

# Nehemiah

## Chapter 8

*Ezra Reads the Law*

**And 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. 2 So 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. 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. 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. 5 And 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. 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. 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. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.**

**8:1–18** According to the traditional view, the reading of the Law by Ezra would be the first reference to him in almost 13 years since his arrival in 458 B.C. Since he was commissioned to teach the Law (Ezr 7:6, 10, 14, 25–26), it is surprising that there was such a long delay in its public proclamation. (CSB)

**8:1** *all the people gathered.* See Ezr 3:1, which also refers to an assembly called in the seventh month (Tishri), the beginning of the civil year. (CSB)

*square before the Water Gate.* See vv. 3, 16. Squares were normally located near a city gate (2Ch 32:6). (CSB)

*scribe.* People took initiative in asking Ezra to read from God’s Law. Ezra previous history is recorded in Ezra 7-19. One task Ezra set for himself was to teach God’s “statutes and rules in Israel” (Ezra 7:10), a responsibility assigned to him by King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:25). (TLSB)

*Book of the Law of Moses.* † Cf. vv. 2–3, 5, 8–9, 13–15, 18. Surely Ezra could have brought back with him the Torah, i.e., the entire Pentateuch. There is no real reason to doubt that the reference is to anything else. (CSB)

Five Books of Moses (Gn–Dt). (TLSB)

**8:2** *first day of the seventh month.* Oct. 8, 445 B.C.; the New Year’s Day of the civil calendar (see note on Lev 23:24), celebrated as the Feast of Trumpets (Nu 29:1–6), with cessation of labor and a sacred assembly. (CSB)

Tishri The Lord had ordained that this was to be a holy day, the Feast of Trumpets. “This is the simple meaning of the [third] commandment: People must have holidays. Therefore, such observances should be devoted to hearing God’s Word so that the special function of this day of rest should be the ministry of the Word for the young and the mass of poor people [Nehemiah 8:2–3, 8]. Yet the resting should not be strictly understood to forbid any work that comes up, which cannot be avoided” (LC I 86). (TLSB)

The convocation when Ezra read God’s Word was held on the day of the Festival of the Trumpets. This day was ideal for this assembly, since an assembly was mandated by the Teaching of Moses (Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1). The assembly was held in the square in front of the Water Gate. This gate on the east side of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt and incorporated into the new wall around the city, so probably only its ruins remained. The idea for reading the Teaching of Moses at this first Festival of Trumpets following the completion of the wall apparently sprang from the people and they recruited Ezra to read to them. (CC)

*women.* See 10:28. Women did not usually participate in assemblies, but were brought, together with children, on such solemn occasions (Dt 31:12; Jos 8:35; 2Ki 23:2). (CSB)

Women and older children were included in the assembly. (TLSB)

*who could understand* – The audience included women as well as men and also children old enough to receive instruction. (CC)

**8:3** *he read from it.* See Ex 24:7; Ac 8:30. (CSB)

Daniel Webster stressed the importance of a proper foundation on which to establish a new society. Having observed the trend of history he pointed out that “there is no solid basis for civilization but in the Word of God. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 122)

Ezra had to limit himself to selected portions of the Law (he probably read mostly from Dt). (TLSB)

*from daybreak till noon.* The people evidently stood (vv. 5, 7) for five or six hours, listening attentively to the reading and exposition (vv. 7–8, 12) of the Scriptures. (CSB)

The reading could not continue into the afternoon and perhaps the evening in order to cover the entire Pentateuch because the priests were needed during the afternoon to offer the required sacrifices for the Festival of Trumpets (Lev. 23:25; Num. 29:2-6). (CC)

**8:4** *stood on a wooden platform* – Literally, “a tower of wood” that had to accommodate at least 14 people. (TLSB)

*Mattithiah...Meshulliam* – Thirteen men flanked Ezra, six on his right and seven on his left. These apparently were important leaders of the Judean community, but we cannot identify them more precisely. Some were priests and some were laymen. The most we can say about these men on the platform with Ezra is that they were honored as leaders of the people. (CC)

