

Nehemiah 8:1-18

1. Three things occur in this chapter
 - a. 8:1-8 – Gathering to read the Law of Moses
 - b. 8:9-12 – The celebration of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the holiest day, on the 10th day of Tishrei (seventh month)
 - c. 8:13-18 – The Feast of Booths (Feast of Tabernacles; Sukkot) on the 15th day of Tishrei

Nehemiah 6:15	Nehemiah 7:73b	Nehemiah 8:1-8	Nehemiah 8:9-12	Nehemiah 8:13-18
25 th day of Elul (sixth month; last month of Jewish civil year) (30 days/month; 5 days left in the year)	1 st day of Tishrei (seventh month; first month Jewish civil year)	10 th day of Tishrei (seventh month; first month of civil year)	11 th day of Tishrei (seventh month; first month of civil year)	15 th day of Tishrei (seventh month; first month of civil year)
	6 days after wall completed	15 days after wall completed		20 days after wall completed
Wall Completed	People back in their towns; This would be New Years Day of the civil year, the first day of the first month (but, also the 1 st day of the 7 th month of the religious year. This is the Feast of Trumpets	Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) People gather in Jerusalem to hear the Law; Celebrate feast for Day of Atonement 10 th of Tishrei the people hear the Law	11 th of Tishrei the men, Levites and priests study the Law with Ezra	Feast of Booths (Feast of Tabernacles; Sukkot) People build little shelters or booths out of branches to remember 1444 BC Exodus and celebrate 538 BC return from Captivity

2. We see in this chapter the style of worship and ritual they had at this time
3. We see in this chapter a type of reformation of moving from the Temple ritual with the professional priests (clergy) to a worship centered on the written text of the Scripture in the hands of the heads of the families (laity)
4. This is the first day of the synagogue.
5. Ezra is last heard from in Ezra 10:17 when Ezra and his committee ends their three-month long investigation into intermarriage in Mar/April of 457 BC.
 - a. It appears that Ezra and his teaching ministry was rejected and put on hold
 - b. Now, with the arrival of Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the walls and the call of the people to read the Law Ezra reemerges 13 years later in 444 BC.
 - c. Ezra was sent to teach the Law of the Lord and the law of the Persian empire by Artaxerxes in 458. Ezra had started, but it appears he had not been activity doing what he set out to do. The reason may have been opposition from the same forces that had been opposing Nehemiah and the building of the wall, the city and the culture.

7:73b – **And when the seventh month had come, the people of Israel were in their towns.**

1. Elul is the sixth month in the Jewish calendar. Nehemiah 6:15 said,
“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.
2. This means the wall was finished late in the sixth month of Elul.
3. This chapter begins early in the seventh month of Tishrei, which is the first month of the Jewish civil year.
4. The seventh month of Tishrei (the first month of the Jewish civil year) occurs in September-October.

8:1 – **And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.**

1. The people gathered for the reading of the Law on this day, but they did not gather at the Temple in the Temple courts. They gathered outside in the square of a city gate.
2. The Law of Moses or the Pentateuch already existed in ancient form because:
 - a. The people “told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses”
 - i. The people knew the Law existed
 1. The people told Ezra to bring the Law of Moses, they were not just being introduced to a newly formed document (as Wellhausen taught in 1870’s)
 - ii. The people were not introduced to the “new” Law scroll, they asked for it.
 - iii. The people are not going to know the words of the Law because it had not been regularly read to them.
 - iv. They do not have their own copies of the Law
 - v. The people know these Words come from the Lord that Moses wrote in the Law.
 - b. Ezra will be able to bring the scroll (not a book yet)
 - i. It was already available
 - ii. Ezra was a scribe trained in the Law
 - iii. The Levites will be able to translate, interpret, explain and teach the Law



