

## Broken and Restored

### *An Exposition of Nehemiah*

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**8** 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.<sup>a</sup> <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>b</sup> <sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>c</sup> <sup>5</sup> Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above

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<sup>a</sup> 8:1 **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.** The words “gathered as one man” pictured the unity that had been necessary to complete such a major construction project. That necessity would continue in the ongoing reformation in Jerusalem.

The richer unity the people had showed up in the way they revered the word of God. The law of Moses contained the words of the covenant between God and His holy nation. Even though the people knew the law, it was necessary to review it regularly. Our memories fail us so quickly.

The “square” was the broad, open place used for public gatherings in the middle of a city (Genesis 19:2; Deuteronomy 13:16; Judges 19:15). Here was the logical place for a worship service.

The “book” was the scroll of the law of Moses. Moses had commanded that this scroll be kept next to the Ark of the Covenant.

It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete,<sup>25</sup> that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying,<sup>26</sup> “Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.”<sup>27</sup> For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more, then, after my death?<sup>28</sup> Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them.” Deuteronomy 31:24-28

<sup>b</sup> 8:2-3 **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. 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.** Men, women and children listened for many hours as Ezra read the Scriptures. There would not have been time enough to read all five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) that morning, but six hours would have been sufficient to hear both a reading and a simple exposition of Deuteronomy.

Nehemiah made sure he noted the way the people listened. All the people were “attentive.”

<sup>c</sup> 8:4 **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.** The reading of the Holy Scriptures is an exercise to be taken seriously by the people of God. Ezra’s pulpit (or platform) was simply an object made out of wood, but it represented the reverence for God’s word that is necessary in the public gatherings

all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup> 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<sup>a</sup>. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> 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<sup>c</sup>. <sup>10</sup> 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

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of God’s people. It represented what ought to be the center attraction at gatherings of believers: God’s word.

<sup>a</sup> 8:5-6 **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. 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.** To say, “Amen” is to say, “This is true” or “I agree.” To repeat the word is to give emphasis to your agreement.

We may want to dismiss the dramatic physical postures described here, but we should not quickly ignore the reason the people assumed those postures. These people genuinely believed they were hearing from God Himself when the Scriptures were read. Do you?

<sup>b</sup> 8:7-8 **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. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.** The word of God is powerful, but hearing it is not enough. That is why the expository preaching model here is so important for us. These leaders combined the reading of Scripture with the explanation and application of the truth of the Scripture. The Lord Jesus clearly spelled out the difference between those who merely hear God’s word and those who put it into practice:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.  
Matthew 7:24-27

<sup>c</sup> 8:9 **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.** This what happens when people listen to the Scriptures and take it so personally that they believe God is speaking. Paul and Peter both wanted believers to view the Scriptures that way:

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not as the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Whoever speaks, *is to do* so as one who is speaking the utterances of God. 1 Peter 4:11

The rejoicing that came out of this event began with repentance. To rejoice in the Lord is to see how sinful you are and then to flee to the only refuge for your sin.

strength<sup>a</sup>.”<sup>11</sup> So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.”<sup>12</sup> 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<sup>b, c</sup>.

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<sup>a</sup> 8:10 **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.”** There is a time to celebrate. Having heard from God and having been used by God, the people threw a party. This party included food, drink, benevolence, joy and the recognition that this was a special day set apart for a glorious purpose.

<sup>b</sup> 8:11-12 **So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.” 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.** It appears here that, like our holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas, the people celebrated this holy day in their homes.

<sup>c</sup> 8:1-12 The worship gathering you see here was not an attraction with passive attendees. It was a worship gathering with active participants who came prepared to hear from God. The primary factor in distinguishing attendees from participants is a matter of the heart. Attendees say, “Impress me, O God.” Participants say, “Speak to me, O God.”

Here are ways you can move toward this kind of reverence for God’s word:

1. You go out of your way to gather and hear it. It is often inconvenient to be a Christian.
2. You take pains to make it the center of attention. Note the construction.
3. You view Scripture reading as God’s voice speaking. That is why the Bible is called the word of God.
4. You look for the best ways to apply it to your life. The people saw the applications and trembled.
5. You seek joy in the correction you receive. There is even joy in the pain because you know God is doing His perfect work.