

NEHEMIAH 12-13

REVIEW...

- After the wall was completed - the people gathered to celebrate...
 - o Ezra the Priest taught the Word of God to the people from morning till midday...
 - o As a result of hearing and understanding the Word – the people wept and repented...
- Then the people made a covenant (*promise*) - to God to obey all His commands...
 - o They all entered into a curse – an oath – to walk in the Law of God...
 - o Why a curse - perhaps they came across Deuteronomy 28 in their reading of the Word...
 - o In which are 13 verses of blessings for those who obey – then 53 verses of curses....
 - o Far more curses than blessings - because those who try and live by the law are cursed!
- There were 3 conditions to their promise to God...
 - o They would be holy in their marriages - not let their daughters or sons marry unbelievers...
 - o They would be holy in their worship – they would honor and not work on the Sabbath...
 - o And they would be holy in their giving - freely giving to provide for the needs of the Temple!

THE PROBLEM WITH A PROMISE... (3 THINGS)

- **1ST – THE DEDICATION OF THE WALL... vs. 1-47** **READ NEHEMIAH 12:1**
 - o 1st – The names of the Priest and Levites... vs. 1-26
 - Nehemiah gives a list of the 24 heads of the Priests that came back with Zerubbabel... vs. 1-7
 - They were divided according to the command of King David – **I Chronicles 24:1-20**
 - Along with the Levites who led the people in Thanksgiving... vs. 8-11
 - Then Nehemiah lists the heads of the Priests from his own day... vs. 12-20
 - Because from the reign of Darius - 522 B.C. - records had been kept...
 - Both of the Genealogies of the Priests / Levites / Singers/ and Gatekeepers!
 - These records were maintained all the way up till the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.
 - Why were the records so important – because they gave us the genealogy of Jesus!
 - **Matthew 1:1-17** – list the 42 generations from Abraham to Jesus...
 - But it includes a couple of rather unusual names – Tamar / Ruth / and Bathsheba...
 - Tamar – A Prostitute / Ruth – a curse Moabite / and Bathsheba – an adulteress...
 - Quite the list of women to be included in the genealogy of our sinless Savior!
 - **Ever thought that you are not good enough because of where you came from...**
 - **Or ever think that God could not use you because of your past...**
 - **God put a prostitute / heathen / and adulteress into the lineage of Jesus Christ...**
 - **To prove we are not bound by our past – we are only limited by our willingness to be used!**
 - o 2nd – Dedication of Praise... vs. 27-47 **READ NEHEMIAH 12:27-31 / 38-40 / 43**
 - Nehemiah called all the Levites from the surrounding cities to dedicate the wall...
 - They came with celebrate with gladness / singing / cymbals / and stringed instruments...
 - The Priests and Levites first purified themselves – then the people – then the wall!
 - Nehemiah split the people into 2 groups...
 - One group began at the dung gate - walked north on top of the wall towards the Temple...
 - The 2nd group with Nehemiah walked west along the wall towards the Temple...
 - They met at the Temple and offered sacrifices – and rejoiced in the Lord...
 - They were praising God because He had been faithful to bring them back – **Jeremiah 33:11**
 - Faithful to rebuild their city – their wall – and make them His people again!

- But should all the more offer a sacrifice of praise to the Lord...
- Because we understand that the city we are seeking is not here – it is the one to come...
- And it is far greater than anything this world could ever offer to us!
- **Hebrews 13:14-15** – “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our lips*, giving thanks to His name.”

● **2ND – CLEANING OUT THE HOUSE... vs. 1-9**

o **1st – Moabites and Ammonites... vs. 1-3**

- The better part of 12 years passes – it is now the 32 year of Artaxerxes reign – 433 B.C.
 - Nehemiah had reigned as governor for most of that time – but returned to serve the King...
 - One day when the Word was being read – they came to **Deuteronomy 23:3-4**
 - Any descendent of a Moabite or an Ammonite – was cursed to the 10th generation...
 - They were not allowed to come into the Temple – enter the presence of the Lord!
- The Moabite or an Ammonite were close relatives of Israel...
 - Lot was the nephew of Abraham - compromised and moved to the city of Sodom...
 - His two daughters believed that everyone had perished in the destruction...
 - Morally corrupted by Sodom - their solution was to get pregnant by their father...
 - Gave birth to Ben-Ammi – father of the Ammonites / Moab – father of the Moabites
- But they did not meet Israel with bread and water coming out of Egypt...
 - Instead they hired Balaam to try and curse Israel – **Numbers 22**
 - So Israel was never to allowed to help the Moabites as long as they lived!
 - Yet Ruth was from the tribe of Moab - and her grandson was King David - **Ruth 2:6**
 - Just because we were given a bad example - does not mean we have to follow it...
 - We can break the cycle - follow Jesus - and be restored to fellowship with God!

