

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 26TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

THE CITY (NEHEMIAH 11:1-36)

CITIES ARE GOD'S IDEA

In our day when so many people want to move out of cities, we should remember that cities are a part of God's plan. God loves cities because that's where people are. Chapter 11 records God's work in repopulating Jerusalem, the holy city, a city He loves.

- **Do we show our love for our city and the people who live in it?**

BEAUTY IN THE STRUGGLE (NEHEMIAH 13:1-3) "AT THIS TIME"

The Israelites were experiencing a time of reformation through regular readings of the Law of Moses.

- Hearing the law stated in Deut. 23:3-4, that "No Ammonite or Moabite should enter the assembly of God", they responded in obedience and "separated all those of mixed descent."

The command in Deut. regarding the Ammonites and the Moabites was a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham in Gen.12:3 where God said, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you."

- God's promises are still true today, which is why we should still be mindful of the treatment of the Nation of Israel.

NO LONGER EXCLUDED

To be allowed to "enter the assembly of God" meant more than just being able to worship together in the temple. It meant leaving their own people and deciding to join God's covenant people.

- Since non-Israelites were not a part of the people of God by birth, they would have to leave their pagan life and join spiritual life with God's people.

HE TURNS A CURSE INTO A BLESSING

V.2 is referring to Numbers 22-24, where Balaam, a pagan diviner, was hired to curse the Israelites that had left Egypt.

- Balaam was unable to curse the Israelites and was able to only "do" what God "speaks", becoming His mouthpiece, blessing them and prophesying about the coming Messiah.

In Gen. 50, Joseph says, "**you [his brothers] planned evil against me; God planned it for good.**"

- Rom. 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to His purpose."
- **This is God's nature, turning evil for good!**

The greatest display of God's nature of turning a curse into a blessing was carried out through Jesus Christ.

- The curse of sin and death, which we all were under, was turned into salvation for all who would accept that their punishment was satisfied on a cursed tree.

ABANDONED (NEHEMIAH 13:4-14) REGRESSION WITHOUT LEADERSHIP

V. 6-7 indicates that Nehemiah had returned to Babylon to fulfill his duties in the Persian court. As a man of integrity, he kept his word to the Persian King (2:6) and returned after the allotted time had passed.

- He returned from his 10-12-year absence to find that Eliashib the priest had entered into an agreement with Tobiah.

Nehemiah was "greatly displeased" that Tobiah, an Ammonite, was allowed to use one of the temple's sacred storerooms, where people's contributions were brought, for some other purpose.

- Tobiah was using the things of God for selfish gain and comfort without the commitment to the work of God.

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

Because the temple had been desecrated by Tobiah's use of the storeroom, Nehemiah threw out Tobiah's possessions and had the items that were removed brought back in.

- The cleansing of the storeroom was similar to Jesus' reaction to the misuse of the temple in Matt. 21:12-13, when he flipped tables and drove out money changers.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

The people were not obeying the Word concerning giving and with a lack of support, the Levites had to return to their land.

- Nehemiah laid out a plan for collecting tithes easily and efficiently, as well as placing a committee in charge of the storerooms to ensure that further lapses and abuses would not occur.

"REMEMBER ME..."

At the end of each reform (v14, v22, v30), Nehemiah offers a prayer to God that He remembers his faithful service.

- In v.14, he prays that God would not "erase the deeds of faithful love" that he had done. The prayer essentially says, "I have faithfully obeyed, don't charge me with their disobedience."

REKINDLING ANGER (NEHEMIAH 13:15-22) PROFANING THE SABBATH

Nehemiah then witnesses that the people have been ignoring God's command concerning the Sabbath.

- The Sabbath was a day of rest and honoring God. However, for them, making and spending money was a higher priority than glorifying God.

Though keeping a day set apart for resting in the Lord is still important, the NT makes it clear (Col. 2:16-17) that we are not under the law of the Sabbath the same way Israel was under the Old Covenant.

- We still have an obligation to make honoring God more important than making money or spending money.

CORRECTION

Nehemiah confronts the nobles and asks them, "What is this evil you are doing - profaning the Sabbath?"

- Though we do not know if they were actively participating in the buying and selling, as family heads and city leaders, they were responsible for setting tone and regulations regarding the Sabbath.

Nehemiah asks the nobles to reflect on the past, "didn't your ancestors do the same? Now you are rekindling His anger against Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

- "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (George Santayana)

SAFEGUARD

Nehemiah again, sees a problem, addresses the problem, and puts a plan in action to minimize the chance of repeating the same disobedience against God.

- He closes the gates to the city during the sabbath, posted men at the gates, and had the Levites purify themselves.

"REMEMBER ME..."

Nehemiah had done all he could to keep people from buying and selling on the Sabbath, but several merchants camped outside the gates and continued to disobey.

- Nehemiah prays, "look on me with compassion according to the abundance of your faithful love." He asks God not to charge him with their disobedience.

DEFILEMENT (NEHEMIAH 13:23-30) ZEAL TOWARDS GOD'S COMMAND

During the time that Nehemiah was away, the Israelites had started to ignore the command to remain set apart and were intermarrying with the pagan nations around them.

- Looking at his reaction of rebuking, cursing, beating, and pulling out hair, it seems that there was a real distain for pursuing ungodly romance.

The reason for his harshness toward the observance of this command is because of the effect it had on Solomon.

- One of the wisest men to live, sinned because of his unwise and ungodly romance with the pagan nations around him and the people of Israel now thought they were invulnerable to it.

TAKING IT UP A NOTCH

Nehemiah then found that a grandson of a priest had married the daughter of Sanballat.

- This marriage was not only with the lineage of a known enemy of Israel, but it defiled the priestly office and ignored God's command to marry "a virgin from his own people, so he will not defile his offspring."

CORRECTION

Nehemiah drove away Eliashib's grandson, "purified them from everything foreign, and assigned duties to get everyone realigned with the oath they took in Ch. 10.

- Once again, Nehemiah sees an issue, addresses the issue head on, and puts a plan in motion to minimize the chance of repeating the same disobedience.

"REMEMBER ME, MY GOD, WITH FAVOR."

At the end of it all, Nehemiah is confident he has done all he could to make the people of God safe, secure, pure, worshipful, and obedient.

- He is painfully aware of their inability to fulfill the promise made in 10:39 to, "not neglect the house of God," so he prays for God's gracious favor.

THE LAW DOES NOT SAVE

The law should reveal our inability to uphold the standard set in it and reveal the necessity of a savior from the penalty of breaking it.

- The law, rules, vows, promises, and covenants are powerless to stop sin. **Only the unmerited favor of God, alive and active in our lives, can give us the power to overcome sin!**

IT IS ABOUT OBEDIENCE

- Hearing the law brings a call to obedience.
- If we are made aware that we are doing things contrary to God's will, **do we take steps to ensure that no further lapses or abuses occur?**
- **If we are obedient to what God tells us, we are not responsible for the outcome.** (1Cor. 3:6-9)

BREAK THE CYCLE

- **Do we realize that we set the tone in our spheres of influence?**
- **Are we protecting ourselves from foreign (ungodly) influence?**
- **Are we keeping a close watch over our heart, actions, and habits?**
- **Do we know that Christ is the only hope we have, to break the cycle of sin?**