

NEHEMIAH 8-9

REVIEW...

- Personal Attacks: When Sanballat / Tobiah / and Geshem heard the wall was almost finished...
 - They sent Nehemiah a message – 4 times – requesting that they meet together...
 - But the plan was to lure him into a remote area – and kill him to stop the work on the wall...
 - Nehemiah wisely refused – why should he leave an important work to meet with them!
- So a servant of Sanballat came with an open insulting letter to Nehemiah...
 - The letter accused the Jews of planning to rebel against Persia – with Nehemiah as king...
 - Nehemiah replied - these are all lies – then prayed for God to strengthen his hands!
- Shemaiah – a priest – told Nehemiah to meet him in the Temple – and close the door...
 - It was the best place to hide – because Sanballat was coming to kill him...
 - Nehemiah recognized the false prophecy – Shemaiah had been paid to scare him!
 - In spite of all the threats - the wall was finished in just 52 days...
 - When their enemies heard they were disheartened - they realized God was behind the work!

REVIVAL IN THE LAND... (2 THINGS)

- 1ST – CELEBRATING THE WORD... vs. 1-19
 - 1st – The Head of the New year... vs. 1-2
 - The people gathered together as one – on the 1st day of the 7th month...
 - The wall was completed on the 25th day of the 6th month – this was 5 days later...
 - They waited a few days – because they wanted to celebrate a new beginning in a new year!
 - ROSH HASHANAH – the Feast of Trumpets – held on the 1st of Tishri (*October 2nd-4th*)...
 - Head of the New Year – blowing of the Shofar – the trumpet call for the people of God...
 - The Jews have a different calendar - in fact they have 2 calendars - religious/secular...
 - The religious Hebrew calendar begins with the month of Nissan (*March/April*)...
 - That is when the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt...
 - Rosh Hashanah falls in the month of Tishrei - 7th month of the religious calendar...
 - The month of Tishrei is the first month of the secular calendar....
 - It is believed to be the month in which God created the world!
 - Another way to think about Rosh Hashanah is as the birthday of the world...
 - Like Israel we also have 'two birthdays' - one when we entered this world...
 - But we also have a second birthday - when we were born again in Jesus - **John 3:3**
 - When we came to/ believe in Jesus – our old life before Christ was gone/dead...
 - We are no longer defined by our past mistakes – old labels no longer apply...
 - We are new creations – we have a fresh start in Jesus – a new beginning!
 - **II Corinthians 5:17** – “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”
 - 2nd – Teaching the Word... vs. 3-8
 - Ezra the Priest brought the Word of God to teach the people...
 - This is the same Ezra who had first returned 13 years earlier to bring reform to Israel...
 - We are not told what he had been busy doing for the decade plus since his return...
 - But tradition tells us that he spent that time assembling the cannon of the Old Testament!
 - All who could hear with understanding were gathered together to listen...
 - The suggestion is that those who were too young – little kids – were not there...
 - The purpose would presumably be to keep the adults from being distracted!

- We do not allow kids under the age of 12 into the main sanctuary...
- That reason is because they are too young to 'understand' the teaching...
- Instead we have a CM that teaches the kids at a level is easy for them to grasp...
- It also allows the adults in the sanctuary to listen without distraction!
- Ezra stood on a wooden stage – and taught the people from morning till midday...
 - And all the people stood up when he opened up the Bible...
 - When Ezra 'blessed the people' (*prayed*) – they all answered Amen / Amen!
 - We are given a unique insight here into some of the traditions of a Hebrew service...
 - Many of them we still hold to today – preaching from a wooden pulpit / saying amen...
 - I must say I wish we still had the tradition of teaching from morning till midday!
- The Levites helped – by reading distinctly to help the people understand the Law...
 - Many of the Jews had forgotten how to speak Hebrew – the language of the Bible...
 - So when Ezra read it – they needed someone to translate it into Aramaic for them!
 - Better to have 5 words in a known tongue - 10,000 in an unknown – **I Corinthians 14:19**
 - Up until 1969 – a Catholic church service including songs / prayers / and the message...
 - Were all spoken in Latin – so that although the priests understood – no one else did!
 - A pastor could teach the best message – giving out life changing powerful truth...
 - But if you do not understand it - then it just becomes empty ritual / religion!
 - We take for granted that we can pick up an English Bible and read the Word...
 - But it has only been in the last 500 years that the Bible has been available in local dialects!
- The Levites helped – by giving sense to the Law...
 - The suggestion is there was also interpretation / expounding on the Word of God...
 - Too many pastors today spend too little time expounding / teaching the Word...
 - Instead they tell funny stories to entertain – sprinkled with the occasional Bible verse...
 - Because they do not want to offend people – and the Bible is offensive!
 - But it is not our words / or funny stories – people need to hear...
 - They need to know about the dangers of hell - and the reward of heaven...
 - About the coming judgment of God - and the amazing hope of Jesus!
 - But they do not know these things - because they do not know the Word!
 - And the ones who should be teaching them - the pastors - do not...
 - The biggest problem in the church today – there is a famine in the Land!
 - **Amos 8:11** - "Not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the LORD."
- o 3rd - Responding to the Word... vs. 9-12
 - Nehemiah – Ezra – and the Levites encouraged the people not to weep...
 - Apparently upon hearing – and understanding – the Word it broke their hearts...
 - The people thought they were pretty good – did not see their need for God...
 - Until the Word of God was read to them – and they realized how sinful they were!
 - **Jeremiah 23:29** - "My word is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces."
 - Good is a comparative term – how good something is depends on what you compare it to...
 - Most people would argue with you there were a good person – few would say we are bad...
 - Yet what or who is it that they are comparing themselves to – Good compared to who...
 - If the definition of good were being better than – a murderer – most would be good...
 - If the definition of good were being better than – my neighbor – maybe still OK...
 - But since the definition of good is God – **Matthew 5:48** - that means we are not good!
 - From the best person to the worst – none are good enough to get into heaven!
 - **Romans 3:10** – "As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one..."
 - The Levites encouraged the people to celebrate - eat fat (*burgers*) / drink sweet (*soda*)...

