

Preparation for Revival

By Matthew S. Black, Pastor

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Series: Nehemiah

Tabernacle Baptist Church

7020 Barrington Road

Hanover Park, Illinois 60133

Website: www.GodCentered.info

Introduction: Open your Bible to the book of **Nehemiah 8**.

After the counting and the assigning of duties, the people gave what they had. There was great sacrifice.

"I am profoundly convinced that the greatest need in the world today is revival in the church of God." – Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

In Nehemiah 8-10, we have one of the ten times in the Bible that God grants a revival to a group of people. This week, we are going to look at Nehemiah 8 and look at the Preparation for Revival. Next week we will look at the Evidences of Revival.

I. **What** is meant by the term "revival"?

A. Wrong conceptions.

1. Perhaps you think of a week long meeting in which a person will open the Word of God.
2. Perhaps you think of a tent where there is a "city wide crusade".

B. Correct understanding.

1. The term "revival" appears in the Scriptures some 30 times.
2. Sometimes it is used of people who were near death and they've been physically brought back to life. They've been "revived".
3. Most of the time, the word "revival" has a spiritually oriented meaning when a spiritually apathetic, spiritually lazy, complacent person is by the power of God aroused out of their apathy and complacency and slumber and is set aflame for God in renewed spiritual fervor.
4. It really is the "normal" Christian life of Spirit-filling.

God gave Isaiah a message about revival in **Isaiah 57:15**, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Revival is when proud people are brought lower than they've ever been before and see God higher and holier than they've ever realized before. They see the greatness of God and the grace of God!

Understand that revival is not a mere feeling or a working up of the emotions for God, but it is a true piety and reverence and trembling before God. It is a deep joy in God where you are ready and willing to forsake everything as long as you can have God.

Who here has lost their first love? We were created to know God, and it is in knowing God that our joy is full. It is in seeing Him that we are satisfied with God Himself. Piper says it well: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him".

Are you satisfied in God? Would you like to know the pathway to revival?

II. **Where** do revivals come from?

William Sprague, whose life spanned the time of the Second Great Awakening when hundreds of churches were awakened tells us where revivals come from:

"In every revival we are distinctly to recognize the sovereignty of God. As this is displayed in the influence by which a single soul is converted, it certainly is not less manifest in those copious showers of influence by which hundreds are converted. He who causes it to rain on one city and not on another, directs the motion of those clouds in the spiritual world from which descend the blessings of reviving and quickening grace. "The wind bloweth, where it listeth; and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit."¹

So revival is a sovereign, supernatural work of God. And this has significant bearing on how we should seek it. Evan Roberts mentions four things we should do as prelude to the outpouring of God's Spirit in revival.

As we seek to love only God, He will give us the desire of our heart.

The Psalms are filled with revival prayers.

- **Psalm 37:4**, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."
- **Psalm 73:25**, "Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*"
- **Psalm 17:15**, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."
- **Psalm 63:3**, "thy lovingkindness *is better than life,* my lips shall praise thee".

Do you want God more than you want all the things in this world. You can have Him. What is your heart cry? What do you hope to accomplish in life. My heart cry is give me Jesus!

Give Me Jesus

When I come to die
When I come to die
When I come to die
When I come to die Give me Jesus

Give me Jesus
Give me Jesus
You can have all this world, but give me Jesus

¹ William Sprague. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Daniel Appleton & Co., 1832), 105.

III. What should we do to **prepare** for revival? I think we find similar truths in Nehemiah 8-9. Let's look at Nehemiah 8.

A. To prepare for revival, we must **understand** the Word (**8:1-8**)

The Bible is not a "magic book" that changes people or circumstances because somebody reads it or recites it. *God's Word must be understood before it can enter the heart and release its life-changing power.*

1. **Scripture.**

Verse 2, "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could **hear with understanding**".

Verse 3, "And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law".

Verse 7 says the leaders and the Levites "caused the people to **understand** the law".

Verse 8, "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and **caused them to understand the reading**."

Verse 12 says, "they had understood the words that were declared unto them."

Verse 13 says after so many hours of reading the Word, they kept coming: "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". They wanted more!

I'll say it again: *God's Word must be understood before it can enter the heart and release its life-changing power.*

2. **Application:** Are you taking the Word of God to heart? If so, it will always bear fruit. In our Lord's "Parable of the Sower" (Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23), the emphasis is on understanding the Word of God. Jesus compared **understanding and receiving the Word to the planting of seed in the soil**, where it takes root and bears fruit.²

3. **What did Ezra do to prepare explain the Word?**

(1.) *Ezra **brought** the Book (8:1-4). Verse 1b*, "They spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel."

The people had no Scriptures. The common people didn't own copies of the Scriptures, so they were thrilled to hear the Word of God.

²Warren Wiersbe. *Be Determined*. (Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, 1996), 8:1.

