

Nehemiah 9-10 - The Importance of Confession

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

Last week we took note of how God was doing a genuine and powerful work, among the people of Israel. We saw how the people, even after the temple has been built, the walls around Jerusalem have been finished, and the people gathered and they wanted to hear the Word of God read to them. And when the Word was read to them, there was just this profound response of the people and they..., we saw there in them, a hunger for the Word of God.

And we talked about that last week when people begin to really truly hunger for the scriptures, hunger for the Word of God, it's a really delightful thing. We saw a new brokenness as the people responded to the Word with sorrow over past sins. And then we saw how they then celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths, which was the recognition or the observance, I guess, of God's faithfulness throughout the 40 years of wilderness wanderings for the nation of Israel.

As we get into chapter 9, we're going to be continuing that basic theme as we see the Lord moving in a very sort of powerful and dynamic way among the people.

And if you're there in Nehemiah chapter 9, verse 1, it says, *“Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.” (ESV)*

Let me just say that timing wise, this is like 3 days later after they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. And now it says that they're coming together in these expressions of grief and humility. And you'll notice that there are 3 of them listed here that we want to talk about for a moment.

It says that the people were fasting, they were wearing sackcloth, and they had earth or dirt on their heads. That's seems real strange for you and I, at least a couple of those. But first of all, let's take a look at fasting. Fasting is a voluntary withholding of food in a sense or an act of showing that this time of prayer is paramount, even to the point of setting aside all else.

We've talked about in the past, that for you and I setting aside a meal time can be nothing more than setting aside the sitting down and eating of a meal. You might say, well, what else is there? Are you kidding, in their day? It was hours of preparation. There's no grocery store, there's no drive in restaurant, drive up lane. There's none of that. Everything is made from scratch and so the process of fasting and giving up eating for a day or whatever, to focus on prayer, gave a person a great deal of time that would otherwise be spent in meal preparation and so forth.

And so this was a way of really taking that time and giving it to the Lord. But you might say, well, why that? Well, there's several different things that you can fast, frankly, that you can give up. But food, eating is pretty big deal. I mean, we've all gotten fairly attached to the process. We're pretty much most of us fans of it when it comes to eating. And we know that it's necessary to maintain our strength, and vitality, and so forth, so to give it up is a big deal.

This is a sacrificial act. Okay. This is a sacrificial act on our parts to pray. You're giving up something. Remember when David was told to offer a sacrifice to the Lord in response to a plague that had come upon the land? And he went to this man to buy his threshing floor so that he could build an altar there and sacrifice. And this man whose name was Araunah, he basically said, hey, you can have it. You can have it. Here's the wood for the altar. Here's the animals to sacrifice on the altar. You can just... Of course he was just as anxious to get this thing over with as David was.

But David, remember what he said? He said, I will offer nothing to the Lord that doesn't cost me something. (2 Samuel 24:24) David understood the idea of sacrifice.

And when we give up something by fasting, giving up in this case. Usually fasting means withholding food but I've come to understand that you can fast from several different things that might otherwise take your time and attention. And frankly, some of those things might even be more appropriate to fast from because they take more of your day.

Like I was just saying, food preparation really doesn't take much of our day anymore. I can prepare a meal in pretty short, I mean, in just a few minutes. I'm not going to get into it because Sue will make me laugh. Ever since we became empty nesters, it's really strange in our home how mealtime just used to be a big deal. We all sit around the table and it just... Boy, when the kids go off and do their own thing, mealtime just becomes a completely different experience. Anyway, so fasting from that sort of a thing isn't frankly all that big of a deal as

far as the time it takes. I think there's a lot of things that you can fast from. We've talked about some of those things before.

Notice, also it says that the people also came in sackcloth. They were wearing sackcloth. What is sackcloth? Well, it's a very rough material made out of black goat hair. I don't know if you can imagine how that might have felt on your skin.

