

NOON BIBLE STUDY: NEHEMIAH 13

SUMMARY

AS WE COME TO A CLOSE IN OUR STUDY OF NEHEMIAH, WE WILL DEAL WITH SOME HOUSEKEEPING ITEMS. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF THINGS WHICH THE NATION STILL NEEDS TO SORT OUT IN THE DESIRE TO BE COVENANT-KEEPERS. UNFORTUNATELY, SOME OF THE PEOPLE ARE COMMITTING THE SINS THAT HAD BEEN SPECIFICALLY HIGHLIGHTED IN THE COVENANT. NEHEMIAH, THE MAN WE HAVE COME TO KNOW AS A GREAT LEADER, WILL HAVE HIS LEADERSHIP SKILLS TESTED ONCE MORE.

NEHEMIAH 13:1-3 - NO AMMONITE OR MOABITE ALLOWED!

DURING ONE OF THE LAW READING SESSIONS, THE NATION LEARNS ABOUT THE SPECIFIC COMMAND FORBIDDING ANY AMMONITE OR MOABITE FROM THE COMMUNITY. THIS PORTION WAS LIKELY FROM DEUTERONOMY 23:3-6:

DEUTERONOMY 23:3-6 - "NO AMMONITE OR MOABITE SHALL ENTER THE ASSEMBLY OF THE LORD; NONE OF THEIR DESCENDANTS, EVEN TO THE TENTH GENERATION, SHALL EVER ENTER THE ASSEMBLY OF THE LORD, 4 BECAUSE THEY DID NOT MEET YOU WITH FOOD AND WATER ON THE WAY WHEN YOU CAME OUT OF EGYPT, AND BECAUSE THEY HIRED AGAINST YOU BALAAM THE SON OF BEOR FROM PETHOR OF MESOPOTAMIA, TO CURSE YOU. 5 "NEVERTHELESS, THE LORD YOUR GOD WAS NOT WILLING TO LISTEN TO BALAAM, BUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TURNED THE CURSE INTO A BLESSING FOR YOU BECAUSE THE LORD YOUR GOD LOVES YOU. 6 "YOU SHALL NEVER SEEK THEIR PEACE OR THEIR PROSPERITY ALL YOUR DAYS.

THIS COMMAND DATES BACK TO WHEN THE ISRAELITES WERE TRAVELING TOWARDS THE PROMISED LAND AND WERE NOT TREATED WELL BY MOAB. HERE IS A SHORT REMINDER OF HOW THINGS WENT:

NUMBERS 22:1-8 - THEN THE SONS OF ISRAEL JOURNEYED, AND CAMPED IN THE PLAINS OF MOAB BEYOND THE JORDAN OPPOSITE JERICHO. 2 NOW BALAK THE SON OF ZIPPOR SAW ALL THAT ISRAEL HAD DONE TO THE AMORITES. 3 SO MOAB WAS IN GREAT FEAR BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE, FOR THEY WERE NUMEROUS; AND MOAB WAS IN DREAD OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL. 4 MOAB SAID TO THE ELDERS OF MIDIAN, "NOW THIS HORDE WILL LICK UP ALL THAT IS AROUND US, AS THE OX LICKS UP THE GRASS OF THE FIELD." AND BALAK THE SON OF ZIPPOR WAS KING OF MOAB AT THAT TIME. 5 SO HE SENT MESSENGERS TO BALAAM THE SON OF BEOR, AT PETHOR, WHICH IS NEAR THE RIVER, IN THE LAND OF THE SONS OF HIS PEOPLE, TO CALL HIM, SAYING, "BEHOLD, A PEOPLE CAME OUT OF EGYPT; BEHOLD, THEY COVER THE SURFACE OF THE LAND, AND THEY ARE LIVING OPPOSITE ME. 6 "NOW, THEREFORE, PLEASE COME, CURSE THIS PEOPLE FOR ME SINCE THEY ARE TOO MIGHTY FOR ME; PERHAPS I MAY BE ABLE TO DEFEAT THEM AND DRIVE THEM OUT OF THE LAND. FOR I KNOW THAT HE WHOM YOU BLESS IS BLESSED, AND HE WHOM YOU CURSE IS CURSED." 7 SO THE ELDERS OF MOAB AND THE ELDERS OF MIDIAN DEPARTED WITH THE FEES FOR DIVINATION IN THEIR HAND; AND THEY CAME TO BALAAM AND REPEATED BALAK'S WORDS TO HIM. 8 HE SAID TO THEM, "SPEND THE NIGHT HERE, AND I WILL BRING WORD BACK TO YOU AS THE LORD MAY SPEAK TO ME." AND THE LEADERS OF MOAB STAYED WITH BALAAM