- c. The Law is written in an ancient language in an outdated form that the people need the Levites to update the meaning of the ancient text
 - d. The people were ready:
 - i. The people willingly gathered
 - ii. The people asked to hear the Law read to them
 - iii. The people respond and repent
3. This all proves that the contrary to the higher textual critics the Pentateuch is not an invention of the 400's BC.
- a. This was taught by German scholars such as Julius Wellhausen in the 1870's and is the foundation for liberal theology today.
4. Ezra has not been heard of for 13 years. He was last mentioned in 458 as having arrived in Jerusalem commissioned to teach the Law (Ezra 7:14, 25-26).
- a. Ezra did not have the opportunity because of the culture, the violent opposition of the enemy, the people living in rural areas, the low population in Jerusalem, and lack of interest.
 - b. Now with the arrival of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls the climate has changed.
 - i. The enemy is opposed
 - ii. The people have been organized
 - iii. There is government in the land (Nehemiah)
 - iv. The city with the temple and the priesthood is secure
 - v. The people are called to gather in the city to start the new year
 - vi. The people were attentive to the hearing the words for a long period of time (8:3)
 - c. Ezra reemerges now in 444 BC in the city he has been waiting in for 13 years to teach:
 - i. The Law of God (for the Lord) and
 - ii. the law of the land (for Artaxerxes)

8:2 – So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month.

1. Here the first day of the seventh month is the beginning of The Feast of Trumpets:
 - a. Commemorating the end of the agricultural year
 - b. Announcing the Day of Atonement begins in ten days
 - c. The sounding of the trumpet on this day was a solemn reminder of what was coming on the Day of Atonement
 - d. With the trumpet sounding on this first day the people had 10 days of repentance and introspection.
2. Ezra was a priest and had access to the ancient text of Moses' Law.
3. "all who could understand" refers to:
 - a. Men, women and children old enough to understand
 - b. Those Jews who could understand Hebrew. All spoke Aramaic, many had lost the language of the Jews.
 - c. The movement here is towards an intelligent population that could understand the Word of God and not merely superstitious ritual or temple sacrifices. The pagans could be superstitious and have rituals, but these people had an intelligent, logical religion that had captured the thoughts and will of their God in written text.
4. This was a new beginning that moved towards intelligent understanding of a divine text and away from mere superstition and temple ritual

8:3 – And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

1. This appears to be about five hours of reading from the Law.
2. The Water Gate is in the east wall just south of the Temple and opens into the Ophel where the southern entrance to the Temple is located.
3. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 had instructed Israel to honor the Word of the Lord, to hear the Word of the Lord and to take the Word of the Lord into their homes, their families, their soul and their hearts. Their relationship with the Lord was much more than rituals at a sanctuary. It was more than in a holy temple, but in their souls, homes and families:
“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”
4. There is a stress in this chapter on the people UNDERSTANDING the Words of the Lord:
 - a. 8:2 – “all who could understand what they heard”
 - b. 8:3 – “those who could understand”
 - c. 8:7 – “the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law”
 - d. 8:8 – “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”
 - e. 8:12 – “all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.”

8:4 – And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And

beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkihah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah,

	1697 [e] lad·dā·bār	6213 [e] 'ā·sū	834 [e] 'ā·šer	6086 [e] 'ēš	4026 [e] mig·dal-	5921 [e] 'al-	5608 [e] has·sō·pêr,	5830 [e] 'ez·rā	5975 [e] way·ya·'ā·mōd	
	–	לְדַבֵּר	עָשׂוּ	אֲשֶׁר	עַל	מִגְדָּל	עַל	הַסֹּפֵר	עֲזָרָא	וַיַּעֲמֵד
	for the purpose	they had made	which	of wood	a platform	on	the scribe	Ezra	So stood	
	Prep-i, Art N-ms	V-Qal-Perf-3cp	Pro-r	N-ms	N-msc	Prep	Art N-ms	N-proper-ms	Conj-w V-Qal-Conseclmperf-3ms	
	"MIGDAL" /MIG-DAWL/ means "a tower" and comes from "GADAL" /GAW-DAL/ which means "to grow up, become great"									
	2518 [e] we·hil·qī·yāh	223 [e] we·'ū·rī·yāh	6043 [e] wa·'ā·nā·yāh	8087 [e] we·še·ma'	4993 [e] mat·tīt·yāh	681 [e] 'eš·lōw	5975 [e] way·ya·'ā·mōd			
	וְחִלְקִיָּהוּ	וְאוּרִיָּהוּ	וְאַנְיָהוּ	וְשֵׁמַע	מַתִּיתְיָהוּ	עֲשָׂלוֹ	וַיַּעֲמֵד			
	and Hilkihah	and Urijah	and Anaiiah	and Shema	Mattithiah	beside him	and stood			
	Conj-w N-proper-ms	Conj-w N-proper-ms	Conj-w N-proper-ms	Conj-w N-proper-ms	N-proper-ms	Prep 3ms	Conj-w V-Qal-Conseclmperf-3ms			
	4441 [e] ū·mal·kī·yāh	4332 [e] ū·mī·šā·'ēl	6305 [e] pe·dā·yāh	8040 [e] ū·miš·še·mō·lōw,	3225 [e] ye·mī·nōw;	5921 [e] 'al-	4641 [e] ū·ma·'ā·šē·yāh			
	וּמַלְכִּיָּהוּ	וּמִישָׁאֵל	פְּדַיָּהוּ	וּמִשְׁמַעַלָיו	בְּיָמֵינוּ	עַל	וּמַעֲשֵׂהוּ			
	and Malchijah	and Mishael	Pedaiah	and at his left hand	his right hand	at	and Maaseiah			
	Conj-w N-proper-ms	Conj-w N-proper-ms	N-proper-ms	Conj-w, Prep-m N-msc 3ms	N-fsc 3ms	Prep	Conj-w N-proper-ms			
				4918 [e] p	2148 [e] ze·kār·yāh	2806 [e] we·ḥaš·bad·dā·nāh	2828 [e] we·ḥa·šum			
				פ	זְכַרְיָהוּ	וְחַשְׁבַּדָּנָה	וְחָשׂוּם			
				-	[and] Meshullam	Zechariah	and Hashbadana	and Hashum		
				Punc	N-proper-ms	N-proper-ms	Conj-w N-proper-ms	Conj-w N-proper-ms		