I'm one of those people that gets really creeped out easy. I mean, I'm the person, I'm the quintessential person that they thought of when they stopped putting tags on shirts and stuff like that. Like right there, you know how they now print things. I won't buy a shirt that has a tag on it. And before they started printing labels on shirts and they still had to, I always took them off. I'd make Sue take them off for me or I'd do it myself. She'd always want me to do it cause I would rip it off and usually rip a hole in the shirt in the process. And but I hated that feeling of just, yeah, that tag. Isn't that crazy? Enough about me.

Anyway, you know what I'm saying? It's just some people are just really, really sensitive to having something next to their skin that is rough and uncomfortable, but that's the whole purpose behind sackcloth. The whole purpose was to sacrifice the comfort of your normal clothing and putting on the sackcloth to remind you of the fact that you are in intense grief and distress. And you're giving up your comforts, worldly comforts to focus, to press in on God. And that's what the wearing of sackcloth was really all about.

If you saw somebody walking by in those days wearing sackcloth, you'd know exactly what was going, well, you might know what's going on. Just because somebody wore sackcloth doesn't mean they were necessarily having a broken and contrite heart. But it certainly could have been and often was an outward sign of that inward thing.

And then also it says they had earth or dirt on their heads. And that one seems really strange to us. I mean, why would you put dirt on your head? I mean, I remember doing that to kids at the playground when I was a kid in school, but that was only as something that was mean. By the way, ashes were also used quite often; putting ashes on the head. And again, it was a public sign of humility, and brokenness, and repentance, and sorrow, and grief, during a time of grieving. In our culture, how would someone signify that they were grieving? Well, and this is even losing steam in our culture, but typically it's been wearing of black, hasn't it? When you would see a woman particularly, but even men in some cases wearing nothing but black. That's a sign of a period of mourning or

grieving. Sometimes you'll see people wear those black armbands, which is frankly a little bit more symbolic.

But if you saw somebody with dirt or ashes on their head, it was that sign that they were going through a hard season. It was very sorrowful time and so forth, expressing that brokenness, repentance before God.

I have to tell you something about this. I think we've lost something in our culture because we don't really have these sorts... and any sign. I'm not saying we should bring this back. Hey, let's bring back sackcloth, ashes or dirt on your... And I'm not necessarily saying that because with anything like these symbolic sorts of things, they can easily become religious symbols that have no meaning.

It happened that way a lot for the Jews. There were many times that they would don the sackcloth and get out the ashes and God would say, you know what? I don't buy it. It's not a genuine expression of your heart. So it can easily become something that is just perfunctory and unreal. But in the course of all that, I think we've just lost our outward expressions of grief and our understanding of the sacrifice that we offer to the Lord to press in to meet Him in prayer.

What do you do? What do you do to sacrifice in order to meet God? That's an important question I think for us to answer. Whether it's getting up early in the morning, which some of you, that's like trying to move a mountain or whatever the case might be. Taking an hour at a time or longer to just devote yourselves to prayer.

That's a sacrifice, especially in what we consider to be our very busy society today. Taking that kind of time is a huge sacrifice. I want you to notice as we go on in verse 2 they did other things to show their expression of humility and seriousness.

It says, *“And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.”* It says that they began to pray and we're going to see how they prayed and we're going to get into their prayer here a little bit in this chapter. But I want you to notice that as they came, this wasn't just an outward expression with sackcloth and ashes and fasting, but there was genuine prayer and confession of sin that went along with it.

I've told you guys over the years that, that prayer is hard work. It's a very difficult thing, and I have personally found it very challenging. And the reason I

don't mind admitting that to you is I know that I'm not alone. I know that a lot of you guys really find prayer challenging too.

I mean, it's one thing when there's a genuine need going on in your life. When people are in distress, they find all kinds of time to pray, but in the general sense of just going through life, we struggle, don't we? We struggle to pray and we struggle to pray consistently. We struggle to pray diligently and so forth.

And frankly, I think it's often easier to serve God than it is to pray to Him. I think it's easier to be busy in the kingdom of God than it is to be speaking to the King of the kingdom. And sometimes we even, sometimes our busyness even becomes a substitute for talking to Him. It's the craziest thing in the world.

