

Lord, Send a *Re-Bible*

Nehemiah . . . Memoirs of an Ordinary Man – Part XIII

Nehemiah 8

Introduction

An anonymous author penned these words:

The paradox of our time in history is that . . .

We spend more, but have less;

We buy more, but enjoy it less;

We have bigger houses and smaller families,

More conveniences, but less time,

More medicine, but less well being;

We read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.

These are times of tall men, and short character;

Steep profits, and shallow relationships.

These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce;

Of fancier houses, but broken homes.

We've added years to life, not life to years;

We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul.

We've learned how to make a living, but not a life.

One magazine article I read put it this way:

There is much to celebrate. We now have, as average Americans, doubled our incomes and what money buys. We own twice as many

cars per person and eat out two and one-half times as often as our parents did. We have espresso coffee, the World Wide Web, sport utility vehicles, and caller ID. New drugs are shrinking our tumors and lengthening our lives. Yet, at the same time, our divorce rate has doubled. Teen suicide has tripled. Violent crime has quadrupled. We have increased, by six times, the number of babies born out of wedlock, and cohabiting couples have increased from 500,000, twenty years ago, to 4.2 million today.

Our economic good time has become dwarfed by our moral recession. One civic leader correctly stated the problem, when he said,

The accumulation of material goods is at an all time high, but so is the number of people who feel an emptiness in their lives.

Pollster George Gallup, Jr. detected the same thing as he wrote,

One of the two dominant trends in society today is the search for spiritual moorings . . . surveys have documented the movement of people who are searching for meaning in life with a new intensity.

At the very time when the church of Jesus Christ can step up to the microphone and announce that it has the answer in a personal Redeemer named Jesus Christ, it has, instead, lost its voice.

One author compiled a list of clippings and mailings sent out by a number of churches that, by the way, are often attended by thousands of people:

One pastor commented,

There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping. Just practical, witty messages.

Another said,

Services at our church have an informal feeling. You won't hear people referred to as sinners. The goal is to make them feel welcome.

And another,

Our answer is God – but we slip Him in at the end, and even then, we don't get heavy. No ranting, or raving. No fire, no brimstone. Our pastor doesn't even use the h-word. Call it Light Gospel. It has the same salvation as the Old Time Religion, but with a third less guilt.

Another,

The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short. You won't hear a lot of preaching about sin. Preaching here doesn't sound like preaching. It is sophisticated, urbane, and friendly talk.

So the church of our generation promises that the consumer will be satisfied rather than that God will be satisfied. If this is true, then God is no longer the audience of our worship, the audience has become god. And, the church is feverishly trying to make this new god happy, comfortable, and satisfied.

I have recently heard of one church that has as their motto the words, "It's all about you." My friends, church is not all about you, and it is not all about me – it is all about God.

Our mandate from God is, not selfishness, but servanthood. It is about selling ourselves to the mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is about becoming passionately committed to the fact that man is sinful and on his way to hell.

The church has the answer in the gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. We communicate that gospel to our world as if we were throwing life preservers to drowning people. We do not warm the water to make them more comfortable; we do not offer lessons on how to float; we do not give self-help tips on how to manage the water. We tell them they are going to drown, if they do not come to the Savior.

The church has lost the moral courage to communicate that message. It makes people uncomfortable.

The church has lost its moral convictions as well. So, in our generation, the materialism of the believer matches the world. The promiscuity and unfaithfulness of the believer mirrors the world. The self-centered believer mirrors the world. The values and plans of the believer are the same as the world's.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the moment of greatest need for an answer of our generation, the church does not have the answer. It is in need of revival.

So were the people of Jerusalem. They had finished the walls. They were secure behind gates and gatekeepers. But there was a spiritual void in Jerusalem. They had everything but a right relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

I invite your attention to a revival meeting. It's found in Nehemiah, chapter 8.

Six Ingredients of Revival

As we study through this chapter, I want to provide at least six characteristics, or ingredients, of true revival.

And by the way, revival has nothing to do with unbelievers. According to Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 1, an unbeliever is,

. . . dead in [his] trespasses and sins.

In other words, his spirit has not been brought to life by regeneration. He is spiritually dead. He does not have a revival because you cannot revive a corpse.

You revive a living person who is unconscious, out of it, in a coma, who has been under water or without oxygen for some time. You revive someone whose heart may have even stopped beating, but the possibility of resuscitation is still there. He can be revived because he is not yet dead.

So revival has nothing to do with winning the unbeliever; revival is warning the believer who is living like an unbeliever. Their heart for God has stopped beating. They have grown cold in their affections for God. They need resuscitating and reviving.

Like David, we plead with God, "Will you not revive us again?"

Can we pray like David, in Psalm, chapter 119, verses 33 through 34 and verse 37,

Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy statutes, . . . Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart. . . . revive me in to Thy ways.

A revived . . . (8:1-5)

There was a great revival in Nehemiah's day, and it began with the first ingredient to any revival.

