

REVIVAL UNDER EZRA AND NEHEMIAH
Great Revivals
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Today we look at the revival under Ezra and Nehemiah. I encourage you to turn to Ezra. We'll be looking through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah today. Before we do I'd like to set a context for the message.

The book of Ezra and Nehemiah, you don't just jump into it. One needs to figure out where these persons are and their moment in history and what it is that God had called them to do. Actually all these books Ezra and Nehemiah follow Chronicles and Kings, even though they're in what to us would seem to be an early part of the Old Testament we have the Psalms and Proverbs yet to go and all the prophets yet to go. In actual fact Ezra and Nehemiah bring up the end of the chronology of the Old Testament. With the prophet Malachi, Nehemiah is at the very end of that Old Testament revelation. They happen to be in our place in the Bible where they're at because the historical books are grouped together. So Ezra and Nehemiah are bringing up their particular position in the canon of scripture.

The background for the writing of Ezra and Nehemiah is that these two persons live in a time when the nation of Judah is beginning to return from its Babylonian captivity. Babylon in 586 had completely taken the kingdom of Judah. They had destroyed the city of Jerusalem. They had destroyed the magnificent temple of Solomon, which had stood for over three and a half centuries. They left the land of Judah in waste. The people of God were carried away into captivity in fulfillment of prophecy that if indeed they departed from the Lord this judgment would come upon them.

We have two very moving accounts in scripture of the condition of the people in their subjugation to Babylon. A good many of the people did go to Babylon into captivity and the way that they felt is so clearly seen in Psalm 137 where the exiles of Judah at Babylon say "By the waters of Babylon there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion [Jerusalem]. On the willows there we hung our lyres for there our captives required of us songs and our tormentors mirth saying 'sing us one of the songs of Zion.' How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land." Tremendous feeling of desolation to those that had gone into exile, carried away in three waves of captivity in 605 and 597 and 586.

The book of Lamentations written by the prophet Jeremiah following the book of Jeremiah itself is a story of the prophets experience of those who were not carried away into captivity but remained in the land. And the kind of desolation that was felt by those who remained after the Babylonian troops had ravaged their kingdom. Thus Lamentations begins "How lonely sits the city that was full of people." Jeremiah does an incredible thing in Lamentations. In the first four chapters – 1, 2, and 4 – every verse in those chapters begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 verses in each of those chapters. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And chapter 3 which has 66 verses every three verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. As though Jeremiah is saying, From A to Z, here is what has happened to us. And here is the depth of our poverty and here is the reading out of our sin.

When he comes to chapter 5 he can only summarize the experience of the people in the land by noting the terrible conditions of the time. "Remember O Lord what has befallen us. Behold!

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See our disgrace. Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to aliens. We have become like orphans – fatherless. Our mothers are like widows. We must pay for the water we drink. The wood we get must be bought. With the yoke on our necks we are hard driven, we are weary and we are given no rest. We have given the hand to Egypt and Assyria to get bread enough [that’s reference to foreign alliances which were not of God]. Our fathers sinned and are no more and we bear their iniquity. Slaves rule over us. There is none to deliver us from their hand. We get our bread at the peril of our lives because of the sword in the wilderness. Our skin is as hot as an oven with the burning heat of famine. Women are ravished in Zion, virgins in the towns of Judah. Princes are hung up by their hands and no respect is shown to the elders. Young men are compelled to grind at the mill and boys stagger under loads of wood. The old men have quit the city gate and the young men their music. The joy of our hearts is ceased. And our dancing has been turned to mourning.”

From captivity God would bring his people back. Thus Ezra and Nehemiah record for us the second great movement of the people of God in scripture. The first great movement had occurred over 900 years earlier when the people of God had moved out of Egypt to their Promised Land. Now the second great movement of God’s people is occurring under Ezra and Nehemiah as they move out of exile in Babylon, back to the Promised Land. We of course live in the time of the third great movement of the Jewish people back to their land – and the last movement we might add.

From captivity, God would bring them back, not with the sign and miracles which had accompanied the deliverance under Moses but under a whole different kind of leadership and a different kind of manifestation. But this time when they came back certain things would happen which are still affecting us.

