

## February 24

**Scriptures:** Read Nehemiah 8

**Key Verse:** “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. “ (Nehemiah 8:10b)

### Overview

Now that the walls were completed, many people would want to live in Jerusalem. Nehemiah, however, sought to repopulate the sparsely inhabited city with only those that were pure Jews — those who could prove it. He looked to the genealogical tables for eligible residents who were likely the families listed in 7:8-24 (vv. 25-38 are people of other towns) and the priestly and Levitical families (7: 39-45).

Nehemiah supported Ezra’s attempts to restore the authority of the Word of God. Previous to Nehemiah’s coming, Ezra was limited in his power; but since Nehemiah, the civil leader, was like-minded, much could be accomplished for the glory of the Lord. It is possible that Ezra had been away during the time when the rich were oppressing the poor (chapter 5), since previously he had been the one to initiate religious reforms (e.g. Ezra 10:5); but now he suddenly appears in Nehemiah’s account of events when he is called upon to read from the precious Holy Scripture.

Ezra’s goal was coming into fulfillment: to see God’s Word in a place of prominence and being understood (cf. Ezra 7:10). Both Nehemiah and Ezra knew that the Word of God had more power than the sharpest sword (cf. Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17), and they understood the importance of living according to the Word of God and loving God in order to bring revival and create a healthy society that witnesses to the reality and power of God. For the individual, following the authority of God’s Word will bring joy, blessings, divine guidance, encouragement, spiritual strength, and true life in the fullest sense of the word. A believer must read and study it, meditate upon it, memorize it, and most importantly, put it into practice to keep from sin.

The men who stood with Ezra were likely his Bible students and all Levites, fulfilling the call of God upon their lives. It is possible that Ezra had gone away with them to a place where he could teach them without interruption, and where these student scribes could study and make copies of the Holy Word. What a thrill it must have been for them to have the opportunity to expose the Scripture reading to the people. Possibly, they broke up into smaller groups after Ezra had read to all the congregation. Surely, the Holy Spirit’s anointing was upon them as they preached, for the people’s reaction was one of great conviction of their sin and sorrow for the terrible ways they had transgressed and how far short they had fallen in keeping the Law of God; yet because they understood the Word of God, they were also filled with much joy, for they knew there was still hope since God was merciful and was pleased to offer redemption (Psalm 130:7-8).

Nehemiah had a wonderful insight about the joy of the Lord, which he understood to be like a weapon — a source of inner strength (8:10, key verse). Joy is listed among the fruit of the Spirit, and there can never be a law against it (Galatians 5:22-23). There is a joy for believers that exists even in the midst of grief and hard circumstances (8:9-10). It allows us to live above the circumstances. In the midst of terror, Habakkuk could still rejoice (Habakkuk 3:16-19), as could

Paul, Silas, and Peter, even though persecuted, beaten, and imprisoned (Philippians 4:4; Acts 5:40-41; 16:25; Matthew 5:11-12; James 1:2).

Ezra began reading the books of Moses on the first day of the seventh month. On the second day, they discovered that the Feast of Tabernacles was to be celebrated for seven days beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:39-43). Since the authority of the Word of God had been restored, they were all encouraged to obey it and keep this holy feast, so they immediately began preparations. This was a remembrance of the time their ancestors had lived in tents (booths) during the wilderness wanderings and of how God provided for them all those years. It illustrates that they all are equal and in a brotherhood under God which binds them together and that the essence of life is not what you possess, but the condition of one's heart and soul.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, Holy Scripture is a mirror into which we are looking today. Help us to discover Your ways and immediately begin keeping Your Word. Thank You that Your joy is our strength.