I've been pastoring now for quite a long time and I know that there have been times in my life that I've felt too busy to pray. Which sounds ridiculous hearing it come out of my mouth to... You're doing the Lord's work and it's like, and I don't have time to talk to the Lord. I mean, doesn't that sound ridiculous? But you can easily slip into that mode where doing is so much easier than praying.

And one of the reasons is because some of you are doers. And when I say doer, I'm talking about people who, man, you just put your head down and go that's the way you deal with life. That's how you attack life. You put your head down and you just go, you're just... There's just this determination and you doers, you doers really find it challenging to stop going long enough to really spend time in prayer. It's a very, very difficult thing for you. And there are other kinds of personality types. But one of the reasons why prayer is so difficult is because it's an exercise. Just like doing is an exercise, but doing is an exercise of effort, praying is an exercise of faith, right?

And that's one of the things that makes prayer so hard is that I've got to apply faith to it, like, throughout the whole process. If I'm spending 15 minutes in prayer, which isn't all that long, by the way, I have to be expressing or exercising faith for the duration of that 15 minutes. I got to put my faith that God's even hearing me. That God is going to respond to me in some particular way. That my prayer is getting through and all the other stuff that goes with it. And that's difficult.

Have you ever been involved in physical exercise that you set the clock and just said, I'm going to walk, or run, or lift, or do something. And you set a little timer on there. All right, go. And you start doing it and man, you get into it and you realize, oh, wow, this is hard. And cause you're just that constant, you got to, you're looking over the clock, oh, is it only about a minute or whatever. And

boy it can be the same thing in prayer. You decide that you're going to pray. We're going to spend some time in prayer. And boy, sometimes that clock can go so slowly.

We've been getting together now for, I don't know how long staff and we've opened it up to some of you guys. Some of you have shown up on Thursday mornings. We get together over the meeting room and we pray for 2 hours, give or take. And sometimes that time can go very quickly, but most of the time it crawls. And I find myself sometimes looking at the clock wondering, I wonder how much time we have left. Oh, mercy. I had no idea it was that long or something.

It's an exercise. And that's why some of the times I'll start off that prayer time with the staff and I'll just say, hey guys, this is hard work. We're coming here to work. And it's just like going out and doing something where you got to stay with it.

I have to say to my flesh, you're not in charge. (1 Corinthians 9:27) Paul talked in the new Testament about, he said, I beat my body to make it my slave. And I don't think that literally meant he was into whipping himself or something like that. I think he was basically, he understood that process behind saying to my flesh, you're not in charge. You're not going to rule the roost. You're not going to tell me what I can and what I can't do.

That's hard, isn't it? I don't know about you, I'm really attached to my flesh. I mean, very intimately. And when my flesh cries out, and I'll tell you something, doing our prayer thing on Thursday mornings was particularly hard in the winter when we would come at 7 o'clock, and it's pitch dark outside, and it would barely be light by the time we were finishing. Oh, that's hard to get up and get out of a warm bed when it's just pitch dark outside. It looks like the middle of the night. It's like, we're going to go pray

My flesh didn't want to do that. My flesh is a constant barrier. And then, in addition to the difficulty of just praying, imagine how hard it was, as we read here in this passage, they weren't just praying, they were confessing their sin. That makes it doubly difficult. See, praying is one thing. If you say to somebody, hey let's pray. Okay, cool. It's like rubbing the genie lamp. I'll pray, sure. God, here's what I need.

But what if we say, all right we're going to get together and we're going to pray, but all we're going to do is confess our sin. That's all we're going to do for the next, oh, how about 3 hours. We're going to do..., you may not ask one thing.

All you get to do during the next 3 hours; start your clock, is you're going to confess your sin. You think, good grief, nobody would ever do that. Well, we're going to read here in just a moment how they did.

But this whole idea, I want to talk about this before we do confessing sins is hugely important. Remember, this is what Jesus taught us to do when he gave us that model of prayer in the scriptures, when the disciples saw how much Jesus prayed. And so they came to Him and they said, Lord, teach us to pray. And He said, all right, when you pray like this. And He gave them an outline never meant to be verbatim.

