

Messages From the Gates of Jerusalem
#21 - Water Gate - Part I - Honoring God's Word

After 70 years in Babylonian captivity, 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel (537 BC). They set about the immense task of rebuilding the temple. Their initial enthusiasm faded when opposition arose from the people who had settled in the region during their captivity. Coupled with the immensity of the overwhelming task, the Jews grew apathetic and abandoned the task. Sixteen years passed as the people settled down and built their homes. God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who challenged the people regarding their way of life and their neglect of the things of God. *Get Back to Work!* Evidence clearly reveals > God's time is NOW! Complete His Temple and restore True Worship. God moved King Cyrus to free you. He commissioned you to return, build the Temple and restore worship. Cyrus provided money and materials to complete the task. God protected you and all the vessels in your journey.

Isa. 44:28 Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid.'" Haggai admonished the Jews with 4 challenges. (Haggai 1)

1. Put God First in Your Life

a. Right to the heart of the problem

b. It exposed their hypocrisy and unbelief - By stopping the work on God's dwelling place, the Jews were admitting they had no faith in God's Word or in God's power to perform it.

c. Isaiah & Jeremiah had predicted a national restoration that would amaze the Gentile nations and bring glory to Israel (Isa. 2:1-5, 11, 35; Isa. 60:1-5; Jer. 30-31).

This wonderful event had not yet occurred. They failed to understand that some of these promises would be fulfilled in the "end times" (last days). When the situation in Judah became worse, the people questioned the dependability of God's Word.

d. Many of the people had been focused on building their own dwelling. Some of them built "paneled houses" - the kind that kings built for themselves. (I Kings 7:3, 7; Jer. 22:14)

Prov. 3:9-10 Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

2. Believe God's Promises - Haggai 1:5-6; 9-11

a. Haggai told them to consider their lifestyle and actions in light of God's law and His covenant.

b. God's covenant is clear: Bless you if you obey Me and I will discipline you if you disobey.

c. Lev. 26:18-20 If you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will break the pride of your power; And your strength shall be spent in vain;

for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

Wiersbe: Their strength was spent in VAIN! They sowed abundantly but reaped a meager harvest. When they ate and drank, they weren't filled or satisfied. Their clothing didn't keep them warm and their income didn't cover their expenses. As supplies became scarcer, prices got higher, and a shopper might as well have carried his wealth in a wallet filled with holes!

3. Honor God's Name - Haggai 1:7-8 Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified.

When the Babylonian army set fire to the Temple, it destroyed the great timbers that held the massive stonework together.

According to Ezra 3:7, the Jews had purchased wood from Tyre and Sidon.

Hmmm! Haggai is NOW commanding them to go into the forests on the mountains and cut down timber to repair and rebuild the Temple.

Question: What happened to the wood they purchased from Tyre and Sidon?

Consider: Where did they get the wood for THEIR PANELED HOUSES when there was no wood for God's dwelling place?

4. Obey God's Commands - Haggai 1:12-15 - When God speaks to us through HIS WORD, there's only one acceptable response. > Obedience

Result of Haggai's Message: The people responded and completed the construction of the temple in Jerusalem. Motivated by a reverent fear of the LORD

Twenty years have passed since the 1st group returned from Babylon.

Sixty more years passed and a 2nd group of Jews travel from Babylon under the leadership of Ezra who sought to re-establish the moral and spiritual life.

Ninety years passed and the walls and gates remained desolate and the people of God were living in shame and affliction.

Fourteen years after Ezra (2nd group), God began to stir the heart of Nehemiah to travel to Jerusalem and lead the people in rebuilding the walls and gates of God's dwelling place.

They completed this task in 52 days. The completion of the wall marked a tremendous victory, but it was no time to let down their defense. The completion of the wall is actually a moment of supreme peril. They are surrounded by the enemies of God who are eager to attack them in spite of the wall. Jerusalem will be in perpetual danger.

Scripture bears out that the great moments of victory is perhaps one of the most dangerous moments in a Christian's life. Ex: Joshua had experienced a tremendous victory at Jericho. This was closely followed by a tragic and humiliating defeat at Ai because the power of the enemy was underestimated. The people of God imagined that their great achievement at Jericho - which was not their own at all, but entirely God's - had imparted to them some peculiar inherent strength for future battles.

