

# From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Nehemiah) ch.7 & 8

by Zac Poonen

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of building the wall of separation by proclaiming all the commandments of Jesus, preserving the purity of the church through the gatekeeper ministry, and maintaining the spirit of praise in the church.*

**Duration:** 59:56

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 8:3, Nehemiah 8:7-10

**Topics:** "From Babylon To Jerusalem"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of praising God and worshiping Him before delving into the explanation of scriptures. The people in Jerusalem were attentive to the word of God and were convicted when they heard it, leading to a sense of mourning in their hearts. The speaker highlights that the joy of the Lord comes after conviction and mourning, and encourages the people to rejoice and celebrate. The sermon emphasizes the need for a love for God's word and a focus on teaching and proclaiming it, rather than seeking entertainment or funny stories in the pulpit.

---

## Transcript

Let's turn to the book of Nehemiah chapter 7. In our last study we considered the completion of the wall in chapter 6 verse 15. It says the wall was completed in 52 days. Now we come to chapter 7 verse 1. It came about when the wall was rebuilt.

We saw that the wall is a picture of the commandments of Jesus. And it is as we proclaim all the commandments of Jesus that we build the wall around the church. It's not that we separate ourselves from other Christian groups.

That is a wrong attitude for a Christian to take. But that we proclaim all the commandments of Jesus, and that automatically brings a distinction between us and any other Christian church or group that does not proclaim all the commandments of Jesus. Now we may think there are no such groups, but there are plenty of those who feel that there are certain commandments of Jesus which are not important, certain commandments in the word of God which can be sacrificed for the sake of interdenominational fellowship.

There's quite a lot of that type of garbage in Christianity today. And that's why we say we have to stand clear of that type of compromise. And we don't have to make any separation.

We only have to proclaim all the commandments of Jesus. Jesus said, go and make disciples of all nations and teach them to do everything that I commanded you. And when we teach people to do everything that Jesus commanded, that becomes by itself a wall of separation around Jerusalem, the church.

And so we see here the wall was rebuilt, and I'd set up the doors. And then he speaks about three categories of people whom he appointed to take care of the gates and to take care of various ministries. And I just want to look for a moment at these three people mentioned here, the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites.

And they could represent three ministries in the church that we need to have constantly. The gatekeepers, we can say in the church today, are those appointed by the Lord to make sure that the gate is not made broader than Jesus made it. And there's a lot of that happening today.

Jesus spoke about a narrow gate. It was so narrow that a rich man could not come inside with his love of money. Now, if a rich man can come into the church today with his love of money and be a part of the church and take leadership in the church, we have to say that some gatekeeper has failed somewhere in making the gate broader that that rich man who loves money got inside.

When Jesus was on earth, we know the rich young ruler couldn't get inside. Jesus said, it's difficult for a camel to go through a needle's eye. The gatekeepers are those who are to preserve the gate the right size.

Jesus spoke in Mark chapter 13. It's a very important ministry to be a gatekeeper in the house of the Lord. One of the Psalms, David says, I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord.

It's a tremendous ministry. Mark 13, Jesus speaks about his own second coming. Verse 33, they keep on the alert.

For you do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man away on a journey. That's Jesus who has gone away, who upon leaving his house, his house of the church, he put his slaves in charge or gave authority to his slaves.

He gave authority to each of his servants, assigning to each servant his particular task. And there is one task he mentions in particular. He commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert.

The doorkeeper is the one who has the responsibility to keep the door the size Jesus made it narrow. That's a very important ministry, an unpopular ministry, because people will call him a Pharisee. People will call him one who judges others and criticizes others.

It's not a very popular ministry. And therefore, many people do not want it. And of course, when we don't have a gatekeeper, then the price we pay is the church becomes a compromising Babylonian system.

It's the gatekeeper who preserves Jerusalem in its purity. And in any part of the world where there is a local church and there is a faithful gatekeeper, then there can be purity there and Jerusalem can be built. It's the gatekeeper ministry that preserves the purity of the church.

And we can see in different places, people can hear about the new and living way and about the various truths of the cross. But if a gatekeeper is not faithful, if he's got a false idea of love and goodness and broadens the gates, then it will only be Babylon. And so Nehemiah appointed gatekeepers, a very important ministry in the body of Christ, and the singers.

And that's another thing that must always be found in the church, the spirit of praise. Be filled with the spirit, it says in Ephesians 5.18, and the very next verse it says, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord. So we see that when we are filled with the spirit, there is a spirit of praise and song in our hearts.

And when the praise and song disappears from us and gloom and depression comes, we know immediately we're not filled with the spirit at that moment. That's clear. We're filled with some other spirit, the spirit of heaviness, not the Holy Spirit, because the spirit of God is a spirit of joy.

Always got to be singers in the church who lead the church in singing the praises of God. It's very important when we come to a meeting, we've said this before, that we come with the spirit of praise. And a meeting becomes heavy if the brothers and sisters don't take their responsibility seriously to come to the meeting with the spirit of praise.

