



## Nehemiah 7-8

**Nehemiah 7-9**  
**Tape #7151**  
**By Chuck Smith**

Let's turn now to Nehemiah as we continue our study in chapter seven.

*Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed (7:1).*

That is they were fulfilling their function now in the ministry in the temple.

*That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many (7:2).*

Now it was this brother of Nehemiah who had come to Nehemiah in Persia. Nehemiah was inquiring of him the condition of Jerusalem, the people that were there. It was this brother of Nehemiah that told him of the fact that this place was a shambles and that the people were demoralized. He was the one that really brought Nehemiah up to speed on what was happening, which caused Nehemiah's tremendous burden and desire to go back and lead in the rebuilding of the walls.

Nehemiah has now finished the task and he makes his brother ruler of the palace and in charge over Jerusalem because of his faithfulness and because of his fear of God above the others.

*And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house. Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded (7:3-4).*

Nehemiah is taking now the practical steps for defense of the city. Each man is appointed a turn to watch at night on the walls. The area of his watch was to be near his house and of course it was a rotating kind of a thing as they establish their defense against the marauding neighbors.

*And God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned [counted] by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at first, and found written therein, (7:5).*

The first migration back into the land, the one we read about in Ezra. This is the copy of that record but Ezra has already given to us the copy of the record. In as much as we have the same record in the book of Ezra and it's just the names of the families and the individuals, the leaders who had come back from the Babylonian captivity. In as much as many of these names are almost unpronounceable and in as much as if we did pronounce them they wouldn't mean anything to you, we're not going to go through and try to pronounce the names of all of these families and the individuals who had come back. Just notice that there are categories of the general people. Then with verse thirty-nine, the category of the priest. Then verse forty-three of the Levites and verse forty-six of the Nethinims and verse fifty-seven of the children Solomon's servants. Then in verse sixty-three again the mention of the priests and "those that sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found:" (7:64).

Certain men were claiming to be Levites of the priestly family but they could not find their genealogies, they could not prove through genealogy their claim to priesthood. Thus they were not allowed to function as priests until they could find their genealogies or prove the fact that they were of the Levites. So as someone said they couldn't prove genuine Levi jeans and so they weren't allowed to exercise the ministry of priests.

They also determined that when the priesthood was established and again they would be able to use Urim and Thummim, that perhaps by this they could find out if they were true Levites and had a right to minister as priests.

The Urim and Thummim were worn by the high priest, they were a part of the priestly garments of the high priest and they were a method of defining the will of God. Just what they were is not known for certain. It is a matter of speculation. Some believe that it was just a little pouch that the priests wore in conjunction with his breastplate that had a white stone and a black stone. They would pray and ask God to guide in the question that was asked to give them an answer from him and the priest would pull out one of the stones. The white stone would indicate the answer yes and the black stone would indicate the answer no. That's one suggestion, very possibly correct. They say that that's where we get the phrase "black balled". The little black stone came out and thus you were rejected.

The words in Hebrew mean lights and perfections. Just what they were for certain we don't know but we do know that they use them to define the will of God. They would inquire of the high priest of the Urim and Thummim for the mind and the will of the Lord.

So we get the total number of those that came back with the first migration back in verse sixty-six was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty beside the servants of which there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven. Then there were two hundred and forty-five in the worship community, the singing men and women. They had of course gives them the number of horses and camels and all, which have no import to us.

In chapter eight.

*And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel (8:1).*

The water gate was probably the gate on the southeast corner of the city down near the pool of Siloam. The people gathered there by the water gate. That is actually where the major source of water for Jerusalem was gathered from the Spring of Gihon diverted into the Pool of Siloam, thus the street that was before the gate. Probably a tremendous assembly area because we find out that there were the forty-two thousand plus the servants and so forth that had come back.

So they gathered into the street and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the law of Moses; to bring out the scroll, the Torah.

*And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month (8:2).*

They took the men and the women and the children who were able to understand, they didn't make the little kids try to sit or stand through this. Those that were able to understand, probably those in their teenagers where able to stand and hear the reading of the law of God.

*And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning [sunrise] until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; (8:3).*

So a period of about six hours he was reading the first five books beginning with Genesis and going through the book of Deuteronomy, on this scroll the law of Moses.

*And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law (8:3).*

He was reading, the people were paying attention.

*And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and*

*Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) (8:4-5).*

On the platform that they had built so that they could hear, so that they could see.

