

RETURN & REVIVAL

Part 4 of The Savior King. Nehemiah 8:1-12.

Peter Foxwell. Cornerstone Church. October 4, 2026.

More teaching resources are available at: www.famousgod.com/groups

INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah records the exiles' return to Jerusalem.

They rebuilt the walls and experienced revival.

Revival is one of the most misunderstood concepts in Christianity.

- It is **NOT** an event that we plan, extreme or weird behavior, only for elite, super Christians, special meetings, public confessions, loud and spectacular.
- It is rediscovering the fullness of the Christian faith and lifestyle: returning to loving Jesus above all, making a fresh commitment to follow Jesus and his teachings, and realigning our lives after drifting from wholehearted commitment to Christ.

SETTING THE SCENE

Nehemiah 8 takes place after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon.

- The Lord kept his promises of return (For example: Deuteronomy 30:1-10; 1 Kings 8:46-53; Isaiah 11:11-16; 40:1-11).

After the city walls were rebuilt, the people asked to hear God's Word.

- But there were some barriers to overcome:
- They did not speak Hebrew.
- They were raised in Babylon and lacked a biblical worldview.

NEHEMIAH 8:1-12

Read the passage in your Bible.

PREPARING FOR REVIVAL

1. READ AND HEAR THE BIBLE - verses 1-7.

Ezra was a scribe or a Bible teacher.

- He probably read excerpts from the first five books of the Bible, known as the law.
- The people stood up and listened attentively.
- Ezra spoke from a high platform; functionally, to be heard; theologically, to symbolize that God and his Word are above all.
- The people worshipped the Lord.

The Westminster Larger Catechism explains how to read the Bible:

- Q. 157. How is the Word of God to be read?
- A: The holy Scriptures are to be read 1) with a high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God; and that he only can enable us to understand them; 2) with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; 3) with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; 4) with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.

2. UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE - verses 7-8

The Bible cannot revive us if we don't understand it.

- The Levites translated and explained its meaning.

Preaching and teaching involve more than reading the Bible.

- Preachers must also explain the meaning of Bible passages; the background and context; theological terms; and connections to God's big story and plan of salvation.

Preaching and teaching are spiritual gifts (Romans 12:7).

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones described the sacred anointing as:

“The Holy Spirit’s special empowering of a preacher during proclamation. It is not merely eloquence, theological knowledge, emotional intensity, or careful preparation; it is God taking hold of the prepared preacher and making him an effective channel of divine truth ... It does not replace study, sound doctrine, natural ability, or careful preparation; it takes hold of those things and makes the preacher a living instrument through whom hearers sense the authority and presence of God.”¹

3. APPLY THE BIBLE - verses 9-12

Application is putting God’s Word into practice and changing our lives.

- The people wept in godly sorrow because they had drifted from the Lord.
- But the leaders reminded them that it was a holy day, so weeping was an inappropriate application; God wanted feasting and celebration.

There were other examples of application:

- Observing the Feast of Shelters - 8:13-18.
- Separation from foreigners, confession of sins - 9:1-2.

REVIVAL IS GOD’S WORK. PREPARATION IS OURS.

God revives his people to advance his purposes. He wants a strong church to advance the Gospel.

¹ A summary by Perplexity AI. Prompt: “How did Martyn Lloyd-Jones explain the sacred anointing? What sets a called preacher apart from a regular person?”

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Use any or all of the following questions to guide your group's conversation about Sunday's sermon.

Observation

As you read Nehemiah 8:1–6, what actions show the people's eagerness and respect for God's Word? What details stand out to you?

According to verses 7–8, what did the Levites do in addition to reading the Law? Why was that necessary for this particular group of people?

Trace the people's emotional response in verses 9–12. What do they do first, what are they told to do, and how do they respond in the end?

Interpretation

The sermon described revival as a return to wholehearted love for Jesus and obedience to him—not merely an emotional event or a series of special meetings. How does Nehemiah 8 support or challenge that definition?

The leaders directed the people to celebrate rather than grieve because it was God's holy day. What does it teach us about the application process? What is the danger in inventing applications rather than following the Bible's instructions or principles?

Application

In everyday life, what most often keeps you from moving beyond simply hearing the Bible to understanding and acting on it—time pressure, distraction, uncertainty about meaning, ingrained habits, fear of change, or something else? What would a realistic next step look like this week?

The sermon emphasized that we cannot manufacture revival, but we can prepare for it through prayer, Bible study, and obedience. What specific practice could you build into your week—such as a scheduled time of Scripture reading, a prayer prompt, a conversation, or a change in a daily habit—to make room for God to reshape you?