

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

February 24, 2019

A Few Thoughts About Scripture Reading

by Frank Himmel

Nehemiah is most often thought of as a great builder because of his work on Jerusalem's walls, but he was also a successful spiritual builder. Just a few days after the wall was completed, the nation gathered in Jerusalem for what proved to be a great revival (Nehemiah 8). A prominent part of that meeting was Scripture reading. The reading on that occasion was...

Planned

The people asked Ezra to bring the book of the law. They constructed a tall platform for him to stand on, one large enough to hold fourteen men (Ezra was flanked by six men on his right and seven on his left). The text does not say exactly what sections he read, but surely considerable thought went into that.

Visual

"Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people..." (v. 5a); that is, he unrolled the scroll. It must have been an impressive sight! Nowadays we have electronic Bibles. They are handy, valuable tools. I have preached from a tablet a few times, but I am old-school. I much prefer using a printed Bible when leading in worship,

in part because it presents a more striking visual image of "it is written."

Revered

"And when he opened it, all the people stood up" (v. 5b). They also bowed low (v. 6). Never lose sight of the fact that whenever Scripture is read, God is speaking!

Lengthy

Ezra read from early morning to midday (v. 3). Reading only a verse or two may have its place, but why are modern readings typically so short? Do we find them dull? Do we have that little attention span? Are we too concerned about the length of assemblies?

Do we value comments about the text more than the text itself? By the way, if the people sat down at some point, the text does not mention it.



Clear

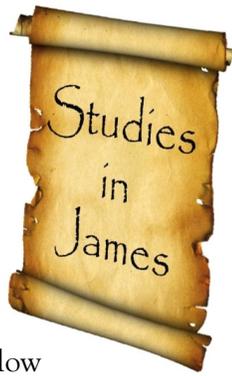
Thirteen Levites (not the same thirteen men who stood with Ezra) "explained the law to the people" (vv. 7-8). Many think these were acting as translators; others think they were expositors, or perhaps a little of both. A good reader practices his reading, thoroughly familiarizes himself with the text, speaks audibly, enunciates clearly, and reads with expression. The Bible is abundantly clear when it is so read. That is evident because it was...

Taken to Heart

The people wept (v. 9). They gained insight (v. 13). They learned (v. 14). And they did what God said (v. 18). That's effective reading! ■

Listening to God's Word

by Frank Himmel



“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:19-21).

James’s admonition to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger is great advice and might well apply in a number of circumstances. In context, it is part of his picture of a how to listen to God’s word. (“This you know” transitions from the previous verse in which James said God brought us forth by the word of truth, and the verses that follow our paragraph are about being doers of the word.) James says a good hearer of God’s word...

Listens *sincerely*. James contrasts the righteousness of God with the filthiness of sin. Sin is disgusting, not just wrong. We must make up our minds to do right. Any sympathy with sin makes us ill-prepared to receive God’s word because it might prompt us to seek ways to justify what we want to do rather than seeking God’s will. Interestingly, James’s word for *filthiness* is used in secular Greek of, among other things, ear wax!

Listens *humbly* or *meekly*. We respectfully listen to financial or medical “experts” because we understand they have greater insight than we do. We want to benefit from what they know. How much more should we respect Almighty God and seek His greater wisdom!

Listens *readily*: “quick to hear.” Don’t assume you already know. Be anxious to learn. Take advantage of every opportunity to hear God’s word.

Listens *quietly*: “slow to speak.” It is hard to listen while you are talking! “Think before you speak” is good advice, often unheeded. In the context of listening to God’s word, the point may be to listen for divine truth instead of expressing personal opinions, or perhaps it is a caution against talking back to God, suggested by James’s next description. . .

Listens *calmly*: “slow to anger.” God’s word often corrects us, and it is tempting to react angrily to rebuke or to truth that does not suit our preferences. We must control ourselves because, as James notes, human anger does not result in divine righteousness. Anger gets in the way of objectively considering the message, its evidence, and its application. It tends to close our minds to God’s word.

Listens *thoughtfully*. “Receive the word implanted” means take it to heart. Read the Bible with a this-means-me outlook: every instruction, every correction, every warning, every promise, every encouragement.

One more vital point: the good hearer of God’s word puts into practice what he hears, next week’s study. ■

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday	Wednesday
GREETER	David Gray	Josh Baucom
SONG LEADER	Sam Walters	Greg Winget
OPENING PRAYER	Jason Chandler	
LORD’S SUPPER		
BREAD	Clifton Lefort	
CUP	Stachys McLeod	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Kerry Gray	
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	John Baucom
CLOSING PRAYER	Lee Davenport	Justin Candella