o **2nd - The practice of intermarrying had polluted to the highest levels... vs. 4-6**

- Eliashib the High Priest – let his grandson marry a daughter of Sanballat – **Nehemiah 13:28**...
 - That opened the door for him to compromise and form an alliance with Tobiah...
 - Eliashib took one of the storerooms in the Temple – meant to hold the tithes of the people...
 - And converted it into a personal apartment for Tobiah to stay in...
 - He invited the enemy of the Lord – to come and dwell in the very House of the Lord!!
- In **Luke 13:18-21** – Jesus gave the parable of the Mustard Seed...
 - The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds – yet becomes a large tree...
 - The Church started small - but grew unnaturally large - filled by unbelievers...
 - So that satan (*the birds of the air*) was even be able to hide in its branches!
 - History shows the church flourished under persecution in the first 3 centuries...
 - It was when the church became the accepted religion that things went wrong...
 - Satan found that the best way to beat the church – was to join it!
 - Just because someone goes to church - that does not make them a Christian...
 - Any more than hanging out in a Starbucks - makes you a cup of coffee...
 - We need to look at the fruit of a person - do they have true faith in Jesus!

o **3rd – Nehemiah was not around when this took place... vs. 7-9**

- But when he heard what was going on - he got permission to return to Jerusalem...
 - When he arrived and saw it – he ‘trembled exceedingly’ – **Ephesians 4:26**...
 - In a very short time span the people – leadership – had allowed sin to come in!
 - There are times when we as believers in Jesus - we should be angry...
 - Angry because compromise has allowed our enemy to come right in the house of God...
 - We need to speak out - we need to take action - because sin destroys lives!

- Just like Jesus when He came in and cast out the moneychangers – **John 2:14-17**
 - Nehemiah threw out all the belongings of Tobiah – and cleansed the room!
 - If Jesus came into many churches today – what would He see...
 - Would he find people coming out of the world – being encouraged to grow in Christ...
 - Or would He find the world invited into the church – encouraging His people to forget Him!
 - The carnality of the church today undermines the creditability of the Gospel message...
 - Churches are to be a place where people come to learn about the Lord...
 - His church should be a place of prayer – where men can come to know God!
 - I fear if Jesus walked into many churches today He would overturn a lot of tables!
- **3RD – DEALING WITH A BROKEN COVENANT... vs. 10-31**
 - o 1st – Breaking the promise to provide for the Priests... vs. 10-14
 - Nehemiah saw that the people had stopped providing for the Levites and Singers...
 - As a result they had all had to go to work in the fields to provide for their families...
 - The people had promised to provide for the Levites – **Nehemiah 10:37-39**
 - So that as they ministered to the spiritual needs of the people of God...
 - The Levites and singers were to be provided for practically - by the sacrifices to God!
 - Those who minister to the spiritual needs of the church - pastoral ministry...
 - As much as possible – should be provided for practically by those within the church...
 - If a pastor has to work to support himself practically - little time for the church...
 - It is a blessing to the people to provide for the pastor to free him up to minister
 - **I Corinthians 9:14** – “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”
 - So Nehemiah demanded of the rulers – why is the House of God forsaken!
 - He put them in their place – and then all of Judah began to bring in their tithes of grain...
 - He also appointed faithful men to oversee the treasury (*formerly the apartment of Tobiah*)!
 - Nehemiah asked God to remember him – and not wipe out his good deeds!
 - Malachi the prophet was a contemporary of Nehemiah – the same Malachi who wrote...
 - **Malachi 3:8** – “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, *Even this whole nation.*”
 - Why is it so important to give to the Lord – certainly it is not because He need anything...
 - Giving shows we are more concerned about others than ourselves...
 - Giving shows we are more concerned about the eternal - than the temporary!
 - o 2nd – Breaking the Sabbath... vs. 15-22
 - Nehemiah saw the people working on the Sabbath day...
 - The people of Judah were working in the vineyards / fields – selling goods in the market...
 - Even outsiders – men of Tyre – were coming in to sell on the Sabbath!
 - Yet the people had promised to keep the Sabbath – **Nehemiah 10:31**
 - Nehemiah argued with the nobles – this is what got them in trouble in the first place...
 - Their ancestors had done the same thing brining on the judgment of God!
 - God will repeat a lesson - if we do not learn the first time around...
 - But there is a danger of hardening our heart towards the truth...
 - That does not mean God does not keep fighting for us - but there will come a point...
 - If we continually choose be hard headed - refusing to obey the Lord...
 - God will give us what we want - we will have a life that bears no fruit for God!
 - **Hebrews 3:15** - “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...”
 - Nehemiah had the gates of Jerusalem locked at sundown on Friday night...

