

Nehemiah 8

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[0:00] All right. Good. Good. So that's the plan. Okay. Nehemiah chapter 8.! Let's go to book Nehemiah chapter 8. Nehemiah chapter 8.

Our text will be verses 1 through 8 of the 8th chapter of Nehemiah. Let's set it in its proper context.

If you remember in the 7th chapter, by the time we get into the 7th chapter, the walls are completed. The walls are completed at the end of the 6th chapter. And in chapter 7, Nehemiah says, after the walls were rebuilt, then God put it into my heart to number the people, to count the people and enroll them by genealogies.

So Nehemiah is moving into the next phase of the work God had called him to do. The work God had called him to do was not just to rebuild the walls, but to reestablish and rebuild the people.

So in the 7th chapter, he says, so God put it into my heart to call the people into Jerusalem, to enroll them by genealogies. We saw that genealogies are very important in our biblical context.

[1:11] They're not as important to us today, but they're very important for the fulfillment of the promises of God, that the Messiah, the Savior, was to come through a particular people in a peculiar place at a particular time.

And then Nehemiah gives us a listing of recording of those who came back at the first inhabitants of Jerusalem after the issue of King Cyrus.

He restates for us Ezra chapter 2. It ends in Nehemiah 7. The last sentence there is, when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.

And Wednesday night, we looked at that very quickly, that Nehemiah said, God says, I want you to enroll the people, list them by genealogies. He started that by finding the scroll and the record of those who came back before and their genealogies.

And if we just want to continue what Nehemiah is doing, then we could turn to the 11th chapter and we can find the 11th chapter that he begins to enroll everyone.

[2:17] He begins to put them by families and we can see in the 11th chapter that he builds upon that first listing of names. So he ultimately does what he intends to do, but interjected in the middle of that, what God had called him to do when he called all the people to be in Jerusalem before him.

And he's getting ready to enroll them. Something happens. And that is recorded for us in chapters eight, nine, and 10. It is the really the spiritual awakening of the people of God.

Now, historically, by this time, the temple has been completed for probably around 80 years. Now the wall has been reconstructed, but the city is still rather uninhabited.

There's this wording. It is found there in that last verse of the seventh chapter. There is this wording, even when they return back, the people of Israel were in their cities.

Their cities. Jerusalem wasn't very heavily occupied by this time because one of the things we notice when we read, if we were to take our time and read this listing of people who came back in the seventh chapter is people, though they were born in the Persian Empire, in Babylon, so to say, and they were born there, they still had heavy connections to what was considered their land or their city in the Jewish territory.

[3 : 40] So when they moved back, though they had never been there, they moved back to the city of their fathers where they had come from because the land, again, is very important to the people of God.

But Nehemiah calls them back. They're getting ready to be re-enrolled. And now, all of a sudden, the people are all together, and that's where we find it in the eighth chapter. It says in verse one, 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.

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.

Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium, which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Matthiah, Shema, Ananiah, Uriah, Hilkihah, and Meshiah on his right hand, and Padaiah, Mishael, Mishaz, Hashem, Hashbani, Zechariah, and Meshulam on his left.

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.

[5 : 10] While lifting up their hands, they bowed low and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also, Jeshua, Bonnie, Sherebiah, Jamin, Aqab, Shebathiah, Hodiah, Hodiah, Meshiah, Kelada, Azariah, Jazabad, Hanan, Paliah, and 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. Nehemiah 8, verses 1 through 8.

I want you to see this evening, laying the spiritual foundation. To be a people in a city with walls reconstructed is not really a special matter because most of the people were living in their own cities or in their own towns.

It is Jerusalem alone that has walls around it at this time. Most people were living outside in their own districts among the people of the world that had been moved there when the Assyrians and later on the Babylonians came in and took over that land.

But just because Jerusalem had walls that were reconstructed it really didn't reestablish the people. Even moving people inside of those walls does not necessarily reestablish the people.

