do not forsake

the reading of the bible. We should always be eager to come and have the books opened and hear expository readings done from both the Old and New Testaments. We find the pages filled with promises of the Lord to come in the old testament, and all that he accomplished and will do in the New Testament. So many today lose so many blessings because they do not come when the church assembles.

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Jesus early on in His ministry taught the disciples the importance of the scriptures and of teaching doctrine.

Mark 1:21 And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.

Mark 1:22 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

Ezra publicly read the Scripture from a wooden pulpit (or platform) located at the street before the water gate (a large street suitable for a large gathering). It is noted that he read from morning (shortly after sunrise) to midday. The listing of the other names in verse 4 may be other priests who assisted him in the reading of the law.

Matthew Henry pointed out the importance of reading God's law.

He and others read in the book of the law, *from morning till noon* (v. 3), and they read *distinctly*, v. 8. Reading the scriptures in religious assemblies is an ordinance of God, whereby he is honoured and his church edified. And, upon special occasions, we must be willing to attend for many hours together on the reading and expounding of the word of God: those mentioned here were thus employed for six hours. Let those that read and preach the word learn also to deliver themselves distinctly, as those who understand what they say and are affected with it themselves, and who desire that those they speak to may understand it, retain it, and be affected with it likewise. *It is a snare for a man to devour that which is holy.* (4.)

What they read they expounded, showed the intent and meaning of it, and what use was to be made of it; they gave the sense in other words, that they might *cause the people to understand the reading*, v. 7, 8. Note, [1.] It is requisite that those who hear the word should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words, Mt. 24:15.

Mat 24:15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

[2.] It is therefore required of those who are teachers by office that they explain the

word and give the sense of it. *Understandest thou what thou readest?* and, *Have you understood all these things?* are good questions to be put to the hearers; but, *How should we except someone guide us?* is as proper a question for them to put to their teachers, Acts 8:30, 31. Reading is good, and preaching good, but expounding brings the reading and the preaching together, and thus makes the reading the more intelligible and the preaching the more convincing. (5.) The people conducted themselves very properly when the word was read and opened to them with great reverence.

Neh 8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

Neh 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Neh 8:7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.

As Ezra stood upon the elevated pulpit platform, he visibly opened the book, “and when he opened it, all the people stood up.” Their standing evidently showed respect for God’s Word.

Before reading, Ezra first prayed a short prayer of invocation blessing the Lord, “the great God.” All the people answered, “Amen.” Amen is part of worshipping God.

The list of other names noted evidently were other priests who that day assisted Ezra in the reading and teaching of God’s Word. They thus “caused the people to understand the law.”

2 Tim 2:15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Neh 8:8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

A profound example of the ministry of God’s Word to this day is set forth.

(1) “They read in the book in the law of God distinctly.”

(2) They “gave the sense.”

(3) And they “caused them to understand the reading.”

(4) In other words, these priests not only read the Word of God, they explained its essence so that the listeners could understand the Word

of God.

(5) That is the essence of this commentary. It should be a major goal of every pastor.

II. The People Called Upon to be Joyful

Neh 8:9 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

Neh 8:10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

Neh 8:11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.

Neh 8:12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

Neh 8:13 And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law.

Once again, the title *Tirshatha* in verse 9 means governor which was Nehemiah. As God's Word was read and expounded that day, many wept, perhaps convicted of their sin.

In verse 10, Nehemiah and Ezra, along with the Levites and priests assisting, encouraged them to rather rejoice and celebrate God's blessing for that day was holy unto the Lord. "*For the joy of the LORD is your strength.*"

Leviticus 23:24 notes that the first day of the seventh month was the Feast of Trumpets, "a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation."

Lev 23:24 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation.

Lev 23:25 Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

The day evidently was a feast day and thus a special holy day to rejoice. Therefore, the leadership admonished the people to rejoice in the Lord for indeed, as we rejoice in Him, there is strength.

Psa 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my

high tower.

Psa 18:3 I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.

Psa 28:7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.

Psa 28:8 The LORD is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed.

They had just come through a time of great stress and trouble. God had given the victory. Nehemiah urged them rejoice in the Lord for it indeed brings God's strength. The people therefore rejoiced that day as mentioned in verse 12. The next day, the spiritual leadership of Israel gathered unto Ezra to hear more of the Word of God. A revival was underway.

Nehemiah had returned. He immediately had undertaken the work notwithstanding great opposition. Now the initial phase was done and as the people heard the Word of God, there was a revival in their hearts.

III. The Feast of Tabernacles Reinstated

Neh 8:14 And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:

Neh 8:15 And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

Neh 8:16 So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.

Neh 8:17 And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.

Neh 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

As the Word of God had been presented, it was noted that the Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. Israel, in the Law, had been commanded to actually live in booths.

The word so translated is (hko) *sukkah* which literally means a hut or a 'lean-to.' The Feast of Tabernacles was intended to be a time each year in which Israel recalled how they in the exodus had lived in tents and the humblest of housing.

It was intended not only as a memorial but also of humbling themselves before God.

We as Christians should seek to be humble people that are pleasing to the Lord.

Mat 23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

James 4:5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

James 4:6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Over the centuries, the Israelites had continued to observe the Feast of Tabernacles, but it had not been since the time of Joshua that they had actually gone to the trouble of pitching the 'booths' or humble lean-to type of dwellings.

Under Nehemiah's leadership they returned to directly and literally obeying the Word of God. The congregation of Israel therefore gathered the necessary branches and brush to construct the *booths* thus noted in the law of Moses. Verse 16 says they built them on the roofs or courtyards of their homes, even in the streets.

In obeying God's Word altogether, "there was very great gladness." There always is. If you want happiness, true happiness in this life, we must do things God's way and obey the commandments.

One reason God's people have problems with discouragement is their lack of total obedience to God. The Feast of Tabernacles (*succoth*) lasted for eight days. During that time, Ezra publicly read "the book of the law of God." Thus, they kept the solemn assembly "according to the manner, that is according to the law."

J. Vernon McGee said this about the last verses of chapter 8.

This is a celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. The dwelling in booths was to be a reminder to them of the fatherly care and protection of God while Israel was journeying from Egypt to Canaan.

Here in Nehemiah's day they are obeying the Law that had been read to them. They had heard the Word of God and are doing what it commanded. My friend, it is one thing to read and study the Bible and have it bring joy to you, but that joy will end unless you obey what you have read and let it have its way with you.

In the following chapter we will see that the result of this great Bible reading was revival.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.