LATER IN THE STORY, BALAAM, WHO WAS UNSUCCESSFUL IN HIS CURSING OF ISRAEL, ENCOURAGED SOME OF THE WOMEN OF MOAB TO SEDUCE THE MEN OF ISRAEL AND MANY ISRAELITES DIED AS A RESULT. NOW, IN THE CURRENT GENERATION, AFTER READING THESE

COMMANDS, THE PEOPLE RESPOND BY EXCLUDING THESE FOREIGNERS FROM THE ISRAEL (V. 3). THERE WAS NOT A GENERAL PROHIBITION OF ANY OTHER NATION COMING INTO THE COMMUNITY, FOR SOME WERE WELCOMED TO LEARN THE WAYS OF THE LORD.

EXODUS 22:21-22 - "YOU SHALL NOT WRONG A STRANGER OR OPPRESS HIM, FOR YOU WERE STRANGERS IN THE LAND OF EGYPT. 22 "YOU SHALL NOT AFFLICT ANY WIDOW OR ORPHAN.

BUT INSTEAD THIS WAS A SPECIFIC COMMAND AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE EVIL MOAB & AMMON DID TOWARDS GOD'S PEOPLE.

NEHEMIAH 13:4-9 - ELIASHIB'S SIN

DURING A PERIOD OF TIME WHERE NEHEMIAH WAS AWAY FROM JERUSALEM, ELIASHIB, ONE OF THE PRIESTS SECRETLY SUPPORTED TOBIAH, ONE OF THE ENEMIES OF THE NATION FROM OUR EARLY CHAPTERS OF NEHEMIAH. WHILE NEHEMIAH IS AWAY, TOBIAH NOT ONLY MOVES INTO JERUSALEM, BUT HE MOVES INTO ONE OF THE STORAGE ROOMS IN THE TEMPLE ITSELF!! NOT ONLY WAS HIS SUPPORT TROUBLING BECAUSE HE WAS AN ENEMY, BUT TOBIAH WAS AN AMMONITE! (NEH 2:10 & 19: 4:3 & 7)!!

"AFTER 12 YEARS IN JERUSALEM, NEHEMIAH LEFT JERUSALEM FOR THE PERSIAN COURT. HIS LEAVE OF ABSENCE HAD EXPIRED. HE HAD TO ASK THE KING PERMISSION TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM, BECAUSE HE OBVIOUSLY FELT THAT HIS MISSION TO REFORM HIS PEOPLE HAD NOT YET BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. HOW TRUE THIS WAS IS ILLUSTRATED BY THE CASE OF THE PRIEST ELIASHIB. DURING NEHEMIAH'S ABSENCE, IN HIS CAPACITY AS OVERSEER OF THE CHAMBERS OF THE TEMPLE, ELIASHIB GRANTED A SPACIOUS CHAMBER TO TOBIAH, THE AMMONITE...IN NEHEMIAH'S ABSENCE CERTAIN PROMINENT JEWISH LEADERS WERE BRINGING THEIR PURE RELIGION INTO DANGER...FOR NEHEMIAH, TOBIAH'S PRESENCE AS A HEATHEN,...MEANT CONTAMINATION OF EVERYTHING WHICH WAS HOLY. A PERSON LIKE TOBIAH COULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE TEMPLE AREA.

