

**Let Us Arise and Build
Lessons from Nehemiah
Rebuilding God's People #2—Reinstating Divinely-Commanded Worship**

Intro: The second half of the book of Nehemiah gives us a great picture of the elements of spiritual renewal or revival. As we look at Nehemiah's efforts we see four important aspects of that spiritual rebuilding.

Reading the Law

Reinstating divinely-commanded worship

Confessing sin

Committing to personal holiness

In our morning lesson, we focused on the second of these—reinstating divinely-commanded worship; and we made several observations about the episode of Nehemiah 8. Review these points.

Israel's worship was a response to the reading of the word of God, not an action originating from the opinions of men.

The Israelites acknowledged that the passing of many centuries did not nullify what the Lord had said in His word.

The Israelites obeyed the Lord's command to the letter.

The Israelites obeyed when it would not have been convenient to do so.

Obedience to the Lord brought them great joy.

Their worship was accompanied by a sincere desire to do what the Lord commanded in their personal lives.

In our morning lesson we made some general applications of these principles to our situation today; but tonight let's discuss how we can reinstate divinely-commanded worship today.

Our worship must be a response to the reading of the word of God, not actions originating from the opinions of men.

Part of the challenge of instating divinely-command worship today involves the question, "Where is the authority found for how Christians worship?"

Or put another way, "In what part of the Bible can we find God's will for Christian worship today?"

Many mistakenly read the OT worship commands as if they are the authority for the church today.

In reading Nehemiah we can see that the practice of the ancient Israelites rested upon the authority of God as manifested in the Laws of Moses.

The revelations of the prophets and writings of the OT were dependent upon the authority of the Law.

The prophets called upon the Israelites to obey the Laws of Moses.

The exhortations of the Psalms (or writings) were likewise informed by what the Law had taught about the tabernacle/temple worship.

The authority of the Law would give way to the authority of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law.

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18)

“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.” (Hebrews 8:6)

The gospel of Jesus Christ constitutes a new covenant that replaces the old.

Thus, the holy calendar of OT festivals and the tabernacle/temple worship has been replaced by a new priesthood and a new temple with its practices.

“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2:16–17)

Consequently we must read the gospel in order to know how we should worship as priests in the spiritual temple of God.

When we say “read the gospel,” we mean more than read the “gospels” Matthew-John, since they describe the practice of Jesus living under the Law as well as His teaching for the new covenant.

The apostles confirmed the message of Jesus:

“how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.” (Hebrews 2:3–4)

But in addition by the Spirit they were guided to receive new revelations from Jesus.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.” (John 16:13)

So then by reading the words of Jesus and His apostles we can understand what God seeks from His NT priests in worship. By looking at the NT we can see that God’s new covenant people worshipped by:

Singing praise to God (Eph. 5:19)

Praying together (Ac. 2:42)

Observing the Lord’s Supper (Ac. 2:42)

Preaching the gospel (Ac. 2:42)

Giving to support the work of teaching and caring for the needy (1 Cor. 16:1-2)

As Christians, like the people of Nehemiah 8, we must practice what we read in Scripture and refrain from the practice of the opinions of men that rest upon human authority.

We must acknowledge that the passing of many centuries does not nullify what the Lord had said in His word.

Does Jesus still have all authority? Is He still the head of the church? Indeed! And this would suggest that we need to continue to practice what the NT church did. Just as the Law was binding in perpetuity, so also is the gospel until a new revelation comes from God to say otherwise.

Having affirmed His authority Jesus assured His presence in doing what He commanded:

“teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

New and different religious practices from those of the early church demands a mechanism of new revelation.

The Roman Catholic Church found the grounds for this new revelation in the doctrine of apostolic succession in the hierarchy of the church. Thus, it is argued that the hierarchy of the church (its pope, cardinals, bishops, etc) have authority from Christ to add practices to those found in the NT. So today we see an elaborate holy calendar evolved through the centuries that involves practices not ever mentioned in Scripture. Other groups will rely upon some concept of Holy Spirit leading that frees them to add practices not found in Scripture. But in so doing, they reserve for themselves an authority that Jesus never gave them.

So again we must ask ourselves, “Will the passing of time nullify the authority of the word? The answer is no!

We must obey the Lord’s command to the letter.

There is enough evidence in Scripture not only to tell us what to do; but also to tell us how to do it.

We are explicitly told how singing should take place.

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”
(Colossians 3:16)

We are explicitly told how to pray.

“What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.” (1 Corinthians 14:15)

We are explicit told how the Lord’s Supper must be observed.

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (1 Corinthians 11:28)

We are explicitly told how we should give.

“NOW concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.” (1 Corinthians 16:1–2)

We are explicitly told how to preach (what the message is and how it should be presently).

“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” (2 Timothy 4:2)

It is then our duty to engage in the acts of worship God has commanded the way He commanded them to be observed.

We must be obedient when it may not be convenient to do so.

What God asks of us should not cause us to say, “This is not convenient for me.

So what if observing the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week breaks up our weekend? What if it would be more convenient to reschedule that on Friday night? Or Saturday night, so that we could spend a whole day off in leisure on the golf course or on the lake? I say, convenience must give way to convenience.

“not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:25)

We can easily lose the concept of worship as service.

Interestingly, this is how God describes what we do.

“I URGE you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” (Romans 12:1)

We serve Him! The word for the work of priests is described as “service.”

Obedience to the Lord should bring us great joy.

To know what the Lord seeks from us and to be able to give to Him that which He commanded should be our highest joy.

“And again he says, “REJOICE, O GENTILES, WITH HIS PEOPLE.”” (Romans 15:10, NASB)

If our attitude is to be bored with what God commanded, it may indicate that we are more interesting in pleasing ourselves and getting what we want rather than what the Lord wants!

Be happy to give the Lord what pleases Him!

Our worship must be accompanied by a sincere desire to do what the Lord commanded in our personal lives.

It was Jesus who rebuked His fellow-Jews for offering God the commanded worship of the temple and then made rules that would enable them to avoid obeying God in everyday life.

He cited as an example their doctrine of corban in which they neglected to honor their father and mother. And he said to them:

““You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’”” (Matthew 15:7–9, NASB)

The message is that it is not enough to worship with the right actions. The spirit to please God in worship should translate to all of life.

Conclusion: The example of Nehemiah 8 can encourage us to approach the Lord with the same respect for His will, the same desire to be fully obedient, and to experience the joy of doing things God’s way, not our way.