

## Nehemiah 12-13

One thing we've discovered as we've studied through the book of Nehemiah is that he apparently really had a love for lists. Because he's all the time making lists of people, who they were, or what they did, and ch 12 begins after that same manner. Now in all fairness this is one of those unfortunate interruptions in the ch break like we spoke on Sunday morning because this particular list began in vs 4 of ch 11 and it really doesn't end until vs 26 of ch 12.

But again it just goes to show us, and really remind us of the fact that even as a lot of these names don't really mean anything *to* us, or seem to have any real relevance *for* us, they mean a great deal to God and He chose to keep record of their works for His names sake. And the application that lies in there for you and me is that those things that *you* do in the name *of* the Lord, that you might bring glory *to* the Lord means a great deal to Him as well. And the bible is clear that He keeps a record of everything we do, and those things that we've done to be seen of man will burn when tested as by fire, they'll be like wood, hay and straw, they'll go up in smoke. But those things that we've done motivated by the love of God, for the simple reason that we might bring glory to God, or somehow honor God, when those things pass through the fire, they'll be *refined*...gold, silver, precious stones. So though *I* may never see it, or though *no one* may know your name, God knows your name, and He sees your good works, and He'll reward you accordingly.

Well, Ch 12 begins with a list of the names of the priests and the Levites who came up initially with Zerubbabel which takes you up to around vs 10, where you see the name of Joiakim mentioned who begot Eliashib who begot Joiada, now in vs 11 we read that Joiada begot Jonathon, and Jonathon begot Jaddua.

For those of you who are in to this sort of thing many believe that this particular Jaddua was the high priest during the time of Alexander the Great, whether or not that's so seems to be unknown for certain, but that's the general consensus.

Vs 12 backs us back up just a bit to the days of Joiakim where we begin to read of the priests, and the heads of the fathers houses in *his* day, vs 24 tells us a bit of their responsibilities with respect to worship that took place in accordance with the command of David the man of God.

Vs26

Now you remember that when the walls were complete, the Divine timing was perfect (as it always is) and they finished the walls in the 7<sup>th</sup> month, so they had a monumental *celebration*, they celebrated the feast of trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and The Feast of Tabernacles one after the other.

They just had radical celebration, then they drew up a contract (if you will) a covenant whereby they committed to serve the Lord and bring honor *to* the Lord in the practical on goings of their lives. They were going to honor the Word of God in the marriages, in their moneymaking, and in their support of the ministry.

From there (having covenanted to tithe their resources) they literally tithed themselves, they cast lots and 1 out of 10 people (families if it applied) (outside of the leaders all of whom would live there) that lived in the nation opted to move into the capital city of Jerusalem. That's where we left off, and now that there are people with in the walls, they've had their celebration, now Nehemiah holds a service of *dedication* whereby the walls that have been built are dedicated to the Lord. The people have dedicated themselves, now the walls.

And the order is correct because it doesn't do much good to have dedicated walls with out a dedicated or consecrated people with in them. So we read in vs 27.

Vs27-29

So this dedication ceremony was to be a massive occasion, they rounded up all the Levites from all over the region to lead them in the celebration of this dedication with gladness. And notice that gladness was demonstrated in 2 primary ways, with thanksgivings and singing. We read in the 100<sup>th</sup> Ps, "*Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.*" Ps 100:2. And again, "*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.*" Ps 100:4 The scripture exhorts us over and over again to be thankful, in everything give thanks for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus, for everything God is *to* you, for all that He's done on behalf *of* you in the person of His Son, be thankful. And we're to come before His presence with singing, we'll see in just a minute that it wasn't the *voices* of Jerusalem that people were hearing so much as it was the *joy* of Jerusalem. Maybe your voice isn't so great, hey our worship of God takes place in spirit and truth, He's tuned in to the praises of your heart as you offer up the fruit of your lips, singing and giving thanks to the Lord.

And notice that the worship leaders (the Levites) were accompanied with instruments, now I know that there are certain groups of people that think that to worship the Lord with the accompaniment of instruments is sacrilege and defiles that sacred aspect of it. And we respect their right to be wrong, but the bible encourages, exhorts and even commands it. Here they sang accompanied by cymbals, stringed instruments and harps. This isn't one of those little "angel" looking harps, it was really the ancient form of the guitar, the lyre. So this service was to be large, and it was to be loud.

