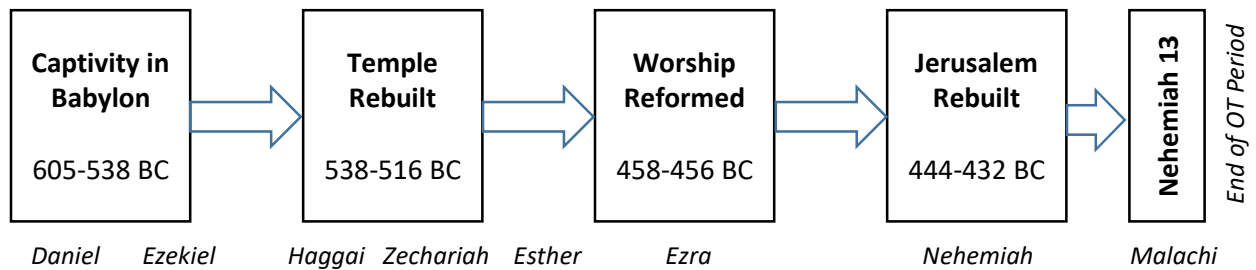


Nehemiah 13

LONGING FOR A SAVIOR

Ezra-Nehemiah ends tragically. The returned exiles demonstrate a marked propensity toward the same sins that caused the exile. Ezra and Nehemiah lead the people in a series of short-lived commitments to get right with God. But the people quickly and repeatedly fall into identical rebellions. They are addicted to particular kinds of covenant-breaking. ...The Ezra-Nehemiah narrative shows readers the constant need to repent and turn to God's will, but not to trust in temporary reforms. The real hope is the same as it has always been, to wait upon God to fulfill His Word even in the face of persistent sin.

—Gary E. Schnittjer, *The Bad Ending of Ezra-Nehemiah*



For the most part, Nehemiah is an amazing success story. Nehemiah prays. God answers, turning the heart and changing the mind of a pagan king, Artaxerxes, to rebuild Jerusalem. The people rally together, despite constant opposition, and rebuild the wall in 52 days. Revival breaks out and the people make a covenant together to follow the Lord wholeheartedly.

1. We will not intermarry with pagans (10:30).
2. We will honor the Sabbath day & Sabbath year (10:31)
3. We will give our tithes and offerings in order to support the Levites and the house of God (10:32-39).

After governing the people for twelve years (444-432 BC), Nehemiah returns to his post in the Persian capital. However, shortly thereafter, perhaps upon hearing of the prophecies of Malachi (~430 BC), Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem.

“On that day” (13:1) does not refer back to the rededication of the wall in chapter 12 but rather to the time of Nehemiah’s return to Jerusalem (cf. 13:6). At his return, the people were reminded of the Word of God and again separated themselves from the influence of the pagan cultures around them. The memoirs of Nehemiah from this time explain why (13:4-31).

Indeed the safest road to hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

—C.S. Lewis

Israel was commanded to love foreigners (Ex. 22:21; Deut. 10:17-19) but they were not to compromise their faith and follow pagan ways (Ex. 34:10-17). The prohibition against Ammonites and Moabites (Deut. 23:3-6) did not prohibit a Moabite like Ruth or a Canaanite like Rahab from becoming part of Israel.

The Ammonites worshiped the god Molech by sacrificing children in the fire. Extensive archaeological evidence of the burning of thousands of young children has come to light....The Moabites worshiped Chemosh to whom they also sacrificed their children.

—Edwin Yamauchi

Nehemiah encounters four big problems upon his return:

1. _____ in the Temple (13:4-9; cf. 2:19; 4:3; 6:12).
2. _____ in the Fields (13:10-14; cf. Mal. 3:7-12).
3. _____ on the Sabbath (13:15-22).
4. _____ in the Family (13:23-31; cf. Mal. 2:10-16).

Each of these problems was serious because they not only broke their own covenant to serve the Lord (10:28-39) but they also exhibited the same moral compromise that led to Israel's downfall in the past (cf. Jer. 17:19-27; 2 Chron. 36:14-21; 1 Kings 11:1-2).

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM NEHEMIAH 13?

One thing we immediately learn is that revivals and reforms don't tend to last long. Like the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, without the constant input of energy, all things revert back toward disorder.

- **Sin is _____.**

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough? (1 Corinthians 5:6)

If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it. (Genesis 4:7b)

- **Our battle against sin must be _____.**

Now if your right eye is causing you to sin, tear it out and throw it away from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. (Matthew 5:29)

- **Our need for a Savior is _____.**

*I am the way, the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).*

If on his first visit, he had been a whirlwind, on his second he was all fire and earthquake to a city that had settled down in his absence to a comfortable compromise with the gentile world.
—Derek Kidner

Malachi speaks clearly to the issues going on in Jerusalem during this time. They had grown apathetic toward worship, bringing their leftovers to God (1:6-14). The priests were corrupt (2:1-2). And many men were divorcing their wives to marry pagan foreign women (2:10-16).

Longtime habits are literally entrenched at the neural level, so they are powerful determinants of behavior. —Elliot Berkman

Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

*According to the Bible, sin is doing without God. Sin is not wrong doing; it is wrong **being**, deliberate and emphatic independence from God. That may sound remote and far away from us, but in individual experience it is best put in the terms of "my claim to my right to myself."*
—Oswald Chambers

Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you. —John Owen (1616-83)

The last word of the Old Testament is 'curse' (Mal. 4:6), and it is meaningful that the opening sermon of our Lord's ministry commences with the word 'Blessed.' —Charles Spurgeon