

A Call to Re-Bible”

Nehemiah 8:1-18

By John Paul Miller

Nehemiah 8:1, “*And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.*”

An African tribal chieftain was educated in English schools and was able to gain an audience with Queen Victoria. He asked her, “To what do you attribute the great prosperity of the British Empire?” To answer the question she picked up her Bible and said, “Take this Book and its message to your people and they will likewise prosper.”

I agree with the Queen’s statement. I believe the greatest need in the world today is for the Word of God. When I say the Word of God I’m referring to ‘The Bible’.

Notice the cry in verse 1, “. . . *bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.*” The cry of the people’s heart was to hear the Word of God.

If the Jerusalem of Nehemiah was to remain strong and free, more was needed than city walls and security measures. A spiritual vacuum existed in the lives of the returned exiles. Their ignorance of the Law of God was appalling, and Nehemiah knew they could not handle physical battles well unless they were spiritually fit. In chapter 8, therefore, we see the leaders of Jerusalem reinforcing the stone walls with a foundation of spiritual values.

Some seventy years earlier, the children of Israel had been taken to Babylon in captivity. Now, as they gained their release, they returned home to Jerusalem to rebuild their lives, and homes. But Jerusalem’s walls were left in ruins; they were without a viable defense. Hearing about Jerusalem’s plight Nehemiah asked the King in Babylon if he could go to Jerusalem to help his people rebuild the walls. Nehemiah knew that, even after the walls had been rebuilt, and the gates re-established, that that was not enough! The people needed the Word of God; they needed a spiritual foundation.

Warren W. Wiersbe said that, “When God’s people get away from loving, reading, and obeying the Word of God they lose the blessing of God upon their lives.” I believe that with all of my heart. As a pastor for many years, I’ve taught the Bible every Sunday. My desire is that, when you come on Sunday morning, you hear the Word of the Lord. That the Bible is opened, read, expounded upon, and applied to your lives. But that’s not enough either: you need to take your Bible home; you need to read it every day. If we want our lives to be like ‘fruitful trees’, we must: “. . . *delight* is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he *meditate* day and night (Psalms 1:2).”

The word used here for ‘meditate’ is the same word used to describe a cow who chews its cud. It speaks of filling ones mind with the Word of God and chewing upon it (meditating, milling over it). Feeding upon the Word of God and letting it be absorbed into your life.

Someone once said that, “we need to marinate our minds in the word of God”.

This is why Nehemiah called for a “Bible Conference” and invited Ezra the scribe to be the teacher. Nehemiah, the layman who built the walls and established the gates, knew there was a spiritual void in the lives of the people. So he called Ezra to come and read and preach the Word of God to the people.

A point I’d like to make before we go any further is that, the United States of America, is not mighty because of our form of government, nor because of a strong military, or prosperous industry. No, our might is in the Lord! When we forsake God and His Word, we deny the Bible as being the Word of God; we become weak as a nation. We may have men who shoot guns but if we don’t have men of character, men who fear God, then our nation falls apart.

The same can be said of us too. Our life may be going well, but if our life is not built upon the Word of God, we’re on a shaky foundation. Storms will come, and winds will blow and beat upon our house, and it will fall if it’s not built upon the solid rock of scripture. David tells us in Psalms 127:1, *“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”*

Chapter 8 can be divided into a two division outline: (1) The **Return** to the Book (vs. 1-8), (2) The **Revival** of the People (vs. 9-18)

The Return to the Book (vs. 1-8)

Nehemiah 8:1, *“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel”.*

First, I want you to notice four things: (1) The People (vs. 1) - *“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man”*. It’s possible that there were 50,000 people in this congregation. That’s a large group to address without a sound system. However, the people came because they wanted to hear the Word of God. (2) The Place (vs. 1) - it’s called *“the water gate”* – the word ‘water’, reminds us of the Word of God. We are to be washed in the water of the Word. (3) The Preacher (vs. 1) - *“Ezra”* (a) He’s called a ‘Scribe’, which speaks of the truth of God’s Word. (b) He’s called a ‘Priest’ (vs. 2) which speaks of the grace of God. When we read our Bibles we need to receive God’s truth and grace. (4) The Plea (vs. 1) - *“bring the book of the Law of Moses”*. What was the ‘Law of Moses?’ The first five books of the Bible known as ‘Torah’, or the ‘Pentateuch’ [Genesis – Deuteronomy]. The people hungered for God’s Word.