And these Levites whom they called upon to lead them, since they were to lead them in praise, obviously they had to be descent singers, but more importantly they had to be people of worship themselves. Because there's a huge difference in being a great singer, and being a great worship leader, our worship should be skillful, it *should be* excellent, nothing wrong with that, but it's not *entertainment*.

And though it may produce a warm fuzzy feeling for you at times, that's not the ultimate aim of our worship, it's not centered on us and how it makes us feel. It's to be centered on Christ and bringing honor and glory to Him, and that's the place to which we need led, to that place whereby we forget about ourselves and magnify *the Lord* and worship Him.

Vs30

Notice again the order here, the priests and Levites purified themselves *first*, it begins with us 1<sup>st</sup>, why? Because how can you or I effectively lead people in the worship, or the ways of God unless I'm personally walking in purity *before* God? So before God can effectively use you, you've got to be a clean vessel through which He can flow, and of course He cleanses us from the inside out, and He does that namely/initially as by the blood of Jesus Christ But then there's that ongoing cleansing that takes place on a daily basis whereby we're washed in the water of His Word. We say it over and over again, it's so important that we cultivate a relationship with God that's centered on His Word, seeking Him *through* His Word, hungry for His Word. There's cleansing power in the Word of God, of course the bible tells us, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" 1 John 1:9

Once they'd purified themselves, they were able to minister adequately to the people, and the same thing applies there, only a pure people can truly worship the Lord. Perhaps you've been familiar in times past with someone whom you *know* isn't living a pure life, but they come to church, raise their hands, seem to be so spiritual in their worship.

Don't be deceived, their worship maybe "soulful" emotional, but its not *spiritual*, because not only do we worship God in spirit, but what's the other prerequisite? "Truth" and With out purity its impossible to worship God in truth. "*Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart,*" Ps 24:3-4 Or to understand that another way it's impossible to approach God, or truly worship God apart from being clean/pure.

Then they purified the gates and the wall, which means they consecrated their surroundings over to the Lord as well. And I think we do well to glean something from that, and that is this, purified surroundings help us to maintain a purified walk. If you're all the time surrounding by defiled surroundings, that's going to begin to rub off on you. And I just wonder how many of our homes, or offices could use a good purification/cleansing. Keep your surroundings in check, and they'll help keep you in check.

Vs31-43

So you get the picture here right? Nehemiah appointed 2 different groups of worship leaders, 1 led by Ezra, the other followed behind by Nehemiah and they made their way upon the wall, 1 group went to the right, the other group went to the left. And we note that the singers sang *loudly, unashamedly*, they were lifting up their voices in praise and thanksgiving to God. And it's always good to be in the company of a people unashamed to openly worship the Lord.

They sing out, not worried that someone might look funny at them, or that they might look funny to someone else, because none of those things are the focus. The fear of man brings a snare, inhibits your worship, they sang out, over the instruments. Cymbals can be pretty loud, they were singing out. And as they went around the city they met up together at the temple and the offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, notice (Vs 42,) "...for God had made them rejoice with great joy;" Have you ever been so overwhelmed at the goodness and greatness of God that you just couldn't help but burst out in praise, just rejoicing with great joy over who He is? We read in Ps 28, "*The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, And with my song I will praise Him.*" Ps 28:7

And here the faithfulness of God demonstrated in the rebuilding of the wall, remember Tobiah had said earlier as they were building that even if a fox were to go up on it that it would breakdown. But now here they are with these 2 massive groups of people, instruments and the whole bit marching *on* the wall, praising God in their dedication *of* the wall. And it's just a testimony to the Gentiles around them of the power of God, beginning the work, finishing the work, and that's the nature of God. Now He's begun a work in you, and the bible promises that He'll be faithful to complete it.

Here everyone was enjoying what was going on, the women and children also rejoiced, and we read that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. No one was a simple spectator, allowing the worship leaders to worship while they gazed upon, no it was a corporate celebration. Be careful to guard against simply *enjoying* a time of worship rather than personally *entering in* to that time of worship. Because in doing so you'll rob yourself of a huge blessing.

But you see what I meant earlier about it wasn't the voices particularly that made an impression, it was the joy, it's the joy of the Lord in your life that'll make an impression, its your strength. So they offered their praise *thankfully*, they offered it *joyfully*, and they offered it *loudly*, not *obnoxiously*, but *enthusiastically*.

It's interesting that David is mentioned a couple of times with regard to the outline and approach to their worship. The bible says that he served his generation *faithfully*, but what I want you to be aware of is that in so doing his faithful service was still blessing generations hundreds of years removed from him.

