

## REVIVAL IN THE DAYS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

### **TEXT: NEHEMIAH 8:1-12**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. I preached last week about the revival that took place during the days of King Josiah. And I mentioned that Josiah was the last good king of Judah.
2. Following his death, the people of Judah drifted back into sin; and the judgment of God came just as they were warned it would (cf. II Chron. 34:21-25).
3. Soon the Babylonian army came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed, and the people were taken into seventy-years captivity.
4. After the seventy years were over, God graciously intervened and put it into the heart of the Persian king Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to their homeland.
5. Cyrus even helped them to rebuild the temple by providing building materials (Ezra 1:1-4; cf. II Chron. 36:22, 23).
6. This was predicted by the prophet Isaiah two hundred years earlier. "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isaiah 44:28).
7. This prophecy reminds us of I Kings 13:2, where King Josiah was mentioned by name three hundred years before his birth.
8. In the year 538 BC, a group of about 50,000 Jews left Babylon and returned to Jerusalem. It has been estimated that this represented only one out of six Jews living in Babylon.
9. They started working on the temple, but quickly grew discouraged and the work stopped.
10. Nothing much happened until 520 BC, when the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah started preaching. It was around this time that Zerubbabel, a great-grandson of King Josiah, was appointed governor.
11. Zechariah 4:6 says, "This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."
12. Then in 457 BC, about eighty years after the arrival of the first group, Ezra the scribe led another group back to Jerusalem.
13. Ezra the scribe was a great man of God and a good Bible teacher. He arrived in Jerusalem about thirteen years before Nehemiah.
14. The building work was very important, but Ezra's primary purpose in returning to Jerusalem was to teach the people the Word of God (Ezra 7:6-10). That is even more important!

15. “Ready scribe” (Ezra 7:6) means “diligent” (cf. Pro. 22:29); and skillful.

## 1. THE READING OF GOD’S WORD (NEHEMIAH 8:1-4)

1. The people were gathered together “and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses” (Neh. 8:1).
2. Notice they asked Ezra “to bring the book” (8:1). True revival comes when God’s people gather together around the Word of God.
3. When you have people who want to hear the Word of God taught, and there are men of God who wants to teach it, God will bless.
4. Notice there was a “congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding...” (8:2). This would include children who were old enough to understand.
5. The word “understand” is repeated throughout this chapter (8:2, 3, 7, 8, 12, 13). God wants us to understand the Word of God.
6. It is very important that people understand the Word of God (cf. 10:28b).
7. Philip heard the Ethiopian eunuch read the prophet Isaiah, and he said to him, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30).
8. And the eunuch said to Philip, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him (Acts 8:31).
9. Our Lord said in Matthew 13:23, “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”
10. Luke 24:45 says, “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”
11. Daniel 12:10 says, “None of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.”
12. It was the beginning of the civil new year, Rosh Hashanah (8:2b), referred to in the Bible as the Feast of Trumpets.
13. Ezra read the Word of God and preached “from the morning until midday” (Neh. 8:3). Every day, for over seven hours, the people stood and listened to the Word of God (Neh. 8:5-7).
14. That’s a long time listening to preaching. “And the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (8:3).
15. Acts 20:7 says that Paul preached on a Sunday night in Troas and “continued his speech until midnight.”

16. Over 100,000 people were converted in Wales during the great revival in 1904 and 1905. Churches were filled from 10 AM till after midnight every day for two years.
17. But today in America, people complain if the preacher goes on too long. Think about it – in Ezra’s day they were standing up, not sitting in padded pews or cushioned seats (8:5b).
18. This is the only mention of “pulpit” (8:4) in the Bible. It includes the platform. That’s the most important piece of furniture. The preaching of God’s Word is essential. If there is going to be revival it has to be based on God’s Word.
19. Some churches have pushed the pulpit off to the side, but it should be right in the middle. That’s how Ezra preached. He stood right in the middle of the platform, with six men on his right hand, and seven on his left (8:4).
20. I referred to the great Welsh revival. Back in 1904, Evan Roberts taught these four essential tenets of revival:
21. Is there any sin in your past that you have not confessed to God? On your knees at once. Your past must be put away and yourself cleansed.
22. Is there anything in your life that is doubtful? -- anything you cannot decide whether it is good or evil. Away with it! There must not be a cloud between you and God. Have you forgiven everybody, *everybody*, EVERYBODY? If not, don’t expect forgiveness for your own sins. You won’t get it.
23. Do what the Spirit prompts you to do. Obedience – prompt, implicit, unquestioning obedience to the Spirit.
24. A public confession of Christ as your Saviour. There is a vast difference between profession and confession.

## **2. THE RESPONSE OF GOD’S PEOPLE (NEHEMIAH 8:5-8)**

1. They all stood up out of respect for God’s Word (8:5). There were thousands of people there.
2. They worshipped the Lord (8:6). After “Ezra blessed the Lord” (praised the Lord), they answered “Amen, Amen.”
3. Notice it does not say they were “singing and swaying.” Let’s worship the Lord with reverence. A lot of church music these days sounds too much like the world’s music.

