

THE LOST ART OF PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE ¹

Budianto Lim

Abstract: Protestant churches are grounded on the conviction of Sola Scriptura. The reality, however, this conviction is presented only through preaching. This article presents a proposal based on biblical foundations that churches need to pay more attention to the art of public reading of Scripture. The writer is convinced that when churches reconsider the way the Bible is read publicly during the Sunday Worship, there will be a renewal of heart in the life of Christians.

Keywords: *Public reading, worship, scripture.*

Introduction

I write this article with a conviction that God's word is living, effective, and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart (Heb 4:12).² I am convinced that the renewal of worship may only happen if churches

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1. This title is not mine, but coined by Richard Ward.
 2. Holman Christian Standard Bible.

pay more attention to the art of the public reading of Scripture. A simple definition of public reading of Scripture is an act of reading a portion of the Bible during the Sunday Worship Service that serves as the textual basis for preaching. Richard Ward³ precisely reminds us that the public reading of the Bible has become a lost art in the church because its aural power has been strangely neglected within the worship life of the church. I agree with him that it is necessary to respect the orality aspect of the Bible by pursuing a fresh and more imaginative engagement with it. I believe Jeffrey Arthurs' view that many churches treat the public reading of the Bible as a little more than "homiletical throat-clearing before the sermon"⁴ is a major reason that the public reading of Scripture has become a lost art in worship. I affirm that churches need to pay attention to arts of reading Scripture. By that, I mean church leaders, have to read portion of the Bible according to the uniqueness of its genres.

In reality of church ministry, I have observed that many Christian leaders or pastors have often treated the Scripture reading as a formality⁵ or merely a preliminary⁶ to the sermon. They do not really pay attention concerning ways of reading Scripture that help

3. Richard F. Ward, *Speaking of the Holy: The Art of Communication in Preaching* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice, 2001), 13.

4. Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012), 14.

5. Timothy J. Ralston, "Scripture in Worship" in *Authentic Worship: Hearing Scripture's Voice, Applying Its Truth*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2002), 196.

6. Robert E. Webber, *Worship is A Verb* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 75.

Christians sense God's presence. Therefore, I believe there is an urgent need to train pastors and/or Christian leaders to be a better readers of the Bible.

In this article, I will limit my discussion only to provide a biblical basis for the enhancement of the public reading of Scripture. Thus, this article presents the 'why' and the 'how' can only be presented in another article. I will present my examination of three passages from the Old Testament: Exodus 19:1-8, Ezra 4:1-8, Nehemiah 8:1-12 and an epistolary command from 1 Timothy 4:13. I believe that those four biblical texts provide a solid foundation for churches to improve on the public reading of Scripture, so that God's message will come alive among God's people.

Exodus 19:1-8

In order to understand Exodus 19:1-8 as being foundational for the public reading of Scripture,⁷ I need to interpret the passage in light of the overall context of Exodus. In relation to Exodus 1-18, Exodus 19 is the initial fulfillment of God's salvific purpose⁸ for the Israelites to worship him at Mount Sinai. In light of Exodus 20-40, Exodus 19 is the beginning of the Israelites' nationhood as they are

7. Exodus 19:6b-8 says, "These are the words that you are to speak to the Israelites. After Moses came back, he summoned the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. Then all the people responded together, 'We will do everything the LORD has spoken'. So Moses brought the people's word back to the LORD."

8. Exodus 3:12; 4:23; 5:18; 6:5; 7:16, 26; 8:16; 9:1; 9:13 and 10:3.

presented before God, consecrated and ready to accept a new identity and way of life by God's decree. The description of how they should live as God's covenant people by way of covenant stipulations is presented primarily in Exodus 20-23. Exodus 19:1-8 and 24:3-8⁹ bind those covenant requirements as a unit and record the public reading of them. I come to this understanding after reading Exodus and assessing some Old Testament scholars. Terence Fretheim,¹⁰ John Sailhamer,¹¹ Douglas Stuart¹² and Nahum Sarna¹³ all agree that Exodus 19-24 should be interpreted as a unit, though they differ slightly in how the passage ought to be divided. When I interpret Exodus 19:1-8, in particular verses 6b-8,¹⁴ in light of the preceding

9. Exodus 24:7 states, "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey'". This verse together with Exodus 19:6b-8 provide a scene of public reading of God's words to the assembly of God's people.

10. Fretheim structures the book of Exodus according to the progress of the Israelites from one geographical area to another. He views Exodus 19-24 to narrate the life of the Israelites at Sinai. T. E. Fretheim, "Book of Exodus," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander & David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2003), 250-251.

11. Sailhamer labels the whole Exodus 19-24 as the covenant at Sinai. John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 281.

12. Stuart takes Exodus 20:1-31:18 as a unit describing the covenantal law. Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman), 438.

13. Sarna takes Exodus 19:1-20:21 as the covenant at Sinai and views Exodus 21:1-24:18 as the Book of the Covenant. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Exodus* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 102-117.

14. "These are the words that you are to speak to the Israelites. After Moses came back, he summoned the elders of the people and set

stories, I become more convinced that the public reading of Scripture is essentially an act of worship, which is a response to God's salvific accomplishment. Exodus 19:6b-8 presents an introductory statement concerning the presentation of God's covenant stipulations before the assembly. Prior to verse 6b, God has reiterated his gracious act of deliverance (Ex 19:4) and his commitment to the Israelites (Exodus 19:5-6a). In this light, I understand that true worship is only possible if people have entered into a covenantal relationship with God. Therefore, worship and life under God's covenant are inseparable. With this understanding, I believe that the presentation of God's word in public worship is necessary because the gathered people are the covenant people of God redeemed by the blood of Christ. Hence, the public reading of Scripture in Sunday worship is an integral part of being in a covenantal relationship with God. The following paragraph provides further explanation.

