

Bible Studies for Life: October 23

Hear God's Word • Nehemiah 8:1-3, 7-12

By Laura Lee Leathers



Leathers

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Today's lesson takes us back to the 430-400 B.C. Warren Wiersbe, in *Be Determined (Nehemiah): Standing Firm in the Face of Opposition*, gives a brief outline: "Concern (Neh. 1), Construction (Neh. 2-3), Conflict (Neh. 4-7), and Consecration (Neh. 8-12).

Put yourself in a position to hear God's Word (Nehemiah 8:1-3, NKJV). The wall has been rebuilt, and the captives have returned to Jerusalem. The chapter begins by pointing out the time frame, which was the first day of the seventh month (7:73b, 8:2). This meant the nation of Israel was expected to celebrate the feasts of the Lord: Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23)

The people, all the men and women, gathered in the square in front of the Water Gate, the east side of Jerusalem. Ezra was called and told to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch. It should be noted that Ezra at this point has been in ministry for about thirteen years, but this is the first time that his path and Nehemiah's have intersected.

Wiersbe says that Nehemiah was calling for a "Bible Conference." In verse two, "Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding." Note that the titles of Ezra – scribe and priest – are used interchangeably.

Most importantly, notice the key theme for this passage: "hear with understanding" (vv. 3, 7, 8, and 12).

From morning to midday, Ezra read and "the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the Law." The people were listening! Commentaries say this would have been a five- or six-hour reading. In verse 18, we are told they continued this for a week and then had "a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner."

In verses four through six, Ezra the scribe is standing on a wooden platform, a pulpit made specifically for this day and

purpose. Thirteen men are standing with him on his left and right.

When he opened the Book, the people who were seated stood up. "And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God." The people answered with "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands, then "they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground."

Listen to God's Word with the goal of understanding (Nehemiah 8:7-8). The men mentioned in verse seven were probably there to help the people understand the Law as Ezra read it. Why was this necessary?

We must remember that these former captives were coming from a foreign place where they didn't have their own copies of the Scriptures. Also, the Hebrew language would have changed from the writing in ancient Hebrew about 1,000 years earlier. In addition, these people who had been in captivity were probably hearing the Hebrew language for the first time.

"The word *distinctly* in verse eight means that the law was explained to the people in a language they could understand" (Wiersbe).

Today, we have the power of the Holy Spirit residing within us as our teacher, and we have the whole counsel of God (see Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:10-11).

Respond to what you hear with both repentance and celebration (Nehemiah 8:9-12). When the people listened to the Word, they "understood the words that were declared to them."

Next came the application. The people responded with conviction and grief, mourning over their sins, and they wept.

Also, because the day was holy to the Lord, they were to share their portions with others who didn't have anything prepared. "All the people went their way to eat and drink, to send

portions and rejoice greatly.”

“The people had a need to grieve over their disobedience to God’s Word, but God did not leave them there. God forgave and restored, giving them cause to celebrate” (LifeWay).

Nehemiah reminded the people that because this was the Feast of Trumpets, it was a time of celebration. “Do not grieve, because the joy of the LORD is your stronghold” (v.10). In other words, through their rejoicing and worship they had the strength of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “give attention to the reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:13). Christ-followers are to be people of the Word – hearing, reading, and applying it to their daily lives.

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