

FIVE HOURS FOR PREACHING

Nehemiah 8

"This morning's message will be five hours long."

A preacher's dream (and a parishioner's nightmare!)

I once told Helen this message would be five hours long.

She warned me I'd be preaching to empty pews.

She probably wouldn't be there either!

How many of us would sit still for that!

Warning of famine of the Word of God – Amos 8:11-12

"The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD, "when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.¹² Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.

People would search for God's Word, and not find it.

Do we face that problem?

It was real for God's people during the exile.

It's still real in many parts of the world.

What about where Bibles are plentiful

and God's Word proclaimed faithfully?

In our lifetime, a new disease has developed. Some young people don't eat enough to meet their needs. Their mothers provide tasty, nourishing meals. The problem is with the youth themselves. They *choose* not to eat—though food's available in abundance. ➤

spiritual anorexia.

How do we respond to opportunity to read or hear God's Word?

We have abundance. Are we grateful? Are we responsive?

**SPIRITUAL RENEWAL MOTIVATED BY READING
GOD'S LAW 8-13**

Once physical issues are dealt with, more important internal, spiritual issues become focus of Nehemiah's attention.

Physical reconstruction was completed in 52 days.

Spiritual reconstruction lasted 20 years

–and still wasn't complete!

Ezra's concerned about more than rebuilding walls.

Condition of hearts is of greater importance.

RECONFIRMATION OF COVENANT 8-10

People need to renew their commitment to the covenant

–reconfirm submission to God who gave them the covenant.

Priority established conforms to Deuteronomy:

First, basic issue of trust and submission to God 8-10

Later, specific stipulations are presented. 11-13

READING OF THE LAW 8

Starting point for renewal of God's people: God's Word.

People gather to listen to God's Word during 7th month–

contains 3 feasts: Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Tabernacles.

INSTRUCTION FROM THE LAW 8:1-8

On 1st day, an assembly unites–Feast of Trumpets

Introduced in Lev. 23:24, 25; Num. 29:1-6

It's to be day of holy convocation. People are to unite to praise

God together. It's a holy day–for praising Him.

8:1a *All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate.–They're unified.*

They ask him to bring the Law. It's *their* idea, *NOT* his.

8:1b *They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.*

THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S WORD

After 14 years of fruitless efforts to motivate them to follow God. They've watched Ezra's example of faithfulness and obedience. It finally pays off—after 14 long years of waiting and praying.

1) IT BEGINS WITH PRAYER/WORSHIP 8:6

Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

His prayer awakens their anticipation:

God's going to do something!

9:5-6 *"the Levites ... said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting." "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you."*

Where'd they learn to pray this way?

2) GOD'S WORD IS READ 8:3

For 5 hours!! His purpose: to teach God's people His Word.

They're attentive. **8:2-3** *So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. 3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.*

They probably only have one copy—they have to listen to it.

Ezra's committed to understanding God's will, to obeying it, and to teaching others also. **Ezra 7:10** [NAS]

*"[Ezra] set his heart: to study the law of the Lord
to practice it to teach His statutes.*

As scribe, that's his mission: teach God's law to His people. He doesn't ask *them* to do what *he's* unwilling to do.

He's personally committed to *know* and *do* God's will.

His enthusiasm is contagious—it catches on eventually!

Their response isn't based on the greatness of the man, his dynamic message, nor his appealing presentation.

They respond because they're hearing God's voice.

He doesn't harangue nor coax;

he expounds the Word and they respond.

3) GOD'S WORD IS EXPLAINED 8:7-8

*"The Levites ... instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning **so that the people could understand what was being read.**"*

No entertainment No "hot" dynamic presentation

They stand outdoors, in sun, 30,000 people and no P.A.

The people are anxious to know what God has said.

Desire to hear God's voice brings spiritual renewal.

Their attitude toward God's Word moves them to celebrate

CELEBRATION OF JOY 8:9-12

When people understand God's Word, many weep.

8:9-12 *Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or*

*weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.¹⁰ Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for **the joy of the LORD is your strength.**”¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve.”¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and **to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.***

The reading brings conviction

They're sad because of past failures

He urges them to rejoice because of present blessing

They're to be HOLY, not tearful.

