

**“Bring the Book”  
Nehemiah 8-9**

Ukrainians... Packing their necessities...

What do you need? What can you not live without? Bring the Book... Spiritually... Can't live without God. Can't live without a growing, vibrant, LOVE relationship with the God through Jesus Christ.

What is one of the primary ways we grow in our LOVE relationship? We listen to his voice in his Word. That's what the people wanted in Nehemiah 8-9. They had one request to Ezra...

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This morning, as we dive into these chapters, we are going to hear the call to...

**The Point: Live with a humble hunger for God and his Word.**

Listen to the first 12 verses of Nehemiah 8...

**Nehemiah 8:1-12 (text displayed)**

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**1. Hunger for God and his joy-producing Word (8:1-12)**

In verse 1, we find the people gathering in unity in the open area in front of the Water Gate. They have come for the “holy assembly” called for in Leviticus 23:24 at the beginning of their month of Festivals. Historically, 10 days later would be the “Day of Atonement” (Lev. 23:27). Then another 5 days, on the fifteenth day of the month would mark the Festival of Booths.

When they gather, they have a word for Ezra the scribe. This is the first appearance of Ezra in the Book of Nehemiah. EZRA arrived 13 years before Nehemiah to serve and lead God's people in truth.

What do they tell him? “BRING THE BOOK!” This was the Law of Moses God gave Israel. Moses wrote it, but God inspired it. He gave it to the people as a love letter, teaching them how to live and relate to him and one another.

Nehemiah 8 teaches us how we should approach God and his Word. Let me give you four characteristics that should mark how we approach God in his Word.

**HUNGER (1-4)**

- Here is a picture of hunger? Here is a picture for us to pray for one another as a church family! What do we learn?
- Who asks for the law? The leaders? Or the People? The PEOPLE!!
- Look at verse 3: “He read it from early morning until midday! We're talking around 5 hours... Men and woman and children who could understand!
- They even made Ezra a wooden platform so that he could be seen and heard (4)
- Ezra embodied this hunger himself. **Ezra 7:10** tells us: **“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”**

**REVERENCE (3-6)**

- “And the ears of all the people were *attentive* to the Book of the Law.”
  - They were leaning in. They were hanging on every word.

## Nehemiah 8-9. Seek and Surrender

- When we encounter the Bible, whether that is on Sunday morning or any time we pick up our Bible to draw near to God through the week, we want to be our posture.
- Verse 5 says the people stood as he read, describing the honor and focus they desired to give God.

### RESPONSIVE (6-9)

- They were excited about their relationship with God!
- Verse 6: "And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen,"
  - Talking back to the preacher is biblical! I find it very encouraging, BUT...
  - More than encouraging the preacher, we are expressing our excitement about God's character and work!
- But not just their mouths, also their bodies. Verse 6: "... lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worship the Lord with their faces to the ground." (You can do this...)
- Verse 9 says they wept as they heard it.
  - Like Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34:27, when he heard the law read, he wept. He knew he and the people had not kept God's instructions.
  - It hit their hearts. They were convicted. They knew some things needed to change. To see where their hearts did not line up with God's heart bothered them deeply. It created godly sorrow.
  - John 16: Spirit convicts regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment.

