Nehemiah 7-8 - Making the Word of God Clear

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Open your Bible please, to Nehemiah chapter 7. You'll remember that Nehemiah is a book that is predominantly about the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, whereas Ezra, the previous book, had to do mostly with the rebuilding of the temple. But there's some very significant things that are happening in these chapters tonight, so let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Spirit, wisdom, truth, and understanding. We know that they all come from You. You are the source of all of those things so impart those to us tonight we pray, in Jesus name, amen.

Nehemiah chapter 7 begins by saying, *"Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ² I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many." (ESV)*

We've been taking note of the fact that Nehemiah shows us some pretty cool leadership qualities throughout the course of this study. We've seen his leadership in the face of pretty rotten stuff. A lot of threats, a lot of fears, a lot of frustration, a lot of difficulty. And we've watched Nehemiah hold his course, and stay strong as a leader, and encourage people, and work out what needed to be done at the time, and it was very, very cool.

I mean, you could go through Nehemiah and frankly, you could do a study on good leadership, to be completely honest with you. And this is frankly one other area where we see great leadership in Nehemiah's life and that is frankly passing along certain responsibilities.

It's very, that's a hard thing to do. I don't know if you know that, but that's a really hard thing to do. It's hard to do a task and then raise up someone else to follow in your footsteps. To train somebody to do what you're doing. And depending on what your job is, and Nehemiah has got a pretty important job, you're looking for godly people. Again, and that probably increases depending

on the position that you're in, but to look for godly people to take over and that's hard. It's really, really, hard to do.

I've been trying to do it for a long time. And I try to disciple those who are under me to do it as well. People on staff and so forth. Very hard, very difficult, very challenging.

But he says that he gives these people positions, and he speaks about the fact that they're faithful and God fearing. In other words, the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

And he said, it's in verse 3, *"And I said to them, "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors.* (meaning later in the day, but) *Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.""*

Now, what's going on here? He's still dealing with the potential, now that the gate is finished, of threats. There are still potential dangers that lurk in their situation.

Normally, in a city like this, they would open the gates at dawn. In fact, just as the sun is beginning to open up, you would open up the gates to your city and let people come in, let people go out, and then, the gates would remain open all day long. And then, toward the end of the day, as the sun's going down, just for safety purposes, you close and bar the gates once again.

Notice what Nehemiah is saying. He says, don't even open the gates until the sun is up and hot. Okay. Why? Because there are still threats that lurk and he wants to make sure that the sun is up all the way and so that they can see everything, including who's coming in and if they are a potential threat.

The whole point of this, is we want to make sure that the light is bright enough to see what's going on. We don't want to let anybody walk in here under the protection of the early morning light where we can't see very well. And this is really just Nehemiah saying, let's guard our interests.

Let's guard what the Lord has done through us. Remember they built this wall in a record of like 52 days and now that it's built, now that they've walked in that obedience. And they've seen God work and it's a cool work, let's be careful that we don't sit back on our laurels now and we just let the enemy waltz in.

This is a theme that we see throughout the Bible as it relates to our own lives. To guard… If you did a search in your Bible of the word, guard and looked at all the passages that came up, you would be interested to find out that this is a recurring idea for you as a believer to protect the things that God is building in your life. That God is doing in your life and the things that you are doing for the Lord.

Let me show you just a few examples. We'll start here with one from 1 Timothy. Chapter 6. Paul writes to Timothy and says,

1 Timothy 6:20 (ESV)

O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge,"

O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge,"

And then in Paul's second letter to Timothy, He says to him,

2 Timothy 1:14 (ESV)

By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

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You ever think about what the Holy Spirit is doing in you and that deposit that has been placed in you? It's through His Word, through His Spirit. He has deposited, truth, and wisdom, and understanding, and you have to guard it. You have to say, like Nehemiah saying to the people, hey, be careful because there are enemies that want to get in and they want to steal.

