

NEHEMIAH 8-9

REVIEW...

- Overcoming danger...
 - o Danger from without - Sanballat heard Jews were rebuilding the wall – made him furious...
 - He and Tobiah mocked - what are these ‘weak Jews’ trying to do – rebuild a ruined wall!
 - If even a fox walked on their new wall – made from burnt stone - it would collapse...
 - When that did not stop the Jews -they made plans to attack Jerusalem and create confusion!
 - They spread rumors - the Jews would never see them coming – surprise and kill them...
 - Nehemiah posted armed guards at low points in the wall / and at the uncovered gates...
 - And he encouraged the people not to be afraid – because the Lord is great and awesome!
 - Those who worked on the wall – had a shovel in one hand / and a sword in the other!
 - o Danger from within - the Jews came to Nehemiah complaining there was not enough food...
 - They had large families – and although there was food to buy – they could not afford it!
 - Some complained they had mortgaged their land to buy food / pay their taxes...
 - Others complained they had to go so far as to sell their children into slavery!
 - Furious – Nehemiah called on the guilty to restore what they had taken – that very day!
 - The example of Nehemiah - in the 12 years as governor – never collected a personal tax!

THE COMPLETION OF THE WALL... (3 THINGS)

- 1ST – PERSONAL ATTACKS... VS. 1-9
 - o 1st – Pretending to seek unity... vs. 1-2
 - When Sanballat / Tobiah / and Geshem heard the wall had been finished...
 - Although the gates had not been hung – the city was still vulnerable...
 - They sent Nehemiah a message – 4 times – requesting that they meet ‘together’...
 - The word ‘together’ is the Hebrew word – Yachad – it carries the idea of unity...
 - The suggestion is that – lets put aside our differences – lets come together in unity!
 - This idea of inclusiveness / tolerance – is still very much a issue today...
 - We live in a world that says there are many ways to heaven – many truths...
 - And we should be tolerant of one another – why can’t we all just get along!
 - Galatians 2:21 – “If we could be saved by [any way], there was no need for Christ to die.”
 - If all roads lead to heaven – then the cross was a waste of time...
 - Jesus suffered and died for no reason – and the Gospel is just news – not Good News!
 - Ironically those who preach tolerance – are the most intolerant of the Gospel...
 - Because the Gospel of Jesus does not always bring people together - it can also divide...
 - Matthew 10:34 - “I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”
 - Jesus came to bring peace between God and fallen sinful world - but with a sword...
 - The sword that Jesus brought was the cross – through it he defeated satan and death...
 - And to this day the Gospel message sill comes across as a sword – causing division...
 - The reason is the Gospel leaves no middle ground – it causes you to make a stand...
 - Luke 11:23 – “He who is not with Me is against Me...”
 - The Gospel makes you either stand for Jesus – or against Him – it divides...
 - There is no grey – if you are not for Him then you are against Him!
 - And although all roads do lead to God – they do not all lead to heaven...
 - The majority of people will not go to heaven - the majority will not be saved....
 - The reason is because most choose the broad way - rather than the narrow gate...

- **Matthew 7:13** - "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."
 - The majority can say the homosexuality is OK / they can say abortion is a right...
 - In a democratic society they can even pass laws that justify their choice...
 - But being in the majority – by no means equates to having the truth...
 - If you are doing what everyone else is doing - if you are with the majority...
 - If you are standing with the crowd – likely you are standing on the broad way...
 - And the end of that road leads to destruction - you might want to get off!
- o 2nd – The plan was to meet in the plains of Ono – an area near the Jordan River... vs. 3-4
- Because the truth was the enemies of Nehemiah were planning on killing him...
 - They wanted to lure him out into a remote area – and stop his efforts to rebuild the wall!
 - They had been unable to stop the work with mocking and threats...
 - The last resort was to try and take out the leader – strike the shepherd to scatter the sheep!
 - **Zechariah 13:6-7** – "Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."
 - Satan is smart – if he can take out a leader – he knows he can scatter the flock...
 - That is why it is so important to pray for your leaders / pastors...
 - Pray the Lord gives them discernment so they can see the snares of the enemy...
 - Pray because God has given them the responsibility to watch over us – **Hebrews 13:17**
 - Nehemiah wisely replied – why should I leave the work...
 - He knew what they were up to – but he had to be wise in how he replied...
 - On the face of things it seemed like Sanballat and crew were working towards unity...
 - If Nehemiah reacted emotionally to their veiled threat – it could have made things worse!
 - **Proverbs 15:1** – "A soft answer turns away wrath, a harsh word stirs up anger."
 - If we react with our emotions when others hurt us – we only do more damage...
 - We escalate the problem rather than solving it – anger causes more anger!
 - Nehemiah had to be careful not to make any assumptions...
 - It would come out in time exactly what Sanballat intended with his request...
 - It is always wise to be careful about making assumptions (*even if we know we are right*)...
 - Assumptions are like bombs – one mistake and they can blow up on us!
 - Hold of on making assumptions – especially if we do not have all the information
 - If we are not careful we can end up doing and saying things we will regret!
- o 3rd – An open letter of contempt... vs. 5-9
- A servant of Sanballat came with an open letter to Nehemiah...
 - In the days of the Persian Empire – there were guidelines for how letters were given...
 - Men of importance always would receive sealed letters – it was for their eyes only...
 - With his open letter Sanballat did 2 things – first he insulted Nehemiah (*not important*)...
 - Second he made sure the contents could be read by anyone – spread the rumors!
 - Social media has transformed the way we communicate in this modern age...
 - What once would be written in private – is not open for the whole world to see...
 - And we will have to answer one day for every idle word - **Matthew 12:36**
 - **James 3:5** – "The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do."
 - Wars begin with words - if are not careful of what we say - we can start a fight...
 - So instead of being quick with our tongue – or keyboard - as a weapon to stir up...
 - Let us instead use it as a tool to share the hope of Jesus – and build up!
 - **Ephesians 4:29** – "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