1. A true revival is revealed in a revived appetite for the scripture.

Look at verse 1.

And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel.

Did you notice the reappearance of Ezra, who was, by now, an old man? He had led a group back to Jerusalem years earlier, and they had rebuilt the temple. Ezra will become the preacher, as you will see in a moment, reading, translating, and applying the text of the Law.

But for now, notice what the people of Jerusalem have asked for – the book which God gave their nation! “Bring us the book” – this was their unified cry!

When a person, a group of people, a family, or a church begin to demand the scriptures, revival is soon to happen.

A native of India, writing to a friend about a revival they were having, wrote in English as he pronounced it in his native tongue, “We are having a great re-Bible here!

What a perfect slip of the pen. A revival is indeed when people are “re-Bibled”. They hunger to hear, read, and learn the Word of God.

Continue to verses 2 through 4.

Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood . . . [all these other priests whose names I cannot pronounce!]

For six hours they listened to Ezra read the first five books of the Old Testament, the Torah, the book of Moses, the book of the Law.

And, in 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.

They listened for six hours standing up. And, by the way, this will continue every day for an entire week. Imagine that kind of hunger to hear the Word of God!

A respectful . . . (8:6)

2. The second ingredient of revival is a respectful attitude toward God.

Look at verse 6.

Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God . . .

That is, he praised God for who God was – the great, the awesome, the sovereign God.

There is no revival if you have a little god. A small god who can be coerced and bribed. A petty god who exists to do your will and fulfill your every wish. An understandable god who is not mysterious or transcendent. A weak god who can barely keep up with his creation.

If you want reviving, you need a great God.

Listen as I read how Isaiah described his great God, in chapter 40 of that book, starting at verse 15,

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust.

Verse 18,

To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?

Skip to verses 22 and 23,

It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.

Verses 25 and 26,

“To whom then will you liken Me that I should be his equal?” says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who has

created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power not one of them is missing.

And verses 28 through 31,

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

Now wait a second, most of us run to verse 31 first. “Okay Lord, give me a shot from your strength potion for today.”

No! Those who wait for the kind of Lord that Isaiah has just described are the ones who find strength. The word “wait” is a reference to contemplating or meditating on God’s character; trusting in His attributes, relying on His power and provision. The believer who is given strength is the believer who has Isaiah’s perception of God.

Believers who have a small god run out of gas, but those who contemplate the awesome character of God, as described in Isaiah chapter 40, have strength for their daily walk.

Revival comes on the heels of an appetite for scripture and an approach toward God based on the great and sovereign God that He is.

Turn back to Nehemiah, chapter 8, and look at the rest of verse 6.

And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!”

“Amen, Amen,” or “so be it.” Everybody was shouting, “Amen.” Evidently there were Baptists in the book of Nehemiah! The verse continues on to say,

while lifting up their hands

I guess they were really “Bapticostals.”

then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

I do not think any denomination does that.

The issue was not how they revealed their respect for God, that will vary from culture to culture and from generation to generation.

Soon, I will go on a fifteen day tour of Africa. I will preach twelve times in Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Swaziland, as well as a rally in Zimbabwe. They are going to worship their great God differently than I do. I can assure you that they will worship God in those meetings in ways I will not even be capable of trying. I will mumble through as best I can and thoroughly enjoy every minute of it. And I will tell you all about it when I come back.

The point is the same for people in Africa and France and Romania and America as it was in Nehemiah’s day. The people in chapter 8 showed respect to God; and ultimately, like so many people throughout scripture who have an encounter with God, they ended up flat on their faces on the ground.

If you want to say, “Amen,” and raise your hands, go ahead. Are you willing, as well, to lie flat on your face in the dirt, so moved out of deep respect for your sovereign God that you dare not whisper or even look upward?!

Revival comes from a revived appetite for the scripture and a deep reverential approach to God.

A radical . . . (8:8, 13)

3. The third ingredient of revival is a radical application of biblical truth.

Look at verse 8.

And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

You ought to underline the word “understood.” It appeared in verse 2 and verse 3, and it will show up again in verse 12.

Why would they need to explain anything?

Let us attempt to read Matthew, chapter 11, verses 28 through 30, taken from John Wycliffe’s translation of the Greek language. It happens to be the first English translation put into print, in the year 1382.

Alle ye that trauelen & ben chargid come to me & I schal fulfille you. Take ye my yok on you & lerne ye of me for I am mylde and meke in herte; and ye shulen finde rest to youre soulis for my yok is softe & my charge liyt.

If you try hard enough and have it memorized as well, you can make some sense of most of the words.

Approximately six hundred years separate us from John Wycliffe's English world. And, six hundred years have brought a lot of changes to our English vocabulary.

Consider the fact that between the time of Moses writing the book of the Law and the time of the people of Nehemiah's day was a span of, not six hundred years, but one thousand years. Consider, also, the fact that these people no longer spoke or understood Hebrew. They had Hebrew hearts but Babylonian ears. They simply needed to know what the words meant.

