

Nehemiah 8:1 - 9:25

Day 1

Ezra Reads the Law. Read Nehemiah 8:1-8

1. What did the people request? 8:1

- How long after the completion of the wall (6:15) did they do this? Compare 6:25 with 8:2. (*Elul*=the sixth month 6:15)? What factors do you see contributing to their desire to hear God's word?

FYI: "Even if 'all' is not taken literally, there must have been gathered here one of the largest congregations ever to hear the Scriptures read in their presence...The book of the law of Moses" undoubtedly included all the Pentateuch, and possibly is used here generically for all of the Scriptures which had been received by this time."

- Henry Morris

2. What else do you learn about Ezra in:

- Ezra 7:6
- Ezra 7:8,9
- Ezra 7:10
- Ezra 7:25

3. Who listened to the Ezra's reading? (Record the phrases that describe the people.) 8:2,3

FYI: "Neither rebuilding the wall nor resettling Jerusalem could guarantee the religious rebirth of the people of God after the exile. The exile had been a punishment for their lack of respect for God's law (1:6-10), and now the people had to demonstrate their obedience to this law if they were to enjoy divine blessing and a new quality of life."

- Africa Bible Commentary (553)

4. How did people honor the reading of the law? 8:3b-5

FYI: "Apparently the congregation stood on their feet from morning until noon, for seven days, as the Scriptures were read and expounded (compare Nehemiah 8:3,7,8,18). This is an amazing testimony of reverence toward God's Word, seldom, if ever, repeated since."

- Henry Morris

5. What did Ezra do before reading the Law? 8:6a (See 1 Chronicles 29:20)

- How did the people respond? 8:6

6. What measures were taken to facilitate the reading? 8:7,8
(What were they explaining?)

FYI: "making it clear, read distinctly/translated" Strong's OT:6567
P'arash; to separate, literally (to disperse) or figuratively (to specify)

"The basic meaning of the word is 'to make distinct or separate' which could denote either that the reading was well articulated or that the law was read and expounded section by section ...probably both were truth..."

- Derek Kidner (106)

Digging Deeper

See instructions about handling God's Word.

Deuteronomy 4:2; 6:6-9;
Proverbs 4:20-22

See Paul's instructions to Timothy. 2 Tim. 4:1-4

FYI: "The remark that the people remained in their place (8:7) may imply that the thirteen instructors (8:7) ...were free to move around amongst them, explaining and expounding."

- Derek Kidner (106)

"These people were Jews by birth but not by tongue or culture. These Jews, who had come from Babylon to Jerusalem, had brought with them a Chaldean mentality and life-style. The words read to them were from the Hebrew Bible. They heard a Hebrew Bible through Babylonian ears. There was a communication breakdown. And so these trained scribes took the Hebrew text and made it meaningful to the ears of these listeners...They gave the sense...They gave their audience an in-depth meaning of the words and passages so that understanding would result."

- Charles Swindoll (144)

7. What other examples about understanding scripture are given in the following?

- Luke 24:27
- Acts 8:30-35
- Acts 17:2,3

Applying the Word: Who or what are some of your favorite places to turn to for help in understanding scripture?

Day 2

The People Respond and Celebrate. Read Nehemiah 8:9-18

8. What effect did comprehending the law have on the people? 8:9

- Why do you think they reacted this way? (Compare Ezra 9:4-8)

9. From 8:9-11, list the reasons given for why the people were told not to mourn. (See Isaiah 12:1-3)

- What instructions did Nehemiah, Ezra and Levites give the people for celebrating? 8:10a

Food for Thought: "We will never know what it means to truly be comforted until we learn to mourn. When we see the true awfulness of sin and we grieve over it in the depths of our souls, then we are ready to receive the comfort, strength, and joy of forgiveness...Joy comes from the amazing fact that God has found a solution to the problem of sin...The Word of God does not bring condemnation; it brings a message of hope, restoration, and forgiveness."
- Ray Stedman (135)

"the joy of the Lord is your strength – even when you are being convicted of sin. When we are convicted of sin we know that God is doing a work in us, so we can be glad and take joy. Our knowledge of our sin should never be bigger than our knowledge of Jesus as our Savior. We are great sinners, but He is a greater Savior."
- David Guzik