- The letter made several accusations against Nehemiah...

- The Jews were planning to rebel against Persia – that was the reason for building the wall...
- And Nehemiah was planning on being crowned the new King...
- He had even hired ‘prophets’ who would claim God had ordained him to lead Israel...
- In light of these accusations – Sanballat warned Nehemiah to come and talk to him!
- Nehemiah replied - these are all lies – then prayed for God to strengthen his hands!
- People are going to say bad things about us – false accusation to make us look bad...
- We can defend ourselves - run around putting out all the little fires...
- But no sooner to we extinguish one – than another accusation pops up!
- We cannot react every time someone makes a false accusation against us...
- If we do we will waste all our time and effort – rather than using it to serve God!
- If we are guilty - then we need to repent / if not – then who cares what people say...
- God knows we are innocent – and He is the only one who really matters...
- Do not be distracted by the comments – instead keep your eyes on Jesus!

• 2ND – FINISHING THE WORK... vs. 10-19

o 1st – Sowing fear... vs. 10-14

- Nehemiah went to the house of Shemaiah – a priest – and apparent confidant...
 - He was a ‘shut up’ or ‘secret informer’ – suggesting he lived a solitary pious life (*monk*)...
 - He told Nehemiah to meet him in the Temple – and close the door behind them...
 - It was the best place to hide – because Sanballat was coming to kill him!
 - As the world around us gets worse and worse – there is a temptation to want to hide...
 - We might think that being ‘shut up’ in our Christian circle – is the best solution...
 - Run into the church – and bolt the doors behind us – forget about the world!
 - But we are not called to hide – we are called to shine – be an example to the lost!
 - The church is not called to be a social club for saints - it is a hospital for sinners...
 - We cannot be afraid to go and get our hand dirty - sinners need our help!
 - **Matthew 5:14** - “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.”
- Nehemiah asked - should a leader / Pastor of the people run when the hard times come...
 - **John 10:12** – “A hireling, not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.”
 - When times get tough - when people do not show - when there is no money...
 - Hired Pastors leave - without any thought for the sheep - only caring about themselves...
 - In contrast – a good shepherd is willing to stand up to danger – for the sake of the sheep!
 - **John 10:11** - “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”
- Nehemiah recognized a false prophecy – Shemaiah had been paid to scare him...
 - He was not the only one – the prophetess Noadiah – and others also gave false words...
 - And they worked – Nehemiah was afraid – but in spite of that he trusted the Lord!
 - When we are hounded by the negative news around us – it is easy to be afraid...
 - We are afraid of what will happen in November / we are afraid of ISIS...
 - But the best answer to fear - is to fall on our faces – and pray!
 - Fear is the opposite of trust- we are afraid because we are not looking to Jesus...
 - So instead of being overwhelmed by fear – lets run to Jesus and find peace!
 - **II Timothy 1:7** – “God has not given us a spirit of fear... but of power, love...”

o 2nd – Completing the Wall... vs. 15-16

- The wall was finished on the 25th day of Elul (*August/September*) – in 52 days...
 - An extremely impressive feat – but God raised a small army up to work on it!
 - Pastor Clark is very fond of saying – ‘Many hands make for light work’...
 - One man can only accomplish so much – but when many men work together...

- There is no limit to what they can accomplish for the Lord!

