



II. THE WORSHIP OF THE PEOPLE (Nehemiah 8:1-18)

A. Laying the Groundwork

1. Upon consideration of the shift from the present to the past in Nehemiah 7:5, we discovered that the remainder of Nehemiah chapter 7 aligned closely to Ezra chapter 2.
2. Some people see the historical references in Nehemiah chapter 7 but fail to see the continuation of such references and believe the text of Nehemiah returns to the present in the shift from chapter 7 to chapter 8.
3. However, Ezra chapter 3 opens with *“when the seventh month was come...the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem”* and Nehemiah chapter 8 opens with *“AND all the people gathered themselves together as one man”* later adding that it was *“upon the first day of the seventh month”* (Nehemiah 8:2). Note: We emphasize the and of Nehemiah 8:1 because it shows a continuation from the text of Nehemiah chapter 7 just as Ezra chapter 3 was a continuation of the text from Ezra chapter 2.
4. Before proceeding to the verse-by-verse study, one more point needs to be made concerning the historical nature of Nehemiah chapter 8.
 - a. Nehemiah 8:17 speaks of the feast of tabernacles and the making of booths and says, *“since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so.”*
 - b. Ezra 3:4 declares *“They kept also the feast of tabernacles, AS IT IS WRITTEN.”*
 - c. All things considered, it seems as though the feast was kept in Ezra chapter 3 in the same fashion as it was kept in Nehemiah chapter 8. If Nehemiah chapter 8 could declare that it had not been done in this manner since the days of Joshua, it stands to reason that Nehemiah chapter 8 and Ezra chapter 3 are speaking of the same observance of the feast of tabernacles.
5. Having established the connection between the account of Ezra chapter 3 and Nehemiah chapter 8, let us get more granular and consider the timing of the eighth chapter of Nehemiah.
 - a. The year in view—The first year of the return from captivity under the leadership of Zerubbabel (see Ezra 3:8).
 - b. The month in view
 - (1) According to Nehemiah 8:2, the events of the chapter took place in the seventh month (see also Nehemiah 7:73; Ezra 3:1).
 - (2) The presence of two calendars allows for two options.
 - a) Abib—the seventh month in the secular calendar
 - b) Ethanim—the seventh month in the sacred calendar
 - (3) This is cleared up by the holding of the feast of tabernacles which is in the month Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2).
 - c. The days in view
 - (1) The first day of the seventh month (Nehemiah 8:2)
 - (2) And on the second day (Nehemiah 8:13)



- B. The First Day of Worship (Nehemiah 8:1-12)
1. The reading of the word (Nehemiah 8:1-8)
 - a. The gathering of the people (Nehemiah 8:1)
 - (1) The nature of the gathering
 - a) The people gathered themselves together.
 - i) This gathering was initiated by the common people.
 - ii) They did not gather at the command of others, but because they personally chose to do so.
 - b) They gathered “*as one man.*”
 - (2) The place of the gathering
 - a) Into the street
 - b) Before the water gate (see Nehemiah 3:26)
 - (3) The desire of the gathering—“*they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses*” (see 1 Peter 2:2)
 - b. The reading of the law of God (Nehemiah 8:2-5)
 - (1) The presentation of the law (Nehemiah 8:2)
 - a) The person presenting the law—“*Ezra the priest*”
 - b) The audience for the law—“*before the congregation*”
 - i) Both of men and women
 - ii) All that could hear with understanding
 - c) The initiation of the presentation—“*the first day of the seventh month*”
 - (2) The reading of the law (Nehemiah 8:3-5)
 - a) The conditions of the reading (Nehemiah 8:3)
 - i) Ezra read from the law before the street that was before the water gate.
 - ii) He read from morning until midday.
 - iii) He read before the gathered congregation.
 - iv) The people were attentive unto the book of the law.
 - b) The positioning of the reading (Nehemiah 8:4-5)
 - i) Ezra’s strategic positioning (Nehemiah 8:4-5)
 - (a) He stood upon a pulpit of wood (Nehemiah 8:4).
 - (i) We commonly think of a pulpit as the piece of furniture behind which the minister stands when preaching or teaching.
 - (ii) In reality, the pulpit is a platform upon which Ezra stood.
 - (iii) This pulpit of wood was constructed for this purpose.
 - (b) He was elevated above the people (Nehemiah 8:5).
 - (i) This allowed all the congregation to see the reader.
 - (ii) It also ensured that the congregation did not mistake the words for the words of Ezra, but they could see him reading from the law of God.



