

Messages From the Gates of Jerusalem  
Lesson # 3 - Fish Gate - You Are My Witness

Fish Gate in Nehemiah's Jerusalem

a. Ancient gate where men gathered to sell fish, sometimes in violation of the Sabbath  
Neh. 3:3-5 *"The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenadah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. And next to them Meremoth ("heights")*

1. Priest who returned from Exile with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:3 )

2 . Priest in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah who assisted with the Temple treasury (Ezra 8:33 ), with the repair of the walls (Neh. 3:4 ,Neh. 3:4,3:21 ), and witnessed the renewal of the covenant (Nehemiah 10:5 ).

3 . Layman with a foreign wife (Ezra 10:36 )

*the son of Urijah (the Lord is my light or fire), the son of Koz (Order), made repairs.*

*Next to them Meshullam (befriended) the son of Berechiah (blessed of Jehovah ),*

*the son of Meshezabel (God the deliverer.), made repairs.*

*Next to them Zadok (Just, righteous) the son of Baana (son of affliction) made repairs.*

*Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord."*

Message from the Fish Gate: You Are My Witness! You Are My Ambassador!

God chose to accomplish His plan through a special, chosen people > Israel.

1. God first promised the Messiah after Adam and Eve's fall into sin.

Gen. 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

2. He later confirmed the Messiah would come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Gen. 12:1-3 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." God wanted to use one nation to bless ALL NATIONS. His heart of concern reached out to ALL.

3. Jesus Christ, the Messiah would be born out of the nation of Israel; tribe of Judah.

God's choosing of Israel:

Lev. 20:26 And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD *am* holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.

Deuteronomy 7:6-9 "For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. "Therefore know that the LORD your God,

He *is* God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

Ex. 19:3-6 *Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:*

<sup>4</sup> *'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.*

<sup>6</sup> *And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'*

When God blessed the nation Israel and set this nation apart, He had the other nations in view. God wanted all the peoples of the world to look at the nation Israel so that they would come to know Israel's God because of Israel's witness. Israel, in the middle of the world, was to be a signpost that would point very clearly to the only true God.

### God's Witness on Earth

Isaiah 43:1, 21 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You *are* Mine. This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

Isa. 43:10-11 "You *are* My witnesses," says the LORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, and understand that I *am* He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, *even* I, *am* the LORD, and besides Me *there is* no savior.

The word "WITNESS" comes from a verb which means "to say something again and again." A WITNESS may be defined as "one who strengthens or confirms the saying of another." Israel, as God's witness, was to strengthen and confirm the saying of God Himself.

Israel was to draw attention to ALL: the fact that the LORD was the only God:

Isa. 43:12 "Ye are My witnesses, says the LORD, that I am God. (Missionary Nation)

Isa. 44:8 You *are* My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me?

Indeed *there is* no other Rock; I know not *one*."

Isa. 45:22 "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth!

For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.

God Says: I am the only God; the only LORD and the only Savior. There is NONE ELSE!

Witness says: Yes, He is the only God, the only LORD and the only Savior. There is NONE Else! Turn from your false gods and turn to the TRUE and LIVING GOD.

I Kings 8: 59-60 that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD *is* God; *there is* no other.

God's intent was for Israel to be a distinct people, a nation who pointed others towards God and His promised provision of a Redeemer, Messiah, and Savior.

God's Instructions for Israel - Deut. 4; I Kings 8:61

1. Listen to, believe, and follow His Word closely.
2. "Let your heart therefore be loyal to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day."
3. PRACTICE His Word. Do not add to it or take from it.
4. Teach the Word to their children.

Why did God give these commands? Other people are LOOKING AT and WATCHING you.

Deut. 4:6 Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.'

Deut. 4:7 They will see that these people have a real and right relationship with the living God!

Deut. 4:8 God had given His wonderful LAW (His Word) to the nation Israel:

The nation Israel had POWER as a WITNESS as long as they were DIFFERENT.

They had a relationship with God that the other nations did not have.

They had the Word of God which the other nations did not have.

They heard the voice of God (Deut. 4:33) which no other people had ever heard.

God had worked for them POWERFULLY as He had not done for any other nation.

(Deut. 4:34)

Danger: If Israel should forget the Lord and forget His Word

Deut. 4:23 Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you.

Challenge: God would bestow blessings and responsibilities on Israel. By conducting their lives in conformity with the demands of the Law, Israel would have been able to function as God's servant nation, representing God and His character to the nations of the world.

Result: Throughout her history Israel had to grapple with the reality that she was related to all the nations through creation and that God had also called her to be separate from them.

Soon they would begin to live, talk and behave like all the other nations.

The peoples of the world would look at Israel, and they would see no difference.

They saw Israel living UNHOLY lives just as everyone else.

Warnings: The inexorable decline was marked by the rise of great prophets who warned of God's grave displeasure at the failure of His people to reflect His character for all the world to see.

Israel's Failure: Israel failed to be the kind of witness God desired. The nation turned away from the LORD and His Word. The 10 northern tribes (Israel) were taken captive by the Assyrians. The 2 southern tribes (Judah) would be left alone in the land.

In Isaiah 1-39, Yahweh delivered His stinging indictment against them.

Divine judgment is coming. They refused to submit to God's sovereignty and God's covenant partner chose to become an adulterous wife.

They did such a poor job at possessing the Word of God that in the days of Josiah the Scriptures had been lost! Finally, someone found the scroll (II Kings 22:8-11). This resulted in revival for a time. Then Josiah died. They became less different from the heathen peoples and pointed less and less to the God that they were supposed to represent.

