

## Nehemiah 8:1-18

### Week 8 - The People Worship and Repent

Leader's Note: there is a link to a Bible Project video in the materials today. If you'd like to watch it, be prepared to show this video to your group.

#### The Law Is Read

##### Nehemiah 8:1-12

<sup>1</sup>all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishaël, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. <sup>8</sup>They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear[a] and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. <sup>9</sup>Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy 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. <sup>10</sup>Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." <sup>11</sup>The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve." <sup>12</sup>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.

**?** What are some of the reactions to this public reading of Scripture? Why do you suppose the people of Israel responded this way?

*Possible answers: They wept, they rejoiced, they understood the law, they celebrated because the people are recognizing and remembering sins, turning away from God, understanding or being reminded again of the need for God and His mercy. Being told the joy of the Lord is my strength, fortress, refuge...*

**?** How did Nehemiah & Ezra respond to the people's reactions? Why did they give instructions to not mourn or grieve (verse 10)?

*Possible answers: They instructed the people to rejoice and not weep. Grieving is an important part of repentance but grieving is not repentance in and of itself.*

? Optional question: how do you personally respond to the public reading of scripture?

? The Levites are seen throughout this passage helping the people understand what is being read. Have there been people in your life that God has used to help you understand Scripture better?  
*Possible answers: mentors, pastors, counselors, etc. Answers will vary.*

The Bible Project Video: [Public Reading of Scripture](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO1Y9XyWKTW)  
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO1Y9XyWKTW>

? Optional question: What ways have you seen God work through public reading of scripture in your life? Do you think there still a place for public reading of scripture in this day and age?

## The Festival Is Celebrated

### Nehemiah 8:13-18

<sup>13</sup> On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. <sup>14</sup> They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month <sup>15</sup> 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 from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters”—as it is written. <sup>16</sup> So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters 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. <sup>17</sup> The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters 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. <sup>18</sup> Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

? How is the feast of booths supposed to be celebrated? See Leviticus 23:33-44 to help explain some of the preparations the people are required to have.  
*Possible answers: No ordinary work, for seven days they are to present food offerings to the Lord, on the eighth day they are to hold a holy convocation and present a food offering, etc.*

“...both a harvest festival and a reminder of the wilderness wandering symbolized by the people living in tents and booths. It was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, which gave nearly two weeks for preparation. This was another visual link with the exodus and thus a reminder of the mighty acts of God.”  
NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Nehemiah 8:14

? How do these festivals and feasts help Israel remember God's faithfulness toward them? What practices do you keep in your life to help you remember God's love and faithfulness?

*Possible answers: Answers will vary. The Israelites would probably recall the events that took place during the exodus and be reminded, yet again, of God's faithfulness to them. Communion.*

#### **For Discussion and Accountability**

? How have you seen God's faithfulness in your life this week?

? What are some things we could do as a church or small group to remember and celebrate God's faithfulness?