And my own experience has been that in the vast majority of churches, the vast majority of believers have no sense of responsibility in this area, because they always leave it to a few people to do it all. They don't feel that they have a sense of responsibility to come to the meeting with the spirit of praise, to lift the meeting when the whole meeting is down. And God wants us to be like that in every meeting, not just once in a while.

The singers, there's a ministry there to praise the Lord. And the third ministry is the ministry of the Levites. And in the Old Testament, we don't have Levites in the New Testament, because every believer is to be a Levite, every believer is to be a priest.

The Levites were those who had the responsibility of service in the house of God. And when we say every believer is a Levite, the Levites, every Levite had a particular task in God's house. And so it must be in the body of Christ that every believer has a particular task that he fulfills in the body of Christ, that he's not just one who comes and sits and listens to messages and attends meetings.

That's Babylon. And one who comes to a meeting just to sit and listen to a message and go away and come back again next week to listen to a message, even if he sits in a church which is proclaiming the truth of Jerusalem, he himself is a part of Babylon. He doesn't have a sense of responsibility to take his share in God's house.

The Levites, every Levite had a task. If you went to the Levites who were appointed by Moses in the wilderness, and you went to any one of those Levites and said, what's your task? He would have told you immediately what he was doing in the house of God. You went to another Levite and said, what are you doing? He could say what he was doing in the house of God.

Now, it's very important, brothers and sisters, that we grow up and we are babies. We don't have a ministry, that's understandable, but we are not to remain babies forever. We are to grow up and come to the place where you say, Lord, there's something that you have for me to do.

It may not be a public ministry of preaching, but some task that you have for me to do in the church. So we see, all these three ministries are very important. The gatekeeper, the gatekeepers, the singers, and the servants in God's house.

And then we go to verse two. It says here, I put Hanani, my brother, and Hanani, the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem. Jerusalem has got to have elders.

And it's always in the plural, in the new covenant. And when we see the movement from Babylon to Jerusalem, we have noticed this, which is not found before that. Before that period, before Babylon, you see one prophet, a Moses, one king, a David, a Hezekiah, an Elijah, an Elisha.

But after Babylon, back to Jerusalem, you always find the movement, in that movement, the leadership always in the hands of more than one. We saw that with Joshua and Zerubbabel together, Haggai and Zechariah together, Ezra and Nehemiah together. And here in charge of Jerusalem, as the elders of Jerusalem, there were two brothers, Hanani and Hananiah.

And there are two qualifications mentioned here about Hananiah, which was no doubt true about Hanani too. It says here in the last part of two, verse two, two things, very important qualifications to be an elder in Jerusalem. He was a faithful man.

And he who is faithful in little things is faithful also in much. And secondly, he was a man who feared God more than many, more than others. That's why he was an elder brother to them, because he feared God more than the others.

There's no mention about their educational qualifications. There's no mention about their cleverness or their gift or their musical abilities, but they were faithful and they feared God. And that's something we have to bear in mind.

Any responsibility that we can ever have in the church depends on the measure of our faithfulness and the fear of God. If we fear God above others, then we deserve to have a responsibility above others and over them. It's not a question of anything else.

It's a question of faithfulness in the private life and the fear of God in our daily life. Notice what Paul tells Timothy in second Timothy chapter two, verse two, two Timothy two, verse two. He says, the things that you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust this, entrust these tremendous truths, not to clever men, not to gifted men, but to faithful men.

Never mind whether they are clever or not. Never mind whether they are gifted or not. To faithful men, Paul was concerned that the truth is passed on in succession from one faithful man to another faithful man.

And so wherever we go, we have to look for faithful people, not just people who agree with the message. There are a lot of people who agree with the message who are not faithful in their private life, who do not fear God in their private life. No, it is to the faithful and to those who fear God that responsibility and the truths of God are entrusted.

And that is not a question of seniority. You know, we can be in the church for many years. We may not be faithful.

We may not still fear God above others. And therefore, God just leaves us there, can't commit responsibility to us. I'll tell you this, if God finds one man or one woman who is really wholeheartedly faithful in their private life and fears God tremendously, God himself will put a ministry on that person's shoulders, man or woman, brother or sister.

Sure, nobody can stop it. God doesn't give it very often because he doesn't find people faithful in the little things, faithful in judging themselves and in the fear of God to keep away from sin. And now we see here in verse 3, I said to them, he gave them a charge, don't let the gates of Jerusalem be open until the sun is off.

In other words, don't let it be open at night. Be very careful to ensure that people don't sneak into Jerusalem. Nehemiah was very careful.

You've got to preserve Jerusalem. Don't let people sneak in in the dark cover of darkness. And while they're standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors.

There are people to whom we have to shut and bolt the doors. And that's why I said the gatekeeper's ministry is a bit of an unpopular ministry. Because you may have to go up to a certain person and say to him, brother, we want you, we would like you not to break bread with us, because we do not feel your life is right.

