

AUGUST 15

Nehemiah 9:22-10:39

This is the conclusion of the feasts we read about yesterday. I find it interesting that God made sure they dedicated themselves to Him and to following Him, before they dedicated the walls. I wonder how many congregations dedicate themselves to the Lord like this, with prayer and confession and tears and renewal, before they dedicate a new building. What's the sense of filling a new building with believers who have lost their focus on why they are here?

One thing to keep in mind as you read this is that this was the beginning of Nehemiah's twelve-year tenure as governor of Judea. In a couple of chapters we'll be reading how things went south, but we've seen that between a couple of verses, years can pass. Since the beginning of Nehemiah, only a few months have gone by. All of the dedication and organization we are seeing will set the tone for twelve years of God's grace on these people. They will receive strong godly leadership.

Nehemiah 9:22-38

I have to admit, I have never enjoyed reading this prayer like I have this time. I hope reading the story of God's plan and working with Israel has given you an exciting understanding of how important it is for Him to save us and how privileged we are to have Him do so. This prayer is full of things that will feed your heart. Remember to keep highlighting *you* and *they*.

Vs. 22-25 This was God fulfilling the promise to Abraham to give Israel the land. It was a great blessing which will now be contrasted with their continued rebellion.

Vs. 26-31 Notice how v. 26 is stated. No national literature paints its people in such a stark and distasteful light. What we have here is a portrait of mankind painted for all mankind to see. This catalogue of Israel's rebellion, leading to their exile, is a description of all mankind. Israel was used by God to show us what all of us are like. In the future, Israel will fulfill their destiny and be rewarded for their service to us.

V. 30 Notice that they understood that the prophets were led by the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 32-37 Still, the *steadfast love* of the Lord had not left or failed them. This entire prayer is steeped in truth and confession and sounds like something all of mankind could declare.

V. 36 They admitted that they were slaves. That's reality and humility. This humility and truthfulness was missing when Jesus faced the Jews in John 8:31-33, *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*³³ *They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"*

V. 38 This is a transition verse between these two events.

Nehemiah 10

Vs. 1-27 Notice that Nehemiah was the first signer of the covenant. Although Ezra's name doesn't appear, his forefather's name is there (v. 2 Seraiah), suggesting that he signed for the house of his family.

Vs. 28-31 Doesn't this remind you of Deuteronomy? It was a promise of the people to keep themselves separated for God, to be His servants on earth. Remember, they could marry those of other lands who were converts and worshipers of Yahweh. Keeping the Sabbath was their way of honoring God and showing they were living in the promise to Abraham. Both of these things showed their understanding of God's purpose in the world, His purpose in Israel and their faith in the promise to Abraham.

V. 31 The children of Israel had never kept the Sabbatical year for the land. The reason this is mentioned now is that those missed Sabbatical years (490 years divided by 7) were the basis of their 70-year exile, to give the land its rest. Oddly enough that number, 490 or 7×70 , also figures into God's fulfillment of Israel's destiny. Sixty-nine weeks of years have already been accomplished, from the command to rebuild Jerusalem to the entrance of the Messiah, as Messiah, into Jerusalem. There is only one more week (7 years) left to be fulfilled.

Vs. 32-39 The tithes were the only way the priests and Levites could serve. The tithes not only showed the gratefulness of the people for God's provision, but they revealed their spiritual devotion and insight. It showed that they understood the need for the teaching and ministry of the Levites so that they could be forgiven and draw near to God. Without the Levites, there could be no sacrifices, no Passover, no Day of Atonement, no feast weeks and no morning and evening sacrifices. This obedience revealed that the people knew their need and were seeking God. Without the teaching of the Levites, and everyone doing their part by giving, there would be no continued generational following of God toward the fulfilling of the promise of redemption through Abraham and through Israel.

The German translation emphasizes the things they agreed to do by the paragraph layout. The ESV is not so gracious. As you read, block out or draw lines to show each thing they were agreeing to do.

This renewal of the people and the covenant is one of the greatest in the OT. The only times Israel seemed this repentant and close to God were at the end of Deuteronomy and in the revival by Josiah. The things that are said and taught and prayed in this event are like a summary of mankind's rebellion and God's amazing grace and love in trying to reach out and save us. I know that this inspires me and I hope it moves you too, to be renewed in working side by side with our Lord in the harvest, reaching out and making disciples. For whatever reason, He has saved us, called us by His name and sent us to tell the news of His love and coming.

1 Corinthians 9:19-10:13

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

I love these verses. They made so much sense to me as a missionary in Germany, and they've gotten me in so much trouble here in the States. All of our talk about music or Bible translations is so silly. If we were in China working underground, we'd never worry about the KJV or any other version. They don't speak English and we'd be happy just to have a copy of the Bible. If we were working in the mountains of Colta, Ecuador, we wouldn't worry about hymns vs. contemporary, because those songs don't even work there. What works there might numb your mind, but you'd learn to love it for the sake of Christ and reaching those people. Our tastes and "necessities" in the church reveal our lack of love for our Lord and the shallow state of our discipleship. Disciples take their cues from the harvest field in which they are following Jesus. They adapt themselves to the people they are strengthening to become disciples in the harvest. How have we missed this? Disciples are His slaves and become all things to all men to reach the lost and make disciples.