The record of Jacob's descendants in Exodus 1:1-7 implies a partial fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. The numerical growth of the Israelites in Egypt positions the story of exodus as the continuation of the covenantal relationship between God and the Israelites. As the story unfolds, the narrative presents God as the one who frequently appears in order to protect and preserve his covenant with his people from any threats. God's protection of his covenant

before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. Then all the people responded together, 'we will do everything the LORD has spoken'. So Moses brought the people's word back to the LORD."

continues as he appears and calls his servant Moses by way of a burning bush. The bush burning without being consumed is a unique visual appearance of God, also called a theophany (Exodus 2-3).¹⁵ God's appearance in the burning bush to Moses would be unintelligible without his aural revelation (Exodus 3:4-10). God's awesome appearance authenticates his authority as the sovereign ruler of the covenant. I believe God's visual appearance affected Moses on a sensory level to prepare him to receive God's commission. Moses' experience of theophany did not only attract Moses' attention but also stimulated his mind and body as he approached the burning bush. I maintain that God's visual appearance and his aural revelation are inseparable in communicating the authoritative and intelligible nature of God's message. Exodus 19:1-24:18 presents the same principle that there can be no legitimate separation of God's visual appearance and his aural revelation.¹⁶

15. I am grateful for the work of Jeffrey Niehaus, who observes theophanic language in the narrative of the burning bush. In a way, God makes himself known to Moses in order to call him and to rescue the Israelites. I find Niehaus' comparison of the theophany narrative in Exodus with the Ancient Near Eastern documents is tremendously insightful and helpful. God as King over all creation enters into a covenant with the Israelites. His grandeur entrance surrounding the covenant-making ritual is an expression of his sovereignty and rulership. In short, covenant and theophany are inseparable. Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 187.

16. Exodus 19:1-8 God speaks to Moses so that he speaks to the Israelites; Exodus 19:9-15 God commands Moses to consecrate the Israelites for the encounter; Exodus 19:16-25 God's awesome appearance is followed by his aural revelation; Exodus 20:1-23:33 God presents the covenant

Therefore, I maintain that the inseparability of God's visual appearance and his aural revelation of the covenant stipulations grounds my conviction that there is an urgent need to enhance the public reading of Scripture, in particular, paying attention to the combination of visual and aural sensory aspects. I believe this way of enhancing the public reading of Scripture can help Christians to sense the authoritative nature of God's word. I hope the well reading of Scripture can stir the congregation to be ready to listen to the exposition of Scripture through preaching. I trust that we cannot separate preaching and the public reading of Scripture, because both are essentially an act of worship in response to God's salvific action. In light of the remaining context of Exodus, Exodus 19:1-8 is an introduction preparing the Israelites to obey the covenant stipulations.¹⁷ Obedience is the people's response of true worship according to God's terms and conditions. Exodus 19:1-2 records the arrival and encampment of God's people at Mount Sinai. Samuel E. Balentine and John Sailhamer carefully note that this arrival at the third month after the exodus falls at the beginning of the seventh week.¹⁸ The Israelites enter a time of rest from slavery in order to

stipulations; Exodus 24:1-18 God ratifies the covenant and his glory covers the mountain.

17. If Exodus 15-18 anticipates the detailed presentation of the covenant stipulations, then Exodus 19-24 seals and formalizes the covenant making between Yahweh and the Israelites.

18. John H. Sailhamer, 281 and Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah's Vision of Worship*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 123.

receive God's instructions. The Israelites will continue to have this rest as long as they are faithful in their role as a covenant partner with God. The essence of this partnership is spelled out in the covenant stipulations in chapters 20-23. Exodus 24 ratifies the covenant through a blood ritual. I am indebted to Stuart,¹⁹ Samuel Balentine,²⁰ Ross W. Blackburn,²¹ Sailhamer,²² and Paul Williamson,²³ who agree that while Exodus 19:1-8 announces the inaugural of the

19. Stuart takes Exodus 19:1-8 as the presentation of God's special calling for the Israelites in the format similar to the suzerain-vassal treaty of the second millennium BC. He views Exodus 24:1-11 as the documentation of the covenant. In other words, Exodus 24 is the ratification of the covenant. Stuart, *Exodus*, 421 and 550.

20. Balentine also acknowledges the root of the traditional Near Eastern treaty patterns in Exodus 19:1-8. He takes it as the first step of the inauguration of the covenant. He observes, insightfully, that in worship one is invited to the covenant obedience and ritual holiness. Samuel E. Balentine, 122.

21. Ross W Blackburn understands Exodus 19:4-6 as the covenant introduction. He views in those verses, Israel's mission statement. The statement defines Israel's purpose as the people of God and the role of the law in that purpose. He takes Exodus 24:3-8 as the ratification of the covenant which centralizes on sanctification. Exodus 24 is Israel's consecration to her priestly calling. Ross W. Blackburn, *The God who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary heart of the book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 28, ed. D.A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2012), 96.

22. Sailhamer sees the link between Exodus 19 and 24 clearly. He understands the formalization of the covenant happens only in Exodus 24. Exodus 19 is the first announcement about the place of the Israelites in that covenant relationship with Yahweh. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative*, 282-296.

23. Williamson agrees with Sailhamer and takes Exodus 24 as the formal ratification of the Sinaitic (or national) covenant. Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with An Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2007), 99.

covenant, Exodus 24:1-11 formalizes the covenant through an official ceremony. Thus, the occasion of Exodus 19:1-8 and 24:1-11 cannot be understood in isolation.

While Exodus 19:1-2 signals a new beginning for the Israelites, I concur with Sarna that Exodus 19:3-6 expresses the essence of the covenant idea.²⁴ The new dawn at Mount Sinai prepares the Israelites to be ready to take the responsibility as God's covenant partner for the sake of becoming a beacon to other nations. The essence of this partnership, with Moses as the covenant mediator (19:3), consists of what God has done (19:4) and how the people should respond (19:5-6). From the perspective of ancient covenantal documents, as Sarna²⁵ has noted, Exodus 19:4-6 follows an ancient suzerain-vassal treaty and Exodus 19:4 summarizes the preamble and prologue component of the Sinai covenant.²⁶ I concur with Stuart that the words "brought you to myself" (verse 4) signify the entering into covenant relationship.²⁷

While I agree with Stuart and Sarna, together with Balentine,²⁸ who also affirms both of them, I dispute Williamson's sweeping comment that there is little consensus as to the extent and significance of the parallels between the Sinaitic covenant and

24. Sarna, *Exodus*, 103.

25. Sarna concludes that the suzerain-vassal treaty of the Ancient Near East has made its influence in the formation of the biblical covenant. Sarna, *Exodus*, 102.

