

Bring the Book! Exalting the Pre-Eminence and Experiencing the Power of God's Word
Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on August 16, 2009
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Nehemiah 8 (NASB95) ¹ *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.* ² *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.* ³ *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.* ⁴ *Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose ...* ⁵ *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.* ⁶ *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 ...* ⁸ *They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.* ⁹ *Then 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 were weeping when they heard the words of the law.* ¹⁰ *Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."* ¹¹ *So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."* ¹² *All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.*

2 weeks ago in our study through James 1 the sermon was on how NOT to listen to a sermon. I promised you we would also study how TO listen to a sermon, which is what we'll complete this morning. Nehemiah 8 may be the greatest recorded example of the right response of God's people to God's Word, and I intended to bring it in during our studies in James 1 as an illustration, but the more and more I studied this passage, the more I felt it deserves its own treatment because it is such a fundamental formative text that is really the foundation for so much of what I hope we do as a church and what I believe with all my heart about preaching and the Word and ministry, and why we are doing what we're doing this day. Each of the main points we've seen in James 1:19-25 in past weeks are, by way of illustration, in Nehemiah 8.

James has been telling us to apply the Word and not just move on from it, and I want to spend an entire message applying that great message of James before moving on to the last couple verses of James 1 and then chap. 2 which moves on to a new subject. I don't want to just tell you what God's Word says and leave you there, I hope this message will give you hope and practical help in how to listen to God's Word, looking at the real lives of real people, sinners like you and me, who experienced real revival in the Bible.

In all the reformations and revivals in biblical history and church history, what stands out as a distinguishing mark is the pre-eminence and power of the preached Word of God. Exactly 500 years ago this summer, John Calvin was born, who along with Martin Luther turned Europe upside-down (really right-side-up). Their "secret"? They brought the Book.

They studied Scripture in the original languages, they read it to their congregations, explained it, applied it; what we would call expository preaching. They brought the Book not just on Sunday mornings but on many occasions and settings to hungry listeners, teaching it book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter, verse-by-verse, phrase-by-phrase, and even word-by-word when needed. Zwingli and other Reformers found tremendous power, reformation and revival through expository preaching, and I can say personally it has radically changed my life and still does.

The same thing was true of the great Puritan revivals in England and America during the 16th and 17th centuries, and later Great Awakening, Welsh Revival, and others. J. I. Packer writes:

‘Puritanism was, above all else, a Bible movement. To the Puritan the Bible was in truth the most precious possession that this world affords. His deepest conviction was that reverence for God means reverence for Scripture, and serving God means obeying Scripture. To his mind, therefore, no greater insult could be offered to the Creator than to neglect his written word; and conversely, there could be no truer act of homage to him than to prize it and pore over it, and then to live out and give out its teaching. Intense veneration for Scripture, as the living word of the living God, and a devoted concern to know and do all that it prescribes, was Puritanism’s hallmark.’¹

Unfortunately, that is not the hallmark of our day. We need God to revive us again, to grant us a new reformation back to the Word of God. I don’t mean by those terms what some mean or some of you think. Some Christians when they hear “revival,” they instantly think of revivalism meetings of 19th or 20th centuries, big tents, altar calls, or Pentecostal emotionalism. Some Christians may want to *revive* the glory days of America of our colonial forefathers when faith in God and fear of God was so much more prevalent in this land. Some Christians may want to *reform* the church to make it exactly like how the Puritans did it a few centuries ago. Other Christians may want to reform the church to conform to a historic tradition’s confession or liturgy or how Calvin did it or how a particular Reformed tradition does it or did it. Still other Christians want to go back before the East/West split (ex: Orthodox, or on another spectrum, burning candles and having prayer labyrinths and reciting Nicene Creed as some emerging churches do, etc.). Many say they want to get back to “the New Testament way,” but of course every group has their own version of what that exactly is.

