

Bring the Book

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
2295 Towne Lake Parkway • Suite 116 #249 • Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

While the first seven chapters of Nehemiah covered the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, the concluding chapters have to do with the reviving of the children of Israel. Nehemiah had accomplished the assignment the Lord had given him. We might say rebuilding the wall was the easy work. The difficult work of building the spiritual lives of the people was only beginning. Buildings and walls can be built in a matter of days or months. But building our spiritual maturity and becoming what God wants us to be is a much longer and challenging process.

Nehemiah 8 begins the reviving of the children of Israel by telling us about a worship service that takes place in a most unusual way and in a most unusual place. The children of Israel gather together in an open area before the Water Gate. This was a most

appropriate place because the Water Gate is a beautiful reminder of the ministry of the Word of God in the life of God's people. Jesus shared in John 15:3, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." Ephesians 5:26 talks about "the washing of water by the Word." The great theme of Nehemiah 8, found in verse 1, also shows us the importance of God's Word in the lives of His children. The people tell Ezra to "bring the book of the law." This request leads to one of the greatest worship services ever recorded in God's Word. Using the outline below, let's look at this worship service and also learn the essentials for a true worship service.

I. The Worshipful Congregation (vv. 1-6)

II. The Faithful Exposition (vv. 1-12)

III. The Joyful Celebration (vv. 13-18)

I. The Worshipful Congregation (vv. 1-6)

Verse 1 begins, "And all the people gathered themselves together, as one man ..." The little phrase, "all the people," occurs 11 times in this chapter. It is a reminder of the importance of God's people gathering together. There is something special that takes place when God's people come together in one place to listen to what God has to say.

The children of Israel's gathering together also reminds us that we should be faithful in our church attendance. Hebrews 10:25 tells us, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." One of the things that happens when we are faithful in our attendance

is we encourage one another. As we approach the soon return of our Lord Jesus, we should desire to be even more faithful in our church attendance. Sadly, it seems like just the opposite is happening in churches throughout our country.

We also read the people "gathered themselves together as one man." The people had



a beautiful unity of spirit. They had come together for the same purpose. It reminds us of the day of Pentecost when the early Christians gathered together. They were “with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). They were all united in spirit.

Notice not only the attendance of the congregation, but the attention of the congregation (v. 3). They gathered together from the morning, which was probably 6:00, until midday or noon. For six solid hours the people listened to the reading and teaching of God’s Word. In addition to that, verse 5 tells us they were standing the whole time. This was done out of reverence and respect for God and His Word.

These people had a hunger for the Word. That is why they told Ezra to “bring the book.” When people have a true hunger for the Word and a desire to know what God has to say, time is not a factor. It doesn’t matter if the church service gets out on time or not. They are more interested in hearing from God than anything else.

We have seen a definite change in our country and in our churches in just the last 50 to 100 years regarding the Bible. People no longer have a reverence for the Word of God. We see this in the way Bibles are treated today. There was a time when no one would ever think of putting another book or anything else on top of a Bible. People had too much respect for God’s Word. This is not to say they worshiped

the Bible. We know God is not confined within leather covers. But it is from the Word of God that we learn about the God of the Word. We also see the difference in our pulpits. There was a time when preachers preached sermons from the Word of God. Their people came to church to learn from the Word. Today

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too few preachers preach the Word. And too many churches are content for their preachers to preach feel-good “sermonettes.”

Notice also the affirmation of the people. In verse 6 it says when Ezra preached, “... all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands ...” There are two Bible words that are always appropriate in a worship service. They are “Amen” and “Hallelujah.” Hallelujah is a word that is translated the same in all languages. It means “praise the Lord.” Amen is a word of affirmation. It means “truly.” In Revelation 3:14 Jesus is called the Amen. He is the true One. When we say “Amen” in a service, we are adding our affirmation or endorsement to what has been preached. We are saying what has been said is true. It is in keeping with the teachings of God’s Word.

The people’s “Amen’s” were saying they believed what was being read to them. They believed and accepted God’s Word. The Bible also says they lifted up their hands (v. 6c). In those days that was a symbol of prayer. Evidently, there were times when the Jews would pray with their hands extended as if to say they were expecting an answer to their prayers. In 1 Timothy 2:8 Paul says, “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands in prayer, without wrath and doubting.”

Today, saying “Amen” or the lifting up of hands can vary from congregation to congregation. What is important to always remember is that worship should be something that comes from the heart. We should never do anything to draw attention to ourselves or to try to impress others so they think we are “spiritual.” The Pharisees of Jesus’ days were known for trying to impress others with their spirituality, but Jesus denounced them as hypocrites (cp. Matt.6:1-7).

The children of Israel were gathered together as one. They asked for God’s Word and willingly listened to it as it was read. That’s the first feature of a genuine worship service.

Reflection Connection

Read Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-29 and discuss why it is so important for preachers to preach the Word of God.



II. The Faithful Exposition (vv. 1-12)

Just because people gather together for a church service does not mean that service will be a worship service. The Word of God must be faithfully taught if there is going to be a genuine worship service. And if there is going to be the faithful exposition of God's Word, several factors come into play. For instance, there has to be someone to teach or preach. At this point in the book, Nehemiah, who has been the main character, steps into the background. The man who steps to the front is Ezra, a scribe and priest. As we have already seen, the people ask him to bring the book of the law (v. 1). That is what he does (v. 2).