That is such a travesty when the Lord's prayer is recited as if that's what He wanted us to do. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy... You can say that without even thinking you can do it without even blinking. You can be thinking about life, the football game, how much money, you can be thinking about anything, and sit and recite that prayer, can't you? It just becomes something you do by rote.

Jesus never meant it to be recited. He didn't say, guys, when you pray, say these exact words. They're magic. He gave us guidelines. Here's what I want you guys to do. Start by calling Him Father, and then spend time in praise. Do you think praise is just, hallowed be thy name? Oh, that's just the springboard.

We're going to talk about how great He is, how wonderful He is, praise and all these other things. But you remember, Jesus came to that place, that one place in prayer. Forgive us our debts. Gee, that didn't take long. 3 hours, you're kidding. Jesus told me to say, forgive us our debts. That's all. Took me just a few seconds.

That's because Jesus wasn't telling you exactly what to say. He said, now spend some time confessing your sins. Bring them to the Lord. Find that refreshing and forgiveness and stuff that comes to that. How key is this idea of confessing sins? Let me show you a passage from 1 John. Look at everything John says about this. I think John learned some important things with his time with Jesus. He said,

1 John 1:8-10 (ESV)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

If we say we have no sin, (first of all) we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (conversely) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (not some of your righteousness, but all of it) If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

People say to me sometimes, pastor Paul, do you think God will forgive me for the things I've done? And I take them to this passage and I say, the promise from God's Word is, you confess your sins and He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Okay. Don't ever get into the trap because it's a trap of the devil, thinking that somehow your sin, it took you off the edge and you can't get any forgiveness anymore.

There's a promise in God's Word, and then John repeats what he said in the earlier verse when he says, *"If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."*

Why do we make God a liar if we say we've not sinned? Because He said we sin. The universality of sin is the easiest doctrine to prove in the Bible. There is no other doctrine easier to prove than that one from the standpoint of just the vast evidence in the Word that repeatedly says, *"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) *"We all like sheep have gone astray."* (Isaiah 53:6) It goes on and on and on and on through the Word of God. And if there's one thing that we ought to have gotten very clearly from God, is that we all sin.

Anybody who says, I don't sin. Well, John has some important things to say to you. Pastor Paul again points to the Bible verse from 1 John 1:8-10.

1 John 1:8-10 (ESV)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

He says, first of all, you're self-deceived, and you're calling God a liar. Secondly, there's no truth in you, and you know what that means. Basically, that means the Holy Spirit isn't in that person either, because when the Spirit is in someone, He conveys the truth to that person. And the Holy Spirit is conveying to you and that we are sinners. Do you know that's what we're looking for? When somebody comes to church and they haven't been in church maybe before

in their life and they come up for prayer. And we start talking to them and finding out what's going on in their lives. One of the first things we look for is do they have an understanding of their sinful condition? Because if they don't, we can't go anywhere until that happens, until the Lord, until they open their heart to that work of the Lord to reveal their sin. If God hasn't revealed their sin, we can't move on. If they say, hey, pray for this, pray for that, you know what? We got to deal with this first. This has to be dealt with because you can't move on from there, right?

Now, when somebody comes up for prayer, and they're just like, and we start talking about sin, and they instantly begin talking about the sinfulness of their life, and goes, oh, I've just, I've sinned against God, oh. the door is wide open now for ministry, and for the Lord to do wonderful things in their heart.

Do you understand this whole idea of confessing sin is what paves the way for God's Word to make sense? Do you understand that confessing your sin and repenting is what makes God's Word understandable? Do you understand that the converse is also true that if a person hardens themselves against their understanding of their sin, the Word of God will never make sense to them?

There is a most fascinating passage in Luke chapter 7, and I particularly like it from the NIV, from the 1984 revision. It says,

Luke 7:29-30 (NIV 1984)

(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right because they'd been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, (they) acknowledged that God's way was right (and then Luke explains why) because they'd been baptized by John (the Baptist). (what was John's baptism all about? Repentance. It was a baptism of repentance. He goes on to say,) But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, (that's a nice way of saying they rejected God's Word. Why?) because they had not been baptized by John.)