WITH THIS INCIDENT NEHEMIAH SET THE EXAMPLE OF HIS NEW APPROACH TO AN UNNECESSARILY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH FOREIGNERS. THE PURITY OF RELIGION HAD TO BE MAINTAINED AT ANY COST. THIS WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IF THE SMALL COMMUNITY, BESET AS IT WAS WITH THE ALL THE TEMPTATIONS OF PAGANISM, WAS TO BE PREVENTED FROM REVERTING TO A COMPROMISE WITH THE NEIGHBORING NATIONS AND BRINGING THEIR ANCESTRAL RELIGION INTO DANGER." ("THE NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE BOOKS OF EZRA & NEHEMIAH", F. CHARLES FENSHAM, PGS 260-261)

NEHEMIAH 13:10-14 - LACK OF SUPPORT FOR LEVITES

ALSO, FALLING APART DURING NEHEMIAH'S ABSENCE IS THE NATION'S SUPPORT OF THE LEVITES AND TEMPLE WORKERS. THE LEVITES WERE NOT BEING SUPPORTED AND AS A RESULT LEFT THE TEMPLE SERVICE "TO (WORK IN) THEIR OWN FIELDS" (V. 10). NEHEMIAH REESTABLISHES THIS SUPPORT AND REORGANIZED THE LEVITES.

NEHEMIAH 13:15-22 - PROFANING THE SABBATH

NEHEMIAH TRAVELS OUTSIDE OF JERUSALEM AND LEARNS THAT JEWS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE ARE NOT HONORING/PRACTICING THE SABBATH. THERE WERE ALSO SOME FOREIGN MERCHANTS (FROM TYRE) SELLING TO THE PEOPLE ON THE SABBATH. NEHEMIAH CONFRONTS THE LEADERS AND REMINDS THEM THAT SUCH BEHAVIOR WAS PART OF THE CAUSE FOR THEIR FOREFATHERS TO BE

PUNISHED. HE ORDERS THE GATES OF JERUSALEM TO BE SHUT EACH SABBATH. AS A RESULT, THE PEOPLE ARE TO STOP WORKING ON THE SABBATH, AND THE MERCHANTS SHOULD STOP SELLING TO (TEMPTING) THE PEOPLE ON THE SABBATH.

IN FACT, NEHEMIAH EVEN REBUKES AND WARNS THE MERCHANTS WHO CAMPED OUT ON THE SABBATH OUTSIDE OF THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM (WHO WERE EITHER SETTING UP TO SELL ILLEGALLY OR GETTING FIRST JUMP ON POST-SABBATH SALES). WHAT'S SO SHOCKING ABOUT THIS TO US (AND CERTAINLY NEHEMIAH) WAS NOT ONLY WERE THESE THINGS ALREADY COMMANDED, BUT THEY WERE THE SINS OF THEIR FATHERS!

NEHEMIAH 13:18A (NLT) - "WASN'T IT JUST THIS SORT OF THING THAT YOUR ANCESTORS DID THAT CAUSED OUR GOD TO BRING ALL THIS TROUBLE UPON US AND OUR CITY?"

NEHEMIAH 13:23-31 - INTERMARRYING CONDEMNED

FINALLY WE LEARN THAT THE PEOPLE HAD RESUMED MARRYING WIVES FROM OTHER NATIONS (SPECIFICALLY ASHDOD, AMMON & MOAB). THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN FORBIDDEN AND WAS ADDRESSED DURING EZRA'S TIME (EZRA 9-10) AND PREVIOUSLY BY NEHEMIAH AS WELL (NEH 6:18, 10:30). NEVERTHELESS, THE PEOPLE DID IT AGAIN. AND FROM THE DETAILS OF THE STORY, IT WAS NOT AN OVERNIGHT SENSATION OR AN INSTANCE WHERE ONE OR TWO JEWS WENT OUT ON A DATE WITH A MOABITESS. THE CHILDREN OF THESE COUPLES HAD GROWN UP SO MUCH THAT THE TALK ALREADY, BUT THEY DON'T SPEAK IN THE LANGUAGE OF JUDAH!

AND AS A RESULT WE SEE THE FIERCEST RESPONSE FROM NEHEMIAH IN OUR TEXT.