You know, it says that in 1 Corinthians 5, put out that man from your midst. That's a gatekeeper's ministry. That's not a very popular thing to go to a brother or sister and say, we don't want you to break bread.

You know, we'd like to have a reputation for gentleness and love and goodness and all that. Well, a person who loves a reputation like that can never be a gatekeeper. And Nehemiah is very strict on that.

You've got to shut and bolt the doors to some people and say, sorry, you can't be with us. There is sin in your life. And we are very strict on that.

It's very important. And once we compromise there, it's going to be Babylon very quickly. Later on, we see the sad thing that Nehemiah died and moved on.

And some years later, Jerusalem became Babylon all over again in the time of Malachi. That's a sad thing. And that's written there for our warning.

But praise God, during Nehemiah's time, it didn't happen. He was very strict and he preserved the purity of Jerusalem. And he also said, appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post and each in front of his own house.

In other words, watch the narrow gate in your own home as well. It's not just in the church. Make sure that in your own home, the principles that we proclaim in the church are preserved there.

Otherwise, carnality can enter the home. And even though we're strict in the church, there can be a looseness and a laxness in our homes. And then, while Jerusalem is being built in the church, Babylon can be built in someone's home.

So he says, be careful. Each in front of his own house. And that's particularly the responsibility of the husband and the father.

To stand as a gatekeeper in front of his own house and to determine what comes into his house and what doesn't. And don't let your wife take the headship there, like Adam allowed Eve to be the gatekeeper of his house and allowed the devil to walk right in. No, don't let the children be the gatekeepers.

The father has to be the gatekeeper there to determine what comes into the home and what doesn't. That's a very serious responsibility. The Lord told Adam, because you listen to the voice of your wife, in other words, because you've made her the gatekeeper, therefore you're also going to be punished.

So it's a very important responsibility, each in front of his own house. And then we read, the city was large, Jerusalem was large, spacious, but the people in it were few. And the houses were not built, you know, it wasn't a delaborated condition.

And people were not willing to come there and work hard. They wanted the comforts of Babylon. But there were few, few overcomers who were willing to sacrifice and offer to the Lord their God that which cost them something in order to build up Jerusalem.

And then God put it in his heart to assemble, verse 5, the nobles, officials, and the people to be enrolled by genealogies. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first, in which I found the following record. And here we read about Nehemiah organizing the people, making a list of the people so that he can fill up Jerusalem.

We read later on in Nehemiah 11, verse 1, that once he had made a list of the people, Nehemiah 11, verse 1, he told one-tenth of all those people to come and live inside Jerusalem. And the nine-tenths could remain in other cities. So that was the purpose with which he took a census and made a list of all the people.

And he found the record of those who had come back from Babylon to Jerusalem. And what we read in Nehemiah 7, verse 6 onwards, these are the people who came up from Babylon and returned to Jerusalem. We remember when we studied Ezra chapter 2, this is an exactly identical list to Ezra chapter 2. It's the same thing.

In fact, it's just a repetition of Ezra chapter 2, of the people who came up long before Nehemiah's time, and in the time of Cyrus, they came from Babylon back to Jerusalem. And we've gone through that, just a few points which, to revive our memories and to recollect what we studied at that time, we studied that there were only 42,360 people who came up. We read in verse 66, we studied that number when we came, when we studied Ezra chapter 2 as well.

42,360 who left Babylon, and when you contrast that with 600,000 people who left Egypt, we find the number is quite small, quite small. It's only about 6% of the number who left Egypt, who leave Babylon to Jerusalem. We studied that there were two movements in the scriptures.

One was a movement from Egypt to Canaan, the other was a movement from Babylon to Jerusalem. And in this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem, there are few. Few are willing to pay the price.

We also considered when we studied Ezra 2, what we see here in Nehemiah 7 verse 27, about the men of Anathoth. And we studied how Jeremiah, before the Israelites went into captivity, according to the word of the Lord, Jeremiah belonged to Anathoth, and he bought a plot of land in Anathoth for a hundred rupees as a testimony that God is going to bring back the Israelites to this land again. And there we see the men of Anathoth, the son, the men of Anathoth, 128 came back, and no doubt there was some relative of

Jeremiah's there, who came back and possessed that land which Jeremiah had bought.

There was a living proof that Jeremiah believed what he preached, that after 70 years, Jeremiah preached that, after 70 years the Israelites would come back, and he bought a plot of land to prove his faith in that. And that's a picture of how we put our investment into Jerusalem, into that which has eternal value. And we also considered what we see here in verse 43, that the Levites numbered only 74, a very small number, because the Levites were the full-time workers of those days, they had to be supported by others, they needed more faith than the others.

The others could work and have their own property, the Levites were not allowed to have their own property. And there were very few who were willing to come to this dilapidated old city, Jerusalem, to identify with God's people and that movement, in order to trust God and do His service. And one other thing also we noticed there in our study of Ezra 2, which we can look at again here in verse 63 to 65, that among the priests there were certain sons of Hobiah, and they searched verse 64 among their ancestral registration, but it could not be located, therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.

