

BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

Ezra Nehemiah Esther

People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).

Text

Nehemiah 8:1-18

Topic

Ezra, Nehemiah, and others encourage the Jews to quit crying and instead celebrate at the reading of God's Word

Title

There's No Crying In Bible Study

Nehemiah 8:1 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

Nehemiah 8:2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

Nehemiah 8:3 Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

Nehemiah 8:4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Nehemiah 8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

Nehemiah 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 8:7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.

Nehemiah 8:8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

Nehemiah 8:9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, 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 nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this day is holy* to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Nehemiah 8:11 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day *is holy*; do not be grieved.”

Nehemiah 8:12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

Nehemiah 8:13 Now on the second day the heads of the fathers’ *houses* of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

Nehemiah 8:14 And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month,

Nehemiah 8:15 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as *it is written*.”

Nehemiah 8:16 Then the people went out and brought *them* and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim.

Nehemiah 8:17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

Nehemiah 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day *there was* a sacred assembly, according to the *prescribed* manner.

Introduction

Every day is a holiday. It’s not wishful thinking. If you do a little digging, you’ll find that every day is some sort of holiday. Truth is, **everyday is several holidays!**

Just this past week people celebrated the following days as holidays:

1. Monday, October 2nd, was Child Health Day; and it was National Custodial Workers Day; and it was UN World Habitat Day; and it was World Farm Animals Day; and it was Independence Day in Guinea. Oh, and it was Yom Kippur!

2. Tuesday, October 3rd, was German Reunification Day.
3. Wednesday, October 4th, was St Francis of Assisi Feast Day.
4. Thursday, October 5th, was National Depression Screening Day; and it was UN World Teachers Day; and it was Republic Day in Portugal.
5. Friday, October 6th, was Lee National Denim Day; and it was National Diversity Day; and it was National German-American Day; and it was World Smile Day.
6. Saturday, October 7th, was International Frugal Fun Day.
7. Today is Grandmother's Day – *but only in Florida!*¹ Yes, the second Sunday of every year in Florida is Grandmother's Day by state statute.
8. The second Sunday in October is another incredibly special day, first established in 1992. I'm not going to tell you what it is though; you'll have to do some research of your own.

In our text, the Jews in and around Jerusalem were in a holiday season. It began on the first day of their seventh month, which was the equivalent of our New Year's Day. The seventh month was a special time on the Jewish calendar because they celebrated the Feast of Trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, and the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days - from the fifteenth day until the twenty-first day.

These days were considered holy, or holy-days, from which we derive our modern word, holiday. There is much we could say about these holydays. One thing that Nehemiah wants us to see in them, which he brings out very forcefully, is that they were not a time for mourning, weeping, sorrowing, or grieving. Instead the people were strongly exhorted to **feast** and to **rejoice greatly**.

What if everyday could be a holyday – a spiritual holyday? Everyday can be; every week can be.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 It's A Holyday When You Understand God's Word, and #2 It's A Holyweek When You Stand On God's Word.

¹ <http://www.holidays.net/dailys.htm>

#1 It's A Holyday
When You Understand God's Word
(v1-12)

The words **understand** or **understanding** are used six-times in the first thirteen verses. It was because they could **understand** God's Word that it had such a profound effect on the people.

We'll concentrate, then, on some of the prerequisites that are necessary in order for God's Word to be understood.

Nehemiah 8:1 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

There are at least two things to notice here about understanding God's Word:

1. It was understood when the people gathered together as one man.
2. It was understood when the people desired it be read and explained.

They gathered together in a public assembly. Personal Bible reading is your bedrock for growing in the Lord. Public reading and teaching should not take the place of personal devotions. But, having said that, God wants us to come together in a spirit of unity and hear His Word explained. Gatherings of God's people are anointed with His presence to reach and teach us.

Then we said that the people desired the Word be read and explained. We should have great anticipation, great excitement, great expectation, when we come together around God's Word. The Creator of the universe; the Savior of mankind; our coming Bridegroom; is going to talk to us!

Nehemiah 8:2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

Nehemiah 8:3 Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those

who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law.

The gist of these verses is that the Word of God should be read and explained with a minimum of distractions. For example: In their case, very young children were excluded for at least two reasons:

1. They could not understand the teaching.
2. They could not be expected to stand for **six hours!**

It is incumbent upon us to minimize distractions when God's Word is being taught. We do it because it is biblical; we do it because it shows respect for God's Word; and we do it because we want God's Word to have its effect on the hearts of the hearers.

Six hours of study! I'm not going to rebuke you for getting fidgety after thirty-five or forty-five minutes of Bible study. This was more like a retreat with several studies throughout the day and breaks in-between.

I will say that we should be hungry to hear more of God's Word. Sure, the teacher should make it interesting; but we should be interested.

Nehemiah 8:4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Nehemiah 8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

Nehemiah 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

We're not really told what the guys did who on the platform with Ezra. Perhaps they took turns reading portions of Scripture. *Or maybe they were the worship team!*

Worship preceded the reading and teaching of God's Word. We, too, must create and maintain an atmosphere of worship whenever we come to God's Word – especially publicly.

Nehemiah 8:7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people *stood* in their place.