NEHEMIAH 13:25 (NLT) - SO I CONFRONTED THEM AND CALLED DOWN CURSES ON THEM. I BEAT SOME OF THEM AND PULLED OUT THEIR HAIR. I MADE THEM SWEAR IN THE NAME OF GOD THAT THEY WOULD NOT LET THEIR CHILDREN INTERMARRY WITH THE PAGAN PEOPLE OF THE LAND.

HE REMINDS THEM (V. 26-27) THAT THIS PARTICULAR SIN HAS TAKEN OUT SOME OF THE GREATEST MEN OF GOD IN HISTORY AND WAS NOT A SMALL OR LIGHT MATTER.

IN FACT THEY SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THAT ALL OF THE SINS MENTIONED IN NEHEMIAH 13 (WELCOMING MOABITES AND AMMONITES, NOT SUPPORTING THE LEVITES, PROFANING THE SABBATH AND INTER-MARRYING) WERE ALL THINGS SPECIFICALLY COMMANDED AGAINST IN THE LAW! THE LAW THAT THE NATION HAD JUST READ ALOUD AND AGREED TO KEEP! NOT ONLY WERE THESE THINGS SPECIALLY RECORDED IN THE LAW, THESE THINGS WERE SPECIFICALLY NOTED IN THEIR SIGNED COVENANTAL DOCUMENT (NEHEMIAH 10:28-39). YET WHEN NEHEMIAH RETURNS BRIEFLY TO BABYLON/PERSIA, THESE THINGS COME UNDONE.

HOW FRUSTRATING THIS MUST HAVE BEEN FOR NEHEMIAH! A FINAL POINT ON HIS LEADERSHIP QUALITIES IS MADE HERE - LEADERS MUST NOT JUST INSTRUCT AND MODEL CORRECT BEHAVIOR, BUT THEY MUST ALSO AT TIMES REPROVE WRONG BEHAVIOR. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOOLISH FOR NEHEMIAH TO HEAR OF THESE PROBLEMS AND SINS AND TURN A BLIND EYE TO THEM. THAT QUALITY HAS BEEN MODELED BY EVIL RULERS IN OUR STORY SINCE SAMUEL & KINGS!

NEHEMIAH RETURNS AND REPROVES, REBUKES, REPRIMANDS AND SERVES OUT CONSEQUENCES FOR THESE VARIOUS SINS. AND THE WAY THE TEXTS END, ONE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT THE PEOPLE TURNED BACK TO THE LORD WITH THEIR WHOLE HEARTS.

A FEW THINGS WE CAN NOTE ABOUT THIS. THESE REBUKES WERE BASED ON SPECIFIC SINS COMMITTED THAT COULD BE VERIFIED BY SCRIPTURE. THESE ISSUES WEREN'T JUST THINGS THAT RUBBED NEHEMIAH THE WRONG WAY OR WERE AGAINST HIS PERSONAL PREFERENCES - THEY WERE CLEARLY SINS BECAUSE GOD SAID THEY WERE SINS. SECONDLY, THESE SINS WERE ALL SINS THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN KNOWN BY THE PEOPLE INVOLVED. THE LAW HAD BEEN READ, THE WORDS HAD BEEN HEARD AND THE PEOPLE HAD AGREED. AND THEN TO GO AGAINST THOSE WORDS IS A CLEAR VIOLATION OF GOD'S WORD. THE PEOPLE WERE NOT IGNORANT, AND THAT IS PART OF WHAT NEEDED TO BE CONFRONTED. NEHEMIAH WOULD HAVE BEEN CRUEL TO REBUKE PEOPLE THAT HAD NO CLUE WHAT GOD WANTED. THAT'S NOT WHAT HAPPENED HERE.

REMEMBER, THIS ALL HAPPENED WHEN NEHEMIAH HAD LEFT TOWN. A GOOD TAKEAWAY FOR ALL OF US IS TO CONSIDER WHAT WE DO AND HOW WE ACT WHEN OUR NEHEMIAH'S AREN'T AROUND. AS SOON AS NEHEMIAH LEFT, THE ENEMY WAS WELCOMED INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD (TOBIAH), THE PEOPLE STOPPED GIVING, THE PEOPLE STARTED ENTERTAINING THEMSELVES WITH EVIL. DO WE DO WHAT WE DO TO PLEASE HUMANS OR GOD? A GOOD TEST OF THAT IS WHAT WE DO WHEN NO ONE, OR MORE SPECIFICALLY, SPIRITUAL PEOPLE/LEADERS AREN'T AROUND.