I’m struck with things in history, which we take for granted. Really if they had not happened we would not be where we are today and we would not be the people we are today. Such is the kind of thing that is happening under Ezra and Nehemiah. Under the return which they accomplished the people of God are forever cured of their idolatry. In Judaism from their time until now never again have the Jewish people bowed down before idols and worshipped the Baals and the gods of Canaan as we have seen in earlier stories of revivals from kings and chronicles. That is stripped forever.

Another thing which happens under their leadership is that the Jewish ethnic purity is preserved. That’s a fundamental concern of Ezra and Nehemiah, the ethnic purity of their people. They are concerned about their people’s cultural ways, about their religious ways and about their genetic track as well. What they are attempting to do is to preserve their people as a distinct people through the forbidding of intermarrying with others and the like.

God has a purpose for his people. It would have been thwarted if they had simply disappeared into history like, for example, the Philistines. They disappeared. They ceased to be. They became incorporated into other people but the Jewish people maintained their Jewishness. Because of the care of Ezra and Nehemiah not only did the Jewish people maintain their Jewishness but they’re preserving of the genealogical record of the Jewish people made it possible for Jesus Christ himself to come with credentials as the messiah. For in their work they paved for centuries in advance the prospect of Jesus coming into the world.

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One other thing that happens under Ezra and Nehemiah, partially through Ezra since he is a scribe. He is the first of the great scribes of Israel. It is under his leadership that the scriptures are collected which were then written. He himself writes scripture. Perhaps writing 1 and 2 Chronicles and gathered together and put into a whole, he starts this and under his ministry it is later completed in the years and decades following him. But it was important that the people of God have a book and it's important that we as the people of God have a book today as well.

In all of these things we see major contributions coming out of this period of time. The book of Ezra and Nehemiah if you put it together covers a span of just about 100 years. From 536 B.C. to 432 B.C.. In these 100 years, these two books describe three returns of God's people from captivity.

The first return in 536 under Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zerubbabel is a governor and Joshua is a priest. They bring back 50,000 people with them. Contemporary with them as their story is told in by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah whom we encounter in the Old Testament.

A second return is accomplished after them by over 75 years later, Ezra comes back. His story is told in Ezra 6-10. Ezra comes back to the land about 458 B.C..

Fourteen years after him, the third return is accomplished under Nehemiah.

I suppose as I have looked at this you can anticipate the predicament that I am in as a person who has pledged today to preach about the revival under Ezra and Nehemiah. What am I to do? I have two minor prophets Haggai and Zechariah plus a third minor prophet Malachi who probably prophesied in the time of Nehemiah. I have Ezra and Nehemiah, some 23 chapters in all. Over a century of time. Somehow we're to grab this as if grabbing for a brass ring in half an hour's time. And put all this together and come out with something, which is meaningful for our life here and now. I felt I should speak on this particular theme.

As I prayed and studied and reread I thought, Lord, there's got to be a way to get into this whole span of time and vast amount of scripture and do it within a half an hour. It finally came to me. Why not speak on the Roadblocks to Spiritual Renewal that kept coming up for the people during this century of time. As I thought through the book sure enough there was roadblock after roadblock to their spiritual renewal. Interestingly enough I discovered these same roadblocks are the same roadblocks that I have come across in times of spiritual renewal in my own life and I dare say you have faced as well.

It's striking that these two chapters therefore kind of form a spiritual paradigm of how it is that we are resisted by the enemy. And how the attempts to have revival and restoral are met with frustration.

Last week I had a major emphasis of speaking about the destroying of the high places. Here today we see in roadblocks another aspect to the lack of spiritual growth in our lives and that is some of the small things – the little foxes that spoil the vine that stand in our way from really being all that God wants us to be. I'd like to look at these roadblocks in succession as we thumb through Ezra and Nehemiah today.

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The first roadblock I see being put in the path of the exiles coming back to their land is the roadblock of someone dragging up their old path in their face and throwing up the past and stopping them from further progress. How did that happen? If you look at Ezra 1, 2, 3 in your spare time you'll find in the first return in 536 B.C. under Zerubbabel and Joshua the people of God upon their return immediately when they come to Jerusalem come to the ruins of the temple. In that memorable moment their first priority is to re-establish worship to God. So even though there is now no temple there they build an altar.

