

*Series: Rebuild; Sermon: Return to the Bible, delivered by
Josh Moody, senior pastor, on November 29, 2020*

Bible text explored: Nehemiah 8:1–12

¹And 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. ²So 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. ³And 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. ⁴And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹And 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. ¹⁰Then 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.” ¹¹So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” ¹²And 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. [ESV]

Review and application:

1. What caused the Israelites to assemble in a spacious square on this day?
[a] To celebrate New Year’s Day (Rosh Hashana) (*Nehemiah 7:73b*)
[b] To observe the Festival of Trumpets (*Leviticus 23:23-25*)
[c] To celebrate finishing reconstruction of the city wall (*Nehemiah 6:15*)
2. How united (*verses 1-3*) was the entire community?
How often does the phrase “all the people” or “the people” appear in this whole passage?
Who (*verse 2*) did the people include?
3. They wanted to hear from the Bible (*Torah*, means “teaching”; see *Psalms 1* and *Psalms 119*). For how long did they listen?
How focused was their listening, and what are the results of receptive hearing? (*Luke 8:4-8, 11-15, 18*)
4. Who (*verses 4-6*) read the Scripture? (*Ezra 8:10*)
The Book of the Law was read from an elevated platform) for visibility. What would the “book” have looked like? (*Luke 4:17-20*)

5. How did the people respond to the book's opening?
Is our response to the reading of God's Word similarly attentive?
6. How (*verses 7-8*) did they explain and apply the Scriptures being read?
What similar discipling role are we challenged to assume?
(*1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 4:11-16*)
7. Why (*verses 9-11*) did Nehemiah and Ezra urge the people to shift from regret for their failure to keep the high standards of Scripture to rejoicing that their holy God is also gracious?
8. What (*verse 12*) was the solid basis for rejoicing?
Pastor Moody said that joy is what makes the church strong. Have you experienced what he stressed: that when *faith* is based on gospel *facts*, the *feelings* that follow are transformed?
9. How has reflecting on this Scripture passage affirmed for you the Bible's believability?
And how has it affirmed for you the Bible's practicality?