This morning I want to go back farther than America and England and Europe’s Reformation, and even farther back than the NT day of Pentecost and the 1st century church James writes to. The origin of much of what we do actually goes back to Nehemiah 8, and in a sense even goes all the way back to Moses and his writings. This chapter takes place in 445 BC., interestingly maybe exactly 500 years before James was written. On the heels of Israel’s physical restoration to their land comes reformation and revival of spiritual Israel. Even more interesting, the events of Nehemiah 8 take place virtually exactly 1,000 years after Israel was brought out of Egypt (1445 BC), and it was in that generation that Moses wrote the Law that would now revive them again, back in the Promised Land. I want you to see how this OT narrative so marvelously illustrates the NT imperatives we’ve been studying in James. The historical book of Nehemiah is *describing* unique events that happened (not all of which are required or even repeatable by us) but I was struck by how much of what Nehemiah *describes* matches what James 1 *prescribes* for Christians: How to Listen to the Preached Word.

1. Listen Eagerly (Nehemiah 8:1)

¹ *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.*

This eagerness to listen to preaching is what marked the Bereans in Acts 17:11: *“they received the Word with great eagerness”*

James 1:19 says *“everyone must be quick to hear/listen...”*

In context, the “hearing” James speaks of is not just hearing in general, but includes especially hearing God’s Word (v. 22) and receiving the Word (v. 21). In Nehemiah’s context, the people of Israel at the Water Gate were certainly quick and eager to hear and listen to the Word of God. No one had to *ask them* to come hear to God’s Word, they are the ones who are asking for God’s Word to come to them. They sent for the man of God to bring the Book.

The end of v. 2 says this took place on the first day of the seventh month, which was called a Sabbath in the Law, and the scene that unfolds here would become the foundation and fabric of Jewish Sabbath practice in the great synagogue era after Israel’s exile.

It wasn’t just the faithful few in this scene. Look at the text: v. 1 begins *“and all the people gathered as one man”* (united crowd, some scholars estimate 30-40,000 or more people) and they are all chanting or demanding “Bring the Book! Bring the Book!” If this happened today in Israel, this type of early morning crowd gathering outside the city would have attracted quite a stir in the media and reporters might have asked people from the crowd, “Why are you here? What’s this all about? What are you asking of your leader? Some book? Do you want to change some law?”

The answer: *“We want God’s Law to change us. God has revealed Himself in a Book and all of us are here to say: Bring the Book! Bring it out!”*

In historical context, the people of Israel were returning from captivity in Babylon, and for 70 years had not been able to observe the public reading of Scripture as commanded in Deuteronomy. In the words of Amos 8:11, there was a “famine in the land” of hearing God’s Word, and the people were now starving for God’s Word, hungry for the Word, craving, crying out “bring the Book!”

They all came eagerly, not to hear the words of a man, not to hear a man rehash this world’s current events or cultural interest, not to hear *his* clowning or kidding around, or *his* keen insights or clever stories or clichés or *his* coolness or way of making unbelievers feel comfortable. God’s people wanted God’s man to bring God’s Book with God’s message in the power of God’s Spirit for God’s glory!

This is how we all must come to the preached Word, like the ones in Acts 10:33 who “*sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.*”

I hope and pray you can say that truly, that you are not just here this morning because your family members come to church or because that’s just your tradition, but that you have come expectantly, eagerly, hungrily, like newborn babes long for milk, as Peter said, accepting no substitutes. Put before a newborn some steak and lobster and your favorite dessert, and he’s only got one question for you: Got milk? Bring the milk is what a baby cries for when it’s born, and born again believers cry out “bring the Book!” Nothing more or less, no fluff, additives, no artificial ingredients!

This should be what we all desire and require: Bring the Book! Give us God’s truth, His whole truth, and nothing but His truth, so help me God. Bring the Book, bring it precept upon precept, line upon line -- this pattern was modeled by Ezra himself, and that’s what they call for and who they call for in v. 1. Notice again in this verse this is coming from the people to Ezra – “Ezra, there’s a huge crowd gathered by the Water Gate, and they’re asking for you ... oh, yes, and they have one request of you: ‘Bring the Book.’”

The man of the hour, they called for in v. 1 is Ezra, who appears for the first time here in Nehemiah, so we need to turn back to the book of Ezra to get to know more about this man. As you turn back to Ezra, the book before Nehemiah, you’re turning back some 14 years in history from the events of Nehemiah 8 to Babylon.

