

Let's Have Bible Revival

Text: Nehemiah 8:1-18

Introduction:

1. Nehemiah 1-7 (Rebuilding the Walls); 8-13 (Reviving the People).
2. Illustration: Imagine if preacher started sermon at 10:30am on Sunday morning and didn't finish until 4:30pm in the afternoon.
3. Chapter 8-10 document a period of spiritual revival in the nation of Israel.
4. Word of God is a central element in true spiritual revival – e.g., Discovery of the Book in Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22:8); Reformation period; Revivals of 18th century.
5. We will note 6 aspects of this back to the Bible movement in the chapter:

I. The Request for the Book (Vs. 1-2)

A. Their Assembling for the Word (Vs. 1)

1. The location: Water Gate
 - a. Water a symbol of the Word (Eph. 5:26; John 15:3). The water gate speaks of the cleansing, refreshing, reviving power of the Word of God. (Ironsides)
 - b. Water a symbol of the Spirit (John 7:38-39).
 - c. Note: The only gate where nothing is recorded about it having been built or repaired. Speaks of the perfectness and indestructibility of the Word of God.
2. The unity: As one man
 1. Note the phrase "all the people" reoccurring throughout the chapter (Vs. 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, & 13) (8 times).
 2. They were in "one accord and one place". This desire for the Word of God was a desire shared by the whole congregation.
 3. Psalm 133:1 "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

B. Their Appetite for the Word (Vs. 1-3)

1. The Thirst in the people (Vs. 1)
 - a. Request for the reading of the law came from the people.
 - b. Bring the Book! When you get up in the morning; bring the Book; when you go to bed at night, bring the Book; when you gather for family meal time, bring the Book; when your on break at work, bring the Book; when your driving in the car, bring the Book; when you come to church, bring the Book; read the Book; meditate on the Book; memorize the Book; study the Book; saturate your life in the Book; Bring the Book!
 - c. Butler: "The dearth in our churches of good pulpit ministries is not only the fault of deficient pastors but also the fault of

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congregations that have not been interested in the Word and are now getting their wish which is a form of judgment from God.”

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.” (Amos 8:11)

2. The Teacher for the people (Vs. 2)
 - a. Ezra had arrived about 14 years prior to Nehemiah.
 - b. Ezra 7 describes the spiritual credentials of this man – “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” (Vs. 10)
 - c. N.T. pastors & teachers are God’s gift to the body (Eph. 4:11-12).

II. The Receptivity to the Word (Vs. 3)

A. The Amount of Teaching (Vs. 3a)

1. Started early in the morning (lit. “from the light”) and finished at midday. Approx. 6 hours! Rebuke to short sermon lovers!
2. Illustration: Hunger for the Word in persecuted & third world countries.
3. Whole families present – men, women and children.

B. Their Attentiveness to the Teaching (Vs. 3b)

1. “ears were attentive unto the book of the law” = lit. “their ears were unto the law” They were listening carefully and eagerly to God’s Word as it was read and taught. They were hanging on every Word! Have your ears trained on the pulpit when its preaching time!
2. Their focus was upon the Word of God primarily, not the man.
3. 1 Thess. 2:13 “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it **not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God**, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”
4. Challenge: When the Book is opened, are our ears open and attentive? How do we approach the preaching of God’s Word?
 - a. Do we hold the Word of God in such high esteem that we have a spirit of reverence when it is opened?
 - b. Do we receive the Word as coming straight from God or have we made the preacher our focus?
 - c. Do we come to church when God’s people are assembled to hear the Book?
 - d. When the preaching is taking place, how do approach it? E.G., body language, presence in the room, distractions (phones, chatting with each other).

III. The Reverence for the Book (Vs. 4-6)

A. The Position of the Book (Vs. 4)

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1. Ezra stood on a raised platform above the people. 'pulpit' comes from same word translated 'tower' in Neh. 3:1, 25, 26 & 27. The clear purpose of this structure was to facilitate the declaration of the Word.
2. Note: The way we structure our church auditoriums often conveys our emphasis.
3. This was not to exalt Ezra but for the purpose of good sight and sound
4. Psalm 138:2 "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for **thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.**"
5. Leaders of Israel stood alongside Ezra (6 men on his right and 7 on his left) Their standing with Nehemiah demonstrated their support of the Word of God. Note: So long as your preacher is reading and teaching from the Book, stand with him!

B. The Posture of the people (Vs. 5)

1. The posture and body language of the people conveyed that their hearts were in total accord with the occasion.
2. Note: The way we dress and carry ourselves in church important.