What is the work of the enemy? To steal, right? He wants to come to steal and ultimately to destroy so you have to be diligent to guard those things. What are some other passages along these lines? We can go into the Old Testament. Proverbs chapter 4 says,

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV1984)

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Above all else, guard your heart, (because) *for it is the wellspring of life.*

Took that verse out of the older rendition of the NIV. I like that particular wording. Your heart can be a very dangerous apparatus, anyway. The Bible says that it's already deceitful, but that doesn't mean you can just let anything you want into it. Because, and frankly, because it's deceitful, you have to be careful what you allow in there. Guard your heart, the wisdom literature says.

And then here's one from 1 Corinthians chapter 16. It says

1 Corinthians 16:13 (ESV)

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, (and) *be strong.*

But notice that first line, it's, "*Be watchful."* That's exactly what Nehemiah was telling the people to do.

First of all, don't even open the gates until it's fully light outside because truth, or attacks on truth, don't necessarily like to come out in the light. They like to come, they like to hide in the shadows. They like to zip in when things aren't well lit. Right?

And so he says, be careful that you don't open the door until the it's nice and bright. Make sure the light is shining in your life, that's going to keep those lies and attacks on the truth at bay somewhat. But even then he says, be watchful and you got to stand firm in what you know. What you've been taught. That deposit that has been placed in you through the Holy Spirit and through His Word. Guard it so that nothing happens to it.

I found a great quote by someone you may have heard of before. And he writes,

If God's people don't protect what they have accomplished for the Lord, the enemy will come in and take it over. —Warren W. Wiersbe

If God's people don't protect what they have accomplished for the Lord, the enemy will come in and take it over.

Warren Wiersbe said that. And I'll even add to that, if you don't protect what you've been given by the Lord, the same thing can happen. Both what he says, what you've accomplished through the Lord and for the Lord, and also what you have been given by the Lord. Those things need to be protected.

He writes in verse 4, *"The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt."* They got a lot of area to guard here, a lot of wall.

And then he says, *"5 Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it:"* And then he goes on to quote it.

Now let me just explain what's going on here. What Nehemiah is wanting to do is he's wanting to basically do a genealogical census of the people who are there in Jerusalem and in the surrounding area now because he wants to find out again, what tribe are you with, are you maybe of the Levitical tribes. He's trying to have a better sense of who should be doing what and so forth, who are the priests, who are the Levites so on and so on. And he wants to get a sense of just, who's all there.

Well, in the course of getting ready to do this counting of the people and this genealogical cataloging of the people, he finds the previous one that had been done almost a hundred years earlier, when Zerubbabel brought the first group of people, and yes, it's been, that long.

He finds this thing, and he begins to quote it in verse 6. And what you're reading in verse 6, by the way, pretty much to the end of the chapter is almost word for word what we saw in Ezra chapter 2.

There are some very minor differences, but he says, *"These were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried into exile. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town. 7 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah,* (a different guy obviously) *Azariah, Raamiah, …"* And all the other Miahs. You can see them there, they're all listed. And all the other names that are really fun to pronounce. And it goes on to talk about the number of the men of Israel.

And then that goes on through the succeeding verses. The sons of, the sons of, the sons of, it goes on. And it's actually quite long because a lot of these verses are just simply the line of the sons of so and so forth. And then you skip all the way down to the bottom, you start seeing some of the general numbers that are given.

It ends in verse 73 with, *"So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel, lived in their towns.*

And when the seventh month had come, the people of Israel were in their towns." And again, this is a finishing of the quotation that Nehemiah is making of what we assume is Zerubbabel's genealogical census of the people.

Nehemiah chapter 8 begins in verse 1 by saying, *"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."*

Now I want you to stop there for just a moment because we can read this verse and the dynamics of it can escape us if we're just not careful here. What's happening? What does this verse say? It says the people gathered together and they asked for a reading of the Word of God.

Do you guys know how weird that is? I mean, okay, not weird. Maybe that's not the right word. How odd, how rare, maybe better sort of a word. For people to gather and they gathered, it says, as one man. And that's a way of saying with the same heart, the same goal, the same desire, and they gathered and they told Ezra. Now we're back to Ezra, and this is an interesting change where Nehemiah is now going to be referred to in the third person.

