

Singing on the Wall

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
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Let's Begin

As we begin Nehemiah 9, which takes place just days after the Feast of Tabernacles, the children of Israel are gathered together and listening to the Word of God again. If we had been in Jerusalem at this particular time, we would have witnessed people dressed in sackcloth, the garment of mourning. We would have also heard their loud sobbing and watched as they refused to eat because they were fasting. They had just confessed and mourned over their sins in Nehemiah 8. They then observed and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, it was a time of "very great gladness" (8:17). Why were they grieving over their sins again?

The children of Israel had been taken into captivity because they had rejected and rebelled against God's commandments. Now that they were back in their land, they knew they needed to know God's Word so they

would know how to obey Him. As they listened to God's Word, they wanted to hear more. The more they heard made them realize not only their sins but the sins of their forefathers. Their brokenness was showing how much they understood the seriousness of their sins; they had offended their holy God. It was also showing how serious they were about their relationship with God. The good news is that God was able to take their brokenness and turn it into singing on the wall. Using the outline below, let's see how God does this and what lessons it has for us today.

- I. The Confession of God's People (9:1-37)**
- II. The Consecration of the People (9:38-12:26)**
- III. The Celebration of the People (12:27-47)**

I. The Confession of God's People (9:1-37)

The Bible tells us to, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). As believers we need to regularly be reading and studying the Word of God so we will be growing in our spiritual lives. This is what we see as the children of Israel gather again to listen to the Word of God as chapter 9 begins. Their desire was so strong that

they spend three hours listening to God's Word and then three hours confessing their sins and worshipping the Lord (9:1-3). One of the very first things they realize from hearing God's Word that day is that they needed to separate themselves from the "strangers" or foreigners. They immediately do just that.

These opening verses teach us an important truth. We cannot

truly worship the Lord if we have sin in our lives. The best way to know if we do have sin in our lives is through God's Word. This is because it is profitable for reproof and correction (cp. 2 Tim. 3:16). Because they were willing to confess their sins, they were able to worship the Lord.

Beginning with verse 4 the Levites cry out to the Lord in the longest recorded prayer in the Bible. It is a prayer of confession that actually reviews the history of the children of Israel. It begins with the creation (9:6). Then it



moves to God's covenant with Abraham (9:7-8). From there it reviews Israel's exodus out of Egypt (9:9-11). It continues into the Wilderness experience, through the period of the judges and then to the prophets (9:12-29). It then concludes with where the people were (9:30-37). They understood they were servants in their own land because of their sins.

As we read through this prayer, there are some highlights we want to note. First of all, it shows us how confession must always be based upon the character of God. If we took out all the references to God in this prayer, we would have nothing left. The Levites pray in verse 5, "... blessed be thy glorious name." God is a truly a glorious God. Everything He does results in glory. By contrast, everything the devil does ultimately ends in misery.

God is also a God of power. We read, "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshipeth thee" (9:6). There is so much talk about evolution today, but the evidence is on the side of creation. When we take the time to look at creation, it doesn't take long to figure out there has to be an all-powerful God who created this universe.

God is also a caring God (9:9). When the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, He not only saw their affliction, but He heard their cries. His Word assures us He cares about us even today. We are told to cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

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God is also a God who keeps His promises. He kept all His promises to Israel, including giving them the "Promised Land" (9:15). Sometimes people make promises but then do not keep them. As believers, we never have to worry about our heavenly Father not keeping His promises. There's not one promise that He has made that He has not kept or will not keep. Our God is a promise-keeping God.

The Lord is also a gracious and merciful God. Verse 31 tells us, "Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God" (cp. 9:17b). Grace means God gives us what we do not deserve, but desperately need. Mercy means He does not give us what we deserve. Ephesians 2:8-9 says

it well, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

We also notice Israel's guilt in this prayer. Verse 16 says, "But they and our fathers dealt proudly and hardened their necks ..." Verse 26 adds, "Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against thee ..." They acknowledge that God is just in everything He has brought upon them (v. 33). We can never truly be right with God until we deal with our sins. We have to be willing to call sin what God calls sin.

As we see Israel's guilt, we also see the grace of God manifested to Israel. About 16 times in this prayer we find some form of the word "give." It's a word that conveys the grace of God. God gave Abraham a new name (9:7). He then gave Abraham and his seed their land (9:8). God gave the children of Israel manna and water (9:15). God also gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them through their Wilderness experience (9:20). And He gave them kingdoms and nations (9:22). Over and over we see the grace of God as He gives to Israel what they did not deserve.

Reflection Connection:

Compared to the Jews' confession we have read in this chapter, discuss whether or not believers take confession of their sins seriously today. Why or why not?



II. The Consecration of the People (9:38-12:26)

The Levites conclude their prayer of confession with making a covenant to the Lord (9:38). Chapter 10 then shares the long list of people who signed their names to the covenant (10:1-28). The first name signed and listed on the covenant is none other than Nehemiah (10:1). It is as though he sets the example and says he'll be the first one to sign his name. All those who signed the covenant were giving tangible evidence they had fully consecrated themselves to God. They were serious about their relationship with God.

As we read on through chapter 10 we find that all the people make application of their consecration to the Lord in a practical way. Verse 29, "They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God, and his judgments and his statutes." They were saying they were going to apply God's Word to their daily life. That's so important for believers today as well. It's not enough to just come to church and hear God's Word. We need to apply it to our daily life.