*and when he opened it, all the people stood up: (8:5).*

Now whether or not they stood for the whole six hours, I don't know. It was customary, in those days, for the teacher, the rabbi, to sit and the students to stand. Somewhere along the line some dirty system got twisted and now the teacher stands. You remember the Sermon on the Mount that "seeing the multitude, he went unto a mountain and when he had sat down his disciples came unto him and he opened his mouth and taught them saying". So it was customary for the teacher to sit and the students to stand. I can see advantages for that. When the students went to sleep, you'd surely know it.

When you were to preach or herald the truth, then you would stand. If you were going to cry out some truth of the people or you came as a herald, as a preacher then you would stand but the teacher customarily sat. So that when on the last day of the feast, John seven thirty-seven, "Jesus stood and cried if any man thirst let him come unto me and drink," we find now he is making a proclamation of the gospel. He's preaching the gospel to them thus he stands. Customarily, the teacher sat.

Ezra was standing also because he was reading to them the law of God, proclaiming the law of God, as he read the five books. When he opened the book, the people stood up and that's why on Sunday morning when we have our scripture reading we have everybody stand. Standing in honor of the Word of God as we read it together. It comes from the book of Nehemiah here, it was the practice that when the book was open for the people to stand.

*And Ezra blessed the LORD, [literally Jehovah or YAWEH] the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, (8:6).*

He proclaimed a blessing of the Lord, the people responded. Amen means, "so be it".

*with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground (8:6).*

It is interesting how that there are those people, when they worship the Lord, do become more emotional. I think there's probably a place for balance. I think though that we so often, the lifting of hands, feel a little reluctant or we feel self-conscience about the lifting of our hands in worship to the Lord. I think that it is proper, if a person so desires, to lift their hands, surely it is scriptural.

Here is a case where they lifted their hands. The New Testament speaks about the desire that holy men lift their hands. Certainly through the book of Psalms, there were the lifting of the hands and the declaration of the hands that were lifted. Even the psalm that we sang tonight, "Thy loving kindness...I will lift up my hands unto thy name". Someone has suggested that the lifting up of the hands is the universal sign of surrender and thus it is a gesture of surrender to God or an expression of my surrender to God and if that were the case then great. It is also the position of a suppliant. The lifting of hands supplication and thus in prayer. In supplication, the lifting of the hands as a suppliant, one who is coming to receive.

I can see a place where the lifting of hands is proper if in your heart it is a method of expression of your worship of God as a suppliant or as surrender. I can see also where the lifting of hands could be a problem if it is an endeavor to display to others spirituality or if it's an endeavor to draw attention to yourself.

I have a problem in public worship of anything that draws attention to an individual. I believe that the focus of worship is always the Lord and I think that often times, the focus of worship is destroyed when someone is doing something that is sort of out of the ordinary, not in keeping with the rest of the group. When we are all worshiping the Lord together and we are all seated and singing, if someone stands up, it is bound to draw attention to that person. My attention is drawn, I look, and I can see one person standing in

the whole congregation. It does draw attention to the individual. It is a practice that has sort of developed and crept up in the last few years. I really don't know where it started; I know where I like it to finish. I do feel that it does attract attention to the individual. Now those who do stand say, "Oh no, I just feel led of the Spirit to do it. My motives are pure," I'm not gonna question that, I'm only saying you can't do it without drawing attention to yourself.

I think that when we are all worshiping together, If someone has a beautiful soprano voice and loves to sing obbligato that it draws attention to them. You hear someone going off on these high things you know and you go "woo what's that" and your attention is taken off of the Lord and onto this single individual. Thus I feel as we are worshiping the Lord together in public corporate worship, that we should not do things that would draw attention to ourselves. That we would seek constantly to keep the focus of attention upon the Lord.

The people corporately were raising their hands, corporately they bowed their faces toward the ground and they worshiped the Lord. Fine, we are all doing it together and that's good. To do it as a solo among a large group, that's a little hard.

Now it gives us the names of the men.

*Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, cause the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (8:7-8).*

That's what expository teaching is all about. It's going right straight through the scriptures, reading the scriptures distinctly and then giving the meaning and the understanding of the scriptures. That is what we have devoted our ministry to, the study of God's Word. The reading of the word of God distinctly and then the explaining, giving the meanings, giving the understandings.

*And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha [governor] (8:9).*

Zerubbabel was under the title of Tirshatha, but there were two and there could be even more. They were just the governors or overseers.