Vs. 19-23 You could read this portion out loud with the rest of chapter 9. There is emotion here too. Notice that Paul is connecting v. 1, "*Am I not free?*" with v. 19, "*For though I am free from all...*" Freedom means the ability to let go of our rights for the sake of Christ, and the harvest, and this tragedy on earth. To hang on to our tastes means we are held by the earth and living by the passions of our body of death. That is a tragedy too and something that disqualifies us as disciples.

Vs. 24-27 Reread Romans 7:14-25 to understand why Paul took this so seriously. This is something I'm still trying to get into my head and heart. The sin within us is not our friend, but we go on thinking it makes us cool and quirky characters for Christ. Notice that the issue here

was being disqualified to be an example to others. This will only matter to people who really care about following our Lord and having an impact in the harvest.

1 Corinthians 10

Chapter 10 is one complete argument, and in it we will find the conclusion of some discussions going all the way back to chapter 6. You can see this by the repetition of words that Paul has used earlier. If you read the entire chapter you'll notice these. This is a great chapter of the Bible.

V. 1 Remember in Romans how Paul would say he was talking to those who knew the law, or was talking to the Gentiles in that congregation. Look at this verse. Clearly, Paul is talking to Jews without asking for any particular group. If you look at this group in Acts 18, you see that it was a very strongly Jewish church. Paul can assume that they all know what he is saying because they are all (98%) Jews.

Vs. 1-5 We have read this in the OT and were amazed that these people did not believe. Actually, we just read something like this in the confessional prayer in Nehemiah. How could people see such signs and deliverance and still rebel against God? What is amazing here is that Paul is applying this same truth to Christians.

Vs. 6-11 Notice how vs. 6 and 11 are parallel, but v. 11 goes beyond v. 6 to a stellar reality we all need to grasp.

V. 7 Do you know which chapter in 1 Corinthians Paul is looking back to? It is chapter 8 and you will see this clearly tomorrow.

V. 8 Here Paul is referring back to chapters 5 and 6 in 1 Corinthians. In using this OT illustration, Paul is getting them to think about the immorality that they had been involved in.

If we knew the OT as well as Paul did, we could use it for illustrations for modern-day situations. In using the OT for illustrations, you're actually teaching people on several different levels, making the Bible more alive to them.

What is sobering here is that even among believers, all of the sins of this chapter can be alive and well. That is incredible if you think about the greatness of our salvation in Jesus. Notice too that in this list, two of the sins are overtly wrong, and the last two are more subtle. Putting the Lord to the test and grumbling are more dangerous to us and to our work in the harvest than we think. Philippians 2:14 says, *Do all things without grumbling or disputing*. The *all things* is referring to all things, but we think sinning like this makes us quirky and cool. What follows that verse is our work as disciples in the harvest.

Vs. 12-13 If you understand these verses correctly, they are an accusation. The Corinthians had already been overtaken in their pride and sin. Tomorrow will blow your mind. Paul is appealing to them to escape.

Psalm 34:1-10

I've got a subtitle note that says this psalm was written after David escaped from Abimelech after faking he was crazy. Since we've read about that, what stands out to me is that this event is when David's 10 years of running from Saul began. David was terrified and losing it emotionally. After escaping from Gath he slowly regained composure and began trusting the Lord. It was in these years that he learned of the steadfast love of the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 As a result of God's deliverance, David made it a point where he could share his testimony with all men. David was apparently not only in his right mind, but in reflecting on his terror, he knew that he should have depended on the Lord.

Vs. 4-7 This is what David learned every day and every way over years of running and hiding.

Vs. 8-10 Not only was there deliverance, but the Lord somehow set the table even when they had no homes and no security. This isn't the only time that seeking the Lord first was said to provide what we need. *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Matthew 6:33)

This psalm and David's praise continue tomorrow.

This psalm has the line, *taste and see that the Lord is good*, but the main focus is on God's deliverance. David would see 10 years of little, constant deliverances and evidences to God's ongoing, daily goodness and steadfast love. Tasting is a dare. You don't know if the Lord is really good. Jesus promises a lot of things to those who follow in the harvest, but you have to follow to "taste" them. In your following will be hardship that teaches endurance, builds character and faith which leads to abundant hope and joy and a very special fellowship with Jesus and the Father. Here it says you have to "taste." When you read Jesus, He says it's more like a "dive" coming to Him, taking his yoke, lifting up a cross and putting it over your shoulder and walking to your death. That's a funny way to experience His promises and unity with Him, but that's what He says. And it all begins with a taste.

Proverbs 21:13

God leaves the poor before us to reveal our hearts. We are all debtors to God. It's interesting to me that Jesus commanded His disciples to give to everyone who begged from them. Of course there was that one time when Peter and John were out of money, but they figured something out.