[6 : 24] It is the spiritual formation of the people of the Lord God that prepares them for what God is going to do in their life. Now, admittedly, they are not perfect in their restoration because we know, and we have seen this, if we were to open up a Jewish Old Testament or Hebrew Old Testament, you would find that Nehemiah and Ezra are towards the latter part of that book.

They are over there where the writings are contained. And we would find it along with Chronicles and also that great book Malachi, the modern prophet.

We know that Malachi is a contemporary just a little bit after Nehemiah and Ezra. And by the time Malachi prophesies to the people of the Lord before God goes silent for 400 years, Malachi criticizes and declares really his judgment upon the worship of God's people.

God says to the prophet Malachi, I would rather you close the temple doors than continue to do what you are doing in my presence, that you are bringing a defiled and an unholy offering and laying it on my altar, something that you would not give your governor, yet you're trying to give it to me.

And God is rebuking their worship. But God was also restoring these people and calling them to live according to his purposes. Now, if we remember this, this reestablishment of God's people, we saw it when we read 1 and 2 Chronicles because we saw in that, this laying out of the order of the priests and the Levites and the temple servants and even the order of who should serve and where they should serve.

[8 : 00] And we saw how that was important because had it not been for that order, then we would not have found Zechariah in the temple burning incense at the altar in which the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him John the Baptist would be born.

It is the continuation of this for centuries, even after God goes silent. But that continuation is built upon the foundation that's laid here.

There is a foundation of spiritual formation that the people are no longer just someone who came out of the Persian Empire to live in a different district. Now, they are the people of God living in the land of the Jewish nation.

Well, even in their imperfections and in their failures, God is building them to be a yet again a distinct people, separate from the nations around them.

Tainted? Yes. Corrupted? Absolutely. Perfect? No, by no means. But they are the people in which the Pharisees are born out of. By the time we get to the time of Christ, we find people that have perfected this thing called legalism.

[9 : 08] At least they think they have. And in their perfection, they judge themselves. Jesus said they are blind because they say that they see. When a Pharisee said, Are you telling me that I'm blind? He said, I'm saying you're blind because you declare that you see.

And if you had not said that you see, then you would not be blind. But he said, essentially, because you claim to know it all, you are proving that you do not. But that foundation comes from what is laid here.

We have seen that Ezra, we give a lot of credit to Ezra. Ezra is considered a scribe. Here in this text before us, he is referred to as Ezra the scribe and Ezra the priest.

A two-fold ministry. He is a ministry of scribes and he is the ministry of the priesthood. And because of this, we believe historically, Ezra is the founding leader of the scribal tradition that made it their job to hand copy scripture.

It is the scribal tradition to which we assert the Septuagint or the Greek Old Testament to. And the one that is so often quoted in our New Testament when Jesus quoted Old Testament scripture.

[10 : 15] And if you were to look up those cross references when it is said in the New Testament, have you not read or it is said, and you read the cross references, you'll see some variances in what Jesus or the other author says over here and what it actually says in your scripture.

Not that it is wrong, not that it is contradictory, but it seems to have a little bit of variance in it. And the reason it has variance in it is because in that day they were quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament in which the scribe of Ezra was the leading founder of those who authored those and who wrote those and who made it accessible because here in this text it declares they were able to give the sense.

Why did they have to translate the scripture into Greek? It's because those people that were born in the Babylonian captivity did not speak Hebrew. And what they found is that so many people moving back to Jerusalem did not speak their native language because they had been born in foreign territory.

They began to translate it into the Greek. Now what you have before you, we'll get into this in one of our classes, is not a translation from the Greek only, but you have translated from the original Hebrew into the English, reconciled with the Greek as well and all this other stuff.

So that's why you see the variances is because yours is a literal English translation from the Hebrew, not only from the Greek. But what we see here is this moment in history is making the word of God accessible to the people of God and is laying the foundation for what God is doing moving forward.

[11 : 55] But what does it look like to lay that foundation and what takes place and what transpires during this? The first thing I want you to notice is there is a longing that united them.

