

Messages From the Gates of Jerusalem
#22 - Water Gate - Part II - The Living Word > A Treasure

The Water Gate led from the old City of David to the Gihon Spring. The Bible does not say that this gate was repaired, but only that the workers repaired the walls adjacent to it. Examine one of 2 sets of workers at the Water Gate.

Neh. 3:26 Moreover the Nethinim who dwelt in Ophel *made repairs* as far as *the place* in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the projecting tower. ²⁷ After them the Tekoites repaired another section, next to the great projecting tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel.

I. The "Nethinim" ("those who are given") were temple servants.

Joshua 9: Israel is fresh on the heels of major victories at Jericho and Ai. The Gibeonites evidently knew about God's command to Israel to utterly drive out and destroy the inhabitants of Canaan (Promised Land). They knew the Israelites had slaughtered every man, woman and child. They are utterly without mercy. We must devise a plan to save ourselves. They did not harness their chariots and sharpen their swords.

They devised an elaborate, crafty, deceitful plan to trick the Israelites.

They disguised themselves as worn out, weary travelers from a far away land. They "acted with cunning" to escape being destroyed along with the other Canaanite nations.

They "took worn out sacks for their donkeys, torn and mended wineskins, worn-out patched sandals and clothes." They made sure "all their provisions were dry and crumbly."

We have come from a distant country. "Make a treaty (covenant) with us," they pleaded (9:11). At first the Israelites were wary, but the crumbly provisions were enough to convince them that it was safe to make a covenant.

Johsua 9:14 Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD.

"Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live." But note: They presumed to be wise enough to handle the situation on their own, and they ended up compromising on what the Lord had commanded them.

Three days after they make the covenant, the Israelites learn that they've been tricked.

The Gibeonites are actually Canaanite neighbors. The Israelites murmur against their leaders, but all agree they can't go back on their promise—the covenant has to stand.

Joshua summons the Gibeonites to learn why they sought to deceive them. The Gibeonites replied: it was told to your servants *for a certainty* that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you—so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing.

Do you hear faith in the Gibeonites' response?

Notice all the parallels between the Gibeonites and Rahab, the hero of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11:31.

- Like the Gibeonites, Rahab was a native of Canaan (Joshua 2:1).
- Like the Gibeonites, she had confidence God was giving the land to Israel (2:9).
- Like the Gibeonites, she responded with fear before God's people, Israel (2:9-11).
- Like the Gibeonites, Rahab acted with cunning so she and her family would find refuge among the people of Israel (2:12-13).

Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation:

Joshua could not kill the Gibeonites, but he could control them by making them perpetual workmen for the tabernacle service. They would serve by cutting wood for the sacrificial fires and carrying water used in its service. The Gibeonites (Josh. 9:27) were the original caste, afterwards called Nethinim. ("those who are given;" temple servants)

- a. I Chron. 9:2; Ezra 2:43, 58; Neh. 3:26 - They labored as servants in the Temple.
- b. Gibeon becomes a priestly city; the Ark of the Covenant stayed at Gibeon often in the days of David and Solomon (1 Chronicles 16:39-40 and 21:29).
- c. At least one of David's *mighty men* was a Gibeonite (1 Chronicles 12:4).
- d. Ezra 8:20 They were formally given by David to the Levites and so were called nethinim.
- e. Gibeonites were among those who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:7 and 7:25).

Return from the exile in Babylon: Their number was considerable: 392 Nethinim accompanied Zerubbabel at the first Return in 538 BC (Ezra 2:58 = Neh. 7:60). When Ezra, some 80 years later went to Jerusalem, he secured a contingent of Nethinim numbering 220 (Ezra 8:20). In Jerusalem they enjoyed the same privileges and immunities as the other religious orders, being included by Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra among those who should be exempt from toll, custom and tribute (Ezra 7:24).

A part of the city - Ophel, opposite the Water-gate, was assigned them as an official residence (Neh. 3:26,31). This was an appropriate dwelling place since they must draw the water for all the priestly functions. They dwelt near the most important source of water for the city > Gihon Spring.

There is no evidence in Scripture that they created any problems for the Jews.

Consider: It's likely that their service in the tabernacle, and in the Temple, influenced them to abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel. The fact that over 500 Nethinim returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity (Ezra 2:43-58; 8:20) suggests that they were devoted to the Lord and His House. (Wiersbe)

The Gibeonites express the same heart David did in Psalms 84:10: *For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

True revival can never take place without an all-consuming hunger for God's Word. When God's people grow weary of hearing His Word preached, a spiritual death begins - and the joy of the Lord departs.

What an incredible scene at the Water Gate! Would you see this in any American church?

Have you heard the phrase "sermon tasters?" This term, almost 200 years old, originated in London during the mid-1800s. At that time, the great preacher C.H. Spurgeon delivered sermons to 5,000 people every Sunday at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Across the city, Joseph Parker preached anointed messages. Other fiery pastors preached throughout London, delivering deep, revelatory, prophetic words.