You see the strictness that was maintained at that time. You can't really prove, there's no clear evidence that you come from a priestly tribe, and so we're sorry, we have to be very strict here. We can't take a chance, and we can't do anything.

You have to wait till a priest arises with the Urim and Thummim, verse 65, which is a means by which God's will was found to find out whether you are fit to be a priest or not. That just shows us the strictness that was adopted in those days. It's not Nehemiah's time, this is way back before Nehemiah's time, when the first group came out from Babylon, but there was a strictness there to ensure that there was purity in the leadership among the priests.

I just want to mention one thing in closing as we conclude this chapter 7, and that is, if you're the clever type and you compare Ezra chapter 2 with Nehemiah chapter 7, you will find certain differences in the figures. Some places it's 129, and here it's 128. In some places it's a little different, a little different there.

Of course we don't know the reason for that. Maybe a mistake in copying from the original scriptures, perhaps? We don't know. But I am convinced that God has kept these things in the scriptures to stumble the clever and the intelligent who are looking for something to stumble on.

So God has allowed those who do not love the truth to go astray, even with figures like that. So that's also a ministry the word of God fulfills, as we have seen many times, to lead the clever and intelligent astray so that the simple and the childlike can come in faith and trust God. That's just in passing.

That's one of the ministries fulfilled by Ezra chapter 2 and Nehemiah chapter 7. So now we come to Nehemiah chapter 8 and verse 1. And here we read, all the people gathered as one man at the square which is in front of the water gate. And that's a tremendous thing. As one man.

That's the mark of Jerusalem. Unity. Many different temperaments, many different backgrounds, but when they come together they gathered as one man in front of the water gate and they asked Ezra the scribe.

Now this is back to Nehemiah's time. Ezra we saw had come a number of years before Nehemiah. And now Nehemiah had built the wall and Nehemiah is describing what happened there.

And Ezra, who was also there, the scribe, and they told him to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. And as we read through chapter 8 and chapter 9 we find the tremendous emphasis there is on God's word. The place that the word of God had in that movement from Babylon to Jerusalem.

And that's very important for us to bear in mind. It says there Ezra stood up on a pulpit in verse 4 and he took the word of God. And it's very important that in Jerusalem we do not allow entertainers in the pulpit.

A lot of churches today where the man who comes into the pulpit is an entertainer. He's come there and can swing his and strum a guitar and bring the spirit of the nightclub into the church. Or another man who can come and crack a few jokes and tell a whole lot of funny stories and make everybody laugh.

Well that's not what Ezra did I'll tell you that. Ezra didn't get up there and swing his hips and make everybody laugh. He was proclaiming God's word, teaching God's word.

And we see there and the people also wanted that. The people didn't want entertainers. They didn't want funny stories.

They didn't want some humorists to get up there and entertain them. They said bring the book of the law of Moses. Bring the word of God.

Let's hear that. And then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, all who could listen with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. And listen to this verse 3. And he read from it before the square which was in front of the water gate.

Now remember in those days there was no printed Bible. There was just one scroll and probably there was only one copy available. Very expensive.

Maybe Ezra had the only copy and all the people, they didn't have any Bibles in their hands. They had to listen carefully to what was being said. They couldn't allow their thoughts to wander here and there.

They had to listen carefully if they wanted to grasp what was being said. Because they had nothing there to look at. They had to listen carefully.

And I tell you I believe that they had a greater power of attention in those days than people have nowadays. Because it's so easy now. And they listened.

And it says here that he preached from early morning. Early morning means six o'clock in the morning until midday. That was a pretty solid Bible study.

Six hours in the morning. Just think of that. Six hours.

You can imagine what a man Ezra was. He just went on and on and on and on and on. We read of an incident like that in Acts chapter 20 in Troas.

When Paul, it says here, says there preached in the evening and he carried on his message till midnight. And then it got interrupted because a man fell down asleep and fell down dead and Paul just went and raised him from the dead. And he didn't ask him to give a testimony in the meeting.

He just asked him to sit down. Now we continue with the Bible study. But even if a man's raised from the dead in the middle of the meeting, he just sits there quietly like an ordinary brother.

And we continue with the Bible study. That's a tremendous example we read there in Acts chapter 20 compared to what we see today where somebody has some fantastic testimony and we close down the Bible study and this man is up there in the front. Now here we can learn a lesson from Paul.

And it says here after this man was raised from the dead and he just sat there quietly like an ordinary brother, Paul continued the Bible study from midnight till early in the morning. He was another man like Ezra. They had a six hour Bible study there in Troas.

In the middle of the night by the way. Well Ezra was like that. That's the spirit of Jerusalem is that a love for God's word.

A love for God's word. Not for entertainment and funny stories. A love for God's word.

In the presence of men and women, those who could understand. And listen to this phrase in the last part of verse 3. All the people were attentive to the word of God. They were listening carefully.