There is a longing that united them. It says, And all the people were gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the water gate. They were gathered not in the temple, but at the square in front of the water gate.

More than likely, the reason they were not gathered at the temple is because if they were gathered at the temple, the only people that could have been gathered were the men. Women would have been outside the gates inside the temple complex.

There is what is referred to as the court of men. Now, by the time we get to the New Testament, there's the court of the Gentiles, there's the court of the women, and then there's the court of men. But there is this separation based upon gender and even ethnicity later on.

But here, they gather in a commonplace. Men and women and children, those that are old enough to understand and those who can comprehend.

[13 : 02] And what is unique in this is we see them gathering together and it is the people who ask Ezra to get the book. Now, Ezra had been there before.

We've seen it in the book of Ezra. Many people believe, and I absolutely agree with them, that at some point, Ezra went back, reported back to the king and then came back a second time because of the work of Nehemiah that was going on.

So he rejoined him there. So Ezra had been there before. Ezra had led them through reading the word before. Ezra had shown them the celebration of the Passover feast.

And now, the people are gathered together as one man, it says, on the first day of the seventh month. And you ought to pay attention to that because that is a special time. This would have been the day that Brother Jamie would have loved.

For this is the festival of trumpets. The first day of the seventh month was the sounding of trumpets. And it was a day of preparation for what was coming nine days later.

[14 : 04] On the tenth day of the seventh month is the day of atonement. the trumpets were to sound so that the people would begin to prepare themselves. Some say that it is the announcement of a time of mournful preparation, of walking through a time of realizing one's sin, of preparing one's sacrifice so that on that day of atonement they could be pronounced clean before the Lord God Almighty.

It was the only day, the day of atonement in which all people and even the entire nation were clean. For on that day their sins were absolutely forgiven.

But the thing that introduced that was the first day of the seventh month with the sounding of the trumpets and the calling of the attention. It is one of the festivals in which all of the people were to gather together.

That is why when we read in the end of the seventh chapter that they were in their own cities and we turn to eighth chapter and now they are gathered as one man. Now notice this.

It is an appointed day of the Lord that you find in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus chapter 24 I believe it is. Just a little short wording there in Leviticus chapter 24 where it says on the first day of the seventh month should be the festival of trumpets and that all people should gather together for the celebration thereof.

[15 : 21] And then it moves on very quickly to get to the day of atonement because it is introducing something that it is not but it is preparing the hearts and the minds for what is to come.

Now they have the temple. The temple is rebuilt. They are going to celebrate the day of atonement but notice what God is doing here. Here is a festival in which the trumpets are sounding and you notice that people are probably asking why do we do this?

Why do we do this? They didn't have the freedom that you and I do. They could not look up Leviticus chapter 24 and they could not find out that God had said they should do this. They were going by tradition.

They were going by this is what the leaders are telling us we should do. People did not have a copy of the word of God in which they could unroll their scroll and get to it and if they did it would take them so long to do it anyway and if they did it would have been in Hebrew and none of them were speaking Hebrew.

But yet the Levites and the priests are saying today is the festival of trumpets. Everyone gather together we are going to blow the trumpets. The question is why? It's a longing to understand and we notice here God often uses those moments and those instances in our life to lead us to a longing to know more.

[16 : 44] What does it say in the book of Genesis? In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. All things were formless and void but do you remember why he set the stars in the sky and why he put the sun and the moon there?

It says for seasons and to be a testimony. If you were here ten years ago and we started that you would know that we said that when God did that in the beginning God was setting the sun and the moon and the stars as a testimony to establish seasons so that if we follow the trail throughout biblical history those seasons would also lead to the celebration of festivals and without these phases of sun and moon there would be no festival celebration and without these festivals there would be no reminder and without these reminders there would be no longing and without these longings there would be no understanding there's got to be something to this and now we find a time when the people that were not born in that land are again celebrating these same traditional elements and they're celebrating them afresh and anew and they want to know why are we sounding the trumpets someone get the book so that we can know why we do what we do that's important when people ask us why do we do what we do we ought to be able to give a biblical answer to that we're not just blowing a trumpet to blow a trumpet so to say on the first day of the seventh month there's a reason behind it