"The reading of the law had caused weeping, as the people realized their failures. Nevertheless, God had preserved them, as He had promised, and this new beginning was a time for thankful rejoicing. This particular phrase, "the joy of the LORD," occurs elsewhere only in Matthew 25:21,23, where the Lord rewards His faithful servants with the invitation to "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."
- Henry Morris

Strength Strong's OT:4581 *ma'ow*; a fortified place; figuratively, a defense: KJV - force, fort (-ress), rock...strong (hold)

10. How did the people respond and why? 8:12 (See Psalm 119:24,35)

The Feast of Booths/Tabernacles

11. What groups gathered together and for what reason? 8:13 What impression does this give you of the access they had to scripture during captivity?

- What special observance did they find? 8:13,14 What does this indicate about their knowledge of the law? (See Leviticus 23:33-44 and the chart on Jewish Feasts at the back of homework.)

FYI: Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles). The third of the great annual feasts, the other two being the Passover and Pentecost. **Names.** (1) The festival of Tents..."Feast of Booths"...(2) The feast of Ingathering...because it was held after the ingathering of the harvest and fruits. (3) The festival of Jehovah ("feast of the Lord"), or simply 'the festival'."
- The New Unger's Bible Dictionary

"References to the Feast of Tabernacles include Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:33-36,39-43; Numbers 29:12-32; Deut. 16:13-16; Ezra 3:4; and Zechariah 14:16,18-19. This festival was observed on the 15th day of the seventh month to commemorate the wandering of Israel in the wilderness. Features of the celebration included a holy convocation on the first and eighth days, and the offering of many animal sacrifices. The Israelites were also commanded to live in booths made of palm and willow trees during the festival to commemorate their period of wilderness wandering when they lived in temporary shelters."
- Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary

12. Who was invited to participate in the Feast? 8:15a

- What did they make and where? 8:15b,16
- Who participated? 8:17 (What was and wasn't their motivation to observe the feast? 8:14 versus 8:17b)

FYI: "Although the children of Israel had occasionally observed the feasts of the Lord, as commanded in Leviticus 23, the observances had generally been perfunctory and often ignored altogether. The Feast of Tabernacles had actually been observed by the captives who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 3:4), but it was not like this, with all the people of Israel dwelling in their own hand-made "booths," with great gladness everywhere."
- Henry Morris

13. What did the people do during this feast? 8:18

Applying the Word: *Have you experienced a time when understanding scripture has turned your mourning into joy? Or, when has simple obedience to truth led to unexpected relief/benefits?*

Day 3

The People's Confession/The Levites' Prayer. Read Nehemiah 9:1-15

14. What did a growing understanding of the law cause the people to do? 9:1,2 How did the people show their humility before God?

- Why do you think the people separated themselves from foreigners as they confessed their sins?

Digging Deeper

Even when God was working through Israel, how had He provided for non-Jewish believers? Exodus 12:48

What was always His hope for all mankind. Genesis 28:14; John 3:16-17

FYI: "'How often the discovery of something new in the loveliness of the Lord Jesus has brought with it the discovery of some new corruption in our own hearts...' (Redpath) This great, humble gathering of God's people took place only two days after the end of the joyful celebration of the feast of tabernacles. They had drawn close to God, and now He is drawing them even closer!"
- David Guzik

"This prayer was led by and on behalf of God's people...They kept this matter strictly within the family of Israel. They did not involve foreigners. They did not blame others for their plight. They looked to themselves, and they confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors."
- Ray Stedman (145)

15. What did the people do and for how long? 9:3

- What did the two groups of Levites do? 9:4,5

Praise to God the Creator

16. In beginning their prayer, what was acknowledged about God? 9:5.6 How does comprehending God as *Creator of all* influence our prayers?