First, the people applied the Word to their family affairs (10:30). The parents said they would not allow their children to

intermarry with the unbelievers who lived around them. This had been a problem in the past and would become a problem again in the future. Yet, God's Word had clearly forbidden it (cp. Deut. 7:1-4). If our faith doesn't go home with us, there is something

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spurious about it. Knowing Jesus Christ as our Savior should make us better fathers, mothers, sons and daughters. It also should affect our social affairs. In verse 31 the people agree to keep the Sabbath day holy as well as the other holy days. They were going to let the day of the Lord be the day of the Lord.

The people's commitment also involved spiritual matters. Nine times from verses 32 to 39, they make reference to "the house of our God." First, they commit to paying the temple tax for "the house of our God" (10:32-33). They commit to providing for the needed wood for "the house of our God" (10:34). In verses 35-36 they promise to bring the first part of their harvest, as well

as their first-born sons and the first born of their flocks, to "the house of our God." They were going to give God their very best. They continue and commit to pay their tithes to "the house of our God" (10:37-39). Then at the end, they say emphatically, "... we will not forsake the house of our God" (10:39b).

One of the surest signs that God's people are serious about their relationship with Him is when they have a renewed commitment to their church and in giving to the things of the Lord. Every documented revival in the history of the Christian church has resulted in a revival of church attendance. People have returned to God's house.

The people's consecration also affected where many of them would live. The wall of Jerusalem had been constructed; yet, we are told in chapter 11 that the houses were few within the city (11:1). Not a lot of people had moved to the city. To correct this problem, the people cast lots and others volunteer to move to Jerusalem (11:2). The rest of chapter 11 lists the names of those who moved into Jerusalem (11:3-19). They are a picture of workers within a church. Some folks have to be "drafted" to do the work of the Lord, while other folks see the need and do it willingly. They are cheerful givers in their service to the Lord. There is



no doubt which ones are blessed in what they do for the Lord.

Years ago the great Black preacher, E. V. Hill told about how his church had claimed every block in the Watts area of Los Angeles, where his church was located, for the Lord. His goal was to get some member of his church to move into every block so the church would have a witness for Jesus throughout the neighborhood. Many of his members willingly moved and became witnesses on their streets. They were intentional in their service for the Lord. Wherever we live and work, we ought to look on that place as

our mission field. Consecration means we are willing to pay a price. It means we are willing to give up material enjoyments to let our life really count for Jesus. We need to realize our lives are passing by quickly; we must make them count for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection Connection:

According to Matthew 19:29, will believers really lose if they give up any thing for Jesus' sake? Discuss.

Chapter 12 begins by telling us about the history of the priests and Levites. They are the ones who returned with Zerubbabel in

Ezra 1. This chapter is a reminder that the work of the future is based on the work of the past. God always calls us for specific purposes and gives us specific opportunities, but we build from the past. We especially see this in verse 24. It mentions David, the man of God. David was the great king, but he was also a great hymn writer and musician. He had given specific instructions for the music and instruments used to worship the Lord. The Levites were still following his guidelines.

III. The Celebration of the People (12:27-47)

When there is confession and people get right with God, it will lead to consecration. People will totally surrender themselves to God. Then, it is inevitable that there will be great joy among the people. That is what we see in the concluding verses of chapter 12. The people prepare to celebrate the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.

The Levites are asked to come to Jerusalem and assist with the music (12:27-29). Even then, they take time to purify themselves as well as the people, gates, and wall (12:30). Their celebration involved rejoicing in what the Lord had done for them and dedicating their city and

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themselves to Him. They also understood their God was a holy God.

When the Jews had started building the wall of Jerusalem, Tobiah, one of their enemies,

said the wall was so flimsy that if a fox were to try to walk on it, it would fall (Neh. 4:3). Was he ever wrong! Now not only could a fox run all over the completed wall, but it was strong enough to support two choirs. Nehemiah organizes the choirs and takes them to the top of the wall. Standing on the wall, they sing and give thanks to the Lord (12:31-42). The strength of the wall reminds us that when God is a part of something, it will stand!

One of the choirs starts marching on top of the wall counterclockwise with Ezra leading it. Then the other choir starts clockwise on the wall the other way with Nehemiah bringing up the rear. This was not a quiet, dignified service. The music included cymbals and trumpets as well as psalteries and harps. It is interesting to note the choirs



start their march at the same place where Nehemiah started the night he inspected the wall when he first arrived in Jerusalem (12:31; cp. 2:13). The celebration begins at the very place where God broke Nehemiah's heart just a few months earlier. Many times God will take us right back to the place where our heart was broken and put it back together again with joy.

Five times in verse 43 it tells about the people's joy, "Also

that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." Their rejoicing is reminiscent of the same joy they had when they completed the temple years earlier (cp. Ezra 3:13). Both times, people from far away could hear them. They knew there was something going on in Jerusalem.

Ever the perfect administrator, Nehemiah closes out the chapter by sharing how the provisions for the temple worship were organized (12:44-47).

Reflection Connection:

Read the attributes of God's Word in Psalm 19:7-11 and discuss why God's Word rejoices the heart.

Wrap Up

The great celebration and dedication of the wall of Jerusalem would never have been possible if the people had not first had a desire to hear the Word of God. Then they allowed it to work in their lives. Because they were willing to confess their sins and then consecrate themselves to the Lord, the Lord was able to bless them with singing on the wall. Let's follow their example. If we do, we will find there is great reward (Ps. 19:11b)!

