

## SPIRITUAL REVIVAL THROUGH HEARING THE LAW

Nehemiah 8:1-18

Key Verse 18

*“Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.”*

In today's passage we are going to learn how to truly experience spiritual revival and heavenly joy. The people in Jerusalem could experience spiritual revival and heavenly joy when they heard, understood, and accepted the word of God sincerely in their hearts. Therefore, we are going to learn what is it about the word of God which could lead the people in Jerusalem to spiritual revival and heavenly joy? May God be with us today to receive one word of God with the same attitude as the people in Jerusalem, so that we too can experience spiritual revival and heavenly joy.

The passage today begins after the people in Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership had finally completed the wall in Jerusalem with the help of God. Now today we learn that after completing the wall the people in Jerusalem settled in their towns, thereafter they all moved to gather as one in the square before the Water Gate. Why did they all decide to gather in the square? Let us look at **verse 1b**: *“They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.”* They gathered at the square together because they were all yearning to hear the word of God and so they requested Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring the Book of the Law of Moses. The law of Moses was composed of the first 5 books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) referred to as the Torah in Hebrew or the Pentateuch.

After completing the wall, Nehemiah and the people of Israel restored the city of Jerusalem and the temple, and finally the people could feel a sense of security from their enemies, they had confidence in Jerusalem as the dwelling of God. However, something was missing in their hearts, completing the wall could not grant them spiritual revival, rebuilding the wall could not restore their relationship with God. What they needed to restore their relationship with God was the word of God, the Law that God gave to Moses. And so, by the help of the Holy Spirit, they were all moved together to gather at the Water Gate and requested Ezra the Priest to bring the Law and read it to them.

How did Ezra respond to the request of the people of Israel?

Let us look at **verse 2-3**: *“So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. 3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.”* When the people requested, Ezra responded by reading the law of God to the people, he spent 6 hours reading the law to the men and women in Jerusalem who were yearning to hear the word of God, who wanted to restore their relationship of God. From Ezra we can learn that true spiritual leadership means being available to God's sheep and spending time to plant the word of God in their hearts. When the people came to Ezra, he did not make them wait or tell them to come next time, but rather he took the opportunity to plant the word of God in their hearts by reading it aloud for six hours.

Furthermore, in **verse 4** we see how Ezra maximized on the opportunity to plant the word of God in the people's hearts. He did not take it lightly, but rather he stood on a high wooden platform build for the occasion to ensure that the people clearly hear him and receive the word of God deeply. He had 13 other priests who stood beside him to take care of the God's sheep. When the people saw and heard the word of God from Ezra, they listened attentively, with reverence and honor to God they stood up as Ezra opened the book of the Law of Moses. As Ezra read the Law of Moses, he praised the Lord, the great God and all the people lifted their hands and responded Amen, Amen, they bowed down and worshiped with their faces to the ground. This response from the people of Israel shows how they were indeed committed to the to receive one word of God, listening attentively at Ezra for six hours. In order to receive the word of God and experience spiritual revival, we also need the attitude of the people of Israel. We should not just come to the worship service and allow our minds to be occupied by school work and other things. Rather we must pray for the holy spirit to help us that we may listen to the word of God attentively, we must pray that we may honor God and with reverence listen to His word.

Furthermore, as Ezra was reading the law to the people of Israel who gave him full attention, the Levites also took the opportunity to co-work with Ezra and also added to the planting of the word of God. How did they do it? Let us look at **verse 8**: *“They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.”* The Levites had deep Bible study with the people of Israel, to help them understand the words of God so that it can have an impact. Here we can see the importance of Bible study, in our ministry we are so privileged that UBF was founded on the principles of Bible study, which was not only reading of the word of God, but also interpretation and application to help campus students understand the words of God, receive one word, repent and be saved. When the Levites had this Bible study with the men and women in Jerusalem, something amazing happened. Let us look at **verse 9-11**:

*“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. 10 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.” 11 The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.””*

As the people listened to the words of God, the interpretation and application, they mourned, wept, and grieved. Why did they weep, mourn and grieve? Their response was a sign of sincere repentance, when they sincerely listened to the word of God, they could realize their sin and consequences. They deeply realized that they were wretched sinners before God. When they were convicted, they did not harden their hearts, but wept, mourned, and grieved deeply in their sins. Weeping, mourning, and grieving for our sins is a great work of God, it godly sorrow that leads to repentance. In **Matthew 5:4**, Jesus also said on the Sermon on the mount: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* Today as well, we need not harden our hearts when we hear the word of God, but rather we should allow it to convict us, we should allow the word of God to penetrate our hearts. When we study the Bible and write testimony, we should not allow our own ideas to take charge, but rather we should allow the work of God to take its course, convict us so that we can be led to repentance.

