

## **RETURN TO THE WORD OF GOD**

Study of the Remnant Return from Babylon

July 30th, 2008

Joe Dennison Jr.

(Dan 9:1-3; Ez 5:1-2; 7:1-10; 9:1-4; Neh 8:1-9:3, 38; 10:28-29, 39b)

### **A. The Standard of the Word of God**

The words of God were the standard on which they based their actions.

#### **1. Daniel – relying on God’s promises (Dan 9:1-3)**

Daniel understood from Jer 25 and 29 that the duration of the captivity - 70 years.

Daniel claimed the promises of God made to Jeremiah.

#### **2. Haggai & Zechariah – communicating God’s words (Ez 5:1; 6:14)**

Haggai and Zechariah – prophesied in the name of the God of Israel

Stirred up the people – motivated to complete the house of God.

Haggai – ministry of exhortation

Zechariah – ministry of hope – expanded the peoples’ vision of God’s purposes for nation

#### **3. Return to the Scriptures – the written words of God.**

Exiles returned to the words and commands of the Scriptures – the standard.

Rebuilt the altar (worship) – “as it was written” (Ez 3:2)

Reestablished the Feast of Booths – “as it was written” (Ez 3:4)

Finished the temple (House of God) – “by the decree of the God of Israel” (Ez 6:14)

Reestablished the priests and Levites in divisions – “as it is written” (Ez 6:18)

Separation from foreign peoples and mixed marriages (Ez 9&10) - a response by “all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel” (Ez 9:4). Ex 34:11-16 and Dt 7:1-4

prohibit the intermarriage of the Israelites with the nations around lest they lead the people away from God to worship idols.

Entered into a covenant (Neh 10) to commit to keeping various requirements of Law.

Agreed to bring wood for the daily offerings – “as it is written” (Neh 10:34)

Agreed to redeem their firstborn sons and cattle “as it is written” (Neh 10:36)

Revivals occur not by compromising the scriptures to make them more acceptable to the culture but when the people of God return to the words of the Scriptures.

### **B. The Teacher of the Word of God – Ezra (Ezra 7 & 8)**

Ezra was the man specifically raised up by God to turn the people back to the Scriptures

Gap of 57 years between Chapter 6 and 7. Return occurred in Artaxerxes 7<sup>th</sup> year (458 BC).

#### **1. His History (Ez 7:1-6)**

Ezra’s genealogy traced back to Aaron the High Priest.

He was a scribe – he copied the scriptures

He lived in Babylonia – immersed in a pagan culture.

#### **2. His reputation**

He was “skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord God of Israel had given” (Ez 7:6)

He was diplomatic – king granted him all that he asked (vs 6)

He was known as one who knew God – “the Law of your God” (vs 14, 25)

In Neh 8 it was Ezra they told to bring the scriptures. He had lived in their midst for 16 years and was known as one who understood the scriptures.

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### **3. His Development (vs 10)**

- a. Purpose of Heart** – He set his heart - “devoted himself”  
This diligence covered the 3 things which follow – study, obedience and teaching.
- b. Learning the Word** – he “studied the Law of the Lord”  
Understood it was the Lord’s word  
*2 Tim 2:15 – “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”.*
- c. Obeying the Word** – “to do it”  
Bible study is never merely for the purpose of gaining intellectual knowledge  
Those who respond in obeying the word receive more light from God.
- d. Teaching Others**  
Understood he was teaching “His” statutes.  
Importance for the maintenance of truth through the generations.  
*2Ti 2:2 “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”.*

### **4. His Character**

- a. Self-less – He put God’s interests first** (Ez 7:6, 11-28)  
He used the King’s favor to advance God’s work and His people rather than seeking personal favors.
- b. Valued Worship and Teaching** (Ez 8:15-20)  
Wouldn’t leave without Levites and temple servants in group  
Levites had the responsibility of teaching the Law.
- c. Dependent on God** (Ez 8:21-23)  
Reliance on God for protection on journey
- d. Trustworthy in material things** (Ez 8:24-34)  
Stewardship of the offerings.  
Ezra wisely entrusts these gifts to men who are trustworthy.  
Demands accountability

## **C. The Public Teaching of the Word of God (Neh 8)**

The gathering in Neh 8 reflects the hearts of God’s people who are responsive to His words.

### **1. Priority of the Teaching**

Finished wall on 25<sup>th</sup> day of 6<sup>th</sup> month & went back to their towns (7:73)  
Returned as “one man” to hear the Book of the Law on 1<sup>st</sup> day of 7<sup>th</sup> month – unity of purpose.  
Gathered in the “early morning” – (Neh 8:3). Scriptures given first place.  
1 Tim 4:13 – “Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of the Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching [doctrine]”.