Do you understand the power of that preparatory work of John the Baptist? He wasn't just some guy walking around in a goat hair garment, eating locusts, crying out hey, He's coming. He was saying, get ready, get ready. And the people were saying, how do we get ready? He said, meet me down at the Jordan, confess your sins. That's how you will be ready for Messiah, that's what

Luke tells us. It was..., those people who got baptized by John the Baptist, they listened to Jesus and they went, that makes sense. I understand that. There was an opening in their hearts that came through repentance. But those who refused to repent also were closed from the knowledge of God.

I wanted to just convey the vast importance of what this is. When Jesus taught you and I to say, forgive us our debts. And again, not verbatim, He's really conveying a very important, vital part of our walk with Him. Our ongoing walk with Him.

Now, let me just say one thing quickly before we move on related to confessing of sins. There's a difference between confessing your sins when you come to Jesus Christ to be saved and confessing your sins after you're a born again Christian. Confession is the same. What happens as a result is somewhat different, and here's why.

When you first come to Jesus and you confess your sins, when you first come, okay, and you come by faith and you believe that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, you are forgiven. You are given new life. You receive the Holy Spirit. You are a born again child of God. All right, that's a work of the Holy Spirit. He comes to do that.

Now, we're told after we come to the Lord that confessing sins is still an important part of our walk with Jesus. Does that mean we get saved again? No, we do not. Listen, when you came to Jesus, you are forgiven, past, present, and future as it relates to eternity and your salvation. Now, confessing of sins has to do with relationship and walking in integrity. Okay.

Now that you're a born again child of God, now that you're a Christian, confessing your sins is what keeps the lines of communication open. Because you see, sin still does what it always did, it separates, okay. Sin separates. It says way back in Isaiah, God is confronting the people of Israel through Isaiah. It says, your sins have separated you from God. (Isaiah 59:2) That's what sin does, it separates us.

Now before we come to Christ, we're separated eternally. When we come to Jesus, that issue is taken care of. We are now eternally connected. We have eternal life. Right? And that situation is dealt with, but sin can still separate relationally, to a child of God. You can be a born again child of God and be separated from God relationally. Yeah, you're going to heaven, but you're miserable.

You're trusting Jesus for the ultimate forgiveness of sins, and you've been given eternal life, but your relationship with God stinks. It has to be repaired. How's that repair take place? Confession of sin. That's how we get that relationship back together again.

I've used so many times from this pulpit the example of in a marriage, when I do something to violate my wife's heart. I hurt her feelings or do something that's hurtful against her, that doesn't mean that we're no longer married and I have to go back and get remarried to her. We're married. That's a done deal. What I have to do is I have to repair the relationship because there's been a separation because I did something I shouldn't have done. And now we're separated from one another relationally, and it's just, the intimacy just isn't there. I have to go to my wife and I have to say, honey, I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have said that. That was 100% wrong of me. Would you please forgive me? And she says, I forgive you. And now guess what? We've repaired the breach. We can be close again. We can enjoy the closeness of that relationship because there's been confession and forgiveness.

Same thing between you and your walk with God. You have a relationship with God, very similar to a relationship with another human being, and particularly in marriage, we see a great intimacy there. How do you restore that intimacy confession? Same with God.

Christians all the time are walking around saved, but lacking intimacy with the Father. I just feel really distant from God. Well, there's a way to deal with that. We still come back to the cross.

We still come back to the Lord. Lord, please, I confess my sin to you. I confess my hardness of heart. I confess my stupidity. Oh, I confess my stubbornness. I confess my hardness of heart. I confess my laziness. God, I just didn't feel like even picking up my Bible for the last couple of days. And I've just ignored You. I haven't talked to You. I haven't read Your Word. I haven't even thought about You. I've just been so distracted. God, I confess this to You whatever it may be.