I believe the greatest hunger in the world today is for the Word of God. The people were hungry for God’s word and they cry, *“bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded. . .”*

For the Nations

The nations of the world need to hear the Word of God too. The need is consistent and the hunger the same; people are hungry for the Word of God.

About ten or fifteen years ago, The Billy Graham Association produced a video entitled, “*The Bible and The Wall*”; which was about Billy Graham’s ministry behind the Iron Curtain. In it they chronicle 30 years of Dr. Graham’s ministry and they accredited the demise of and fall of Communism to his ministry. It’s a fascinating video that shows how the Word of God broke down the walls of Communism. How it brought the people to a place of wanting to live their lives according to the Word of God.

Many times, as Dr. Graham preached, the Communist government would not allow his Association to promote, announce or publish where the meetings were to be held. Fearing large crowds they would change the meeting place at the last moment unannounced. One day as he was to preach at a church, they told him they were moving him to an open field. His team thought there might be a few hundred people that would show up. But, when they arrived there were over fifty thousand people hungry to hear the Word of God. It stirred my heart as I saw Dr. Graham get out of his car with his Bible held high up in the air, as the people quickly crowded around him to hear the Word of God.

I’m frightened for our country because our freedom, and our liberties are slipping away from us because we’ve lost our mooring and foundation in the scriptures. It’s a frightening trend we’re on; we need to get back to the Bible.

In the late nineteen eighties and early nineties, I made several trips to China in order to work with a missionary we supported in Hong Kong. Part of our work was to smuggle Bibles into China. What an exciting experience that was for me. We knew that if we were caught we could be thrown into prison, but we continued none the less. There was one trip where we happened to miss our contact. We were to drop a load of Bibles off at a local hotel, and our contact would pick them up and distribute them to those in need. But since we missed our contact, we had to distribute them ourselves. So with tracts in hand and copies of the Bible in Cantonese, we began passing them out in the streets. I was amazed at the people, the moment they saw that it was about Jesus, that it was scripture; they literally began to maul us for their own copy. I can honestly say that has never happened to me here in the States.

There was one instance where we left a copy of the scriptures out on the dresser in our hotel. The maid came in and saw it and asked excitedly, “is that a Bible?” We said, “Yes it is!” She said, “I’ve been hearing about Jesus on the radio and I don’t have the book. Can I have the book?” We said, “Yes, take it, it’s for you.” She gladly took the book and went home. The next day we saw her and she came up to us and said, “I stayed up all night reading; this very good book!” This caused me to realize how, in our country, we take God’s Word for granted. This woman stayed up all night reading ‘The Book’. How about you?

George Washington said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world (our nation) without God and the Bible” (*Back to the Bible* – Woodrow Kroll, pg. 24).

Daniel Webster (1782-1852) was an orator, politician, and Constitutional lawyer who served as a U.S. congressman, senator, and secretary of state. Webster maintained, "If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering...but if we and our posterity neglect its instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity."

We need to pray for our country, our president, and our leaders; that we as a nation would come back to the book! Would to God, like Ezra and Nehemiah's day, that our whole city would come to church on Sunday to hear the Word of God. That would indeed be a revival, and it would be due to the Word of God being preached in our pulpits.

In the Church – Bring back the Bible

The Bible tells us in II Timothy 4:2 that pastors are to *preach the Word*. Not their opinion, views, ideas, or philosophies, but the Word of God. That "*they be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*" Why? Paul says, "*the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*"

What that means, and what is happening in many churches today, is that people are going to churches where the pastor tells them what they want to hear, not what they need to hear. If they disagree with the pastor, they move on to another church where the pastor "itch their ears". We live in a day an age where people do not hunger for the Word the way they should.

It's important to note that Ezra and Nehemiah put the Word of God first in the lives of the city. What happened in Jerusalem from that point on was a by-product of the people's response to the Scriptures. "The primary task of the church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God," said Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. "The decadent periods and eras in the history of the church have always been those periods when preaching had declined" (*Preaching and Preachers* - pg. 24).

That's so true, whenever there was revival in the church the forefront of that revival were men who were preaching the Bible as the Word of God. We need a revival in our nation today.

In our Personal lives

You and I need to have the same hearts cry as the people of Nehemiah's day. We need to bring back the book into our homes. We need to have family devotions, husbands and wives reading the Bible together. When was the last time, you as a married couple, sat down and read the Bible together; praying together that God would help you both to live your lives according to His Word?