These 13 on Ezra's right and left were probably laypeople demonstrating their support. Anaiah, Maaseiah, Hashum, and Meshullam were "chiefs of the people" who signed the covenant (10:14, 18, 20, 22, 25). (TLSB)

**8:5** *book*. Scroll. (A long strip of leather or papyrus on which scribes wrote in columns (see Jer 36:23) with pen (see Isa 8:1) and ink (see Jer 36:18), sometimes on both sides (see Eze 2:10; Rev 5:1). After being rolled up, a scroll was often sealed (see Isa 29:11; Da 12:4; Rev 5:1–2, 5, 9) to protect its contents. Scrolls were of various sizes (see Isa 8:1; Rev 10:2, 9–10). Certain Egyptian examples reached lengths of over 100 feet; Biblical scrolls, however, rarely exceeded 30 feet in length, as in the case of a book like Isaiah (see Lk 4:17). Reading the contents of a scroll involved the awkward procedure of unrolling it with one hand while rolling it up with the other (see Isa 34:4; Eze 2:10; Lk 4:17, 20; Rev 6:14). Shortly after the time of Christ the scroll gave way to the book form still used today. (CSB)

*all the people stood*. The rabbis deduced from this verse that the congregation should stand for the reading of the Torah. It is customary in Eastern Orthodox churches for the congregation to stand throughout the service. (CSB)

Praise of God before reading the Scripture has a long history, and this verse is the first known example of the practice. In the church, the congregation customarily stands (as did the people in this verse) before the reading of the Holy Gospel, which is introduced with liturgical praise. (CC)

Out of respect for the Law. (TLSB)

**8:6** *Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God* – This title for God occurs only here, though the similar, translated identically in English as "the great God" occurs in Deut. 10:17; Jer. 32:18; Dan. 9:4; Neh. 1:5; 9:32, and its Aramaic equivalent is used in Ezra 5:8 (cf. Dan. 2:45). (CC)

*lifted up their hands*. Hands were raised during prayer (Ps 28:2; Lm 2:19). (TLSB)

*Amen! Amen!* The repetition conveys the intensity of feeling behind the affirmation. (CSB)

Chemnitz: "Prayers and invocations are ended with this expression, not only to show that in a general way we approve of the prayer but also that it may be applied personally" (LTh 2:492). (TLSB)

The people uttered their "amen" with the gesture of lifting up their hands, a common posture of prayer and praise to God in both OT and NT times. (1 Ki. 8:22, 38, 54; Is. 1:15; Ps. 28:2; 44:20; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; Job 11:13; Lam. 3:41; Ezra 9:5; 2 Chr. 6:12-13, w9; 1 Tim. 2:8). This was followed by kneeling and bowing to the ground in humility before God and His holy Word, another frequent posture of worship in both Testaments (E.g, Ex.34:8; 2 Chr. 20:18' 29:30; Mt. 2:11; 14:33; 28:9; 1 Cor. 14:25; cf. Gen. 24:26, 48; Ex. 4:31; 12:27; 1 Chr. 29:20; Acts 9:4; Rev. 1:17), one even used by the angels and the saints in heaven (Rev. 4:10; 5:8, 14; 19:4). (CC)

It is also like when we say "This is the Word of the Lord" and "Thanks be to God." (CSB)

*worshipped*. In its original sense the Hebrew for this verb meant "to prostrate oneself on the ground," as the frequently accompanying phrase "to the ground" indicates. Private acts of worship often involved prostration "to the ground," as in the case of Abraham's servant (Ge

24:52), Moses (Ex 34:8), Joshua (Jos 5:14) and Job (Job 1:20). There are three cases of spontaneous communal worship in Exodus (4:31; 12:27; 33:10). In 2Ch 20:18 Jehoshaphat and the people “fell down in worship before the LORD” when they heard his promise of victory. (CSB)

*faces to the ground.* Sign of humility and repentance (Ezr 9:5; 10:1) (TLSB)