You never know the extent to which God wants to use your life, there's no way David could've foreseen the way that his faithful service to God would continue to be a blessing generation after generation and even to us today. Serve God *faithfully*, it's a blessing, not only to you specifically, but it can continue to bless lives of succeeding generations personally/practically.

Of course the idea here being that receiving pay if you're in a position of full time ministry is a biblical premise, both OT and NT, you might also see how the heart of giving and the heart of worship are so intimately intertwined. We worship the Lord as we give of ourselves to the Lord.

## Ch 13

### Vs1-3

Of course we want to draw attention to the fact here of the natural flow together of worship and the Word.

Having had their hearts prepared in worship, they begin reading from the Word and they come apparently to Duet 23 whereby they're commanded not to let any Ammonite, or Moabite into the assembly of the Lord. Why? What caused the Lord to sorta single them out like that? If you didn't know otherwise you might think it had to do with their beginning. Perhaps you're familiar with the account of Lot, being in Sodom and when the Lord destroyed the city Lot and his 2 daughters took refuge in a cave. And they were all, "There's no one left on the earth who can father children for us," so they got their dad drunk and one night one of them laid with him and the next night the other one did. And the oldest daughter had Moab (the father of the Moabites) and the other gal had Ben-Ammi (the father of the Ammonites). It's a pretty hideous and sad beginning. But that's not why God said that they couldn't enter the assembly, God is merciful, He allowed them to prosper and the whole bit. But perhaps you recall the promise God gave to Ab back in Gen 12 when He said, "*I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you;*" Gen 12:3 and What you'll find back in the book of Numbers around ch 22-24 is that rather than bless Israel, the schemed against Israel, they didn't help them when they came up out of Egypt and they even hired a man named Balaam to try and *curse* Israel. Now of course God turned the curse into a blessing, and that's one of the things God specializes in, taking the things the enemy means to destroy and turning them as a means to glorify Himself. But the bottom line is that these people brought a curse upon themselves in seeking to curse the nation of Israel.

But what we love about what we're reading here is the simple fact that they're reading the Word, taking in the Word, and readily responding in obedience *to* the Word. And where we read of the Moabites or Ammonites not coming into the assembly, it saying that they couldn't be born into the covenant like an Israelite. They had to come as a foreigner, that's why they took any of those who had Moabite or Ammonite blood flowing through them and removed them. They'd have to make a choice to enter in to God's covenant, and leave their own "roots" so to speak, just like Ruth the Moabite.

Now, there's a little bit of ambiguity in here because somewhere along here there's a time gap whereby Nehemiah left Jerusalem and went back to Babylon just like he told the king that he would. Remember he was the king's cupbearer, and when he asked for a leave of absence to go and tend to things in Jerusalem the king wanted an approximate timeline.

Well, now that things were done, Nehemiah had returned. Nor do we know the exact amount of time he was back serving the king before he requested another leave and found Jerusalem in another unfortunate condition, but be that as it may we read here.

Vs 4-9

Nehemiah goes back to the king, decides at some point to venture back to Jerusalem see how things are doing there and to his own shock and chagrin he found one of the large storerooms in the temple that was reserved for the tithes of new wine, the grain offering, various articles and frankincense cleared out and occupied by Tobiah! and To add insult to injury it was at the consent of Eliashib the priest! Now Tobiah was an Ammonite and one of the archenemies of Nehemiah the whole time he was building the wall, remember he's the one who ridiculed the stability of the project, who sought to distract him from the project, threatened war over the project. And now he's kicking back in the temple using one of the storerooms meant for the provisions of the people of God as a furnished apartment! And we read that it *grieved* him bitterly, why?

Well, for several reasons, #1 Tobiah was a pagan, as we mentioned he had an active history of opposition to the work of God, it demonstrated a spiritual declension already taking place in that this was happening at the consent of the priest Eliashib. And that's really the measure of spiritual revival, I mean it's awesome to have a radically uplifting spiritual experience, but the true test of that work in our lives is what's happening a year from now, or 10 yrs from now, what's going on in our walk then? Are we still on fire for Jesus, or have we cleared out the some of the storerooms of the holy habitation of our heart and given them over to the things of the this world, those things that stand in opposition to the will/word/ways of God for our lives. That's what happened here, he was grieved because it seems as though the revival had no real lasting impact, the spiritual leaders are condoning this compromise.