### **2. Attitude of the Listeners**

Characterized by 4 features

- a. Eagerness** - People requested that Ezra read the Law (8:1)
- b. Seriousness** - Read from early morning to mid-day – people were serious about learning the scriptures (vs 3).
- c. Attentiveness** – all the ears of the people were attentive to the book (vs 3).

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**d. Reverence** – people stood when the law was read (vs 5)  
Early disciples “devoted themselves to the apostles teaching” (Acts 2:42)

### **3. Principles of Teaching**

Lessons about teaching from the Neh 8.

#### **a. Inclusive (For everyone)**

Men, women and children who could understand were present (vs 2) – word of God and teaching is for all people not just the males.

God expects all of us to understand and know His word.

#### **b. Organized**

Ezra stood on a platform “made for the purpose” (vs 4).

Teaching should not depend on one man – priests stood with him (vs 4).

Levites taught the scriptures to the people (vs 7).

#### **c. Transparent**

Book opened in sight of all the people (vs 5)

Importance of transparency regarding the source of truth.

#### **d. Authoritative**

Ezra stood above the people and addressed them (vs 4)

We are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet 4:11)

#### **e. Instructive**

“read clearly” – importance of every word for meaning (vs 8).

“gave the sense” – interpretation, exposition (vs 8).

Levites helped the people to understand the meaning of the Law (vs 7)

Scriptures written in Hebrew and the people spoke Aramaic.

#### **f. Comprehensive**

Synthesized the teachings of the OT

Case study – Feast of Tabernacles (vs 14-18)

- instruction in gathering leafy branches (Lev 23:40 ff) carried out in vs 16-17;
- command for rejoicing (Dt 16:13-15) reflected in vs 17b
- requirement for reading the Law (Dt 31:10-13) carried out in vs 18;
- requirement for a solemn assembly on the 8<sup>th</sup> day (Num 29:35) also carried out in vs 18 “according to the rule”.

#### **g. Personal**

Good teaching makes the words personal to the hearer.

“they understood the words that were declared to them” (8:12)

“made confession and worshipped the Lord their God (9:3)

### **D. The Effects of Teaching the Word of God**

*“so shall my word be... it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11)*

#### **1. Thanksgiving and worship (vs 6; also Neh 9:3)**

Reading accompanied by prayer and praise to God.

The people were engaged in the prayers and said “amen, amen”, raising their hands, bowing their heads and worshipping God.

#### **2. Joy - Emotional Response (vs 9-12)**

People wept when they heard the law – likely a mixture of remorse and joy.

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Day was holy to the Lord your God – it was a day separated for God.  
People instructed to rejoice and celebrate rather than mourn (vs 10-12)  
The people were to eat the fat (the best part), drink the sweet wine and give portions to the poor who had none or those who were unprepared.  
*“the joy of the Lord is your strength”* – to rejoice in the Lord is to have the joy of the Lord which enables and empowers us to live for God.  
The understanding of the words of the Lord brings great rejoicing (vs 12).

### **3. Appetite for Learning (vs 13)**

Heads of houses, priests and Levites came together on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day for more learning.  
Came to Ezra – sought out one with greater understanding than themselves.  
Came together “to study the words of the Law” – every word has meaning.  
Leaders have a greater responsibility to know the Scriptures.

### **4. Obedience to the Scriptures (vs 14-18)**

The people responded with obedience to what they discovered in the Scriptures.  
Obedience in Worship - Discovered the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles)  
Eagerness to obey is seen in the completeness of their execution of the commands.  
Obedience in separation – correcting mixed marriages (Ez 9& 10)  
Depth of their obedience seen in the cost of rectifying these wrongs.

### **5. Confession of Sin (Neh 9:1-3)**

Desire to make things right with God  
Held a national day of repentance and mourning on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of 7<sup>th</sup> month (vs 1).  
Assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with earth on their heads – symbols of repentance.  
Separated themselves from all foreigners – taking all responsibility.  
Confess their sins and the sins of their forefathers in the nation.

### **6. Commitment to God (Neh 10)**

Entered into a written covenant  
Names of those who signed the covenant (vs 1-27)  
Terms of the covenant (vs 28-39)  
Five specific undertakings

- Prohibit mixed marriages (vs 30)
- Preserve the holiness of the Sabbaths by not making purchases from non-Israelites during the Sabbaths (vs 31).
- Protect the poor by honoring the Sabbath year and allowing the land to lie fallow and also by forgiving all debts every 7<sup>th</sup> year as commanded by Dt 15:1-11 (vs31)
- Present all firstborn at the temple (vs 32-33).
- Provide money, wood and tithes to support the temple services so they “will not neglect the house of our God” (vs 34-39).

All of these commitments had a cost to the believer and constituted an expression of faith and trust in God.