26. Stuart, *Exodus*, 422.

27. Stuart, *Exodus*, 422.

28. Samuel E. Balentine, 122.

ancient suzerain-vassal treaties.²⁹ I think verse 4 is the essence of the Gospel. This verse is in a way the reason why Christians gather in weekly worship. God's grace and salvific act is the ground of worship. Verses 5-6 express God's intention for the Israelites to be his treasured possession and his priest to the nations. I agree with Balentine,³⁰ who understands that God's statement here includes a creation motif. In Genesis, God commissions humankind as both royal steward and humble servant. Genesis 2:15 specifically uses a verbal expression that is used in the context of a priestly task in Exodus and Leviticus. Thus, humankind is meant to play a priestly role since the beginning. In Exodus 19, God concretizes the previous commission in Genesis 2:15 by summoning Israel to a vocation of imaging God on earth as "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." Since the role of priest is to mediate between God and the people, the election of Israel is not an end in itself.³¹ Rather, the Israelites are to represent God to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him.³² Representing the holy God requires that the Israelites follow his terms and conditions spelled out in the covenant stipulations. In short, Exodus 19:5-6 lays out an introductory statement of the covenant stipulations, which the people have to obey. Exodus 19:7-8 is the actual and introductory reading of those

29. Williamson, *Sealed with An Oath*, 98.

30. Samuel E. Balentine, 123.

31. Williamson, *Sealed with An Oath*, 97.

32. Stuart, *Exodus*, 423 and Blackburn, 91.

stipulations. Thus, the public reading of God's stipulations cannot be done without understanding the covenant concept. Moses as the covenant mediator presents all God's words to the people in verse 7 and they respond with a commitment in verse 8. The ratification of the covenant includes the reading of all the words of the Lord in front of the people gathered (Exodus 24:3, 7).

From the explanation above, I believe that the public reading of Scripture is meant to be a presentation of God's covenant stipulations for the people to respond obediently to what God has done. Such obedience is expressed, first of all, by a verbal commitment from the people. The Israelites committed to do all God's words because they were authoritative. The public reading of God's word accompanied by God's appearance touched their visual and auditory senses, which then influenced their heart or emotion to act in obedience for the sake of fulfilling their identity as God's covenant people.

If churches claim to be a biblical community under the covenant relationship through Jesus Christ, then we must not neglect the public reading of the Bible. I believe the public reading of God's word is a divine mandate for God's covenant people. Without Scripture reading, worship loses its essence. Thus, I am against the dismissal of the public reading of Scripture. I disagree with churches that justify replacing the public reading of Scripture on the grounds that hymns or other liturgical elements already contain scriptural principles. I believe that in any Christian gathering Scriptures must be

read in ways that emphasize God's authority. I uphold that the integration of visual and aural aspects during the public reading of Scripture gives emphasis to the authoritative nature of God's message. Therefore, the ministry team must prepare well to understand God's intended meaning of certain biblical texts before publicly reading the text. This preparation is necessary in order to properly plan the enhancement of the reading. I believe that diligence and consistency are the key to this enterprise and are worthwhile because God's instructions are the core of our being as the Church, a new covenant people of God. At the same time, the reading of Scripture is a covenant act. Next I will explain how Ezekiel 4:1-8 grounds my thesis project.

Ezekiel 4:1-8

I chose Ezekiel 4:1-8 because it is a representative text that relates closely with my previous understanding from the book of Exodus. The explanation of Ezekiel 4:1-8 in the context of Ezekiel 1-3, which consists of Ezekiel's vision and calling, is sufficient for this article.³³ Douglas Stuart has noted, and I agree, that although the book of Ezekiel is enigmatic in many ways and the vision is overwhelming and the repetitive nature³⁴ of the message is

33. I admit that Ez 4:1-8 is only a portion of God's command for Ezekiel to symbolize the siege of Jerusalem. The study of those verses, without going further, however, is adequate to ground my project.

34. For example: Ezekiel 3:1-3, God commanded Ezekiel to eat a scroll so that he can speak to the house of Israel. This command repeats Ezekiel 2:8b-9. Ezekiel 3:4-7 God commanded Ezekiel to speak his words to

daunting,³⁵ the structure of this prophetic book is clear. The relationship of Ezekiel with the book of Exodus, especially the theophanic imagery,³⁶ adds complex insight³⁷ for grasping the meaning of the prophetic message. In spite of many difficulties, similar to Douglas Stuart, other scholars such as Robert Chisholm,³⁸ Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer,³⁹ Willem VanGemeren⁴⁰ and Daniel Block⁴¹ agree with the clarity of Ezekiel's structure. They divide the book into three main sections: Chapters 1-24 focus on the calling of Ezekiel and the pronouncement of judgment on Jerusalem; chapters 25-32 concentrate on the oracles against nations, and chapters 33-48 highlight the pronouncement of hope and salvation. Thus, Ezekiel 4

the Israelites, although they would not listen. The fact that Israel is stubborn and obstinate is frequently assessed in both chapters (Ez 2:3-4 & 3:4-7, 3:8-11).

35. Douglas Stuart, *Ezekiel*, The Preacher's Commentary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 11.

36. Robert Chisholm affirms Niehaus' work on theophany in *God at Sinai*, where he admits that Ezekiel's account of theophany is a more thorough articulation of the stormy presence of God than Exodus. Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 232. Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 255.

37. Reading Ezekiel a few times will show the shift between first and third person, which may indicate that the book is composite in nature. Tiemeyer has already noted that even scholars have voiced the idea of pseudepigraphy in Ezekiel. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: Book of" in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, eds. Mark J Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2012), 214-215.

38. Chisholm, *Handbook*, 231.

39. Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: Book of", 219.

40. Willem VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 327-328.

41. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 23.

is an essential part of Ezekiel's calling and a declaration of judgment on Jerusalem.

I think it is important to understand the placement of Ezekiel 4 in the light of Ezekiel's calling in chapters 1-3. Ezekiel 1 is part of Ezekiel's call, comparable to that of Moses in the book of Exodus. God used a burning bush as a way to attract Moses visually in the wilderness before he spoke his call and commission to Moses. To Ezekiel, God gave vision employing the imageries that corresponded to the Ancient Near Eastern culture.⁴² The heavenly vision that happens in a particular time⁴³ is God's revelation according to the language of human beings. Hence, the visual revelation of God's glory and majesty grips Ezekiel's heart and mind for his whole life and ministry. I think that God gives such an overwhelming visual to Ezekiel because of the difficult nature of his task – a task for which he needs a lasting reminder about the authority behind his calling. The difference between what Moses and Ezekiel has seen in the vision is while God's visual appearance (theophany) was an integral part of the covenant making at Sinai, in Ezekiel the theophany signifies covenant curses-disaster for his people.⁴⁴ The vision Ezekiel saw when he was among the exiles by the Kebar River is held together by what Block has labeled "the fire motif".⁴⁵ Niehaus explains the fire

42. Chisholm, *Handbook*, 232.

43. The dating of Ezekiel's prophecy is prominent in the book. Stuart has noted that all the dates fall between 593 and 571 B.C. Stuart, *Ezekiel*, 12.

44. Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 255.

45. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 91.

motif as the theophanic event – a thunderous voice, sound of a great storm, cloud, flashing lightning, fire, and heavenly throne – an event that strike all human senses.⁴⁶ The vision casts beauty on the heavenly scene, which is indescribable. Ezekiel sees a “form” of God’s appearance in order to prepare him for his mission. All of these visions are of no meaning, however, without the speaking voice of God.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, without the visual, God’s message would probably lose its grip on the discouraged prophet in exile. Thus, both aspects of visual and aural are equally important.

I maintain that this understanding of the inseparability of the visual and aural aspects during the public reading of Scripture has significance for my thinking. I believe that visual aspects in the public reading of Scripture function to attract Christians to listen better because the integration of the visual and aural emphasizes the authority of God’s words. Therefore, I encourage Christian leaders to apply carefully visual elements during the public reading of Scripture, especially if these visuals help make the message become more clearly understood. I simply cannot ignore this aspect of visualization, because in some church contexts some Christians have taken for granted the familiarity of the stories of the Bible. I think when someone gets too familiar with biblical stories there is a tendency to ignore the reading. Therefore, visualization helps Christians to enter

46. Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 256-259.

47. Ezekiel 1 closes the visual revelation with Ezekiel’s response of humble reverence, when he also hears a voice begins to speak to him (Ez 1:28).

afresh into the stories of the Bible that they have heard frequently and reconsider God's message in those stories for their spiritual growth.

As for the Israelites, however, the issue probably was not so much about familiarity, but skepticism. Both Ezekiel 2 and 3 describe how stubborn and obstinate the Israelites were. I think the reason for the symbolic eating of the scroll (2:9-3:3) is for the internalization of God's word in Ezekiel's life.⁴⁸ Viewing Ezekiel 4 in this light makes a lot of sense. Thus, even as a person, Ezekiel is God's living word. Ezekiel's dramatic act of eating the scroll to visualize God's message of doom for the people is proof that we cannot separate the message from the messenger. Ezekiel 2-3 continues to highlight God's authority behind what Ezekiel speaks and dramatizes.⁴⁹ Working with such an understanding of these chapters requires me to carefully choose members for my ministry team of public readers. Finding Christians who are passionate about studying, internalizing, and communicating God's words is a great challenge in the context of the Indonesian congregations. I believe that skills of reading and dramatic visualization are important, but finding readers who live God's words daily is even more important for the enhancement of

48. Tiemeyer, "Ezekiel: Book of", 218-219.

49. There are many references where Ezekiel 2-3 explicitly states about God's speaking. For instance, Ezekiel 2:1-2 gives four references of God's speaking to Ezekiel, either in direct speech or a report. In particular, a prophetic formula 'thus says the LORD God' appears thrice (2:4, 3:11 and 3:27).

the public reading of Scripture. I also believe, however, that readers will grow as they continue to commit themselves in this ministry.

I think, for example, that Ezekiel himself has grown throughout his journey as God's messenger. Ezekiel 4 is a picture of ministry proper for Ezekiel. He begins the prophetic ministry with two object lessons that he needs to dramatize.⁵⁰ Both object lessons are about the siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel 4:1-8 presents the first dramatic act that ends in Ezekiel 5:4. I agree with Block⁵¹ and VanGemeren,⁵² who take Ezekiel 4:1-5:4⁵³ as the overall dramatization of God's message.

I agree with Block that the dramatization is addressed to a certain kind of people who are deaf spiritually.⁵⁴ In fact, God mentioned that the people would not listen to Ezekiel's prophetic warning, even though Ezekiel has spoken the divine words. An overall picture of Ezekiel 4:1-8 is as follows:

- Ezekiel 4:1-2, the Lord asks Ezekiel to place a brick, where he can draw a Jerusalem map on it. I take it that Ezekiel's action is supposed to attract the people surrounding him. They watch Ezekiel, perhaps, like a street circus act, not knowing that the

50. Chisholm, *Handbook*, 235.

51. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 167.

52. Van Gemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, 327.

53. I agree with Block who takes Ez 5:5-17 as the continuation of the dramatization based on the prophetic formula 'thus says the Lord'. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 167.

54. Block has made a precise conclusion that "Ezekiel faced an audience that was disillusioned, cynical, bitter and angry. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 8.

action is an enactment of God's message of doom for them. In verse 2, God commands Ezekiel to build a siege wall, a ramp, pitch camps, and place battering rams in order to encircle Jerusalem. The act is to signify that in the near future,⁵⁵ Babylonians would lay siege against Jerusalem in order to destroy it.

- Ezekiel 4:3, the Lord commands Ezekiel to get an iron plate or griddle to further signify the siege of Jerusalem. The iron plate symbolizes an erection of an iron wall. The iron instrument, I gather from Block's conclusion, is to signify the impenetrability of the barrier and the firmness of God's rejection of his people.⁵⁶ Therefore, Ezekiel 4:1-3 allows the people to visualize God's word about the siege of Jerusalem.
- Ezekiel 4:4-5⁵⁷ and 4:6, the Lord commanded Ezekiel to lie down on both of his sides for a period of time.⁵⁸ The purpose is for Ezekiel to bear the iniquity of the people of Israel and Judah. I

55. Ezekiel's message is presented at the last stage of the kingdom of Judah before the exile.

56. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 173.

57. Grammatically, I agree with Block who views the conjunction as adversative to signal a shift in the scene. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 174-175.