I confess, Lord, that I'm running ahead of You and moving beyond what Your will is for my life. And I'm just playing Lord of my own life or whatever. I confess this to You. Oh, and don't you know God is just so anxious to hear the confession of His children so that relationship can be restored? So you can be close again and that intimacy can be reignited between you and your Lord. So vitally important.

It says in verse 3. *“And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; ...”* Guys, that's 3 hours they sat and read the scripture. They just read the scripture for 3 hours. Okay.

“...for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.” That's a total of 6 hours of scripture, worship, and confession. 6 hours. Okay, how are we doing? Are we doing okay? 6 hours? You good? Okay, yeah. We're like, yeah, piece of cake.

And then we get to the New Testament and we find Jesus saying to Peter, James, and John, couldn't you stand watch with me for an hour? Couldn't you pray with me even for just one hour?

It says in verse 4, *“On the stairs of the Levites stood (and then it names these men) Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; (but look at this, I want you to notice this, it says) and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.”* These guys lifted up their voices, and on behalf of the people, *“they cried with a loud voice.”*

When was the last time you heard somebody cry out to the Lord with a loud voice? No microphone needed. Just cried out in the hearing of all the people. Just spoke directly to the Lord.

And then it says, *“⁵ Then the Levites, (and it names most of the men that we just mentioned there, and there's a couple more added) Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, (and they) said, (to the people) “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”*

Notice what they're doing here. First of all, they're telling the people stand up and bless the Lord. Stand up and praise the Lord, they tell them and then they begin to do it. In other words, they don't just say, okay, stand up and praise the Lord. They say, stand up, and the people stand up, and they begin to praise the Lord with loud voices so they're showing by example. And what they're saying is, *“Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.”*

Verse 6, *“You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, (I'll tell you what that means in a moment) with all their host, the*

earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.”

Notice they speak of the “*heaven of heavens*.” That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? Because the Jews believed in a 3 tiered heaven. And there really isn't anything in the Word to necessarily corroborate it. But this was a belief and the apostle Paul believed it too. But they believed that there was the first heaven and the first heaven is essentially the atmosphere or the air of the earth, which is where Satan also, by the way, has some influence as the prince of the power of the air, as he is referred to, but that's the first heaven.

And then the second heaven, in the Jewish mind, was the visible universe stars and planets and stuff like that. And then the third heaven in their reckoning was the dwelling of God, the very presence of the Lord.

Paul talks about this in 2nd Corinthians. He says, I know a man who was taken up to the third heaven. And he talks in the third person, but he's talking about himself when he was taken. And he says, in the body or out of the body, I don't know. But all I know is I was there. I was in the very presence of God and he refers to it as the third heaven.

Again it's, it was a belief of the Jews that we can't necessarily clarify specifically in the Word but what we're seeing here is just a beautiful expression of praise that I would encourage you to even use in your own prayer time. Go to Nehemiah, talk use these verses, read them aloud to the Lord when you're just spending that time in prayer. And it's beautiful.

Notice how it confesses that He is like, you're the only God, the only Lord. It confesses Him as creator of all the earth and the One who not only created the earth, but who sustains His creation. And so it's a really a beautiful expression of praise and worship.

And then as we go on into verse 7, you'll notice here that as happens so often in Jewish prayers, there is a recounting of God's dealing with that nation, beginning with the calling of Abraham.

And it says in verse 7, “*You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham.*”⁸ *You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.*

⁹ “And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, ¹⁰ and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. ¹¹ And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. ¹² By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. ¹³ You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments,”

Do you guys know that the people of Israel heard the voice of God? The 10 commandments were spoken by the voice of God and everybody heard it. They all heard it and it scared everything out of them. After they heard the voice of God, they said to Moses, okay, you go up, you talk to God. You find out what He wants to say and you come back and tell us we don't want to hear His voice anymore. It'll kill us. They were so afraid. They thought it would literally kill them, so they heard and they're confessing here. These people heard You speak these things.

Verse 14, “and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. ¹⁵ You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.