It's sad when people only hear the Bible when they come to church on Sundays. That's not enough! You may have the walls built, so to speak, you may have the gates and you

may look nice but, if you're not built on the solid rock of scripture your marriage, your home, and family will not survive the storms of life. The Bible is what we need in our homes.

As husbands, the Bible is very clear what your responsibility is: to your wife: "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;*" (Eph. 5:25). Wives, you're to love your husbands and be subject to them (Eph. 5:22). How do we relate to one another in a marriage relationship? The Bible tells us! God's Word gives us that direction.

As a parent, the Bible tells you how to be a better mother or father. It tells you how to love, discipline, train, and bring up your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

If you're single, the Bible has a lot to say to you about how to live your life; how to use your singleness for the Lord.

The Bible tells us what is right and what is wrong.

In II Timothy 3:16-17, it says, "*All scripture (all the Bible) is given by inspiration (God breathed) of God, and is profitable (beneficial) for doctrine (what is right), for reproof (what is wrong), for correction (how to get right), for instruction in righteousness (how to stay right): That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*"

Currently, in the United States our courts are trying to decide what constitutes a marriage. The Bible states very clearly what a marriage is. It says, "*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh*" (Ephesians 5:31). That's a marriage! There's no debating, there's no question about what it is. God made and designed it; it's His idea, and He tells us how it's to be designed and function in His Word. Our problem is we don't believe the Bible anymore.

The Bible tells us all we need for life and godliness (II Peter 1:3).

Have you ever taken a trip to a place you didn't know how to get to so you used a map? You say, "No, I don't, I just drive; we'll get there somehow!" That's pretty stupid but sadly, that's the way that people live their lives.

They get married, have children, yet don't know where they're going. They go to work, yet don't know how to relate to their boss. They simply don't know how to live their lives. Their instruction manual is the Bible and its collecting dust in a bottom drawer or coffee table in their living room. Their whole life is falling apart and there sits the instruction manual for all of life. It's so sad that we neglect God's Word.

Here are some things that the Bible can do for you: (1) *Convict of sin* – Acts 2:37, "*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" When you read the Bible it's like a

mirror that shows you your need. Sometimes when we look at a mirror we're not too excited, we don't like what it shows. Ever get mad at your mirror? The problem isn't your mirror, it's you! When you look into the mirror of God's Word don't get mad at the Bible. The problem is not the Bible, it's you! We need to bring our lives inline with His Word. (2) *Converts the soul* – Psalms 19:7, “*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*” (3) *Creating faith* – Romans 10:17, “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (literally, a sermon preached about Christ).” (4) *Keep us from sin* – Psalms 119:11, “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*” You hide God's Word in your heart and when a temptation comes, the scripture will come back to help and strengthen you.

What Ezra did

He brought the Book (vs. 2-4)

Nehemiah 8:2-4, “And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday (6 hours), before the men and the women, and those that could understand; (their response) and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.”

Notice that they were “*attentive*” (vs. 3). My prayer is that our church will never loose its hunger for the Word of God. That they'll come to church with their Bibles and they'll be attentive to the Word.

He Opened the Book (vs. 5-6)

Nehemiah 8:5-6, “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up (a reverence): And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered (they respond in worship), Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.”

This is a pastor's dream come true, fifty thousand people show up for a Bible conference saying, “Give us the Bible!” So Ezra opens up the Book, begins to read; and as he does, they stand up with reverence and begin to worship God. If you're a well-taught person in the Word you ought to be a worshiper. Something's wrong when it's time to worship and you don't want to sing or praise the Lord. Does not the Word of God dwell in you richly? Is not the Holy Spirit plucking the strings of your heart? Do you not want to worship God and respond to His Word? Understanding the Word brought an attitude of humility, brokenness and worship.

How do you respond to the Word? Do you come to church with your Bible on Sunday mornings?

He explained the Book (vs. 7-8)

Nehemiah 8:7-8, “Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.”

This is a model for those who teach and preach the Bible. This is what is called, *Expository Preaching*. Read, explain, and apply the Bible. As a pastor it’s always my job to read, explain and apply the Bible.

In verses two, three, seven and eight, you find the word understanding. We need to understand the Bible. It’s not just for a pastor, it’s for every believer; to know, understand, believe and obey the Bible.

