



## “Spiritual Renewal”

Part 3

Nehemiah 8

**Idea:** Spiritual renewal and vitality come through God’s Word, which forms the believer.

**Intro:** Before President Eisenhower died in 1969; Billy Graham was invited to visit him. The evangelist was told he could only stay thirty minutes. But when the time was up, the president asked him to stay longer. “Billy,” he said, “I want you to tell me once again how I can be sure my sins are forgiven and that I’m going to heaven, because nothing else matters now.” Billy took out his New Testament and read several verses. He pointed out that we go to heaven totally on the merits of what Christ did on the cross. After prayer President Eisenhower said, “Thank you. I’m ready.” This reminds us it is the Word of God, and not man’s opinion, that people want when they are stepping into eternity. – Thomas F. Zimmerman

Death awaits all of us. It points out and reminds us of our finiteness. It causes us to search for something or someone who transcends life and death. We find the *Someone* we are

looking for in the pages of the Bible. God has spoken. From the opening page of creation to the concluding promise of Christ's return, the Bible and as such the Christian faith conclude that God has indeed spoken and continues to speak. The Bible in our hands is an inspired book. Many writers contributed to its composition over a span of some 1,500 years, but it only has one author...God.

*16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

*...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. – 2 Peter 1:20b-21*

Through this inspired Word, God has revealed the truth. We could not have come up with this on our own. The nature of man leads him to suppress the truth (Rom 1:18) that “*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen 1:1). We could not have fitted together the prophecies or designed something so wondrous as grace. It takes revelation. The Bible is God's revelation to us.

The Christian faith is based on revelation: God meets Moses and bestows the law. God comes down in the Person of Christ and reveals salvation and hope.

Revelation is the unveiling of that which is hidden. It is God pulling aside the curtain, sweeping away the clutter, opening the door of understanding and truth. His clearest revelations are in creation, Scripture, and Christ.

The result of inspiration and revelation is that the Bible has authority for all of life. It is the only rule of faith and practice. It is God's inspired, revealed, and authoritative word for us. Unfortunately, many people, while finding it an interesting

book, will not accept its authority. Jesus was thoroughly committed to the authority of Scripture. He obeyed it in His every move, and He is our example. Therefore, as followers of Christ we believe, the veracity of God's Word is the center around which life arranges itself.

**Inquiry:** As we have seen so far in the first seven chapters of Nehemiah, his ambition was not simply to reconstruct the city's defenses but to revitalize a spiritual community. He wasn't seeking to resurrect a religious community. He desired to see his countrymen experience a spiritual renewal in their lives. Nehemiah quickly discovered that reforming a community is a more exacting task than restoring its walls. He understood that the only way for them to experience a spiritual renewal was for them to return to God's Word. Spiritual renewal and vitality come through God's Word, which forms the believer. Spiritual renewal is what we've been examining.

As soon as the building work came to an end, an unusual event took place, which was to prove dramatically influential in the spiritual life of God's people. The work was finished during the late summer month of Elul (6:15), and the next month, Tishri, marked the beginning of the year. The first day of the seventh month was a public holiday known as the Feast of Trumpets. So, only a few days after the completion of the wall, hundreds of men, women, and children gathered in Jerusalem for a new year celebration in which God's written Word played a central part. An outdoor public meeting was devoted entirely to hearing the reading and interpretation of Scripture.

Ezra and Nehemiah's work to reestablish faithfulness and holiness among the Jews cultivated a genuine desire for the Word of God that opened the door for spiritual renewal. Let's examine this desire, which led to renewal. We have learned that experiencing spiritual renewal involves first valuing God's Word and second applying God's Word. There is a third component to spiritual renewal.

### III. Sharing God's Word (8:13-18)

Read Nehemiah 8:13-18.

The day following this huge meeting, the heads of families gathered with Jerusalem's spiritual leaders for further study of God's Word. Their reading on the second day reminded them that halfway through this seventh month they were to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Lev 23:33-43). Scriptural teaching concerning this week of celebration was to be communicated by the heads of families to everyone else in the country.

On this Father's Day we see a great example for dads to model in their homes. Gordon Chilvers has said, "The father is God's special representative in the home. As the family's divinely appointed priest and intercessor, he is the spiritual leader." Dads don't neglect the privilege and responsibility God has given you to point your kids toward Jesus and to teach them the Word of God.

Nehemiah tells us that the fathers were to proclaim this word and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem (vs. 15). During the upcoming festival, God's Word was not only to be declared orally but also enacted visually so that, by hearing and seeing, people would recall what God had done for them. The Feast of Booths directed God's people to three great themes.