They were attentive to the word of God. And Ezra stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattityah, Shema and I and a number of them there on one side and some on the right some on the left who were helping him.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people and now it's a description of the meeting that they had there. And when he opened it all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.

And all the people answered Amen, Amen while lifting up their hands they bowed low and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. In other words before they had the ministry of the word Ezra said let's all stand up now and lift up our hands and praise the Lord. I think he would have fit it wonderfully in our midst.

That's how it was there way back in Jerusalem. He said before we turn to the word of God let's all stand up now and bless the Lord. And the people said Amen and they all lifted up their hands and worshipped the Lord and bowed low before him with their faces to the ground.

And then they said all right now we will have the word of God. And then it says here there were a number of people who were also teachers. Ezra wasn't a lonely man.

There were others who had been wholehearted to study the scriptures who assisted Ezra in teaching. We read of them in verse 7 about 13 of them are mentioned there. They explained the law to the people while the people remain in that place.

And they read from the book verse 8 from the law of God translating to give the sense so that they that what I just mentioned that Ezra did not carry out that teaching ministry alone. It was a huge crowd. And it says there were 13 others.

And don't think that those 13 others were suddenly had some supernatural gift in order to teach. No doubt there were people who in their younger days as I've always exhorted young people to do studied the word of God diligently instead of playing the fool like a lot of other Christians. And therefore when the time came

for an important ministry these people were ready just like Ezra was ready.

These younger brothers were also ready to share with him in that ministry. That need can come suddenly. And there's such a great need of that even today in our country.

Many who teach the word. It says they explained verse 7 the law to people. That's a tremendous ministry to explain the word of God what it means.

And it says they read from the book verse 8 from the law of God translating. There was possibly a need for translation because the word of God was written in Hebrew. And the people who had come back from Babylon had now acquired the Aramaic language.

And so there was a need for translation and also explanation to give the sense so that they understood the reading. That's a tremendous ministry. Think of that in this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem.

There is a great need for Bible teachers not one but many who will explain what is written in God's word. Make it plain and simple and clear. Unfold it so that people understand the meaning.

First they began with praising the Lord lifting up their hands and worshipping him. And then they came to the explanation of the scriptures. That's how it is in Jerusalem.

And it's all written for our instruction. And then what was the result of this teaching? The last part of verse 9 it says the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. They weren't laughing at the funny stories.

They were weeping because there was conviction. The secrets of their heart were made manifest. And that is the mark of the New Testament church.

Through the spirit of prophecy the secrets of people's hearts are made manifest and they are convicted. There's a mourning in their hearts. Whether there were tears in their eyes or not is secondary.

But there was a mourning in their hearts when they heard the word of God and it brought conviction. Very important. See this is almost a description of how our meeting should be.

That we get up first and praise the and then we hear the word of God and the word of God must bring conviction and a mourning in our hearts because there's been disobedience to what we have heard. We've got light on something. And then Nehemiah who was the governor and Ezra the priest.

Here's that body ministry. Nehemiah the one with the gift of administration and Ezra the one with the gift of proclaiming the word of God. Together the priest and the 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. Yes.

The mourning over sin. Once a person mourns over sin that's right. But we don't have to mourn forever.

There's a stage here. It's very interesting to see. First they praise God and then there's a teaching ministry of the word of God.

That leads to conviction and mourning. And then the leader said well the sacrifices of God are broken in a contrite spirit. Now you can rejoice.

Go verse 10. Eat the fat. Drink the sweet.

And send portions to him from nothing has been prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

This is the verse we are all familiar with. The joy of the Lord is your strength. But it comes in the midst of a meeting.

It comes in the midst of a New Testament meeting. In the midst of that movement from Babylon to Jerusalem. Otherwise any joy that we have is shallow and empty.

But if you have moved out of Babylon to Jerusalem that verse has got meaning. Because the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It's that joy.

Not your joy. It's the joy. Whose joy? The joy of the Lord.

The joy of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God's righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

When we have praised the Lord. When we have heard the word. When we are convicted and we mourn.

The Lord gives us, replaces that with joy. Weeping may endure for a night. But joy comes in the morning.

The weeping is replaced with joy. And not only with joy, but with an unselfish sharing of what we have with those who are in need. Now, when we speak about those in need, most people can only think of material need.

But the spiritual need is far greater. And it says here, go, eat the fat, drink the sweet. That means receive all that God has given you.

And then send portions to him for whom nothing has been prepared. Of course, it was referring to physical food there, that there are people who are not as well off as you among your brothers and sisters. Think of them.

Share what God has given to you with them so that they don't run short. That applies to us today also spiritually first and then materially also. Joy and an unselfish sharing.

And this is part of the new covenant. Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness because he loved righteousness and hated iniquity. And to move from Babylon to Jerusalem is to love righteousness and hate iniquity.

And it will always bring to us the oil of gladness and joy. I do not believe that a person who is still depressed and gloomy and in bad moods has really understood the message of the cross and of the new and living way. There is a total, complete freedom that God promises from all depression and gloom and bad moods if we really understand to go the way of the cross, the way of death, come out of Babylon into Jerusalem.