**8:7** *helped the people to understand.* These 13 Levites assisted Ezra in helping the people understand the Law. Four of them may have taken part in the service of repentance (9:4-5), and seven may be named among the signers of the covenant (10:9-13). (TLSB)

They may have been joined by the rest of the Levites in explaining God’s Teaching to the laity. (CC)

**8:8** *clearly.* Rabbinic tradition understands the Hebrew for this expression as referring to translation from Hebrew into an Aramaic Targum. But there is no evidence of Targums (free Aramaic translations of OT books or passages) from such an early date. The earliest extensive Targum is one on Job from Qumran, dated c. 150–100 B.C. Targums exist for every book of the OT except Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah. (CSB)

Levites repeated the words loudly and distinctly for all to hear and perhaps paraphrased in Aram what Ezra read in Hebrew for those who no longer understood the original language. Some rabbis regarded this as the beginning of synagogues and the Aram Tarums. (TLSB)

Some consider it to mean that Ezra read in Hebrew while the assisting men translated the words of the Teaching into Aramaic, an interpretation that is as old as the Talmud. Williamson translates it as “paragraph by paragraph,” since the verb “clear” can denote making divisions. Whatever this word implies, it is certain that the activity made the sense of the text clear to the laity so that they understood what was being read. (CC)

*understand.* That is the right kind of religious service, when the Word of God is read and explained, and when all who hear it accept it in all sincerity, with praise and thanksgiving to God. (Kretzmann)

**8:1–8** Nehemiah’s efforts result in an opportunity for Ezra and others to teach God’s Word to the Judeans. God’s Word is our source of peace and blessing. Support the proclamation of the Word not only by your offerings and service but, most important, by hearing and studying it. The clear teachings of Scripture will clear your heart of doubts and grant you abiding faith. • Grant us, O Lord, faithful preachers and teachers that we may receive Your Word with peaceful hearts. Amen, Amen. (TLSB)

*This Day Is Holy*

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

**8:9-12** The Word of God contains both Law and Gospel. The Law in the text that was read and explained moved the people to sadness over their sins, which however, was not the purpose of this day. Instead Nehemiah advised the people to eat the festive food prepared for the day and to share with those had nothing, so that all could receive the blessings of God. Nehemiah's solution to the people's grief was the Gospel: "the joy of Yahweh is your strength" (8:10). While the reading of Moses' Teaching contained Law, which always accuses the hearers of their sins and brings them sorrow and contrition, the Pentateuch also contains magnificent Gospel promises of forgiveness and the Messiah, which bring joy to the penitent sinner. It is joy in the Gospel that is the believer's ultimate strength. Nehemiah's encouragement, reinforced by the Levites (8:11), pointed the people to the comforting Gospel, so that the joy of Yahweh overcame their sorrow, and they celebrated the day (8:12). (CC)

**8:9** *Nehemiah ... Ezra*. An explicit reference showing that they were contemporaries (see 12:26, 36). (CSB)

In the report of the religious activities (chapters 8-10), Nehemiah's name occurs only here and in 10:1. (TLSB)

*this day is holy* – Set aside for "a holy convocation," "proclaimed with blast of trumpets" (Lev. 23:24). Completion of the walls made this day particularly joyous for the people of Judah. (TLSB)

*Do not mourn or weep*. Evidently, what the people heard Ezra read made them realize that they had cause to grieve in repentance for their sins, as King Josiah did under similar circumstances (2 Kings 22:11, 19). Grief over breaking God's Law was in order; the proper time to express this was coming (chapter 9). (TLSB)

When the people of Israel examined themselves, they realized they had been unfaithful. They wept tears of repentance. The preaching of God's law had achieved its intended purpose when it aroused an awareness of sin, but the assurance of forgiveness and mercy would soon bring joy to replace the tears. Ecclesiastes tells us there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Eccl 3:4). There are appropriate times to mourn over our sins. In our worship calendar Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are such days. On the other hand, there are times when such sorrow and gloom are inappropriate. Christmas and Easter are such days. (PBC)

