

DEEP WATERS MEN'S DISCIPLESHIP-LEADERSHIP TRAINING
Lesson Seven: The Word of God Takes Center Stage
Nehemiah 8:1-18

A new person appears in this chapter. His name is Ezra. He had come to Jerusalem some 15 years earlier and was involved in some major disciplinary actions upon his arrival. We know this about Ezra: he was a man of the Word and he was a man of prayer. Where he had been during the time the wall was being reconstructed, we do not know. But I can guess that he was much in prayer for the workers and for Nehemiah.

A Great Assembly - Nehemiah 8:1-8

Occurred during the seventh month of the Jewish calendar (following the religious calendar; Jews have two calendars - a religious one that begins in the spring with Passover, a civil one that begins in the fall with Rosh Hashanah).

The seventh month was one of celebration:

Rosh Hashanah - First of the month

Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) - Tenth of the month

Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles) - Fifteenth of the month

Wall was completed on the 25th of Elul

Assembly convened on the 1st of Tishri (6 days later) - during this time a large platform built

Verse 1 - Unity of purpose and response - "as one man"

Book of the Law of Moses - these were the foundation of faith for Israel

(not sure if it was Genesis -Deuteronomy, or just Deuteronomy that was read)

(Deuteronomy is a summary of the Law)

"Lord had commanded" - the people knew the full divine authority of these words

Verse 2 - Ezra the scribe

Read Ezra 7:1-6 - his qualifications for office of scribe and priest

...the son of Aaron, the chief priest - this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.

Scribe had three functions: teach the law; administer the Law; interpret the Law

Primary focus should be upon teaching - Malachi 2:6-9

True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin. For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction – because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,” say the LORD Almighty. “So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.”

“All who were able to understand” – this was God’s purpose for Israel
Exodus 12:25–27 – When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, “What does this ceremony mean to you?” then tell them, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.”

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 – Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Mindless superstition was the mark of paganism – Isaiah 44:18–20
They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, “Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, “Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?”

Verse 3 – Water Gate – site of daily life

God’s Word has application to all areas of life – it is to impact our daily routine

People listened attentively for nearly six hours!

Verse 4 – 13 helpers – probably took turns reading (was a synagogue occurrence)

(Verse 7 – 13 Levites – probably mingled with the crowd to help people to understand what they were hearing)

Verse 5 – REVERENCE FRO THE SCRIPTURE

From this point on Israel would be a “people of the book”

- The focus here was the scroll or the Word of God; not the walls

Verse 6 – WORSHIP OF GOD

Adoration was for God – they were not venerating a book

Response – adoration + willing submission to authority

Verses 7–8 – COMPREHENSION OF SCRIPTURE

“Clearly” – “to make distinct or separate”

1. Law was well articulated
2. Law was read and explained section by section
(This is what happens weekly in the synagogue – parasha – paragraph of the Pentateuch each week)

A Call to Festivity – Nehemiah 8:9–12

Three times in these four verses we read where holiness and gloom do NOT go well together

Verse 9 – REMORSE FOR SIN

“Sacred day” – Leviticus 23:24–25

Say to the Israelites: “On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire.”

Verse 10 – REJOICING IN GOD’S FELLOWSHIP

“Choice food “ – “rich food” – foods not normally eaten

“Those who have nothing prepared” – those still suffering because of financial constraints

(Nehemiah 5:14–19)

Verse 12 – The joy came not because the walls were completed, but because they have begun to

understand what God wanted them to do.

Feast of Tabernacles – Nehemiah 8:13–18

Verses 13–18 – OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD

Verse 13 – This was a time of intensive teaching

Here we have fathers anxious to know the Word so they could teach their families

Verses 14–15 – Feast had lapsed in importance

Leviticus 23:39–43 – So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the

festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

It was the symbolic living in booths that had been neglected over the years

Customs can find a new sense of purpose

Verses 16-17 – Two weeks to get ready for this celebration

Closing: “So the move to make Scripture the guiding principle of Jewish life was powerfully initiated. The great teaching operation on the first day of the month, the training session which had followed it, and now the seven days of readings at the festival had exposed the people to the fundamentals of their faith with considerable thoroughness. But the clinching of it was yet to come, as the next two chapters will show.” (Kidner, p. 109)

Homework Assignment:

- 1. What do you need to do to have a more meaningful time in the Word of God?**
- 2. How can you teach its truths to your children?**

BIBLE STUDY PLAN

Let me share with you how I approach my devotional time in the Word. I have been using this method for nearly 30 years. I never cease to marvel at what God teaches.

1. I try to work through one chapter a day – depending upon the length of the chapter.
2. I have a Monday–Friday reading schedule; if you follow this plan, you can complete reading through the entire New Testament in 52 weeks (260 chapters) and the entire Old Testament in 42 months (929 chapters) – in other words, the entire Bible in 4.5 years. (You will be amazed at how fast that time will go).
3. I usually recommend beginning in either Genesis or Matthew, but you really can begin anywhere.
4. Here is what I look for in my reading:
 - a. I read the chapter through in its entirety to get a feel for the context.
 - b. I then seek to discover a verse that I think is key to that chapter (some chapters will

- not have a key verse)
- c. I try to discern any words that seem to be key to the chapter – could be a word that is used more than once; or a word or phrase that identifies the theme of the chapter
 - d. I attempt to outline the chapter – not an essential task, but can be helpful in putting together the chapter
 - e. Finally, I write down any thoughts that God might impress upon my heart as I read the chapter once again. This becomes my journal which I have found to be an invaluable guide.

The handouts I have been giving you on Nehemiah are taken from my journal. It might become a model for you.

This is my no means the only model for Bible reading/study available. You might already have a plan that works well for you. The key is to just dig more deeply into the Word. I have found 30 minutes to be a minimal foundation.

God bless you as you dig deeply into His Word.