58. I think Block has responsibly listed the interchangeable usage of 'the house of Israel' and 'the house of Judah'. Three hundreds and ninety days refers to 390 years of the iniquity of the Israelites as God's people when Solomon started the official court-sponsored apostasy. Forty days refers to 40 years, which recalls 40 years of wilderness wandering as God's punishment for the Exodus generation. Block has noted a stylistic links between verse 6 and Num 14:33-35. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 178-179.

think that Block is precisely correct that Ezekiel's sign-acts in this section are to highlight his priestly role.⁵⁹ His own bodily gesture⁶⁰ is the message of judgment to the people. The relation of Ezekiel 4:1-3 and 4:4-6 is clear. Therefore, the sign-acts show what God will do to punish the people's iniquities. The siege of Jerusalem is only a beginning of that punishment. I agree again with Block that verses 4-6 express two phases of Ezekiel's sign acts: the long period of Israel's apostasy and the punishment they will face.⁶¹

- Ezekiel 4:7-8, the Lord gives a similar command for Ezekiel to set his face against the siege of Jerusalem as in verse 3. Verse 8 expresses the Lord's determination to let the siege happen as he has planned it.

Ezekiel 4:1-8 is a public reading of God's message by means of dramatic presentation.⁶²

59. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 175.

60. I think that we simply cannot be very sure that Ezekiel did or did not lay down continuously. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel* 179.

61. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 180.

62. Ezekiel 12 records a similar dramatic presentation of God's message of doom for the Israelites. Ezekiel 12:1-2 opens up with a statement of prophetic authority. At the same time, it expresses a pessimistic notion concerning the people's ability to respond God's warning. "They have eyes to see but do not see; they have ears to hear but do not hear". In spite of this pessimism, the prophet is called to speak to the people. Thus, Ezekiel uses a similar rhetorical strategy similar to his prior method in Ezekiel 4. Verses 3-6 are casted in a series of imperatives and "in their sight" is repeated several times (v. 3 twice, v. 4-6 and also v. 7). This repetition is linked with verse 2 and can be treated as a vivid reminder that Ezekiel's sign

I believe that a dramatic presentation of the biblical texts is one of many ways we can do the public reading. Reading the Scripture by such a method may help the listeners to engage with God's message better. The dramatic presentation may engage the sensory aspect of the listeners. Eventually, I hope it may tackle familiarity, skepticism or apathy present among believers. Thus, I think that the passage in Ezekiel 4 underlines the important role of the Scripture reader or a team of readers. Practically, it is necessary to select Christians who are passionate about God and his words. Otherwise, the public reading of Scripture cannot impact the people with God's message. In a way, Christians who read Scripture publicly represents God's message. The fact that the Lord commands Ezekiel to dramatize his message for the people grants Christians today license to apply appropriate dramatic acts to deliver the message of the Bible. Such dramatic acts are visualization to move Christians to listen attentively to God's message. Dramatization works best, I think, for the narrative portion of the Bible.

The study of Ezekiel affirms what I have discovered and concluded in looking at the book of Exodus. The public reading of Scripture is a covenant act that cannot be dismissed. The enhancement of Scripture reading highlights the authoritative nature

act signifies more of his obedience than the people's expected response. The Lord commands Ezekiel to dramatize the procession of exile in verses 3-7. The goal of this dramatization is expressed clearly in the last part of verse 6. Ezekiel is a sign for the people in exile. The medium has become the message as Daniel Block has concluded. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 371.

of God's message. The way to enhance the reading of biblical texts includes employing visual aids and dramatic sign-acts applied for the purpose of having God's message touch and transform God's people. Although visualization is important in the process of reading Scripture, one must be cautious because God decides the kind of visuals that he uses before he gives his message orally. Hence, one must not overuse visualization. In that light, I think that it is important to consider carefully each biblical genre and the context of the passage as well as the audience.

Nehemiah 8:1-12⁶³

I chose this passage because it provides a vivid scene of corporate worship that centers on the reading and teaching of God's words. The presentation of God's words is vital because the postexilic Jewish community and its leaders (Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah) revived the people's allegiance to the Torah for the sake of purifying themselves from the syncretistic influence of the neighboring nations.⁶⁴ In short, the leaders put forth effort to renew their commitment to the covenant. For that purpose, Nehemiah 8 presents Ezra reading God's words publicly before the congregation on the first day of the seventh month (8:2). Together with the Levites,

63. Nehemiah 7:73b presents the time setting, which signals a new scene in the narrative.

64. Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Ezra and Nehemiah, Books of" in *Dictionary of The Old Testament Historical Books*, eds. Bill T Arnold & H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2005), 284.

Ezra explains the meaning of God's words to the people (8:8). In spite of the vivid picture about the public reading of Scripture and its explanation, Nehemiah 8, however, led a number of scholars to believe that this chapter has been displaced.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the relevance of Nehemiah 8:1-12 remains convincing in terms of its theological and practical aspects without delving into critical issues.⁶⁶ I am convinced that reading Ezra and Nehemiah as a single book⁶⁷ gives us insight into the public reading of Scripture as a covenant act of worship. Specifically, the public reading of God's words in Nehemiah 8 is central to the theme of covenant renewal as it

65. Yamauchi, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 290.

66. Williamson and Yamauchi have mentioned how Nehemiah 8-10 creates the very widest spectrum of opinions because these three chapters lie at the heart of the historical and literary problem of this post-exilic work. One of the literary issues is concerning the sources behind each section of Ezra and Nehemiah. Edwin M. Yamauchi, specifically categorizes Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8-9 as Ezra Memoir. He considers Nehemiah 1-7 and 10-13 as Nehemiah memoir. Williamson differs with Yamauchi concerning the demarcation of Nehemiah 12 and 13. He takes only Nehemiah 8 as part of the Ezra memoir. H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), xxiv-xxix and 275. Yamauchi, "Ezra and Nehemiah, 290.

67. There is a plethora of discussion concerning the authorship of this post-exilic document. Generally, scholars for examples Williamson, Fensham and Myers, all agree that Ezra and Nehemiah are regarded as a single book. The author of this material, however, is unknown for certain. Jacob Myers has noted that Origen divides the material into the first and second Ezra, presuming Ezra as the author. Williamson adds that Jerome in the Vulgate also separates the two books. Charles Fensham accepts the Chronicler as the author of both books by viewing 2 Chr 36:22-23 as preparation to Ezra 1. H. G. M. Williamson, xxi. F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 3. Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, The Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1965), xxxviii.

correlates also to the Exodus event. I strongly agree with Michael W. Duggan, who views Neh 7:72b-10:40, the narrative of the covenant renewal as the climax of Ezra-Nehemiah because that narrative represents the defining moment for the postexilic community.⁶⁸ Similarly, I am convinced that the public reading of Scripture is a moment of covenant renewal for Christians. In other words, every time Christians read the Bible in worship, it is to renew our commitment to God. Thus, the renewal of mindset and behavior is the expected result when the Spirit works in the process of Scripture reading on Sunday worship.

