

Sunday – May 28, 2017

Preparation

This week's reading will bring us completely through the Book of Nehemiah and into the book of Esther. Nehemiah has 13 chapters, 406 verses, and 10,480 words. It was written around 445- 440 B.C. Just as Ezra, Nehemiah is prophetic of events that take place following what Ezra prophesied of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which, in and of itself, is remarkable concerning this Book that God has preserved for us.

The Book of Esther contains 10 chapters, 167 verses, and 5,633 words. The writer of Esther is unknown. The date of this Book is around 485-465 B.C. Esther is the account of a Jewish girl that God uses in a mighty way to deliver the nation of Israel. Through the key characters of this Book, we see an incredible picture of the born again believer and the battle between flesh and Spirit.

By way of Preparation, let's prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to teach us regarding these upcoming Books. One of today's greatest downfalls in the church is the fact that overall this battle is not taken seriously, or perhaps, even given thought. The typical Laodicean mindset concerning the spiritual battle we face each day is found in Revelation 3:17, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:" Based on this verse in Revelation, the church really has no idea of the state that they are in. If we do not follow the principle of "preparation" we discussed a couple weeks back, we will, without doubt, fall into the same snare that the typical Laodicean is in. According to 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11, "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" and "all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." We have the Book of Esther for the very purpose of learning of the battle that Esther faced; therefore, learning of the battle we face on a daily basis. Men, we have to pay attention to what God has provided through His word. As Daniel, let's "purpose" in our hearts to seek God through the pages of His Book. Through all God has done for us, He truly deserves nothing less.

TODAY'S READING: NEHEMIAH 1-4

OVERVIEW:

Nehemiah prays to God about Jerusalem's desolate condition; Nehemiah petitions the King for permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem; Nehemiah organizes the people and they begin repairing the walls; opposition to the work arises.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As the Book of II Chronicles came to an end, we saw that God's people were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. In the Book of Ezra, we saw that God worked in the heart of Cyrus, the pagan King of Persia (note, that while Israel was in captivity, the Babylonians were overtaken by the Persians), to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and restore Temple worship. After this small revival, (only a remnant of God's people chose to return), which began around 536 B.C., God used a prayerful man named Nehemiah in 445 B.C. to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the ruined city. God's purpose behind this mission was to restore safety and order to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

After hearing reports of the sad state of the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah became burdened for his brethren and began to pray. This was all in spite of the fact that he was in a high position in the King's court (he was the cupbearer – Neh. 1:11) and truly had no worries for himself. It wasn't his fault that the city was in the condition it was in. He could have easily justified not doing anything but praying. Instead he risked his own life by going before the King with his request to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-6). Unlike Nehemiah, we oftentimes pray, expecting God to do all the work. Yet we need to be more like Nehemiah who was willing to get up and do something about it. God can't direct our steps if we aren't moving (Prov. 16:9)! Note that God did more than just get the King to grant his permission for the work, he funded the whole thing as well! Our God is certainly able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Eph. 3:20). We need to ASK and then we need to ACT, just like Nehemiah! Pray as if all depends on God, but work as if it all depends on you.

In chapter 3, God lists the names of the workers and the work that they did. Each man had a specified area of responsibility. No man can do everything, but every man can do something. It is interesting to note that in verse 5, some of the nobles didn't do anything! God reminds us of this truth in I Corinthians 1:26-29, when he

says that *"not many noble are called"* to do the work of God. Be careful if you find yourself not doing anything because you are just too good to be doing such meaningless tasks. It may well be because you are too "noble" in your own mind!

There are 10 gates that were repaired in this chapter and they paint for us a very incredible picture of the Christian life:

1. The sheep's gate (vs. 1) – speaks of Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. This was the first gate repaired, for without the sacrifice, there is no salvation. Note that the sheep's gate had no locks or bars, for the door of salvation is always open for the sinner to enter!

2. The fish gate (vs. 3) – We are called to be fishers of men (Mark 1:17).

3. The old gate (vs. 6) – We are to follow the old paths and old truths of the Word of God (Jer. 6:16).

4. The valley gate (vs. 13) – We are to be humble just as Christ was (Phil. 2:5-9).

1. The dung gate (vs. 14) – This is the gate through which the waste of the city was taken. We are to cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (II Cor. 7:1).

