

## NEHEMIAH – WEEK 8 – REBUILDING THE WALLS

### CHAPTER 12

The wall has been rebuilt, the people have moved back into Jerusalem, and back to their homes. The Law of the Lord has been reinstated, and Nehemiah is the governor of Jerusalem. Chapter 12 can be divided into two main parts. The first part of the chapter lists the Priests and Levites and the second part of the chapter describes the dedication of the wall.

Read Nehemiah 12: 1-25

*According to verse 8, who was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving?*

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The Levitical duties included the temple singers and musicians, as well as those who take care of the temple. They were not priests, but they were servants of God, and they were taken care of by the tithes of the people. These Levites were in charge of the songs of thanksgiving for the dedication of the wall. Thanksgiving is great when it is spontaneous, but it also a beautiful thing when we take time to intentionally give thanks to God.

*According to verse 22, who was the King of Persia when these names were recorded?*

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Darius was one of the kings that Daniel served in Babylon, he was the one who sent him to the Lion's den. These records were able to be validated from Babylon.

*According to verse 24, who originated "responsive" praise and worship?*

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When David and Solomon were the kings of Israel, it was a very good time for the Israelites. They were safe, prosperous, and their kings were serving God, for the most part. It was their golden age. Davidic worship was considered the standard of worship, and still influences our worship today. David and the chief musician Asaph wrote many of the Psalms that were known by generations of Israelites. It is likely that the Psalms would have been some of the things passed down in the generations because they were songs. These forms of responsive worship is where our present day "liturgical" worship, and congregational response comes from.

Notice that the Israelites did not try to institute a "new" form of worship with their "new" wall. The entire book of Nehemiah is about returning to God's standard and his ways. A return to His word and what is right. They needed to return to Davidic worship as well. When we find ourselves off-track spiritually, and our wall is beginning to fall apart again, we need to return to

the Lord. I have heard it said that when you find yourself in a mess, return to the last right decision you made in that situation, and start again from that point. Then you make the next right choice, one step at a time, and you will have a different, better outcome.

Verse 25 discusses the gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms that were at the gates. We have talked about gates at length, but here is another dimension of our gates. Not only are there the gatekeepers that guard the gates themselves, but the storehouses as well. As gatekeepers we are to be mindful of what comes into and out of our lives and minds, but we also must be mindful of what gets stored there! Our memories are powerful things, and there are certain things that happen to us that are very forcefully imprinted on our minds. We don't have much control over traumatic experiences that happen to us. But when we are taking our thoughts captive, we can also re-frame situations so they can be stored in our minds in a beneficial way. Here is an example:

***Jane was really falling for Tim, he was perfect for her. She believed he was the one and felt that she had received confirmation from God that this was true. She was seeking the Lord for His plan, and asked him to close the door with Tim if he wasn't "the one", although she never considered that as a real possibility. Even though Tim talked about them being "friends" he also talked about their future, and led her to believe that he felt the same way for her. As they were talking one afternoon, she brought up a "when we are married scenario". He freaked out, and told her in no uncertain terms that he only thought of her as a friend, and was actually falling for someone else. Jane was incredibly hurt, angry and humiliated. She felt foolish, and worthless. She could not let him go, and questioned everything. She constantly played what-if scenarios in her mind. She fell into a 6 month depression, and still struggles with rejection today...years later.***

I would suggest that Jane cannot help being hurt in this situation, but she did not have to fall into a depression, or struggle with rejection today, she could have learned to re-frame her situation early on. I do not minimize the hurts that we suffer, but sometimes they don't have to hurt as bad, or as long.

Since Jane had asked God to reveal his will in the situation, she should have been prepared for this outcome as a possibility. When she started to feel foolish and worthless, it was time to "capture". She is a child of God, favored, and protected. She should pray and speak those things that God has said about her. He will never leave her, he loves her, he revealed himself to her, etc. Next is to "re-frame". After a suitable period of anger, she could re-frame this into something like this. "This really hurts, and I feel foolish and angry, but I am thankful that God loves me so much that he would not let me continue in a fruitless relationship. I am thankful that before I wasted any more time with Tim, he released me, so I am free to walk in God's will and not my own."

*Personal question: Are there any situations that you need to re-frame?*

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The memory in our storehouse then becomes a positive educational experience rather than a negative, destructive thought process. There are some circumstances that cannot be reframed, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse that has been on-going creates a pattern in our brains. This requires more than reframing, because it affects so many areas of the victim's life. I recommend counseling with a licensed counselor who specializes in these areas to help you.

### **Dedication of the Wall**

Read Nehemiah 12:27-30

The dedication of the wall was a big deal. Everyone came to town for the dedication. There were special choirs, musicians, singers. The Priests and Levites were required to perform the purification rituals for this important day.

