THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

Jesus Christ
The Chief Cornerstone
Ephesians 2:20

Nehemiah
Rebuilding God’s People to Reflect God’s Purpose
William Jones

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# Table of Contents

About the Author  
How to Use This Study  
Introduction  
1. The Arrival of Revival: The Demand  
2. The Arrival of Revival: The Desperation  
3. The Arrival of Revival: The Deliverance  
4. How to Take On a Tough Task  
5. The Power of Preparation  
6. The Productivity of God’s People Pulling Together  
7. Overcoming Opposition: How to Handle Your Haters  
8. I’m Doing a Great Work and I Can’t Come Down  
9. The Scriptural Requirements for Spiritual Renewal  
10. The Prerequisites and Promises of Revival  
11. Building a Great People for God’s Purpose  
12. The Dramatic Mystery of Dry Bones Marching  
13. Remaining in Revival
about the author

William Jones has served as the minister of the Boulevard church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee for the past nineteen years. Brother Jones was a frequent contributor to the Character Under Construction series as well as the head of his own publishing company, A Word From the Word. He also authored material for the 2013 Cornerstone quarterly. He serves as Vice Chairman of the National Teachers Workshop and has been a long-time board member of Agape Child and Family Services.

He received his education at Southwestern Christian College, David Lipscomb University, and the Masters Seminary and School of Theology. He and his wife of twenty-eight years have three children.
how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God’s Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section “preach.” God’s Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God’s Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God’s Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.
introduction

The greatest need in this mixed up and messed up world of misplaced priorities, mishandled power, and misdirected passions is for God to send a revival. I believe our survival as the people of God depends on our experiencing a spiritual renewal and revival.

In this study of the book of Nehemiah and other selected Scriptures we will learn lessons on leadership, spiritual renewal, and revival. We will discover the conditions that are required if we are to experience revival.

If the walls of your spiritual faithfulness are broken down and the gates of your fruitfulness burned, this is the study for you. If you recognize that as a congregation or as an individual Christian you are not where you used to be or where you ought to be in your spiritual development and devotion, this is the book for you.

Nehemiah teaches us how to rebuild our lives so that in our actions, attitudes, affections, and aspirations we reflect the purpose of God for our lives. The good news is that where we are does not mean we are destined to stay there. We can know renewal; we can experience revival.
The Arrival of Revival:
The Demand

*Nehemiah 1:1-3*

The only hope for this world, so completely dominated and defeated by the devil, is the church on fire for the Lord. The world at its worst needs the church at its best. The world will never get up on its feet if the church is never on its knees. We need a revival.

In this exciting adventure in the life of Nehemiah, we can learn what the requirements are for the arrival of revival. The reason revival has not arrived in many places is because no one seems to be concerned enough to seek revival. One must be moved with compassion by the conditions of our world. That compassion ought to move us to seek God’s purpose with an increasing intensity of purpose.

Nehemiah’s story takes us back to seventy years after the people of God were taken into captivity. In 530 B.C., the King of Persia released some fifty thousand Israelites. They returned to Jerusalem determined to rebuild the temple that the Babylonians had desecrated and destroyed. They soon abandoned the effort with only the foundation laid. The temple would not be completed until twenty years later. The walls
and the gates of the city would remain in ruins until the time of Nehemiah.

“The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said to me, ‘The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire’” (Nehemiah 1:1-3, NKJV).

Revival never takes place until the need for it is recognized. Nehemiah came face to face with the need for revival. Part of the reason that spiritual renewal and revival does not occur in the lives of many is the fact that many are unaware of the need for revival.

The Distress That Was Felt

Nehemiah was in excellent shape himself. The Bible informs us that he was the cupbearer of the king. This was a highly honored position. Only the most trusted of the king’s subjects held such a position. At each meal, it was Nehemiah’s responsibility to taste the king’s wine to make sure it wasn’t poisoned. A man who stood that close to the king had to be handsome, cultured, and trustworthy. Because of his access to the king, the cupbearer was a man of great influence.

