

Nehemiah 08 - Ezra Reads the Law; The Feast of Tabernacles

II. Rebuilding of the people (Neh 8:1–13:31)

(1) Revival: covenant renewal (Neh 8:1–10:39)

- (A) The sinful people hear and respond to the covenant (8:1-18)
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Nehemiah 8

II. Rebuilding of the people (Neh 8:1–13:31)

(1) Revival: covenant renewal (Neh 8:1–10:39)

- (A) The sinful people hear and respond to the covenant (8:1-18)
 - (a) Ezra reads the law (8:1-4) (Cf. Ezra 3:1)

1 And all the people gathered as one person at the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel.

1 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel.

1 All the people gathered as a united body into the plaza in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

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.

- When the seventh month arrived the Israelites were settled in their towns (Cf. 7:73a). The seventh month was September-October.

— Ezra had returned to Jerusalem in 458 BC, 14 years before Nehemiah, also with the blessing of King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7). His primary purpose in going to his homeland was to teach the Jews God's Law. In Ezra 7:6,11-12,21 he was called a teacher. Of course Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries (Cf. Neh 12:33,36).

When Ezra first arrived in Jerusalem, the moral and spiritual condition of the people was deplorable (Ezra 9:1-4; 10:2,10). But as he prayerfully taught them God's Word, they began to respond to and to obey the laws of God. A few years later Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and challenged them to trust God to help them rebuild the walls. The effectiveness of Ezra's ministry is also reflected in the people's behavior after the walls were completed. The two-month building program was an interlude in Ezra's teaching, but apparently it helped motivate the people to want to know more of God's Law. They themselves asked Ezra to continue his teaching ministry among them (v1). This was the first day of the seventh month, the day which was to be the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:24; Num 29:1). Adults and children who were old enough to understand (v2-3) listened attentively all morning as Ezra faced west by the Water Gate (Cf. v1).

2 Then Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.

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2 So on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought out the Law before the assembled people. Both men and women were in attendance, as well as all who could understand what they were hearing.

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.

3 And he read from it before the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

3 He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

3 Ezra read from it, facing the plaza in front of the Water Gate, from early in the morning until mid-day in the presence of the men and women, as well as all who could understand. All the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

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.

4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam on his left.

4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah *and* Meshullam on his left hand.

4 Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden rostrum erected for that purpose. Beside him to his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maasseiah. Beside him to his left stood Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

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 Uriah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchijah, and Hashum, and Hashbaddana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

(b) The people react (8:5-18)

(i) Respect for God's Word (8:5)

5 Then Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. Because he was visible above all the people there, as he opened it, all the people stood up.

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:

(ii) Worship (8:6)

6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" with the raising of their hands; then they kneeled down and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

6 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with uplifted hands, all the people responded, "Amen! Amen!" They bowed down and worshipped the LORD prostrate on the

ground.

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.

(iii) Comprehension (8:7-8)

7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Law to the people while the people *remained* in their place.

7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people *remained* in their place.

7 Furthermore, Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the descendants of Levi taught the Law to the people while the people remained standing.

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.

8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

8 They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, distinctly communicating its meaning, so they could understand the reading.

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

(iv) Mourning (8:9)

9 Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the Law.

9 Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.

9 Because all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Law, Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the descendants of Levi who taught the people told everyone, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep."

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.

- Standing on a platform above the people Ezra read from the Law, while 13 men, perhaps priests (Cf. v7), stood on the platform beside him. As he read, the people stood (v5). He then praised the LORD, the great God (Cf. 1:5; 4:14).

- The people's response to the reading of the Scriptures and to Ezra's praises must have been an emotional experience for this scribe and priest. Lifting their hands toward heaven they shouted Amen! Amen! in an expression of agreement with God's Word. Then they fell on their knees and bowed low as they worshiped the LORD (8:6).

Nehemiah did not explain exactly how Ezra and the Levites read and explained God's Law to this large crowd that may have numbered between 30,000 and 50,000 people (7:66-67). Possibly Ezra read sections of the Law in the presence of all the people (8:3), and then at certain times the Levites circulated among them and made it clear ("to make distinct or interpret," possibly means here "to translate" from Hebrew to Aramaic) and explained (gave the meaning of) what Ezra had read as the people stood in groups (v7-8). The most gratifying thing that happened, of course, is that the people obeyed God's Word. What they heard touched their emotions, for they wept as they heard the Law (v9). Apparently they were remorseful over their past disobedience to the Law and contrite over their sins.

(v) Rejoicing in celebration (8:10-12)

10 Then he said to them, "Go, eat the festival foods, drink the sweet drinks, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your refuge."

10 Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

10 He also told them, "Go eat the best food, drink the best wine, and give something to those who have nothing, since this day is holy to our Lord. Don't be sorrowful, because the joy of the LORD is your strength."

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.

11 So the Levites silenced all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."

11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."

11 The descendants of Levi also calmed all the people by saying, "Be still, for the day is holy. Don't be sorrowful!"

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

12 Then all the people went away to eat, drink, to send portions, and to celebrate a great feast, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

12 All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

12 So all the people went to eat, to drink, to send something to those who had nothing, and to celebrate with great joy, because they understood the words that were being declared to them.

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.

(vi) Observation of the Feast of Tabernacles (8:13-18)

13 Then on the second day the heads of fathers' *households* of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe so that they might gain insight into the words of the Law.

13 Then on the second day the heads of fathers' *households* of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.

13 The next day, the heads of the families of all the people were gathered together, along with the priests and the descendants of Levi, to meet with Ezra the scribe in order to understand the words of the Law.

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.

14 And they found written in the Law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month.

14 They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month.

14 They found written in the Law that the LORD had commanded through Moses that the Israelis were to live in tents during the festival scheduled for the seventh month.

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:

15 And that they were to proclaim and circulate a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of *other* trees with thick branches, to make booths, as it is written."

15 So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of *other* leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written."

15 So they circulated a proclamation throughout their towns and in Jerusalem. It said, "Go out to the hill country and bring back olive branches, wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of mature trees, in order to set up tents, as has been written."

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.
- Nehemiah then encouraged the people to consider the day sacred and to eat, give to others in need, and rejoice in the LORD, their source of strength. Holiness and joy were to go together!