

The Prayer of Daniel and Nehemiah 1-4-02

Daniel 9:1-19 Nehemiah 1:4-11

The Prayer of Jabez has been on the New York Times' best seller list most of the year 2001. I should be glad that a Christian book has held such a status. I must admit though, I have had a bad attitude about the book from day one. When I saw it on the cover of a Christian book advertisement my first thought was, "that is really what America needs, another 'bless me' book." Yet, I have heard testimonies from people who were encouraged by the book. Now you can get a Prayer of Jabez' CD, coloring book, prayer journal, stationary, coffee mug and more. We do need to remember to pray God's blessing upon our own lives. I wouldn't discourage you from reading the book or praying that God bless your life. Blessings are things in our lives that cause us to be more dependent on Jesus. To the Apostle Paul that was a thorn. To Jacob it was a crippled leg.

I believe the prayers of Daniel and Nehemiah are more appropriate for the church today. You'll see they go hand in hand, for the Lord was leading these men by the Holy Spirit to pray at the same time for the restoration of Judah. The nation had gone into captivity a generation before, and now it was God's time for the restoration. When God is ready to act, He stirs His servants to prayer. When you hear of a variety of godly people praying for the same thing, watch to see what God is doing.

In Daniel 9, Daniel has read the prophecy of Jeremiah and knows that the restoration is at hand. He might have said, "Oh well, if God said it, He'll do it, so I'll just sit here and watch it come about." Instead he went into desperate prayer.

Dan 9:1-3 (NIV)¹ *In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom--² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.³ So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.*

When was the last time you read the Word of God and it took you straight to your knees in prayer? As he read the prophecy, he understood it was about to be fulfilled and so he turned to God in prayer, but not just in a casual way. He pleaded with God in sackcloth and ashes. Dan 9:4-5 (NIV)⁴ *I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.*

Nehemiah and Daniel both use this description, "*great and awesome God*". It must have been common in that time. I think that is because they had experienced the judgement of God. When His judgements come down we find how utterly powerless we are, and in that recognition of how weak we are we see how great and awesome He is. In that recognition of His just judgements we see the other side of the same coin, His faithful love to those who love and obey Him. He starts his prayer just as Jesus taught us to pray, addressing the One to Whom our prayer is directed.

Then he says, "*WE have sinned and done wrong.*" Not the people a generation ago who were first taken captive, but he says, "WE". That includes Daniel himself. Daniel is one of the few men in the Bible of whom there is no recorded sin. Surely he did sin and he knew he was a sinner. This godly man had a realization that all sin is rebellion against the great and awesome God of creation. Instead of comparing himself with his neighbors and considering himself better, he compares himself with God and sees himself as one with his neighbors- a sinner. He steps into the need of those around him and prays for them. That is intercession. It is what Jesus is doing for you right now.

But he doesn't just stop after saying we have sinned, he goes on to say, "*We have been wicked and have rebelled...*" All sin is rebellion against the rightful place of God in our lives. Everything we are and have is from His gracious hand, and so our total obedience and submission is owed to Him. The person who recognizes that is on the road to getting right with God. WE have been wicked. WE have ignored the Law and God's commands. We are getting just a portion of what we deserve. What does this have to do with us today?

I don't want to focus on our nation, though it is certainly in need of returning to God and His Word. Judgement begins first at the house of God. As we reach the end of this prayer we will see that Daniel's concern is for the people of God and for the testimony of God. What is the testimony of the church in this city? Is the Name of the Lord honored here because of the faithfulness of His people to live as examples of the life of Christ? If you have been here long, you will know that 'shame' is more the appropriate word than 'honor'. That is not true everywhere, but it is true in many if not most cities. We need to pray this prayer of Daniel for the church in this town and the honor of the name of the Lord, the testimony. There needs to be a restoration, and a building up, but there must first come a sincere and genuine repentance. Repentance is a leveling, a shaking, tearing down of all we, in our pride, have built up. When it all lies in the dust and we recognize who we are and how great God is, then God can begin to restore and rebuild. (Jeremiah 1:10) Consider John the Baptist message to repent, to fill up the valleys and level the mountains to make a straight path for the Lord. There is a leveling before He moves in. With that in mind, let's go on through the prayer and consider its application to our own life and the church of Jesus in our own town.