Ezra is going to be the star of these chapters of the Book of Nehemiah. And yeah, this is the same Ezra, and he's now back. He's a scribe. Remember, he's the man who becomes the quintessential example of what a rabbi is going to be. They don't call them rabbis at this point. They will much later on, but he is that example of the teacher.

And so he's there and the people gather in huge numbers so they can hear the scriptures being read. Can you imagine that happening today? And this is not Ezra putting up a sign and saying, hey, we're going to gather on Thursday. And we're going to read… The people gathered, the people gathered, and they said, Ezra, would you read the scriptures to us? We want to hear the law. Wow, that's pretty crazy.

For a teacher, an instructor in the Word, there is no greater blessing than when people, the people of God, hunger for the Word of God. There is no greater blessing. One of the things that delights my soul more than anything else is

seeing people become hungry for God's Word and start consuming. And I'm not just talking about people who show up for church. I'm talking about people who just really get hungry and they can't wait till the next time they can dig into the scriptures. And they start listening to other teachings and they're just every day getting into the Word of God.

And it is absolutely amazing to see the transformation that takes place in those people's lives and in their families. And in their relationships, in their businesses, it permeates everything in their lives and there becomes a new sensitivity, a new awakening, a new awareness.

I have literally seen people go from sitting in the back row to the front row because of a hunger for God's Word. I seriously have and I have watched as the light in their eyes just comes on and suddenly, you know these hearts are perking with the Word of God. And then eventually we'll hear something about how, well, you know, we just started doing this.

We started getting into the Word every day, we're listening to teachings or we're doing this or we're doing that every single day. So and so as he drives to work, he listens to the Word of God on his phone or he's listening to this teaching on the radio or he's listening to one of your messages or data whatever it might be. And suddenly there's this excitement that's just burning inside these people. It's just it's amazing really is it's delightful, and I'm sure Ezra was delighted.

It says in verse 2 here, *"So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly,* (meaning, basically the scriptures) *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* (look at this) *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."*

How long were the people that… We talk about attention spans today, we talk about how kids have like a less than a 30 second attention span because that's about how long they can stay with anything.

It says here, they started at dawn. These are people standing, listening to the Word of God. They started it at when the sun started coming up, and they listened until midday. Yeah, pretty interesting, huh? Can you imagine? Can you imagine people doing that today? Can you imagine people in the United States of America gathering in like parks and huge areas and clamoring and saying, would somebody get up and read the Bible to us? Now the necessity of such a

thing is hardly there today because you can pick up your phone and you can read the Bible in any number of translations at any time that you want to. That wasn't the case back in these days. These people didn't have a Torah at home that they could just pull out and read to the kiddies. They probably hadn't heard the Word for a long time. Even though they'd been in the land and the temple had been built, who knows?

You have to understand something about Israel. Up to this point in time, the temple and the things that went on in the temple had been central to Israel's spiritual search, not search, that's not the right word. But service to the Lord. I mean, it was all about the temple. Building that temple was so key and when it was destroyed, people decimated. And the temple, and the altar, and the sacrifices that were on it, was such a key element to Israel. Instruction was not a key element. Do you get that? Okay?

What you're seeing in this chapter with the people clamoring and coming to a priest/teacher/scribe like Ezra and saying, read the Word to us, signals a paradigm shift in Israel's religious history that is going to carry on now until the time of Christ.

The priest and the prophet fade and the pulpit begins to emerge as a paramount element of Israel's religious history and understanding to the point where when Jesus comes along, who are going to be the big guys in Israel's vision. The rabbis and the teachers of the law, right? Those are the people that really were at front and center. I mean, the Sanhedrin, sure, they were there ruling, they were the Jewish ruling council. But as far as the religious instruction of the people went, it was rabbis and they almost venerated these rabbis. I mean, they held their writings.