WHAT WOULD YOU WATCH ON TV IF YOU PASTOR COME OVER TO WATCH TV WITH YOU? WOULD IT BE THE SAME THING YOU WATCH WHEN HE IS NOT THERE? HOW DO YOU SPEAK TO YOUR SPOUSE, CHILDREN OR FRIENDS WHEN YOU ARE AT CHURCH? IS IT DIFFERENT THAN HOW YOU SPEAK TO THEM WHEN YOU ARE AT HOME? HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR MONEY WHEN NO ONE IS KEEPING AN ACCOUNT? HOW WOULD YOU SPEND IT IF AN ELDER IN THE CHURCH HAD ACCESS TO YOUR REGISTER? THESE ARE POINTED YET IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK. BECAUSE OUR ANSWER TO THEM TOUCHES AS THE ROOT OF HYPOCRISY IN OUR LIVES (OR LACK OF).

A PERSON OF INTEGRITY AND A FOLLOWER OF JESUS RECOGNIZES THAT THEY ARE CALLED TO "SAMENESS". AS IN, THEY ARE THE SAME PERSON IF AND WHEN EVERYONE IS WATCHING AS THEY ARE IF AND WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING.

IN THE CASE OF THE GENERATION OF NEHEMIAH 13, IT SEEMS THAT THEY WENT ALONG WITH THE PLAN WHILE NEHEMIAH WAS AROUND BUT WHEN HE WAS NOT THERE THEY DID WHATEVER THEY PLEASED. IT IS EASY TO LOOK AT THEIR FOOLISHNESS AS WE READ THEIR STORY IN A FEW VERSES, BUT DON'T OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT THEIR STORY JUST MIGHT BE YOUR STORY.

A "CHRISTIAN" IS A DESIGNATION OF WHO YOU ARE, NOT JUST WHAT YOU DO. AND IT DOES US WELL TO REMEMBER THAT THOUGH PASTOR, PARENT OR FRIEND MAY NOT SEE, "THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE IN EVERY PLACE, WATCHING THE EVIL AND THE GOOD (PROVERBS 15:3)."

REMEMBERING NEHEMIAH

THREE TIMES IN THIS CHAPTER WE HEAR NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER TO BE "REMEMBERED" BY GOD FOR HIS RIGHTEOUS ACTS. THIS IS NOT A DESIRE OF AN ARROGANT MAN, BUT A REQUEST FROM A HUMBLE HEART. NEHEMIAH APPEARS TO BE (IN CHAPTER 13 ANYWAY) A RARE COMMODITY IN JUDEA AT THIS TIME. A MAN COMMITTED TO RIGHTEOUSNESS AND OBEDIENCE. IT IS UNCLEAR HOW MUCH SUPPORT HE HAS IN THE COMMUNITY IF AS SOON AS HE LEAVES LEADING MEN IN THE NATION ARE CORRUPT. IT SOUNDS LIKE THIS PLEA TO BE "REMEMBERED" IS MORE IN LINE WITH THE CRY OF A MAN WHO IS NOT BEING ACKNOWLEDGED PRESENTLY AS DOING THE RIGHT THING, YET HE IS COMMITTED TO DO THE RIGHT THING NONETHELESS. AND SO HIS DESIRE IS FOR GOD TO SEE, THOUGH HIS PEERS ARE NOT.