Ezra 7:1-13 ¹ *Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, there went up Ezra son of Seraiah [end of v. 5 traces his line to] ... son of Aaron the chief priest [original brother of Moses and chief priest when law was first given] ⁶ This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him ... ⁹ For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

This is a James 1 man – he practiced what he preached, before he preached. Notice the 3-fold 3-step pattern of this godly man’s life:

1. “*set his heart to study*” (NIV “devoted himself to the study,” NKJV “prepared his heart to seek”)
2. “*and to practice it*” (or “to do it,” like James 1:22)
3. “*and to teach*” (what a standard for all who teach! Jas 3:1)

LEARN IT → LIVE IT → LET IT OUT

Those who feared God and revered God’s Word were naturally drawn to this man Ezra. Ezra describes them this way in Ezra 9:4: *Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me ...*

So this is the man they called for in Nehemiah 8, and I think it's easy to see why. As you turn back to Nehemiah 8, this is how Steve Lawson summarized the scene in his unforgettable message to TMS grads in 2005 and to pastors at Shepherd's Conference 2006:

Ezra 'brought forth no new truth [i.e., this was not his message or any other man's]. He simply was an echo for the Word of God. This is what God has called us [preachers] to be. We are to be students, we are to dig, we are to live the message, we are to teach it, we are to preach it, and this is where the revival at the Watergate began. It was birthed 14 years earlier, with Ezra alone with God, with scrolls of Scripture unraveled before him; studying the Word, digging into the text, grasping its meaning, capturing its thunder, incorporating it into his soul, applying it into his personal life, practicing it in his walk, teaching it faithfully all these years, becoming immersed in the Word of God, becoming a walking Bible himself. Yes, Ezra was the man they called for. He was a man who along in the process had been made for this hour.

This revival at the Watergate began with people crying out for biblical preaching, and Ezra was ready and Ezra was prepared, and Ezra was immersed when he heard that cry "Bring the Book!" ... the people who truly know God and who love God, they are in their heart crying out the same "... preacher, bring it on! Bring the Book! Bring it to me!" And sad to say there are pastors all over this country who rather than hearing the heart cry of their people ("Bring the Book!") they're going to other kinds of conferences and they're hearing "Oh, this is what we do, we go around and survey unbelievers and we give them what they want." While our own people are malnourished and there is a famine in the land!

... you go survey a bunch of lost people, and they're not going to say to you "we want more Bible exposition!" The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him because they are spiritually appraised. They will want entertainment, they will want shtick, they will want drama, they will want skits in church, and [Lawson says] we sin under heaven before Almighty God to cave into that!²

Before we let the world dictate to us how we should worship God based on what they want to do and hear, we best hear what God has to say in His Book about *what He wants*, and *what we need* to hear! It is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation for all that believe, the Jew first and also the most pagan Gentiles (Rom. 1:16)! It is the Word of God alone that is living and powerful and sharper than any 2-edged sword if we will unsheathe the Sword!

2. Listen Attentively (v. 2-3)

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.³ 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.

Just like the first point tied in with James 1, this point is a perfect illustration of what James says: v. 25 "*one who looks intently at the perfect Law...*" The end of Nehemiah 8:3 says "*all the people were attentive to the book of the law.*" They all listened intently, attentively, giving the perfect Law of God the attention it deserves, including the youth and children for 5-6 hours!

I have a hard time getting people to come back to hear a 30-40 minute sermon Sunday night! God's Word had the prominent place here. Unlike so many places today where the Word takes the backseat to more and more music, programs, less important things, and less and less of the Word, God's people here couldn't get enough of the Word. These people knew the pre-eminence and power of the Word, and no one cared about the time or had something better to get to as soon as the preacher hurries up and finishes. This scene is a preacher's dream!

The people listened attentively and there were no frills or fads, no bells and whistles or gimmicks to draw the crowd – this was God's Word and God's sovereign working, nothing manufactured by mere man. There wasn't an hour + of syrupy choruses with a little brief message tacked on at the end. This wasn't little sermon-ettes for Christian-ettes (when we have weaker and weaker messages, it's no wonder Christian's lives are weaker and weaker). This also wasn't just reading a verse and then the speaker spends most of the time talking about things that really have very little to do with the text he just read – no, for Ezra the text was the very message itself!

Notice no one was discriminated or excluded or segregated from the Word of God; they didn't exclude women from instruction as was common in ancient times, they didn't exclude the youth or children who could understand (v.2 says there were "*men, women, and all that could understand*"), they didn't segregate the older ones into a separate service. All will always be welcome here.

