

Revival Starts with the Word Nehemiah 8:1-18

V1-3

- By this time Nehemiah has led a third group back to Jerusalem, and their mission is to build the wall in order to protect the people from the enemy coming in and out of the city, wreaking havoc anytime they felt like it. After 52 days of sweat, work, attacks, innuendos, and rumors, the wall is finished, and now Nehemiah calls for a bible conference. The person he wants to teach is our man Ezra. The same man who, upon hearing that Israel had once again taken pagan wives and embraced ungodly cultures, plucked out his hair and his beard, and sat silently for hours until people rallied around him in order to repent. This is the man who was a priest by birth. But since there was no temple in Babylon, he studied the scriptures so vigorously and thoroughly that he became also a scribe as well as a priest.
- The material needs of the city have been met, now it's time to focus on the spiritual needs of the people in the city. **Ezra 7:10** - God had raised him up for this very purpose: to come to Jerusalem and teach the people His word. Likewise, the primary task of the Christian minister is to preach the Word of God. It was D. Martin Jones who said, "When society is at its worst then preaching is usually at its lowest." That's because the Spirit of God uses the Word of God, to cleanse and revive the hearts of the people of God. The Spirit uses the Word to empower the people, and in this chapter you'll see the 3 responses needed for this to happen.
- The first response: **We must understand the Word.** Verse 2-3 - the bible is not some magic book that changes people or circumstances because somebody reads or recites it. God's word must be understood before it can enter the heart and cause life-changing behavior. We will find the word "understanding" used six times in this chapter to emphasize its importance.
- Verse 2 - the Word was read before men, women, and all who could hear with understanding. This is one of the reasons we primarily have adults in the sanctuary and not children. Instead we provide children's church where they can learn on their level. They may not be able to withstand an all morning teaching like Ezra gave. Also, notice Ezra brought with him the Word-law, and not a bunch of stories or antidotes. His focus was on scripture and not feelings or opinions.

V4-8

- Verse 5 - many churches bring the book but how many open it and keep it open the whole time? The star of the service was not Ezra, the choir, or the first lady, but rather the scriptures, and because of this the people respected the reading of it. They knew it wasn't a mere man speaking his own ideas, but they would be hearing the very Word of God (**1 Thessalonians 2:13**).
- Verse 6 - notice what was being done was not a solo job, but in unison they answered, "Amen, bowed their heads and worshipped." Verse 8 is a model for expositional teaching as you see three things that should be done when teaching:
 1. They read distinctly - a language for people to understand
 2. They gave the sense - the interpretation of the verse
 3. They caused them to understand - how to apply it to their lives

- Reading the Word distinctly and explaining the Word in simplicity are still the greatest needs of the church today. This is why we teach line upon line, verse by verse, and why it's at the center of everything we do. Like in **Acts 20:26-27**, when you give the whole counsel of God then you are innocent of what people do with it.

V9-18

- When brokenness occurs the Word is always prevalent. Notice their tears; it shows their seriousness concerning what they heard. But after sorrow comes joy, when we apply what we've heard. If you continue to be sorrowful then it's not the Lord. Either sin hasn't really been dealt with or the Word has not truly been understood. Verse 11-12 - the Levites tell them to be still, quiet yourselves and let the joy of the Lord wash over you.
- Here's the second response: **We must rejoice in the Word**. The Word does bring conviction and leads to repentance, but it also brings us joy (**Psalm 19:8**). Verse 14 - they find written in the Word the festival of booths, which leads to the third and final response: **We must obey the Word**. Verse 16-17 - what good is it if you hear great preaching and do very little applying? However, when you apply truth, rejoicing will follow, and obedience will not be a burden but a blessing.
- Verse 18 - we need to continue to read day by day. We cannot rely on last week's nourishment but rather a continual daily feeding in order to know God's will, obey God's will, and rejoice in God's will.