It's kind of like in 1967 when the western part of Jerusalem was taken and we saw the rush for the wailing wall. It is that kind of element which is going on in these early chapters of Ezra that people come back and they are again in their land and for the first time in 70 years they are able to open up in their worship to the Lord in the manner which had been prescribed for them by their law and by their custom.

It is a moment of tremendous happiness. That moment of offering the burnt offering on the altar is then followed by a time in which they take a large offering for the collection of revenue to build a second temple. It is going to be a temple to replace Solomon's which had been destroyed.

Chapter 3:12 begins to tell us how it is that these people feel when they see the foundations of this new second temple laid. "The people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers houses, old men who had seen the first house wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this housing laid. Though many shouted aloud with joy so that the people could not distinguish the should of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping."

What is being said is that after they come back to lay the second foundations there are now men who are 70, 80, 90 years of age who had been only teens and children when they had seen the temple of Solomon destroyed. The younger people who had never seen the first temple are all excited and filled with joy as they see the second temple's foundations laid but the people who really knew the glory of the first one said, It's not like the good old days. So there are sounds of weeping co-mingled with the sounds of joy.

But the temple was underway. To his progress that the Lord wanted his people to take there now comes opposition. Here's where we get the theme that the enemy who wants to throw a roadblock in our lives wants to drag up the old past. The people of the land who had settled in the land who were not Jews did not like what was happening because they saw the possible slipping of the land from their grasp in just so simple a thing as the start of the building of the temple. So they sent a letter Ezra 4 to the king of the Persians. Persia had replaced Babylon as the major world power. They say to the king in verse 14 and 15 to search his records. "You will find in the book of the records that this city is a rebellious city hurtful to kings and provinces and that sedition was stirred up in it from of old. This was why this city was laid waste. We make known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls finished you will have no possession in the province beyond the Eurphrates." A throwing up of the past to the king, saying this people has been a people of political insurrection. Don't let them do this.

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It's like when we start out to rebuild things in our lives that have been absent. We start out to do what's right, one of the strategies which the enemy will try to bring against us is to stop that building work. One of the devices which he will use is to throw up to us something of the past and say to us what in the world made you to think that you could ever change from what you were. You're always the same. There's no hope for you. To the people in Ezra and Nehemiah's time and before the idea was presented to them, "You're always a politically seditious people and you cannot be trusted. You must be stopped." It's as if the enemy likes to take a home movie screen and show pictures of us as we were 10-15 years ago. We know we're not like that now but he wants to make us think when we see the old films that that is still what you are like. This by the way helps us to see our tasks as the people of God to encourage one another rather than telling people you can't make it. You can't change. Your old nature is going to come out on top. I don't care how many times you've tried, you're always going to fall flat on your face. The enemy tries to drag up this thing from the past.

For a while it works with the Israelites as they come back into the land. In fact they have a very initial weakness to the strategy of the enemy. Just as often occurs when a fresh commitment is made to the Lord of a person who has never made a commitment before there may be a time of initial weakness resisting attack of the enemy. You start out with such good intentions. It seems like such a great thing to rebuild this temple and you hadn't expected any one to think ill of you for doing it. You hadn't expected anyone to try to make sense out of your life and really come to the Lord. You're not prepared for the opposition.

Sure enough "The work on the house of God stopped. It ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." For 14 years we will learn from the scriptural text their work came to a dead halt because someone was able to stop them by dragging out the past.

I simply remind you from the New Testament that if you're in Christ you are a new creature and the old things have passed away.

The second roadblock that comes up and it comes during this period of 14 years of lethargy. A second roadblock to spiritual development and renewal is the roadblock of wrong priorities.

We read in Ezra 5:1 "Now the prophet Haggai and Zachariah the son of Iddo prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. What they prophesied was, Get going. Rebuild this temple which you have started.

The prophet Haggai in 1:4 & 9 you find the specific problem that the people, the exiles who had returned, got into during this 14-year period of time. As they left off their top priority of restoring the center of worship they began to do other things. Haggai protests to them and said to them "Is it a time for you to dwell in your paneled houses while this house, the Temple, lies in ruins?" and he says "You have looked for much and lo it came to little. When you brought it home I blew it away. Why? Says the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins. While you were busy yourselves each with his own house." The message of Haggai is simply this: you've worked and worked to settle your own affairs and yet you have not had the fruitfulness of the land and you've neglected the doing of your top priority. If you return to your top priority then your fruitfulness and your abundance will pick up and your whole economic condition will be changed.