Torah. This was the entire scroll of the Torah, the five Books of Moses, the very foundation of the Jewish religion and civil law. It isn't likely that Ezra read and explained all five Books of Moses in that short a time. Perhaps he concentrated on explaining Deuteronomy and referred to the other books as he had need.

The timing. Ezra opened the Bible on "the first day of the seventh month" (**verse 2**), which was the Jewish equivalent of our ***New Year's Day***. This would have occurred between September 8th and October 1st depending on the year. The seventh month was a ***special time*** in the Jewish calendar because the Jews celebrated the ***Feast of Trumpets*** (for repentance) on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, and the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth day to the twenty-first day (**Leviticus 23:23–44**). It was the perfect time for the nation to get right with the Lord and make a fresh new beginning.

Ezra took his time. He was diligent. **Verse 3** says, he read the entire Pentateuch "from the morning until midday". That's five or six hours, and they did this according to **verse 18** for one week.

Verse 4a, "Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose"—He would have been situated above the people so they could see and hear him better.

- (2.) *Ezra **opened** the Book (8:5–6).* The people honored the Word of God. **Verse 5**, "Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people...and when he opened it, all the people stood up". When Ezra lifted the scroll and unrolled it to the passage he would read, the people who were seated honored the Word of God by standing up.

After he opened the Word, "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God" (**verse 6**). The people affirmed his words by saying "Amen, Amen", which means "So be it!" They were hungry for the Scriptures and were willing to devote half of their day to hearing it read and taught.

Illustration: We ought not to be in too big a hurry to have the meeting end. In some parts of the world, believers stand for hours in crowded churches to hear Bible teaching. In the average Western evangelical church, the shorter the sermon, the better we like it. Revival will not come when there is no hunger for God's Word.

Application: To many people, their Bible is a road map. It is underlined and cared for. It tells the story of spiritual growth. To others, the Bible is not a road map, but more like road kill—it's left behind and forgotten on the auditorium floor, or used as portable filing cabinets for miscellaneous papers, or even left behind in church building where it is forgotten and donated to someone who will read it.

- (3.) *He **read** and **explained** the Book (8:7–8).* **Verse 8**, "So they read in the book in the law of God **distinctly**, and gave the sense, and **caused them to understand the reading.**"

The word "**distinctly**" in **verse 8** means that the Law was explained to the people in a language they could understand. The Word was translated and expounded in such a way that the people were able to apply it to their own lives. The Hebrew language would have undergone some changes since the days when Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and the everyday conversational Hebrew of the people would be different in some ways from ancient Hebrew.

We need new translations of the Bible, not because the Bible changes, but because our language changes.

We have already undergone new translations of the English Bible before the King James Bible. Suppose you had to use John Wycliffe's Version of the Bible, the oldest version in English. How much of this passage would you understand *if you did not already know it from another version?*

Matthew 11:28 in Wycliffe's version "alle ye that traueilen & ben chargid come to me & I schal fulfillle you. take ye my yok on you & lerne ye of me for I am mylde and meke in herte: and ye schulen finde rest to youre soulis/ for my yok is softe & my charge liyt."

Wycliffe's translation goes back about 600 years (1382); but between Moses' writing of the Law and Ezra's reading of the Law, a thousand years had elapsed!

In **verse 7**, we find the Levites assisting Ezra in teaching the Law. They acted as counselors and probably mingled with the people. It is quite likely that when there was a break in the reading, they answered questions and told them how to apply the Law to their own lives.

Application: You need to read a translation of the Bible you can understand. I've had various people tell me how they were struggling—they didn't have all the study tools that some others have. I recommended they read a conservative modern translation like the ESV, and they began to find satisfaction in the Word. It does us no good to read the Word of God if we do not understand it.

It also does us no good if we do not apply it. We need to understand the Word not for our intellects, but for our heart! We need to apply the Word of God!

To prepare for revival we must UNDERSTAND the Word of God.

- B. Secondly, to prepare for revival, we must **rejoice** in the Word (**8:9-12**). **Verse 10**, Ezra says, "This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law." Now this response takes place after the Day of Atonement when they have already been forgiven.

Imagine the scene with me. As Ezra reads and explains the Word, the assembly's first response is one of deep conviction and grief. They mourn over their sins, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (**Romans 3:20**). The law can't save us; it can only convince us that we need to be saved and then point us to Jesus Christ the Savior (**Galatians 3:24**, "the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ").

Yet Ezra told them not to mourn. He said it was a time of celebration, a time to rejoice in God's holiness and forgiveness.

Explanation: Three feasts being talked about here in this passage. The Feast of Trumpets for repentance, the Day of Atonement for cleansing and forgiveness, and then the Feast of Tabernacles for celebration! They had culminated the reading with the Day of Atonement, and the Lord had dealt with their sins (**Leviticus 16**); so they should have been rejoicing in His forgiveness during the Feast of Tabernacles, giving God's people an entire week of happy celebration (Leviticus 23:26–44).

