

## Part 2: Spiritual Restoration of the People - Chap. 8-13

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### I. Instruction in the Law and Keeping the Feast of Tabernacles – Chap. 8

#### Notes on Nehemiah Chapter 8

**Step #9 in useful service to God: Restore God's service by teaching people His word.**

Verses 1-3

1. Where did the people meet? What did Ezra bring?
2. What did Ezra do? What did the people do? (Think: What should we do today when God's law is read and studied?)

#### ***The people gather for the reading of the law***

Now that the wall was completed, the people turned to restoring their spiritual service in the city. The law had commanded that the law be read to the people from time to time (Deut. 3:11,12; Joshua 8:34,35; 2 Kings 23:2).

They assembled in a convenient place described as the open square in front of the Water Gate. The reading was led by Ezra the scribe, the same Ezra described in the book of Ezra (see on Ezra 7:6). Ezra had led the second group that returned from captivity, and Nehemiah led the third group. Evidently these were not far apart.

Ezra brought the book of the law and read from it from morning till noon. The message is called the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Moses. Note the clear claim that Moses' writings were inspired by God. See also the notes on v8, where the law is called the Law of God.

Those who were assembled were men, women, and all who could hear and understand what was taught. The people listened attentively to what was read. This occurred on the first day of the 7th month, which was a holy day (v9), the feast of trumpets (see on v14ff).

#### ***Note the value of reading God's written instructions.***

We today also need to read God's law. In those days before the printing press, copies were hard to come by, so the law was read publicly. New Testament examples record it being read regularly in the synagogues. We should also read it, and we have the advantage that we can easily possess our own copies. This is the value of having the word in writing, but we must realize the value of reading and studying it.

The people paid attention. We should do the same. Attention is hindered by day-dreaming, whispering, joking, playing with babies, etc. Note that, even though the session was lengthy (morning till midday), people still were attentive. They did not complain that they could not absorb any more after a certain length of time, as some complain today. If they could listen and benefit for that long, why can't we?

Verses 4-6

3. How long did this continue? What did the people say and do after hearing the law (v6)?

#### ***The pattern of the reading***

An elevated platform had been built so the people could see (and presumably hear) Ezra. With him were various other men named here who helped the people understand (see also vv 7,8).

When Ezra praised God, the people said “Amen!” This is an expression of agreement meaning “so be it.” It affirms that the hearer agrees that the message spoken is true. It is appropriate for the audience to express “Amen” to the words spoken, provided it is a genuine expression of agreement. It should not be allowed to be done to the point of distracting from the message or simply to drum up excitement. See Nehemiah 5:13; 1 Corinthians 14:16.

We are told that the people stood when he opened the book. When Ezra praised God, the people lifted their hands and bowed their faces toward the ground. This is acceptable posture for worship, but it is surely not the only permissible posture. Many other postures are described in Scripture. What matters is that the acts done in worship be authorized by God and sincerely meant from the heart. Specific posture is not required, though some positions at some time may help us concentrate or express our meaning.

Verses 7,8

4. Besides reading the law, what did the teachers do (vv 7,8)?
5. Based on vv 1-8, list at least four important lessons we can learn about teaching and studying God’s word.
6. Compare v1 to v8. What can we learn regarding those who say the “Law of Moses” is a different law from the “Law of God”? Explain.

### *The law read and explained*

Other men are named as assisting in the teaching. The people stood in their place, and these men helped them understand the law as it was read. They did this by explaining the meaning to the people.

This is the plain simple essence of gospel teaching and preaching. Proper teaching requires appeal to the book as the source or basis of our teaching and our only authority. We should not use human ideas as our foundation. Then we help people understand what it says by explaining the meaning. Note that helping people understand the meaning of Scripture is authorized by God. What is not authorized is changing the meaning or adding our own human ideas that differ from it.

Note that the people did understand the meaning – note especially v12. Understanding the written word is not impossible nor is it reserved for specially trained leaders. The common person can understand it but must work hard at studying and learning.

Note also that, comparing v1 to v8 shows that the “law of Moses” and the “law of God” are the same thing. There is no difference as some claim. The terms are interchangeable, because God gave the law, but He gave it through Moses — v1. Some claim that the Law of Moses is the ceremonial law and was removed when Jesus died, but they claim the Law of God is the Moral Law or Ten Commands, which remains in effect today. Passages like this show the error of such distinctions. See also notes on Ezra 7:6.

Verses 9-12

7. What effect did the message have on the people? (Think: Why might they have done this?)
8. What day and month was this (v2)? Note Lev. 23:24 and tell why this day was special.
9. List other **passages** about this day and explain what was to be done on that day.
10. What did the leaders tell the people to do instead of grieving?