Most rabbis in their teachings would quote other rabbis. As rabbi so and so said, and to the point where there were even debates between different rabbinical positions that happened to be opposing related to divorce. Some of those they brought up to Jesus. They came to Jesus and said, hey, would you solve this issue with us? When it comes to divorce what's okay? Can a man divorce his wife for any and every reason, or does it have to be because…?

Do you know why they were asking that? Because there was two rabbis who had two different positions who were very famous. Because the rabbis were it. Well, when did the rabbis become it? Starts here, right here in the Book of Nehemiah. This is where the shift from the altar to the pulpit takes place. From the sacrifice to the instruction, and it's really a very fascinating sort of a thing that's going on in the history of Israel at this time.

And you'll notice that it starts talking about things we've never read before in the Old Testament, like in verse 4. It says, *"And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood…"* These men who it names there who are presumably leaders. We don't know, actually, really that much about these guys and what positions of leadership they had, but some of them were on his right, some of them were on his left. I'm going to let you go through those names by yourself because they're just so much fun to say.

Anyway, and it says in verse 5 that, *"…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."*

Now obviously they had him up in a position like that because it's better to hear people when they're elevated. And you can speak in such a way that people, other people aren't in the way, and so forth.

But it says that as he opened the Scriptures there in verse 5, that they all stood up. Everybody starts standing as soon as he's opening the Word of God up. He's, I don't know exactly how, if he's got this big scroll, I don't know, but he opens this thing and everybody rises to their feet just spontaneously.

Can you see what's going on? Again, this probably would never happen today in our culture, just simply because the Word of God is so freely available to all of us. But it depicts what's in the heart, the reverence for the Word of God that is in the heart. When people open their Bible, they start paying attention.

When somebody starts quoting the Word of God, there's just this reverence, there's this attitude of awe. I never forget, I've mentioned this many times, in the past, but it always impressed me that one of my favorite Christian authors, A.W. Tozer, would read his Bible on his knees. Do you know why he did that?

He was a humble man. His greatest disappointment in life was that he was uneducated. Yeah. You read his books and you think the guy had a master's in language. But no, he was an uneducated man and that bothered him, but it also humbled him to the point where he realized, he recognized, apart from the Holy Spirit, I'm not going to get anything out of this thing, right?

He would open up his Bible and get down on his knees and read it because he said to God, I am utterly dependent upon you to pull anything out of this of any value. But doesn't that reverence just challenge you right to your core? And

we're just so casual. We're flipping through the Word of God on our phone, or, we've got all these Bibles at the house and we've got scripture things all over.

And there was just this reverence, that caused the people to rise, to stand up. You know how you stand in the honor of someone who walks into the room is really important. You don't just sit there and look. Somebody walks in like some head of state or something like that, people rise. Hey, we're supposed to rise even when a judge walks into the room. It's just respect.

What is our attitude toward the Word of God? What is our attitude toward the Scripture, the truth of God's Word that's been given to us?

Verse 6 says, *"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* (all these men) *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."* Isn't that interesting?

And it says here, verse 8, that *"They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense,* (and that means the meaning, the meaning of what is being said) *so that the people understood the reading."*

This is a really a wonderful description, I think, of the gift of the teacher, the Bible teacher, who is who does really the same thing. Who opens up the Word of God, reads it, and speaks of it clearly. So that the…, giving the sense, giving the meaning, talking about the meaning of the words so that the people can understand what they're reading.

And a Bible teacher needs to be careful to do that, to communicate the Word of God in such a way that you give the meaning of the scripture. Not what I want to say, or not what's on my agenda, not what's bugging me today. It's one of the reasons I love going through the scriptures, chapter by chapter and verse by verse because when you come here on a Sunday, you know there are things probably bugging me. I'm just like anybody else.

I don't get the freedom to talk about those things because we're going through the scriptures and we got to talk about what we're going to talk about. And last Sunday, we had to deal with divorce, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, not one of my favorite topics. I'll just tell you right here in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Not one of those… If I was leafing through the Bible and thinking, now what do I want to teach on today? I wouldn't have landed on, I would have gone right past

that. I would have probably gone to somewhere talking about the resurrection or the work of the Holy Spirit or something fun.

