

How to Study the Bible

Nehemiah 8:1-18

INTRODUCTION

- A. There are many throughout history who have set examples for us in their Bible study.
 - 1. Eusebius said that he heard of one, whose eyes were burned out under the Diocletian persecution, repeat from memory the Scriptures in a large assembly.
 - 2. Beza could repeat all Paul's epistles in Greek at age 80.
 - 3. Augustine said that after his conversion, he ceased to relish Cicero, his favorite author, and that the Scriptures were his pure delight.
- B. Unfortunately, we live in an age where Bible study is almost a thing of the past.
 - 1. Of the 93% of Americans who say they own a Bible, half have never read it. Only 18% of those who claim to be Christians say they read the Bible daily.
 - 2. We need to be people of the book, people who know Scripture.
 - a. But, in order to be people of the book, we need to know how to study the Bible.
 - b. When Ezra reads the Law before the people, we see a prime example of how to study the Bible.
 - 1) READ TEXT.
 - 2) This evening, we want to examine this episode to see what we can learn about Bible study.

PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD SCRIPTURE, vv. 1-5

- A. The Jews were eager to hear Scripture, vv. 1-2.
 - 1. All the people gathered and told Ezra to bring the Book of the Law of Moses.
 - a. This episode occurred on the Feast of Booths, when, according to Deut. 31:10-11, the Law was to be read and the covenant renewed.
 - b. Thus, the people asked Ezra to do what God had commanded.
 - 2. The people, however, could have ignored God's instructions and not wanted Ezra to have brought the Word of God out to be read.
 - a. These people, however, valued what God had inspired, and they wanted to know what he had said.
 - b. What an important lesson for us: to value what God has inspired and to want to know what he said.
 - 3. Notice also that all the people were there; v. 2—"Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month."
 - a. Children and everyone else who could understand attended this assembly.
 - b. No one stayed home because they said, "What they're doing isn't that important; I don't need to go."
 - c. The church in this modern age suffers a severe problem with people not being eager to hear Scripture.
 - 1) Many do not attend Bible study on Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights, although Scripture is proclaimed.
 - 2) Many do not return on Sunday evenings although Scripture is proclaimed.
 - 3) How can children of God not be eager to hear Scripture? How can we miss an assembly where Scripture will be proclaimed?
 - 4. The people stood and listened to the Law read for around six hours.
 - a. Verse 3 says that Ezra read from the Law "from morning until midday"—that would have been a span of about six hours.
 - b. Today, if the preacher goes over by five minutes, people begin to get upset, but these people stood and listened to the reading of Scripture for six hours. Would we value Scripture enough to listen to Scripture for six straight hours?
 - 5. These Jews were eager to hear the word of God, but far too often we are not that eager to hear Scripture.
 - a. We often view sermons as "boring," fodder for sleep or daydreaming rather than an opportunity to be instructed in the ways of God.
 - b. Let us be eager to hear Scripture!
- B. We need to be attentive to the proclamation of Scripture, v. 3.

1. “The ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.”
 2. These people actually paid attention to what Ezra read - they were not sleeping, they were not daydreaming, they were not reading something else.
 3. We need to be attentive when the Word of God is proclaimed in our hearing.
 - a. We don’t need to daydream, we don’t need to read the bulletin, we don’t need to be getting up to get a drink of water.
 - b. What Scripture says has a great impact on our lives:
 - 1) If we pay attention to the proclamation of Scripture, we will become better people.
 - a) Scripture has the power to aid us in overcoming temptation: “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Ps 119:11).
 - b) Scripture has the power to convict us of sin: “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12).
 - c) Scripture will judge us at the last day: “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (Jn 12:48).
 - 2) If we pay attention to the proclamation of Scripture, we will be able to overcome temptation, we will be convicted of sin, and we will be ready to be judged at the last day.
- C. We need to be reverent during the proclamation of Scripture, v. 5.
1. When Ezra opened the book, “all the people stood.”
 - a. Standing is a sign of reverence—when the national anthem is played, we stand to show respect.
 - b. Likewise, these people stood during the reading of Scripture to show respect to the Law of God.
 2. We need to show respect during the proclamation of Scripture.
 - a. We need to be very careful about causing disturbances while Scripture is being proclaimed—we need not get up to get a drink of water, talk with our neighbor, read the bulletin, or any such thing.
 - b. There are going to be times that we have to excuse ourselves from the assembly, but we need to be very careful not to make it a habit.
- D. Are you eager to hear Scripture, attentive to Scripture, and reverent during the proclamation of Scripture?

