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- Neh 8:7 Also 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.
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2Ti 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and **profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,**

2Ti 3:17 that **the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

Question: What is the importance of letting the people understand the Law at this time, that is, in chapter 8?

Fellowship: Why was the law (the five books of Moses, or the Pentateuch, but today signifying the entire word of God) not introduced earlier? Why did Nehemiah wait until chapter 8, until the wall had been rebuilt, before introducing the people to the law?

1. Many times, we look to or read the Bible for knowledge, or to understand it. Indeed, verse 2 specifically says that the law was read to all the people and those who could understand. However, it is hard to understand the Bible, especially when we are not living a church life with brothers and sisters. Can anyone read the Bible, at any place and at any time? Absolutely. However, in order to experience what we read, and even understand a little bit of what we read, we need a living and an exercise that may enable the Lord to speak to us. The people had rebuilt the wall in 52 days (Neh 6:15). The people experienced the fruit of being in teams, laboring and serving with one another, and resisting the enemy (today, spiritually, this signifies the prayer of the church). It was through such a living that the law (the word of God) was able to be read and spoken to the people so they could understand. For us also, do we have a church life? Do we accompany people? We do not need to know the Bible profoundly to accompany people, or preach the gospel.
2. All the returned exiles had lived in Babylon for at least 70 years (the older ones who had been carried away into captivity and then returned). Many were second and even third generation, born in Babylon, and had never heard or read the law. They had the Babylonian (worldly) way of thinking, tastes and preferences, just like us. There was a need for them to be reconstituted. For us, as we live the church life, and even serve the Lord, our way of thinking needs to be changed. We need to pursue the word of God, with companions and individually

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Acts 11:25 So **Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,**

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Joh 6:5 Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”

Joh 6:6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

Joh 6:8 **One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,**

Joh 6:9 “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?”

Chapter 8 gives us an insight into Nehemiah’s large heart and his reading of the church situation, through the leading of God. From chapter 1 to chapter 7, Nehemiah was actively involved, with other brothers, in the rebuilding of the walls, coordinating and overseeing the work, according to the burden the Lord had given him. He had a plan and he diligently prayed for the Lord’s leading. However, he realized that he was not able to meet the need of the people for the word of God. Some commentators say that Nehemiah did not know the word of God (the law). The Bible does not say so. But Nehemiah did realize that Ezra was a scribe who knew the law, and he may have requested Ezra to fill that need. To read and expound the law to the people may not have been Nehemiah’s function, but he, like Barnabas who sought out Saul (later Paul) in the New Testament to bring him to Antioch to teach the word of God, knew Ezra and his capacity and ministry. Do we know the saints and their different portions? Also, do we invite them and incorporate their portions in the church life? We are not able to meet the needs of many saints. Like Andrew in John 6, do we know a little boy (a young saint) who may be able to minister to those needs that we are not able to address?

Neh 8:4 And 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.

Neh 8:7 Also 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.

Like Nehemiah, Ezra was not alone. He had a team of brothers, perhaps those whom he had raised up, to know the law like him, and also expound the law. These brothers were Levites. They gave themselves to read and study the law. Today, all believers or Christians are priests and Levites. There is no so-called special category of people in the New Testament who are more qualified to serve. However, there are some who give themselves to the Lord to serve with more of their time, to know the Bible and how to expound the Bible. They are even trained, to a certain extent, to be able to handle the word of God. We honor and need such brothers and sisters, and the churches need them for the growth of the saints and of the Lord's testimony.

Even if we are working brothers and sisters, or students, and we may not have as much time, we can still give ourselves, and the time that we have, to pursue the word of God (the Bible).

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Neh 8:6 And **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.**

Deu 27:14 And **the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel in a loud voice:**

Deu 27:15 “‘Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ **And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:16 “‘Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:17 “‘Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor's landmark.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:18 “‘Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:19 “‘Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:20 “‘Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's nakedness.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:21 “‘Cursed be anyone who lies with any kind of animal.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:22 “‘Cursed be anyone who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:23 “‘Cursed be anyone who lies with his mother-in-law.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:24 “‘Cursed be anyone who strikes down his neighbor in secret.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:25 “‘Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Deu 27:26 “‘Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ **And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’**

Joh 11:41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

Joh 11:42 I knew that you always hear me, **but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”**

Joh 11:43 When he had said these things, **he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”**

Please read the fellowship on these verses in the next slide.

How we come to the Bible (the word of God) matters. How is our person? It is not a matter of our intelligence or intellectual capacity, but our person. Is our person godly, proper, before the Lord?

