

The Law Brings Revival

Lesson Scope: [Nehemiah Chapters 7 to 12](#)

Lesson Focus

Nehemiah was a leader similar to Joshua, David, Josiah, and others who led God's people to a revival of obedience to His Law. Practices that had died out many years before were revived, such as constructing and sitting under booths during the Feast of Tabernacles, which had not been done in this way since the time of Joshua (Ezra 3:4; Nehemiah 8:17).

At this time of renewal, the people reflected on what had been lost and on what could have been lost. Years earlier, those who remembered the first temple had wept when the foundation of the new temple was laid. Now the reading of the Law produced weeping because of disobedience and the consequences it had brought.

This was a new beginning for the Jews at Jerusalem. They were united in their cause and gathered together "as one man."

God has promised, "My word ... shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). God works to awaken men from their spiritual slumber and to draw them to Himself.

In every true revival of past generations, there was a renewed interest in the question "What saith the scripture?" Conversely, every era of spiritual decline included a growing disregard for the "word of the LORD." Obviously our regard for the Word of God determines our course of travel and our spiritual vitality.

Conservative Biblical churches continue to face strong pietistic pressures. We must beware the emphasis on spiritual renewal and greater spiritual vitality that at the same time seeks to exalt personal rather than group interpretation and disdains tried and proven traditions. Nehemiah led Israel in an extensive revival within the bounds of Israel's spiritual heritage, and we can continue to prosper spiritually in the context of our Biblical heritage.

Lesson Aim: To present principles for experiencing spiritual revival.

Theme Verse: Hebrews 4:12. For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Lesson Text

God's Law Is Obeyed

Nehemiah 8:1-14 ¹ And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that *was* before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. ² And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 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. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people *stood* in their place. ⁸ So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading. ⁹ And Nehemiah, which *is* the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, 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. ¹⁰ Then he 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:

God's Law Is Read

Nehemiah 8:17 ¹⁷ And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.

Nehemiah 9:1-3 ¹ Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. ² And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. ³ And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God *one* fourth part of the day; and *another* fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

Nehemiah 10:28-32 ²⁸ And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; ²⁹ They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes; ³⁰ And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons: ³¹ And *if* the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, *that* we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and *that* we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt. ³² Also we made

ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;

Nehemiah 10:34 ³⁴ And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring *it* into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as *it is* written in the law: **Nehemiah 10:39** ³⁹ For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where *are* the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

Questions for Study

God's Law Is Read

1. Why was it important that explanation followed the reading of the Scriptures (Nehemiah 8:8)?
2. What is it about collective worship that encourages a right response?
3. How can a person measure his own spiritual appetite?
4. What areas of lost ground were recovered in the revival of our past generation?

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5. What practical lines of separation did the Jews establish by their oath (Nehemiah 10:29)?
6. How might Scriptural separation be considered an act of worship?
7. How might a church isolate itself from the world, yet lack spiritual power?
8. How can we keep God's work central in our lives?

Analyzing the Passage

Chapter 7 reports that the wall was finished and that a city mayor, an administrator, and a city watch were appointed. The families living in the area were reckoned, and a city treasury was established (Nehemiah 7:70-72).

Chapters 8-10 chronicle the revival of collective worship in Jerusalem, beginning with Ezra's reading the Law and the keeping of the feast of the seventh month, which was a great convocation. Chapter 9 tells of a special feature of this revival; they drafted and ratified a covenant based

on the Law for the remnant group (Nehemiah 9:7-8). The signers of this covenant, who are listed in chapter 10, likely were the fathers and the chief of the people. but all the people pledged their support. The main points of the covenant are listed in Nehemiah 10:29-39.

Chapter 11 reports the appointment of the people to their stations in the city of Jerusalem. One in ten of the inhabitants was chosen by lot to dwell in the holy city. The workers in the house of God are listed, as well as the chiefs of the provinces, the Levitical courses, and the keepers of the gates.

Chapter 12 lists the priests initially involved with Zerubbabel and the lineage of the priests and the Levites. Finally, the wall was dedicated. Two companies upon the wall marched in opposite directions around the city and met on the other side. All the while, they were singing and giving God thanks "so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off" (Nehemiah 12:43).

Principles and Applications

God's Law Is Read

1. Recognizing our spiritual need is essential for revival (Nehemiah 8:1). It is the first step in finding the answer to our need, which is given for us in God's Word. We must attentively open our hearts to God before His Word will penetrate. United collective worship encourages this response.
2. Scriptural understanding is foundational to true revival (Nehemiah 8:8-10). Note that the thought of understanding is mentioned six times in this chapter. In order to experience the life-changing power of the Word, the needy soul must not only hear the words but also understand their message.
3. An increasing spiritual appetite marks revival at work in the heart (Nehemiah 8:13). God's people love His Word. They search its pages eagerly to learn more about Him and about His will for them. They exclaim with the psalmist, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). revival must surely produce such spiritual hunger, and the well-fed spiritual man most certainly will continue in the spirit of revival.
4. Spiritual revival is marked by an effort to recover lost ground (Nehemiah 8:14, 17-18). Sincere obedience goes deeper than the appear-

ance of obedience. It desires to do all of God's will. Many revival efforts have lost their strength because those involved were unwilling to return to full Bible obedience. Although many today resist the idea of complete and detailed obedience, it is the only way to have settled assurance and joy.