**8:10** *eat the fat*. Delicious festive food prepared with much fat. The fat of sacrificial animals was offered to God as the tastiest element of the burnt offering (Lev 1:8, 12), the fellowship offering (Lev 3:9–10), the sin offering (Lev 4:8–10) and the guilt offering (Lev 7:3–4). The fat was not to be eaten in these cases. (CSB)

*sweet wine* – Good quality wine, not bitter or sour. (TLSB)

*who have nothing*. It was customary for God's people to remember the less fortunate on joyous occasions (2Sa 6:19; Est 9:22; contrast 1Co 11:20–22; Jas 2:14–16). (CSB)

*the joy of the Lord is your strength* – The Hebrew word for "joy" is used only here and in 1 Chronicles 16:27. (TLSB)

"Joy is derived from the verb "rejoice." (CC)

*Strength* – One pleased and content in the Lord is secure from the attacks of others, just as soldiers within a stronghold are secure from attack. (TLSB)

**8:12** *make great rejoicing* – Their mourning turned to joy as the people recognized what great things the Lord had done for them (Ps. 100). (TLSB)

**8:9–12** God’s Word moves the hearts of the Judeans, who sanctify the day of celebration by Word and faith. When sorrow overwhelms you, celebrate the holiness of your Lord, who sanctifies you by the Word. Sing the Word in joyful hymns, for in their words, He will grant you strength. • O Savior, we eat and drink and take joy in Your holy reign, taking all comfort in Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

*Feast of Booths Celebrated*

**13 On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law. 14 And they found it written in the Law that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths[c] during the feast of the seventh month, 15 and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.” 16 So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. 17 And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. 18 And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.**

**8:13-14** As the leaders of the community continued to study the Law, they found that another joyous festival was to be observed from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the seventh month, the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles (Ex. 23:16; Num. 29:12-38; Dt. 16:13-15). The Day of Atonement, which fell on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month, is not mentioned (Lev. 23:26-32). (TLSB)

**8:13** *second day* – Following Ezra’s public reading of God’s Law (v. 2). (TLSB)

**8:14** *booths. Feast of Ingathering.* Also called the “Feast of Tabernacles” (Lev 23:34) or “Booths” because the Israelites lived in temporary shelters when God brought them out of Egypt (see Lev 23:43). It was celebrated from the 15th through the 22nd days of the seventh month (usually about mid-September to mid-October) when the produce of the orchards and vines had been harvested; it commemorated the desert wanderings after the exodus. (CSB)

The Festival of Booths is described in Exodus 23:16b; 34:22b; Lev. 23:33-43; Num. 29:12-34; Deut. 16:13-15. Of these passages, only the one in Leviticus mandates all three parts of the festival that are recorded in Nehemiah 8:13-18: (1) announcing the festival, (2) gathering branches, and (3) dwelling in booths (Lev. 23:37, 40, 42). However, both the Leviticus and Deuteronomy passages describe it as a joyous festival (Lev. 23:40; Dt. 16:14). From the description of the festival celebration in Nehemiah 8:13-18, it is clear that Ezra and the people had read the Leviticus passage and also the Deuteronomy passage. (CC)

**8:15** *proclaim* – Literally, “make the report heard and make it pass.” (TLSB)

Ezra and the people understood that Yahweh’s Teaching implies that an announcement was to be issued “in all their cities and in Jerusalem” to come to Jerusalem for the festival. Leviticus does not include any stipulation about where the proclamation was to be announced. However Deut. 16:16 speaks of celebrating “at the place where He (Yahweh your God) will choose.” Since God had chosen Jerusalem (1 Ki. 11:13, 32, 36; 14:21; 2 Ki. 21:7; 23:27; Zech. 3:2; 2 Chr. 6:6; 12:13), it was valid for Ezra and the leaders to infer that the announcement had to be proclaimed in Jerusalem itself as well as in all the cities in which returned Judeans resided. (CC)

