

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

Revival at the Water Gate

Nehemiah 8:1–12



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Once the walls and gates were finally completed (Nehemiah 6:15), Nehemiah organized Jerusalem into a well-guarded, stable body of people (7:1–73). Immediately upon the completion of this massive task, he made plans to revive the authority of the Scriptures in the minds of the citizens. The testimony of God's Word had been silent for far too long. The beginnings of spiritual revival were taking place. And the potential for revival is always present in our own lives, if we just know where to look.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Setting of Revival (Nehemiah 8:1–2)

Having completed the wall and elected Nehemiah as governor, the people of Israel were well-organized, well-defended, and well-governed (Nehemiah 7). But their spiritual welfare still languished from neglect. So they asked Ezra to meet with them in what would prove to be the beginning of a legendary spiritual revival.

The people met at the square in front of the Water Gate. One of the key figures at this gathering was Ezra, a godly scribe and priest. As a scribe, Ezra possessed expertise in two areas. He was an expert in the realm of legal matters—able to act as both judge and jury before the people, and he was an expert in interpreting Scripture—able to teach the Word of God. As a priest, Ezra could enter the temple to represent the people before God.

According to verse 2, the people voluntarily came together, seeking spiritual food from the Law of Moses after decades of hunger for its nourishing power. This revival took place “on the first day of the seventh month” (8:2). What's so significant about the timing? For the Jews, that day marked the beginning of their most sacred month of the year in which they celebrated three important feasts: the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. Traditionally, the Scriptures were read on the first day of the Feast of Booths, so after hundreds of years, the Israelites started fresh—with obedience.



Quotable

*Every Bible-
teaching ministry
hangs on
three wires.*

Is it accurate?

Is it clear?

Is it practical?

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. The Event of Revival (Nehemiah 8:3–8)

Nehemiah 8:3–8 contains a detailed account of the exposition—or explanation—of Scripture which the people heard that day. That exposition had three distinct characteristics.

First, *the exposition included reading of the Scriptures*. Ezra read to the nation of former prisoners of war the life-giving Word they had so sorely missed. He read to them for several hours as the people stood and listened in silent awe (Nehemiah 8:3–5).

Second, *the exposition included praise because of the Scriptures*. Ezra praised God for what He had revealed to them in His Word (8:6). The Israelites then responded in a spontaneous, unguarded expression of praise and gratitude.

Third, *the exposition included insight into the Scriptures*. These verses strike a beautiful balance between the emotional and the intellectual. Each Israelite received a large, satiating helping of the Word through the teaching ministry of Ezra and the Levites (8:7–8).

3. The Mobilization of God's People (Nehemiah 8:9–12)

The remnant of Israel wept over the sins of their forefathers that had led them into captivity. Then, when the Law of Moses was explained to them for the first time in decades, the people not only became reacquainted with their own laws and sacrifices, but they were also reintroduced to Yahweh, the holy God of Israel. In the light of His perfect presence, their own great sins broke their hearts.

Certainly, this kind of guilt is wholly appropriate. But the people needed to move on from feeling remorse to knowing the joy of God's grace and forgiveness. So Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites, as loving ministers of God's Word, moved their people from mourning to celebration (Nehemiah 8:10–12).



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A CLOSER LOOK

A Teachable Spirit

For a full day prior, the people of Jerusalem had listened as Ezra read the Scriptures. They absorbed the facts, but they still lacked true insight. Several factors will always be necessary to gain spiritual understanding. First, it takes time. The people had to process what they learned before they came back to build upon that foundation. Second, it takes the right people. The people specifically sought out Ezra the scribe to teach them the Scriptures. The Bible repeatedly affirms the importance of godly people imparting life's wisdom to those willing to learn it. That's the third factor: it takes a teachable attitude. The older leaders were members of Ezra's peer group, and yet they said, "Teach us." They demonstrated a genuine desire to learn. Sometimes the Lord wants to deliver the insight we need through our peers. But if we are to learn from them, we must come with a teachable attitude.



LET'S LIVE IT

Before we leave this incredible scene of revival at the Water Gate, let's pause to consider four practical lessons.

First, *no life is complete without the spiritual dimension*. Many of us are like the Israelites—we have well-organized lives and homes, but we lack a vibrant spiritual life. We feel the pangs of emptiness. We feel the same aches as the spiritually starving people of Israel. And if we don't fill that hunger with God's Word, we'll naturally try to fill it with something else.

Second, *no spiritual dimension is complete without scriptural input*. Just as our physical bodies depend on food to sustain them, our spiritual lives depend on the food supplied by God's Word. The Lord Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, confirmed this truth: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Third, *no scriptural input is complete without personal obedience*. Hearing the truths of Scripture without acting upon them is like sitting down to a feast without partaking. The people of Israel not only heard the Word of God, they acted upon it. First they restored the reading of the Word, and then, as we will discover in the next message, they reinstituted a God-ordained feast. They personally digested what they heard, allowing God to nourish their hearts.



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Fourth, *no personal obedience is complete without great rejoicing*. Rejuvenated by the first solid spiritual food they had ingested in years, the people of Israel dried their tears, gathered their children, and headed home with a feeling of euphoria that rivaled the day they completed the construction of the walls. They were exuberant in their restored relationship with God.

Do you have a specific place and time set aside to spend with the Lord, digesting His Word? If so, where and when? If not, what is the greatest obstacle that prevents you from spending more time with Him?



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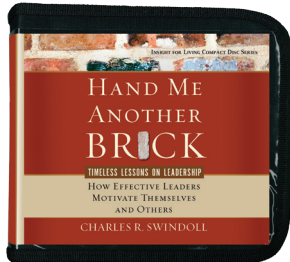
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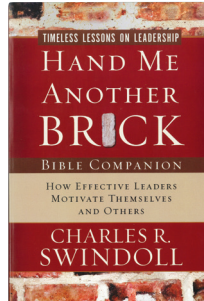
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