Ezra had an FAQ team. They mingled among the crowd, fielding Bible questions during the breaks. It speaks to me of Ezra being organized. He was ready to minister.

All of these things we've discussed are prerequisites. Here is the payoff:

Nehemiah 8:8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

They **read** from God's Word. It's sad that many Churches are minimizing the Word in order to try to reach a new generation. They substitute multi-sensory, multimedia presentations. They bring in icons and incense to try to get you to connect with God on a sensory level, rather than giving the **sense** of the Word.

The word **distinctly** is interesting. It means that they read in a language that the people could understand. It had been about 1,000 years since Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. Hebrew had changed. So the words needed to be translated.

There is nothing wrong with a good, solid, scholarly translation of the Bible. There are some folks out there who have made it their life's mission to prove that only the original King James Version is anointed. After all, it's the version the apostles used, isn't it?

No; **of course not!** We don't have six hours to go into the KJV-only controversy. Let me just give you three quick talking points:

1. KJV-only advocates point to certain verses whose meaning seems to be altered by the modern translations. They believe it is a hellish conspiracy to undermine God's Word. They don't

- tell you about the verses in the KJV whose meaning is greatly improved!
2. The KJV-only people refer to the KJV as if it were an original manuscript. It is not; it is a translation. There is no doctrine in the Bible based upon a single word or text. No doctrine is altered in any way by a good, solid modern translation.
 3. You may not know it, but there are different versions of the KJV. They, too, have their own variations.

We use the New King James because it allows us to **read distinctly from the book**.

They read in language that the people could understand, then **they gave the sense**. They put the texts in their context, explaining any necessary details.

I would add something obvious: God gifted Ezra and the others to teach. All of it resulted in helping them **to understand the reading**.

We'll see the people respond by weeping, grieving, mourning, and sorrowing. They must have seen how far short they fell of God's standards in the Law. As much as that might be expected, it was the exhortation of Nehemiah, Ezra and his assistants that caught my attention.

Nehemiah 8:9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, 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 nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this day is* holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Nehemiah 8:11 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day *is* holy; do not be grieved."

Why is it we always think it is more spiritual to weep, grieve, sorrow, mourn and cry? **Quit crying! Rejoice!**

Yes, there is a time for weeping... But not most of the time. Once you fully understand God's Word, you can only weep for joy and you will rejoice. You can be forgiven; you can be saved; you are a new

creation in Jesus Christ; old things pass away and all things become new. You are being changed from moment-to-moment to become more like Jesus. God began the work in you and He will complete it.

What about sin? Confess it and He is faithful and just to forgive it and cleanse you from your unrighteousness.

What about suffering? It is only a light affliction that lasts for a brief moment and works for you an eternal reward.

What about death? It's been conquered! If you must die, you will be absent from the body but immediately present with Jesus. You might not die! Jesus is coming quickly to Rapture the Church.

If you are a mourner... A weeper... A griever... A sorrower... Then you are either unsaved or you do not understand God's Word.

Nehemiah 8:12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

Let God's Word have its desired effect in your life. God the Father loves you – as much as He loves His own Son, Jesus Christ. He is romancing you. If you are unsaved... Get saved! If you are saved... Quit crying!

- being changed to bring change -

#2 It's A Holyweek
When You Stand On God's Word
(v13-18)

They were nearing a holyweek – the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a time when the Jews lived outdoors in booths made of branches. It commemorated the forty-years of wandering in the wilderness, when the Jews were homeless and lived in temporary shelters. It also pointed them forward – to the promise of a glorious kingdom of Heaven on earth. It was a week-long festival of joyful praise and thanksgiving.

Nehemiah 8:13 Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

Nehemiah 8:14 And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month,
Nehemiah 8:15 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as *it is* written.”

The Bible retreat from the previous day continued the next day. They came to the reading in the Law that prescribed the duty and details of the Feast of Tabernacles. They immediately received the Word and began making plans to keep the feast.

There was no hesitation. That tells us they were reading God’s Word with submitted hearts. Whatever it said, they were willing to do – *before they even read it.*

There was no discussion. They didn’t appoint a committee to study the feasibility of staging such a large event. They didn’t consult their budget. They just did what God said to do.

If we are not experiencing more holy weeks, it might be because we hesitate and spend too much time discussing the practical feasibility of what we already know God wants us to do.

Nehemiah 8:16 Then the people went out and brought *them* and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim.

Nehemiah 8:17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

Wow! For nearly a thousand years, the Jews had blown-off the Feast of Tabernacles. These Jews did what others should have, and could have, and they did it under less than desirable conditions.

It tells us to not wait to obey God when it is most convenient, but to obey Him immediately.

Obedience to God can be a *duty* or it can be a *delight*. When we realize it is a delight, our weeks will be holy and spiritually festive.

Nehemiah 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day *there was* a sacred assembly, according to the *prescribed* manner.

If you are in the Word everyday, with a heart to submit to it without hesitation or discussion, everyday will be holy and, thus, every week a holyweek.

Hey, we're human. I'm not suggesting that you will never weep, mourn, grieve, or sorrow. I am suggesting that, when you do, God wants to come to you, anoint His Word to your hearing and heart, and say, ***"There's no crying in Bible study!"***

Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.



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