The book of Ezra tells us what kind of priest Ezra was. First, he was "a ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6). This tells us he was thoroughly trained. Ezra 7:10 tells us why, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Ezra had not only prepared his mind, but he had also prepared his heart. He gives us a very good definition of what every preacher who stands in a pulpit should strive to be.

We have already seen how Nehemiah was an extremely wise leader. This is just another example. He was wise enough to understand that there were

others who were better at some assignments than he was. Nehemiah was the layman. Ezra was the preacher. Nehemiah led in the building of the wall, but he has Ezra lead in the worship service. Sometimes people who are leaders think that because they are good in one thing, they are then experts in everything. Nehemiah was not like that.

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Notice how Ezra goes about his preaching. According to verse 4 he stands on a pulpit of wood that had been made especially for the occasion. There were two purposes for the pulpit. One was sight. The people could see him. The second purpose was so the people could hear him. He also has 13 other men standing alongside him, six on one side and seven on the other. It is very probable that these men were

also priests and were giving their support to Ezra.

Verse 5 says, "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people ..." Then verse 6 says, "And Ezra blessed the Lord the great God." That is the definition of preaching. It's what every preacher should want to do when he preaches. His desire should be to lift high the name of our Lord, the great God. Years ago in London, England, it is said there were two preachers the people preferred to hear. When people heard the first one preach, they walked away saying, "What a great preacher." When people walked away after hearing the second one, they said "What a wonderful Savior." It is not difficult for us to determine which one truly "blessed the Lord the great God" in his sermons.

Verse 7 names the other Levites who helped the people understand the law. Verse 8 tells us, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." That's a good statement of expository preaching. Exposition is the opening up of the Scriptures so people can understand what is being said. No doubt, the other Levites had prepared themselves like Ezra had so they could help expound and explain the Word of God.



Notice the effect of Ezra's preaching on the people. There was, first of all, conviction. They "worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (v. 6d). The preaching of the Word is meant to convict our hearts if there is sin in our lives. We are living in a day when people want to do away with all guilt. People come up with all kinds of excuses for why they are not responsible for their actions. But many times guilt is a symptom of sin in the heart. If we never feel conviction for our sins and are unwilling to confess our sins, we will never get saved. That's what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about.

The people also wept when they heard the Word of God (v. 9). Their conviction became contrition because of their sins. This is something we seldom see today. People no longer cry over the Word or their sins.

The good news is that after there is contrition and conviction over sin, there is compassion. Nehemiah and Ezra, along with the Levites who assisted in teaching the Word to the people, tell the people not to weep or mourn (v. 9). It was a holy day, and it was a time for celebrating. Instead, Nehemiah tells them to go home and celebrate (v. 10). They were to share with those

who didn't have anything prepared. A giving spirit is normal for people who are right with the Lord. The Levites continued to comfort the people (v. 11), and the people went their way (v. 12). They were ready to celebrate because they had heard and understood the Word of God.

Reflection Connection

Discuss how the "joy of the Lord" (v. 10d) can be our strength when we are in right fellowship with the Lord.

III. The Joyful Celebration (vv. 13-18)

On the next day the people came back to hear the Word of God again (v. 13). As they listened to the Word they discovered they were to observe the Feast of Tabernacles (vv. 14-15). This feast was one of those special days on God's calendar. It taught the people some very important spiritual lessons. First, it was a time to celebrate the past. The people built tents or booths and then lived in them for seven days. Living in the tents was a reminder of how they had lived during their wilderness wanderings. The feast was also a reminder that God had provided for their every need during their 40 years in the wilderness. We also should take time to remember and rejoice in

what God has done for us in the past.

The feast of tabernacles was also a celebration of the present. As they built and then lived in

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their tents, they knew they were obeying the Word of God. The entire seven days became days of celebration. This is a reminder that when we obey the Word, it will bring joy. But when we disobey the Word, it will bring misery.

The children of Israel also celebrated the future. They looked forward to the future blessings of the Lord. We also can celebrate the future as we look forward to "the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

As soon as the people heard what they were supposed to do,



they obeyed (v. 16). They cut down the different tree branches to make their tents. They then lived in their tents for the seven days and were filled with joy (v. 17). They had not celebrated like this since the days of Joshua. The chapter ends by letting us know God's Word continued to be a priority in their lives. Day by day

Ezra read the book of the law of God (v. 18). They concluded the feast with a solemn assembly, as God's Word required.

Reflection Connection

According to 1 Corinthians 11:24-26, what event should Christians always remember?

Wrap Up

The great worship service in Nehemiah 8 began when the children of Israel gathered together and then told Ezra to "bring the book." They understood not only the importance of God's Word but also the need of God's Word in their lives. We need to ask ourselves today if God's Word is a priority in our life and the life of our church. If it is, let's be committed to keeping it that way all the days of our lives and to passing it on to our children and grandchildren. If it is not, let's follow the children of Israel's example and bring "the Book" back into our life and the life of our church.