*and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God, mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law (8:9).*

It is interesting to me how that weeping is so often a response or a reaction to the work of God's spirit in your heart. I have so many times people come up and just as they come up, they break out weeping and then they get all embarrassed; I say, "No, this is often a sign that God's spirit is just working in your heart. Don't be embarrassed or ashamed about weeping. It's our response, often, when God's spirit is working in our hearts, in my own heart". In my own life I've had those experiences where as God's spirit begins to move on your heart, there's just that spontaneous weeping.

As these people heard the law of God, they had the law of God explained to them, the Spirit of God began to work in their hearts and they began to weep. The weeping was, in this case, out of the sense of failure. We have failed to keep the law of God. We have sinned against the law. The weeping of conviction. There can be weeping for joy; there can be weeping for many things, as it is an emotion that can express so many different things. The people began to mourn; they began to weep, when they heard the words of the law. God's spirit began to work in their hearts. So people, as they come in the door, start to weep. God's spirit comes upon them and his spirit begins to work in their hearts and they just begin to weep before the Lord. That's a beautiful experience.

*This day is holy unto the LORD your God, mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the*

*fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength (8:9-10).*

When God's spirit begins to work through the word in the heart of an individual, God is working and it's time to rejoice. There are gonna be changes as God's spirit begins his work in their life. Thus, as they were convicted for their sins, convicted for their failures, began to weep over it; good indication that God is working and there is going to be changes. So this is a special day. God is begun a work in our hearts and in our lives, it is a time to rejoice.

*Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, [prepare a feast] and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: [give to the poor]; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, [merriment] because they had understood the words that were declared unto them (8:10-12).*

In the New Testament, it is interesting that as the gospel was taken to Samaria and to other places, the last little footnote, "and there was great joy in that city". The ultimate affect of the work of God in our lives is great joy. As we come to the realization that our sins are forgiven, God has worked in our lives, and the sorrow has turned into great rejoicing as we see the fruit of the work of God's spirit within our hearts and within our lives.

*And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in boothes in the feast of the seventh month: (8:13-14).*

Now they began reading on the first day of the seventh month and they were reading they discovered in the law that on the seventh month, the people were to build little booths. For the period of the feast, the eight days of the feast, they were to move into these little booths with their families. The feast of Tabernacles or tents. It was the feast that commemorated God's miraculous preservation of their fathers through the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Thus the whole idea of the feast was to bring them into remembrance of God's special work in creating this nation. "You are a special people, you are a nation that has been created by God for the purposes of God and your fathers, when they were brought by God out of Egypt, spent forty years in the wilderness and God preserved them." So these little booths, they would build outside of their houses or on the roofs of their houses and they move into these little booths with their families.

At night, as their children would be lying there, looking up through the thatched ceiling, at the stars, they'd say, "Daddy I can see a star up there, how come we're living out here? How come we're sleeping out here tonight daddy?" And the daddy would have a chance to say, "Honey, our forefathers slept out under the stars for forty years as they were coming out of Egypt into this land that God had promised to Abraham. And the little children had to sleep at night next to their parents in tents or under the stars." As the winds would come blowing through the thatches they'd say, "Daddy, I'm cold. The wind is blowing," "Well honey, our forefathers live for forty years like this". So it was a method by which they were to be able to pass on to their children the glorious heritage that they had as a nation. "A special people, created by God for his purposes to bring his son into the world. That through the seed of Abraham all of the nations of the earth might be blessed."

And so they came across there in Deuteronomy where on the seventh month they were to build these little booths and move out of their houses and live in these booths during this memorial period to remind them of what their forefathers had experienced.

*And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches,*

*and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness (8:15-17).*

So they found this in the law and said that they should be doing this. So they inaugurated again this practice.

We were in Israel a few years ago during the feast of Tabernacles or Succoth, the feast of booths. It was interesting going down the street next to these high-rise apartments; you'd see these little lean-to shanties where the families moved out. The orthodox families, the Jewish families, still to the present day, build these little palm thatched rooms next to their houses and they move out and live in these booths.

*Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner (8:18).*

So the feast actually lasted for the seven days and then the eighth day was a holy day, a Sabbath day, a very solemn day. And you remember in John seven thirty-seven, it speaks concerning Jesus on the last day, the great day of the feast, he stood and cried saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink". Again, during the feast of Tabernacles, they would pour water out onto the temple pavement out of these large pitchers to remind the people of the water that came out of the rock in the wilderness that helped their fathers to survive the tremendous thirst.

