

RETURN & REVIVAL

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

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. October 4, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

STUDY GUIDE

As you came in this morning, you should have received a bulletin. Inside, you'll find a simple study guide you can use in a few different ways: to follow along with today's teaching, to reflect on during your personal devotions this week, or to spark conversation in your small group.

More resources are available online. The link is in your study guide.

Let's get started on today's teaching ...

INTRODUCTION

We're working our way through some of the highlight passages in the Old Testament. Today, we've come to the Book of Nehemiah, which records the return of the Exiles to Jerusalem and the revival that God sent to the people.

I'd like us to explore the revival and what it can teach us about the Christian life.

Revival is one of the most misunderstood concepts in Christianity. So, let's begin with a definition. First, what revival is not:

- It is not an event that we plan.
- It is not extreme or weird behavior.
- It is not only for elite, super Christians.
- It is not special meetings.
- It is not public confessions.
- It is not loud and spectacular.

OK. So what is revival?

- It is rediscovering the fullness of the Christian faith and lifestyle.
- It is returning to loving Jesus above all.
- It is a fresh commitment to follow Jesus and his teachings.
- It is realigning our lives after drifting from wholehearted commitment to Christ.

Generation after generation, the Lord sends revivals that wake up sleepy Christians. The church is too important in God's plan for the world to let it grow cold. We should all want revival in our lives and in our church.

SETTING THE SCENE

Today's teaching passage is Nehemiah 8. Before reading it, let's take a moment to set the scene.

Nehemiah 8 takes place after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem and the Promised Land. 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). The date was around the mid-400s BC.

Nehemiah organized them into construction teams, and despite adversity and opposition, they rebuilt the city walls, making the city secure.

The people had never lived in the Land. They had not seen Jerusalem and the Temple in their glory days. They returned to a city of rubble.

More than that, they did not speak Hebrew, which was the language of the Bible. Instead, they spoke Aramaic, the language of the Babylonian Empire.

Worse still, they did not know their religion very well; they had never participated in the temple rituals, and most of them had never read the Bible.

And that brings us to chapter 8 ...

It was the Jewish Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-24), a joyful time of trumpet blasts, worship, rest, and abundant food. Later, in Jewish history, it became the New Year - Rosh Hashanah.

Now, I'm going to ask you to stand for the reading of God's Word. I think you'll understand why as we read ...

NEHEMIAH 8:1-12 (CSB)

... all the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses that the LORD had given Israel. 2 On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding.

3 While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law.

4 The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

5 Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, **all the people stood up.** 6 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, “Amen, Amen!” Then they knelt low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

7 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. 8 They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

9 Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, “This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said to them, “Go and eat what is rich,

drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

11 And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, “Be still, since today is holy. Don’t grieve.” 12 Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them.

It was an incredible day. The congregation was massive. They heard God’s Word for the first time. And it brought them to their knees in repentance and revival. It changed hearts and lives. It was a heaven-sent revival.

Nehemiah rebuilt the walls, but the Word of God rebuilt the people.

Now, let’s take a few minutes to explore PREPARING FOR REVIVAL.

THE PREPARATION FOR REVIVAL

1. READ AND HEAR THE BIBLE - verses 1-6.

The people asked Ezra to read the Bible to them. Ezra was a scribe, which was to say, after the Exile, a Bible teacher.

He read “the law,” written on a scroll, for six hours straight. Probably not the entire five books from Genesis to Deuteronomy, but selected highlights.

The congregation heard about God’s mighty works: the creation, the fall, the covenants, the Exodus, the Law, the conquest, and they were transfixed. It was a momentous event.

The people listened “*attentively*.” They believed they were hearing from God, and they didn’t want to miss a single word. They “***stood up***” to signify their reverence for God.

Ezra spoke from a “*high wooden platform*.” This was functional and theological. Functional because it made it easier to hear him. Theological because it symbolically placed God and his Word above everything else. It gave God the honor and respect he deserves. That’s why they also “***knelt low and worshipped the Lord***.”