- ii) Ezra's supporting staff (Nehemiah 8:4)
 - (a) On his right hand
 - (i) Mattithiah
 - (ii) Shema
 - (iii) Anaiah
 - (iv) Urijah
 - (v) Hilkiah
 - (vi) Maaseiah
 - (b) On his left hand
 - (i) Pedaiah
 - (ii) Mishael
 - (iii) Malchiah
 - (iv) Hashum
 - (v) Hashbadana
 - (vi) Zechariah
 - (vii) Meshullam
- c) The reverence for the reading (Nehemiah 8:5)
 - i) Ezra opened the book.
 - ii) The people stood up (from morning until midday).
- c. The exposition of the law of God (Nehemiah 8:6-8)
 - (1) The people worshipped the Lord (Nehemiah 8:6).
 - a) Ezra's worship—"*Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God.*"
 - b) The people's worship
 - i) The expression of their worship—"*all the people answered, Amen, Amen,*"
 - ii) The posture of their worship
 - (a) They lifted their hands (typically a position reserved for prayer).
 - (b) They bowed their heads.
 - (c) They worshipped with their faces to the ground.
 - (2) The leaders explained the scriptures (Nehemiah 8:7-8).
 - a) The identity of the leaders (Nehemiah 8:7)
 - i) The individuals
 - (a) Jeshua
 - (b) Bani
 - (c) Sherebiah
 - (d) Jamin
 - (e) Akkub
 - (f) Shabbethai
 - (g) Hodijah
 - (h) Maaseiah
 - (i) Kelita
 - (j) Azariah
 - (k) Jozabad
 - (l) Hanan
 - (m) Pelaiah
 - ii) The group—"*the Levites*"



- b) The actions of the people (Nehemiah 8:7-8)
 - i) Of the leaders (Nehemiah 8:7-8)
 - (a) They read in the book of the law of God distinctly (Nehemiah 8:8).
 - (b) They gave the sense (Nehemiah 8:8).
 - (c) They caused the people to understand the reading for the law (Nehemiah 8:7-8).
 - ii) Of the people—*“the people stood in their place”* (Nehemiah 8:7)
- 2. The response to the word (Nehemiah 8:9-12)
 - a. The admonitions from the leadership (Nehemiah 8:9-11)
 - (1) The initial instruction (Nehemiah 8:9)
 - a) The instructors
 - i) Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha
 - ii) Ezra the priest the scribe
 - iii) The Levites that taught the people
 - b) The audience—*“all the people”*
 - c) The message
 - i) The problem—*“all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law”*
 - ii) The admonition—*“mourn not, nor weep”*
 - iii) The reminder—*“This day is holy unto the LORD your God”*
 - (2) Nehemiah’s continued instruction (Nehemiah 8:10)
 - a) The instructor—*“he”*; Note: Since Nehemiah was listed first in Nehemiah 8:9, it stands to reason that he was the main voice and others were there in support.
 - b) The audience—*“them”*; Note: Looking back, *them* is, no doubt, *all the people*.
 - c) The message
 - i) The admonition
 - (a) Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet.
 - (b) Send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared.
 - (c) Neither be ye sorry.
 - ii) The reminder
 - (a) This day is holy unto our Lord.
 - (b) The joy of the LORD is your strength.
 - (3) The Levites’ continued instruction (Nehemiah 8:11)
 - a) The instructors—*“the Levites”*
 - b) The audience—*“all the people”*
 - c) The message
 - i) The admonition
 - (a) Hold your peace.
 - (b) Neither be ye grieved
 - ii) The reminder—*“the day is holy”*