AND WHAT DOES HE WANT TO BE REMEMBERED FOR IN THIS CHAPTER? IT WASN'T BECAUSE HE HELPED MOVED THE HEART AND HAND OF THE PERSIAN KING IN NEHEMIAH 1. WE READ NO MENTION OF HIS LEADERSHIP AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF THE JEWS IN THE EARLY CHAPTERS. THE AMAZING TASK OF REBUILDING THE WALL IS NOT CITED EITHER. INSTEAD WHAT IS MENTIONED IS RELATING TO HIS DEVOTION TO THE LORD

AND HIS TEMPLE. THAT'S WHAT NEHEMIAH WANTS TO BE REMEMBERED FOR. NOT HIS POLITICAL GAINS, HIS GOVERNMENTAL DECISIONS NOR HIS CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS - BUT HIS FAITH AND FIDELITY TO YAHWEH.

THAT SPEAKS TO THE HEART OF THIS GREAT MAN AND SERVANT OF THE LORD.

LET'S NOT FORGET THAT THIS IS A CRITICAL MOMENT FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD. FRESH FROM SEVENTY YEAR IN EXILE TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM AND A REBUILT TEMPLE FOLLOWED BY A REBUILT WALL AND CITY - THE NEHEMIAH GENERATION WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE AND SURVIVAL OF GOD'S PEOPLE. WILL THEY STAY FAITHFUL TO THE LORD AND CONTINUE ON AS A PEOPLE? WILL THEY TEACH THEIR CHILDREN THE WAYS AND WORDS OF GOD?

IT IS IN LARGE CREDIT TO NEHEMIAH'S LEADERSHIP OF THE PEOPLE AND MORE IMPORTANTLY HIS LOVE FOR THE LORD ENSURE THEIR SURVIVAL. NO LONGER A GREAT KINGDOM WITH A GREAT KING, THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL ARE SUBJECTS TO A WORLD EMPIRE. BUT NEHEMIAH TAUGHT THEM HOW AND FOUGHT FOR THEM TO BE DISTINCT. HIS GREATEST MOMENT MAY JUST HAVE BEEN WHEN HE REINTRODUCED THE NATION TO THE WORD OF GOD. THE WORD OF GOD WOULD OUTLIVE NEHEMIAH AND BE SURE THEIR CHILDREN AND CHILDREN'S CHILDREN. AND SO BECAUSE OF THIS, THEY WILL INDEED SURVIVE. NOT ALWAYS THRIVE, BUT SURVIVE.

YEARS WILL PASS AND THERE WILL BE A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE IN THE LAND WHO WILL HOLD ON TO THIS WORD. WE WON'T HEAR MUCH OF THEIR STORY IN SCRIPTURE, BUT HISTORY RECORDS THEM. THEY WILL CLING TO THEIR HOPE IN GOD AND WAIT FOR HIM TO FULFILL HIS PROMISES. YEARS WILL PASS ON AND NEW NATIONS WILL RISE, NEW THREATS WILL BE MADE, BUT AS LONG AS THERE WAS ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN, WHO HELD ON TO GOD'S WORD...THEY WOULD SURVIVE.

GOD WAS NOT ABSENT, THOUGH SILENT, FOR HE HAD ALREADY SPOKEN THROUGH HIS WORD. IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME. TIME PASSED AND THE WORD WHICH NEHEMIAH GAVE AGAIN TO GOD'S PEOPLE WAS KEPT. AND THAT'S HIS REAL LEGACY. BECAUSE NEHEMIAH TAUGHT THE PEOPLE GOD'S WORD, THEY KNEW WHAT TO WAIT FOR, WHAT TO LOOK FOR, WHAT TO LONG FOR. AND AT LAST, BECAUSE A FEW FAITHFUL HELD TO THIS WORD...IT WOULD FINALLY COME TO PASS.

THIS TIME THOUGH, GOD WOULD NOT JUST SEND THEM HIS WRITTEN OR SPOKEN WORD, HE WAS GOING TO SEND THE LIVING WORD - JESUS THE CHRIST.

WE STARTED EZRA JANUARY 25TH
NEHEMIAH APRIL 26TH

NOON BIBLE STUDY STARTED MARCH 12, 2015

ACTS → EPHESIANS → 1 & 2 SAMUEL → 1 & 2 KINGS → EZRA & NEHEMIAH

WHAT'S NEXT:

TAKE ONE WEEK OFF

JAMES?

GENESIS?