Furthermore, although, mourning, weeping and grieve is a good work of God, Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites instructed the people of Israel saying: *“This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.”* Again, Nehemiah said: *“This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”* And the Levites said: *“Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.”* Here Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites comforted the people of Israel, because although weeping, mourning and grieve is the great work of God. The leaders revealed the people the much greater work of God, which is comfort when they repent from their sins. Realizing our sins is great work, which is critical, but being comforted through the revelation of the forgiveness of our sins is much greater work of God. That is why Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites comforted the people of Israel, by revealing the grace of God unto them, the love of God who welcomes every sinner who comes before him with a repentant heart. Nehemiah, said to the wretched people of Israel who were weeping, *“Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared.”* The leaders did not assign a punishment for the sins of the people, but rather they comforted them.

Today as well many people think God will not accept them because of their sins, they think they will not be accepted in the church and so they harden their hearts from the word of God and continue with their worldly way of live. However, through the encounter of the people of Israel, we can see how when we humble our hearts and allow the word of God to work, we can experience a great blessing. Just like the prodigal son, although he had wronged and committed great sin before his father, wasted away his inheritance, when he returned with a repentant heart, his father said in **Luke 15:22b-23**: *“Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate.”* Although we have sinned greatly before God, God loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ to shed his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. God did this to save us, he wants to save us, he wants to help us overcome the power of sin, so let humble our hearts, come to God with repentant hearts.

Furthermore, in comforting the people of Israel, Nehemiah said to them: *“Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength”* Here Nehemiah emphasized the grace of God unto the people of Israel, which is the true source of our joy.

In this world there are many things that promise to grant us joy, money, romance, sport, doing well in academics and many other things. But as we have experienced, this joy is only temporary, it does not last forever. But the joy that Nehemiah is talking about is that which lasts forever, joy that comes through the hearing of the word of God, joy that comes through the forgiveness of our sins. This is a very special kind of joy, for it grants us strength. Sin has power to paralyze us, make us unhappy, tarnish our relationship with loved ones, even though we have lots of money, even though outwardly we are nice and kind people, even though we might be getting good results in our studies. Sin is able to take away our joy, sin is able to make us weak.

But God through his mercy and grace, can take away the power of sin, God is able to grant us true joy through the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, through this joy we can have true strength, so the joy of the Lord is not just an emotional thing that we experience, but it is living with great power that cuts through our hearts destroying the power of sin.

After Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites had comforted the people of Israel, revealing the grace of God unto them, something amazing happened. First, the mourning of the people of Israel turned into great joy. Let us look at **verse 12**: *“Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.”* Finally, the people of Israel could experience the spiritual revival and heavenly joy, how did this come about? This came about when they listened to the word of God attentively, through the word of God they could realize how wretched sinners they are and repented, they were comforted by the grace of God in the forgiveness of their sins. And this led to their revival and heavenly joy.

Secondly, when the people of Israel humbled their hearts and listened to the word of God and experienced the grace of God, they were moved with a great appetite to learn more of God’s word and to obey it. Let us look at **verse 13-14**: *“On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. 14 They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month.”* It was quite amazing that when the people read this word, it was on the seventh month, and this was great opportunity for them to practically obey the word of God and renew their commitment to God by celebrating this festival. They spread out the word throughout their towns in Jerusalem and everyone went out and brought back branches to build the temporary shelters in accordance with what the law of Moses had instructed. Their obedience and careful observation of the law of Moses was so great that this celebration was so said to be the most and spectacularly celebrated since the days of Joshua Son of Nun. And the joy of the people of Israel was so great. Great spiritual revival was witnessed among the people of Israel.

### Conclusion

From the **key verse 18** it says: *“Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.”* From the key verse we can see that just as we learned the people of Israel considered listening to the word of God as priority. As we learnt when the people of Israel prioritized listening to the word of God, they could experience true spiritual revival and heavenly joy. The people of Israel could be filled with great strength to overcome the power of sin and to live holy and Godly lives with great joy. Furthermore, when they dedicated special time to the word of God, they could obey it absolutely and bring great praise to God with great joy.

Therefore, just like the people of Israel, let us return to the fundamentals by humbly studying the word of God and writing weekly testimony, which was at the core of the spiritual revival of the people of Israel. Let us not harden our hearts but allow the word of God to work by convicting us of our sins. Let us not just consider our coming to church as a social gathering. But realize, that it is a communion with the Living God, listening to His word and finding our sins. For as we learnt spiritual revival and heavenly joy come when people hear and accept God’s words sincerely with Amen and obey them immediately. May we be men and women of God who study the Bible sincerely so that we can experience God’s spiritual revival work in us. May God also raise many Bible teachers among us continually, who will be ready to teach the Bible to campus students and lead them to understanding the words accurately.