



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **The Teacher Vol. 52 No. 2**

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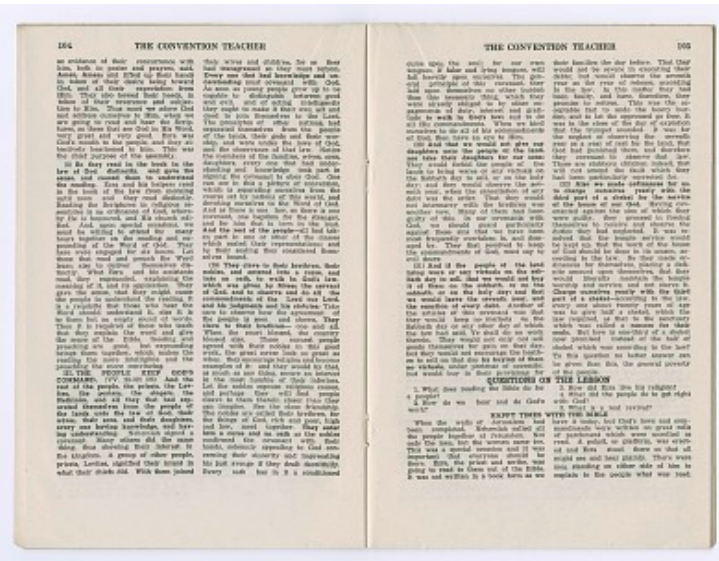
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as evidence of their concurrence with him, both in praise and prayers, said, Amen, Amen; and lifted up their hands in token of their desire being toward God, and all their expectation from Him. Thus we must adore God and address ourselves to Him, when we are going to read and hear the Scriptures, as these that see God in His Word, very great and very good. This was the chief purpose of the assembly.

(8) So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. Ezra and his helpers read in the book of the law from morning until noon and they read distinctly. Reading the Scriptures in religious assemblies is an ordinance of God, whereby He is honoured, and His church edified. And, upon special occasions, we must be willing to attend for many hours together on the reading and expounding of the Word of God. They here were engaged for six hours. Let those that read and preach the Word learn also to deliver themselves distinctly. What Ezra and his assistants read, they expounded, explaining the meaning of it, and its application. They gave the sense, that they might cause the people to understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words. Then it is required of those who teach that they explain the word and give the sense of the Bible. Reading and preaching are good, but expounding brings them together, which makes the reading the more intelligible and the preaching the more convincing.

III. THE PEOPLE KEEP GOD'S COMMAND. (VV. 28-32) And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the signers, the Nethinim, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; Nehemiah signed a covenant. Many others did the same thing, thus showing their interest in the kingdom. A group of other people, priests, Levites, signified their intent in what their chiefs did. With them joined their wives and children, for as they had transgressed so they must reform. Every one that had knowledge and understanding must covenant with God. As soon as young people grow up to be capable to distinguish between good and evil, and of acting intelligently they ought to make it their own act and deed to join themselves to the Lord. The proselytes of other nations, had separated themselves from the people of the lands, their gods and their worship, and were under the laws of God, and the observance of that law. Notice the members of the families, wives, sons, daughters, every one that had understanding and knowledge took part in signing the covenant to obey God. One can see in this a picture of conversion, which is separating ourselves from the course set by nations of this world, and devoting ourselves to the Word of God. And as there is one law, so there is one covenant, one baptism for the stranger, and for him that is born in the land. And the rest of the people-all had taken part in one or other of the classes which sealed their representations; and by their sealing they considered themselves bound.

(29) They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes; Take care to observe how the agreement of the people is seen and shown, They clave to their brethren- one and all. When the court blessed, the country blessed also. These earnest people agreed with their nobles in this good work, the great never look so great as when they encourage religion and become



examples of it: and they would by that, as much as any thing, secure an interest in the most humble of their inferiors. Let the nobles espouse religious causes, and perhaps they will find people cleave to them therein closer than they can imagine. See the close friendship. The nobles are called their brethren, for the things of God, rich and poor, high and low, meet together. They enter into a curse and an oath as the nobles confirmed the covenant with their hands, solemnly appealing to God concerning their sincerity and imprecating his just vengeance if they dealt deceitfully. Every oath has in it a conditioned

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curse upon the soul; for our own tongues, if false and lying tongues, will fall heavily upon ourselves. The general principle of this covenant, they laid upon themselves no other burden than this necessary thing, which they were already obliged to by other engagements of duty, interest and gratitude to walk in God's law; and to do all His commandments. When we bind ourselves to do all of his commandments of God, then have an eye to Him.

(30) And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; They would forbid the people of the lands to bring wares of any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, or on the holy day; and they would observe the seventh year, when the cancellation of any debt was the order. That they would not intermarry with the brethren was another vow. Many of them had been guilty of this. In our covenants with God, we should guard particularly against these sins that we have been most frequently overtaken in, and damaged by. They that resolved to keep their commandments of God must say to evil doers:

(31) And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day; and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt. Another of the articles of this covenant was that they would keep no markets on the Sabbath day or any other day of which the law had said, Ye shall do no work therein. They would not only sell goods themselves for gain on that day, but they would not encourage the heathen to sell on that day by buying of them no victuals, under pretense of necessity; but would buy in their provisions for their families the day before. That they would not be severe in executing their debts; but would observe the seventh year as the year of release, according to the law. In this matter they had been faulty, and here, therefore, they promise to reform. This was the acceptable fast to undo heavy burden, and to let the oppressed go free. It was in the close of the day the expiation that the trumpet sounded. It was for the neglect of observing the seventh year as a year of rest for the land, and therefore they covenant to observe that law. Those are stubborn children indeed, that will not amend the fault which they had been particularly corrected for.

(32) Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God. Having covenanted against the sins of which they were guilty, they proceed in forcing themselves to receive and observe the duties they had neglected. It was resolved that the temple service would be kept up, that

the work of the house of God should be done in its season, according to the law. So they made ordinances for themselves, placing a definite amount upon themselves, that they would liberally maintain the temple worship and service, and not starve it. Charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel-according to the law, every one about twenty years of age was to give half a shekel, which the law required, as that to the sanctuary which was called a ransom for their souls. But how is one-third of a shekel now promised instead of half of the shekel which was according to the law? To this question no better answer can be given than this, the general poverty of the people.

#### QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON

1. What does reading the Bible do for a people?
2. How do we hear and do God's work?
3. How did Ezra live his religion?
4. What did the people do to get right with God?
5. What is a real revival?

#### HAPPY TIMES WITH THE BIBLE

When the walls of Jerusalem had been completed, Nehemiah called all the people together at Jerusalem. Not only the men, but the women came too. This was a special occasion and it was important that everyone should be there. Ezra, the priest and scribe, was going to read to them out of the Bible. It was not written in a book form as we have it today, but God's laws and commandments were written on great rolls of parchment which were unrolled as read. A pulpit, or platform, was erected and Ezra stood there so that all might see and hear plainly. There were men standing on either side of him to explain to the people what was read.

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