

## Remembering the Restoration Nehemiah 12-13

### Introduction

The end of the book of Nehemiah remembers those who were involved with the restoration. No one ever achieves success on their own. There are always many who have contributed to the work of restoration. When the work of restoration is complete, we must never forget those who contributed to the restoration.

As a point of remembrance, we need to establish a hall of honor. Nehemiah does this in Chapter 12. In the first 26 verses, Nehemiah records all of those involved in the restoration. In the first seven verses, he records the priests and Levites who came up with Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and Joshua. They were the heads of the priests in the days of Jeshua. Nehemiah begins by recognizing those who were the founding fathers, who proved their faithfulness.

According to Scripture, all of our deeds will one day be evaluated. Those worthy of Christ will be celebrated and remembered.

### I. Celebrating the Restoration

David's exact divisions set up centuries before were now back and all intact and ready to be re-established again.

Verse 27 says, "At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres. The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall. I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate." ([Neh 12:27-31 NIV](#))

Time and commitment were necessary. Setting up the ministry of the Levites, singers, and musicians was critical. There was no rush to hurry up to expedite the process ahead of time. Music and worship are a foundational part of God's Church.

The process was completed by the very people assigned to purify the other parts of the city. Even something as simple as a wall or gate needed God's anointing on it.

Worship and singing are an active part of the church. The two great choirs were positioned prominently on the wall where they belonged. They stood surrounding Jerusalem like a symbol of God "encamping around those that love Him." What Nehemiah was doing was re-establishing the Spiritual Gates of Worship.

Verse 37 says, "At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the site of David's palace to the Water Gate on the east. The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people—past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard, they stopped. The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, as well as the priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets— and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. And on that day, they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away." (Neh 12:37-43 NIV)

The music was so joyous that everyone joined in -- worship is contagious. Also, notice that great sacrifices were offered -- with great joy. Obedience can be joyful even though it sometimes requires a sacrifice of our Will. The celebration was so joyous that the music in Jerusalem could be heard from afar.

## II. Re-Establishing Order

Verse 44 says, "And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered. Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification, according to the command of David *and* Solomon, his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old *there were* chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah, all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion for each day. They also consecrated *holy things* for the Levites, and the Levites consecrated *them* for the children of Aaron." (Neh 12:44-47 NKJV)

The people realized the importance of the temple and the need to provide for it. The temple was a constant reminder that God was watching over them and helping them recover from the devastating effects of their sins.

They remembered Israel's greatness when David was King, and they remembered how profoundly David loved God and wanted to build a house for God! So, all Israel in Zerubbabel and Nehemiah's days gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required and set apart the Levites' consecrated amount.

### **III. Re-Inspecting the Progress**

In Chapter 13, Nehemiah returns to inspect the progress. True worship leads to obedience. Verse 1 on Chapter 13 says, "On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing." (Neh 13:1-2 NKJV)

As the people drew near to God in worship, they became aware of God's standards. An Israelite enjoyed God's covenant blessings by birth, but an Ammonite or Moabite did not. They had to become a part of the covenant by choice – by joining God's covenant people and renouncing their gods.

The Ammonites and Moabites were singled out because of their devious schemes against Israel when Israel came into the promised land – at least a thousand years before this. God blessed Israel, even though the prophet Balaam wanted to curse them. God can turn any curse into a blessing. They could have thought of many reasons not to do what the word of God told them to do. Instead, they obeyed.

Today, many churches have people of goodwill who attend but have not received God's covenant of salvation in Jesus. Unless we accept Jesus and worship Him with obedient hearts, the church is only a meeting place.

After the restoration was complete, Nehemiah left Jerusalem and went back to his duties in the Persian court. He was gone from Jerusalem for anywhere from 10 to 12 years. The real test of restoration and revival is the long term effect. Where is your faith five to ten years after you accept Christ?

When Nehemiah came back, he saw that Eliashib the priest had entered into agreements with Tobiah, who opposed the work of rebuilding the wall. Tobiah had not changed over the years. He did not join the people of God and did not keep the terms of His covenant.