- b. The obedience of the people (Nehemiah 8:12)
 - (1) The declaration of their understanding—*“they had understood the words that were declared unto them”*
 - (2) The proof of their understanding
 - a) The participation in the proof—*“all the people”*
 - b) The practice in the proof—*“the people went their way to”*
 - i) Eat
 - ii) Drink
 - iii) Send portions
 - iv) Make great mirth

- C. The Second Day of Worship (Nehemiah 8:13-18)
 - 1. The reading of the word (Nehemiah 8:13-15)
 - a. The gathering of the people (Nehemiah 8:13)
 - (1) The time of the gathering—*“on the second day”*
 - (2) The audience of the gathering
 - a) The chief of the fathers of all the people
 - b) The priests
 - c) The Levites
 - (3) The recipient of the gathering—*“unto Ezra the scribe”*
 - (4) The purpose of the gathering—*“to understand the words of the law”*
 - b. The study of the law of God (Nehemiah 8:14-15)
 - (1) The source of the study—*“they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded Moses”* (Nehemiah 8:14)
 - (2) The subject of the study (Nehemiah 8:14-15)
 - a) The action requested—The children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month (Nehemiah 8:14).
 - b) The proclamation requested (Nehemiah 8:15)
 - i) The places of proclamation
 - (a) In all their cities
 - (b) In Jerusalem
 - ii) The practice of proclamation
 - (a) Preparations
 - (i) Go forth unto the mount.
 - (ii) Fetch olive branches, pine branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of thick trees.
 - (b) Purpose—*“to make booths, as it is written”*
 - 2. The response to the word (Nehemiah 8:16-18)
 - a. The preparation for the feast (Nehemiah 8:16-17)
 - (1) The practice of obedience—*“the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths”* (Nehemiah 8:16); Note: The feast historical began on the fifteenth day of the seventh



month. It is quite possible that their work took time and the feast began on the typical day.

- (2) The places of obedience (Nehemiah 8:16)
 - a) Upon the roof of his house
 - b) In their courts
 - c) In the courts of the house of God
 - d) In the street of the water gate
 - e) In the street of the gate of Ephraim
- (3) The enjoyment of obedience (Nehemiah 8:17)
 - a) All the congregation that was come out of the captivity made booths and sat under them.
 - b) This had not been done since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun.
 - c) There was very great gladness among the people. Note: Gladness is a holy feeling that followed obedience. Failure to obey would have negated the gladness.
- b. The observance of the feast (Nehemiah 8:18)
 - (1) The duration of the feast—*“they kept the feast seven days”*
 - (2) The companion to the feast
 - a) Ezra read in the book of the law of God.
 - b) He did so day by day, from the first day unto the last day.
 - (3) The conclusion of the feast—*“on the eighth day was a solemn assembly”*

D. Special Notes on the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-44)

1. The event (Leviticus 23:33-44)
 - a. The date (Leviticus 23:33-39)
 - (1) On the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:34-35)
 - a) In Ezra chapter 3 and Nehemiah chapter 8, Israel began their preparations on the second day of the month.
 - b) It is highly likely that the fetching of the branches and the building of the booths took the time between that day and the fifteenth day of the month when the feast was typically observed.
 - (2) On the seven days following this day (Leviticus 23:36)
 - (3) When the fruit of the land had been gathered (Leviticus 23:39)
 - b. The activities (Leviticus 23:40-44)
2. The representation
 - a. The commemoration—Israel’s history (Leviticus 23:43); Note: It was fitting for Israel, returning from captivity, to be reminded of God’s past deliverance from Egypt.
 - b. The prophetic view—God dwelling with man (Revelation 21:3-6); Note: It was fitting again for Israel, returning from captivity, to look forward to the time when there would be no more captivity and when God would personally tabernacle with the people.