

# 2021-10-03: Faithfulness and Wisdom in Reading

## Nehemiah 8

The people had not read the word of God for a very very long time. Especially after having come back from captivity. They weren't even familiar with some of the laws and the feasts that Moses had written about. So they called for Ezra to come and to read it to them.

<sup>1</sup> Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were *attentive* to the Book of the Law.

When the deacon says "Stand up in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel" it is a message to stand and be attentive and to hear and listen to the word of God. You can test yourself now and ask "do I remember the Pauline from today? Do I remember the Catholic Epistle and the Acts and the Gospel from today?"

<sup>4</sup> So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose;

A platform of wood that was made specifically for this purpose - this is for us, the [Coptic] . And it was a platform higher than the rest - actually the [Coptic] should be at the highest point in the church so that all of us are standing below the word of God because the word of God has authority over us. [Coptic] is Coptic for "place" and [Coptic] is "Gospel" so [Coptic] is the "place of the Gospel"

and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishaël, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

This is like when Abouna reads the gospel and we find deacons on his left and his right, holding the candles.

<sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.

Just as Abouna says "blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord" before reading. And he holds the Gospel above his head when he says it in order to say that "all of us - even the priest or

bishop - are under the authority of the word of God" and this is why the bishop or patriarch removes the crown from his head while reading.

And all the people stood up, as the deacon says "Stand in the fear of God" - and if you enter the church and the gospel is being read, just stand in your place and don't move until the Gospel is done.

Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground.

Just as when we say "Blessed is he..." we all bow our heads toward the ground

<sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people *stood* in their place.

Sermon is to explain the gospel of today to the people, just as here the Levites when to help the people understand the law.

<sup>8</sup> So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

This part is very important for readings. "Distinctly" - "Gave Sense" - there is a difference between someone who is reading and saying all the words right, and someone who is giving sense. When you read a question, it's different from reading a sentence. You have to know how to read in a way to give the sense to the people - with the right pauses, and inflections. Need to read with a loud voice and help the people to understand.

<sup>9</sup> And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest *and* 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 nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day *is* holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

There was no screen or Coptic Reader back then, all they did was hear the word of God. And the word of God pierced their hearts even to the point that they were emotional and started to weep and mourn because they were not following the Law. It is a big responsibility for the readers. Maybe there's someone in the church who doesn't read the Bible at home... maybe this is the only time in the whole week that he hears the word of God. Give it a chance to pierce His heart. Maybe he will be like St Anthony, who heard a single verse in the church and went and sold all that he had.

All of this applies just the same with those who are serving in the sanctuary. Almost every deacon response is an instruction for the Congregation... "Pray for the Holy Gospel" - "You who are seated stand" - "Let us attend." - "Amen Amen Pray" - etc. If the congregation cannot hear you, then who are you talking to?

So when you come to say a response outside and you don't see a microphone, take the microphone and bring it to you to say your response. Or if you see the microphone is already out and the leading deacon took care of it, come close to it and say in it. And if you're on the altar, turn the microphone on, come close to it and say your response clearly.

In this way, we are giving our beloved congregation members the chance to hear the word of God clearly and to understand it, to follow along in the prayers, and to understand their role in the liturgy.

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