This pulpit in our worship center is also functional and theological. It places God and his Word above us all. We believe that it’s not an ordinary, hum-drum thing to read and hear God’s word. It is revelation, God speaking. That’s why we add, “*This is the word of God; thanks be to God*” to our readings.

The Westminster Larger Catechism¹ 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.

When we read the Bible like that, it prepares the way for revival.

The second way we can prepare for revival is:

¹ <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-larger-catechism/>

2. UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE - verses 7-8

It's one thing to read or hear the Bible; it's another thing to understand it. And understanding the Bible is absolutely essential. It cannot revive us if we don't know what it's saying.

The people had a couple of obstacles in the way of understanding the Bible: 1) they did not speak its language, Hebrew, and 2) they had been raised in Babylonian culture and religion, so they didn't have a biblical worldview.

That's why the Levites, as Bible teachers, ***translated*** it into Aramaic and ***explained its meaning***. They wanted everyone to understand the Bible.

Preaching and teaching are more than reading the Bible. That's a good start, but it's not the whole job of the preacher.

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.

This is the reason why God calls and equips Bible preachers and teachers. We don't appoint ourselves. When Christians show respect for their preacher, they aren't honoring the man or his natural abilities; they're honoring God and his anointing that makes the Bible so powerful in their lives.

Preaching and teaching are spiritual gifts (Romans 12:7). **The late Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote about this.** He called it the ***sacred anointing***, which is:

"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.”²

So, the first two elements of preparing for revival are: 1) hearing the Bible and 2) understanding the Bible. The final element is:

² 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?”

3. APPLY THE BIBLE - verses 9-12

Application involves responding to the Word, putting it into practice, and changing our lives.

When the congregation in Jerusalem's Water Gate square understood the Bible, it broke them. The Holy Spirit convicted them of drifting from the Lord: They were ***“weeping as they heard the words of the law.”***

That kind of godly sorrow is only the first step of application; there are many more. For example:

- Ezra and the Levites told the people to celebrate and feast because it was a holy day - a day set apart to honor God and celebrate his grace, not grieve their failings.
- In verses 13-18, the people observe the Feast of Shelters because they found it in their Bible study.
- In chapter 9, there's another example of application:

Nehemiah 9:1-2 (CSB) On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting, wearing sackcloth, and had put dust on their heads. 2 Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors.

Application is a change in our beliefs and behaviors. Words on the page must become directions in our hearts; otherwise, we short-circuit God's plan for our lives (see James 1:22-25).

Application is the hardest step. Our sinful nature, old habits, and the devil all fight against godly changes. So, pray for wisdom, strength, and commitment to do all that God wants.

The Westminster Longer Catechism is helpful:

Q. 160. What is required of those that hear the Word preached?

A. It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

REVIVAL IS GOD'S WORK. PREPARATION IS OURS.

Revival is God's work. And he does it to advance his purposes. He revived the returning exiles to preserve the line of succession down to Jesus, the promised Savior. He revives us so that we'll be a strong church advancing the Gospel.

We can't create a revival, but we can prepare for one.

Historically, genuine spiritual renewal comes through preaching or prayer meetings.

God-sent revivals are rare. We can't force God's hand, but we can prepare the way for the Lord.

It's good that we gather Sunday after Sunday to pray and hear God's Word. Let's keep doing that.

But let's add some things:

- Private prayer for revival: "Lord, send a revival, and start with me."
- Small group prayer. Add some requests for revival to fall.
- Personal and group Bible study to seek God and apply his Word.
- Do you think we could start hosting an annual Bible conference? We'd bring in a powerful, anointed preacher for several days. Would you come to 3-4 evening meetings?

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

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

Icebreaker

Think of a time you had to learn something important in a setting that felt unfamiliar—at work, in school, with technology, or in a new community. What helped it finally make sense?

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 toward celebration rather than grief because it was God's holy day. What does it teach us about the application process? Should we invent applications or follow the Bible's instructions or principles?

Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls, but the sermon says that God's Word rebuilt the people. Why might restored buildings, programs, or outward stability be insufficient without renewed hearts shaped by Scripture?

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?