PROPER PREACHING OF SCRIPTURE, vv. 7-8

- A. Several men, apparently priests, helped the people understand the Law, v. 7.
1. Rabbinic tradition says that these priests helped the people understand the Law by translating it from Hebrew to the Aramaic the people would have spoken.
 - a. That may very well be the case—Ezra may have read the Law in Hebrew and these priests may have translated it.
 - b. At any rate, the people did not grasp Scripture in some way, and these priests helped the people to understand.
 2. There are parts of Scripture that are very difficult to understand.
 - a. Peter says of Paul’s Epistles, “There are some things in them that are hard to understand” (2 Pt 3:16).
 - b. Romans Revelation, and other books are quite difficult to understand fully. Many times, I scratch my head over a text, for I have no clue what it fully means.
 3. Proper preaching, however, helps people understand the Scriptures.
 - a. Just as these men helped the Jews of their day better understand the Law, preachers today need to help people understand the Word of God.
 - b. A preacher’s main responsibility is to be certain that those who hear him understand the Bible.
- B. These priests also read distinctly from the book in the Law of God, v. 8.
1. The priests did not tell a bunch of good stories and then try to find a part of the Law that might apply, they didn’t preach a lot of psychology—they read from the book.
 2. Solid preaching today is based upon the Word of God.
 - a. Preachers have a great responsibility to preach the Word of God.
 - b. Paul tells Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2).
 - 1) Scripture needs to be the basis of what is proclaimed.
 - 2) Although there is a place for stories, psychology, philosophy and the like, the Bible, rather than these extras, needs to be proclaimed.

PROPER RESPONSE TO SCRIPTURE, vv 9-18

- A. The people wept when they heard the words of the law, v. 9.
1. The people understood they were not what God expected, and as a result, they wept.
 - a. Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites had to remind the people that they should not weep on a divine holiday.
 - b. People who sinned against God often wept when they realized what they did.
 - 1) Josiah wept when the Book of God was read in his hearing and he realized he had sinned (2 Ki. 22:19).
 - 2) Peter wept when he denied the Lord (Mk. 14:72).
 2. Their weeping no doubt demonstrated remorse that they were not what God expected them to be.
 3. When was the last time we wept when we realized we were not what God expected us to be?
 - a. Do we have deep remorse over our sinfulness, or have we become so numb that we no longer flinch when we hear Scripture proclaimed?
 - b. Let us have tender hearts that break when we discover we are not what God expects of us!
- B. The people obeyed what they heard from the Law, vv. 13-18.
1. When the people found written in the Law that they were to dwell in booths during the Feast of Booths the people did so.
 - a. The Jews had not kept the feast in this way since the days of Joshua, v. 17.
 - b. These people wanted to do what the Lord wanted, and they sought to obey the Lord.
 2. We need to seek to obey the Lord, seek to obey what we read in Scripture.
 - a. “This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 26:16).
 - b. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt. 7:21).
 3. What we read in Scripture needs to be obeyed.
 - a. During the Civil War, General Lee sent word to Stonewall Jackson that the next time he rode in the direction of headquarters the Commander-in-Chief would be glad to see him on a matter of no great importance.
 - 1) General Jackson received the message & immediately prepared to leave the next morning.
 - 2) Rising very early, he rode the eight miles to Lee’s headquarters against a storm of wind & snow, and arrived just as Lee was finishing breakfast.
 - a) Much surprised, Lee inquired as to why Jackson had come through such a storm.
 - b) General Jackson replied: “But you said that you wished to see me. General Lee’s slightest wish is a supreme command to me.”
 - b. Is God’s slightest wish a command to us? Are we obeying what God desires?

CONCLUSION

- A. The people of Ezra’s day set a powerful example for us about how to treat Scripture—the right attitude, the right preaching, and the right response.
- B. How will you respond to the preaching of Scripture? Will you respond by obedience or will you respond with defiance?