The proclamation called on people to gather branches to make booths. Of the plants noted here – cultivated and wild olive, myrtle, and palm – only the palm is specifically included in Leviticus 23:40, which also mentions poplars or willows. The legislation in Leviticus, however, does allow for braches taken from any kind of “leafy trees” (Lev. 23:40), and the identical phrase for “leafy trees” (Neh. 8:15) is in the proclamation in Nehemiah, so it conforms to the Teaching of Yahweh through Moses. (CC)

*olive.* Widespread in Mediterranean countries. It was growing in Canaan before the conquest (Dt 8:8). Because it takes an olive tree 30 years to mature, its cultivation requires peaceful conditions. (CSB)

*wild olive.* Lit. “tree of oil,” commonly regarded as the wild olive tree. But this is questionable since the “tree of oil” was used as timber (1Ki 6:23, 31–33), whereas the wood of the wild olive tree would have been of little value for use in the temple’s furniture. Also, the wild olive tree contains very little oil. The phrase may refer to a resinous tree like the fir. (CSB)

*myrtle.* Evergreen bushes with a pleasing odor (Isa 41:19; 55:13; Zec 1:8, 10–11). (CSB)

*palm.* The date palm was common around Jericho (Dt 34:3; 2Ch 28:15). (CSB)

*leafy trees.* Cf. Eze 6:13; 20:28. Later Jewish celebrations of the Feast of Tabernacles include waving the *lulav* (made of branches of palms, myrtles and willows) with the right hand and holding branches of the *ethrog* (a citrus native to Palestine) in the left. (CSB)

*as it is written* – Not a verbatim citation of any one passage, but a summary of how to observe the feast. (TLSB)

The other great festival during “the seventh month was the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Interestingly, it is not mentioned in Nehemiah 8. This may be due to the emphasis on joy that ends the discussion of the celebration on the Festival of Trumpets (8:12) and which also characterizes the Festival of Booths (8:17). The Day of Atonement (Lev, 16:1-34; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11) was, in contrast, a day of austerity (Lev. 23:27; Num. 29:7). (CC)

**8:16 courts of the house of God.** The temple that Ezekiel saw in his visions had an outer and an inner court (see diagram on “Ezekiel’s Temple”). Ezekiel’s temple was to some extent patterned after Solomon’s, which had an inner court of priests and an outer court (1Ki 6:36; 7:12; 2Ki 21:5; 23:12; 2Ch 4:9; 33:5). The temple of the NT era had a court of the Gentiles and an inner court, which was subdivided into courts of the women, of Israel and of the priests. The Temple Scroll from Qumran has God setting forth in detail an ideal temple. Columns 40–46 describe the outer court as follows: “On the roof of the third story are columns for the constructing of booths for the Feast of Tabernacles, to be occupied by the elders, tribal chieftains and commanders of thousands and hundreds.” (CSB)

This celebration of the Feast of Booth took place on October 22-29, 445 BC. The booths were constructed not only on the roofs of homes in Jerusalem, but also in their courtyards as well as the temple courtyards and in public squares. Since many of the pilgrims to the festival would have been from outlying cities in Judah, the construction of booths in accessible public places was a necessity so they could live in these temporary structures for the duration of the festival. (CC)

*each on his roof* – It need scarcely be repeated, that the houses in the East are generally built with flat roofs. On these they reposed; on these they took the air in the heats of summer; and on these they oftentimes slept. (ACC)

*Gate of Ephraim.* A gate of the oldest rampart of Jerusalem (see note on 3:6; see also 2Ki 14:13). It was restored by Nehemiah (12:39). (CSB)

In the north wall close to the temple. (TLSB)

**8:17** *Jeshua.* Variant of “Joshua,” who led the people of Israel into the Promised Land. (TLSB)

*From the days of Joshua to that day.* The phrase does not mean that the Feast of Tabernacles had not been celebrated since Joshua’s time, because such celebrations took place after the dedication of Solomon’s temple (2Ch 7:8–10) and after the return of the exiles (Ezr 3:4). What apparently is meant is that the feast had not been celebrated before with such great joy (cf. 2Ch 30:26; 35:18). (CSB)