It became a popular sport among wealthy Londoners to hop in their carriages and race across the city from one church to another, sampling the preaching of these ministers.

Each Monday in Parliament, exclusive meetings were held to discuss which preacher delivered the best sermon and who brought forth the deepest revelation.

These gadabouts were dubbed "sermon tasters." They always wanted to lay claim to some new spiritual truth or revelation. But very few practiced what they heard.

At the Water Gate in Jerusalem there was no eloquent preaching, no sensational sermon. Ezra preached straight from the Scriptures, reading for hours on end.

As the people stood and listened to God's Word, they grew excited as the Word "came alive" in them. Even the most fiery preacher cannot stir up a complacent congregation if they're not hungry to hear God's truth.

I. Understanding the Word - in my mind

II. Rejoicing in the Word (in my heart; emotions) - Neh. 8:9-12

1. People's first response was conviction (conscious of their own failure and sin), grief > wept over their sins. They were cut to the heart and wept because the Word was personal to them and spoke directly into their hearts.

Rom. 3:20 for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

2. Neh. 8:9-10 "This day *is* holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day *is* holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

3. Neh. 8:11-12 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day *is* holy; do not be grieved." The people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

Consider: What is my strength for the future? I have wept and mourned over my sins and failures, yet failure is always with me. I need a strength that is enduring, not just a little increase in power for a moment, but real stamina that will endure all my life.

Truth: The enemy can use my spirit of brokenness. He whispers: It's no use. You might as well forget it. You are just hopeless. I told you...this Christian life is no use. You can't live it.

Truth: True conviction from the Holy Spirit will bring us to the end of our own strength to discover infinite resources in Jesus Christ.

Question: Have you been horrified to discover the evil that resides in your heart?

The things that shock me about myself never shock God.

Praise Him > He has infinite resources to meet my need.

Question: What is the "joy of the Lord" that is to be my strength?

I. A Joy Based upon Forgiveness

1. No matter what I have done, there is absolute acceptance before God by the death of His Son.

2. Forgiveness is not something I earn. It is something I accept as a gift.

Acts 4:12 for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Rom. 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, When God forgives, He forgets and casts all our sins into the depths of the sea.

We should never let Satan drag up before our minds that which God put away forever.

II. A Joy Nourished in Affliction

1. A believer whose joy is the Lord possesses a calm, quiet serenity in every situation. When you see someone with this demeanor, you might think he has no problems or burdens. You need to "lift the veil" from his life to discover the fact that because the joy is there is a sure sign there is also a burden. "The burden which God places in a life means the grape is being squeezed and crushed, and out comes the wine." Most of us only see the "wine of joy," not realizing that behind the joy is the pressure of the trial.

- a. Such a man doesn't go around looking for sympathy. He is delivered from self-pity.
- b. It is between him and the Lord. It is the strength of his life.
- c. The joy of the Lord is revealed through people in deep affliction who manifest His life.

III. A Joy Dependent Upon Obedience - NOT dependent upon successful Christian service

1. Heb. 12:2 ...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame...

a. The secret of His joy > doing what the Father had sent Him to do.

Consider: The one thing that matters in any type of service is that you are doing the will of God and are obedient to His Word in the power of His Spirit. If this is true in your life, there will always be a deep joy in your heart.

IV. A Joy that is Independent of our Circumstances

1. NO experience in my life can touch me except by God's permission
2. Testing is woven into the pattern of EVERY Christian life.

3. It is part of the will of God. Do not seek to "get out of it."
4. Whatever God permits in my life, He will bestow POWER to see me through.
5. Question: WHAT do you want me to learn?

Result: This JOY can enable me to sing in the night - just like Paul & Silas.

Praise: Even in the midst of my heartbreak, there is a JOY deep in my heart that NOTHING on earth can take away.

Truth: I can't "work up" this JOY. It is a fruit of the Spirit imparted to me when I am filled with the Holy Spirit. "It is safely nestled in between love and peace." Let Him fill you and the joy will be as natural as breathing. The JOY of the LORD reveals itself to others.

They had just observed the Day of Atonement and the LORD had dealt with their sins so they should be rejoicing in His forgiveness.

Day of Atonement is followed by the Feast of Tabernacles.

The sequence is: conviction, cleansing and celebration.

-God's Word brings conviction and leads us to repentance, but it also brings us joy, for the same Word that wounds also heals.

Note: It is as wrong to mourn when God has forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us. We experience POWER that can transform sorrow into joy.

III. Obeying the Word - My Will - Neh. 8:13-18

1. When I obey the Lord and serve Him because I rejoice in Him, my service will be a delight and not a drudgery.

Matthew Henry: "Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience."

John 4:34 To the believer happy in the Lord, the will of God is nourishment.

The Jews still had work to do in Jerusalem and they needed the joy of the Lord to give them the strength to do it.