Truth: There is no experience in my Christian life, no matter how exhilarating or triumphant, which imparts to me strength for the future.

Consider: It seems that the higher the peak of victory, the deeper the fall a believer can sustain.

Ex.: II Sam. 11:1-5- Darkest hour in the life of King David - He gave way to selfish desires that left a blot on his name that time has not erased. David's sin of adultery led him to commit murder. He sank into spiritual deadness with no apparent thought of repentance until

God shook him to the very depths of his soul.

THEN he returned to his senses and sought God's forgiveness.

Truth: To be careless in spiritual things and to underestimate satanic power is not a sign of "spirituality" or extreme bravery, but of complete folly. Every alert soldier of the cross will always be prepared for the possibility of a counterattack from the devil.

A principle of my life should be to: WATCH and PRAY.

With the completion of the walls and gates, it is time to turn attention to the spiritual needs of the people. The people of God needed to be brought to an intelligent understanding of the Word of God and realize the secret of their strength for the future.

Problem: When God's people get away from loving, reading and obeying the Word of God, they lose the blessing and power of God.

Truth: If I want to be a fruitful tree, I must delight in God's Word.

Ps. 1:2-3 But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

³ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

Nehemiah's Solution: Have a 'Bible Conference' at the Water Gate.

It will be a restoration of hearing God's living, prophetic word. (Neh. 8)

The Water Gate led from the old City of David to the Gihon Spring located adjacent to the Kidron Valley. The Bible does not say that this gate was repaired, but only that the workers repaired the walls adjacent to it.

This suggests that the Word of God stands forever and will not fail.

Ps. 119:89 Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

Matt. 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

"The Bible does not need to be repaired or improved." (Warren Wiersbe -Be Determined)

God's general, written Logos Word is represented at the Old Gate. The second Power Gate or Water Gate represents the quickened, living, Rhema Word of God to us.

This only comes after the Fountain Gate when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will open up God's Word to us and quicken specific words from it to our spirit.

Psalms 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word.

Ephesians 5:26 That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word, (Rhema)

The Holy Spirit is the one who makes the Word of God alive to us personally.

This allows cleansing, encouragement and direction to take place in our life.

The Spiritual Ministry of Nehemiah for the people included:

1. *Instructing the people in the Word*- Ezra and the priests explained the Scriptures to the people. It was a restoration of hearing God's living, prophetic word.
2. Confess Sin
3. Dedicating the walls
4. Cleansing the Fellowship

Note: Ezra & Nehemiah put the Word of God FIRST in the life of the city.

What happened in Jerusalem (God's dwelling place) from that point on was a by-product of the people's response to the Scriptures.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones "The primary task of the church is the preaching of the Word of God. The decadent periods and eras in the history of the church have always been those periods when preaching the Word had declined."

Truth: The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to cleanse and revive the hearts of people.

If I want God to work in me and through me, I must respond positively to His Word.

My whole being must be captive to God's truth.

Nehemiah 8 describes 3 basic responses (3 parts of my soul):

Understanding the Word > my mind

Rejoicing in the Word > my heart; emotions

Obedying the Word > my will

I Thess. 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. Understanding the Word of God - My Mind - Neh. 8:1-8

1. God's Word must be understood (mentioned 6x in chapter 8) before it can enter the heart and release its life-changing power.

a. Parable of the Sower - Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23 - Emphasis is on Understanding the Word of God. Jesus compared understanding and receiving the Word to the planting of seed in the soil, where it takes root and bears fruit.

Seed=Word Soil=types of hearts Results=response

b. Heb. 4:12 Word of God *is* living and powerful,

c. God's Word must take root in our heart, and be cultivated so we will bear fruit.

Note: $\frac{3}{4}$ of the seed did not bear fruit

Question: Do most people hear the Word, but not receive it (take root) and bear fruit?

