

## **An Illustration of Worship**

Nehemiah 8: 1-6; 9:3

This was a very special time for the people of God. The Babylonian captivity was over and the Jews had returned to Jerusalem. God had blessed them abundantly as they rebuilt the city. To celebrate all that God had done, Nehemiah called all the people together for a celebration and dedication service at the public square near the Water Gate.

This was also a sacred time for the Jews. It was during the 7<sup>th</sup> month, the month when several feasts were held. The Feast of Trumpets was held on the 1<sup>st</sup> day on the month; the sacrifices for the Day of Atonement were offered on the 10<sup>th</sup> day, and the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month.

This was a time of celebration and dedication, but more importantly it was a time for worship. In these verses we see an example of genuine worship. There is a lot that is labeled “worship” in our day, but much of it doesn’t resemble what we find in this passage. I am convinced if we are to worship in a way that pleases and honors God, we must learn to worship biblically. If our worship doesn’t resemble worship in the Bible, then I fear we are not achieving worship. Our society has embraced the idea of “to each his own,” but that simply will not work for worship. I want to examine the [elements](#) of worship found in the text as we consider: [An Illustration of Worship](#). As we do, consider the elements of our worship.

### **I. The Assembly of Worship (1-6)**

**A. The Congregation (1-6)** – This was not just a select group of the religious elite. It was not reserved for the priests and the tribe of Levi. This was a worship experience that all were called to be a part of. Notice the words in the text – [Vvs. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6](#). All the people were involved in worship unto the Lord – men, women, and even the children. There were none left out or excused. All were present and in their places.

- Modern society would have us believe that worship is for the faint or the feeble. It is viewed as something for former generations. Many youth and young adults see no reason for worship. Biblical worship is essential for all the people. Bring your children to the house of God. They need to hear and be exposed to the Word, the Spirit, and the atmosphere of worship!

**B. The Cooperation (1)** – All the people were gathered as one man in the street before the water gate. Each was in their place and they were united in their purpose. The people called for Ezra to

bring the Word of God. They were all hungry for the Word and desired to hear it. There was no division or discord among them on this occasion.

- We need that same cooperation in our worship services. We need to be united in our purpose, desiring to hear from God and worship Him. I trust you have come today with a desire for worship. If we are not united in our purpose, we will never achieve worship together.

**II. The Agenda for Worship** – The focal point of the worship service was the Word of God. Notice:

**A. The Priority of the Word (2-3)** – The people of God were hungry for His Word. They were interested in what the Bible had to say. Keep in mind, they had been in captivity and did not enjoy the privileges of worship and biblical instruction they had at Jerusalem. Ezra read the Word of God from morning until midday. They weren't concerned with time, wanting to get finished and go home. There was emphasis placed on the Word.

- As I said, there is a lot that is labeled "worship" in our day, but much of it isn't biblical worship. There is a great emphasis placed on emotion and entertainment in our day. Biblical worship is centered around the Word of God. That was the focus here and if we are to experience real worship, it must be centered on the Word.

**B. The Preaching of the Word (4)** – Does that sound familiar? Ezra the priest stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for that purpose, and expounded the Word of God. They had made preparations for preaching. Worship must include the man of God preaching the Word.

- I know modern society has gotten away from Bible preaching, but nothing can replace preaching in the worship service. Preaching is essential to worship! God has chosen that method of delivery to share His message and deal with people's lives. [1 Cor.1:21 – For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.](#) Ezra had a desire to share the Word of God. [Ezra 7:10 – For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.](#)

**C. The Persuasion of the Word (5-6)** – When the Word is presented and preached in the worship service, it affects people's lives. Notice:

**1. It Brought Respect** (5) – When Ezra opened the Word of God, [all the people stood up](#). They stood in attention to the Word. They knew the Word of God was beneficial for their lives. There was a respect and eagerness for the Word.

- Oh, how we need that respect for the Word of God in our day. In the Bible we have the heart of God. He has given us His Word to live by. It is the Word that brought conviction to me, resulting in my salvation. It is in His Word that I find encouragement and direction for my life. The Word is not to be ignored or dreaded, but cherished and respected!

**2. It Brought Rejoicing** (6a) – As the Word was read and preached, it brought rejoicing to the hearts of the people. They lifted their hands and rejoiced in the Lord. The Bible had brought comfort to them and they rejoiced in the Lord. They had reason to rejoice.

- We too have reason to rejoice. There is nothing wrong with rejoicing in the Lord. God deserves and desires the praise of His people. If God's people can't rejoice, who can? If they can't rejoice in the worship service, where can they? We need to get beyond our pride and rejoice in the Lord. I am blessed beyond measure and have reason to rejoice!

**3. It Brought Reverence** (6b) – Upon hearing the Word of God, they [bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground](#). The people didn't feel worthy to lift their heads. They had been in the presence of the Lord. They feared God and worshiped Him.

- We need that godly reverence in our worship services today. We have not met for a social gathering. We have not come to waste an hour or so. We have come to meet with a holy God and worship Him. We ought to come before the Lord with fear and trembling. God deserves our best – He gave His best for us. May God help us to come before Him with a humble heart in holy reverence. If we could grasp His holiness and all He has done for us, it would transform our lives.

**III. The Attitude of Worship** (9:3) – They developed an attitude that we need if we are to experience real worship. Consider:

**A. Their Commitment** (3) – The people stood in their place for a fourth part of the day reading the Word of God. For another fourth part of the day they confessed and worshiped the Lord. A fourth part of the day consisted of three hours. They read the Word for three hours and then confessed and worshiped God for another three hours. They were committed to the worship service.

- Now, I am not implying that we start holding our worship services for six hours a day, but we need commitment to God. Many get irritated if the service lasts beyond 12:00. There is little commitment in our day. Many have a hard time giving the Lord an hour on Sunday morning. Oh, that we would get to the place that we have come to worship and hear from the Lord and stay until we do.

**B. Their Confession** (9:3) – For three hours the people confessed before the Lord. These people were having revival. They were getting their hearts right with God. Ezra wasn't pleading and prodding folks. They came willingly and confessed before God.

- Can you imagine a response like that in our day? If we sing over two verses, some think the preacher is trying to manipulate the invitation. These were serious about the Lord. They didn't want anything to stand between them and God. We cannot afford to allow anything to stand between us and Him. I believe that some are afraid of the altar. This is a special place that needs to be used. We must keep short accounts of our sin. Confess it, forsake it, and live for God!

**C. Their Completion** – We find that they worshiped the LORD. They actually achieved worship that day. This was a service that God was pleased with. It was not an empty, vain service. It was a worship service.

- We have set aside three services per week for worship, but how often do we see it through? How often do we carry worship to completion and actually achieve worship? Church we need to complete our worship. I know that each service is different, but we could worship more than we do. We could achieve worship more frequently if we would follow the example set forth in Nehemiah.

**Conclusion:** Where is your heart today? Are you ready to get out the door and go home or are you concerned with worship? Are there some things in your heart that are not right? If so, why not come and confess it? If all is well with your soul, why not praise the Lord for His goodness? You can achieve worship, but it is up to you.