¹⁶ “But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. ¹⁷ They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

¹⁸ Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies, ¹⁹ you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. ²⁰ You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. ²¹ Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

²² “And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. ²³ You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. ²⁴ So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. ²⁵ And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

²⁶ “Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. ²⁷ Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors (that that word means deliverers) who saved them from the hand of their enemies.” That's basically the book of Judges in a nutshell.

²⁸ “But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. ²⁹ And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. ³⁰ Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. ³¹ Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

³² “Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. ³³ Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. ³⁴ Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. ³⁵ Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you

set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works.

³⁶ *Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves.* ³⁷ *And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.*

³⁸ *“Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. “On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, Zedekiah, ² Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ³ Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests.”*

“And the Levites: (begins to mention them there, in verse 9) Jeshua the son of Azariah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; ¹⁰ and their brothers, (verse 10 and following) Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹ Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹² Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³ Hodiah, Bani, Beninu.

(down to verse 14) The chiefs (meaning the heads or leaders of the clans or tribes) of the people: (it names them there) Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁵ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁶ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁷ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁸ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ¹⁹ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²⁰ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²¹ Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, ²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁶ Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷ Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

²⁸ *“The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, ²⁹ join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.*

³⁰ *We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.* ³¹ *And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.*

³² *“We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the showbread, the regular*

grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

³⁴ We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. ³⁵ We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD; ³⁶ also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; ³⁷ and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor.

³⁸ And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.” See, there was even a tithe from the Levites, who received a tithe. They tithed on the tenth.

“³⁹ For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. (and look at this last statement) We will not neglect the house of our God.”

That's a great way to end that particular chapter, isn't it? You can see that what's going on here is just a resurgence of devotion and passion toward the law of the Lord. And beginning to keep the law in a genuine and honest and truly biblical sort of a way. Their heart is to serve the Lord and to do all that He had asked them to do.

Now again, I want to just remind us as we close here tonight that we're under a different covenant. We're not under the covenant of Moses. We're not under that, what we call the Mosaic Covenant. I'm thankful that I'm not to be completely honest with you. I like the covenant that I'm under.

The covenant that was inaugurated the night that Jesus was arrested, betrayed and ultimately the next day crucified. I like that covenant because that covenant is Jesus. This is my body. This is my blood. Take and eat, take and drink, that's the covenant. I'm doing all the work. You just receive. Just receive.

Now that's the beauty of the covenant that we have for eternal life. Now that we're in that covenant, now that we're walking in that covenant with the Lord, God has given us guidelines to live by, things to offer up as a sacrifice.

Tithing is still a reality, I suppose, but not in the strict sense that it was in the Old Testament. People ask that from time to time. Should people tithe today? Well what the Bible says related to that? It doesn't say that we should necessarily tithe in the New Testament. It says that everybody should give what he is being prompted in his own heart to give because God wants a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7)

You may say, well, so no 10% anymore? No, no 10% anymore. What does He want from us? He wants 100%. That's what we know. That's what Paul talked about. He says, you really want to worship God? The Jews would bring all of these things in worship, the tithe from their..., the grain, the crops, the orchard. They bring these tithes animals from the herd and so forth like that. And that was one of the ways they worship God.

How do you and I worship God? Paul says, therefore, in view of God's mercy, let us offer ourselves as living sacrifices, all of you. He says, that is holy and pleasing to God and is actually our spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1) To give yourself.

God isn't looking for the 10% anymore. He's looking for the 100% and that's you and all of you. It all belongs to the Lord's. Does that mean, you don't get anything to enjoy yourself. That's not the point. The point is we give it to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

He's very gracious to His children to bless us in so many ways, but all that we have now belongs to Him because we belong to Him. We are now the temple of the Lord I want to just remind you of this very last statement that they make here in chapter 10 and that is "*We will not neglect the house of our God.*"

You Christians are the house of our God and so what their determination was all about transfers to you and I, to our very lives, our prayer life, the way we live our life, the way we give our time and our energy. Our hearts, our attitudes toward the future. Basically, this is like a Christian rededicating them self to God. And in that rededication, just saying, I give myself completely to You. The whole temple, I will not neglect any longer this life that you've called me to because I am a temple of the Holy Spirit. And this is not going to be a neglected thing any longer.