The covenant renewal motif in Ezra and Nehemiah, for example, is inseparable with the remembrance of the Exodus event. The relationship between covenant renewal and the memory of the Exodus event is shown in three different sections comprising of list of returnees and the acts of worship they practiced thereafter. The list of returnees in Ezra 7:28b-8:14 reminds the reader about the previous list in Ezra 2 and the next one in Nehemiah 7. Though each list has its place for a different timeline during the return trip to Jerusalem, I agree with Williamson, who considers that there is the definite impression of a second Exodus.⁶⁹ If I compare the contextual

68. Michael W. Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah (Neh 7:72b-10:40): An Exegetical, Literary and Theological Study*, SBL Dissertation Series 164 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 67.

69. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 111.

reading of both lists, I think Williamson's comment is correct.⁷⁰ The following paragraph explains my understanding.

The list of returnees in Ezra 2 is followed by the concerns of worship. First of all, Ezra 3 describes a sacrificial ritual, which is an aspect of worship present in the narrative of Exodus. Second is the laying of a foundation for the second temple in Jerusalem in Ezra 3:7-13. This is comparable to the building of the Tabernacle in Exodus. After the suspension of the redevelopment of the temple because of some enemies of Judah in Ezra 4:1-24, the work resumes in Ezra 5:1-6:22. Thus, the impression of a second Exodus comprises the long march of the Judahites and the building of the second temple. God's providential care of bringing home his people meets with the response of the people's commitment to obey God's prophets, Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1-2).

The same pattern appears again in the list of returnees led by Ezra beginning in Ezra 7:28b-8:14. The concern of worship occurs in Ezra 8:15-20 when Ezra reviews the returnees. When he finds no Levites, he takes initiative to send a message to Ido to ask for the Levites to fulfill their role in worship (Ezra 8:17). A call to pray and fast as a humble plea, an act of worship, occurs in Ezra 8:21-23. Ezra 8:24-36 further describes matters of worship: the consecration of the chief priest together with the utensils for worship (8:24-30) and the

70. I find that it does not only present an impression of a second Exodus, but also echoes a Sinaitic event. At Sinai, God has made himself known and given covenant stipulations through Moses as the covenant mediator and in unison the people responded verbally.

burnt offering (8:31-36). After Ezra and the people arrive in Jerusalem, the first and foremost affair is communal prayer of confession (Ezra 9). The people repent and reform the institution of marriage in order to purify themselves from intermarriage.⁷¹ Again, I find that the impression of a second Exodus represented in the list of returnees is tied with acts of worship, prayer being the dominant one.⁷²

Thus, I am even more convinced that the public reading of Scripture during Sunday worship is a must for the following reasons. First, the public reading of Scripture is a must so that the Holy Spirit may work through God's words to renew God's covenant people, the Church. Second, the role of a church pastor, first and foremost, consists of the reading, teaching, and preaching of God's word. As a pastor, I have to be an example for the ministerial team to read God's words with conviction.

The concern of worship in the temple continues even in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah 1-7, however, has puzzled many scholars in terms of its literary placement. They talk about the misplacement of Nehemiah 8-9, and sometimes they include

71. The purity of the people in the midst of other nations is highly important for Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus, the reading and interpreting of the law is critical to maintain their covenantal loyalty to the Lord. I agree with Fensham that the heavy emphasis on the law is an attempt to counteract a way of life that is not in accordance with the covenant. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra*, 17.

72. Yamauchi is precisely right. Ezra is not only an expounder of the Scriptures, but also a man of fervent prayer with deep piety and humility. Yamauchi, "Ezra and Nehemiah, 294.

Nehemiah 10. I concur with those scholars⁷³ that if Ezra and Nehemiah are a single work, then it is necessary to solve the literary problem, which centers on Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8-10. I think it is correct to consider Nehemiah 1-7 as the account of the ruin of Jerusalem and its wall. The destruction of Jerusalem's wall must be addressed. Without the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall, the second temple would continue to be vulnerable. Therefore, Nehemiah's leadership to rebuild the wall (1:1-7:28a) is critical before the covenant renewal could take place. Otherwise, the force of the covenant renewal recorded in Nehemiah 8, beginning with the reading of the law cannot be sustained. Hence, Jerusalem⁷⁴ as the city of God has an important role in the whole book of Ezra and Nehemiah. Theologically, I think the proposal to rearrange the sequence of the narrative in both books is not necessary.⁷⁵

The understanding of the narrative flow leading to Nehemiah 8:1-12 is very important. If a person reads the list of the returnees in Nehemiah 7 in light of Nehemiah 1-6, then I think it is plausible to consider those six chapters as alluding to the difficulties Moses experienced in his approach to Pharaoh of Egypt. Hence, the list of the returnees to Jerusalem in Nehemiah 7 bears an impression of a

73. Myers has given several options taken by some scholars concerning the rearrangement of the materials in Ezra and Nehemiah. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, xlii-xlviii.

74. The concern about Jerusalem is evident in its frequent usages in Ezra and Nehemiah. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, lix.

75 Fensham has surveyed several opinions concerning the placement of Nehemiah 8-10. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra*, 215.

second Exodus.⁷⁶ Nehemiah 8 expresses the centrality of worship with Ezra as the scribe, with some Levites taking the lead to read God's words publicly. Here again, I am convinced that one must not exclude the public reading of Scripture during Sunday worship for any particular reason.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the scene of Nehemiah 8 shows that reading Scripture can be done with a group of readers.