The text says Ezra brought the law before all, v. 3 says: *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.*

The emphasis is on "all the people" - a phrase appearing 9x in 12 verses. As one commentator explains it, the Hebrew phrase and terms 'involved the entire community, including young people and children. The Jews became known as "the people of the book." The Old Testament emphasizes that God's Word is to be known and used by all the people, not only the priests and leaders ... [The Reformation revived the NT's] biblical principle that every believer should read Scripture as God's Word for their lives.'³

William Tyndale's passion to translate the Bible into common English was that every plough boy, common worker, man, woman, or child could understand and read the Bible for himself or herself.

Martin Luther condemned preachers who aimed at intellectuals to the neglect of helping simple, unlearned people understand gospel truth. He said that even though he had more than 40 doctors and magistrates in his church, when he preached he spoke to the young people, children, and servants. If the educated people weren't impressed, Luther said, the door is open; let them be gone.⁴

Rowland Hill was an 18th century English preacher greatly used of God. But he argued that your duty to listen attentively does not depend on the preacher and his delivery or oratorical ability (or lack thereof) but it's about the content of what is read or spoken and Who it's from (in this case, a loving Lord). Hill said for those who may not prefer a certain preacher's delivery:

“Supposing you went to hear the will of one of your relatives read, and you were expecting a legacy from him. You would hardly think of criticizing the manner in which the lawyer read the will. Rather, you would be all attention to hear whether anything was left to you and if so, how much. That is the way to hear the [Word] preached.”⁵

3. Listen Reverently (v. 4-6)

⁴ *Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose ...* ⁵ *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.* ⁶ *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.*

What an illustration of James 1:21: “*in humility receive the Word*”! Their humility is seen as they bow down low, faces to the ground. Their receiving the Word with reverence is seen in v. 5 in their standing as the Book is opened, in honor of the Living God of the Living Word that is about to be read (cf. 9:3). You can almost hear the holy hush as the pages of the scroll unfold in the sight of all the people. The elevated platform or podium or pulpit, depending on your translation, symbolically elevated the Word of God above all the people and practically speaking, 8:4 says it was designed for the occasion and purpose that all could see and hear Scripture read.

The Jews followed this pattern when they designed synagogues. They built raised platforms for the Word to be read and they would all themselves rise up in reverence when a man brings the Book. Some churches in Scotland and perhaps other places solemnly carry out the Bible and hold it above all the people and place it on the pulpit before the pastor arrives to communicate that all people, preacher included, are underneath the authority of God’s Book.

Men of God have a great responsibility to instill reverence for God’s Word in the sight of the people. Like priest, like people, the shepherd must lead the sheep, and Ezra led God’s people here in standing himself in v. 4, as Jesus Himself did in Luke 6 in the synagogue as He read Scripture. v. 6 says before Ezra began, he “*blessed the LORD, the great God.*” His high view of God as the great God, his giving all glory to God and none to himself, his blessing the Lord (prayer or praise or both?) beginning and end, communicated to the people what he truly believed about Scripture. How God’s Word is handled reveals more than what a doctrinal statement says. There must be gravity, weightiness, a reverence.

Lawson: ‘when you step into the pulpit, you’re not to start with a stupid joke. You’re not to act silly. There are enough clowns in the ministry without any of us adding to that number. A lot of preachers where I’ve come from [in Alabama] it looks like they’ve fallen off the truck of “Hee haw.” [Preachers, you] are an ambassador for the King and you have showed up with His Book. And you need to conduct yourself like a man of God. You need to be like Ezra and open the Bible and read from the text ... There is an authoritative posture - Ezra is not sitting on a stool sharing. He is not walking around gabbing. He is standing at a pulpit because the Word of God is in the pulpit ... not walking around [on stage] without a Bible in his hand ...’⁶

But Ezra had the Bible open and all the people listened reverently. This is the Word of the Living God, and it deserves our solemn and serious and sustained honor in our actions and attitudes while it is preached, before it is preached, and after. The flip side of honoring God and His Word: the higher your view of our awesome God, the lower your view of yourself. James 1:21: *in humility receive the Word.*

Part of humility is recognizing your need to receive the Word more. I know some churches don't do evening services anymore, and not all of you can come back, but I've never known a church where such a small percent of the people come back to receive the Word in the evening. I hope it's not for some of you a lack of humility that you don't need more Scripture, or lack of hunger to receive God's Word eagerly, attentively, and reverently. These people in Nehemiah 8 exalted the pre-eminence of God's Word in their families and experienced its power as they increased their intake of God's Word daily, for hours. May we increase ours.