1. They purified themselves first, before they did anything else. We need to make sure that we dedicate ourselves to the Lord first.
2. They then purified the people. We need to dedicate those that we have responsibility for to the Lord, next.
3. They then purified the gates. We then need to dedicate our gates. Purify what we let in and out of our gates (this includes our mouths)
4. Lastly, they purified the wall. We dedicate the wall last, giving it to the Lord and surrendering to Him completely.

When we dedicate something to the Lord, it is intentional and significant. We should celebrate the milestones of our faith. Let's read about the dedication of the wall.

Read 12:31-43

In our culture today, we are very informal. We have our ceremonies, but they are generally low-key, and more casual than some other countries that are older than America. In Europe, there is still a lot of ceremony. Think about the difference between Chelsea Clinton's wedding, and the wedding of Prince William. Or the difference between our Presidential Inauguration and a Coronation. The more ceremony there is, the more serious the occasion. The dedication of the wall was a formal, serious, joyous occasion with much significance. When we dedicate ourselves to the Lord, it is not a small thing we do, it is one of the most important moment of our lives, and it should not be taken lightly.

*Are there any areas of your life that need to be dedicated or rededicated to the Lord?*

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Read Nehemiah 12:44-47

After the dedication comes the reorganization. Plans to maintain the new life within the wall had to be made. Practicalities of storerooms and salaries of Levites had to be decided. All of these were handled biblically according to the Law. Of course, our decisions and lives need to be governed by God's Word.

## CHAPTER 13

### Nehemiah's Final Reforms

It would be nice if we could have stopped in chapter 12 and the Israelites all followed God for the rest of their lives and lived happily ever after....instead Nehemiah ends on a sobering note, that reminds us to remain diligent.

Read Nehemiah 13:1-3

*Why should all foreigners be excluded from Israel?*

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So far, so good...they did what God told them to. Let's read on...

**<sup>4</sup> Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, <sup>5</sup> and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests. <sup>6</sup> But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission <sup>7</sup> and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. <sup>8</sup> I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. <sup>9</sup> I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.**

What??? Tobiah is living on the temple grounds? Really? See what happens when Nehemiah leaves? This would be a prime example of going back to the last right thing. He threw Tobiah out and cleansed the room. I don't think it is wise to think that we would never do something so awful. Even Peter denied Christ, after Jesus told him he would!

Unfortunately, this was only one of many things that the Israelites had allowed into their walls. Let's continue.

Read Nehemiah 13:10-14

*What had the Israelites allowed to happen?*

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This was one of the things that they had sealed in the covenant with the Lord.

Read Nehemiah 13:15-22

*What were the Israelites allowing in this portion of scripture?*

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*How did Nehemiah view this?*

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Here are some key words from Nehemiah regarding what the Israelites had done. Wicked, wrath, desecrating the Sabbath. Notice that the gatekeepers were not doing their job! They should have been closing the gates on the Sabbath! The merchants were waiting outside the gates and sleeping, waiting for them to open after Nehemiah had them close them. The gates were not functioning, the storehouses were empty, the enemy was sleeping in the temple...what else could go wrong? Let's see...

Read Nehemiah 13:23-27

*What were the Israelites doing in this passage of scripture?*

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*How did Nehemiah respond?*

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Not only had the Israelites intermarried again, but half their children did not even speak Hebrew! This is not an argument for language inclusion, this is a commentary on the worldliness of their children. As a side note, do our children speak the language of the culture? Or do they speak the language of the Lord?

Nehemiah flipped out! Sometimes things have to be dealt with head-on, with no mercy. There are things in our lives that need to be torn out, put to death, killed. There is no other way.

Verse 28 adds another thing to the list of Israel's transgressions...

**<sup>28</sup> One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. And I drove him away from me.**

One of the enemies was living in the temple, and the other one had marital ties to the priesthood of Israel...

**<sup>29</sup> Remember them, my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites. <sup>30</sup> So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. <sup>31</sup> I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me with favor, my God.**

I pray that each of us would be remembered with God's favor! Nehemiah did great things, and he completed an impossible task. He was a man of prayer, phenomenal leader, and wise man. He gave the Israelites all the training, tools and structure to be successful in their wall-building. But it is ultimately up to each one to apply outward help to inward issues for true change. Nehemiah's reforms allowed for many people to repent, have a genuine change of heart and return to the Lord. But others never made a true change, it was surface, or outer change. When he left, they were unable to maintain their wall and gates themselves. That is our true test...the Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. I encourage you to remain diligent, stay in the Word and evaluate the state of your wall often. The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love...he has great plans for you, and He loves you lavishly! Be blessed!