#### A. Thanking God for the past.

This festival was Israel's annual reminder of God's protection and provision centuries earlier as their forefathers traveled through the wilderness on their journey from Egypt to Canaan. During those long years, the people of God lived in booths, simple tents made from leaves and branches, as they made their way through the dangerous wilderness.

Natural hazards, wild animals, and marauding enemies were a constant threat to their safety, but through it all the Lord had brought them safely to the land He had promised to give them. Amid the pressure of new challenges, it was all too easy to forget what God had already done for them, not just in the wilderness but even since they had settled in their own country. Even here, some of the people did not have a proper home in Jerusalem (7:4), but at this festival they confessed that their confidence was in the Lord, not in walls and buildings. Sovereignly God had guided them, generously He had fed them, and powerfully He had protected them; such abundant and evident grace must never be forgotten.

The Feast of Booths was an annual reminder to Israel of their immense indebtedness to God. You see, in the inevitable pressures of life, we too can be so concerned about what we want God to do that we forget what He has already done for us. Instead, we ought to be like Samuel who said, *“Till now the Lord has helped us”* (1 Sam 7:12). Each day we need deliberately to recall the Lord’s goodness to us, remembering specifically how He has promised to help. Forgetfulness is at the root of a great deal of discontentment. Obsessed with what we need, we ignore what we have.

As we value God’s Word and apply it to our lives, we share it with others. As we do so, we are reminded of God’s faithfulness in our past. The sharing of God’s Word leads us to thank God for His faithfulness in the past. Secondly, it leads to...

#### B. Testifying of God in the present.

One of the beautiful aspects of the Feast of Booths and other festivals was their impressive witnessing

value. Once the Jews settled back in the land, they did not live in detached, insulated communities. Merchants and travelers visited their towns and villages. In Nehemiah's time, we know that traders from the northern coastal country of Tyre established a permanent base in Jerusalem for the sale of fish and other commodities (13:16). The Feast of Booths would take any community's visitors by surprise. As local citizens left their homes to camp out for seven days, people who knew little of their history and culture would naturally ask what was happening during the week's holiday and, intrigued by the event, enquire why they were living outside their homes. It was a magnificent opportunity for them to proclaim and spread the word to visitors, strangers, and aliens as well as to their own children and young people. It was a remarkably vivid teaching-aid for people who knew the importance of passing on to this and the next generation the truths, which God had entrusted to them.

The sharing of God's Word leads us to thank God for His faithfulness in the past and to testify of His goodness in the present. Thirdly, it leads to...

#### C. Trusting God into the future.

The Feast of Booths reminded the Jews of the biblical perspective they were to have regarding their lives and livelihood. It told them that, not just during their past history, but in their present experience, they were a pilgrim people. At this particular time, the feast would have been a sobering reminder not to trust in walls. Like their patriarchal forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) who lived in tents, they were looking to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:9-16).

As Christians we also look beyond this world to that home, for which God is constantly preparing us. This longing does not cause us to opt out of our present responsibilities; far from it. Our position as aliens and strangers in this life creates a sense of urgency as well as perspective.

Regardless of how enriching or disappointing our present experience may be, as followers of Jesus we know that ultimate satisfaction is reserved for the future which Christ has promised us. It has been said that people who have something beyond will never be weary.

Billy Graham used to share a story of a lady who had been very sick for a number of years. The lady who was a follower of Jesus said, "I have spent many days alone but never a lonely day."

The intellectual and technological advancements of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have made many things of life easier. However, they have not been able to satisfy the deep longings of the human heart or heal the depravity in culture. Only God can do that. Therefore, as God's people we look to God's Word for direction. In it we find the words of life. In it we find our sense of purpose as God's created and redeemed people. In it we find the source of spiritual renewal as we thank God for His faithfulness in the past, testify of His faithfulness in the present, and trust in His faithfulness into the future.

**Conclusion:** God has spoken. He is the one who said, "*Let there be light*" at creation. And He is the one who said, "*It is finished*" on the cross.

God has spoken, and He has spoken most clearly through the God the Son, Jesus Christ. And He alone has *the words of*

*eternal life* (John 6:68). His presence and voice are what we seek. They are what bring spiritual renewal to our lives. Therefore, we would be wise to value God's Word that reveals Him to us. We would be wise to apply it to our lives. And we would be wise to share it with others...our spouses, children, family, friends, coworkers, classmates, neighbors, and the nations. God's Word, His revelation to mankind is found in the Bible.

The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its decisions are immutable. Read it to believe, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's guide, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, daily, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and will be remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labor, and condemns all who trifle with its contents.

How is your walk with Jesus today? Is there one? Do you need to confess your sin and place your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior? As a follower of Jesus, are you walking at a guilty distance? Are you in need of spiritual renewal? The spiritual renewal and vitality you desire come through God's Word, which forms the believer.