C. The Preparation for the Book (Vs. 6)

1. Ezra offers a prayer of thanksgiving to God.
2. The people respond with "Amen, Amen" indicating they agreed with what was prayed.
3. The people bow down and worship the LORD with their faces to the ground. It is important to note that they worshipped God, not the Book.
4. This was heart preparation – thanksgiving to God for the Word and humble worship.

IV. The Revealing of the Book (Vs. 7-8)

A. The Teaching People (Vs. 7)

1. 13 men plus others assisted Ezra in the teaching of this vast congregation.
2. Appears these men may have moved amongst the congregation to help the people understand the Word.
3. Eph. 4:11-12 "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:"

B. The Teaching Process (Vs. 8)

1. The Enunciation of the Word – they read it 'distinctly' which means with clearness and clarity. Don't rush the reading of God's Word! He may or may not bless your comments on the Word but He will always bless His own Word.

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2. The Exposition of the Word – they explained it so that the people could understand it.
 - a. “gave the sense” = the word ‘sense’ is often translated ‘wisdom’ or ‘understanding’ in the Old Testament.
 - b. 1 Timothy 4:13 “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”
 - c. 2 Timothy 4:1-4 “I charge thee before God...”
 - d. Titus 2:15 “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”
3. This type of preaching means the preacher is governed by the text. As preachers our job is not to fill our sermons with our ideas, opinions and stories but make sure they are Scripture soaked.
4. To preach like this requires much study and preparation. Ezra was described as “a ready scribe in the law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). The word ‘ready’ means skillful, diligent.
5. Illustration: Preaching is like cooking. You can throw together a quick packet of two-minute noodles or you can put time and effort into preparing a nutritious, tasty meal.

V. The Response to the Book (Vs. 9-12)

A. Conviction (Vs. 9)

1. They wept as the Scriptures were read, indicating a soft and responsive heart.
2. Illustration: George Whitefield’s preaching to the coal miners in England.
3. Our hearts are often cold and hard to the Word of God.

B. Celebration (Vs. 10-12)

1. “joy of the Lord is your strength” – ‘strength’ = a fortress, a defense
2. Matthew Henry: “Holy joy will be the oil to the wheels of our obedience.”
3. The expression of their rejoicing (Vs. 10-12a)
 - a. Feasting
 - b. Giving
 - c. Illustration: Jerusalem Church - Acts 2:46 “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,”
4. The cause of their rejoicing (Vs. 12b)
 - a. Psalm 19:8 “The statutes of the LORD are right, **rejoicing the heart**: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.”
 - b. Psalm 119:162 “I **rejoice** at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.”
 - c. Jeremiah 15:16 “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and **rejoicing** of mine heart...”

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- d. Psalm 119:72 “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”
- e. The Lord’s Day is the best day of the week!
- f. Note: If the Israelites could rejoice so much over the first 5 Books of the Bible, how much more we who possess the completed canon of Scripture (66 Books within the covers of this blessed Book of books).

VI. The Rediscovery in the Book (Vs. 13-18)

A. Their Study of the Word (Vs. 13-15)

1. The key men of the nation assemble to go deeper into the Word of God.
2. 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 “Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”
3. 2 Tim. 2:15 “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
4. As men, we are to know the Word of God in order to help our wives in their understanding of Scripture (1 Cor. 14:35).

B. Their Submission to the Word (Vs. 16-18)

1. Their obedience was full and complete. They were doers of the Word (James 1:21-25). The whole person – mind (understanding), heart (rejoicing) and will (obeying) must be captive to God’s truth.
2. No careless attitude to the detail of Scripture here! No “essential and non-essential” categorization of the Word of God!
3. Feast of Tabernacles had been commemorated since days of Joshua (e.g., Ezra 3:4) but not in the spirit of complete obedience seen here. The specific instruction concerning “dwelling in booths” had been overlooked. (Refer Leviticus 23 for laws concerning Feast of Tabernacles).
4. Finney: “A revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God.”
5. The result of their obedience was great joy (Vs. 17). There is great joy to be experienced in both the understanding and the doing of God’s Word.
6. This dispels the lie of the world and the devil that says a life of obedience to God means a life of drudgery and misery. Because Christ “loved righteousness and hated iniquity” He was “anointed with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Hebrews 1:9)
7. John 13:17 “If ye know these things, **happy** are ye if ye do them.”

Conclusion:

1. How is our spiritual appetite for the Word of God?
2. What is our mindset when we come to church? Are we here for the Word?