2. The gate of the fountain (vs. 15) – We need to be filled with the Spirit (John 7:37-39, Eph. 5:18).

3. The water gate (vs. 26) – Speaks of the Word of God (Eph. 5:26). This just "happens" to be the seventh gate mentioned (seven is the number of perfection in the Bible). Psalm 19:7 says that God's Word is perfect! It just so "happens" that this gate needed no repairs!

4. The horse gate (vs. 28) – The horse is a symbol of war and we are certainly in a warfare as soldiers of God (Eph. 6:10-17; II Tim. 2: 1-4).

5. The east gate (vs. 29) – This reminds us of Christ's return. For the Sun of Righteousness will rise in the east (Mal. 4:2) with healing in His wings.

10. The gate Miphkad (vs. 31) – this speaks of God's judgment. This Hebrew word means "appointment", "account", or "census". We, too, will have to give an account before God at the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12).

Just the order in which the gates are mentioned can teach us some amazing truths about the Christian life.

In chapter 4, the enemy appears. One thing you can be sure of – when God's work is being accomplished, the enemy will come against it. The enemy tries ridicule, force, discouragement, and fear to get God's people to stop the work. How did they overcome all of these? Through prayer (vs. 9). Note that Nehemiah did not just depend on prayer alone, he also set a watch. God expects us to do the possible, and then trust Him for the impossible.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the KING'S CUPBEARER – Nehemiah 1:11 (Nehemiah was the King's cupbearer – i.e. served the King beverages at his table. Jesus took the cup of wrath of our King for us on the cross – Luke 22:42).

Through NEHEMIAH – (He left the King's court and his high position behind, to go far away (approx. 750 miles) to build a wall of protection for God's people) – Nehemiah 1-3. (Jesus did this same thing for you and me!)

As the SHEEP GATE – Nehemiah 3:1 – (The only way we can become one of Christ's sheep is by entering through the right "door," which is Christ himself – John 10:1,7,9,10).

TODAY'S READING: NEHEMIAH 5-9

OVERVIEW:

The anger of Nehemiah regarding the way the wealthy Jews had taken advantage of the poorer Jews; the enemy attacks with deceit, slander and threats; the people who returned are numbered; the Word of God is preached to the people; the Levites cry out to God praising Him for His mercy and goodness.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapter 5 is a sad chapter. The Jews are selfishly preying upon one another for the sake of material gain and money! It just so happens to be that no building takes place in this chapter either. There were great economic burdens on the Jews, not only because of the famine (Hag. 1:7-11), but also because of taxes and tributes. The poorer Jews were being robbed by their own richer Jewish brethren through mortgages and servitude. They were forced to do this in order to get food and other necessities. The Jews, like us today, were supposed to watch out for one another, love one another, and help one another. They did the exact opposite...they preyed on one another. Proverbs 3:27 tells us to, *“withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.”* Philippians 2:4 says, *“look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”* We can become so selfish that we choose to make money on those to whom we should be offering help. This whole practice of the Jews made Nehemiah very angry (Neh. 5:6). That just happens to be the same response Jesus had when this same type of thing was happening in the New Testament (Mark 11:15-17). Nehemiah very wisely put this evil, selfish practice to an end (Neh. 5:9- 12) and got back to the work at hand.

In chapter 6 the work on the walls resumes. It is no coincidence that when the work started again, the enemy also appears. This time Sanballat and his men aim their attacks at Nehemiah the leader. Satan knows that every thing rises and falls on leadership. If he can get Nehemiah to stop building the walls, then the work stops altogether. There is a high price to pay when you are God's leader in any area (i.e. pastor, father, mother, teacher, discipler, etc.). There is a large target on your back for Satan to take aim. This is why we must all put on the whole armor of God daily (Eph. 6:10-18). Sanballat tries repeatedly to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah “to just talk”. Nehemiah did not fall for this trick because he was not ignorant of Satan's devices (II Cor. 2:11). Beware of the smiles of the enemy, for Satan is more dangerous when he appears to be your friend than at