And so the Levites calmed all the people, it says in verse 11, saying, be still for the day is holy. Do not be grieved. It's repeated a number of times there.

Verse 9, verse 10 and 11, three times. This day is holy. This is the day which the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it. It's a day, a holy day, a day set apart for the Lord, for us every day of the year. That is true.

This day is holy. In the Old Testament, God asked them to give 10% of their income. Today, God asks us to forsake everything and give it to him.

In the Old Testament, God asked them to set apart one day in seven as holy. Today, God says, every day of the week, seven days a week is holy. This is the new covenant.

Not 10% of our income, but 100%. Not one day of the week, but seven days of the week. Not one day Sabbath, but a seven day Sabbath in a week.

Every day is holy and therefore do not be grieved. It's very interesting to see the connection here between holiness and joy. It says, since this day is holy, don't weep.

Verse 9, verse 10, since this day is holy, don't be grieved. Verse 11, since this day is holy, don't be grieved. Holiness leads to happiness.

It's holiness that leads to the joy of the Lord. Many people are seeking happiness. They'll never get it till they seek holiness first.

It's righteousness first and then joy in the Holy Spirit. And if the righteousness we have has made us gloomy, I just want to say that righteousness is not the new covenant righteousness of God's kingdom. The righteousness of God's kingdom brings the oil of gladness and abundance and the joy of the Holy Spirit.

There's tremendous amount of new covenant truth in these books. And all the people went away to eat and to drink and to be unselfish in sending portions to others and to celebrate with joy because they had mourned first for their sin. Why did they enter into this joy and unselfish sharing? Because they understood the words which had been taught to them by their Bible teachers, Ezra and his team.

They understood what God's word said. And when people understand what God's word says, it will bring the same results even today. First, a joy in their life and second, an unselfish attitude towards others.

That's exactly what it says there. They rejoiced themselves and they shared with others. Why? Because they understood the word of God.

And when we do not rejoice and we remain in our selfishness, it proves we have not understood the word of God. That's clear. And now we come to verse 13.

The second day, well they just had six hours of Bible study the previous day. On the second day it says, the leaders gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the word of God again. It's fantastic to see the emphasis on God's word in this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem.

They came back to Ezra, this time not all the people, they had work to do no doubt, but the leaders. Here was a Bible study especially for the leaders, for those who had responsibility, the heads of the households, the priests and the Levites. These were the leaders of the people and they gathered together to Ezra in order to gain insight into the word of God.

They were so keen to get the insight that Ezra had into God's word that they came to him privately in order to know God's word. And as they studied God's word together and Ezra expounded it to them further, we read here in verse 14, they found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. In the Old Testament God had commanded seven feasts, you read about all seven in the book of Leviticus chapter 23.

And sometime we could study that perhaps the seven feasts because each of them have a symbolic meaning, but the last of the seven feasts was the feast of tabernacles. The first one was the Passover, we are familiar with that, which speaks of Jesus dying on the cross. One of the ones in the middle was the feast of Pentecost, we are familiar with that, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The last one was the feast of tabernacles, where they used to bring leaves from a number of trees and build little booths on the terraces of their houses or in their compounds and live in them for seven days. And it's a picture of the millennium, when Jesus will reign on earth for a thousand years. And it was a testimony to their looking forward to that time when there would be peace on earth, when Jesus would reign.

And also it was a testimony to the fact that even though they were living in houses made of stones, they were to remember, God told them, when you build these little huts with leaves, remember how you came out of Egypt. It was a reminder to them of the fact that they were pilgrims on this earth. So the feast of tabernacles had a double function.

First, to remind them not to be thrilled with their houses and their material things, to get back into little huts for seven days and remember that you're a pilgrim. It was a physical way of reminding them you're pilgrims here. And secondly, looking forward to the reign of the Messiah on earth for a thousand years.

And they read that in the word of God, that God had commanded Moses and the children of Israel to do this every year in the seventh month. From the 15th to the 22nd of the seventh month, they were to do that. And just by the way, on the 10th day of the seventh month, which is the day we read of here, when they came together for their Bible study, the first day of the seventh month, that was the day when they were to have the feast of trumpets.

And the feast of trumpets signifies the trumpet that will sound when Jesus will come again. And here, on the 15th day of the same month, you can read all this in And so, when they saw this, the leaders saw this in the word of God, and they thought, hey, we're not doing that. We haven't done that for many years, in our whole lifetime.

We haven't done that which God has commanded in his word. They discovered something in the word of God which they had not obeyed. It wasn't a very big thing, but they saw something there.

They didn't say, oh well, it doesn't really matter too much if you don't do it. No, they took it seriously. And so they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities.

Think of what leaders these people were. They didn't sit there and have an argument, oh well, so many people haven't done this before us, and why should we do it? No, they saw the word of God, they submitted to the authority of God's word, and they immediately went out. These were the leaders, and over all the people whom they had responsibility over, they said, hey, do you know that we haven't obeyed God's word in one area? We have obeyed it in many areas, but here's an area we haven't obeyed it.