God gives these markers in our lives these stones of Ebenezer Samuel would say these stones of help that would point to this is what God is doing here so that we would have a testimony to give it is the longing that united them because this longing brought them all together men and women and children standing shoulder to shoulder all of them wanting to know it's very unique in biblical text by the way to have this mixed multitude gathering as one body crying out bring out the book which leads us to the second thing the leading that moved them we praise God that when this longing was put in their heart when the Levites and the temple servants were so faithful to say we're going to celebrate the festival of trumpets and they had the trumpeters there the musicians were there we know what musicians should be there because we can read them in the book of Chronicles we do know that when Nehemiah consecrates the walls that he has the musicians standing in place and the sounding of trumpets we know all the instruments are available to them but we are so thankful that when the people wanted to know why do we do this there was someone present they could ask so they said to Ezra the scribe this shows that

Ezra has a heart for the word of God you remember the book of Ezra Ezra chapter 7 Ezra had set his heart to study the word to know the word and to practice the word that he may instruct the people of God concerning the word he is a scribe he has a heart for the word of God and then it says in Ezra the priest that means he has a heart for the people of God he was not just one who loved the word but he was one who loved the word and the people for he set his heart to know the word so that he may live it but then also that he may teach it he had a desire that people would understand what the word of God says there was the right man present at the right time when the people had a longing and they needed someone there so Ezra goes and he gets the book and it says that Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium is what it says in our English but the original wording there literally implies he stands on a wooden platform I told you leading up to this this is the first time in scripture by the way we don't know if it's the first time in history but it's the first mentioning in scripture that someone stands on a platform we don't necessarily know that there's a podium but the word podium little translation is platform he stands on a platform above the people not because he's leading over them but he is standing so that they can see him so that all have the opportunity and he has gathered beside him a number of people we're not going to read their names again but this number of people sometimes upsets biblical scholars because if you count them you will notice that there are six on one side and seven on the other there are 13 people standing with Ezra now for those of you who know your scripture 13 is a weird number not because we're doing our valentine's banquet on Friday the 13th but 13 is just an odd number it's odd because you would expect it to be the number 12 12 is the entire nation of Israel right and there are 12 stones in the altar there are 12 sacrificial offerings given and 12 represents the entirety of the nation of

Israel but why 13 and believe it or not people ask that question and want to know why are there 13 well a good answer would be because right before they went into the promised land the first time there was a man named Joshua standing and with Joshua there were 13 representatives of the tribe you say whoa there's not 13 tribes oh but there are for when you include the Levites who had no inheritance in the land they are the 13th tribe because of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh the double portion given and there were 13 representatives standing with Joshua before they went into the promised land the first time and now the 13 stand with Ezra to signify the reestablishment of that land by the people of God the second time and not only are there 13 people standing with him on the platform there are 13 Levites scattering among the congregation to teach them we have two sets of 13 and they are showing clearly by their leadership that God is reestablishing us as his people in this place they're laying a spiritual foundation it is also the first time in scripture that we find the book being opened and immediately when the book were opened and by the way this is one of the leadings behind why we have family worship this is one of the reasons why I think it's good to have children up here at times I know it can get disruptive I know I don't sit down there among it and I know it's stressful on parents I get it I understand it and I know it can be hard but we see this here it is the men the women and the children and I also know it says those who can understand and give the sense and maybe some of our little ones can't understand and give the sense I get it I but we also see that for the first time in scripture when the word is open everybody stands because they see the word now I do love what one commentator says is we love to adhere to the first but we don't adhere to the second one that is everybody saying amen amen hitting the ground bound their faces to the ground and worshipping we love to all stand but we all don't fall flat on our faces and worship worship either but we do praise and worship the same we notice that he is leading by opening up the word and all the people stand out of reverence and attentive wanting to listen and they stand while he reads for six hours every day we don't know exactly what he read but we do know that tradition shows us the scrabble tradition there tends to be a laying out of daily readings a little bit after this time that would cover some of the teachings and the history of God's interacting with his people and we believe that probably that came out of this season he is surely reading as to why we blow the trumpets why we do the festival what is the day of atonement we'll see they do the feast of the festival of booths we'll see all these things following this chapter there's the recognition of what God is doing among his people for six hours they stand and listen but the when the word is open it says and when he opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people 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 the receiving of the word always leads in a response of worship when they heard the word they responded with worship the word properly received always affects the heart and leads to a time of worship and adoration it is the leading that moved them it moved them first to stand and and it moved them next to bow low and worship as they