But, to talk about marriage and divorce and remarriage. And what do you do if you're married to an unbeliever? And then what do you do if you got a believer? And then they don't want to… And you got all these… But it's the Word of God and there's a lot of people that need to hear the Word of God as it relates to those subjects.

And I had to learn long ago that it doesn't matter whether that is a hot topic on my heart or whether it is something that I think is necessary. God doesn't actually talk to me about what He thinks is necessary. He doesn't consult me. You might be surprised to hear that, but He doesn't. And He just goes, hey Paul, just do it. Just teach the Word and be faithful.

And I learned years ago that's what makes the difference anyway. But it's not up to me. It's not my favorite topic and it's not what I think you need to hear. It's what we see that Ezra and these other men did is, they gave the meaning of the scripture. They made it clear to the people and I like how it says here they, they did it clearly. Do you guys get that? They did it clearly. They did it clearly. Okay. I've got to be careful not to get up on my soapbox here.

The Word of God needs to be clear. Okay. It needs to be clear. If you grew up with the King James Bible, then it's probably clear using the King James. I know a lot of people for whom that's all they've ever heard as it relates to the Word of God. They've got a King James Bible and they read it and to them, they've been studying it that way for so long, it's clear to them even though it's a mess to the rest of us.

And King James English is no longer spoken and it's basically an archaic sort of a language in the sense that there are a lot of words that no longer even mean what they have in the King James any longer. They don't even mean the same thing. There are whole literal words that mean something other than what, which shouldn't be surprising at all. I mean, when I was a little boy, gay did not mean homosexual, right? It meant happy. Look at there. Just in my lifetime, there's just one example.

Imagine what's happened in the last, few hundred years, since 1611, when the King James was translated. 400 years, you have a lot of time for things to well… Here's my point, if the King James Bible works for you, wonderful. If it's clear for you, wonderful. But you know what? I'm not giving it to anybody

who's brand new and has never been raised with it. I'm just not. You know why? The Word of God needs to be clear.

They need to hear the Word of God. In their own language and I believe that very strongly and I upset people when I say that because there's such a reverence for the King James. But you know what? We shouldn't have a reverence for the King James. We should have a reverence for God's Word.

The King James translation is a translation, and it was a good one in its day. And believe me, God used it powerfully and still uses it today, gloriously, and I'm thrilled about that. But we're not going to venerate the King James Bible. I'm sorry, we're just not going there.

It's God's Word that is inspired, not translations. That's something you've got to remember. Biblical inspiration refers to the original autographs, right? That's where they were inspired. Translations are not inspired. Translations, frankly, are done by fallible men. And, we're not going to lift up a translation and go, woo, we're going to bow down at that one. We're just not going to do that.

And many people have a lot of favorite translations of the Bible that they like to read, and I think that's wonderful. I really do. It's whatever translation that you're reading and getting the most out of and is clear to you, read it, go with it, study it, grant you, wonderful! Don't let anybody stand in your way. Even if that's the King James Bible for you. Fine. Great. It's the Word of God, just like all the others, but it needs to be clear. It needs to be clear.

When I'm talking to a 15 year old kid that has never darkened the door of a church and I'm telling him about Jesus and the verses I quote are in some kind of flowery language that's no longer even spoken. I have a sense that I'm communicating something to that kid of the Word of God that's just beyond life. It's like, wait a minute. Does this even apply to my life? Why are you saying that? Why? Why are you telling me that? Why are you quoting it in this sort of a, language that isn't spoken today? Anyway, so there you go. Off the soapbox, but it needs to be clear.

Here's Ezra and these other men who are teaching the people, teaching. And it's such a…, and you guys know that I'm passionate about teaching. What does the Bible say about teachers? Well, first of all, teachers are a gift to the church. One of many, but they are a gift. Ephesians chapter 4 talks about this.

