



World Christian Fellowship

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Nehemiah

Session 9

Essential of Scripture for a man of God!

Introduction

In Nehemiah 8:1-12, we see a powerful example of how God's people can come together to read and apply His Word. The passage describes the return of the Israelites from exile and their desire to understand and obey God's law.

1. The Importance of Reading Scripture.

After the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt, the people gathered at the Water Gate and asked Ezra the scribe to read the Book of the Law of Moses. Ezra read it aloud from morning until midday to all who could understand, and the people listened attentively.

Nehemiah 8:1-4, *Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel.² So Ezra the*

priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ³Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Ezra, a priest and scribe, stood on a wooden platform to read the law of God to the people. This act of reading Scripture was not just a formality, but a call to action for the people to understand and obey God's commands.

Unity of the People (v.1)

- *“All the people gathered as one man”*
This shows a remarkable unity and hunger for God’s Word. After years of exile and hardship, the people were spiritually ready to listen and obey.
- It reflects a communal desire for renewal and covenant restoration.

Initiative from the People (v.1)

- The people themselves asked Ezra to bring the Law. This wasn't a top-down command, but it was a grassroots spiritual awakening.
- It suggests the Spirit of God was already stirring hearts toward repentance and obedience.

The Role of Ezra (v.2)

- Ezra is both a priest and a scribe qualified to teach and interpret the Law.
- He brings the Law before *“men and women and all who could understand”*
Indicating inclusivity and the importance of understanding, not just ritual.

Timing and Setting (v.2)

- This event occurs on the first day of the seventh month (**Tishri**), which aligns with the Feast of Trumpets (**Rosh Hashanah**) a time of spiritual reflection and renewal.
- The location, the Water Gate, was likely chosen for its space and accessibility, not its religious significance, emphasizing the openness of the event.

Attentiveness and Reverence (v.3)

- Ezra read from morning until midday!
About six hours and the people listened attentively the entire time.

- This shows deep reverence for God's Word and a willingness to be shaped by it.

Theological Significance

- **Revival through the Word:**

This passage illustrates that true revival begins with a return to Scripture.

Not by worship or holding prayer meeting for revival.

- **Accessibility of Scripture:**

The Law was read aloud and explained so that all could understand. Foreshadowing the importance of teaching and preaching in later Jewish and Christian traditions.

- **Covenant Renewal:**

This moment sets the stage for a renewed covenant relationship between God and His people, rooted in obedience to His Word.

Reading Scripture is essential for spiritual growth:

Just as the Israelites needed to understand God's law, we too need to read and study Scripture to grow in our faith and knowledge of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

This is evident in the life of the apostle Paul, who wrote extensively about his spiritual growth and maturity in Christ.

Reading Scripture can be a powerful catalyst for spiritual renewal:

The Israelites' response to Ezra's reading of the law was a call to repentance and a renewed commitment to following God.

Psalm 119:18, *"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."*

This is also seen in the life of David, who wrote many psalms that express his desire for spiritual renewal and growth. **Psalm 51 and 119.**

2. The Importance of Applying Scripture:

Nehemiah 8:5-6, *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. ⁶And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen,*

Amen!” while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

The people's response to Ezra's reading of the law was that they wept and mourned because they realized how far they had strayed from God's commands. This response was not just emotional, but a call to action to make things right with God.

Ezra opens the scroll in full view of the assembly. As he does, the people stand in reverence. He blesses the Lord, and the people respond with lifted hands, saying “Amen, Amen,” then bow and worship with their faces to the ground.

Public Reverence for Scripture (v.5)

- *“Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people”*

This act was symbolic and intentional. It emphasized transparency, authority, and the centrality of God's Word.

- The people *stood up*
A physical expression of honour and readiness to receive divine instruction.

Ezra's Elevated Position (v.5)

- He stood on a wooden platform above the people, not to elevate himself, but to ensure the Word was seen and heard clearly.

- This foreshadows the pulpit in later worship traditions, where Scripture is read and explained from a place of visibility and clarity.

Blessing the Lord (v.6)

- Ezra *“blessed the Lord, the great God”*
Acknowledging God’s supremacy before reading His Word.
This sets the tone: **Scripture is not just information, but divine revelation.**
- It models how worship and Word go hand in hand.

2. Corporate Response (v.6)

- The people respond with *“Amen, Amen”*
A Hebrew affirmation meaning *“so be it.”*
This shows their agreement and submission to what is being read.
- *Lifting hands*
Symbolizes surrender and appeal to God.
bowing heads and worshipping
Reflects humility and awe.