After the completion of the Jerusalem's wall and its protection (Nehemiah 6:15-7:3), the covenant renewal ceremony plays a crucial role to seal what God has done and what he requires of the people. The timing also indicates the importance of the ceremony. Nehemiah 7:73b-8:1 records the seventh month as the timing when the people assembled to listen to the reading of the Torah. Fensham⁷⁸ and Myers⁷⁹ have commented that the seventh month is a rightful timing for the reading of the Torah, which is the centerpiece of the covenant. After the reading of the Torah (Neh 8:8), the people celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacle (Neh 8:13-18). The

76. As a summary, the impression of second Exodus and the concern of worship can be observed in this order: (a) Ezra 2:1-70, the first list of the returnees and Ezra 3:1-13 describes the concern of worship; (b) Ezra 7:28b-8:14, the second list of the returnees and Ezra 8:15-36 explains matters relating to worship; (c) Nehemiah 7 is the third list of the returnees which comprises of the families of the Judahites and Neh 7:73b-8:12 presents the public reading of Scripture before the congregation as a covenant renewal action of worship.

77. In the context of some Indonesian churches, there is a trend to substitute Bible reading with singing. Some churches have bought the idea that as long as the lyrics of the songs contains scriptural messages the public reading of Scripture is unnecessary.

78. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra*, 216.

79. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 153.

reading of the Torah and the Feast are the returnees' acts of worship. The list of the returnees in Nehemiah 7:6-73a is followed by the acts of worship consisting of the reading of the Torah (Neh 7:73b-8:8) and the Feast of the Tabernacle substantiates the theological impression of a second Exodus and the concern of worship. The book of the Law of Moses in Nehemiah 8:1 also provides another ground for recalling the exodus event, especially the giving of the Law at Sinai.

Nehemiah 8:1-12 describes a corporate worship scene where God's word takes center stage. Among many passages in the Old Testament,⁸⁰ Nehemiah 8 presents one of the clearest pictures of Scripture reading in the context of corporate worship. I agree with

80. The Old Testament passages on the nature of God's word and the practice to read it is a tapestry of theological conviction upon the power of God and covenantal commitment to read it aloud for every generations. The power of God's word to create, to separate, to make life, and to evaluate the whole created order is expressed in the narrative of Genesis. This power continues as God speaks to Moses and leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Ex. 24:7 presents the covenant ratification when Moses read the Book of the Covenant in front of the whole congregation and the people commit to do it corporately. Exodus 34:31-32 gives a similar picture as 24:7 after God graciously forgives the sinfulness of the Israelites. The whole book of Deuteronomy basically is Moses' speeches and re-reading of the Law for the new generation. Two important notes are the requirement to retell the redemptive story to the children (Deut. 4:9-10; 6:6-9, 20-25; 11:18-21) and the anticipation for the kingship main responsibility to copy, to read and to enforce God's covenant stipulations or words (Deut. 17:14-20). Deuteronomy 31:9-13 is Moses' command to read the law of God regularly in the context of family and community. Old Testament prophets have shown their conviction of the power of God's word through their messages. Isaiah (40:8, 55:10-11) and Jeremiah (23:29) have said the eternal value of God's word to fulfill his purpose and the inability to confine its power. The reading of God's word, in particular the Law, becomes the most important aspect of the Jewish Liturgy for every generation.

Fensham who describes the chapter as a careful description of the liturgical ritual of public worship in the postexilic time.⁸¹ The narrative of the public reading of the Law happens on the first day of the seventh month. The outline⁸² of the narrative is

- Setting: public gathering of the congregation (Neh 8:1a)
- Action: the congregation asks Ezra to bring the book of the Law (Neh 8:1b-3a)
 - The request from the congregation (Neh 8:1b)
 - Ezra brings the Law in front of the congregation (Neh 8:2)
 - Ezra reads the Law before the congregation (Neh 8:3a)
- Response: the congregation is attentive to the public reading (Neh 8:3b)

I understand and agree with Williamson that Nehemiah 8:1-3 is introductory, providing a summary statement⁸³ of what follows in Nehemiah 8:4-12.⁸⁴

- Setting: the description of Ezra and thirteen leaders standing on the wooden platform to do the public reading of the Law in front of the congregation (Neh 8:4-5a).
- Action: the congregation stands as Ezra opens the book of the Law (Neh 8:5b) and Ezra praises the Lord God (Neh 8:6a).
- Response: the congregation bows down to worship (Neh 8:6b).

81. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra*, 215.

82. Duggan, *The Covenant*, 81.

83. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 288.

84. Duggan, *The Covenant*, 82.

Nehemiah 8:7-8 records the explanation of the reading of the Law for the congregation, so that they can understand God's requirements for their life as God's covenant people.

The obvious point of the passage is that the public reading of Scripture must make sense to the listeners. When it makes sense, the people obey and execute what is read accordingly. I think the act of public reading of Scripture and the exposition of Scripture through preaching are inseparable. Preaching without the reading of Scripture becomes a mere motivational or morality talk without any mark of Christian distinctive. Scripture reading without an exposition is not complete because there is a need to understand its meaning for our time. The most important thing to understand about the public reading of Scripture is that it is the renewal of a covenant commitment. Thus, the attitude of the leaders or readers toward the Book of the Law as a substantial covenantal document⁸⁵ is a model for my Scripture reading team. Another important aspect of Nehemiah 8 that grounds my thesis is the presence of other leaders along with Ezra. The reading of God's word is not only the responsibility of pastors, but also of other Christian worship leaders. The establishment of a ministerial team for the public reading of Scripture is biblical and important.

85. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 288.

1 Timothy 4:13

We are commanded to read the Bible publicly⁸⁶ according to 1 Timothy 4:13. It is a direct command from Paul to Timothy who serves in the church of Ephesus. That is obviously the main reason I chose this verse as a foundational passage. The meaning of Paul's exhortation to Timothy for my thesis is that church leaders need to publicly read Scripture diligently. Although 1 Timothy 4:13 never tells readers how to read Scripture, a contextual understanding of Paul's exhortation will give us insight on how Timothy should read Scripture to strengthen the solid teaching of the church. I will explain the significance of this verse for my thesis by looking at the overall context of the letter.