17. What title did they ascribe to God? 9:7a (Why would this be so important considering their history? Jeremiah 1:16; 16:11)

FYI: You are the LORD God "The word order of the Hebrew text is striking: 'You are He, Yahweh (the) God.' The use of the definite article marks Him as 'the true God.'" - The Nelson Study Bible (800)

FYI: thou hast made heaven. This is one of the great affirmations of faith in Scripture, recognizing publicly that the God of Israel was, first of all, the Creator of the entire cosmos and everything in it, a concept utterly foreign to the pagan religions of other nations.

thou preservest them. "Not only is God the Creator of all things, but also their Sustainer (compare Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3). This principle of universal conservation of the created universe is recognized scientifically in the most basic of all scientific laws, the Law of Conservation of Mass and Energy." - Henry Morris

"It was important for the people to begin with this foundational understanding, for they had already been yielding to the temptation to embrace the beliefs of the world, which included a vast pantheon of make-believe gods. The Levites also were leading the people through a chronological remembrance of who God is and what He had done for them, so it was appropriate for them to begin before the world was even created, when God alone existed... The Jews were reminding themselves that the world's teachings were utterly false concerning the origins of man." - John MacArthur (125)

18. Underline what the following conclude about God.

- Isa 45:18 For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, But formed it to be inhabited), "I am the LORD, and there is none else. NAS
- Jeremiah 32:17 "Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You, NAS
- Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. NIV

Praise for Dealings with Abraham

19. List the actions that Ezra recalled about God and Abraham. (Note "You...")

9:7	
9:8	

- What conclusion did Ezra make about the Lord? 9:8b

Praise for Deliverance from Egypt

20. Summarize the actions recalled about the Lord's dealings with Israel in the wilderness.

9:9	
9:10	
9:11	(See Exodus 14)
9:12	
9:13,14	
9:15	(See Exodus 16:14,15; 17:6)

Food for Thought: "Here we see God's providential care for His own. He taught the Israelites how to live holy lives even though surrounded by great wickedness...how to live in the midst of these pagan people without adopting their soul-destroying immorality and false religions...God also supplied the needs of the Israelites. He gave them bread to eat...He gave them water from a rock in the barren midst of the desert. He met their physical and spiritual needs...The new Testament tells us that God's provision for the Israelites in the wilderness is a picture of Christ. Jesus is the Bread of Life and the source of Living Water. As they learned the meaning of these symbols, they realized that they pointed to the One who was to come, the Anointed One who would meet every need of the human heart - Jesus the Messiah."
- Ray Stedman (149,150)

"In reciting the history of Israel all the way from the call of Abraham to the return of the exiles from captivity, representing a period of at least sixteen centuries, Nehemiah was confirming the historicity of these events."
- Henry Morris

Applying the Word: "When is the last time you looked back over your life and counted up the ways God has demonstrated His providential love for you? Have you thanked God for the victories He has achieved in your life? Have you thanked Him for the...blessings you didn't deserve? For the consequences and punishment you should have received that God spared you from?"
- Ray Stedman (153)
This week, start each day thanking God for three blessings you see in your life. (Try thinking of some you have overlooked or haven't thought of in a while.)

Day 4

Man's Sin and God's Gracious Response. Read Nehemiah 9:16-25

21. List the attitudes and actions the people had to God's goodness. 9:16,17a, (See Exodus 16:3;17:3; Numbers 14:1-5)

22. Why didn't God forsake them? 9:17b (*Note the contrasting words such as "but/yet/however/nevertheless" throughout this prayer.*)

23. How far did their rebellion take them? 9:18 (See Exodus 32:1-6)

24. List the blessings that God gave in spite of their rebellious spirit.

9:19	
9:20	
9:21	
9:22	
9:23	(See Exodus 1:7)
9:24	
9:25	

25. What characteristics of God are repeated in these verses?
9:19,25

- How is God's mercy and compassion described in Lamentations 3:22,23?

Digging Deeper

How vast are the blessings we have in Christ?
Ephesians 1:3-7

Why did God give us these?
Eph. 1:6,7; 2:4

26. Read through the following verses about the Lord being “forgiving/ready to pardon” (9:17). Underline the qualities, reasons or extent of God’s forgiveness that impress you.
- Exodus 34:6-7 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. NIV
 - Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. NAS
 - Psalm 86:5 You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. NIV
 - Psalm 103:10-12 He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. NIV
 - Psalm 130:7-8 O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. 8 He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. NIV
 - Psalm 145:8-9 The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. NIV
 - 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. NIV
 - John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! NIV
 - Romans 5:6-10 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly....8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. NAS

Applying the Word: *Is there anything in your life that you feel the Lord is not ready to forgive you for? What do the above verses say to you?*