

## THE ISRAELITES READ THE WORD, CONFESSED THEIR SINS AND WORSHIPED GOD

Nehemiah 9:3

*“They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the Lord their God.”*

The key verse makes reference to the people of Israel who for a long time lived their lives without God, they lived in sin, they lived in fear as though they were not the chosen nation. Actually, they lived this way because they followed their own will and ideas. But after rebuilding the wall with the help of God, they were filled with a desire to change their lives, they wanted to restore their relationship with God and live according to God's will and direction. They wanted to live holy and godly lives. Now the theme of our conference is “Live Holy and Godly Lives”, so just like the people of Israel we too have come here to be renewed, by learning and being encouraged to live Holy and Godly lives.

Over the past weeks, our Shepherds, brothers, and sisters have spent quite some time preparing for the conference, preparing material based on the word of God, to lead us to change. To **Live Holy and Godly Lives**. Let us therefore consider how the Israelites could be changed from living in fear, living in sin, living according to their will and purpose, to restoring their relationship with God and living holy and Godly lives.

**First, the Israelites read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day.** What does this mean? This means they put effort in the study of the word of God, they did not just read through it with a shallow understanding but rather they went deep, they asked questions on the meaning of the word of God. So just like the people of Israel, as we study the Bible in our groups during this conference, let us spend time to think deeply on the word of God, let us spend time to ask questions so that we can be equipped with the full understanding of the word of God. As we listen to the messages, let us ask God to grant us humble hearts and ears to listen to the word of God and receive it deeply. We will learn through the conference messages that a journey to living holy and godly lives begins with a deep understanding of the word of God.

**Secondly, the Israelites spent another quarter of day in confession.** What does this mean? This means that after they heard and understood the word of God, they also realized their sin before God. And so, they confessed. How could they realize their sins and confess them? They could realize their sins, by reflecting on their full personal life based on the word of God they had received and understood. Based on the word of God, they considered their personal lives, they did not just look at the current days or what others are doing wrong, but rather they looked all their lives all the way back in history. They looked at all aspects of their lives, they brought everything to God. When they did this, they could realize their sins and sins of their forefathers before God, how from generation to generations they have been rebellious before God. In the midst of all their rebellion and sins, they realized how God had been faithful and how loved them. And so they confessed. So just like the people of Israel, as we hear the word of God during the conference, let us not harden our hearts but bring everything unto God. Let us reflect on our lives holistically, on Sunday we will be given the opportunity to write testimony.

As we write our testimonies, let us think about our whole lives, our family background, our parents, siblings, our journey in our studies, our past and current life problems, our sin problems. When the Israelites reflected on their lives holistically, they could realize their deep sin problems, and the mercy of God upon their lives. Because of their sin problem, the people of Israel could not live freely, they could not experience true joy, because of sin they were paralyzed by fear. But when they sincerely reflected on the word of God, they could realize their sins before God, and how God was merciful and filled with

love for them. And so they confessed, and experienced magnificent change. Before, living Holy and Godly lives was difficult, because of their sins, but when they confessed their sins and surrendered everything to Jesus, they could begin to live Holy and Godly lives, depending on Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

**Lastly, the Israelites worshiped the Lord, their God.** What does this mean? To worship the Lord, their God means, instead of living life according to their will and purpose, they were now filled with reverence and adoration for God. They were filled with fear for the Lord their God. In **Nehemiah 9:5-6** it says:

*And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah—said: “Stand up and praise the Lord your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.” “Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.*

The Israelites were now beginning to live for God, God became priority above their own thinking and will. They began to live with repentant hearts, and with full knowledge and confidence on who God is and who they are before God. Let us sincerely humble our hearts, study the word of God deeply during this conference, let us think about our whole life as we write testimonies on Sunday. When we do this, we will experience change, just like the Israelites.

I was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1986, to a very young couple who I believe loved each other, I did very well in school and was loved by everyone in my community and amongst relatives. Life was quite good for me until when I was in high school. My parents got divorced, my father left my mother because he just could not bear with my mother who was always drunk. From that time on, I lived with a sense of shame and embarrassment. It was quite difficult to explain my family situation on the playground at school and after school. From a very young age I had to become a parent to my younger brother, because most of the time my mother would not come back home, I had to cook and wash dishes, iron etc. at the age of 12. This encounter really made my life so sad; it affected my confidence; it made me angry and helpless. To change my life, I thought I needed to study hard and get a good job. I made it, I finally graduated with Engineering Degree from Wits. I now had money, but my heart was still filled with emptiness, I was tormented by sin, sexual immorality, hate and anger from my past experiences. But by grace of God, my friend Shepherd Lesedi had invited me to UBF, where through deep Bible studies and testimony writing I could realize that my fundamental problem was sin.

Through writing testimony, I could receive one word of God from **1 Peter 2:9**: *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* Through this verse, my life could be changed, I was very encouraged to know that I am chosen by God, a royal priesthood, God's special possession, I saw myself now having a sense of confidence. I was encouraged through this verse to live for the glory of God, to be used by God to bring sinners like me to Jesus.

I pray that through this conference, we may all receive one word, be renewed, and filled with desire to live holy and godly lives. Let us study the word of God deeply, ask questions and be filled with great desire to fully understand the word of God. Also let us reflect on our lives holistically, all the way from the beginning so that we can spot our sin problem that hinder us from living Holy and Godly lives and bring it to God; also see how God has worked in our lives. And how he is continuing to work to lead us to living Holy and Godly lives.