THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
"Great Reading of the Law"
Nehemiah 8:1-8

Introduction
1. Before this events of the chapter, the walls of Jerusalem were completely rebuilt (6:15-19). Then, the city was set up for trustworthy guards (7:1-3).

2. With the city properly defended, concern was raised about its relatively uninhabited status. Consequently, families were resettled and this called forth a census. This, in turn, became the basis for determining purity of genealogy (7:4-73). So those were wonderful days in Jerusalem as plans were made to move many into the city and prepare for new home construction.

4. It seems evident that the final clause of 7:73 belongs to the first verse of the next chapter and forms one sentence (8:1). This makes it similar to Ezra (3:1). However, in Ezra the assembly of the people differed from the purpose in Nehemiah (cf. 3:1-3 with Nehemiah 8:1, 2). So in Nehemiah the returned exiles were attracted to God's Word. Historically this has been true in times of spiritual revival (cf. Josiah, 2 Chron. 33:18-21; Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 29:32:33).

5. So with a new month (cf. 6:15 with 7:73) comes a blessed unity of the people. They were all gathered together as one man (haish echad) into the street. That was in the very face (lifne) of the water gate. How particular God's Spirit sets the stage for what is to be described. The venue is clear. What events are detailed? Look at the text:--

1. THE WORD WAS DESIRED v. 1
It is the gathered people who are the subject of the verb "they spake." God help us to have a group of people with such a desire! They call to Ezra whose recent presence is not clearly explained. Look what happened:--

a. The Word Requested
Here is an imperative expression as a part of a purpose clause. Bring the Book! What book? The Law of Moses. It was given by His hand (cf. Hebrew, v. 14 and cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2) . In its expanded statement, this is the Torah, the Pentateuch (Gen. – Deut.).

b. The Word Provided
Mark carefully that the Book was that which the LORD (Hashem, Tetragrammaton) had issued. Such a statement must be understood in the light of verses on inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:21). It was the Word of God!

c. The Word Directed
This is a clear statement that the Law of Moses is for "Israel." God commanded it to them (cf. Ex. 19:1-6). This should forever settle it that Gentiles and N.T. believers are excluded from the Mosaic Law. Note that the Law is given to men and not just as a record to fill a page!

2. THE WORD WAS DECLARED vv. 2-6

a. So Stated vv. 2, 3, 5
Ezra is described as a "scribe" (v. 1) and a "priest" (v. 2). Consider what he did with the Word. He "brought" it (hifil form, causative), "read" it, and "opened" it. What a wonderful response to the desire of the people (cf. Ps. 81:10). Ezra was God's man for the occasion (cf. Haggai 1:13).

b. So Approved
For the festive occasion, a wooden platform was erected. It was high enough so that the people could see Ezra. Thirteen Levites were on the platform with Ezra. Some believe that these Levites may have moved among the people to explain the Law (v. 7).

c. So Responded
1) Congregationally
Both "men and women" and "those that could hear with understanding" were responsive. Apparently there was no Junior Church. All were expected to listen.

2) Attentively
This is precious. The ears of all were towards the Word. Apparently there was no selective hearing. "All the people" listened. Wonderful!

3) Reverently
Here is something absolutely incomparably rich. The response of the people was that they "stood up" (v. 5), they answered with "amen, amen," they "lifted their hands," they "bowed their heads," they "worshipped with their faces to the ground."

Note: There you have it. That's a clear statement of glorious response to the bold reading of the Word. Remember, this was "in the street" and before "the water gate." This is not in a comfortable building with chairs!

3. THE WORD WAS DEFINED vv. 7, 8

a. Understandingly v. 7
The causative form of the verb is employed to express that the Levites enabled the people to understand the Law and be instructed. All this took place while the people were standing in the street. Note that it is the "people" who are the issue, not a program as regretfully is the way things are in today's gatherings.

b. Distinctly v. 8
The verb here comes from a root meaning "spread out, separate, distinguish." The noun Pharisee comes from this term. The obvious meaning is that the reading of the Word was given clearness for the people.

c. Sensibly v. 8
Two words in the Hebrew rendered "gave the sense" means to "give understanding or wisdom." The thought is that of exegesis so that the meaning of the Word is given.

d. Practically v. 8
It is not sufficient to "know" the text of Scripture, it must be utilized. This seems to be the thought in the phrase "cause . . . to understand the reading." One must receive the Word so that it becomes a part of one's life. So was the purpose of the call for the Book (v. 1).

Conclusion The events on the "first day of the seventh month" were spectacular. No wonder Ezra "blesses the LORD, the great God" (v. 6). What a mighty God the people heard about through His Law. How much richer we are with the entire Bible at our disposal. So "bring the Book!" Amen and Amen.