Ephesians 4:11-12 (ESV)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (which is pastors, same Greek word) *and* (also the) *teachers,* (why?) *to equip the saints for the work of ministry,* (and that's the job that's being done, hopefully, in those areas) *for building up the body of Christ,*

Secondly, we know that teachers are going to deal with a stricter judgment. It's told us in James chapter 3, he writes,

James 3:1 (ESV)

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, (and here's why) *for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*

Now, when we say judged, first of all, please understand, well, understand that when we use the word, judged, to a believer, we're never talking about being judged for sins. Jesus has been judged for our sins. You guys understand that. But that doesn't mean that we're not going to answer in some particular way related to our life. And some judgements are even in this life, you guys know that too.

Paul talked to the…, we're going to get to this not terribly long in Corinthians. He's going to start telling them that the way they've been conducting their communion, their love feasts, was so out of order, he said, that's why some of you are sick, and some of you have even died.

There are judgments that even for believers that can take place in this life. Now, they're not going to be judged for their sin later on, because again, as believers, Christ has been judged on our behalf. You with me? And when we talk about any kind of judgment, that's the case for a believer. That doesn't mean that there aren't judgments in our lives. There aren't disciplines and consequences. But they're not eternal, right? And they can't separate you from God. That's something that you need to keep in mind. All right. Again, I want you to, as we go back here to Nehemiah, I want you to understand here that this shift that's going on in Israel moving toward now the teacher.

Verse 9. It says, *"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."* Why are they even saying that?

Well, we're told here. *"For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law."* This is the next response to the Word of God that I want you to take note of here this evening as we're going through Nehemiah. I want you to notice not only did they stand when they began to hear the Word, when he was opening up the scripture, this reverence for God's Word, but they were convicted in heart and they began weeping because they realized they hadn't lived up to the Word of God.

And so there was this overflowing sorrow, and this is one of the things that God's Word is used for in our lives. And it's interesting that people keep coming back for more. Let me show you this passage from 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16. You guys know this.

2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness…

All Scripture (Paul writes to Timothy) *is breathed out by God and* (therefore it is) *profitable* (what's it profitable for? Well) *for teaching,* (right? That's what we're doing tonight even. It's also profitable) *for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness…*

Now, I don't know what you think of when you think of the word, reproofed, you've been reproved by someone. We don't use that word typically but it sure could be used. It just means to be corrected. It means to be rebuked. It means to be made aware of an area of your life that is deficient, in need of correction, in need of adjustment. I don't know about you, I don't like that. Right? I really don't. I don't particularly like to be corrected. I don't like to be reproved, to be rebuked.

And yet, it's one of the functions of the Word of God. Question is, are we able to be corrected? What we call that, today, when we're referring to somebody who can't be corrected by the scripture? We call them unteachable and so when we're talking about people, frankly it's one of my biggest concerns. Is the person teachable. Is there a teachable spirit in that person's life? Or is there a hardness of heart or a stubbornness that just resists the instruction of the Word of God. Do they hear the Word of God just to me and go? Oh, well, I don't know about

that. Yeah, well, or is there that response we're seeing here in Nehemiah verse 9, where the people are weeping because of the scripture, sometimes it hurts.

Verse 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."*

Rejoiced because they understood the words. Isn't that great? The leadership is basically saying to the people, you've been convicted by the scripture and you've shown by your response to the scripture and your fear of God, that your hearts really truly are teachable and that just blesses our socks off.

But, God's doing something powerful here, the fact that you have all gathered here today just to hear the scripture and it's something that you requested of us, that's God. That's God working in our midst. The fact that you have such a reverence for God's Word when it's brought out and as it's beginning to be open you rise to your feet and spontaneously, that's God. They know that.

And the fact that you've responded with weeping and sorrow at the fact that you have not lived up to the standard of God's righteousness, that's God in you, right? That's God speaking to your heart, challenging you. This is a good thing. These leaders are excited about this, and they're saying, all right, no more crying, this is a time of rejoicing. God is working in your hearts. God is challenging you. He's bringing you to a place of change and reformation. And they're telling the people, hey, we need to dance a jig, this is good stuff going on here.