So Nehemiah cleaned house, literally, took all of Tobiah's junk and through it out, then he had the rooms cleansed and things restored to their proper order. And that's what God desires of us, if you've given room to compromise in your life, don't worry about the politically correct approach to dealing with it, just throw it out, all the Spirit to cleanse you, confess your sin and allow God to restore things to their proper order.

And of course this sort of reminds us of when Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple and drove them out with a whip of cords saying, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer but you have made it a den of thieves.'"

Vs10-14

Now if what we're reading of isn't the perfect picture of Rom 8:3 which we looked at Sunday morning I don't know what is. Remember that vs? Speaking of what the law couldn't do in that it was weak through the flesh. What we're beginning to read of here is how they were already breaking every aspect of the covenant that they'd so eagerly signed back in ch 10. Remember how that ch ended? "We will not neglect the house of our God."

They were going to tithe and bring in all their lawfully required resources to ensure the ongoing ministry of the priesthood. That's what they *wanted* to do, it's even what they *intended* to do, but they didn't maintain the standard, their flesh was weak. Nehemiah realized that all the Levites had ceased their temple service and were out in the fields farming, because they weren't being paid so they couldn't continue, they had to feed their families. Look at vs 11 (read)

Here's what I want you to see, when people ceased giving to the Lord through the temple, Nehemiah seen that as synonymous with forsaking the house of God. And more than likely this about the same time frame that Malachi was on the scene and prophesying, and of course you're familiar with the passage there in Ch 3 about a man robbing God by not giving God what's His in the form of the tithe and all. But that's a pretty heavy indictment, think about it, where are we at with all that?

Nehemiah quickly re-established all that, and appointed faithful men to make sure the ministers were being paid. And of course we've spoken before of the necessity of faithfulness to be found in the servant of God. They were considered faithful therefore they were entrusted with the task.

Vs15-22

Nehemiah was all about business wasn't he, you gotta love him, but this was another area they'd vowed to, not only would they tithe with *regularity*, they'd honor the Sabbath day *perpetually*. They'd support the ministry, and honor God in the way they made money, they've slipped there as well, Nehemiah recalibrated them in that area and shut down business on the Sabbath. When he was speaking of laying hands on the merchants it wasn't for prayer purposes.

Vs23-29

This was the final major aspect of the covenant, marriages. They weren't going to be unequally yoked, but they've already slid right back into that pattern as well. And notice you guys what language the children of the mixed marriages were learning. Were they learning the language of the Spirit as represented by the Hebrews? No, they were learning the language of the world, another reason we're not to be unequally yoked, the children so often rather than learning the word and the ways of God follow after the ways of the world and the unregenerate parent.

And it just tore Nehemiah up, so he tore them up, cursed them, smacked them down and yanked out some of their hair. This is a guy you just didn't want to mess around with, remember back in ch 10 how they said, "May we be cursed if we don't uphold these things," well, Nehemiah's following through on that, he curses them, pounds on them a bit and makes them swear not to compromise the marriages of their sons and daughters again.

In vs 28 we see a plausible reason for Eliashib the priest's compromise, his grandson was Sanballat's son in law, he'd married Sanballat's daughter. Now Sanballat and Tobiah were buddies, so you begin to see how these unequally yoked marriages just spill out poison everywhere. Now if you're in that situation, God can work it out, but if you're not there avoid it at all costs.

Vs30-31

The Law is powerless to stop sin, only the grace of God by the power of the Holy Spirit in your life can give you victory over the power of sin.

But God did remember Nehemiah for good, and He recorded it all right here in His eternal Word. And just as Nehemiah cleaned out the rubble and made a new wall, he cleaned up the ministry that served *with in* those walls. If dedicated/consecrated walls are to fulfill their purpose, they've got to be surrounding dedicated/consecrated hearts.

Thank God for uncompromising leaders like Nehemiah, because the vast majority of us apart from that type of accountability would have a tendency to wax and wane in our spiritual integrity. Nehemiah was true to God, through and through, had a love for God, a passion for His Word, He was faithful and committed to God's call on his life and God used him in a radical way. The church could use more individuals of his spiritual caliber, may we count the cost, commit to God's call, follow through and finish well.

Prayer Points: God may Your grace flow through us, and may Your Holy Spirit rest upon us that we might follow through with that which You've committed to our trust. That your body might be built up and edified, that You might be glorified, and may we finish well the course You've called us to. God may the things You've purposed that we should glean through the study of Nehemiah become a practical working part of our lives, increase our faith, cause us to be a people of integrity, You desire truth in the inward parts, may you find it in us for Your own glory.