Zeph. 1:1-2, 10 "The word of The Lord which came unto Zephaniah... in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah. I will utterly consume all things from off the land,... And there shall be on that day," says the LORD, "The sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate,

"There shall be the sound of a mournful cry from the fish gate"

Almost every Biblical mention of the Fish Gate of Jerusalem involved either corruption of the people of Israel, or the aftermath of it. Possible reason: When a society becomes corrupt, the two most public manifestations of that degeneracy involve:

1. Places of religion: Jer.32:34 "they set their abominations in the House, which is called by My Name, to defile it"

2. Places of Business: Neh. 13:16-17 "Men of Tyre dwelt there also which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day?"

The Lord sent prophet after prophet to warn the Israelites of severe consequences if they did not repent of their apostasy and fulfill His purpose to be a witness and point all peoples to Him. Time after time, the people did not heed the warning, and they suffered for it.

This example, which mentions the Fish Gate of Jerusalem, shows how King Manasseh paid dearly for his wickedness. Manasseh learned his lesson the very hard way, but overall the people of both Israel and Judah had set for themselves a course of destruction.

II Chron. 33:1-13; II Kings 21:1-18 Manasseh *was* twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.

A. He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down.

B. He raised up altars for the Baal and led the people into idolatry.

C. He worshiped all the host of heaven and served them; worship the "starry host."

D. He built a detestable idol in the temple of the Lord.

E. There was to be only one altar in the Temple Court, but he added altars dedicated to various gods. He made Jehovah one "god" among many.

F. He practiced the religion of Molech and caused his sons to pass through the altar of fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom.

G. Practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists.

H. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.

God's Promise: I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses."

Your enjoyment of the land depends on obedience to the law of the Lord.

I. So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

What Will It Take? The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen.

Therefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria,

1. Took Manasseh with hooks (in his nose), bound him with bronze *chains*, and carried him off to Babylon. (Wiersbe: He was treated like a steer being led to slaughter. He deserved it.)

2. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,<sup>13</sup> and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom.

Then Manasseh knew that the LORD *was* God.

True Repentance? Matt. 3:8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,

II Chron. 33:14-16 When he returned home, he proved the reality of his conversion by seeking to undo all the evil he had done.

*After this he built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and it enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. Then he put military captains in all the fortified cities of Judah.<sup>15</sup> He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem; and he cast them out of the city.*

*<sup>16</sup> He also repaired the altar of the LORD, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel*

Punishment Still Follows: Manasseh, the most wicked king in Judah, reigned the longest.

Wiersbe: "It appeared as though God took His hand off the nation and allowed all the filth to pour out of the people's hearts."

He was blamed for the fall of the Southern Kingdom.

II Kings 24:3-4 Surely at the commandment of the LORD *this* came upon Judah, to remove *them* from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed;

for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the LORD would not pardon.

Jer. 15:1-4 Then the LORD said to me, "*Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.*"<sup>2</sup> And it shall be, if they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you shall tell them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Such as *are* for death, to death; And such as *are* for the sword, to the sword; And such as *are* for the famine, to the famine; And such as *are* for the captivity, to the captivity.'" "And I will appoint over them four forms of destruction," says the LORD: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy."<sup>4</sup> I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.

Jer. 32:26-36 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,<sup>27</sup> "Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"<sup>28</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it.'<sup>29</sup> And the Chaldeans who fight against this city shall come and set fire to this city and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs they have offered incense to Baal and poured out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke Me to anger;<sup>30</sup> because the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only evil before Me from their youth. For the children of Israel have provoked Me only to anger with the work of their hands,' says the LORD.<sup>31</sup> 'For this city has been to Me *a provocation of My anger and My fury* from the day that they built it, even to this day; so I will remove it from before My face'<sup>32</sup> because of all the evil of the children of Israel and the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me to anger—they, their kings, their princes, their priests, their prophets, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup> And they have turned to Me the back, and not the face; though I taught them, rising up early and teaching *them*, yet they have not listened to receive instruction.<sup>34</sup> But they set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile it.<sup>35</sup> And they built the high places of Baal which *are* in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through *the fire* to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.'<sup>36</sup> "Now therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, 'It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence':

This is a future you chose by refusing to REPENT.

The days before her destruction marked the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words about the coming famine, pestilence, and sword. They were dark days and full of terrors and horrors. The siege of Jerusalem lasted from the winter months in Zedekiah's ninth year as king to the summer of his eleventh year. This works out to be about thirty months of an increasingly terrible situation. The famine was so severe the people were cooking and eating their own children. The invaders broke through the walls and took the city, looting and destroying the

houses and burning the city and the temple.

Nebuchadnezzar's forces > Point of entry: Fish Gate = Mournful Cry

God has a call and purpose for His Church - corporate and individuals

Ephesians 2:8-10 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Be My Witnesses; Keep My Commandments; Light of the World; Proclaim the Gospel; Grounded in the Faith; Be Holy, etc.

Neh. 3:5 *Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord."*

The nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of the Lord.

Literally, the idea in the Hebrew is that they wouldn't submit - they would not "bend their necks" to what God wanted them to do. The real issue was submission. They stand in infamy as the only people mentioned in this chapter who did not join in the work!

A High School boy who had been at a summer camp was asked, "How did you get along as a Christian there?" He replied, "Oh, they never found out I was a Christian."

Warning Alert: Fish Gate needs to be repaired.

Has this gate broken down in your life? Has the wall around the Fish Gate crumbled? If this wall is broken down, you will find that through this gate the enemy will enter again and again. Without continual spiritual growth and discipleship, our zeal for the Lord and His Word diminishes.

Wiersbe: "God is seeking dedicated, distinctive people - not cookie-cutter, carbon-copy Christians. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. We are to be living sacrifices, distinctive people whose lives and witness point to Christ and shine like lights in the darkness."

D.L. Moody: "A holy life will produce the deepest impression."