

Revival, Renewal and Blessing

Nehemiah 8:1-6

Nehemiah 8:1-6 - *"Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ³ Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.*

⁴ So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

Background Notes

The book of Nehemiah is the account of the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. After the Jewish people had spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon, they were allowed to return to Jerusalem. They rebuilt the Temple, completing it in 516BC, but the city wall remained in ruins until God stirred up the heart of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the Persian king. When he got word about the state of the city walls, he was very distressed and concerned that the city of God's Temple was weak and not well defended. So he traveled to Jerusalem from the capital of the Persian Empire, in about 445BC. When he arrived, he motivated the people to rebuild the wall. In spite of the hard work and opposition from enemies, Nehemiah 6:15 says that they completed the rebuilding of the wall in only 52 days - a tremendous accomplishment!

The Water Gate (v1) has nothing to do with the American political scandal of the early 1970s! This was one of the gates in the city wall of Jerusalem.

The "Ezra the scribe" who is mentioned in this chapter was the same Ezra who wrote the book of Ezra. He had returned to Jerusalem about 13 years prior to Nehemiah's return. He was a great leader, and he did a lot to turn the hearts of the

people in the right direction. In fact, Ezra's ministry probably laid the groundwork for the good response of the people when Nehemiah returned and challenged them to rebuild the wall.

After the wall was completed, great blessing and revival continued. Nehemiah 8 tells us that this blessing and revival was centered about the Word of God.

Doctrinal Points

Any renewal or revival of God's people will be centered on the Bible.

In Nehemiah's day, the blessing and revival occurred because the people paid attention to and had great appreciation for the Word of God. Notice four things that show that the people's great appreciation for God's Word.

- The people requested that the Bible be brought and read (v1).

The people were united in this request. They asked Ezra to bring the "Book of the Law of Moses" - that's Scripture.

The people were not forced to hear the Word – they wanted to hear it! I hope you're not forced to hear the word of God! I hope you go to church by your own choice. That's an indication of appreciation for the Word of God.

Notice that the people didn't ask Ezra to give a sermon on a topic, like "The Political Situation Between Jerusalem and Babylon," or another topic unrelated to Scripture. No! They wanted to hear the Word of God!

No wonder there was revival. They asked for the Word of God to be brought and read.

- The people listened from daybreak until noon (v3).

I would say that time period was at least six o'clock in the morning until noon! That shows a great appreciation for the Word of God. This was no half hour sermon, spiced up with some great stories or illustrations! This was straight reading of the Scripture, and explanation to follow. A strong indication that they appreciated the Word of God!

- The people were attentive (v3).

The people weren't just listening to the Word of God. *"They were attentive to the Book of the Law" (v3).*

They weren't dozing off in church, or daydreaming about the movie they had seen the night before. They weren't planning what they were going to do that afternoon. They were **attentive** to the Word of God!

No wonder there is revival and renewal and blessing. The people appreciated and paid close attention to the Word of God.

- They stood up (v5).

Verse 5: "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up."

The people stood up when God's Word was brought out! And it's possible that they remained standing. Verse 7 seems to indicate that they remained in their place. They may have stood for six hours, from early morning until noon.

In our day, some people have a hard time just sitting for a half hour sermon. The attitude of the people in Nehemiah's day shows a real appreciation for the Word of God. They requested the Word of God, they were attentive to it, they listened intently to it – and they stood out of respect for the reading of the Word. Do we have the same kind of appreciation for the reading and explanation of Word of God?

Several years ago my wife and I were traveling, and were in an unfamiliar town on Sunday. We attended the only church in the small town. As the service began, the Bible was carried in a formal procession from the back of the church, and placed on the lectern - and as the Bible was brought in, everyone stood up! This was symbolic, but it was a great symbol! This action showed great respect and honor for the Word of God.

No wonder there was revival and blessing in Nehemiah and Ezra's day. We need to have that kind of great appreciation and honor for the Word of God.

Practical Application

If you want revival in your Christian life, you must appreciate the Word of God.

It's a dangerous signal if your concentration and focus is on spiritual experiences and feelings and spiritual highs more than an appreciation for the Bible. There's got to be a desire for knowing and obeying the Word of God. Now I'm not saying that God won't sometimes provide spiritual highs and spiritual experiences, but if you really want revival and renewal and blessing in your soul as a Christian, your life has to be centered about the Word of God.

Do you read the Bible each day? Do you set aside a time for Bible study? Do we have a time for actually reading Scripture each day - or do we just kind of skim through a devotional reading? Are there those days when we're so busy that we never get around to any reading of the Word - even though we vaguely think we have, because we've been taught that we ought to have a "quiet time"?

A few years ago a Christian man said to me that he was no longer reading the Bible each day because he felt that he knew the Bible well enough. It's interesting to see where that Christian man is today. He's far from being blessed, or having renewal and revival in his life as a believer.

We could extend this practical application to the family. As families, we need to have an appreciation of the Bible. How is that seen in the family? Do you read the Word with your children? Do you have a family devotional time? Is it an indication of the lack of appreciation of the Word of God if you only have Bible reading some of the time?

I would speak to fathers here. You need to pick a regular time each day when the family is together. The best suggestion is a mealtime when the family is together. Yes, families are busy, but the devotional time doesn't have to be long! If you have young children, you can read a Bible story book to help explain the Word, so they can understand it. But you need to have a family time in the Bible if you want to have revival, renewal, and blessing in your life, and in the life of your family. Many of us need to work a little harder at this.

We could even extend this practical application to the local church. If you want to have revival, renewal, and blessing in your church, you've got to have a focus, attention and appreciation of the Word of God. That is essential to having revival, renewal, and blessing – in your own life, in the life of your family, and in the life of the church.

In Nehemiah's day, focus on the Word of God was the basic reason for the renewal, the revival and the blessing that continued after the wall was built. There was a great appreciation of and attention to the Word of God.

If you want revival in your life as a Christian, there must be an appreciation of the Bible!