### TEACHABLE (7-12)

- They came to understand (2, 3, & 7). We see the word understanding in verse 2, 3, 7, 8 & 12.
  - Knowledge involves gaining information. Understanding involves translating the meaning of that information.
  - Those trained in the law help give the "the sense, so that the people understood the reading." In other words, they explained the meaning of what they were hearing to help them see why it mattered for their lives.
- We see their teachability another way. Look at verses 9-12.
  - When the people heard the word, they began to weep and mourn. But... Nehemiah, the governor of Judah, and Ezra, the priest and scribe, who was the other prominent leader of the people, taught the people how they should respond.
  - Because this was a holy, festival day for feasting not mourning. Was it was appropriate to mourn over their sin before God? Of course! They were so bothered, verse 11 says they had to be calmed down.
  - Why? Because, on this day, it was more appropriate to honor God by keeping the Feast prescribed in the law they just heard. "And do not be grieved..."
  - Then we come to Nehemiah's most quoted verse: "for the joy of the Lord is your strength."
    - What does the phrase "joy of the Lord" refer to? God's joy or our joy? It seems to refer to their joy. We see the people rejoicing multiple times, BUT clearly their joy comes from God's joy!
    - Did you know God rejoices (Zeph 3:17!! Luke 15!!)? Did you know God is the source of joy (Gal 5:22)?
  - The picture here is that of a covenant renewal. Imagine two people entering into a marriage renewal ceremony. When they come together to say, "I am devoted to you, and you alone! I promise to give you my best for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer (it's okay to grab your spouses hand right now, rub on it a little bit! That's right!) in sickness and in health, til death does us part!" That is an occasion for celebration!! For JOY!!! Anybody ever been to a sad wedding? I HOPE NOT!!

**"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11)**

And when you experience the joy of God again, his joy in you & your joy in him, it will strengthen you.

## Nehemiah 8-9. Seek and Surrender

- Strength... fortress/refuge protection
- Think about it. What did they just build? A wall. What does a wall do? Protect.
- Now they are speaking of... their relationship!! (Tie it tight)

### Two Encouragements

#### 1) Bring the Book!

- Seek God daily with passion and joy.
- Remember, these are more than words on a page. They are an expression of God's voice. They are his voice to your ears.
- This is not about checking a box; it is about receiving and giving LOVE!

2) If you have been struggling... doubting... going your own way..., God still loves you. That's Israel's story... God wants you back! He's waiting to renew vows again.

T: #1 Hunger for God and his joy-producing word. Then #2....

### **2. Humble yourself before God by obedience, confession, and commitment (8:13-9:38)**

#### First, we see obedience.

#### **Nehemiah 8:13-18 (text displayed)**

- On the second day of the month, the family leaders could not get enough of the Word (Give me more!), so they met again, in order to "study the words of the Law."
  - It is important to read the Bible. It is also important to study the Bible. When we study, we dig in. We uncover key words, examine the grammar, and look at the flow of thought. We find themes and connections. We make sure we know what is being said and how it fits within the larger context of the story. We spend time dwelling in God's truth to let it sink deeper in our souls.
  - Download the ESV Bible App and get free access to an excellent Study Bible.
- When they studied the Law, they found the command to keep the Feast of Booths. The Feast of Booths commemorated the time when the people of Israel journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land and lived in tents. God gave these acts of remembrance, so that the people would reflect on what God did for them and how much he loved them.
- Verse 15 says they spread the news far and wide. Verse 16 says the people set them up everywhere, on roofs, courts, and city squares. Verse 17 says they rejoiced because they had not kept the feast like this since the days of Joshua (maybe because they did not actually build temporary shelters or because they never kept it with such passion or under such circumstances). Verse 18 says. They continued to hear from God's Law, day by day, until the solemn assembly on the eighth day

Here's the primary point for our consideration. They heard the Word. They heard God's good plans for their lives, and then they obeyed. They did what it said. This is where joy is found. This is where peace comes from.

"Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea;" (Isaiah 48:18)

Obedience involves doing what God says will bring us LIFE, AND stopping what he says will harm us. We find the people recognizing their sin, the things that must stop in chapter 9. Here they make one of the longest and most profound confessions in the Bible.

#### Second, they make confession.

### **Nehemiah 9:1-5 (text displayed)**

Think about this: they experienced profound conviction on the first day the law was read, 23 days ago, BUT they were not able to mourn over their sin as an act of repentance. As soon as they obeyed all the law required concerning the 23 days of feasting, they immediately moved to deal with the conviction they felt over their sin.

Verse 1 says they “assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.” These were all steps and signs of repentance.