2. They learned about the Feast of Tabernacles > ready to obey the Word to celebrate it.

Neh. 8:17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

3. For 7 days they lived in booths made of branches. They looked back remembering the nation's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, when the people were homeless and lived in temporary shelters.

4. They also looked around at the harvest blessings from God.

5. They looked ahead to the glorious Kingdom God promised His people.

6. The celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles was also for enrichment and encouragement.

Neh. 8:10 The joy of the Lord is your strength.

Ponder: God doesn't give us joy instead of sorrow, or joy in spite of sorrow. He gives us joy in the midst of sorrow. It is not substitution but TRANSFORMATION.

Illus. John 16:20-22 Birth of a baby - The same baby that gives the mother pain also gives the mother joy! Her pain is not replaced by joy but transformed into joy!

Truth The difficult circumstances of life are "pregnant" with joy, and by faith we must give that joy time to be born.

7. The Feast of Tabernacles was a time for giving food and gifts to others. The Jews had found joy in hearing the Word of God, but now they found joy in sharing the blessings of God.

Consider: The mind grows by taking in, but the heart grows by giving out.

8. Ezra continued the "Bible conference" during the entire week of this feast, day by day, reading and explaining the Word of God.

a. The combination of joyful fellowship, feasting and hearing God's Word must have strengthened the people greatly.

b. The week concluded with a solemn assembly.

Question: Did the blessings of the celebration last? For a time - they became careless again.

Billy Sunday: Do revivals last? No, neither does a bath; but it's good to have one occasionally.

The Treasure of God's Word

Jer. 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.

Ps. 19:8 The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart;

Truth: The secret of Christian JOY is to believe what God says in His Word and act upon it. Faith that isn't based on the WORD is not faith at all.

Faith based on the Word will produce joy that will weather the storms of life.

Ps. 119:162 I rejoice at Your Word as one who finds great treasure.

Consider: If I read the Word of God only from a sense of duty, then its treasures may never be revealed to me.

Truth: It is the believer who rejoices in the Word, who delights to read and study it day by day, who will find God's hidden treasures.

Prov. 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.

1. The 66 books of the Bible constitute a highly integrated message system. These 66 books, penned by 40 different authors between 1146 BC & 90 AD, are an integrated pre-designed message system.

2. We discover that there is a cosmic warfare going on and *we are the objects* of this invisible conflict. Our own eternal destiny will result from our *relationship* with the protagonist who emerges victorious! What could be more exciting?

3. There is a theme in the Old Testament which is fulfilled in the New Testament. The New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is revealed in the New. Many things in the Old Testament do not seem to make sense until you illuminate them with the New Testament. It is an integrated whole that evidences supernatural engineering in every detail. The Bible unabashedly records history *in advance!*

Example: Genesis chapter 5 > the genealogy of Adam through Noah. Don't skim over this chapter. God always rewards the diligent student. In our Bible, we read the Hebrew names. What do these names mean in English? It will yield some fascinating insights.

The Flood Judgment -> A Secret Message in Methuselah's name

Methuselah comes from Muth, a root that means "death"; and from shalak, which means "to bring." The name Methuselah means, "his death shall bring."

It SEEMS Methuselah's father (Enoch) was given a prophecy of the coming Great Flood. He was apparently told that as long as his son was alive, the judgment of the flood would be withheld. The year that Methuselah died, the flood came. Remember: The flood was not a surprise. It had been predicted for 4 generations.

It is interesting that Methuselah's life, in effect, was a symbol of God's grace in forestalling the coming judgment of the flood. It is, therefore, fitting that his lifetime is the oldest in the Bible, speaking of the extensiveness of God's grace.

Meaning of the names (Hebrews roots) from Adam through Noah when the flood came:

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|--------------|-------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| • Adam | Adomah | Man | |
| • Seth | | Appointed | Gen. 4:25 |
| • Enosh | Anash | Mortal, frail, Miserable | |
| • Kenan | | Sorrow, Dirge, Elegy | |
| • Mahalal'el | Mahalal -El | The Blessed God | |
| • Jared | yaradh | Shall Come Down | |
| • Enoch | | Commencement; Teaching | |
| • Methusaleh | | His Death shall bring | |
| • Lamech | | Despairing; lament | |
| • Noah | Nacham | Comfort; Rest | Gen. 5:29 |

Together in English Sentence: "Man (is) appointed mortal sorrow; (but) the Blessed God shall come down teaching (that His) death shall bring the despairing ones rest."

Lessons: 1. Summary of the New Testament Gospel tucked away in a genealogy in the Torah.

2. EVERY detail is in Scripture by DESIGN.

3. God's plan of redemption was not a knee-jerk reaction to the fall of man in Genesis 3.

4. God had ordained His plan before the foundation of the world.

There are many other examples in Scripture. God's Word is inexhaustible - you will never get to the bottom of its depth.

Matt. 5:18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Ps. 119:162 I rejoice at Your Word as one who finds great treasure.