

NEHEMIAH 8

BRINGING OUT THE BOOK

This chapter gives us an account of a solemn religious assembly, and of the good work that went on in that assembly, to the honor of God and the edification of His people. This assembly was held on the first day of the seventh month – the day of the Jews' Feast of Trumpets. All the people gathered together in the street that was before the water-gate in Jerusalem. It was not only the men who came, but also the women and children; for heads of households should bring their families with them to the public worship of God, so that they may be acquainted with the Word and the means of grace.

The leader in this great assembly was Ezra the priest. The people asked him to bring out the scroll containing the law and read it to them. He stood at a wooden pulpit, which had been made expressly for the occasion, so that his words might be more gracefully delivered and better heard; and so that the eyes of the hearers might be upon him, in order to engage their attention (Luke 4:20). Several assistants stood with him – six on his right hand and seven on his left. Others are also mentioned in verse 7, who seem to have read and expounded to those who could not come within hearing of Ezra. There were also thirteen priests, who were to teach the people. It is a great mercy to a people to be blessed with faithful ministers who are able and willing to teach them!

Ezra read the law of God before the assembled people. The Scriptures are not to be confined to pastors' studies alone, but they must be brought before the people and read in their own language! When the Bible is read publicly in our worship services, the Lord is honored and His Church is edified. But when the Book of the law was read to the Jews assembled near the water-gate, the meaning was also explained to them. It is very necessary that those who hear the Scriptures should also understand them; otherwise, they will only be an empty sound of words to them (Matt. 24:15).

The people conducted themselves very properly when the Lord's law was read and explained to them. When Ezra opened the scroll, they reverently stood up – thereby showing respect both to Ezra and to the Word which he was about to read. They stood with great attention and close application of mind, for the Word of God commands attention and deserves it. But the people were wounded by the words that were read to them; for the law of the holy God proclaims death, speaks terror, and thunders curses to sinful human beings. Therefore, when they heard it, they all wept. This was a good sign, for it showed that their hearts were tender. They wept to think how they had offended God. However, the people were healed and comforted with the words of peace that were

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The public and solemn reading of the Book of the Law of God – verses 1-8
- ❖ The joy which the people were told to express upon this occasion – verses 9-12
- ❖ The solemn observance of the Feast of Tabernacles – verses 13-18

spoken to them by Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites. It was good that they were so much moved by the Word of God, and received the impressions of it; but they were not to yield excessively to their mourning – especially at this time, because the day was holy to the Lord. “The joy of the Lord is your strength!” they were told. This was not a carnal, sensual joy; but rather, a holy and spiritual joy in the goodness of God, arising from an assurance of His love and favor.



The assembly complied with the directions that were given them. Their weeping was stilled, and they made great mirth. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy; those who tremble at the convictions of the Word may also triumph in the consolations of it. To have the Holy Scriptures with us, and faithful guides to help us understand them, is a very great mercy which we have abundant reason to rejoice in! The better we understand the Word of God, the more comfort we shall find in it. When the words were first declared to these people, they wept; but when they understood them better, they rejoiced – finding precious promises made to those who repented and reformed their ways. And so there was hope in Israel!

So far from being weary of hearing the Lord’s Word, the chief of the people came together again the next day to hear Ezra expound further. Then followed a joyous festival in the city, which had not been witnessed for a long time. On this second day, when Ezra read out of the scroll, he read to them those laws which concerned the feasts of that seventh month – the Feast of Tabernacles among them (Lev. 23:34; Deut. 16:13). This Feast of Tabernacles was a memorial of the Israelites’ dwelling in tents in the wilderness – a representation of our tabernacle-state in this world, and a picture of the holy joy of the Gospel-Church. And so – according to the law of God – this ancient feast was kept with such an elaboration of detail, that stone walls and flat roofs and narrow streets were temporarily transformed into gardens of beauty, and labyrinths of flowers and trees. Olive branches and pine, myrtle and feathery palm, were all woven together in graceful luxuriance; and for a whole week, the people lived under the shadow of the tent, in memory of the days of pilgrimage when their forefathers were on their way to the Promised Land. This feast had not been observed for about 1,000 years, since the time of Joshua. There was very great gladness every day during this happy week. Their joy was heightened by some new message of truth and love from their covenant-keeping God, as their teachers – no longer hidden in a corner – read from the law of the Lord, or sang with them some of their beautiful anthems of praise and thanksgiving.

Lord, help us to attentively listen as Your faithful ministers read Your Word and preach Your Gospel! Keep us from returning to the Dark Ages of paganism and superstition, when there was a general ignorance of the Scriptures! Amen.