Rom 10:17 Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

2. They chose the Water Gate for the sight of the Bible conference.

a. In the Bible, water for washing is a picture of the Word of God (John 15:3; Eph. 5:26)

b. Water for drinking is a picture of the Spirit of God (John 7:37-39)

c. When we apply the water of the Word to our lives, the Spirit can work in us and through us. "It is refreshing to the soul when you receive the Word and allow the Spirit to teach you."

3. Timing of the Conference

- a. 1st Day of the 7th month (Tishri) - Jewish equivalent of our New Year's Day
- b. This is the day they celebrate the Feast of Trumpets. They will celebrate the Day of Atonement on the 10th day and the Feast of Tabernacles from the 15th-21st days.
- c. Perfect time for the nation to get right with God and make a fresh new beginning.

4. Ezra was an excellent choice to conduct this outdoor Bible conference.

- a. Ezra 7:10 He was a priest and scribe (skilled in the Law of Moses) who had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel."

God raised up Ezra to rebuild, cleanse and fill the Temple with the worship of God.

5. Ezra performed 3 ministries for the people at the Water Gate.

- a. *Ezra brought the Book of the Law* (Neh. 8:1-4)

He stood on a platform above the people so they see and hear him. (13 other men)

- b. *Ezra opened the Book of the Law* (Neh. 8:5-6)

i) When he lifted the scroll, the people in the square before the Water Gate honored the Word of God by standing.

- They knew they would hear the very Word of God.

I Thess. 2:13 ...when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

- They remained standing while the Law was read and explained.

Neh. 8:3 Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

Note: They stood and listened for 5-6 hours. This continued for a week.

Neh. 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God.

ii) After he opened the scroll, Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. (8:6)

- They praised God for His Word before they read it.

- Neh. 8:6 And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands.

And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

This work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God had three immediate results.

- The people *thanked God* (by saying Amen when Ezra blessed the Lord)

- They prayed (by lifting up their hands)

- They worshipped (by bowing down before Him)

Thanksgiving, prayer, and praise are all good measures of how the Spirit of God and Word of God are working in us.

Note: They were a united congregation who honored the Scriptures and were willing to devote $\frac{1}{2}$ day to hearing it read and taught. (8:1)

I Tim. 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching. (NASB)

Ponder: In some parts of the world, believers stand for hours in crowded churches to hear Bible teaching. In the western evangelical churches, the shorter the sermon, the better.

c. *Ezra read and explained the Book* (Neh. 8:7-8)

i) v. 8: So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

- Distinctly > explained in a language they could understand - could apply it to their lives.

Question: Do my daily choices reveal a love for God's Word?

Do I thirst for an understanding of His Word?

Consider: People filled with the Spirit of God have a great longing for God's Word.

Christians in China spent literal months and years writing down their own copies of the Scriptures. When they couldn't take the copy of the Holy Scriptures home with them, they would memorize it. They simply cannot understand that we have a Bible, perhaps many Bibles, and yet not read and meditate in God's Word all through the day and night. We are dull. We have little response to God's Word.

Truth: My relationship with God's Word has a lot to do with my relationship with God.

Can others tell I am in love with God by the way I eagerly study and discuss God's Word?

What do I like to read the most? God longs for us to desire to hear more of His Word.

Next time you pick up that novel, magazine or catalogue, ask yourselves whether you have just again bypassed His Word for some materialistic preoccupation, fictional adventure or indifferent business. God wants your whole heart.

Prayer: Increase my desire & thirst for Your Word.

May Your Word occupy my mind so I meditate on It day and night.

Prayer of Spurgeon: Lord God, let the words leap out of the page into my soul, Thyself making them vivid, quick, powerful, and fresh to my heart.

Spurgeon: Our Lord Himself felt the power of the Word. It was not so much the devil who felt the power of "It is written" as Christ Himself. "No," saith He, "I will not command stones to be made bread; I trust in God Who can without bread sustain Me. I will not cast Myself down from the temple; I will not tempt the Lord My God. I will not worship Satan, for God alone is God."

The manhood of Christ felt an awe of the Word of God, and so it became a power to Him.

To trifle with Scripture is to deprive yourself of its aid. Reverence it, I beseech you, and look up to God with devout gratitude for having given it to you.