So Jesus said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink". Paul tells us that he was that rock from which the water came. So Jesus sort of confirms that saying, "hey, come unto me and drink all of you that are thirsty. As the scripture sayeth, he that drinketh the water that I give, out of his belly there shall begin to gush torrents of living water," as he spoke to them of what would happen when they were filled with the spirit. They would be like a river of water gushing forth from their lives.

*Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them (9:1).*

Sackclothes was a form of penance. It was itchy, miserable and it was to afflict yourself, even as fasting is a self-type of affliction. It is the denial of the flesh; it's going against the flesh, the fasting, and the sackclothes. The earth upon them; they put dirt on them just as a sign of penitence, as a sign of mourning.

*And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God (9:2-3).*

Now they divided the day into four parts. From six in the morning until noon, from noon until six in the evening, six in the evening until midnight and midnight until six in the morning. So the fourth part would have been from six in the morning until noon; they read the scriptures. Then from noon until six o'clock in the afternoon there was that response, the worshipping of God by the people. You try to get people to do that today and you probably have a difficult time, even in upholstered pews and in an air-conditioned building. Here these people were standing out there for six hours, listening to the word being read and then spending the next six hours in worshipping the Lord.

*Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah,*

*Shereahiah, said, Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise (9:4-5).*

So they encouraged the people to begin to praise the Lord, to worship the Lord, “to bless the Lord for ever and ever and then declaring the blessedness of God’s glorious name,” the name YAWEH or I AM, the coming one.

*Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee (9:6).*

As they begin to praise the Lord and worship the Lord, they’re acknowledging, first of all, the vastness of God and his creation. He is the God who has created the universe and that heaven of heavens goes on out and takes in the universe. He is the creator. You made the heaven of heavens. “With all their host,” (9:6) that is all of the spirit beings, the angelic beings that are in them.

“You made the sea and all of the creatures that inhabit the sea and you preserve them all,” (9:6) God is not only the creator but he is the preserver of that creation. The natural laws of entropy and the speak of them breaking down. We know in thermodynamics, this law of entropy that irrecoverable energy that takes place with friction and with time. The aeromocasses, this little burning fire of nature, where things are gradually being reduced. Our mountains, these lofty granite mountains, are being gradually eroded. There’s a breakdown as the rain and the winds and the so forth beat down upon it, there is that gradual deterioration.

God is the one that preserves his creation but I think this can go even a little bit deeper as we mentioned a few weeks ago in Colossians where Paul comes again with this kind of description of the creation God the Creator, Jesus Christ the Creator, by whom and for whom all things were created and by him all things are held together. We talked about the atom and how that the nucleus of an atom is a cluster of positive charges, the protons, and how that the nature of the positive charges is that of repelling. The repelling force of the positive charges. And we have seen the power of the atom when it has been upset, when we bombard the nucleus of an atom with slow moving neutrons and it upset the balance within the heart of the atom. We release that tremendous energy and we have what we call the atomic explosion by the releasing of the energy that is pint up within an atom, all of these positive charges that are clustered together. In upsetting the balance we allow them to follow their natural bent and to repel each other and when they repel each other, we have this tremendous release of force and energy. Now the power that holds these positive charges together has to be greater than the power that is released when it’s upset. So the tremendous power by which the material world is held together is the power of Jesus Christ holding together, the preserver of creation.

“And the host of heaven worships you,” (9:6). In the book of Revelations, we get an insight in chapter five, of the angels worshipping the Lord, the host of heaven worshipping him.

*Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; [father of many] And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous: (9:7-8).*

Now as we find them beginning to praise the Lord and to acknowledge God, first God as the creator of the universe and of the various life forms within the universe. Secondly, we find that they will be talking of the faithfulness of God. He created now a nation, beginning with Abraham and made promises to Abraham to give unto his seed this land of Canaan. God has fulfilled that promise. They acknowledge that for you are a righteous God.

*And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the*

*people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day (9:9-10).*

So God, you drew out a nation. You began the nation with Abraham and then the birth of the nation as God brought them out of Egypt to give to them this land.

*And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters, Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go (9:11-12).*

Through the wilderness, the temperatures get up to a hundred and ten, a hundred and twenty degrees during the day, so God put a cloud over them in the wilderness, wandering. So that they might travel at night, he put a pillar of fire to give them a light at night when they needed to travel through the wilderness. Of course traveling at night is always preferable to daytime traveling in the wilderness there in the deserts.

*Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: (9:13).*

“The law of the Lord is perfect,” David said, “converting the soul”. A lot of times people, especially Christians, are prone to say, “I thank God we’re not under law, we’re under grace,” and there is that tendency to sort of put down the law of God. The law of God is good, it is righteous, it is holy. The law of God is the right way to live in your relationship with God and your relationship with fellow man. This world would be a much better place if everybody lived by the law of God. It could be a beautiful place if everybody lived by the law of God.

There is nothing wrong with the law of God; we should seek to keep the law of God. My faith in Jesus Christ does not release me from the necessity of seeking to keep the law of God. The law of God cannot make me perfect, that’s were people make a mistake in seeking to be righteous by the law of God, or to seek to have a righteous standing by keeping the law of God. The law of God cannot make you righteous, keeping the law of God will not make you righteous. We are made righteous through our faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the works of the law. But my coming into this relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, and the subsequent in filling of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit within my life gives me the power to do what I could not do in my flesh; that is obey the will of God. It’s not that God has set aside his law or abrogated the law or has now a whole new standard for us as Christians, the standard of God still is the law. The power now to keep the law is given to us by the Holy Spirit. The law still does not make me righteous or more righteous. My righteousness is complete because of my faith in Jesus Christ.

The law of God was given to show you the good and the right and the acceptable way. The law of God was given to bring you into success, happiness and prosperity, to bring you longevity, to bring you a good rich life.

*David said, “blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of the scornful but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and in his laws and he meditates day and night. For he will be like a tree that’s planted by the rivers of water that brings forth fruit in his season. His leaf also shall not wither and whatever he does, will prosper.”*

That’s what the law of God is all about. The power to keep it is given to me by the Holy Spirit.

*Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgements, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy Sabbath, (9:13-14).*



Now I think that we would all be better off if we kept the Sabbath as God intended the Sabbath to be kept. I think there should be one day a week when you could just kick back and stay in bed. That's the way God intended the Sabbath to be kept, a day of complete relaxation and rest. A day when our minds are focused on the things of God. It wasn't necessarily a day of gathering to worship God; it was a day where we just rested. We wouldn't do any work, we would limit even how far we walked, we wouldn't go out to gather sticks to build a fire, we wouldn't cook anything, we'd just take a day off; a complete day off. That is where we just relaxed and laid around and sort of communed with our families, spent time with the kids and just a day for family togetherness. I can go for that. The older I get, the more I can go for it.

Now as Jesus said, "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath". It is for man, it's for man's benefit. Our body needs that opportunity for regeneration. Our body needs that change of pace, the relaxing and kicking back and we'd probably be healthier and live longer if we did it.

*and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant: (9:14).*

Then taking care of the spiritual aspects, you also took care of the physical.

*And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, (9:15-16).*

Notice God was good, God was faithful, he gave them the good commandments and fed them and yet they rebelled against God. He is not all seeking to lay any blame or fault upon God for their problems. It comes upon us, we are the ones, our fathers are the ones who failed. God you were faithful, you were righteous, you kept your word but we failed.

*And [our fathers] refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not (9:17).*

They went so far in rebelling against God that the time that they came to Kadesh-barnea and the spies came back with the report that the land had giants and the walls were up to heaven and the people said, "let's choose a captain who will lead us back to Egypt". We can't go in and take the land, God you had promised the land, and we're not able to take it. Let's get someone to lead us back to Egypt. There was a rebellion against Moses, against God, as they were really just looking for someone to take over the leadership, to take them back into the bondage of Egypt. So our fathers failed but yet "God, you're gracious, you're ready to pardon, you're merciful, you're slow to anger," (9:17). All of this was demonstrated by the fact that God didn't forsake them.

*Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: (9:18-19).*

God was faithful, they were unfaithful. There is this acknowledgement of God all the way along you were faithful, you were merciful, you were gracious, you didn't forsake them.

*the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, (9:19-20).*

The Holy Spirit to instruct that's part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You remember when Jesus in John fourteen said, "but the Holy Spirit whom the father will send in my name, he will teach you all things". The Holy Spirit to instruct and you gave your good spirit to instruct them.

*and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. (9:20).*

God you were good. God you were faithful. God you are great, you are awesome. You created the universe, you created a nation and you were good and faithful but the nation was not. They rebelled; they turned their backs against your law, against you.

*Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not (9:21).*

This is such a miraculous feat that the Bible critics tried to discount it and say that it really didn't happen. That over a million people, they say it's impossible that that many people could actually make this kind of a trek and be in that wilderness for forty years. The wilderness will not sustain that many people. Well, I don't doubt that. But God could sustain them and God did sustain them. It was God who gave them the manna every morning; it was God that gave them water out of the rock. There is this recognition that "God, it was your miraculous power that did it.

*Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it (9:22-23).*

So God you blessed them, you multiplied them; you brought them into the land.

*So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, (9:24-25).*

They moved into houses that were already furnished.

*wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness (9:25).*

You provided, it was all there, they became fat.

*Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations (9:26).*

The theme repeated. God was good, God was faithful, God kept his word; the people failed, failed miserably. Yet God was merciful, gracious and forgiving.

*Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies (9:27).*

God they turned their backs, they had trouble but when they called, you answered you were faithful still.

*But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven: and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies; And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgements, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear (9:28-29).*

Over and over and over again God, you spared them, you helped them, you delivered them because of your mercies. That same God is the God that you and I serve and he is still a merciful God and he is still a gracious God and he is still a pardoning God and a forgiving God. He knows we need it. How many times we have failed? Now the thing is, in our failure, the enemy often comes to us and says, “hey, that’s enough. God is tired of you. He’s given up on you; he’s not interested in you anymore. You shouldn’t even call on him again. You had every chance, every opportunity and you just messed up so bad. God doesn’t care about you anymore”. That’s a lie of the enemy. God knows your frame, he knows you but thus he is merciful, he is gracious, he is slow to anger and he will pardon when we come and ask for his forgiveness and he will strengthen.

*Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. Nevertheless for thy great mercies’ sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God (9:30-31).*

Are we reading the Old Testament? I have problem with these people who say they like the New Testament; the God of law but I don’t like this God of wrath bit. The Old Testament God I sort of reject but I sort of lean towards the New Testament God. Hey, we are reading the Old Testament and the testimony concerning God who though the people failed over and over and over again; he was merciful, he was gracious, he was kind, he did not forsake them.

*Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible [awesome] God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: (9:32-33).*

Oh God help us to come to that realization. We’re always ready to blame God when anything goes wrong, when our lives get messed up. We’re always ready to turn and blame God as though God is not fair with us; God has not been dealing fairly. Here is the truth and they’re acknowledging that truth. God you were just; we are wrong. When we come to that acknowledgement and that confession, then God can do something with us. If I’m always trying to tell God “well I’m just and I’m not getting a fair shake. Lord you haven’t done this and you haven’t done that,” that’s wrong. And he’s not about to do anything. But when I acknowledge “God, I have failed, I have sinned. It’s my fault, not yours. You are just, you are righteous in all that you do. I’m the one Lord who has failed.” You’ve done right; we have done wickedly.

*Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them (9:34).*

They just didn’t listen. We haven’t listened.

*For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works (9:35).*

Our history is that of rebellion, even when we established the king.

*Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it: (9:36).*

God, we are now in subjection to the king of Persia. We are servants, we are paying tribute and taxes though we are living in this land; we are still his servants.

*And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: (9:37).*

The abundance of fruit now goes to these kings of Persia that are over us because of our sins.

*also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it (9:37-38).*

God, because of all of this, we want to make a covenant. We are going to serve you, we're gonna be your...oh great, great, great day.

The results of the reading of the law and the giving of the understanding, it is the work of the word of God in the hearts of the people that wrought these changes. That's why we just go through the word of God. Jesus said, "now you are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you". David said, "Where with all shall a young man cleanse his ways by taking head to the word of God". That power of the word of God to bring us the conviction of our sins, to help us to get life in a true perspective.

God is faithful, God is good, God has blessed; we have failed, we have turned our backs, we have been guilty. If I'm having any problems, it's because I haven't followed totally after the Lord. So God, I want to make a convenient with you. You've been good, even in my failures. You've been good to me even though I have not done right. Lord, I want to make a convenient; I want to do right. I want to live before you a life that is pleasing unto you. God I want you to take over and guide my life. I want you to be the authority, in control over me and that submission and surrendering of myself to the hand of God. May that be our covenant with God tonight.

Father we thank You for this opportunity of looking again into Your perfect law. Coming to an understanding of Your faithfulness and of Your goodness and of the way You have worked in the past. We thank You, Lord that You are a merciful God. That You are gracious and that You have not rewarded us according to our iniquities but as the heavens are high above the earth so high is Your mercy over those that fear You. Teach us Lord to walk in the fear of the Lord; hating evil and doing that which pleases You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.