- Because although they were sinners – the joy of the Lord was their strength!
- They were to celebrate because in God there was hope – He had power to overcome sin!
- It is not being a sinner - we all are **Roman 3:23** - that keeps us out of heaven...
- God provided in Jesus Christ the solution for sin – we have hope!
- Although being good cannot save us – no one can earn a trip to Heaven...
- We are saved by believing in the sacrifice that Jesus made for our sin on the cross!
- **Ephesians 2:8-9** – “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”
- More than that the people were encouraged to send to others – so they could celebrate too!
 - We also are called to celebrate – and then go share the good news with others!
 - And when one person gets saved - before you know it - family and friends follow...
 - Then people start coming to church - and it makes others curious...
 - More and more people start to come - they also get to hear the WORD - **Romans 10:17**
 - And through the hearing the Word of God - you have a revival!

o 4th – The Feast of Booths... vs. 13-18

- The next day the leaders gathered with the priests and Ezra...
 - They continued to read the Word – found they were to dwell in booths in the 7th month...
 - So a proclamation went out for all of Israel to gather branches – and build booths...
 - They built them on the tops of houses / in open courtyards / next to the Temple...
 - Since the days of Joshua – the children of Israel had not celebrated in this manner!
 - For 7 days they celebrated – and on the 8th day there was a special gathering!
- SUKKOTH – the Feast of Tabernacles -15th-22nd of Tishri (*October 16th-23rd*)...
 - A weeklong feast to commemorate the 40-year wilderness wandering of Israel...
 - Booths were constructed from palm branches as joyful reminders...
 - The temporary housing used by their forefathers during the Exodus...
 - 8th day of the feast – the priest would pour down water from Siloam on the Temple steps...
 - Remembering the water God brought from the rock for Israel – **Exodus 17:6**
 - According to **I Corinthians 10:4** - that Rock was Jesus Christ!
 - Tradition was the priests would take 7 gold jugs of water from the Gihon spring...
 - They would pour it down the ‘Steps of David’ - remembering the water from the rock...
 - **John 7:37-38** - “On the last day, great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”
- The water Israel drank only satisfied for a moment - they were thirsty again...
 - Did you ever notice how things in this world never seem to satisfy for long...
 - If you get a new cell phone - you are satisfied - for a day or a week...
 - If you get some new clothes - you are happy - till they get their first stain...
 - If we only look to be satisfied from the world - we will be thirsty again...
- But the water that comes from our Rock - Jesus - is Living Water!
 - When we drink deeply from Jesus’ Living water - we will find true joy / contentment...
 - We were not created by God to buy a cell phone / or wear the latest fashion...
 - We were created by God to know Him - worship Him - **John 17:3**

● 2ND – RESTORING THE RELATIONSHIP... vs. 1-38

o 1st – Confessing sin... vs. 1-3

- The feast of trumpets took place on the first day of this month...
 - On the 14th day began the feast of tabernacles - lasting 7 days - finished on the 22nd day...
 - On the 23rd they separated themselves from their illegitimate wives and children...