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If we translate that in terms of the kinds of roadblocks that develop in our life. What's the enemy trying to do to get us to put secondary things first? And to minimize the central issues of life. To become, for example, so busy in the family area with building a house that we forget building a home. If you are in a career, to become so busy in building a career that you do not become concerned with building a life. To become so concerned if you are spiritual with the trappings of religious liturgy of books and things that one fails to sense the vital communion with the Lord that is available. That is even greater than simply the going through the motions of religious tradition. It is the lack of priorities which is occurring at this particular moment, which has to be addressed. For as long as our priorities are wrong, things we are giving our utmost attention to, then inevitably there is a kind of a dryness.

Do you sense a spiritual dryness in your life? Could it be that the spiritual dryness in your life is directly traceable to a lack of right priorities?

Finally 14 years later after the building of the temple is left off and under Haggai and Zachariah's ministry, the work on the temple is begun and four years later in 516 it is completed.

We find then a third roadblock that comes in the experience of these exiles as they are coming back into the land. The third roadblock really comes to us in Ezra 9:1-4. It's seen very clearly. Ezra has returned. It's now some 66 years after the temple has been completed. A whole generation has come and gone. Ezra leads a second return back into the land. The people have rebuilt the temple. But now as he comes back he begins to inquire as to what is happening. He has secured approval from the king of Persia to come. In 9:1 we find the officials approached him and said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations. From the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Ammorites."

By the way, over a century ago these people were to be put out of the land. But when you do not take decisive action in your life with removing the things which God has told you to remove they become thorny problems down the road. You become so entangled with them that you can hardly cope with them and separate from them.

Verse 2, they had taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. In this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost." What would you respond if you heard this? "So what? People get married all the time."

Verse 3, Ezra's response, "When I heard this I rent my garments and my mantle and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled." I submit to you that that hurt. He sat in ashes and prayed for a long duration of time. What he was seeing as a roadblock to the development spiritually of the exiles was the roadblock of expediency. The people had come back into the land and perhaps there were more men than women. Rather than waiting for God's perfect will in regard to their marriage relationship they simply take a shortcut and begin intermarrying with the people of the land. In so doing they begin to lose that distinctive Jewishness that God wanted his people to keep.

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I submit when you look over in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 7 you find there is a whole different set of regulations for believers and unbelievers living together than apply here in Ezra. So we have a unique thing in Ezra.

But there is that fundamental spiritual principle that is emerging of a short cut, a willingness to settle for second best. A willingness to do what is fast rather than what is right. Ezra sees this situation as destroying the whole purpose of the exile. Ultimately we would see that had it continued it would have destroyed the Jewish people in their existence and it would have prevented us from having the Messiah.

What Ezra does and the book of Ezra ends on this note in Ezra 10, 111 persons put away their entanglements of marriages with persons in the land. Thus this problem is dealt with. Expediency.

I have to look at this and then overlay that principle against my life. A particular way that principle may be manifested in my life and yours of course is going to be much different than in the life of Ezra and Nehemiah. But the thing which I'm always looking for in scripture is to get past the specific illustration that is used to the underlying principle that runs through that illustration that may be running through my life and may be running through yours. The principle of expediency. Of settling for the second best of walking outside of God's will because we're in a hurry to do what we want to do.

A third roadblock to spiritual development in this whole long passage of scripture is the lack of progress among the people even after Ezra returns. If you look at the book of Nehemiah you'll find in 1:3 the following. Persons are coming to him from Judah. Nehemiah is an important person, a cupbearer to the king of Persia, which means that perhaps he was of the status of perhaps prime minister or something like that. "They said to me, the survivors there in the province who escaped exile are in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are destroyed by fire."

