

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL UNDER NEHEMIAH: WORD AND SPIRIT **Exiles: The Power of Repentance Series, Part 2**

History tells us the Jewish people suffered greatly in captivity and faced very powerful cultural pressures in a foreign land that would have caused most cultures to lose their identity. But even in Babylon the Jewish people were able to maintain some semblance of a national and religious identity apart from Babylonia.

Some believe that it may have been during this period of captivity when synagogues – probably in homes – were first established, so Jews could observe the Sabbath and certain religious holidays.

Yet even with these pretty noble efforts 60-70 years of captivity took its toll on the Jewish people and many of their historical practices and much of their knowledge was either lost or forgotten to many.

PERSONAL APPLICATION: IF WE DO NOT CONSISTENTLY AND PUBLICLY PRACTICE WHAT WE BELIEVE... WHAT WE BELIEVE WILL BE FORGOTTEN IN FUTURE GENERATIONS.

HOW DO WE INSPIRE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AMONG A PEOPLE WHO HAVE LARGELY FORGOTTEN WHO THEY ARE AND WHO THEIR GOD IS?

*Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “**This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.**” For **all the people had been weeping** as they listened to the words of the Law. **Nehemiah 8:9¹ (NIV)***

WHY ARE THE PEOPLE WEeping AND WHAT IS THE CONNECTION TO SPIRITUAL RENEWAL?

- **This day is holy to the Lord...**

Psalm 118:24 tells us, *“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.”*

PERSONAL APPLICATION: SPIRITUAL RENEWAL, PERSONAL OR CORPORATE, MEANS THAT WE TOO MUST REGULARLY SET ASIDE TIME AS “HOLY TO THE LORD.” ON THOSE DAYS OR DURING THOSE TIMES WE SHOULD RID OURSELVES OF DISTRACTIONS AND FOCUS ON GOD.

¹ All Scripture is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise specified.

- **All the people were weeping... Why?**

PERSONAL APPLICATION: WHEN WE READ OR HEAR GOD'S WORD WE SHOULD TAKE THE TIME TO UNDERSTAND HOW IT APPLIES TO US AND RESPOND ACCORDINGLY.

THREE WRONG APPROACHES TO READING THE BIBLE²

- **The Xanax Approach**
- **The Magic 8 Ball Approach**
- **The Personal Shopper Approach**

HOW WE SHOULD READ THE BIBLE

A disciple is, literally, a learner — someone who follows the teachings of another. We should read the Bible to learn who and how we can become like Christ and who our God really is – all by reading to hear His voice. This results in learning, not just reading. Learning leads to being, which results in doing. But doing, without learning, leads to self-righteousness.

- **Do not mourn or weep...** If their response was appropriate, why do the leaders tell them to stop weeping and mourning?

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...
Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 (NKJV)

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)

Then all the people went away to eat and drink... to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

Nehemiah 8:12 (NIV)

² Adapted from an online article entitled, Why Bible Study Doesn't Transform Us, by Jen Wilkin, dated May 7, 2012. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-bible-study-doesnt-transform-us/>

- **Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks...**
 - **CIRCUMSTANCES HADN'T CHANGED, BUT THEIR HEARTS AND THEIR OUTLOOK HAD!**
 - Nehemiah reminds them that it is the joy of the Lord in their willingness to repent that has resulted in encouraging them and giving them strength.
 - Even though much is still the same, there is still much to be grateful for.
 - God preserved a remnant of His people while in captivity.
 - God has brought them back to Jerusalem from exile, as He promised He would do.
 - God protected them from the enemies while they rebuilt the walls and began to rebuild the Temple.
 - The wall was rebuilt in 52 days.
 - There are provisions enough in the city for everyone to eat and drink and celebrate for a change.
 - Their sins are forgiven, and they are restored to God.
 - All of this was reason enough to set aside a time as holy to the Lord to celebrate God's goodness, grace, and faithfulness to His people.

PERSONAL APPLICATION: WHEN WE READ GOD'S WORD IN OUR PERSONAL TIMES OF DEVOTION, OR HEAR IT TAUGHT WHEN WE COME TOGETHER, GOD'S GOAL IS NOT TO LEAVE US BROKEN OR HEAVY HEARTED – BUT TO DRAW US CLOSER TO HIM.

Sometimes the **drawing closer**, requires a more painful time of **drawing out** certain things that hinder our ability to approach God.

*Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds... he will revive us... he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. **Hosea 6:1-2 (NIV)***

CLOSING CHALLENGE

Focus on reading and listening to God's Word. If you read it carefully and earnestly the Spirit will give life to the Word, and it will give life to you as you respond to it.