- Apparently the commands of Ezra – **Ezra 10:3** – had not been completely headed...
- They had all agreed with Ezra – but then went home and did what they wanted!
- Those who attend Bible studies – will often agree with everything that is said...
- Then go home and inexplicably forget everything they just heard!
- The Bible is not a textbook you must learn - it is an instruction manual to follow...
- You can know all words - but if it does not change your actions - it means nothing!
- **James 1:22-25** – “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”
- On the 24th they held a solemn day of fasting and confession of sin - and reading the law...
 - For ¼ of the day they read – and for another ¼ the day they confessed and worshiped!
 - No doubt 13 years of trying things there way had led to devastated marriages / lives...
 - The people were ready to confess their sin – listen to wisdom of the Word of God!
 - Unfortunately for many people it takes a tragedy – to get them to listen to the Lord...
 - I have met a lot of men whose marriages are falling apart – and they do not know why...
 - They thought they could live for the world – and still enjoy a Godly life / wife!
 - Like a child who only has to touch a flame once - God teaches us through our consequences!
 - Not to punish us – but to teach us - keep us from things that would harm us!
 - **Hebrews 12:5-8** - “You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD... For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and punishes every son whom He receives...’”
- o 2nd – Remembering the faithfulness of the Lord... vs. 4-38
 - Then some of the chief Levites stood up and exhorted the people to bless the Lord...
 - Because He was the one who created the heavens – and preserves them... vs. 6
 - Jesus holds all things together - the example of the atom – **Colossians 1:17**...
 - o If you hold two positively charged magnets together – they repel each other...
 - o It takes a significant amount of force to keep them together...
 - o Within every atom are two positive forces – proton and neutron...
 - o For instance if you had a tablespoon of each and set them next to each other...
 - o It would take 30k tons of weight to keep them from flying apart...
 - o A nuclear explosion is allowing an atom to do what it naturally wants – fly apart!
 - Because He choose Abram – and made a covenant to give him the Promised Land... vs. 7-8
 - Because He saved Israel from the bondage of Egypt – parting the Red Sea... vs. 9-11
 - Because He led Israel in the wilderness - and gave them the Law... vs. 12-14
 - Because He fed them manna – and brought water from the rock... vs. 15
 - Yet in spite of that – the people of Israel rebelled against the Lord... vs. 16-25
 - They wanted to return to bondage (*Egypt*) – gave credit to a golden calf for saving them...
 - But rather than abandon them - God in His grace kept providing - manna / water...
 - He continued to lead Israel with a cloud by day – and the fire by night...
 - He even gave made sure their clothes did not wear out - **Deuteronomy 29:5**!
 - He prospered them till they multiplied like the stars in the heaven – **Genesis 22:17**
 - And when they came into the Land – after 40 years – God gave them victory!
 - We often assume that being blessed by the Lord comes from obedience to the Lord...
 - If I read my Bible and pray every day – then God will give me a blessed life!
 - But the truth is the Lord blesses us in spite of what we do – that is what makes it Grace!
 - But the people turned their backs on God again (*Judges*)... vs. 26-31
 - When the people would cry out for help – God would send deliverers...
 - Only to find once the people again had peace – they would rebel against the Lord again!

- Yet for many years God was patient with them – sending prophets to warn them...
- Until finally He allowed them to be scattered – Israel 722 B.C / Judah 586 B.C.
- Nevertheless God allowed a remnant to remain – because of His Grace and Mercy!
- Many assume they are 'ok' because God does not immediately punish them...
- They make mistake of interpreting God's 'patience' for God's 'acceptance'...
- But just because God has not judged yet – does not mean God will not judge...
- God is patient – longsuffering – giving time to repent and turn back to Him...
- God waits to punish sin only because He loves the sinner – **II Peter 3:9**
- But for those who harden their hearts – do not to repent – their sin will not remain hidden!
- **Numbers 32:22** - "Be sure your sin will find you out..."
- The Levites concluded with a request that God see the plight of Judah... vs. 32-28
 - Not that it was the fault of God – they were suffering for their own choices...
 - Neither their kings / priests / or fathers had kept the commands of God...
 - And as a result they were now slaves in the Land God had promised to give them...
 - So they made a covenant to God – to keep the Law of God / not intermarry with pagans...
 - They made a choice – they choose to live for the Lord rather than be a slave to the world!
 - **Romans 6:16** - "You become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God..."
 - I heard a story about a young boy who was learning to ride a bike...
 - The only way he knew how to stop was by running into things...
 - His father had told him about the brakes – but he refused to use them...
 - The point being – Jesus has set free from sin – if we choose to use the brakes...
 - We no longer have to sin - we have the choice of being free – do we choose to use it...
 - Do we choose to live in bondage to sin – or do we choose to be free!
 - Only when we are willing to live our lives for God – do we truly find life!
 - It is then we will find the ultimate reward – not only eternal life with Jesus...
 - But a full and fulfilling / abundant life while we wait for His soon return!
 - **John 8:36** - "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."