If you remember the date of Nehemiah at this particular moment it's about 445 B.C.. The gates and walls of Jerusalem had been broken down in 586 B.C. which meant that for one century and a half they had been down. Meanwhile the exiles had been in the land already nearly a century. Yet no one had done anything about getting some security back to the city. Simply a lack of progress. Getting up every day and living life as it's always been lived. Without considering what tasks are to be done. What progress is to be made. Even when Ezra had come back and taken care of the problem of expediency somehow he hadn't moved the people past that to a point of progress in the rebuilding of the city's walls.

Nehemiah shows us what to do when there's a lack of progress, which you see. This has been such a help to my own life. There are so many beautiful spiritual things we can get out of Nehemiah's life. I am forever concerned about progress. Progress in our church, in my own life, in spiritual development as people of God. It struck me how Nehemiah responded to the lack of progress in the life of his people.

The first thing which he did was he wept. He didn't have any grandiose plans to start off. He simply sat down and wept and mourned for many days. He added to that weeping fasting and praying. For some four months he continued in this internal turmoil of weeping, mourning,

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fasting, and praying for this situation. As if to say that all spiritual change and getting off dead center has to be accompanied by a deep inward desire and inward spiritual renewal. The reason why so many things fail in the work of God is that they come off kind of spur of the moment. We get a great idea and we rush to do it. Instead of really baking that thing in the internal heart of our lives where we pour out our lives before God.

Nehemiah wept and prayed. When he was through weeping and praying he did something else. He went to the king and he volunteered. In other words he became part of the answer to his prayer. When he comes to the king, the king notes that there's sadness on his face. The king asks (2:4) "For what do you make request?" he said. So I prayed to the God of heaven and I said to the king, 'If it pleases the king...' there's something really neat here. A rapid telegram prayer in the Bible. He's on the spot with the king of Persia as to why he looks so sad. You're not supposed to be sad around the king. He paid people to be happy. The king says, "For what did you make this request? And Nehemiah said, So I prayed to the God of heaven." It doesn't tell us what he prayed. He just shot one up. In the spur of the moment of time. Then he comes right back and says to the king, "If it pleases the king send me." He volunteered.

We find if we keep on tracing the story of Nehemiah that in this lack of progress, that beyond volunteering Nehemiah had a plan. He had a master plan for what he wanted to do. It's a good idea to have some idea of what we want to do with our own lives or if we have a family, what we'd like to see come out of that family. Or with the church, what we'd like to see God do in our midst. A master plan for development. He had it. Long range.

Then he had one more thing to go with it. Organization. He was organized. He had everybody working. If you read chapter 3 you'll find that he had somebody working all around the wall. Each of them was given a specific section to work on. A tremendously organized person. We some things think that spiritual renewal and spiritual growth occurs in the heart, it's casual, it's not capable of organization or the like. Some of the greatest revivals that have had the most long lasting influences on the kingdom of God are the revivals in which there has been great organization. For example, Charles Wesley who took the great spiritual move which God was accomplishing and boiled it down into groups of ten. And had a method from which we derive the term "Methodists." Organization.

This lack of progress can I think always be dealt with in our life if we follow these kinds of steps which Nehemiah followed. Weeping, praying, volunteering, planning, and organizing. But don't plan and organize until you've wept and prayed.

When you get going and you start making progress after a long period of lack of progress there's going to be a person like a Sanballat come into your life. He is the leading evil character in the book. His whole purpose is to frustrate the progress that Nehemiah's going to make on the building of the wall. He tries five different tricks on Nehemiah.

First thing he tries to do with Nehemiah when the wall was started is ridicule. You start living for God, and you'll be ridiculed. Sanballat says to Nehemiah in 2:19 "They derided us and despised us and said, 'What is this thing that you are doing?'" and 4:2-3 when they see the walls starting to go up they says, "What is this heap of rubbish?" And one of them Tobiah in verse 3, "If a fox goes up on that wall he will break down their stone wall." When you consider

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how light a fox is you can get a measure of the sarcasm that is involved here and the ridicule that comes against progress.

If ridicule doesn't work the next thing that Sanballat tries in 4:8 is to arrange an attack. Nehemiah responds to this. He doesn't let it draw him off. He simply arms his people for the attack.

The next thing he tries in Nehemiah 6:2 is deception. He sees he can't ridicule Nehemiah out of his progress and he can't attack him out of his progress so he says to him "Come and let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono. And they intended to do me harm." He wants to trick him and get him to a peace conference where he can slip a knife at him.