Dan 9:6 (NIV)⁶ *We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.* There is a refusal to listen to the word of God through His servants to our leadership, to our fathers, and to the people of the land. Even worse we refuse to listen to the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is proclaimed. Unity and love for the body of Christ has been preached, but WE prefer to consider our ways and our doctrines the superior ones. Competition is more the description than cooperation. The truth is spoken but how few desire to hear it. As long as we are comfortable and "successful" we don't want to rock the boat. WE have not listened. OUR leaders have not listened. The Word is there for all who have ears to hear, but there must first be a heart willing to conform to the will and ways of God. That means acting in the fruits of the Spirit toward one another.

Dan 9:7-8 (NIV)⁷ *"Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame--the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you."*⁸ *O LORD, we and our*

kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.

If we are able to sense shame for our unfaithfulness to the word, shame because of our refusal to hear, we have hope. When there is no shame for sin, for disobedience there is a hardness of heart that has little hope of restoration. But if we can sense shame in the church in this city, we have hope of restoration through our merciful God. Does the condition of the church today in Sedona cause us to be ashamed? It certainly should. We are apart of it just as Daniel was apart of the Jews in captivity. God is righteous, and our example has not been so. Our ways have not been His ways. Our thoughts have not been His thoughts. WE have rebelled.

Dan 9:9-14 (NIV)⁹ *The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;*¹⁰ *we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets.*¹¹ *All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. "Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.*¹² *You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.*¹³ *Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.*¹⁴ *The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.*

Do we realize how merciful and forgiving God has been to us even though we have been rebels? How did Daniel propose they seek God's favor? By turning from their sin and giving attention to the truth. The truth is God hates slander. Let us turn from it. Let us give attention, instead, to the Word of God – the truth. We are commanded to love one another and esteem others above ourselves– that is truth. We make factions in the body when Jesus says for us to be in unity. The Lord is righteous to bring the deserved judgement upon the church, but will we now obey?

Dan 9:15-19 (NIV)¹⁵ *"Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong.*¹⁶ *O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.*¹⁷ *"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.*¹⁸ *Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.*¹⁹ *O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."*

God delivered us just as He delivered them. We were slaves of sin as they were slaves of Egypt. The deliverance was a testimony to God's power, and yet we turned back to the captivity of sin, just like the Children of Israel desired to return to Egypt. The church is an object of scorn in our community and in many cities across our country. Lord, help us live as a testimony for Your name's sake! We bear His name, CHRISTian. We need to let His

life flow through us to be that testimony the world so desperately needs to see. They'll know we are Christians by our love.

Look at how Nehemiah was led to pray the same things after hearing about the condition of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 1:4-11 (NIV)⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.⁵ Then I said: "O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands,⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you.⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.⁸ "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,⁹ but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'¹⁰ "They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.¹¹ O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

Do you see the similarities? He enters into intercession, praying for the people, on their behalf, and yet he includes himself as one who has sinned. He says the judgement is God's faithfulness. He pleads for God to listen and forgive and restore the testimony, a dwelling for His name. That is what the church (you and I) should be and that is what we need today, a restoration of the testimony, a dwelling for His name. Nehemiah went from that prayer right to the King's table with the first sad face he had ever worn in the King's presence. Nehemiah's life and position were on the line. He put feet to his prayer and trusted in the Lord to answer.

Those prayers were the beginning of a great work. Parts of it went quickly. Part of it went slowly. It was not free of treacherous people trying to stop it, and compromising people who hindered the blessing of God, but it still went forward. God helped them deal with one situation at a time. The Temple, walls, and gates were rebuilt. People were assigned their places of ministry. The testimony was restored. The world saw and said, "God is with them!"

Is God leading us to pray for the restoration of His temple in this city? Can we enter into the place of the people and pray for repentance and a restoration of His testimony here? I don't mean one church building in which we gather or one pastor under which we come together, but that we, as a church, express the life and love of Jesus. I mean that the unselfish love of God and not seeking of power or first position always motivate the work we commit ourselves to. Can we embrace those with different doctrines as brothers and sisters as long as they hold Jesus as Lord and Savior? When will the church in this city have a testimony of love that is worthy of His name, instead of one of shame? Will you pray from your heart the prayer of Daniel and Nehemiah?