"Broken Promises (Nehemiah, Part 11)"

Text: Nehemiah 13:1-31

Unfortunately, we all make promises that we don't keep. Sometimes we blatantly break our promises, but other times we gradually drift away from our commitments. In Nehemiah 13 we come face-to-face with some backsliders who turned their backs on the promises and commitments that they had made to the Lord. Within a relatively short period of time the children of Israel returned to their old ways of doing things – violating God's laws and allowing the world's system to press them into its mold. One of the lessons in the Book of Nehemiah is: *good beginnings are no guarantee of happy endings*. Nehemiah went back to Persia after his assignment in Jerusalem was completed. When he finally retired from his government job he returned to Jerusalem to live out his final years there and eventually be buried in the city of his fathers. What he discovered upon his return left him greatly disappointed and filled with righteous indignation. In Nehemiah 10 the people made four vows; but by the time we get to Nehemiah 13 each of these promises had been broken.

The promises of chapter 10 began with **a pledge of loyalty to the Word of God**. But the people had allowed the very things the Scriptures warned against. However, when they heard (again) what God's Word had to say they obeyed it (Nehemiah 13:3). When we fall short, let's turn from a pattern of disobedience and determine to live out what God says. The next promise they failed to keep was **to live separate from the world**. In Nehemiah 13:4-9 we see that God's people had welcomed an enemy intruder (Tobiah) into their midst, and he was influencing people away from God's ways. This grieved Nehemiah bitterly, so he threw Tobiah and all his stuff out. The people of God were also allowing marriages with heathens to take place. Through these forbidden practices they were welcoming sinful and pagan ways into their lives and homes. Yesterday's enemies had become today's marriage partners. How quickly we forget when we give into the lure of temptation. The third broken vow was that **they neglected to support God's work**. The Temple ministry was hampered because the people had stopped bringing their tithes and offerings into the storerooms. Nehemiah set up a system so they could once again put God first with their finances. And the people responded – they renewed their commitment *to not neglect God's house* and brought to God what was rightfully His. They had also broken their fourth promise **by secularizing the Sabbath**, or as we would say it, **by failing to keep Sundays special**. In demanding that the people keep their Sabbath promise Nehemiah was emphasizing the importance of honoring the Lord and the necessity of rest.

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Diligently guard against backsliding and falling away.
2. Let's cleanse our lives and homes of everything pagan.
3. Don't keep slipping back into the bondages from which the Lord has set you free.
4. Put God first in your finances.
5. On the Lord's Day: honor and worship the Lord, rest, make it a special/unique Day.