If that didn't work then 6:6-7 he then tries threats against Nehemiah. Finally in 6:10-12 he tried entrapment by getting Nehemiah to be so afraid for his life that he would go live in the holy place of the temple. Since Nehemiah was not the high priest what Sanballat was going to do was blackmail him if he actually went into the holy place for fear of his life. Sanballat would simply circulate the report that Nehemiah was being untrue to his faith and had violated his ancestral laws.

Start moving for God and expect to be met with attack. But don't get on the negative side. Realize that the attack can successfully be met and the walls will be rebuilt. That is certainly what's happening with Nehemiah.

Another roadblock that develops, a fifth roadblock, is a roadblock in the people that is rooted in social injustice. Nehemiah 5:1-19. Nehemiah starts working on the wall and then he comes to find out that some of his laborers have mortgaged their property and their fields to others of their brethren who are charging them interest and in so doing are stripping them of their property. They have gotten into debt and they're getting further and further into debt to their brethren. Nehemiah when he hears this is tremendously angry that persons would be taking advantage of other people in their time of distress. So he corrects that situation.

Another roadblock that occurs to spiritual renewal and a simple roadblock in Nehemiah is the absence of the word of God. When the word of God is rediscovered it leads to the greatest spiritual awakening perhaps that we can close the Old Testament on. In fact it's found in Nehemiah 8.

The people had rebuilt the temple but they had not really rebuilt their daily life, which could only be geared around the word of God.

Finally in Nehemiah 8, Ezra and Nehemiah link up together for the proclamation of the word of God. "All the people gathered as one man into the square before the water gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly both men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh day. He read from it facing the square before the water gate from early morning until mid day. In the presence of the men and women and all who could understand. And the ears of the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they made for the purpose." This is the first time that the word "pulpit" is used in the scripture and it marks the beginning of a change in Israel's

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experience. The age of the prophets was coming to an end. Now replacing it was a time when persons would simply expound on what God had already said in the past. Ezra was at the forefront of that movement. Ezra is doing the same thing then that I'm doing today. Standing by a wooden pulpit and proclaiming the word of God.

Verse 5 "When Ezra opened the law all the people stood and they said, Amen, amen, and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." Then Ezra set out among the people in thirteen different Bible study groups teachers who, when he would read the law, he would stop and they would explain the law to the people so that verse 8 reads, "They read from the book of the law of God clearly and they gave the sense so that the people understood the meaning." What is the good of treading the law if no one understands it?

This revival of the word of God which replaces a long period of absence from the word brings tremendous renewal and blessing to the people.

The first thing that the word of God, the rediscovery of it does in Nehemiah's time is that it brings a blessing of discovery. 8:13-17 tells us that as the law was being read they ran across the Pentateuch, this Old Testament teaching on the feast of the tabernacles which was one of the 7 feasts of ancient Israel. It was the happiest feast. It was a time, which commemorated the wandering of the children of Israel through the wilderness when they lived in shelters, lean-to shelters called booths or tabernacles. The people of God in the future were told that when that time of the year rolled around everybody was to get out of their houses and go live in a tent or a brush arbor for a week.

The book of Nehemiah tells us that when the people saw that they said, We've got to do this! This is what the law says. We've got to have a week off and live like this.

So we find in 8:17 "All of the assembly of those who had returned from captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths for from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing." For a 1000 years no body had kept this. Finally in Nehemiah and Ezra's days the people rediscover the law and it brings rejoicing.

If that isn't an application if you've neglected the word of God, you're neglecting exciting discoveries for your life, which will move you into experiences that you had not previously planned or even knew were available. That happens. They discover and it brings great joy.

The second thing which the word of God does... They keep on reading. That's the problem with the Bible. You not only read things that give you great joy but also things that point out other things in your life. So the people kept on reading. In fact, 9:3 "They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day and for another fourth of it they made confession and worshipped the Lord their God." For three hours the word was read and for another three hours the people confessed. The word of God is a searching word in our lives. It's absence from our lives means we're not really allowing God to come to grips with our own life and our lack of conformity to his will and design for us.