any other time. Four invitations came (Neh. 6:3-4) and Nehemiah refused them all. Stay on the job when Satan invites you to quit, and God will bless you. The fifth time the messenger comes with an “open letter” (vs. 5) filled with slanderous accusations against Nehemiah. “It is reported” (vs. 6) is one of the devil’s chief weapons. “They say” or “I have heard,” and “Did you know?” are usually phrases that introduce gossip and lies. Nehemiah’s life and character refuted every lie in the letter. Note how Nehemiah once again takes this problem to God in prayer (vs. 9). The servant of God cannot help what men may say about him, but he can help what kind of character and testimony he has. If Nehemiah had stopped the work to defend his reputation, the walls would never have been built. But that didn’t happen and the walls were completed in just 52 days (vs. 15)! God was glorified and the enemy was embarrassed (vs. 16). May all the work you allow the Lord to do through you end with this same result!

Chapter 7 is a numbering of all the people who had returned from the exile. In Chapter 8 Ezra returned to Jerusalem to assist Nehemiah with the dedication of the walls and the sanctifying of the people. It is significant that the people gathered to hear the Word of God at the water gate (8:1)...for water always pictures the Word of God (Eph. 5:26). Verses 8 and 9 describe the perfect church service: the people all assembled to listen; the Word was exalted high; the preacher read and explained the Word so the people could understand it; and the people wept at hearing the Word, which no doubt, revealed their sin! This reading of the Word in chapter 8 led the leaders to prayer in chapter 9. All of chapter 9 is a prayer that gives us a spiritual summary of the Old Testament history of the Jews. In this prayer, they praise God for His mercy to them in spite of their unfaithfulness.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through NEHEMIAH – Nehemiah 5:17-19. He was the governor of the people, yet he fed all who came (Jews, nobles, and even Gentiles) to his table at no cost to them.

TODAY'S READING: NEHEMIAH 10-13

OVERVIEW:

The list of leaders who placed their seal on the covenant with God; the city of Jerusalem is populated with by the Jews; the dedication of the city wall; Nehemiah condemns the people's wicked ways and reforms the abuses.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

After making a "sure" covenant with God in chapter 9 to do all things according to His Word, the leaders sealed it. Chapter 10 lists for us the names that entered into this covenant with God that day by sealing it themselves. Little did they realize that their names would be recorded eternally in God's Word for us all! In verses 28-39, we see the people actually applying the Word to their everyday lives. It is one thing to pray and sign a covenant; it is another thing to separate from evil, straighten out our homes (vs. 28-30), honor the Sabbath (vs. 31), contribute to the house of God (vs. 32-33), and serve God with tithes and offerings (vs. 34-39). Too many "Bible conferences" end with people stirred and feeling all blessed inside, but never actually obeying what God supposedly taught them! How are you doing with the truth God taught you at our recent Bible conference?

In chapters 11 and 12, the city of Jerusalem is populated and the wall of Jerusalem is dedicated. It was necessary to get the Jews to live in the city, both for the good of the city and the glory of God. This, of course, demanded faith because you had to leave your home for a different place. In order to accomplish this, the leaders cast lots and moved 10% into the city. Nehemiah 11:2 indicates that there were some volunteers. The numbers in Nehemiah 11:3-19 total just 3044 men. If this represents 10% of the male Jewish population that had returned from exile to the Promised Land, then we can see how small the remnant in the land actually was. This illustrates for us the truth found in Matthew 7:14...*"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and FEW there be that find it."*

From Nehemiah 13:6 and 7:2 we learn that Nehemiah had returned to Babylon for a few years, leaving the governing of the city in the hands of his brother. When he returned, he discovered that the people had fallen back into their old ways. Nehemiah 13:1-3 tell us of the cleansing that took place the very day of the dedication, when they had separated the heathen wives in the families (see Deut.