Theological Significance

- **Scripture as Sacred Encounter:**
The people’s physical responses such as standing, lifting hands, bowing show that hearing God’s Word is a sacred act of worship.
- **Unity in Worship:**

This moment wasn't private devotion but a communal, visible act of reverence, reinforcing the idea that God's Word shapes the identity of His people.

- **Preparation of Heart:**

Before understanding comes submission. The people's posture shows they were spiritually prepared to receive and obey.

Applying Scripture requires a willingness to change:

Just as the Israelites needed to change their behaviour to align with God's law, we too need to be willing to make changes in our lives to follow God's commands.

Acts 9:1-31, the apostle Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus led him to change his life and follow God's commands.

Acts 16:1-40, the apostle Paul and Silas were forced to change their plans and follow God's leading, which ultimately led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

Applying Scripture can lead to spiritual transformation:

The Israelites' response to Ezra's reading of the law led to a renewed commitment to following God, and we too can

experience spiritual transformation when we apply Scripture to our lives.

Romans 12:1-2, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

This is seen in the life of the apostle Peter, who was transformed from a sceptic to a leader in the early church.

3. People God uses to understand the Scriptures.

Nehemiah 8:7-8, *Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.⁸ So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.*

The Levites named individually helped the people understand the Law while Ezra read.

They read from the Book of the Law of God, clearly and with interpretation, so the people could grasp the meaning.

The Role of the Levites (v.7)

- Thirteen Levites are listed, showing this was a coordinated teaching effort.
- Their task was to *“make the people understand the Law”*
Not just read it but explain it.
- This reflects a shift from mere ritual to meaningful engagement with Scripture.

Teaching in Context (v.8)

- *“They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly”*
The Hebrew suggests they translated or explained it in a way that was understandable.
- This may have involved translating from Hebrew into Aramaic (the common language at the time) or simply breaking down complex passages.

Clarity and Comprehension (v.8)

- The phrase *“they gave the sense”* means they interpreted the meaning, not just the words.
- This is one of the earliest biblical examples of expository teaching—explaining Scripture in context so it can be applied.

Spiritual Accessibility

- The goal was that *“the people understood the reading.”*
This shows that Scripture is meant to be understood, not mystified.
- It affirms the importance of faithful teachers who can bridge the gap between ancient text and present understanding.

Theological Significance

- **Biblical Literacy:**

This passage underscores that revival is sustained not just by hearing Scripture, but by understanding it.

- **Model for Preaching and Teaching:**

The Levites’ role mirrors that of pastors and teachers today making God’s Word clear and applicable.

- **Empowered Laity:**

The people weren’t passive listeners. They were active learners, equipped to respond because they understood.

Nehemiah 8 and Luke 24 both centre on the transformative power of Scripture, but they unfold in very different contexts.

Let’s compare them side by side to highlight their theological and narrative parallels:

Theme	Nehemiah 8:1–8	Luke 24 (13–35, 44–47)
Setting	Post-exilic Jerusalem, at the Water Gate	Post-resurrection, on the road to Emmaus and later in Jerusalem
Audience	Returned exiles—men, women, and all who could understand	Disciples—confused, grieving, and struggling to understand recent events
Scripture Reading	Ezra reads the Law of Moses aloud	Jesus explains the Scriptures concerning Himself
Explanation of the Word	Levites give the sense, helping people understand	Jesus opens the disciples' minds to understand the Scriptures
Emotional Response	Reverence, worship, and eventually weeping (v.9)	Burning hearts (v.32), joy, and awe
Spiritual Outcome	Covenant renewal and national revival	Faith renewal and commissioning for global mission
Medium of Revelation	Written Law, read and interpreted	Living Word (Jesus), revealing Himself through Scripture and breaking of

- **Clarity and Comprehension:**

Both passages emphasize that Scripture must be understood, not just heard. In Nehemiah, the Levites “gave the sense”. In Luke, Jesus “opened their minds.”

- **Revival and Revelation:**

Nehemiah 8 sparks a national revival through the Law. Luke 24 reveals the risen Christ through the Law, Prophets, and Psalms showing that all Scripture points to Him.

- **From Mourning to Mission:**

In both cases, the people begin in sorrow or confusion and end in joy and purpose. Understanding God’s Word transforms their outlook and direction.