- When the enemies of the Jews heard the wall was completed...
 - They were very disheartened – because they realized God was behind the work!
 - In Acts 5 the Pharisee Gamaliel gave some advice to the rulers of Judah...
 - Stay away from the Apostles of Jesus Christ – and leave them alone...
 - Because no matter what the counsel did there were only TWO possible outcomes...
 - If the Apostles 'religion' was the ideas of men and would come to nothing...
 - But if the Apostles 'religion' were from God – they would end up fighting against God!
 - It is fun to watch new years fire works – lots of 'flashes' and 'bangs'...
 - But if you stick around after the 'show' – something far better appears...
 - Stars – they may not be as flashy – but they are there night after night!
 - It is easy to find out if God is in something - just wait and watch...
 - If it is not from God – it will not last / if it is a work of God – no one can stop it!
 - The ideas of men are fireworks – flash / bang – and then they are gone...
 - But the things of the Lord – they continue to shine and never fade away!

o 3rd – Slaves to the world... vs. 17-19

- During all this the nobles of Judah were in constant communication with Tobiah...
 - Because they were sworn to him – ba'al shēbuw'ah – he was their master by oath!
 - The nobles had married into the pagan nations – knitting them together...
 - Making them talk about Tobiah in a positive way – and report to him all Nehemiah did!
- The choices of the nobles made them slaves to the enemy of God...
 - We all choose to be a slave to someone – **Romans 6:16**...
 - We will either choose be a slave to Jesus / or we choose to be a slave to sin...
 - Did you ever wonder why our country is so backwards when it comes to truth...
 - When did good become evil / and evil become good – **Isaiah 5:20**...
 - Right to allow men into a woman's bathroom / but wrong to teach children about God...
 - The average American watches 5 hour of TV a day / and is on Facebook for another hour!
 - Wherever we invest our time into - we will also find we are a 'slave' to!
 - **Galatians 5:16-17** – "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

● 2ND – CONFIRMING THE GENEALOGY... vs. 1-73

o 1st – Guarding their gates... vs. 1-4

- Once the wall was completed – and the gates hung – it was time for Nehemiah to return...
 - He had been given permission by King Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall – a task completed...
 - So he gave the care of the city over to Hanani – the same from **Nehemiah 1:2**
 - The man who had first told him in Shushan of the state of the city of Jerusalem!
 - He was a faithful man – who feared God more than most!
- Nehemiah instructed him not to open he gates till the sun was hot...
 - In other words open the gates only later in the morning – and close them early at night...
 - Israel still had many enemies that their best defense was the closed wall around them...
 - But the men were also to defend the area of the wall in front of their own house...
 - Because the city was large – and as of yet – it still did not have many people inside!
- Hanani had been faithful to share about the people of God – now he was leading them!
 - I think a lot of people wonder why God does not give them greater responsibility...
 - Yet I have noted two traits on the people God uses...

- They have humility – realizing it is not about them – but all about Jesus – **John 15:5**
 - And they are faithful in the little things / proving they can be trusted – **Luke 19:17**
 - When we are faithful in the little things God will give us greater responsibility!
- o 2nd – Guarding their heritage... vs. 5-73
- The Lord put it on the heart of Nehemiah to register the genealogy of the people...
 - He used the list given by the captives returning from exile under Zerubbabel...
 - This is the second of 2 identical lists of returning exiles – the 1st is in **Ezra 2:1-70**
 - If you add everyone who returned in the list in Ezra – 29,818 people
 - If you add everyone who returned in the list in Nehemiah – 31, 089 people
 - But Ezra mentions 494 persons omitted by Nehemiah...
 - And Nehemiah also mentions 1765 not noticed by Ezra...
 - If you add those in - both lists come to the same number of people – 31,583
 - But we are told that 42,360 returned from exile – 10,777 more than are listed...
 - Those 10,777 are not listed cause they were not from Judah / Benjamin / Priests / Levites
 - Keeping the genealogy was extremely important...
 - Because only the sons of Levi could serve in the Temple / sons of Aaron as priests...
 - And only the sons of David could rule – and from that line would come the Messiah!
 - Jews today cannot tell you what tribe of Israel they came from – lost to history...
 - But in the days of Nehemiah it was still very important – because the Christ...
 - Had to come from line of Adam (*that would be everyone*) – **Genesis 3:15**
 - Had to come from the line of Abraham (*that would be Jews*) - **Genesis 22:18**
 - And also had to come from the line of David – **II Samuel 7:16**
 - That God fulfilled the genealogy in the life of Jesus tell us – that God is faithful to His Word!
 - **Numbers 23:19** - “God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?”
 - God cannot lie - and He never changes His mind - God says it / that settles it!