Obedience, not tears, is right response to God's Word.

They should rejoice because God is restoring them!

This is a holiday. It's an occasion for rejoicing.

The joy of the Lord is to be their strength, not their sorrow.

Rabbis said, "He who has not seen Jerusalem during the feast of Tabernacles does not know what rejoicing means."

They should rejoice over God's blessing and share blessing.

God gives joy to His people when they desire to follow Him.

Swindoll–Bumper sticker: "God is back and boy is He mad!"

BUT, God never left. *HE* isn't the one who's angry.

Man is in rebellion. God wants us to come back to Him;

He rejoices at our return to Him.

Sorrow over sin is converted into joy of obeying God's Word.

Family and religious leaders assume spiritual responsibility of headship and lead nation in obedience to God's Word.

CONSTRUCTION OF BOOTHS 8:13-17

On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law.¹⁴ They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month¹⁵ and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches ... to make booths”— as it is written.¹⁶ So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim.¹⁷ The whole company that returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

2nd day, leaders gather again to hear God's Word.

They discover it's time to celebrate Tabernacles.

It's a reminder of God's *past* blessing.

–leading them through the wilderness into the promised land.

Opportunity for parents to teach children of God's blessing.

Also promise of *future* provision to look forward to.

Prophetic significance—

God has brought them back to the land. (=Trumpets)

They've been restored to fellowship (= Day of Atonement)

Now they celebrate Tabernacles

(looking for Messiah and His kingdom).

They've not had such joyous, enthusiastic celebration since Joshua's day, after entering land from the wilderness.

CONTINUATION OF READING GOD'S WORD 8:18

Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

People continue to gather daily to listen to the law.

On 8th day they conclude with an assembly.

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE

1) The people ask for God's word– *twice!* (More?)

They're excited! They keep the flame alive.

They come to Ezra in the first place (8:1)

They come back (8:13)-possibly repeatedly for 8 days (8:18)

2) The people stand before God's Word– **reverence 8:5**

Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up.

3) The people respond spontaneously– **from heart 8:6**

Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Answer: "Amen! Amen" Lift hands

Bow low Worship with face to ground

These easily become routine repetitions–that's not it.

Also easily neglected–or frowned upon!

Must be spontaneous expressions–from the heart.

Spontaneous, but appropriate, heartfelt, response.

Standing before God's Word, lifting hands to God,
bowing before Him, lying prostrate before Him
– all are signs of reverence and worship.

Worshipful response to God's work in our life.

4) The people stand still and listen 8:7 *The Levites... instructed the people in the Law while people were standing there.*

You don't get idea people are watching watches impatiently.

God's talking to them and they're listening to His voice!

5) The people weep upon hearing God's Word 8:9

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Test of hearing and understanding God's Word is obedience.

However, it isn't just knowledge and action.

The Word of God touches their emotions also.

They're overcome with godly sorrow. They weep before God.

6) The people obey what God's Word says 8:10-18

They ALL did it–*"the entire company ..."* 8:12, 16, 17

7) People rejoice; they understand God's will 8:12

8) The people keep coming back for more 8:13, 18

WE have lots of Bibles & commentaries to help understand it.
According to a survey of 641 adults by the Barna Research Group,
93% of people in U.S. own a Bible.

Among born-again Christians polled,

- * 18% read the Bible every day

- * 18% read it 3 to 6 days a week, other than in church

- * 37% read it once or twice a week

* 23% never read it.

Christians who read the Bible spend about 22 minutes at each sitting.

Man severely injured in an explosion; his face badly disfigured; he **lost his eyesight and both hands.**

As a new Christian one of his great disappointments: **he could no longer read the Bible.** He heard about a lady who read Braille with her lips. Hoping to do the same he sent for some books of the Bible in braille. He discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed also. One day, as he brought one of the pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters and he could feel them. Like a flash he thought, I can read the Bible with my tongue! At last count, the man had read the Bible four times!

How about us?

How many times have WE read the Bible with our eyes?

Do we thirst its counsel?

Do we reverence it as God's will revealed?

Do we respond in obedience to what we read?

What does God want YOU to do?