- They were not allowed to open again till sundown on Saturday – the end of the Sabbath...
- Living for Jesus is a choice - and it takes work and commitment on our part...
- We need to shut the gates on the temptations in life that would distract us...
- We need to choose to take the time to get into God's Word - set-aside time to pray...
- We make the time to attend Bible studies – and grow in our faith!
- Some of the merchants did not get the hint – and camped outside the city...
 - So Nehemiah had to threaten to 'lay hands on them' if they came around again!
 - Then he asked the Lord a 2nd time – to spare him according to His great mercy!
 - We have a persistent enemy who would love to distract us – keep us from God...
 - Not that its recommended to threaten to 'lay hands' on satan (*as tempting as that might be*)
 - The key to standing against satan is the Word of God - **Ephesians 6:13**
 - He is powerless when we come against him with the Bible!
 - **James 4:7** – “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”
- o 3rd – Breaking the promise not to marry pagans... vs. 23-31
 - Nehemiah saw men marrying foreign women – Philistines / Moabites / Ammonites...
 - Half of their children spoke other languages – could not even speak Hebrew!
 - Even though the people had promised not to marry foreigners – **Nehemiah 10:30**
 - So Nehemiah cursed them – struck them – and pulled out their beards...
 - This seems a bit severe – but he was making a point – better that than the alternative!
 - They were in danger of allowing their hearts to be turned away from God!
 - When we see someone whose life is 'out of control' - making poor choices...
 - It is our opportunity to come along side and help that person...
 - Sin destroys lives – and it is not loving to let someone destroy themselves...
 - Not that we should hit them – or pull out their beards...
 - But a true friend is one loves you enough to tell you when you are wrong!
 - **Proverbs 27:6** – “Faithful are the wounds of a friend...”
 - Nehemiah reminded them of the fate of Solomon...
 - He was the greatest of all Kings – beloved by God – yet foreign women were his downfall...
 - o Solomon had 700 wives – and 300 concubines (*mistresses*) – **I Kings 11:3**
 - o Apparently every time Solomon saw a new beauty – he would fall 'in love' again...
 - o I imagine the 'royal weddings' had to have been an almost monthly event!
 - o After many years – a lot of marriage can seem to loose their spark / joy...
 - o Many men make the mistake of thinking a 'new woman' will make them happy...
 - o At first it might seem to work – people put on their best faces at first...
 - o But over time they find they left one sinner - only to end up with another sinner...
 - o The key to a happy marriage – is not to change spouses...
 - o The key is to keep Jesus at the center of the marriage – so it lasts a lifetime!
 - God's plan for marriage is for ONE man and ONE woman - **Genesis 1:27/ 2:24**
 - o A relationship that was meant to last for a lifetime - 'let no man separate'...
 - o Because marriage is meant to be a picture to help us understand the love of God...
 - o God defines His love for us by called us His kids / He calls us His bride!
 - o This picture of marriage is distorted when a marriage falls apart...
 - o When a marriage is not longer filled with love – when it becomes stale...
 - o Or when a husband or wife walks away – looking for a new relationship....
 - o It gives the impression God just puts up with us because he has no choice...
 - o Or God loves us now - but some day He might get board of us and leave!
 - Nehemiah cleaned the priesthood by chasing the grandson of Eliashib out...
 - Because he had married one of the daughters of Sanballat...

- And for a 3rd time he asked the Lord to remember him for all the good he had done!
- o 4th – Why the people broke the covenant...
 - There is definite irony to the fact that the Jews made a covenant to follow the Law...
 - Then specifically promised to keep 3 aspects – marriage / the Sabbath / and giving...
 - And we find that those 3 things are the very ones that they quickly failed in!
 - The problem with promising to obey God - is we are not dependable...
 - We can make our promise - be determined to do the things we know we should do...
 - But we end up condemned – because we were are not able to follow through...
 - It is not that we do not want to do the right things – we cannot do the right things!
 - Our problem is our heart – we are the problem – we are sinners!
 - **Romans 7:18** – “I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can not make myself do right...”
 - Why do I do what I know is wrong – because I want to – no one forces me...
 - Why do I not do what I know is good and right – because I do not want to...
 - And the challenge is I cannot change my heart – how can you change what you want...
 - My problem is my heart/desires – I am the problem – I sin because I want to!
 - That is why God gave us a new promise - a New Covenant...
 - **Jeremiah 31:31** - “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant... I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”
 - The New Covenant is not about what we have to do - but what God does for us!
 - Only Jesus can bring lasting change - a transformed heart and new life...
 - As we look to Jesus - we new are changed from the inside out!