4. Conviction and Joy comes through Scriptures.

Nehemiah 8:9-12, *And Nehemiah, who was the governor, 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 nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.*

¹⁰*Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”*

¹¹So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.” ¹²And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

After hearing the Law, the people begin to weep, overwhelmed by their guilt and failure.

But Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites urge them not to mourn because this day is holy.

Instead, they are encouraged to rejoice, share food, and celebrate, for “the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Conviction of Sin (v.9)

- *“All the people wept when they heard the words of the Law”*
Their sorrow reveals a tender conscience. The Law exposed their disobedience, and they responded with genuine repentance.
- This is a sign of spiritual sensitivity a necessary step in revival.

Pastoral Encouragement (v.9–10)

- Nehemiah (the governor), Ezra (the priest), and the Levites step in to comfort the people.
- *“Do not mourn or weep... this day is holy”*

Holiness here is linked not to sorrow, but to celebration. It's a sacred day of restoration, not condemnation.

The Joy of the Lord (v.10)

- *"The joy of the Lord is your strength"*
This iconic phrase teaches that spiritual strength flows from rejoicing in God's grace, not wallowing in guilt.
- Joy is not superficial happiness, but it's rooted in God's covenant faithfulness.

Practical Compassion (v.10)

- The people are told to *"send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared"*
A call to generosity and shared celebration.
- True joy overflows into acts of kindness and inclusion.

Obedient Response (v.12)

- The people go their way rejoicing, *"because they had understood the words that were declared to them."*
- Understanding leads to transformation. Their joy is not blind—it's informed by truth.

Theological Significance

- **From Guilt to Grace:**

God's Word convicts, but it also restores. This passage shows the balance between repentance and rejoicing.

- **Joy as Strength:**

In a world that often equates strength with stoicism or power, joy in God is what sustains His people.

- **Community and Celebration:**

Holiness isn't just solemnity it includes feasting, fellowship, and shared joy in God's goodness.

Conclusion:

We are reminded of the importance of Scripture in our lives.

We have seen how God's people can come together to read and apply His Word, and how it can lead to spiritual growth and transformation.

We are challenged to take Scripture seriously, to read it regularly, and to apply its principles to our lives.

We are reminded that Scripture is not just a collection of dusty old books, but a living and active force that can transform our lives and communities.

Spiritual growth and transformation are not just individual pursuits, but community endeavours.

Let us seek to support and encourage one another in our spiritual journeys, and let us come together to read, study, and apply Scripture in our lives.

A Blueprint for Revival

Scripture at the Centre

The chapter begins with the people's hunger for God's Word. They gather willingly, listen attentively, and respond reverently showing that true revival starts when Scripture is central.

Understanding Leads to Transformation

The Levites don't just read the Law—they explain it. This emphasis on clarity and comprehension highlights that transformation comes not just from hearing, but from understanding.

Conviction Balanced by Joy

The people weep under conviction, but they are reminded that God's holiness also invites celebration. "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*" becomes the heartbeat of their renewal.

Community in Worship

Men, women, and children participate. The event is public, inclusive, and communal demonstrating that spiritual renewal is not private but shared.

Obedience with Joy

The people leave rejoicing *“because they had understood the words”* a beautiful picture of informed obedience. Joy flows from truth received and embraced.

When God’s Word is read clearly, explained faithfully, and received humbly, it leads to conviction, comfort, and contagious joy.

It’s not just a historical moment but a living invitation to let Scripture shape our hearts and communities today.

Practical Application

Here are a few practical steps we can take:

1. Make time to read and study Scripture:

Just as the Israelites made time to hear Ezra read the law, we too need to prioritize time to read and study Scripture.

2. Be willing to change:

When we read Scripture, we may be confronted with areas where we need to change. We need to be willing to make those changes and follow God's commands.

For example, in **Jonah 1:1-17**, Jonah's initial reluctance to obey God's command to preach to the people of Nineveh ultimately led to their repentance and salvation.

Similarly, in **2 Corinthians 12:1-10**, the apostle Paul's willingness to change his plans and follow God's leading led to spiritual growth and maturity.

3. Seek community:

The Israelites came together to hear Ezra read the law, and we too can benefit from reading Scripture with others and seeking community in our spiritual journeys.

In **Hebrews 10:24-25**, the writer encourages us to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

This is seen in the early church, where believers came together regularly to worship, fellowship, and encourage one another (**Acts 2:42-47, Acts 20:7-12**).