God's Law Is Obeyed

5. Repentance and revival must issue into separation from sin (Nehemiah 9:1-2). Separating ourselves from that which displeases God is an act of true worship. Disobedience to God's will is, in reality, idolatry. Conversely, true devotion results in becoming like our God in true holiness.

6. Spiritual revival calls for a commitment that embraces a covenant relationship with God and His people (Nehemiah 10:28-29). Separation from evil without drawing near to God is merely isolation without spiritual power. True separation from the world must also include uniting with God's people, or it will be independent isolation without spiritual fellowship and submission.

7. True revival is marked by active concern for the rising generation (Nehemiah 10:30). The purpose of the covenant was not only to separate God's people from the people of the land but also to ensure that they would remain so. The solemn pledge was to make a visible standard that could not be violated without a choice to disobey.

8. A spiritual revival involves drawing practical lines for daily life and business practices (Nehemiah 10:31). Sometimes we draw lines as a matter of precaution. And sometimes we need to back up to a safer stand because regrettably, we have been caught in an unsound or unsafe practice. But that is the blessing of revival. Some areas requiring a safer stand include, for some of us, teenage cell-phone use, cell phones being taken to church, fascination with and pleasure-oriented use of computers, and casual dress that does not complement our Mennonite heritage. We must continue to hold safe lines regarding Lord's Day activities, unequal yokes in business, and many areas of nonconformity.

9. A sacrificial lifestyle characterizes those who have experienced spiritual revival (Nehemiah 10:34). It involves a voluntary, willing support of the church and its ministries. We ought to exercise the faith required to give even when we have needs ourselves.

10. Those who have experienced spiritual revival view God's work as central in their lives (Nehemiah 10:39). Worship should be at the heart

of this. It is beautifully illustrated in the erection of an altar where a fire was continually burning (Nehemiah 10:33).

Important Teachings

1. Recognizing our spiritual need is essential for revival (Nehemiah 8:1).
2. Scriptural understanding is foundational to true revival (Nehemiah 8:8-10).
3. An increasing spiritual appetite marks revival at work in the heart (Nehemiah 8:13).
4. Spiritual revival is marked by an effort to recover lost ground (Nehemiah 8:14, 17-18).
5. Repentance and revival must issue into separation from sin (Nehemiah 9:1-2).
6. Spiritual revival calls for a commitment that embraces a covenant relationship with God and His people (Nehemiah 10:28, 29).
7. True revival is marked by active concern for the rising generation (Nehemiah 10:30).
8. A spiritual revival involves drawing practical lines for daily life and business practices (Nehemiah 10:31).
9. A sacrificial lifestyle identifies those who have experienced spiritual revival (Nehemiah 10:34).
10. Those who have experienced spiritual revival view God's work as central in their lives (Nehemiah 10:39).

Answers to Questions

1. Why was it important that explanation followed the reading of the Scriptures (Nehemiah 8:8)?

In the parable of the sower when the Word was not understood, Satan seized the opportunity to take it away. Unless it is understood, the Word certainly will not penetrate and change the heart.

2. What is it about collective worship that encourages a right response? Personal study of the Word serves a vital place for the child of God. Collective worship has the added dimension of together hearing, together understanding, and together applying the message of the Word. Collective worship increases our sense of accountability.

3. How can a person measure his own spiritual appetite?

Eagerness to hear God's Word includes being reverent and alert during worship, whether private or public. The conclusive proof of one's spiritual appetite is how he applies the message.

4. What areas of lost ground were recovered in the revival of our past generation?

These areas include practical nonconformity, brotherhood assistance and deacon work, wholesome youth activities, and the conviction against the use of radio and television.

5. What practical lines of separation did the Jews establish by their oath (1 Nehemiah 0:29)?

The Jews promised to keep all the commandments of the Lord. They promised not to allow intermarriage with the heathen. They took active measures to keep the Sabbath Day holy. They promised to keep God's directives for the Sabbatical year.

6. How might Scriptural separation be considered an act of worship? Scriptural separation places God first, ahead of all other associations. No social tie or business relationship may hinder our obedience to the will of God.

7. How might a church isolate itself from the world, yet lack spiritual power?

Separation can be visible externally without there being a heart change. It is possible to shun the entertainment of the world without crucifying our carnal will and desires.

8. How can we keep God's work central in our lives?

Just as God's people kept the altar of sacrifice continually burning, so we must keep the flame of love, sacrifice, and devotion burning.

Summarizing the Lesson

God's people had utterly failed in spite of the work of faithful kings, prophets, and priests to guide them. Now the reading of the Law brought them face-to-face with the fixed message of the written Word. The Law and the faithful ministry of the teaching priest were the remaining elements of their former national and religious life. We, as they did, must choose whether we will allow God to work fully in our lives.

Research Guide

1. Compare the revival of Nehemiah's time with the revival of Josiah's

time.

2. Research the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jewish history.