We're going to do it. And they sent a proclamation through all the cities and in the hills, bring olive branches and wild olive branches and myrtle branches, palm branches, branches of other leaf trees to make boots, as it is written in God's word. And so the people went out and brought them and made boots for themselves, each on his roof and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God and the square of the water gate and the square of the gate of Ephraim.

They were united. They submitted to their leaders. Their leaders told them God's word and they submitted to it.

That's how it was in that movement from Babylon to Jerusalem. That's what God is seeking to restore, that spirit in the church even today. And the entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made boots and lived in them.

And here's a very interesting statement after that in verse 17. The sons of Israel had indeed not done this from the days of Joshua, the son of Nun, to that day and there was great rejoicing. You know, Joshua lived one thousand years before Nehemiah.

One thousand years before Nehemiah's time, God had brought the Israelites into Canaan's land through Joshua. At that time, they had celebrated the feast of tabernacles because Joshua had faithfully preached what he had received from Moses. He was a faithful man.

But now, during that period of one thousand years, can you think of that? For one thousand years, they had not obeyed that completely, even a single time. And when you think of the wonderfully great men who lived during that one thousand year period, there was Samuel, for example, the prophet. There was David the king, Hezekiah, another good king, Josiah, another good king.

All of them restored certain things, but still something was left out. Now I want you to see with me for a moment something very interesting that you know, because this has relevance to the time in which we live. In the book of Joshua, they had all the truths.

And the book of Joshua is something like Acts of the Apostles. Supernatural miracles, a new beginning, a new covenant, and a new beginning in Canaan, and a new beginning from the day of Pentecost. But after Joshua comes the time of the judges, backsliding and going away from God.

And then comes the restoration, beginning with Samuel and David, again backsliding and up and down through different kings. And then finally, this movement from Babylon back to Jerusalem. And in the movement from Babylon back to Jerusalem, there's a complete restoration of even the things that were left out, not done for one thousand years.

Now we find in the history of the church something similar. In the days of the apostles, they had all the truth. And then there was something like the period of the judges.

Backslidden, compromised, the dark ages, for a long period, about a thousand years again. The dark ages. And then began the restoration of truth to the church worldwide, with Martin Luther proclaiming justification by faith, and others through the centuries, and finally coming to these days in which we live, the last century and perhaps the last generation.

And there's a restoration of truth which even Martin Luther did not know. And that's what I want you to see here, that Nehemiah and Ezra restored certain truths which even Samuel, David, Hezekiah, and Josiah

could not restore. They restored some, but here was a complete restoration.

I want you to turn back to the second book of Samuel and just point out something there. David, something that happened in David's time. David lived 400 years after Joshua.

And in the time of David, it says here, in verse 6, 2 Samuel 5 verse 6, the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites. Jerusalem was to be the capital of Israel. But for 400 years, the Canaanites were living there.

400 years after Joshua, the Canaanites were living there, the Jebusites. And only in David's time was he wholehearted enough to drive out the Jebusites. And it says here, verse 9, David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David, that is Zion.

That's how that name Zion comes, the city of David. But it's very interesting to see that God's purpose for Jerusalem was not fulfilled for those, that 400 year period between Joshua and David. There was a failure there.

But even though David captured Jerusalem and accomplished something there, he restored something of God's purpose, yet everything was not restored. Let's turn to another example in 2 Kings, in chapter 18, and you see something that happened there in the days of Hezekiah. Now, Hezekiah was a king who lived 300 years after David.

300 years after David. And in 2 Kings, chapter 18, we read about Hezekiah, verse 1, becoming the king. Verse 2, he was 25 years old when he became king.

Verse 3, he did right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father did. And see what he did, verse 4. He removed the high places and broke down the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah. What is the Asherah? It was a wooden idol.

Another thing, he also broke in pieces, listen carefully, the bronze serpent that Moses had made. For until his time, the sons of Israel were burning incense to it and he called it a piece of bronze, Nehushtan. You know the bronze serpent which Moses made in the wilderness when the children of Israel were healed of their snake bites? And these children of Israel were superstitious.

They said, well, maybe it will heal us of our snake bites again, so we'll keep it. And they used to burn incense to it, you know, like these candles that are burnt in front of the picture of what they call the sacred heart. Just like that, they burnt incense to this bronze serpent.

And have you ever thought, why didn't David do something about that? David knew that was going on. This wholehearted man, David, he didn't do anything about destroying that incense worship to that bronze serpent, it says here, from that time until Hezekiah's day, the sons of Israel were burning incense, but Hezekiah got light on it and he smashed it to pieces. There's a little more recovery of truth, a little more than David had.

Hezekiah led things a little further, right? Now we go to another king who lived a hundred years after Hezekiah, that is Josiah, 2nd Kings 23. Here was another king. We are looking at just three kings of Judah and Israel in the Old Testament, David, Hezekiah and Josiah.