I love the story about William Tyndale, a priest in the Catholic Church, who believed that the Bible should be read by the common person. Because it was against the law (of the church) to print the Bible, he left England and printed Bibles in Germany and then smuggled them back into England. His goal in life was that the common plowman would know the Bible as well as the Priest in the church. Through William’s efforts and ministry the Word of God saved England from civil war, even though it cost him his life.

Woodrow Kroll, in his book, “*Back to the Bible*” (pp. 169-171) lists three things we need to stop the spread of Biblical Illiteracy in its tracks:

1. **You need a Book** – You’ve got to have a Bible. Make it your best friend; spend time with it.
2. **You need a Nook** – A place where you can get alone with God and spend quality time in His Word.
3. **You need a Look** – You need to spend time looking into the Word of God.

James said, “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25).

I encourage you to have those three things in your life; if you do, your life will never be the same!

The Revival of the People (vs. 9-18)

Notice the effect that God’s Word had on the people.

Nehemiah 8:9-12, “And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said

unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.”

First of all, when the Word of God was read and expounded upon there was *conviction and grief* (vs. 9).

Nehemiah 8:9, “. . . *For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.*”

When we hear the Word we need to grieve over our sin. If you hear the Word but don't do what it says; you deceive yourself. If God is speaking to you, listen, repent, and confess your sin.

If you find yourself not loving your wife as Christ loved the church, you need to ask God to forgive you. If you're not the submissive wife God wants you to be, you need to ask God to forgive you and put it into practice. If you're not disciplining and training your children in the way of the Lord, you're neglecting them. Ask God to forgive you and start being obedient. Do what the Bible says.

Secondly, it leads to *joy* (vs. 10-12)

Nehemiah 8:10-12, “. . . *for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*”

Once we've repented and been forgiven, its time to rejoice. Warren W. Wiersbe said that, “*It is as wrong to mourn when God has forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us.*”

“. . . *weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.* (Ps. 30:5).”

“*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted* (Matt. 5:4).”

Joy comes when I believe God and His Word. Joy isn't just an emotion or feeling, its faith, based upon what God says in His Word. It's not my circumstances; it's believing God, living by faith in the Word of God. When you do that, you may not have smooth sailing but, in the midst of storms you will have joy.

Thirdly, there was *obedience* (vs. 13-18)

Nehemiah 8:13-18, “*And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month (called the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles – The Children of Israel would move out of their homes and move into little shacks for a week – this hadn't been done for over a thousand years – they realized the needed to do what the Bible says): And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is*

written. (Notice the people's response) So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner."

The people were obedient to the Word of God.

Matthew Henry tells us that, "Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience."

How effective can you be, as a Christian, without the joy of the Lord? Not very.

Notice their obedience was three-fold: (1) it was prompt (vs. 16) – they didn't delay; (2) it was complete (vs. 17) – "all" of the congregation; (3) it was costly – this is inferred in the text

When you read, understand, and obey the Bible it will be costly. Perhaps it'll cost you your job because you're not going to lie, cheat or steal anymore. Your boss may fire you because you no longer desire to cut corners. It may cost you your friendship and affection of other people. You may be ostracized, not invited anymore to their parties. Your spouse may misunderstand or even not like you anymore. Obedience can be costly!

The story is told of a man named Pierre who, as a gunner, was standing by his gun, during a 19th century siege of Paris, when the commander came up and said, "Gunner, do you see the bridge over there and the little shanty in a thicket to the left?" "I see it, sir," said Pierre, turning pale. "It's an enemy nest; hit it with a shell!" the commander ordered. Pierre turned paler still but aimed his gun carefully and then fired it. "Well hit, my man, well hit!" exclaimed the general. But then he noticed the tears running down the gunner's cheeks. "What's the matter, man?" "Pardon me, General," said Pierre, "it was my house – everything I owned in this world."

When you seek to obey God it will cost you something. Who are you living for? If you don't live for God and obey His Word you'll be a miserable person.

I'll never forget being a teenager and coming home after a party, and having my mother wait up for me and say, "Johnny Paul, if you don't give your heart to Jesus, and follow the Bible, you'll be a miserable young man." That was the last thing I wanted to hear. "I have another party to go to tomorrow, why did you tell me that?" I replied. She really messed me up. Her words haunted me for quite a while until I came to the point where I surrendered my life to Jesus.

Let's Bring back the Book
Let's Open the Book
Let's Read the Book
Let's Understand the Book
Let's Rejoice in the Book

Let's Obey the Book

To give the Bible its rightful place
Is to bring glory to God,
Health to the church
And light to the world.

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