

Twenty Lessons from Nehemiah 8

Text:

(Nehemiah 8 NASB) "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. {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. {3} And 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. {4} And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam on his left hand. {5} And 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. {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. {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. {8} And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. {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. {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." {11} So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." {12} And 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. {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. {14} And 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. {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." {16} So the people went out and brought *them* and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate, and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. {17} And the entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing. {18} And he read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day *there was* a solemn assembly according to the ordinance."

I. The Context:

A. There was unity "gathered as one man"

B. They desired to hear.

C. There was unity of purpose "they asked Ezra the priest to bring the book of the law ... which the Lord had Given."

II. Lessons to be learned from the text information.

A. (1) Need the text (8:1-2)

1. Before they could hear the truth "law" they had to have the text.

a) Many today use everything but the text.

b) Recently a man complained that members of the church of Christ were guilty of substituting traditions in place of the text and then claiming to be "bible believers" – perhaps to our chagrin he is closer to the truth than we want to acknowledge.

c) We often, in our attempt to be "right" ... meaning to "confirm what we believe to be correct," are willing

to ignore the most fundamental rules of exegesis. The first rule must be “consider the text”

d) These people realized that they first needed the text of the law.

B. (2) The Text needed was INSPIRED (8:1)

1. “Which the LORD had given”
2. Uninspired text is exactly that “uninspired”

C. (3) Presentation was for ALL who could listen with understanding (8:2)

1. Men
2. Women
3. ALL
 - a) It applied to all who could “listen with understanding”
 - b) It is the Nature of God’s law

D. (4) Must read (8:3) “and he read from it”

1. Mere possession isn’t sufficient.
2. It had been in possession for hundreds of years without affording much benefit (at least to that generation)
3. The Bible is the most sold book in the entire world.
 - a) It would perpetually be #1 on the Best Seller list (if given It’s proper recognition).
 - b) Mere possession isn’t necessarily indicative of reading and or understanding.
4. Often, in the endeavor to study, the Scriptures are the last thing to be consulted on a subject.

a) Will often consult commentaries, experts, and intellectual preachers for their opinion – yet neglect reading the text.

E. (5) Time involved (8:3) “from early morning until midday.

1. Most likely means “from the breaking of the day” until noon or till 3 PM.
2. Either way, it would be considered “too long” by today’s standard.
3. Don’t miss the point – their desire to hear was great!
4. Time does not mean much to those who are truly interested ... in any thing.
5. When I hear speculative comments about the length of attention spans, etc., I am not duly impressed. No golfer limits his game to 30 minutes... hunter, recreational reader, etc., etc.

F. (6) Ability needed (to both listen and understand) (8:2-3)

1. Almost all have the mental ability ... but not all cultivate the ability to “hear with understanding” ... as described in the text “all the people were attentive to the book of the law”
2. In other words “they paid attention to the text”!
3. Note: the law was read for those who had the ability, and thus the responsibilities of the law.

G. (7) Preparation was made specifically for the occasion (8:4) “Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for that purpose.”

1. Demonstrates “looking ahead to the need”
2. It is needful for the preacher to look ahead to the need (preparation of needful material)
3. It is needful for the audience to look ahead in preparation – prepared to be attentive listeners... rest,

mental preparation, even material preparation Bible, note paper, pen, list, etc.

a) Specific for purpose.

b) We have prepared a place specific for the purpose of worship.

H. (8) Preacher was surrounded by supporters (8:4) on both sides – right hand and on the left.

1. While one must be faithful to his charge even if no one at all stands with him, it is always easier when even a few will “surround” and support the who preach and teach the truth.

a) Cf. (2 Timothy 4:16 NASB)

b) E.g. Moses – Exodus 17:11-12

I. (9) Law “opened in the sight of all the people” (8:5)

1. Source openly revealed.

2. Nothing to hide from them.

3. Truth has nothing to fear from being exposed.

J. (10) Preacher blessed the giver “blessed the LORD the great God” (8:6) and the people showed reverence and worshipped.

1. The giver is always preeminent.

a) Cf. (2 Corinthians 4:7 NASB)

b) (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NASB)

c) Ezra was thankful to be able to present the word.

d) “And ALL the people answered ‘amen’ ‘amen’” (8:6)

(1) Note – when the book was opened, the people stood up to show respect.

(2) When the Lord was “blessed” the people “lifted up their hands and then bowed and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground”

(a) All signs of deep reverence and respect.

K. (11) Law was exegeted, explained ... i.e. expounded, verbal commentary, more detailed explanation (8:7-8)

1. “Explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place”

a) Did not distract by milling around.

2. “Translated giving the sense so that they understood the reading.”

a) Broke it down, so they could all understand.

b) How can they hear without a preacher? Romans 10.

L. (12) People were patient in listening (8:7).

1. Were hearing what they NEEDED to hear.

2. Desired to hear.

3. Stood in their place and waited patiently.

M. (13) It was a “holy time” (8:9)

1. This is a holy day to the Lord your God”

2. It would be wise to note that when the word of God is being read and expounded upon, it is a holy time.

a) No, the preacher is not holy – but the Word he expounds upon is, and the time it takes to do so is as well!

b) There are those who “discount” the preaching of the word, but Nehemiah said it was a holy time.

N. (14) It was a time for rejoicing (8:9-11)

1. They were “weeping”
2. However, told not to weep, but to rejoice.

a) Note for those at Westside Pittsburgh: One preacher thought this was an error on the part of the teachers – thinking they should have been mourning. However, the preachers were correct – they were supposed to be rejoicing.

(1) They were to “celebrate” and “rejoice” during the feast of the tabernacle (Leviticus 23:33-40 [39-40])

(a) Cf. More details about the feast in Numbers 29:12-40.

(b) Deuteronomy 16:13-16 (verse 14 “...you shall rejoice in your feast”)

(2) This was the first day of the 7th month.

*(3) Nehemiah 8 – 24th day of 7th month – 9 days late
(?)*

3. Application for today: It is time to rejoice when one hears truth – any of the truth at any time!

O. (15) Can't obey with faith until understanding comes (8:12)

1. They went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, BECAUSE they understood the words which had been made know to them.

P. (16) Insight needed (8:13)

1. “That they might gain insight into the words of the law.”
2. What did they find?

a) (Nehemiah 8:14 NASB)

Q. (17) Willingness to obey (8:15-17)

1. (Nehemiah 8:15-17 NASB)

R. (18) All submitted to authority (8:16-17)

1. “So the people went out ...”
2. “And the entire assembly ... made booths and lived in them.”

S. (19) Their obedience brought great rejoicing (8:17).

1. “And there was great rejoicing”
2. cf. Obedience of the Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8:39
“went on his way rejoicing”
3. Paul’s encouragement to the -- Thessalonians –
“rejoice evermore” – 1 Thessalonians 5:17

T. (20) Their continued obedience was contingent upon a daily effort (8:18)

1. “And he read from the book of the law of God daily.”
2. This was during the feast time – but did it daily from the first through the last.
3. It is good and will assist us in being consistent in our obedience when we put in a daily effort!

III. Conclusion:

A. Here are 20 quick lessons that we can learn from Nehemiah chapter 8.

B. Let us go forth and be strengthened and encouraged that we can use these lessons to our benefit!