Although things were going well for Nehemiah personally and professionally, things were not going so well for the people of God in Jerusalem. There are some people who have no
regard for the conditions of others as long as things are all right with them. Compassion would not allow Nehemiah to ignore the situation.

It was in the month of Chislev (November/December), in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes, that word came to Nehemiah about the condition of Jerusalem. The word about Jerusalem was distressing to Nehemiah. The word translated “affliction” is ra in Hebrew, and means, “a injurious and hurtful circumstance.” The people of Jerusalem were experiencing serious difficulty and this news caused Nehemiah stress and distress.

Some things ought to bother the people of God. So many Christians are compromising their commitment, forsaking their faithfulness, and disregarding their duty. It is unfortunate, but there are people who claim to love the Lord, and yet He is not an important item on their agenda.

Is it distressing to you that sometimes we preach the Bible by the yard, but we live it by the inch? Does it bother you that sometimes Christians proclaim a dedication by the ton, but they practice devotion by the ounce? Sometimes it is hard to tell the saints from the “ain’ts.”

The world is cloaked in a darkness that is so thick that it is like the marriage of a million midnights. We Christian people are meant to be the light for this dark world. In so many instances our lights have been turned off by insensitivity and indifference. The candles of our influence have been blown out by the winds of compromise and neglect.

Like Nehemiah, we ought to view our present conditions as a distressing set of circumstances. The state of Jerusalem was distressing to Nehemiah. The state of the world, the state of the church, and often the state of our own lives as Christians ought to be a real concern for us.
The Dishonor Faced

“And they said unto me, ‘The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire’” (Nehemiah 1:3).

The word “reproach” is cherpah in Hebrew. It carries the connotation of “having a finger pointed at you with scorn.” All of the people around Jerusalem would see God’s people living in a city without walls and would point at them in shame. This was a tremendous disgrace and dishonor for the people of God.

I think that often the world can point an accusing finger at the church. We are often populated with phonies and heavy with hypocrisy. We often fail to keep pace with the claims we make. In every congregation you can find people who are unholy, unthankful, unfruitful, unfaithful, unruly, and uncommitted.

I wonder if the world does not point a finger of scorn at us and say, “They don’t act any better than we do.” That is a disgrace. Far too often, our lives bring dishonor to the glorious and great God of our eternal salvation. We must rededicate ourselves to honoring the One who died for us. “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

We were designed as the church to bring God glory and honor by our lips and with our lives. The reason some have not believed in our Redeemer is because those who are redeemed don’t live and act more redeemed. The old folks used to say, “If you got good religion, you ought to show some sign.” Our lives are meant to honor God. Failing to live up to our high calling brings dishonor. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Ephesians 4:1).
The Defenselessness Found

The fact that the wall was broken and the gates were burned left the city in a serious condition. As a result, the people were virtually defenseless. They were prey to every surrounding nation. They were always vulnerable to their enemies' attacks.

It is unfortunate that in many of our lives there is nothing to keep the devil and his army at bay. By our neglect or by our compromise we have burned the gates and broken down the walls of our lives. It is no wonder that we are often so easily defeated by the devil.

- Has the gate of your gratitude been burned?
- Have the walls of Bible study been broken?
- Has the gate of sacrificial stewardship been burned?
- Have the walls of committed involvement been broken?
- Has your faith become faulty?
- Has your commitment become crippled?
- Has your dedication dwindled?

Our desperate need is for the great God of heaven to send us a revival. When we neglect our prayer life, Bible study, worship, active involvement in ministry, and fellowship we leave ourselves defenseless. Our spiritual condition ought to cause us distress and move us to recognize the demand for revival.

Revival will never arrive unless and until we recognize the demand for it. If the walls of our spiritual lives are in ruins, the first step to rebuilding them is to recognize the need.
Questions for Discussion

1. What are some issues we encounter that hinder us from sensing the demand for revival?
2. What was the condition of Jerusalem that caused Nehemiah such distress?
3. What are some conditions we can face in our own lives that should cause us concern?
4. What are some improper ways of reacting to being confronted with the need of revival in the lives of Christians?
5. What are improper ways for a congregation to react?
6. In what ways can living unfaithful lives leave us defenseless?