The sequence is important: first conviction, then cleansing, and then celebration.³ ***It is as wrong to mourn when God has forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us.***

The Word of God brings conviction and leads to repentance, but it also brings us joy; for the same Word that wounds also heals.

- "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16).
- "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:8).
- Job said in **Job 23:12**, "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."

Look at **verses 10-12**, it is an amazing sight: "Then he [NEHEMIAH] said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: **for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.** 11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day *is* holy; neither be ye grieved. 12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them."

Application: The ultimate power of Christ in your life is not your sorrow, but your joy in Christ. We must have repentance, but the goal of the Lord is not that you would remain sorry, but that your "joy would be full".

John wrote the entire book of 1 John to tell us how we can know we are saved. Why did he write it? Look at **1 John 1:4**, "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

Assisted by the Levites, Nehemiah convinced the people to stop **mourning** and start **celebrating**. There is a time for mourning, but if you have come to Christ, then leave your sins on the Cross, and don't try to pay for them again! I'll say it again, *It is as wrong to mourn when God has forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us.*

The message of Nehemiah and the Day of Atonement is found in **John 3:17**, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved".

³Ibid.

Isaiah 45:21-23 tells us this same message, "Tell ye, and bring *them* near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? *who* hath told it from that time? *have* not I the LORD? and *there is* no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; *there is* none beside me. 22 **Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else.** 23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

The purpose of God's book to us is to warn us so that He can save us! He is a merciful God. Turn to Him, and be saved!

C. Thirdly, to prepare for revival, we must **obey** the Word (8:13-18).

The people not only had joy in hearing the Word, but they also had "*great gladness*" in obeying it (**verse 17**). We must be a doer of the Word, not a hearer only. The old Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote, "Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience."

James 1:22-25, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

Jesus told the Samaritan woman in **John 4:23-24**, "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. 24 God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth."

As Christians, we don't just know the Word of God, we love the Word of God. It is like a love letter that reveals our the one we love. Jesus tells us this God is calling worshippers who will worship God in Spirit and in truth. Christians are people who are addicted to the Word of God. They worship God when they hear truth.

Evan Roberts was the son of a coal miner from the small village of Loughor on the south coast of Wales. Evan Roberts did not possess a extraordinary intellect or eloquent speech, but simply a **burning passion** for Jesus. After ten years of praying, he was in a young people's meeting at 7pm with Seth Joshua, an evangelist, who asked that God would bend all of them there. That phrase pierced him. He began praying as Seth Joshua preached. He began to pray that God would bend him. At the nine o'clock meeting Evan Roberts with tears streaming down his face prayed publically, "Bend me! Bend me! Bend us O LORD!"

Roberts commented on these words in his journal. He wrote: "*What bent me was God commending his love, and I not seeing anything in it to commend. After I was bent a wave of peace came over me...the salvation of souls became the burden of my heart. From that time I was on fire with a desire to go through Wales...*"

And go he did. It was announced after the adult prayer meeting, that there would be another service, and Evan Roberts would preach. Sixteen adults and one little girl stayed. No one responded. This was a test for Roberts. It did not stop him.

The next night he held another meeting nearby, and the crowd began increasing. He then spoke every night to increasing crowds. By the weekend the church was packed and invitations came for him to speak in many other churches. Newspapers began describing the crowded meetings. Three months later, by January 1905 the papers had reported 70,000 converted to Christ in less than three months.

The people's lives were transformed. Taverns shut down and were closed after that for decades! The Spirit of God convicted people as each night Evan Roberts insisted on four simple Biblical principles.

- Confess all known sin
- Doing away with anything doubtful in our lives
- Be ready to obey the Holy Spirit instantly
- Confess Christ publicly

The Spirit of God convicted people as each night Evan Roberts insisted on four simple Biblical principles.

1. You must put away any and all unconfessed sin.
 - a. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (**Psalm 66:18**).
 - b. "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (**2 Timothy 2:19**).
2. You must put away any doubtful habit.
 - a. "he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (**Romans 14:23**).
3. You must be ready to obey the Spirit promptly.
 - a. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (**Romans 8:14**).
 - b. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (**John 10:27**).
4. You must confess Christ publicly.
 - a. **Matthew 10:32-33**, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. 33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven".

Conclusion: Next week we are going to look at the question....

- IV. What are the **evidences** of true revival?
- A. We see the greatness of God (9:1-6)
 - B. We see the goodness of God (9:7-30)
 - C. We see the grace of God (9:31-38)

For tonight, remember the words of 67 Brethren We have Met to Worship...

Brethren, we have met to worship,
And adore the Lord our God;
Will you pray with all your power,
While we try to preach the word.
All is vain, unless the Spirit

Of the Holy One come down;
Brethren, pray, and holy manna
Will be showered all around.