### *The people’s reaction to the law*

When the people heard the law, they wept. There are many reasons for weeping when one hears God’s law. This was especially the case of these people, who had not been able to worship as they would have liked to because the city of worship had been so destroyed. We weep when we have godly sorrow for our sin (as in chapter 7; cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10), or when we appreciate how good God has been and how unworthy we are, etc.

However, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the other leaders who were teaching the people told them not to weep. It was not a day for weeping, but was a time for joy. It was a holy day, the Feast of Trumpets –cf. v2 to Leviticus 23:24. This was expressly commanded to be a time for eating and drinking, and giving food to those who were had none - Deut. 16:14; cf. Deut. 26:11-13; Esther 9:19,22. The people did as told.

Note that the passage expressly says that the people understood the message (cf. v8). We too can understand if we study honestly and diligently. Those who claim that the Bible cannot be understood are mistaken. See also Mark 7:14; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 3:3-5; 5:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Isaiah 55:11; Psalm 119:104,105,130; 1 Timothy 2:4.

Verses 13-15

11. What happened on the next day? What did they learn as they studied?
12. List other *passages* about this feast, and explain its meaning.

### *The people learn about the feast of the tabernacles*

On the next day there was another meeting to read the law, the heads of the houses this time meeting with Ezra, the priests, and the Levites. Note that one day of reading and studying the law was not enough. In fact, we will see that they met together to read and study the law all week long during the feast of tabernacles. This is similar to what we would call a gospel meeting. It was a special concentrated time of reading and studying God's law.

As they studied, they read the Scriptures where God revealed that, in the 7<sup>th</sup> month, there should also be another feast, the feast of tabernacles or booths. This is mentioned in Lev. 23:33-44 (Deut. 16:13-17; cf. Neh. 8:14ff). This feast began on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month and lasted for seven days. The people were to get branches from various trees (olive, myrtle, palm, etc.) to make booths (temporary dwelling places). This was a reminder of the time when they were dwelling in temporary dwelling places in the wilderness after they left Egypt. Many offerings were associated with each day of the Feast of Tabernacles, as listed in Num. 29:12-38.

Verses 16-18

13. What did the people do regarding this feast?
14. Cf. Ezra 6:19-22. List again lessons we can learn from these events about restoring our service to God.

### *The people keep the feast of tabernacles*

Having read the command of the law, the people obeyed. They built booths on the roofs of their houses, or in courtyards, or in the open square before the gates. All the people participated.

The result was that the feast was kept as it had not been since the time of Joshua. This might appear to mean that this feast had not been kept at all since Joshua's time, but that would appear to contradict 2 Chronicles 8:12,13; Ezra 3:4; etc. So another possibility is that the statement could mean no one kept it *in this way* since the time of Joshua (note "so").

Since these people had recently come out of Babylonian captivity, perhaps this feast had special meaning to them as they identified with their fathers who came out of Egyptian captivity. In any case, it was a time of great gladness, which was what God had commanded at this feast (see on vv 9-12 above).

The feast lasted seven days, and on each day the people continued to read the law. On the eighth day they had a special assembly as was commanded for this feast. Note how they continued to want to read and study the law. If they could study for hours per day for a week, surely we can study for a few hours on the first day of the week and other times as well.

### *Restoration of God's service*

Cf. Ezra 6:19-22.

Note that the people here restored an act of service to God that had been neglected for years. When we see how they restored it, we will understand the principle of restoration according to

the written word. We will see how we can restore all aspects of our service to God as they were in the New Testament, even though it may have been many generations since others did it properly. This requires:

**1. The people followed the source of guidance for knowing God's will: the written word.**

Note that Moses' words had been written a thousand years earlier and had been neglected for many years at a time in the interim. Yet by diligently studying and following it, the people were still able to restore their service. We can do the same today, despite the fact it has been two thousand years since the New Testament was completed, and despite the fact people have been in apostasy for years at times since then.

**2. To help understand, teachers assembled the people, read the law, and explained the meaning of it.**

We need teachers today who will show the same dedication.

**3. People attended the assemblies and listened attentively.**

Restoration today likewise requires the people to have the same commitment and willingness to learn.

**4. The people were thus able to understand the written word which they studied.**

People often tell us that the Bible was written hundreds of years ago so we can't understand it, and besides it is out of date and has no application today. Yet the same things would have applied in Nehemiah' day, but the people could understand and the law did apply. We can do the same today.

**5. The people then obeyed what was written, and the worship was restored.**

This worked despite the fact the law had been written 1000 years earlier and had been neglected for years. The same will work today. The power is in the seed to make Christians and restore Jesus' church anytime, anywhere. See 1 Peter 1:22-25; Galatians 6:7,8.

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