

“REBUILDING BROKEN PLACES”
STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND HAGGAI
Nehemiah 11:1-13:30
“Heart Work is the Hard Work”

Introduction: Have you noticed a cycle of sin, consequence, shame, and regret in your life? How do we avoid making impulsive vows fueled by an emotional high and truly count the cost of walking with the Lord? As we finish this series let us learn from the example of the Israelites and break the cycle of sin, consequence, shame, regret and move to the cycle of confession, repentance, and belief (1 John 1:9).

I. GOD ALWAYS KEEPS HIS PROMISES EVEN WHEN WE DON'T DESERVE IT
(Nehemiah 11:1-12:26)

- A. Jerusalem is called the “holy city” because it was set apart for God’s purposes. The earthly Jerusalem is a foreshadow and type of the heavenly Jerusalem which ultimately represents the place where God dwells with His people for eternity (Hebrews 12:2-24). The people are categorized into six groups – Israelites, priests, Levites, Nethinim, and descendants of Solomon’s servants. This is a documented account of the faithfulness of God.
- B. Chapter 12 has a genealogical record of the priests and Levites. The Levites are the tribe God chose to serve as priests in the temple. They offered the sacrifices, collected offerings, maintained the temple, led worship services and rituals, and helped people understand the word of God. This list shows the continuity between the people who returned with Zerubbabel and the people in the days of Nehemiah. David was led by the Spirit of God to organize groups of Levites into a choir system that lasted hundreds of years (1 Chronicles 16:7; 1 Chronicles 25:1-7; 2 Chronicles 29:30).

II. REMEMBER TO REJOICE IN LORD FOR YOUR REDEMPTION AND RESTORATION
(Nehemiah 12:27-47)

- A. All the Levites are summoned to the city for the wall dedication ceremony. The dedication was celebrated with thanksgiving, singing, cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps. The singers gathered in from all their villages.
- B. Spiritual leaders had to first purify themselves then the people, the gates, and the wall. It is critical that we are in the proper status to worship God. The purification process was described in the Law. It means to cleanse ritually – a physical act that illustrates a spiritual reality. Spiritual cleansing involves removing traces of idolatry (Genesis 35:2; 2 Chronicles 29:15; Ezekiel 36:25; Ezekiel 37:23; Malachi 3:1-3). The dedication ceremony included sacrifices and rejoicing.
- C. The people prepared provisions to support the ministry of the Levites. The purpose was not to enrich the Levites but to supply needs. The restoration of the Levitical priesthood was reminder of God’s faithfulness. The people gave a tithe to the entire tribe of Levi and the Levites gave a tithe of the tithe to the priests (descendants of Aaron).

III. THE HOLINESS OF GOD LEADS TO JUSTICE BUT THE GRACE OF GOD LEADS TO REPENTANCE (Nehemiah 13:1-31)

- A. The book of Moses is read publicly, and the Ammonite/Moabite prohibition was discovered. This was not a prohibition against inter-racial marriage. Racism is a social construct that did not exist in the ancient world. The Israelites believed that all humans are created in the image of God – taught in the first section of the book of Moses. This is a prohibition against inter-religious or inter-faith marriages. They could not marry someone who worshipped idols. There is a specific command related to Ammonites and Moabites (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). Ammonites and Moabites refused to help Israel with basic needs and hired Balaam to curse them (Numbers 22:1-6). God

turned the curse into a blessing (Numbers 23:11-12). The people took action and demonstrated repentance based on hearing God's standard.

- B. Prior to these radical acts of repentance Eliashib the high priest did not protect the integrity of the ministry and allied with Tobiah who fought against the rebuilding project. The high priest made a room for Tobiah in the temple Nehemiah returned to discover Eliashib's error. Nehemiah was grieved at the sin and dishonor of God's temple. Do you care about how God is honored?
- C. The sin of Eliashib – preparing a room in the temple at the expense of the Levites. Nehemiah contended with the rulers to make sure the Levites were paid what God required. There are times when leaders need to be confrontational and assertive. Nehemiah prayed to God because he understood he had to give an account for his leadership.
- D. Israelites were doing common labor and retail activities on the Sabbath. Priests were allowed to work on the Sabbath because ministry is 7 days a week (daily offerings). Nehemiah took action by placing guards and regulating the times the gates of the city were open. The Levites were given charge to guard the gates. Enforcing the rules was how they sanctified the Sabbath – set it apart as holy.
- E. Some of the men had married pagan women. Nehemiah had a zealous response (John 2:13-17). The Law of Moses allowed stoning and 39 lashes for some sins (Deuteronomy 25:3). Solomon sinned by marrying pagan women and they influenced him to worship false gods. Christians are not allowed to marry unbelievers (1 Corinthians 7:39). There are strict rules in the Law of Moses regulating who priests (descendants of Aaron) could marry (Leviticus 21:13-15). This time Nehemiah prayed “remember them” because they were defiling the priesthood. He is agreeing with God regarding the consequences they deserve. He provides a summary of his reforms and a final accountability prayer (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Ezra- Nehemiah sets the stage for the events of the intertestamental period. A period of 400 years of silence from God. The story picks up in the New Testament with Israel under Roman occupation desperately waiting for the Messiah to deliver them from their oppressors. The Messiah, Christ Jesus came to Israel and the leaders rejected Him. He came to provide spiritual freedom when all they wanted was political freedom. Place your trust in Christ, surrender to His will, and experience freedom from the cycle of sin, consequence, shame, and regret. Heart work is the hard work that Christ can do in your life.

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January 14, 2024*