23:3-5). Sin has a way of repeating itself! When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he found that the Jewish men had repeated this very sin (vs. 23-31). In fact, even the priests had sinned in this way! It was necessary for this courageous saint and leader to face sin honestly and judge it! And that is exactly what he did. How are you doing judging the sin in your life? Are you a good enough friend to those you love that you confront them with the sin in their lives?

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the WALL OF JERUSALEM – Nehemiah 12:27. God is our fortress in whom we trust (Psalm 91:2).

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 1-3

OVERVIEW:

Vashti (a Gentile woman) is removed from her royal position as queen; Esther (a Jewish woman) is chosen to be the new queen; the evil plot of Haman against the whole Jewish race.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The events of Esther take place between Ezra 6 and 7. The third year of Ahasuerus (1:3) would be the year 483 BC. Ahasuerus is the title of the Persian ruler, just as Pharaoh was the title of the Egyptian ruler. God's name is found nowhere in this Book, although Jewish scribes have found the name Jehovah hidden in five different verses. What a great spiritual lesson this illustrates for us all: when it seems that God is nowhere to be found, we just need to look a little harder and we will find Him working "behind the scenes" to accomplish His purposes for our lives (Rom. 8:28).

The Book of Esther opens with King Ahasuerus holding a seven day (1:5) feast for all those in His palace. During this feast, the king, after much drinking, decided to show off His beautiful queen to all of his male friends. The queen, in her wisdom and with her apparent high moral values, refused to cater to the king's selfish drunken request. This, of course, ticked off the king and all his princes. So they all decided that it was best for the king to remove her from being the queen. They let this be known by way of the "pony express" to the entire kingdom so that all the women would fear and honor their husbands.

After about four years, the king began to regret his rash decision regarding Vashti because he missed her (2:1). His servants convinced him to pick a new queen from among the many beautiful women in his kingdom. It just so happened that God had placed a man named Mordecai in an important position, for he was seated at the king's gate (2:21). Mordecai, a cousin of Esther, who had brought her up from her youth and was like a father unto her, decided to enter her into this "contest" to become queen. Esther did not let it be known to anyone that she was a Jew at the request of Mordecai (2:20). She was chosen by the king to be his new queen and a feast was thrown in her honor. At the end of chapter 2, Mordecai found out about a plot to kill the king. He notifies Esther, who then tells the king in Mordecai's name. This all then gets written down in the book of the chronicles of the king. While this may seem rather insignificant at the time, it ends

up being the very thing that God uses to save His people from destruction. Isn't it just like God to save His people by something written in a "King's Book" (Rom. 10:17)?

Chapter 3 begins with a man named Haman getting a big promotion from the king. Haman was now the King's right hand man so to speak. This promotion went to his head and when he found out that Mordecai didn't bow to him as he passed by, it ticked him off (3:5). Haman decided to offer the king about 25 million dollars in silver if the king would pass a law condemning the entire Jewish race to death (including women and children). This money would probably come from the property of the Jews that would be slain (much like has happened down through history with Hitler during WWII and the Roman Catholic Church during the crusades). The king passes the law and the date was set by casting lots (Est. 3:7, Prov. 16:33). In God's providence he sets the date for this murder of His people a whole year away (3:7) in order to give time for Mordecai and Esther to work their plan in the following chapters to stop this wicked plot!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through KING AHASUERUS – Esther 1-2. There is coming a day very soon when God will rapture the church (His Gentile queen) off this earth because of her unfaithfulness to Him, and replace her with the Nation of Israel (His Jewish queen) for His 1000 year reign on earth as King.

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 4-7

OVERVIEW:

Mordecai and the Jews mourn over the king's commandment to destroy them; Esther and Mordecai work a plan to save the Jews; Esther plans a banquet for the king at which she makes her request of the him to save her people, the Jews; The king belatedly honors Mordecai for his service to him in uncovering the assassination plot; Esther accuses Haman before the king and Haman is executed.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In chapter 4, Mordecai grieves and mourns aloud over the decree issued by the king to destroy the Jewish race. He does this right in the king's gate where everyone could see him without being ashamed of his God or his people. Esther, not knowing why he was doing this, sent a servant to find out what was wrong. Mordecai sent her word that explained his actions, along with a copy of the king's decree that she might know how desperate the situation was. Mordecai proceeds to convince Esther that she is the one that God wants to use to deliver His people, at *"such a time as this"*. We must admire Esther, for she presents herself before the king as a *"living sacrifice"* (Rom. 12:1) to do God's will knowing she could die if the king doesn't hold out the golden scepter to her. Are you like Mordecai in that you are deeply concerned for those who are condemned? Are you like Esther in that you are willing to sacrifice yourself in order to intercede on behalf of those who are lost?

