

Theme: Believers, families, and churches are fed and formed by the reading and teaching of the Word of God.

## I. Foundational Figures in History

- A. I am reading *Team of Rivals* - pivotal time and men
- B. Our text comes from a pivotal time - return from exile
- C. Ezra is a pivotal figure in the history of Israel/Judaism
  - 1. Sometimes called the founder of Rabbinic Judaism
  - 2. Some say he laid the foundations for the Sanhedrin
  - 3. Some say he influenced the creation and practice of synagogues and formed the Jews into the people of the Book
- D. In today's text, we see his efforts to feed and form God's people by the Word of God

## II. God's People Gather for Worship

- A. The people were gathered for public worship

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate... on the first day of the seventh month... Nehemiah 8:1-2

  - 1. A sacred assembly in the 7<sup>th</sup> month (7:73; 8:9)
  - 2. The month included the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and feast of Booths - all sacred days
  - 3. LXX translated "gathered" with *συνάγω* - synagogue
  - 4. The gathering included men, women, and children

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. Nehemiah 8:2

- 5. The people clearly respond in worship

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. Neh. 8:6

  - a. Blessing/praise, amen, raised hands, bowed heads, worship with their faces to the ground - worship!
  - b. Note the physicality of worship - it is impossible to engage with God and His Word 'spiritually' without involving my body; to think we can is Gnostic!

### B. Recognizable elements of Jewish (& Christian) worship

- 1. The Word of God is read to the people

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. <sup>3</sup> 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.** Nehemiah 8:2-3

  - a. Ezra reads from the book of the Law (Torah)
  - b. The people listen attentively as God's Word is read
  - c. The reading of the Law was foundational to Jewish worship, and later reading from the prophets and writings was added.
  - d. Many Christian churches feature readings from the Old Testament, from the Gospels, and the Epistles as part of worship.
- 2. The people stand to hear the Word read

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.** Nehemiah 8:5

- a. The people stand as a sign of respect as the Word is read to them.
  - b. This was continued in the synagogue and also often in Christian worship in many places.
  - c. Also note that Ezra is above the people - he is on a platform (v4) - this is where the idea of a “pulpit” developed.
  - d. It was actually more like a platform or stage, such as we have at BRCC (13 people on it with him!)
3. A blessing & response is given as the Word is read  
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. Neh. 8:6
- a. Ezra adds a blessing as the Word is read and the people say Amen.
  - b. This became a practice in the synagogue.
  - c. In many churches, readings are concluded with statements such as “The Word of the Lord” and the response “Thanks be to God.”
4. The Word of God is explained to the people of God  
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. <sup>8</sup> **They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.** Nehemiah 8:7-8
- a. The Levites help the people to understand the Word
  - b. It is possible they had to even translate it into Aramaic from Hebrew to help the people.

- c. But they are certainly explaining the Word so the people can understand what God says.

### III. The Word In Worship and Spiritual Formation

#### A. The Word of God must be central in worship

##### 1. The Word is central in this worship gathering!

- a. Law/Law of Moses/book - v1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8
- b. Ezra read the Word - for about 5 hours (v3)!
- c. A key focus on understanding the Word - v2, 3, 7, 8  
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.** Nehemiah 8:12
- d. True worship **MUST** be founded upon, centered on, and saturated with the Word of God!

##### 2. God gives leaders to teach the Word so it can be understood

- a. This is clear in this whole passage - Ezra and others explained the Word so it was clearly understood.
- b. This is what characterized Ezra’s ministry  
For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel. Ezra 7:10
  - 1. This was not a one-time activity - it was Ezra’s practice and his role in restoring Israel!
  - 2. This is why he became legendary in Israel
- c. This was God’s call for the Levites  
And of Levi he said... they shall teach Jacob your rules and Israel your law; they shall put incense before you and whole burnt offerings on your altar. Deuteronomy 33:8,10

1. The Levites led in worship (incense, offerings, altar)
  2. But they also had to teach God's Word to the people!
- d. God still calls leaders to do this in the church today
- Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. 1 Tim 4:13

1. What was needed was not just the reading of Scripture, but for Timothy to exhort and teach the people from the Word of God.
2. A church that does not have a strong ministry of teaching the Word of God will be anemic and will eventually wander from the ways of God.

## B. The Word is central in personal/family spiritual formation

### 1. The Word is central in personal spiritual formation

- a. A prosperous life is built upon the Word of God
 

His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:2-3

  1. We are not called to just hear the Word on Sunday - it is to be a daily delight and source of meditation.
  2. Our prospering - spiritually, emotionally, relationally - depends upon us being planted deep in the Word.

### b. The Word is the food that sustains us

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Deuteronomy 8:3

1. God gave manna each day to humble the people, reminding them each day of their need for Him.

2. But the real lesson is that what we actually need is the food of God's Word!
3. Like manna, we need to "collect" and "feed" upon God's Word every day!

### 2. The Word is central in family spiritual formation

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:6-9

- a. Families were to talk about God's Word together!
- b. Parents had a special responsibility to read and teach the Word of God to their children!
- c. They were even to write the commands on their house so the whole family was in constant contact with the Word of God!
- d. This is why Mark Holmes gives away Bible leaflets!

## C. The people of God must not only receive the Word in times we gather for worship, but must feed and be formed by the Scripture on a daily basis!

## IV. Applying the Word

### A. Am I fed and formed by the Word of God?

1. This is not just for church leaders or scholars - it is for every one of us!
2. Each of us need to have a plan for how we will be fed and formed by the Word of God.

3. The Church will certainly continue to build our worship and life upon God's Word, and it will be encountered in song, prayer, reading, teaching, and in the practice of the Sacraments.
4. But thankfully, we have the advantage of being able to own Bibles at home, so we need to read God's Word in our personal lives as well!
  - a. Thanks God for this gift - very few believers in most of history could actually hold and read the Bible on their own!
  - b. The ONLY way they could be fed and formed by the Word was through the public reading of Scripture and teaching.
  - c. But the primary way believers today should be engaged in the reading of Scripture is no longer through public readings but in private reading of our own Bibles!
  - d. Take advantage of this great gift!
5. We also have the advantage of being able to re-listen to the teaching of Scripture via the podcast and website - take advantage of this ability!

#### B. Encountering Jesus - A Journey Through the Gospels

1. Starting tomorrow through Easter, we will read the Gospels together.
2. We have published a schedule of the readings for each week, along with the teaching for that week.
3. We will read Monday-Saturday, and then on Sunday the text will be drawn from the section of the Gospel read the previous week.
4. The teaching will not cover all the chapters read, but will focus on a specific passage to encounter Jesus in His Person, teaching, ministry, death, and resurrection!

5. Determine the time you will read each day, and how much you will read to get through the material in a week - you might read it fast and then leave time to focus on the teaching passage, or just read a bit each day.
6. Husbands and wives might want to read together.
7. Parents might read to their children, or just read a few verses and talk with the kids about what they learn about Jesus in that passage.
8. Let us be fed and formed by God's work over the next couple of months!
9. Let's encounter Jesus together as we journey through the Gospels as a church!

### Fed and Formed By the Word of God

Nehemiah 8:1-8  
 January 25, 2026  
 Communion  
 Acts 20:32

Teaching keywords: Word of God; worship; leadership; Christian life; marriage and family

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Fed and formed by the Word of God, you are blessed - so go forth and be a blessing! Acts 20:32

**HAVE EVERYONE STAND FOR READING OF THE TEXT**

1 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. Nehemiah 8:1-8