Nehemiah found this very distressing. It grieved him because rooms in the courts of the temple of God were being occupied by a man, not only a pagan but who also had a history of actively opposing God's work. It grieved him because it reflected so poorly on Eliashib (a man who was a spiritual leader in Israel) and those around him. It grieved him because it made Nehemiah

question the lasting value of the spiritual revival that began when he was governor in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah wasn't one to only sit back and grieve, so He took action. He threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the rooms he occupied in the temple courts and ceremonially cleansed the rooms. Then he restored the rooms to their proper use as storerooms for the sacred things of the temple. It foreshadows something Jesus will do when he cleanses the temple and declares it as a house of prayer.

Nehemiah also realized the people were not obeying God's word regarding giving. Because the people weren't giving the priest and staff had to take secular jobs. Nehemiah asks them, "Why is the house of God, forsaken?" Nehemiah sees the problem not as a lack of financial support but as turning their back on God.

Verse 11 says, "So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place." [\(Neh 13:11 NKJV\)](#)

Have you ever been put in your place by someone? I can tell you it's not much fun! Then, Nehemiah reorganized the collection, accounting, and distribution of the people's tithes and gifts.

The Sabbath was also being ignored. On the Sabbath day, they were supposed to rest and trust God. But the foreigners sold items on the Sabbath, and the people of Israel bought them. The New Testament makes it clear we are not under the Sabbath law in the same sense Israel was under the Old Covenant ([Colossians 2:16-17](#)), but we are definitely under the same obligation to make honoring God more important than making or spending money.

Nehemiah knew that sin is not only a personal issue but invites the correcting hand of God. Nehemiah wasn't going to sit still for this, so he threatens them, "If you do this again, I will lay hands on you!" He didn't mean the gentle laying on of hands for prayer; I think he meant the rough laying on of hands for correction.

In the years Nehemiah was away, the Israelites resumed their intermarrying practice with the pagan nations in disobedience to God's command. Verse 25 says, "So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear:" How would you like to have Nehemiah for your pastor? Considering his reaction, he must have considered this to be the most dangerous of their sins – pursuing ungodly romance and getting involved in romantic relationships God had said not to. His example is Solomon, the King of Israel, who sinned against God through his many pagan wives' influence. If Solomon, one of the wisest and most

blessed men ever, sinned through unwise and ungodly romance, then no one else should consider themselves invincible.

## Conclusion

Nehemiah does all of this with a clear conscience. He writes, "Remember me, O my God, for good!" Nehemiah knew he did his best to make the people strong, safe, and secure. He also led them to be pure, worshipful, and obedient. Nehemiah did his best to lead the people to connect with God in a way that impacted their daily living.

Sadly, we often start out with the best of intentions. We make promises to obey God and do what is right. But Satan is always trying to infiltrate our lives with suggestions of better things. No one intentionally sets out to sabotage their life. But just like Adam and Eve, the tempter subtly works on us until we give in to the temptation and sin.

When Nehemiah first came to Jerusalem, the people made a solemn covenant to God that they would not:

- Have ungodly romantic relationships ([Nehemiah 10:30](#)).
- Buy and sell on the Sabbath ([Nehemiah 10:31](#)).
- Fail to support the work of God financially ([Nehemiah 10:32-39](#)).

Nevertheless, 10 to 12 years later, Israel was again steeped in the exact sins they vowed to stop. And so, Nehemiah had to address the same problems once again.

The longer you live, the more you realize that certain things seem to be a life cycle. The Apostle Paul addresses this in Romans Chapter 7. He says, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now, if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind, I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." ([Rom 7:18-25 NKJV](#))

In Nehemiah 10:39, the people promised, "We will not neglect the house of our God." But later in Nehemiah 13:11, Nehemiah had to ask, "Why is the house of God forsaken?"

It was forsaken because Israel did not keep her promises before God. The point is vividly clear. The law – that is, rules, vows, promises, and covenants- is ultimately powerless to stop sin.

Only the grace of God, alive and flowing in our lives, can give us the power to truly overcome sin. In Romans 8:3, Paul says, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Rom 8:3-4 NKJV)

Don't look for victory in making rules, or vows, or promises because all those things tend to make us look to ourselves instead of looking to Jesus. The Old Testament history of Israel, from beginning to end, illustrates this.

Nehemiah is pulling hair out – his own and those of sinners – because they couldn't keep their promises to God. If our own promises and commitments could save us, then Christ's death would have been unnecessary. We aren't saved by a vow we make or some leaf we turn over; we are saved by trusting in who Jesus is and what He has done to save us.

Do an inventory of your life, not to see what you need to do, but what you need to allow Jesus to do in you!