4. And lot of preaching these days sounds weak, worldly, and ineffective. Isaiah 56:10 says, “His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.”
5. The people understood the Word as it was being preached by Ezra, and they responded to the Word of God (8:5-8).
6. The Bible says, “They bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground” (8:6).
7. They understood the Word as it was being preached by Ezra (8:7, 8). “Giving the sense” and “causing the people to understand” means they explained God’s Word clearly (8:8).
8. God’s plan is to have the Bible preached, taught, explained, read, studied, distributed, and memorized as widely as possible. “The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalm 119:130).
9. If we hope to see revival here, it has to be based on the Bible. Parents, bring your children to Sunday School on time. Let them learn the Bible. Read the Bible with them at home.
10. Our Lord said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).
11. William Tyndale was a great man of God. He translated the Bible into English. Because of this, he was burnt at the stake by the RCC.
12. Tyndale was once involved in a dispute with a RC priest who was highly educated but knew nothing of the Bible. Tyndale said, “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou doest.”
13. Nehemiah chapter 8 describes how the people understood the Word of God (8:7), and how they wept over the Word of God (8:9), and how they rejoiced over the Word of God (8:10), and how they obeyed the Word of God (8:14, 17, 18).
14. When a Christian is revived, his whole mind (understanding) and emotions (weeping, rejoicing), and will (obeying) are in tune with God.

### **3. THE REVIVAL OF GOD’S PEOPLE (NEHEMIAH 8:9-12)**

1. They wept over their sin – there was genuine repentance (8:9b).
2. When was the last time you wept over sin? When was the last time you wept over lost sinners?

3. Many years ago, two Salvation Army officers set out to start a new work, but they found it extremely difficult. Faced with failure and opposition, frustrated and tired, they appealed to General Booth to close down the mission.
4. General Booth sent back a telegram with only two words on it, “TRY TEARS.” They followed his advice and they witnessed a great revival.
5. Luke 19:41 says that when Jesus beheld the city of Jerusalem, He wept over it.
6. Nehemiah wept in chapter 1.
7. The book of Nehemiah begins with some of Nehemiah’s brethren traveling from Jerusalem to Shushan, the capital city of Persia.
8. Nehemiah asked them about the situation in Jerusalem, and they told him that the Jews were in great affliction and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and the gates were destroyed by fire.
9. Nehemiah 1:4 says, “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.”
10. There must be genuine repentance and genuine conviction of sin. Preaching without repentance produces shallow results and big problems.
11. Worldly people complain when a preacher preaches hard against sin, but those who love God know that we must (cf. Isa. 58:1; II Tim. 4:1-5).
12. Evangelist Sam Jones was often criticized for his strong preaching. In one revival, the local pastors felt that Sam Jones was too negative in his preaching, so they gathered for a prayer meeting one afternoon to pray for him. Jones, riding by the tabernacle, was overjoyed to see a group of ministers conducting a prayer meeting, so he slipped in quietly to join them.
13. He heard their prayers about him... “Help him to have more tact, change his mannerisms,” etc. Then it was his turn to pray: “Lord, I hope you won’t listen to a one of these preachers. They don’t preach against sin. They don’t visit from door to door. They don’t weep over sinners, and they don’t win souls. And they want You to change me until I’m just like them. Oh Lord, help these preachers to have enough sense to realize that if You were to answer their prayers, I would be just as worthless and no-account as they are. I’d be too lazy to work too. I’d be afraid to fight sin and too cold to cry over sinners and too indifferent to win souls. Please God, don’t make me like any of these fellows.”
14. If we had more preaching against sin, churches would be stronger. And cleaner, and purer, and more evangelistic, and more holy.

## CONCLUSION:

1. There are twelve gates mentioned in the book of Nehemiah. Interestingly, Revelation 21:12 say that there are twelve gates in the New Jerusalem.
2. Nehemiah 8:1 and 8:3 says that all the people gathered to the street “that was before the water gate.”
3. In the Bible, water represents cleansing, specifically cleansing by the Word of God. Ephesians 5:26 says, “That he (Christ) might sanctify and cleanse it (the church) with the washing of water by the word.”
4. And in the Bible, water is a common type of the Holy Spirit. Without water this old world would be a parched and desolate wasteland.
5. Isaiah 44:3 says, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.”
6. Oftentimes, God promises to “pour out” His Spirit like water.
7. Acts 2:17 (referring to Joel’s prophecy) says, “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”
8. Acts 10:45 says, “On the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
9. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to cleanse us. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”
10. Our Lord said to the woman at the well, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John4:14).
11. The worldly pleasures of this life soon fade and run out, but the Spirit of the living God is a spring of life and joy that will never end (John 7:37-39).
12. *Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;  
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. – Daniel Iverson*
13. John 7:37 says, “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive)” (John 7:37-39).
14. When we read God’s Word, and believe God’s Word, and obey God’s Word, the Holy Spirit fills us, and leads us.