In verse 13 of Nehemiah 8, it says, *"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 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."*

Now, stop there. The very next day, this excitement for God's Word doesn't wear off at all. They get together to have a Bible study. And so they're getting

together and they're just reading through the scripture and they realize, wow, God told us to do this. And this is, these booths that they're supposed to create are part of what we call the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles. Which was a feast of Israel, the goal of which was to remind them of God's providential care during their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness. How God supernaturally fed them, took care of them, protected them.

Their clothing didn't even wear out. I can't imagine wearing a pair of shoes for 40 years. But it says that literally their clothes didn't wear out. God supernaturally provided water for them to drink on more than one occasion. It was a miraculous time of God's providential care.

I mean, good grief. When you wake up every morning and your cornflakes are out on the lawn. I mean, that's pretty crazy. This manna stuff, God just took care of them. Well, God said, all right, here's the deal. Once they came into the land, he says, I want you guys to commemorate how I took care of you all those years.

We're going to do it through this thing called the Feast of Booths. And what you'll do is you'll go out into the hills and you'll get sticks and this and that and you're going to build these little, booths that you're going to stay in during the course of this week to commemorate how I took care of you and you're just going to remember.

And your kids are going to probably ask, what in the world are we doing staying in… Of course kids would think it's fun, right? We're going camping It's that camping week, but you know kids are going to ask what are we doing here dad? Why are all the people living in these little stick huts during this week? Well, son, this is given to us as a way of commemorating God's faithfulness and provision. Really a great way of passing things on to the kids. How did Israel do on passing things to the kids? Really, really bad. Keep reading with me.

It says in verse 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,* (even) *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* (look at this) *days of Jeshua* (and that's Joshua, okay, same name, slightly different spelling) *the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so."*

And that's why it says here, there was very great rejoicing. How the Israelites done on passing things over to their kids. Really bad. It says from the days of

Joshua, they hadn't done this. Joshua was the one who brought them into the land. He spent 40 years with him in the wilderness and then brought him into the land and conquered, the peoples that they conquered and then set him up. And by that time he was a very aged man, died at 110 and left them to follow the Lord, but they didn't follow the Lord.

The next generation came up and you know what it says in the Book of Judges? You start the Book of Judges and it's just flat out depressing. Yeah, after you get done with Joshua. It says, well, the people followed the Lord all during the life of Joshua and even during the people who outlived Joshua, the leaders, who were Joshua's guys. And then it says, and then the next generation came up who knew not the Lord or what he had done for Israel, and you're like, how can that happen? How in the world is that possible?

Well, I'll tell you how it's possible. By parents not passing along things to their kids. And it says right here that from the days of Joshua, they hadn't kept the Feast of Tabernacles. They hadn't told their kids in any sort of a remembrance or commemorative way, hey, guess what God did for 40 years?

Now I want you to notice at the end of that verse that we read there, verse 17. It says, *"And there was very great rejoicing."* People rejoiced. What was the cause of it? Was it because they were having a party? I mean, I think these feasts were meant to be times of rejoicing And stuff like that.

But I don't think that was the cause of their rejoicing. In this case, I believe it was their obedience. They were being obedient. And this was the first time this had been obeyed since the time of Joshua. And the people were just pumped. They were jazzed because they were walking in obedience to God. And that's an important thing for you and I to see.

Because the world tells you that the way to happiness, well, they've got all their opinions, right? You just got to make yourself happy. You got to just live in such a way that you're going to be happy. If you want to be happy, you have to live in such a way, that you just got to make yourself happy. Do what makes you happy. It's all about you. It's all very self-centered. Very me oriented.

But you know what you see in the Bible? When people are doing what God wants them to do, they're happy. You want to really be happy? Obey God. Yeah, it's a great way of just increasing your happiness and your rejoicing. Obey. Stop living for you and live for Him. Live to please Him. Live to make Him happy and He will pour that joy into your heart as well. And this is a beautiful picture of it right here.

Verse 18. It says, *"And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God.* (during this Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths, and) *They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule."*

Meaning according to what Moses had written down in the law related to the Feast of Tabernacles.

And so here they are keeping this feast and rejoicing because of it.