A third thing which the reading of the word of God brought comes at the end of chapter 9 and extends all the way through chapter 10. It brought commitment. "When the people were done

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rejoicing, when they were done confessing then they made a pact. 9:8-10 and said to the Lord “These things we will do.”

The word of God brought them commitment.

There are two other roadblocks which stand out during this period of time. They occur after Nehemiah has gone back to Babylon. Or twelve years this great revival occurs where the word of God is now open to them. Nehemiah feeling everything is secure goes back to Babylon for a period of time. Then he comes back perhaps after an absence of 18 months to two years. When he comes back he finds two things that have happened which have served as additional roadblocks to revival. He finds immediately upon his return that the people again have engaged in compromise. The story is told in Nehemiah 13:4-9. You have to kind of be a detective to figure out what’s going on in the word.

This man by the name of Tobiah had found the rebuilding of the walls, which Nehemiah had started some 14-15 years earlier. He had sought to try to destroy the work of the Lord. Having not succeeded in that he is successful in getting the high priest to allow him to take up residence in the temple area so he had prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the cereal offering, the frankincense, the vessels, the tithes of grain, wine and oil which had been given by commandment to the Levite singers and gatekeepers and the contributions for the priests.

Nehemiah says “While this was taking place was not in Jerusalem. But after some time I went back to Jerusalem and I discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah and I was very angry and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chamber.”

What is happening here in the book of Nehemiah? It is a way of saying that in our spiritual development that even after times of great commitment you are then removed from dangers of temptation and are failing.

The people have a tremendous revival in Nehemiah 8 but by the time a few years has gone by a slight compromise has come in again. Nothing big and flagrant. Satan works in subtle kinds of things. Let a Tobiah live in the high priest’s place, in the temple area. Let him kind of seditiously work among the people to bring them false doctrine and a false way of living and gradually infiltrate that way. One has to look at this then and say as you look at your own life, “Am I letting compromise stand in the way of my spiritual development?”

One final thing that takes place as a roadblock is a real spiritual falling away that Nehemiah discovers upon his return. He finds in 13:10-11 that the house of the Lord has been forsaken. He finds in verses 12-14 that the people have stopped giving to the work of the Lord. He finds in verses 15-22 that the people have stopped keeping the Sabbath. And he finds in verses 23-29 that the people have again began to practice intermarrying with the people of the land. All of this a clear falling away from something which had so fervently begun as a spiritual renewal and revival in their life.

I wish that this didn’t happen. From time to time I talk with persons who a few years ago made a commitment to faith to Jesus Christ and then became careless to that commitment of faith. And

REVIVAL UNDER EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

Great Revivals

have gotten in such deep predicaments imply as a result of a disobedience to the Lord. It tears your heart to see what happens when you allow those spiritual roadblocks to be set up in your life. The only way to deal with the roadblocks is to admit that they come and that they're there and to allow the word of God to search you. Thank God that in this day he had a Nehemiah and Ezra who would faithfully tell the people when they had gone wrong and how it was that they could make it right.

That's why God today gives us his word and gives us preachers and teachers to point out to us that there are perils which we face spiritually. To be careful of our walk, to keep growing, to keep making progress, to keep alive the word of God in our heart. Not to become careless. By that faithful searching ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah over this period of time embraced in these chapters there is something long lasting which occurs in Israel's history. A settledness occurs which brings us from them right to the time of Christ where we find in his time still a basic loyalty among the people to God. Many that are away from God but many who are still hungry for God. A kind of a revival that in his day lasted and lasted and had effects for centuries.

Our commitment to Christ is not some today we're in and tomorrow we're out. It's designed to carry us through, to be stabilizing, to grow, to find ourselves as the people of God who keep a walk with God all of our days. And that the remainder of what we do is so solid and so permanent that it just has effects that go on and on and on until Jesus comes.

The scripture as we see in the book of Nehemiah brings to us great discovery and keen awareness of what we need to be and what we need to be about. We thank you for the living nature of your word, which as it is read and explained becomes for us food from heaven. We're thankful that behind your written word is your person – the living word – who communicates not only concepts by which we should live but you yourself Lord Jesus live in and with us. We thank you for that today.

[end of tape]