

## Wilderness Wandering and Wonder # 24

Nehemiah 9: 16-21

Tonight our text passage is actually a continuation of the prayer offered by Ezra and the people of Jerusalem. We have already considered the opening of the prayer, and attitude of adoration for the Lord. We now come to a definite shift in the focus of their prayer. The remaining verses of this chapter continue to deal with the prayer of the people, but it is now offered in confession of sin and rebellion, as well as an awareness of the faithfulness of God.

This passage deals with a very familiar account of history regarding the nation of Israel. As the people prayed unto the Lord, they were once again mindful of the wilderness wanderings and all that was associated with that time in the lives of their fathers.

We have studied the wilderness journey many times, but for me it is a story that never grows old. I will admit, each time I read an account of their time in the wilderness, I am amazed at their rebellion and lack of consideration for God, but I am also reminded that we too are more like them than we care to admit. The wilderness journey reveals many parallels to our modern society and lives. Let's take a few moments to consider Nehemiah's account of the wilderness journey as we seek to discover the [parallels](#) it reveals while thinking on: [Wilderness Wandering and Wonder](#).

**I. The Disobedience of Israel** – As Ezra prays, he is mindful of the disobedience of his fathers as they journeyed in the wilderness. These verses mention several areas in which they were disobedient and if we aren't careful, we too can commit such acts of disobedience.

**A. Their Arrogance (16a)** – [But they and our fathers dealt proudly](#). As I read that I was amazed at the attitude of the people. They had suffered for hundreds of years under bondage in Egypt. They were literally slaves to Pharaoh and his evil task masters. They were at the mercy of their captors, hopeless to ever gain freedom in and of themselves.

- Each day was the same as the day before. They were forced to gather straw, make bricks, and serve at the demands of Pharaoh. Clearly there was little to rejoice in. God was merciful and heard their cries of despair. He sent Moses to lead them out of bondage and miraculously delivered them. They had nothing to do with the Exodus other than following the commands of God. He had secured their deliverance and yet they were filled with pride. Somehow on this side of the Red Sea, they felt as if they had secured their freedom.
- I have never met a prouder group of people than self-righteous Baptist. Each of us was in the same predicament as the captives in Egypt. We were in bondage with no hope of

escape. The Lord in His mercy and provision provided for our redemption. We have nothing to boast in but the cross of Calvary and the grace of God, and yet many are so proud that they fail to give God the glory He is due. Some feel as if they are superior to those around them simply because they have received the favor of God. May I remind us that we are nothing more than sinners saved by grace! All that we are or ever hope to be is by and through the Lord Jesus Christ!

**B. Their Abandonment** (16b-17a) – *But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, [17] And refused to obey.* This reveals a progressive and willful disobedience. Over time their rebellion grew worse; *they consistently hardened their necks.* This speaks of spiritual decline. The longer they wandered in the wilderness, the more rebellious they became. They willfully chose to ignore God; *they refused to obey* His commandments and walk in His ways. God had led them out and they chose to abandon the ways of God for the lusts of the flesh.

- We may read this and develop a critical spirit toward the Israelites, but I am sure that we have been guilty of the same. Each time we ignore the ways of God for the desires of the flesh, we stiffen our necks and harden our hearts. This always leads to spiritual decline. I am sure that we have all, at some point in time, made a conscious decision to disobey the Word of God. We chose to have it our way instead of submitting to the will of God.

**C. Their Apathy** (17b) – *neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them.* In essence they became ungrateful and apathetic toward the mercies and wonders of God. They failed to remember all that God had done for them and praise Him for that. He had daily met their needs, putting up with their impatience and murmuring, and yet they were not mindful or thankful for any of God's blessing. I suppose they somehow figured God owed them something and there was no need to offer thanksgiving for His blessing.

- I doubt that any of us are purposely unthankful. We know that God has blessed us abundantly and all that we enjoy is from His merciful hand, but are we mindful of His blessings as we should be. Do we thank Him each day for our redemption? Are we mindful of the love that was shown and the price that was paid? Do we take the time to thank the Lord for the daily blessings that we enjoy? It is often easy to take much that we receive for granted. I pray that we will offer God the praise and thanksgiving He is due.

**D. Their Ambition** (17c) – *but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to bondage.* The people literally desired someone other than Moses to lead them;

someone who would lead them back to Egypt, back to the old life prior to the Exodus, [Num.14:4](#). Rather than follow the man of God, according to the will of God, they desired a new leader and the ways of Egypt.

- Now I can't imagine any of us really desiring to return to the old life of sin we knew prior to salvation. For me, there is nothing to go back to. But, many times we have desired to travel a different path than the one God chose for us. We have murmured against the man of God for only desiring to help us and point us toward the Lord. We have desired to have it our way rather than God's way. We may not have wanted to go back to Egypt, but we have likely desired a path that God had not chosen for us. We must ensure to seek the ways of the Lord.