But that was not all. Notice verse 13.

Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.

The word "insight" is translated from a Hebrew verb that means "to be wise or prudent." In other words, they wanted to understand the Word so that they would have the insight or wisdom in how to apply the Word to their lives.

In Mark's Gospel, the Lord breaks the fish and loaves and feeds over five thousand people. He shows His miraculous ability over the elements of nature by creating fish and bread. A few hours later, the disciples are terrified in a storm. Eventually, Jesus walks on the water to where they are and climbs into the boat and the storm ceases and the wind stops. Chapter 6, verses 51 and 52, say it all,

. . . and they were greatly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves . . .

They had seen Christ's power demonstrated earlier, but they had not connected it with how they should live and act because of it. Some people go to church nearly every Sunday, even attend a Bible study and go to a conference or two, and nothing of their lives changes.

My friends, there is a vast difference between biblical input and biblical insight. Guess what happened when they gained the insight and applied the meaning of the Bible to the way they were living?

A repentant . . . (8:9-12)

4. The fourth ingredient of revival takes place, which is a repentant awareness of sin.

Look at verse 9.

Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.

They heard the words of God's standard, and they began to mourn and weep.

We avoid the Word because the Word convicts and challenges us to the very core of our being. As Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12, tells us,

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

George Bernard Shaw, the British playwright, once had a Bible. Four years before he died, in 1950, he sold it to auctioneers, who, in turn, sold it for fifty dollars after Shaw's death. One of the selling points was an inscription on the flyleaf by the playwright himself,

This book is a most undesirable possession . . . I must get rid of it. I really cannot bear it in my house!

The Bible is a penetrating sword and he could not stand the guilty verdict that pierced his heart!

Eventually Nehemiah stood and told the people to stop mourning and begin rejoicing. It was the day the Feast of Tabernacles was to begin. Notice verses 10 through 12.

Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

A responsive . . . (8:14-17)

5. The final ingredient of revival is an attitude of joy.

Matthew Henry wrote a century ago,

Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience.

And would you notice how the people of Jerusalem obeyed? Look at verses 14 through 17.

And they found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches, and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate, and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing.

God said for them to build little shanties and lean-to shacks out of sticks so they could remember their journey in the wilderness.

It does not make much sense. They need to be rebuilding their homes inside the newly constructed city walls. But God said, "Build a booth."

So, "We'll build a booth."

And guess what? There was great rejoicing.

Insight led to obedience and obedience led to joy.

Application When Re-Bible Occurs

Let us make an application. When "re-Bible" occurs, at least four things happen.

Excuses . . .

1. Number one, excuses are replaced with confession.

In 1992, the Texas educational bureaucracy reviewed and approved a new set of history textbooks for the public school system. A group of parents, concerned about the information their children were coming home with, conducted their own review. They found two hundred thirty one errors. The textbook reported Napoleon actually winning the

battle of Waterloo, and President Truman dropping the atom bomb on Korea, and General Douglas MacArthur leading the anti-Communist campaign in the 1950's, instead of Senator Joe McCarthy.

When called to account for these errors, the Texas officials studied the texts again. They found more than the two hundred thirty one errors the parents first found. Then the parents found more, until the tally stood at five thousand two hundred mistakes in texts published by Prentice-Hall, Houghton Mifflin, Rinehart and Winston.

How did the publishers react to this mess? The publisher's spokesperson argued that, "Except for the errors, these were the finest textbooks they had ever seen."

The believer who wants revival throws away the list of favorite excuses for his, or her, sin. Excuses are replaced with confession.

Selfishness . . .

2. Secondly, selfishness is replaced with servanthood.

Compromise . . .

3. Thirdly, compromise is replaced with commitment.

You might say, "I've confessed and tried and failed and tried."

Revival does not last.

Someone once asked evangelist Billy Sunday, in the early 1900's, if revivals lasted. He replied,

No, neither does a bath, but it's good to have one occasionally.

If you want friends, you probably ought to bathe every day; if you want fellowship, you need reviving every day as well.

Complacency . . .

4. Finally, complacency is replaced with devotion.

You might say, "Oh, but my love for God ebbs and flows; it seems to come and go. My devotion and affection for God is affected by my inconsistency and brokenness and sinfulness."

I know. Like the Apostle Paul, who said, in Romans, chapter 7, which I will paraphrase, "The things I want to do, I don't do, and the things I don't

want to do, I seem to do . . . wretched man that I am!”

I remember and like the way it was said, but, unfortunately, cannot remember who said or wrote,

The only way to keep a broken pot filled with water is to keep the faucet running.

To have a revival:

- Approach God with due respect and adoration.

- Be willing to apply what you learn.
- Repent, repent, and repent some more.
- And, know that obedience will lead to joy.

It is always in that order.

And stay under the faucet – of God’s Word – of God’s Spirit – of God’s wisdom – and in the company of God’s people.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/4/2000 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2000 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.