

Deuteronomy 31:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

Analysis

When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose—the central sanctuary (later Jerusalem) during the pilgrimage feast. **Thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing**—public oral reading to the assembled nation. The Hebrew *tiqra et-hatorah hazot* (תִּקְרָא אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת) emphasizes proclamation, not silent reading. The entire law was to be heard audibly by everyone present.

This command presumes most Israelites couldn't read—literacy was limited to scribes, priests, and aristocrats. Oral reading democratized access to God's word, ensuring the illiterate majority could know divine requirements. The practice also created communal experience—hearing together bound Israel as covenant people. Ezra's later reading (Nehemiah 8:1-8) took hours, with Levites circulating to explain meanings. Public Scripture reading remains essential in Christian worship (1 Timothy 4:13), continuing this pattern of gathered believers hearing God's word proclaimed.

Historical Context

Prescribed circa 1406 BC, anticipating centralized worship 'in the place which he shall choose' (ultimately Jerusalem's temple). Before Solomon's temple (960 BC), the tabernacle at Shiloh and other locations served this function. The requirement for all Israel to hear presupposed pilgrimage feasts drawing crowds from across

the nation. Jesus Himself participated in this tradition, hearing Scripture read in synagogues (Luke 4:16-21) and teaching at Jerusalem during festivals.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does public reading of Scripture differ in effect from private reading?
What's lost when we abandon corporate reading?
2. Why was oral hearing the primary means of Scripture transmission, and what does this teach about accessibility?
3. How should churches balance exposition (explaining Scripture) with simple reading (letting Scripture speak)?

Interlinear Text

אָלָה יְבִרְאֵל הִנֵּה הַיְהוָה בְּבֵבָב וְאֶל
thy God the LORD before he comes When all Israel to appear before
H430 H3068 H6440 H853 H7200 H3478 H935

הַתּוֹךְ הַתְּקִין אֶת תְּקִין אֶת יְבִרְאֵל אֲשֶׁר בְּמִקְדָּשׁ וּמְ
this law the place in which he shall choose thou shalt read
H8451 H853 H7121 H977 H834 H4725

בְּאָזְנֵיכֶם: כִּי־אָתָּה כִּי־אָתָּה כִּי־אָתָּה כִּי־אָתָּה
in their hearing When all Israel to appear before he comes
H241 H3478 H3605 H5048 H2063

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 23:2 (Word): And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.

Exodus 34:24 (References God): For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year.

Deuteronomy 12:5 (References God): But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:

Acts 13:15 (Word): And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

Acts 15:21 (Parallel theme): For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

Psalms 84:7 (References God): They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

Nehemiah 9:3 (Word): 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.

Nehemiah 8:13 (Word): 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.