**E. Their Allegiance** (18) – [Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations;](#) Very early in their journey from Egypt, while Moses was upon Mt. Sinai with God, the people made a molten calf and worshipped it as their god, [Ex.32: 1-8](#). What a tragedy! God had dealt mercifully and mightily with them, and yet they quickly forsook the true and living God for an idol made of hands.

- Most people are offended if someone insinuates that they would serve an idol. I will admit that I have never seen an idol purposely set up for worship, but I am sure that we have all been guilty. If we aren't very careful we will allow the desires and treasures of this world to take the place reserved for God. We know that God is the only One worthy of our praise and that He alone has met all our needs, and yet many times we will allow something to take the place of God in our lives. Anything that is more important to us than the Lord is an idol. God must come first, period! That is not open for debate; He must be the priority of our lives!

## **I. The Disobedience of Israel**

**II. The Devotion of Jehovah** – As Ezra and the others continued to pray, they were mindful of the mercy and faithfulness of God. It is amazing that He didn't destroy them in the wilderness, but He was merciful to them and kept His promises. Notice:

**A. His Pardon** (17d) – [but thou art a God ready to pardon](#). They had sinned greatly against the Lord, in many different ways, and yet God was ready to forgive. He forgave their trespasses and continued to show them loving favor.

- I, for one, am certainly thankful for the pardon of God. There is no doubt that we were all guilty of sin, condemned and separated from God. In His mercy, through the blood of His Son, all who come to Him by faith can receive forgiveness and pardon. Through His great love, He provided a means of forgiveness and restoration.
- Even after we are saved, He continues to extend forgiveness. We all sin and come short of the glory of God each day. In our flesh we cannot live above sin. I rejoice that my sin doesn't just pile up without hope of forgiveness. [1 Jn.1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.](#)

**B. His Patience** (17d) – [but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.](#) It is a good thing that the people's lives were not in the hands of men. Most would have consumed them in the wilderness and started over. God was [gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.](#) Even in their rebellion and sin, [God did not forsake them.](#)

- Patience is not one of my strong points, but I am certainly glad that God is patient with me. I know there have times when He would have been just to have abandoned me in the way. There have been times when He would have been just to have taken me out of this life. I have failed Him many times and yet He has never forsaken me. He continues to love me in spite of myself. I rejoice that we serve One who is gracious, merciful, and slow to anger. How many times have we sought forgiveness for the same sin? God is always faithful to forgive.

**C. His Presence** (19) – [Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go.](#) Isn't that amazing? After all of their rebellion and sin, God continued to manifest His presence among them, leading them in the right way. Man would have said, "If that's the way you want, then go! Make your own decisions and choose your own way, but don't expect me to be waiting around to bail you out of trouble." God never left them. He remained near to them, lovingly leading them in the way they should go.

- I am sure that we have all made bad decisions and traveled roads we shouldn't have. We have rebelled against the will of God for our lives. We have tried to make our own way, and yet God has never forsaken us. We may have grieved the Spirit, but He is ever there to lead us if we will only look to Him and follow His guidance. [Dan.9:18 – O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.](#)

**D. His Provision** (20) – Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. God was faithful to supply their every need, both spiritual and physical. He provided His Spirit to instruct them and gave them manna each day and water for their thirst. They lived as if they didn't need the Lord, but He was always faithful to provide for them daily.

- Would you not agree that we have been blessed beyond measure? We have been offered the Bread of Life and His Living Water spiritually and He meets our needs physically as well. There is not a moment of the day that passes when our Lord is not faithful. We may not recognize Him or thank Him as we should, but He daily provides for us! Ps.40:5 – Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered. John 6:35 – And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

**E. His Preservation** (21) – Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. God's faithfulness was not short lived or lacking. For forty years He met the needs of the people, paying attention to every detail of their existence. During all of their wanderings their clothes didn't wear out and they never suffered need. He preserved them in a difficult and harsh environment.

- God continues to prove Himself faithful. I have traveled this road of life for over forty years and He has been continually faithful to me. My every need He has supplied and I am secure in Him. This body of flesh will continue to wear out and decay, but I am preserved forever through the grace and power of my Lord. He will keep me in this life and carry me into eternity!

We have seen a great contrast between the rebellion of men and the faithfulness of God. I rejoice that my blessing and provision from God are not dependent upon my faithfulness. I fail Him every day and yet my God remains faithful. He has promised to keep me throughout all eternity. My every need He does supply. I want to have a greater appreciation and devotion for my Lord. He is worthy of that and so much more.

Jesus is man's only hope. Some may enjoy a measure of success and happiness in this life, but apart from Christ there is no real peace or security. Lean upon the Lord and follow His guidance. Trust Him in every aspect of the journey. He will never fail.