We are told that the celebration of the feasts was universally observed by the Judeans and that because of the great joy there had not been such a celebration since Joshua’s day. The statement about the festival’s surprising celebration can be compared to statements about Passover celebrations. The Passover held under King Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30:26; 715 BC) was unequalled since the reign of Solomon (971-932 BC), and the Passover feast sponsored by King Josiah (2 Ki. 23:22; 2 Chr. 35:18; 624 BC) was unprecedented since the era of the judges and Samuel (fourteenth-eleventh centuries BC) or during the reigns of earlier kings. (CC)

In this case, however, the reference point is even earlier, almost a millennium back in Israel’s history, in the days of Joshua (ca 1406 BC). This point of comparison is important. Joshua led the people into victory under God as they inherited and settle in the Promised Land. There, some forty years after the Israelites had escaped captivity in Egypt (ca 1446 BC), they could begin to celebrate the festivals God had commanded through Moses. The book of Joshua highlights the first Passover celebrated by the Israelites after they had crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, whose fruits they could now eat instead of the manna (Josh. 5:10-12). In a similar way now, under the leadership of Ezra, the people who had come back from exile in Babylon (“the entire congregation that had returned from captivity,” could joyfully celebrate the Festival of Booths in the Promised Land according to the ancient Teaching given through Moses (8:1,14). (CC)

*had not done so.* Feast of Booths had been observed often since the days of Joshua, but not with the same degree of joy and fervor. Cf 2Ch 35:18. This celebration was particularly meaningful because it marked the reestablishment of Jerusalem as the center of faith and life. (TLSB)

**8:18** *assembly.* See Nu 29:35. (CSB)



Moses required that the Law be read in the hearing of all Israel every seven years at the Festival of Booths. (TLSB)

*day by day...he read* – We are told that this celebration of the Festival of Booths included the reading of the Pentateuch for all seven days. This is another indication of how this celebration surpassed preceding ones, since normally the Teaching of Moses was read at the Festival of Booths only in Sabbatical Years (Deut. 31:10-13). However, earlier this year (445 BC) Nehemiah had led the richer Judeans in forgiving the debts of the poorer one (Neh. 5:1-13; cf. Deut. 31:10) as was done in a Sabbatical Year (Deut. 15:1-18), so the Israelites may have deemed it appropriate to read the Teaching even though it was not a Sabbatical Year. In addition, the Judeans carefully followed the regulations of the Teaching Yahweh had commanded through Moses by holding an assembly on the day following the festival (Lev. 23:36b; Num. 29:35-38). (CC)

Moses required that the Law be read in the hearing of all Israel every seven years at the Feast of Booths. (TLSB)

The joy of the Festival of Booths celebrated the fruits and prosperity of the land in which God promised to grant rest to His people and dwell with them in His grace. The overwhelming joy of the Judeans in Nehemiah's day was specifically connected to that land of promise through the reference to Joshua (Neh. 8:17). Thus the feast was a foretaste of the greater land that God has prepared in Christ for His people throughout eternity: after their bodily resurrected from the dead (Dan. 12:2-3), they will dwell in God's presence in the New Jerusalem that is part of the new creation (Rev. 3:12, 21:1-22:7). This was the goal of God's OT people (Heb. 11:10, 16), and the Festival of Booths pointed them to the joy of being with God forevermore in His heavenly city (Heb. 12:22). (CC)

In addition, the desire of the Jews to learn more of the Law is shown by the fact that Ezra is asked to hold DAILY "Bible readings." With such earnestness, it is no wonder that a spirit of renewal becomes evident. And through this experience the people are prepared for self-government. The experience of the Jews highlights one of the reason why we need continuously to expose ourselves to the teaching of God's Word. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 127)

**8:13–18** By studying Scripture, the Judeans learn that they had overlooked celebrating a key feast. How often we may overlook God's teachings because we do not know the Word! Each day, the Lord's people need to partake of God's Word—a feast for the soul. Consume and study the Scriptures daily, for by them the Lord nurtures faith and grants life. • I rejoice, O Savior, in the goodness of Your Word, my daily good news in this sad, sin-broken world. Amen. (TLSB)