and identified as Levites.

2. These men are stationed among the people gathered in the public square at the Water Gate.
3. These men were stationed among the people to help them understand the words being read from the platform.
4. This was the beginning of the teaching ministry of the synagogue. A synagogue service would include:
 - a. The reading of the text of Scripture
 - b. The explanation and commenting on the text of Scripture
5. There were no sacrifices offered in the synagogue.
 - a. This practice of reading and teaching of scripture may have developed in Babylon while the people were in exile without a Temple and without sacrifices.
 - b. Ezra may have been instilling a practice the exiles had developed while they were in captivity and needed to read and teach the text of Scripture to maintain:
 - i. their relationship with God
 - ii. their identity
 - iii. their separation from the Pagan world, Pagan religion and Pagan philosophies.

8:8 – They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

7922 [e] še-ḵel, שֶׁחַל the sense N-ms	7760 [e] wə-šō-wm וְשׂוּמ and they gave Conj-w V-Qal-InfAbs	6567 [e] mə-pō-rāš; מַפְרָשׁ distinctly V-Pual-Prtcpl-ms	430 [e] hā'è-lō-hîm הָאֱלֹהִים of God Art N-mp	8451 [e] bə-tō-w-rat בְּתוֹרַת in the Law Prep-b N-fsc	5612 [e] bas-sê-per בַּסֵּפֶר from the book Prep-b, Art N-ms	7121 [e] way-yiq-rə'û וַיִּקְרְאוּ 8 So they read Conj-w V-Qal-ConsecImperf-3mp
sekel /seh-kel/ = "prudence", "insight", "understanding", "meaning"		parash /paw-rash/ = "to make distinct", "declare", "interpreted", "explain"		qara /kaw-raw/ "to call, proclaim, read"		
				4744 [e] s bam-miq-rā. בַּמִּקְרָא: the reading Punc Prep-b, Art N-ms	995 [e] way-yā-bî-nū וַיִּבְיֵנוּ and helped [them] to understand Conj-w V-Qal-ConsecImperf-3mp	

1. "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly"
 - a. This refers to Ezra and the thirteen with him on the platform
2. "and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading."
 - a. These are the Levites in the crowd
 - b. The people are hearing the reading from the platform.
 - c. The people in the public square cannot understand the words being read from the Hebrew scroll for one or both of these reasons:
 - i. They do not know Hebrew and need the Hebrew text translated into the language they speak which is Aramaic.
 - ii. They do not understand the context and meaning of these ancient words given to Moses. Most of them have never seen a full temple service and have never celebrated the festivals in accordance with the Law of Moses.
3. "**clearly**", "**distinctly**" are translations of the Hebrew *meporas* which is a form of the word *parash* /paw-rash/ which means "to make distinct", "to declare", "to interpret", "to explain".

