

## SOLEMN CONSECRATION

NEHEMIAH 9:1-5 | Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. <sup>2</sup> And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. <sup>3</sup> And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. <sup>4</sup> On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. <sup>5</sup> Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

**T**he effect of Ezra's teaching ministry was phenomenal. As we have seen, the men who apprenticed themselves to him in the Water Gate Revival were leaders of Israel's ancestral houses (NEH 8:1-13). As fathers of fathers, they had all the authority and avenues they needed to disseminate the knowledge of God across the entire postexilic community. They were not idle.

Three weeks into the revival, the ministry of the Word produced a national movement of repentance from the ground up. The people came together with sackcloth on their bodies and dirt on their heads (9:1). This seems out of place. The wall is built. The city is secure. The harvest is in. The people are saturated with Scripture. Why not celebrate? Why all this monastic austerity?

The problem, ironically, is that these people have rightly understood the Bible for the first time in living memory. The Living Word that is razor sharp is doing its peculiar work (HEB 4:12-13). The people are heavy laden with sin and guilt. Sackcloth and soil are vintage expressions of desperation, grief, and repentance.

Thus Israel has unfinished business. Nehemiah's wall of stone could never remove the stain of sin that has disgraced God's people for generations. This requires deep soul-searching, honest confession, and sincere repentance in the light of the Word and the conviction of the Spirit. There must be a clean and decisive break with present sin, as well as *the iniquities of the fathers* that precipitated the exile (2).

So it happens on a solemn day of national repentance in 445 BC (1). It's a whole-family and whole-nation affair. Foreigners are excluded. This is about Israel's sins, not theirs. Three hours in the Word are followed by three hours of confession and worship (3). What a difference it would make in our lives and churches today if we spent an equal amount of time confessing, repenting, and praying as we spend listening to the reading and preaching of the Word (T.J. BETTS). Let's make that difference.

## WALL OF DUTY

The Water Gate Revival marks a return to the *Ancient Path*—the Word of God, the Will of God, and the Ways of God that are ever old, ever new, and everlasting. Ask boldly for vintage expressions of true revival in our day:

■ **New Norm, Ancient Path.** Nothing less than solemn consecration to God, the *Ancient of Days*. Anyone who seeks God wholeheartedly can experience personal revival anytime, anywhere! Don't wait around for the so-called 'next move of God'. God is waiting for you to make the next move: *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded* (JAMES 4:8). God is a promise-keeper. His invitation stands:

*Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters... Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live... Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion*

*on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon* (ISA 55:1-7).

■ **New Norm, Ancient Path.** Nothing less than wholehearted devotion to the Word of God that stands forever (ISA 40:8). *Billy Graham was asked, 'If you had to live your life over again, what would you do differently?' His answer: 'One of my great regrets is that I have not studied enough, I wish I had studied more and preached less. People have pressured me into speaking to groups when I should have been studying and preparing.'* *There is no substitute for the man of God being a diligent student of the Word of God* (STEVEN LAWSON).

• Watch and pray. The Singapore Church is in a generational transition. By faith, consecrate and commend our young preachers and teachers to God. Pray: *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success* (JOS 1:8).

• Pray for phenomenal effects as they honour God's Word: church-wide repentance and consecration in the light of the Word. A clean and decisive break with all known sin, past and present.

■ **New Norm, Ancient Path.** Nothing less than a campus-wide revival with Bible saturation at its core. University students today are our future leaders. On campus, they are *exposed to new people and new ideas as they marinate in an intellectual atmosphere of human reason... often extremely hostile towards faith in Jesus and the truths of Scripture* (JOSHUA HAWKINS). Pray for campus ministries to major on the infallible Word of God, trusting the Holy Spirit to convict the student world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (JOHN 16:8). Pray for godly sorrow that leads to a ground-up movement of deep repentance and solemn consecration. On campus. Beyond campus.