1. The people stood while Ezra read out loud. To stand means that we are girded up, ready to receive the Lord's speaking. Do we understand? Maybe not. Maybe a little. But if we are girded up, the Lord may speak one word to us.
2. Ezra blessed the Lord, and all the people answered "Amen," lifting up their hands, and bowing their heads and worshipping God. Any time we come to the Bible, do we seek the Lord? Do we realize that we are coming to Jesus Christ Himself? He is the word of God (John 1:1).
3. Do we read the Bible out loud? Do we pray out loud, even with a loud voice (Deut 27:14)? Do we say "Amen?" audibly? Many say that they like to pray silently or say "Amen" silently. That is wonderful. But there are times when to pray or read the Bible with a loud voice strengthens our spirit, and even encourages and strengthens us, and not only us, but also those who hear us. Even Jesus prayed out loud, not for His sake, but for the sake of those who were listening (John 11:42).
4. Do we humble ourselves before the Lord? When we come to the Bible, do we tell the Lord, "Lord, I know nothing. Speak to me. I don't trust in any knowledge I may have. You must speak to me."

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- Neh 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.
- Neh 8:4 And **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.
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The first day of the 7th month was the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:24), the 10th day of the 7th month was the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27), and the 15th day of the 7th month was the Feast of Booths (Lev 23:34). The 7th month was also the time when the first returning people built an altar and sacrificed in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:1-6), and it was the beginning of God's restoration of Jerusalem. Praise our Lord, they were in one accord (**all the people gathered as one man**).

"From early morning until midday", people who read the law and listened to the law stood together, regardless of men, women, and children. The people carefully "listened with their ears" for about five hours. They did not exclude their children, but let "everyone who listened and could understand" listen to God's words together. As long as children can understand the words of people, they can understand the words of God. Therefore, the Bible teaches the parents to teach their children the word of God diligently.

Neh 8:4-5 mentions three times "stood," This means that all the people honored the words of God and were very focused and diligent to read and listen to the words of God.

Acts 11:22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and **they sent Barnabas to Antioch.**

Acts 11:23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,

Acts 11:24 for **he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.**

Acts 11:25 So **Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,**

Acts 11:26 and **when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.**

Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul (the Apostle Paul), and was also a great example of someone who formed a spiritual service team and honored those who know the words of God.

Acts 11:26 shows that God also blessed this invitation and the latter operation because **in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Therefore the church invites many servants of the Lord to expound the words of God and receives much blessing from the Lord.**

John 1:1 In the beginning was the **Word (G3056; logos)**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words (**G4487; rhema**) that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Heb 4:12 For the **word (G3056; logos)**, of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

word (logos) Word (rhema) word (logos)
 unlimited limited unlimited

Law and Sheepfold (John 10:1-16)

inside the sheepfold

outside the sheepfold



2 Cor.3:6b not of the letter but of the Spirit. **For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

Without the Lord Jesus Christ as the door, not only inside the sheepfold is there death, but also outside it is not rich. When we enjoy the Lord Jesus Christ (or God) as the door, there is pasture inside (Rom 2:13-14) and outside of the sheepfold.

Rom 2:13 **For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.**

Rom 2:14 **For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.**

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Neh 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.

Wow ! We need to have the service teams in one accord. In Neh 8:1, all the people gathered as one man to read, explain and testify the words of God together with all the saints who were willing to listen.

An effective testimony/prophecy of brothers and **sisters** may need three elements: (1) speak the words of God clearly, loudly and slowly together **with PPT (for large gatherings)**; (2) explain the meaning of the words of God in detail and with examples (ex testimonies); (3) enable the audience to clearly understand and accept them. **In the current church life we very much need to pay attention to the receptivity of the audience, in both small groups and large gatherings.**

If a saint would merely like to release his or **her** own burdens, without paying attention to whether the audience can understand and accept them, then the effectiveness of his or **her** speaking is limited.

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God's intention for Israel was to gain a group of people with a holy constitution on earth to bear His testimony. However, most of those who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile were born in and also grew up in Babylon. The Babylonian elements had been worked into them and constituted into their whole being. Therefore, after they returned to Jerusalem and became citizens of Israel, they needed to be reconstituted. To be reconstituted, they needed to return to God's law, which is His word. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the returned Israelites were collectively constituted by God himself through God's words, becoming a nation, and being God's testimony.

To reconstitute the people of God is to let them understand and experience the word of God, so that they may be able to know God and God's heart desire. The word of God is one with the Spirit. Through our daily reading of the holy words, the words of God may work in us; and through the words, the Spirit naturally dispenses the disposition of God with the elements of God into us, so that we can be constituted by God.

The priest Ezra knew the words of God, which is necessary in the restoration of God's people, because through him, the people could be reconstituted with the word of God. Nehemiah was the governor and chief of the State of Israel, but admitted that he needed Ezra, which indicated that he had no ambitions and valued the service team. Nehemiah knew that he did not know the word of God that well in the matter of rebuilding the nation of Israel. But Ezra was known for knowing God's words, so Nehemiah was willing to turn to Ezra for help. Nehemiah knew that without Ezra, he would not be able to reconstitute the people of God.