- a. This most likely means the Levites on the ground heard the Hebrew text read to the people, and then translated it into the Aramaic language that the people spoke.
 - b. In Nehemiah 13:23-25 we can see that Nehemiah is upset because the families in Judah are not teaching their children Hebrew. Nehemiah had returned to Artaxerxes and upon his return he found the people had resumed marrying foreigners and letting their children learn the foreign languages instead of Hebrew:
“In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair.”
 - c. This was a problem after Nehemiah had returned the second time. Was the lack of the Hebrew language also a problem at this time in 444 BC
 - d. 2 Chronicles 17:7-9 – the Levites are sent out to teach by Jehoshaphat:
“In the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah; and with them the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah; and with these Levites, the priests Elishama and Jehoram. And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the Lord with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.”
4. **“the sense”** is the translation of the Hebrew *sekel* /she-kel/ which means “prudence”, “insight”, “understanding”, “meaning” and would seem to refer to the teaching ministry of the Word of God that had been translated.
- a. The basic meaning is “to make distinct” and “to separated”
 - b. This would be exegetical instruction and articulation of the material.

8:9 – And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.

1. This verse mentions Nehemiah as governor while Ezra was the priest and scribe together in Jerusalem in 444 BC.
2. The reading of the Law exposes the sin of the people before God.
 - a. The people weep and repent
 - b. This is the purpose of the Day of Atonement
3. One of the themes of this second section is that gloom and sadness do not go with the holiness of the Lord. This is repeated four times in three verses:
 - a. 8:9 – “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep”
 - b. 8:10 – “This day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved.”
 - c. 8:10 – “For the joy of the Lord is your strength.”
 - d. 8:11 – “Be quiet (as in stop moaning, weeping and crying!!), for this day is holy; do not be grieved.”
4. This is the Day of Atonement,
 - a. Lev. 23:27 – “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the Lord.”
5. The people had gone from a blind religion that they did not understand to beginning to understand the person and presence of the Lord. It was shocking and grieving. But, the

message of the Day of Atonement was deliverance from the Slavery of Egypt (and, the slavery of sin). Now, the Lord had delivered them and was living with them. It was time to celebrate.

8:10 – Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

8:11 – So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.”

8:12 – And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

8:13 – On the second day the heads of fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law.

1. There was five days between the Day of Atonement (10th day, 7th month) and the Feast of Booths (15th day, 7th month).
2. The day after the Day of Atonement the men (heads of fathers’ houses; not women or children) got together with the priests and Levites to study the Word of God with Ezra
 - a. Ezra is now called a “scribe”. In 8:2 he was identified as “the priest”.
3. While studying the Law they discovered how to properly celebrate the next feast, the Feast of Booths.
 - a. The directions for the Feast of Booths in Leviticus 23:39-43 were details the people (and, many of the priests and Levites) had not remembered in Babylon.
 - b. Ezra the scribe had dedicated himself to having the text, reading the text, understanding the text and, now finally, teaching the text.

8:14 – And they found it written in the Law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month,

1. The Feast of Booths begins on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and is seven days of Feasting while they live in “booths” or “shelters” built outside their homes.
 - a. Leviticus 23:34 – *“On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the Lord.”*
 - b. The Feast of Booths recognized and celebrated a couple of things:
 - i. The ingathering of the crops at the end of the year:
“You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end.”
 - ii. The people’s time in the wilderness
“*You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*”
- Leviticus 23:42-43
 - iii. The Lord’s presence dwelling with the people in the wilderness in the Tabernacle

8:15 – and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.”

1. All the Jews of Judah were to participate in the Feast of Booths
2. Communication and instructions were sent out

8:16 – So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

1. Booths or shelters were made
2. The booths were set up:
 - a. On the flat roofs of the homes
 - b. In the open, center court of their homes which was surrounded by rooms
 - c. In the temple courts on Mount Moriah
 - d. In the open squares of the main gate on the east and main gate on the west side of the new city walls:
 - i. East wall – in the Water Gate
 - ii. West wall – in the Gate of Ephraim

8:17 – And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing.

1. The Feast of Booths had been celebrated since the days of Joshua, but not with such great understanding, celebration and dedication since the days of Joshua.

8:18 – And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.

1. The reading of the Law (the Word of God) and the continued study of that text was the activity the people committed to during the seven-day Feast of Booths.
2. The study of and the dedication to the Word of God had set in. The synagogue system would soon follow and spread to every village and city in Judah.