- Repentance is more than saying, “Sorry,” Repentance is seeing our sin like God sees it. It involves feeling sorrow for it, even hating it, and turning away from it.
- This Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. It is a time when our church, with millions of other followers of Jesus around the world, makes a 40 day journey to Easter Sunday. It is a time of fasting (giving up food or some other comfort), so that we can draw near to God. Let’s allow God to confirm the areas where our lives look like Jesus, bringing joy to our hearts. Let’s also allow God to gently expose the ways our lives do not look like Jesus and repent.

Verses 2-3 show us their repentance led them to separate from false worship and confess their sin and the iniquities of their fathers. Look at this: for THREE HOURS they heard the law read. For THREE MORE HOURS they confessed their sin and worshiped God.

They begin by crying out with a strong word of blessing: “Bless the Lord from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”

Their prayer then follows a simple rhythm of proclaiming God’s greatness and faithfulness contrasted with their faithlessness and rebellion.

Listen for that rhythm as we work our way through this verses.

Time will not permit a deep dive, but in the spirit of Nehemiah 8-9, I would encourage you to read these chapters again and go to some of the parallel verses that unpack Israel’s story in the rest of the Old Testament.

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### **Nehemiah 9:6-21 (text displayed)**

#### God’s Faithfulness

- Creation (9:6) – See Genesis 1-2
- Covenant with Abraham (9:7-8) – See Genesis 12ff
- Exodus (9:9-15) – See Exodus 1-17

#### Our Faithlessness

- The Wilderness (9:16-18) – “BUT they and our fathers...” – See Exodus 32
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#### God’s Faithfulness

- God’s Mercy (9:19-21) – Even in spite of their failures, God did not forsake them – See Exodus 33-Deuteronomy.

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### **Nehemiah 9:22-31 (text displayed)**

## Nehemiah 8-9. Seek and Surrender

### God's Faithfulness

- Into the Land (9:22-25): God fights for them, keeps his promises and provides for their every need. – See Joshua
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### Our Faithlessness

- Rebellion (9:26) - "NEVERTHELESS, they were disobedient..." – See Judges

### God's Faithfulness

- Deliverers (9:27): In his love, God disciplined them and raised up Judges, or deliverers to save them from their enemies. – See Judges

### Our Faithlessness

- Rebellion (9:28) - "BUT after they had rest, they did evil again..." – See Judges

### God's Faithfulness

- The Prophets (9:29-30): "You bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets." – See 1 & 2 Kings & the Prophets (especially Isaiah)

### Our Faithlessness

- Disobedience (9:30) - "YET they would not listen." – See 1 & 2 Kings & the Prophets (especially Isaiah)

### God's Faithfulness

- God's Grace and Patience (9:31): "NEVERTHELESS [GOD] in his great mercies..."

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We come to their current moment. Though they have been exiled, God has been faithful. That is why they pray for restoration (9:32-35) in their current predicament (9:36-37).

### **Nehemiah 9:32-37 (text displayed)**

Finally, this leads to their covenant commitment.

### **Nehemiah 9:38 (text displayed)**

What are they saying: "God, we are committing ourselves to upholding your Word, to honoring our relationship as a faithful spouse. We are signing our names to the document and sealing it. We could not be more committed to living for you!"

*Conclusion:*

We can turn to the True and Greater Nehemiah, Jesus Christ for a summary of Nehemiah 8 & 9.

In Luke 11, when Jesus was casting out demons and teaching the people, they were amazed. One woman in the crowd shouted out: "Blessed is the womb that bore you!" Jesus, you GREAT! Everyone connected to you, is blessed by God, especially your mother. This is certainly true, but Jesus wanted them to hear who has the greater blessing.

**But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it." - Jesus, in Luke 11:28**

Let's live with a humble hunger for God and his Word. Let's show that by how we live our lives.

Prayer – Lead into song... "Build My Life"