4. **Listen Responsively** (like James 1:22 "*not hearers only*")

⁶ *Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands ...*

I don't know where anyone ever got the idea that good Baptists sit in the back row as still as possible and never make a sound and sit on their hands during the message ... but it's not from the Bible. It would do many of you good to be more engaged and responsive in a message, at least nodding your head (not nodding in drowsiness!) or to be radical, smiling once in a while – just do something! Write something down, say Amen sometime, it's ok to lift up your hands sometimes, there are psalms that even call you to shout at times.

We don't kneel in church (v.6b) because "that's what Catholics do," and we don't want to be exuberant or emotional because "that's what Charismatics do," or we think only Southern or ethnic churches say "Amen" (good Presbyterians say *ahmen*). If anything should move us to respond it should be God's Living Word preached! Our hearts at least should leap in praise, or our souls bow low in response; why not our lips and lives in some way.

In v. 6, Scripture was open, people's hearts were open, and even their hands were opened (raising them up perhaps as if to receive what they loved) and their mouths were opened as well in Amen's. The end of v. 9 says "*all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.*" Why? God's very Word was explained.

⁷ *...the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book ...*

Perhaps the men listed in v. 7 helped take turns reading the text (my voice is tired if I speak 2 or 3x on Sunday – Ezra would have needed a break reading hours with a loud voice to thousands of people). Some think maybe the men were stationed throughout the crowd to relay the message. The key is: "*they read from the book*"

This pattern is not just an OT story – the NT commands: "*give attention to the public reading of Scripture*" (1 Tim. 4:13, NASB, which is not equated with the teaching there, but is distinct).

The Jews in this pattern had Scripture readings during each synagogue service, and we also begin our services this way, currently reading through the Psalms. When we do that, it's not a mere formality or preamble or like the national anthem played before the real event. God's Word read is the only infallible thing in a worship service. Give attention to it. Men, when you read Scripture, read it well.

Wiersbe wrote: 'in many churches, the only Scripture publicly read is the text of the sermon [if that]. "Independent churches" criticize "liturgical churches" for being bound to tradition, but the so-called "liturgical churches" at least devote themselves to a systematic public reading of the Word of God. (The word "liturgy" simply means "a form of public worship." *Every* church has a liturgy, either a good one or a bad one.) [We can be so casual with our Bibles, they're] ... left behind in church where they are stacked up and finally given to the local city mission. We [talk about] the Bible as the Word of God, but we don't always *treat* it like the Word of God. We are also in too big a hurry to have the meeting end. In some parts of the world, especially in Eastern Europe before the collapse of the Communist bloc, believers would stand for hours in crowded churches to hear Bible teaching.'⁷

⁸ *They read from the book, from the law of God, translating [or "explaining"] to give the sense so that they understood the reading.*

NIV: *making it clear and giving the meaning*

ESV: *They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly* [foot note: "Or with interpretation, or paragraph by paragraph"]

In other words, they broke it down for them, not just into sections but breaking down what it meant, explaining Hebrew terms that some may not have been familiar with in captivity, giving the meaning of the text, making it clear. A preacher is not a chef who cooks a meal, but a waiter who delivers it. This is an OT example of expository preaching that God has blessed for over 2,500 years when God's Word is expounded and His people listen responsively

5. **Listen Joyfully** (v.10-12, Jas 1:25 *this man will be blessed*)

¹⁰ *Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

There's not just the origin of preaching in this chapter, here's the origin of potlucks! (actually both came out of the Torah, there were festivals and feasts of God's people for various reasons). What better occasion for us in the New Covenant than at baptism to have the joy of the Lord as we celebrate what He has done in saving sinners among us. We'll have the privilege on this holy day a little later like this verse to eat of the fat, drink of what's sweet, and share with others (like this text, all of you are welcome even if you don't have food to bring). But notice that they rejoiced, celebrated most greatly here *because* they understood the preached Word:

¹² *All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.*

It was not the food or the fellowship that brought this joy, it was the fuller understanding they got of God's Word. Job said: *"I have esteemed / treasured your Word more than my necessary food"* (Job 23:12). Jeremiah said when God's Word came to him: *"I ate them, and your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart"* (Jeremiah 15:16, NKJV). Jesus: *"These things I have spoken to you, that **my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full**"* (John 15:11). This joy of the Lord, from the Lord, and in the Lord, is our strength.