They were three of the best kings. But I just want you to see here that each of them recovered something which was not recovered in previous generations. One went a little further than the previous king, another went still further.

And here was Josiah. He was a wonderful king, Josiah. And it says here in verse 19 of 2nd Kings 23, he removed all the houses of the high places.

Which the kings of Israel had made provoking the Lord. And then it says here, then the king commanded all the people in verse 21, saying, celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in God's word. And then listen to this, surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, including David, including Hezekiah, including all those people.

Josiah led people further even than David and Hezekiah. That was one step further. To celebrate the Passover in total obedience.

It is not just a symbolic Passover. You read in the previous verses, he purified the people and then celebrated the Passover. He preached purification.

He said, we're not going to break bread until we sort out all our relationships. There's too much confusion in the church. People are not speaking to one another.

They're not in a good relationship. We're not going to have breaking of bread for six months. That was the type of man Josiah was.

We don't want to go through the ritual of breaking bread every Sunday when we don't mean it. We're not willing to take up the cross. We're not willing to live in a proper relationship with each other.

What's the use just breaking bread once a week or once a month? We're going to stop it. Till we sort out our relationships. And then they broke bread.

Applying that to today. That's what he did in those days. He purified the people and then he had the Passover.

And it says, the Holy Spirit says, there was never a Passover like that. Even in the days of David. Even in the days of Hezekiah.

Wonderful man. But even Josiah did not have light on obedience when it came to the Feast of Tabernacles. And that's 200 years after Josiah comes Nehemiah and Ezra.

And they restore something which neither David had light on, nor Hezekiah had light on, nor Josiah had light on. We can say that all these people recovered truth a little more. But finally, in that movement from Babylon to Jerusalem comes the full recovery of truth.

Now apply that to today and you find it's exactly what's happened in the history of the church. That God has raised up different men. They have been like David, like Hezekiah, like Josiah.

Wonderful men of God. And they recovered truth more than the previous generations and some previous men of God recovered. But finally, in our day, God has brought us to the full light of His Word.

To an understanding of the new and living way. To an understanding of Christ manifest in the flesh and the way through the flesh. The way into the most holy place.

The gospel of the rent veil. And the building of the body of Christ. And the baptism in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the New Testament pattern of the church. And many things like that. So it's a wonderful thing that we read there, there in Nehemiah chapter 9 and verse 17.

That the sons of Israel, verse 17 last part, had not done anything like this from the days of Joshua. There had been many wonderful things they did. But here at last was a complete obedience.

And that was the result of the ministry of these wholehearted men. Haggai and Zechariah did their part. Joshua and Zerubbabel did their part.

And finally, Nehemiah and Ezra did their part. It's wonderful to see how God has raised up different ministries in the body of Christ to lead His people to the full obedience to all the truth of God. And there was great rejoicing.

That is the true joy. The joy that comes as a result of total obedience to all the commandments of Jesus. You see that spirit in the book of Nehemiah.

I told you that the wall is a picture of all the commandments of Jesus. And we see the same spirit here. Total obedience to all the commandments.

And how did they do, how did they get light on that? One way, through Bible study. They had that 6 hour Bible study the previous day. And the leaders got so gripped that they came to Ezra again the next day and had another Bible study with him quite likely for another 6 hours.

And they got light. And they went out without argument and just obeyed what God had said. And there was great rejoicing.

The joy that we get as a result of total obedience to God's commandments is a joy that no man can take away. If we find our joy in the fact that somebody said something nice to us, or somebody said you're a very spiritual brother, or you're a very spiritual sister, that type of joy puffs us up for a few days, it disappears also after some time. Or the joy that comes from material things.

I got some material thing and I'm very happy. That disappears in no time. But if we want permanent joy, the joy of the Lord which is to be our strength, that can come as it says here only through total obedience to that which we see in God's word.

And that's why it's so important to expose our hearts to the study of the word of God. You never find anywhere in the Old Testament such concentrated study of the word of God as here. Six hours.

And it says here in verse 18, he read from the book of the law of God daily. This Bible study continued. Every day from the first day to the last day.

Seven days. And they celebrated the feast for seven days with Bible study for seven days. And on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly.

Thank God there were no jokers around there. They came with seriousness. It was a solemn assembly according to God's word.

And that is the emphasis that we need even today. In the book of Amos it says in the last days there will be a famine of the word of the Lord. That means a famine of the prophetic word.

Not a famine of the Bible, that there will be plenty. But of the prophetic word there will be a famine. Men will run to and fro from coast to coast, east to west.

And we are entering into those days and have already entered into those days. And that is why it's very important for us in these days to come back to the word of God. To come back like these people did to God's word and say, is there something else which we haven't obeyed? Is there something else, some other commandment which we haven't obeyed? We want to obey everything because we want to please God completely.

It is only such people who will build Jerusalem as God wants it built in these days.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/15/SID15038.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/from-babylon-to-jerusalem-nehemiah-ch7-8/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**