Right from the beginning of the letter, Paul demonstrates his concern about the sound teaching of the faith and the increasing threat of false teachers. It is not possible to fully know specifically the kind of false teaching that was happening in the church at Ephesus. There were probably Jewish mythical stories that subtly developed into early Gnosticism⁸⁷ (1 Tim. 1:3-7). Perhaps, there were also some Jewish teachers who forced Christians to follow the requirement of the Law (1 Tim. 3:8-11). Paul testifies how the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ has changed him, a defender of the Law,

86. Arthurs, *Devote Yourself*, 15.

87. Gnosticism was a movement that claimed to provide a secret knowledge about God. In Gnostic teaching the material world was innately evil and thus its Creator a lesser deity. *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 2029.

into a servant of the King. Thus, Paul writes his letter to encourage Timothy to fight the good fight by standing firm on the right teaching grounded in Jesus Christ (I Tim. 3:18-19a). Furthermore, Paul gives Timothy some pastoral advice to focus on the worship life of the church by continually praying (through intercession and thanksgiving) for all (2:1-3, 8), pursuing the knowledge of the truth in Christ (2:4-7), fostering unity (2:8), and guarding the qualities of spiritual leadership (2:11-3:16). In 1 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul returns to his concern about false teaching that may cause some people to stumble. Within such a context, Paul exhorts the young Timothy to be a servant-leader who faithfully teaches the true faith, while consistently living a godly life and pursuing the ministry of public reading of Scripture,⁸⁸ preaching or exhortation, and teaching.

Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin have concluded that “Scripture” may have referred to the Old Testament and the rapidly growing collection of New Testament writings.⁸⁹ Reading Paul’s command in context, I think in his mind the public reading of

88. In the original, the word “Scripture” is not given. It is natural to understand “public reading” refers to “public reading of Scripture” because it is expressed together with “preaching and teaching”. In fact, I think it is not separated in Paul’s mind because these holy acts are critical for keeping the true faith grounded in Jesus Christ. Paul urges Timothy to be diligent in those matters and persevere (1 Tim. 4:15-16). Paul repeats a similar exhortation at the end of his letter, after giving some more practical pastoral advices to Timothy. 1 Timothy 6:12 echoes 1:18-19a, in which Paul presses Timothy “to fight the good fight of the faith”.

89. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr, *1, 2 Timothy Titus*, The New American Commentary, Volume 34 (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 138.

Scripture has a crucial role to guard against false teachers. Some of these teachers are actually in the leadership.⁹⁰ The reading of Scripture is also important to train God's people in godly living. Paul gives an imperative to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13,⁹¹ although this verse never tells us how to read Scripture.⁹² I believe it is not correct to assume that the reading is done in ways that some have suggested as "plain or neutral reading".⁹³ How else can the believers in Ephesus sense God's authority if the reading is not showing it? How else can believers come to the conviction of the power of Scripture in their personal life as God-breathed, profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16)? The fact that

90. R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 121.

91. "Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching."

92. In the ancient context, reading is always out loud. Johnnye Akin and Seth Fessenden have concluded that even the sole purpose of committing the Scriptures to writing was to preserve them so that later generations could read them aloud. I agree with their conclusion because the Bible is rightly taken as a storehouse of the Spoken Word in its original form. All of the Pauline Epistles are meant to be read aloud in the communal gathering, because these epistles are sermonic and exhortatory in essence. Johnnye Akin and Seth A. Fessenden, *Helping the Bible Speak: How To Read The Bible Aloud More Effectively* (New York: Association, 1956), 4-6.

93. Schmit argues and I agree, "there is no such thing as a 'neutral reading,' because reading aloud from the Scripture calls for oral interpretation." Robert Jacks affirms Schmit's argument, and even sharpens it by saying that "by reading Scripture in a flat voice [plain or neutral], a reader already engages in an oral interpretation." Clayton J. Schmit, *Public Reading of Scripture: A Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 40. G. Robert Jacks, *Getting the Word Across: Speech Communication for Pastors and Lay Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 25.

Paul never separates Timothy's godly living and his understanding of sound doctrine underscores the authority and relevance of God's word read through him. Thus, I conclude that reading Scripture without expression (in a neutral or plain manner) will only negatively highlight that the Bible is not relevant, without authority and boring. The implication is even greater for the younger generations. They will have no sense of reverence and awe for God's word because the reading of Scripture does not express its authority and show its sense in their minds.⁹⁴ Therefore, Paul's command to read Scripture publicly demands ways of reading Scripture that underscores the authoritative teaching of the Bible.

Thus, the purpose of public reading of Scripture is to read the Bible well, in such a way that Christians will have a stronger conviction of their faith. Reading the Bible well means that the team ministry will seriously consider meaningful and biblically responsible ways of communicating the word of God. Paul's exhortation to Timothy also underlines the inseparability of the public reading of Scripture and its exposition.⁹⁵ In fact, 1 Timothy 4:13 sets three activities on an equal footing: public reading of Scripture, exhortation

94. Thomas E. McComiskey, *Reading Scripture in Public: A Guide for Preachers and Lay Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 14-17.

95. I find that most seminaries focus on equipping God's servant on the art of preaching. The public reading of Scripture, however, is taken for granted. I spent three years doing the Master of Divinity program without any exposure on how to read Scripture according to its unique genre, for example.

and teaching. George W. Knight has compared the usage of those three terminologies with other passages in the New Testament, Acts 13:15 in particular. Knight concludes that the reading of the Old Testament aloud is done publicly and followed by a “word of exhortation”.⁹⁶ Thus, I maintain that the careful and proper reading of Scripture should precede the sermon.

Conclusion

From these biblical studies, I conclude that the enhancement of the public reading of Scripture is necessary because the reading of Scripture gets at the essence of being a covenant people of God. God’s presence throughout the covenant making process, with the public reading of the covenant stipulations at its core, is the center of the worship experience. In other words, the public reading of Scripture in Sunday worship cannot be replaced with any other practices. The public reading of Scripture does not belong exclusively to the clergy. Christians who love God and his word are welcomed to be part of this ministry. Thus, training how to read properly and creatively is necessary for the readers, so that the public reading of Scripture can be done in ways that produce commitment to obey God’s instructions. I trust that Scripture reading that is sensitive to the aesthetic nuances of the various biblical genres will heighten the people’s sense of God’s presence. In the end, the Spirit may use those

96. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 208.

readings to strengthen one's identity as a Christian and shape spirituality and godly conduct. Without the reading of Scripture as God's revelation, prior to the subsequent preaching, worship loses its center. Thus, the Scripture reading and its exposition are equally important. One cannot elevate Scripture reading to the detriment of preaching and vice versa.⁹⁷

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97. Chapell has noted that traditions valuing non-prescribed forms of worship tend to de-emphasize Scripture readings and traditions maintaining a high regard for ritual often organize worship around Scripture readings in liturgical forms while giving less attention to formal exposition of those texts. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2009), 225.

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