[25 : 51] claimed that he is the Lord God Almighty the great and awesome God but hearing the word means nothing if we don't understand it which leads us to the third and final thing the learning that changed them to simply hear the word read means very little I spoke with someone this morning following the morning service that had attended a church recently in another land in another tongue and said I'll set there in the church and I knew what they were saying was from scripture I had no idea as they were saying it for it was in a different language there were some matters I could say oh well that sounded like it could have been the Lord's prayer that was this and the language was completely different and I assume she's all that the man was really preaching but I have no idea what he was saying but he seemed to be very moved as did the people from the message that he was proclaiming but until we understand it it matters very little and so here we see the learning that would actually change them for as he read it says that the people were scattered among them the Levites explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place we would call that small groups now right he would read and they would explain he would read and they would explain and it goes on that they read from the book from the law of God translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading Ezra was reading the Hebrew the people did not speak Hebrew more than likely at that time and so as he read it in Hebrew the people would stand among them and translate it so that it would go into their native tongue at that time of the Greek and they would be able to understand what is going on and they had now moved from just longing to hear the word to grasping the word and understanding it it would be one thing to stand before the people and just to read the word of God and to never give the sense so to say we would call this the first mentioning of expositional preaching in scripture it is reading from the text and explaining the text reading from the text and explaining the text which is all that expositional preaching is letting the text say what it says and giving the sense of its understanding and Ezra is setting a precedence here that is not just enough to hear the word but we must also be able to grasp and to learn the word it is to have the full understanding of what it is that it says because it will be that that moves them we will read as we continue reading on through the eighth chapter they will be moved to brokenness and be weeping because the word of God is doing something it has changed them now they understand for the first time what sin is they will have to be told don't weep don't mourn this is a day of rejoicing and they will be changed because then they will choose joy they would choose to celebrate with one another they would choose to observe the festival booth they will go out into the hills and cut everyone a limb and live in booths in the tent in booths inside the city and they will be changed because of what they understand in the word we would call it they would have a great revival great spiritual awakening does it last no but when they were understanding it when they were learning it it was changing how they lived for the foundation of spiritual formation is not laid on what we hear but it is laying on what we learn things we know for we hear a lot but it is the learning of the word that changed them so that God could begin to awaken a people for himself once again

these matters take place before Nehemiah and rose by genealogy these matters take place before Nehemiah has to correct and rebuke them because now there is a foundation link you are a distinct people you should not be living this way now he has grounds to correct them on because they have heard what the word of God has said and their life will look different because of it they will not walk in perfection no but God is laying a foundation here through Ezra among the people that he will build upon his people again for the purpose of bringing about his promises and we see that the laying of that foundation is through the word of God to the people of God for the glory of God let's pray father we thank you for this day we thank you for your faithfulness and goodness towards us we thank you for your word may we never take it for granted Lord your word cuts to the very depth of our being Lord we long to know it and to understand it so father we pray that you would help us to have a longing to hear your word a longing to read your word but more than that a desire to learn it father help us as we study may it mature and grow us to become more and more like you may we continue to build upon the foundation of Christ our understanding of the word of God that we may live as your people in the time and space you have given us be with us as we leave here tonight may you be glorified and honored in the week ahead and in every action we take and we ask it all in

Christ's name amen thank you guys really