Esther, very wisely, goes before the king and invites him to a banquet that she will prepare for him and Haman, rather than just come right out with her request. She knew of the king's love for food and wine and decided her best chance for getting her request granted would be when the king was happy. The king asks Esther what was on her mind but she put him off one more day. That night on the way home from Esther's banquet, Haman was wroth once again over Mordecai's refusal to bow to him. This is when he decides to build the gallows for which to execute Mordecai on the following day for his "crime". At this same time, the king couldn't sleep for some reason, so he decided to pick up a book and he proceeded to read about Mordecai's disclosure of the assassination attempt against him. He then decided to honor Mordecai and asked Haman how to do this? This, of course, must have humiliated Haman, for he had just come to the king's court to request permission to execute Mordecai on the gallows he had

built. Haman went home that day, and his wife warned him that he could not overcome the Jews now (6:13). While they were discussing this matter, the servant came to take Haman to the second banquet Esther was throwing.

In chapter 7, Haman comes to the feast with some fear and trembling in his heart, for he knows that his sin is going to find him out and God's law of reaping and sowing is once again about to be illustrated. Esther lets her request be made known unto the king at this second banquet as she reveals to the king who was behind this wicked plot: Haman. The king orders that the very gallows made for Mordecai be used to execute Haman, but not before Haman begs for his life in the presence of Queen Esther. What a perfect picture of the flesh. When it is in control of our lives, it seeks to kill; but when the Spirit of God brings judgment, the flesh acts so humble and innocent! This is why the apostle Paul writes, "*have no confidence in the flesh*" (Phil. 3:3). We must "*die daily*" (I Cor. 15:31)!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through ESTHER – Esther 5-7. Esther goes before the King pleading for the salvation of her people knowing it may cost a very high price: her own life. Jesus goes before the Father (or King) on our behalf as our advocate (I John 2:1, Rev. 12:9-10) to plead our case for forgiveness in light of the very high price He had to pay to obtain it for us: His own life.

Saturday – June 3, 2017

Reflection

This week's reading proved to be intensely constructive by providing a pattern that we all could, and should, follow as believers. In chapter one of Nehemiah, we were directed to "henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind," but rather turn to God, no matter what has happened in our past. As we moved into Day 150 of Daily in the word, we focused on the importance of the work that we are called to do. As the Bible reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Wednesday, Day 151, reminded us of the principle of "separation" as we read of the downfall of many Israelites, including Solomon. To reiterate what God desires to see in us as believers, He preserved passages such as 2 Corinthians 6:14 and 17, which reads, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you," Thursday, Day 152 brought us into the Book of Esther where we jumped straight into the devotional application of Esther and examined the key characters of the Book and what they represent. Without doubt, Esther paints a vivid picture of the battle between flesh and Spirit. What's truly at stake in this battle is the throne of our hearts. Within the first few chapters of Esther we read of Haman, a picture of the flesh, being promoted, which, in turn, caused potentially catastrophic effects to Esther and her people. Friday closed out the week by reexamining the battle we face and provoked us to daily "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:" (Colossians 3:5). Because, "if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Romans 8:13)

As we close out this week, we should all be thankful that God has preserved such patterns for us throughout the Bible, and furthermore take heed to what's written and apply it to our lives. God is so much more gracious than we could ever grasp by giving us his mind on all matters. Praise the Lord for He truly is worthy of all that we could ever offer!

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

Nehemiah 1:9 “But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.”

Nehemiah 6:3 “And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”

Nehemiah 13:26 “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.”

Esther 3:1 “After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.”

Esther 5:9 “Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.”