God's Word is given not just to show us how to glorify God but how to enjoy God forever. So listen joyfully to God's Word. If you have been made to understand God's Word more, thank God right then, praise Him, rejoice in that privilege many do not have.

6. Listen Regularly (v. 13, 18)

¹³ *Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.*

...¹⁸ *He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day.*

This illustrates James 1:25, the one who looks at the Law and continually "abides by it." We don't need to spend as much time here since we covered it last week, but notice again that God's Word is needed regularly repeatedly daily continually. We have a great privilege they do not have today to increase our hearing of Scripture (audio Bible, sermon CDs, MP3 players, etc.)

Notice in v. 13 it is the fathers in particular who sought out more teaching and insight. These men were not passive but were active, taking seriously their responsibility as spiritual leader and teacher in their own house, as priest of their home. This church has been committed to building up men for years, but men individually all need to be committed to being built up in God's Word. Don't leave to the wives or the ladies your spiritual responsibilities. The church needs you and your families need you to be men of the Book. Why not join us for men's Bible study on Saturdays? Why not lead your wife or kids through a study in God's Word? Be men of the Book!

In Nehemiah 12:43 whole families rejoiced as the men led in worship: *"...they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar."*

7. Listen Obediently (v. 14-17)

We also don't need to spend much time here, because obeying God's Word, being a doer of God's Word, was emphasized in the last 2 messages. James 1:22 and 25 ("an effectual doer") is again illustrated marvelously in Nehemiah 8. In vs. 14-17 as they read from the Law they realized they were not living what it said about the festival of booths. They weren't like the man in the mirror in James 1 who goes away and immediately forgets, they instantly set about to obey, taking practical steps to ensure quick obedience. At the end of v. 17 the result was *"and there was great rejoicing."*

8. Listen Repentantly (9:1-2)

James 1:21 says to receive the Word we must be repenting or putting off as we put on. It says “*laying aside all filthiness and all that remains in wickedness...*”

Nehemiah 9 ¹ *Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.* ² *The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins ...*

To symbolize repentance and the putting off of sin they would actually put on dirt and sackcloth garments, and here they not only confessed their sins, but they took action to separate themselves from pagans and paganism (you can read more about that in Ezra). Their repentance was so urgent they would not eat, they fasted instead of feasting. Scripture causes both rejoicing and repenting.

9. Listen Worshipfully (Neh. 9:3-6)

³ *While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.*

The Word of God is the height of worship. The deeper we go in the study of God and His Word which reveals Him, the higher our worship will ascend. It’s not a certain type of music or feel that makes worship; it’s the truth of God’s Word. Worship does not end when the singing portion of our service ends, worship culminates in the Word of God proclaimed and obeyed. Listen to a snapshot of their biblically informed worship here, their God-centered prayer:

9:4b “*and they cried with a loud voice to the Lord their God.*

9:5b “*Arise, bless the Lord your God forever and ever! O may Your glorious name be blessed And exalted above all blessing and praise! You alone are the Lord. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before You.*”

It’s not just the host of heaven that bows down. Nehemiah 8:6 says *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.*

Come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our God our Maker. Bring the Book, O Lord! Revive us again!

¹ J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, Crossway Books, p. 98.

² Steve Lawson, “Bring the Book,” available at www.shepherdsconference.org (2006 General Session)

³ M. Breneman, *The New American Commentary*, Vol. 10, p. 224. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993.

⁴ *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, edited by Thomas Kepler [Baker], pp. 253-254.

⁵ As told by Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* [Zondervan], pp. 391-392.

⁶ Lawson, *Ibid.*

⁷ Warren Wiersbe. *Be Determined*. (Neh 8:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1992.