

# **The Joy of the Lord is My Strength**

## **A study in the book of Nehemiah**

### **#12 Our Reaction to Sin**

#### **Introduction**

Nehemiah's first term as Governor lasted 12 years and then he returned to Babylon. We are not sure how long he was gone, but chapter 13 begins sometime after the great season of rejoicing that the wall was finished, the temple was rebuilt, and people were populating the city of Jerusalem.

Special Note: The books of Malachi and Haggai parallel the conditions that Nehemiah had to contend with.

Upon his return, Nehemiah had to deal with **4 major issues**:

**Issue #1: (v. 1-9) COMPROMISE-No Ammonite or Moabite was to be allowed into the assembly of God (Deut.23:3-4).**

Eliashib, the priest allowed Tobiah to convert one of the storerooms in the Temple into a place to live. Tobiah was an Ammonite (Neh. 2:10). Nehemiah was greatly displeased (he grieved over what was going on).

Some examples of those who grieved over sin:

Ninevites-Jonah 3:5, 10

David- Ps. 119:136

Ezra-10:6

**Issue #2: (v. 10-14) THEFT-The house of God was being neglected.**

The people were not tithing. The Levites had not been paid and had to find other ways to support themselves. Nehemiah asked the pertinent question: "Why is the house of God neglected?"

Haggai 1:4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house remains a ruin?"

Malachi 3:8 "...But you ask, how do we rob you? In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse, the whole nation of you, because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Test me in this..."

**Issue #3: (v. 15-22) SECULARIZING THE SACRED-The Sabbath was not being kept.**

The people were permissive with their time. God and His service were not a priority. Nehemiah threatened to lay hands on those merchants if they continued the practice. And to help hold them accountable, he installed guards at the gates.

A word about accountability: See Gal. 6:1-2

**Issue #4 (v. 23-31) DISCARDING PURITY- The people were intermarrying with people from neighboring countries.**

In these mixed marriage homes, children were not even being taught the Hebrew language. How could they pass on their spiritual traditions and forms of worship? Even the grandson of the high priest married Sanballat's daughter.

**Contrast these behaviors with the vows made in Chapter 10:**

Making a vow was serious business for the Israelites. See Numbers 30:2 and Ecc. 5:4-5  
10:30. We promise not to intermarry.....13:23-31

10:31 We promise to remember the Sabbath.....13:15-22

10:32-39. We promise to support the work of God.... 13:10-14

10:39 We promise not to neglect the Temple.....13:11

**Nehemiah's reaction was severe (vs. 25)**

He rebuked them, cursed them, beat them, pulled out some of their beards and drove them away. (Note how Ezra reacted to the same problem: See Ezra 9:3. Nehemiah was not passive in his response. His love for righteousness compelled him to act on behalf of those he loved.

1. He was deliberate. He gave things serious thought. He engaged in meaningful prayer over things that mattered.
2. He followed his convictions. his world was black and white as it related to spiritual matters.
3. He worked towards permanent corrections. He put guards by the gates etc.

**Nehemiah's Request:**

In pursuit of God's blessing, Nehemiah asks for Yahweh to "remember" him (to keep him in mind, be mindful of his deeds). See 5:19, 13:14, 13:22, and 13:31.

## So What?

The problems of spiritual intermarrying, ignoring the house of God, and avoiding their responsibility to give were all emblematic of our own problems. Vows, promises, covenants are virtually impossible to keep without the power of the Holy Spirit. We are powerless to stop sin without the grace of God active in our lives (see Rom. 8:3). Only by His grace can we overcome sin and meet the real test of revival.... long term obedience in the same direction.

“Lord, I am so prone to extravagant extremes. I either foolishly justify my imperfections or I frantically bemoan them. All the while you wait for me, to release them...to you.”

We need to address our sin and compromises just like Nehemiah did:

With honesty

With conviction

With commitment to Him

Romans 6:12-14 “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life...”

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the expression, “When the cat’s away, the mice do play” fit Nehemiah’s situation? Does that concept ring true in some area of your life?
2. Talk a bit about houses of worship. How should we care for them?
3. Does God need “our money?” Why does He ask for the tithe (and offerings)? Discuss the importance of tithing.
4. The issue of intermarrying in the Bible was a spiritual issue, not a racial one. How does Prov. 12:26 speak to that issue?
5. How did Nehemiah address their sinful ways? Was he timid, fearful, reluctant? Is that how we usually address our sin or the sin around us?

## Personal Reflections

1. When no one is watching, how easy it is for you to slip back into bad habits and sinful practices? Are you spiritually accountable to anyone? Why or why not?
2. Of the four issues Nehemiah addressed, to which one(s) are you susceptible? Why do you think you are vulnerable in that area? Why do you think it keeps coming up in your life?
3. How do you react to your own sin? Anxious to avoid it? Anxious to deal with it? Anxious to leave it at the foot of the cross?
4. The Israelites had a difficult time keeping their vows. We do too. What can we do to improve our spiritual commitments?