

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 12/15/10

Series: “Facing the Past, Moving Ahead for God’s Honor: Nehemiah”

Current study: Nehemiah 9 “It’s Time to Change” part 1

It’s a serious thing to defy God. There are certain consequences. God will not be mocked. Whatever a man sows that shall he also reap.

Yet we all sin. In fact, we blow it big time at times. Then what? What should we do when we blow it? More specifically, what should a nation do when it has blown it? What’s involved in changing? How does a nation make a break from its current ways and go in a direction that pleases God?

That was the situation that faced Nehemiah in the 5th century B.C. In the case of the Israelites in Nehemiah’s day here’s what happened...

In Chapter 9—they focused on what God had done in light of their past actions

In Chapter 10—they focused on what they were going to do in the future

We’ll focus on the first part of chapter 9 this week...

Nehemiah 9-10 -- “It’s Time to Change”

The Setting:

--The Wall is built...

--There is a lack of people living in the city, a problem which Nehemiah began to address in chapter 7 (by registering the people) and which he will continue to address in chapter 11.

But first, something more pressing. The seventh month came on the Jewish calendar. The seventh month was the month of Tishri and occurred in September/October. It was one of the most sacred months in the Jewish calendar (see Lev 23:23ff.). In chapters 8-10 we discover what happened during this particular seventh month:

Day 1 – verses 1-12 (also mentioned in Ezra 3:1) [which we studied last time]

Day 2 – verses 13-18 [today’s study]

Day 24 – chapters 9-10 (9:1ff.)

On day 24 the people met together and decided it was time to change. The change involved four corporate activities...

I. The change involved corporate repentance (9:1-5a).

Notice that Nehemiah specifies this occurred in the “same” month (1).

A. They exhibited brokenness (1).

And they didn’t do this by themselves, either. Rather...

1. They gathered together.

This wasn’t merely private confession time, but corporate confession time. It was like the Day of Atonement which had occurred on the 10th day of the month. But this was the 24th day, October 30, 444 B.C.

Q: What evidences of brokenness are mentioned?

2. *They fasted, wore sackcloth, and put dust on their heads.*

Q: Why?

Discuss: What actions/postures/ gestures are appropriate to express brokenness today?

B. They practiced separation (2a).

How?

1. *They recognized their distinct identity.*

Q: How so? The text mentions they were of “Israelite descent.” What did they do?

2. *They removed themselves from foreigners.*

Q: Why? What had God told the Israelites from the day He first gave them the Promised Land?

C. They responded with an initial confession of sin (2b).

More confession will follow, but notice this initial confession...

1. *They confessed their sins.*

Q: What sins? What does it mean to “confess” sin?

2. *They also confessed their fathers’ sins.*

Q: Why? Are we responsible for what others do today? We are not the covenant community of Israel, but we are a covenant community. The Church.

Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of you.” Our actions do affect others in the covenant community.

D. They engaged in reflection on God’s Word (3a).

1. *They stood.*

Q: Why?

2. *They read the Book of the Law for a quarter of the day.*

Remember, they’d just read it about three weeks earlier, devoting about a half a day that time (3). They can’t get enough of it.

But this is no matter of entertainment for them. They want to hear God’s Word because they want to change. And hearing God’s Word will show them where and how to change.

It’s no different for us...

E. They responded with further confession (3b).

Why? Because spending time in God’s Word brings more things to mind that need confession.¹

Don’t miss this...

1. *The confession occurred in response to hearing God’s Word.*

Reflecting on God’s Word is how we learn what God’s standard is. And as we reflect on God’s Word we find out how far short we have

¹ It’s possible to read the text such that the two times of confession are one and the same.

fallen. Spending time in God's Word forces us to run to the Cross! Why so?

2. *The confession took time.*

How much time? Too often, we try to rush things.

F. They engaged in worship (3c).

What kind of worship? We're not told. We can assume the worship involved singing and ascribing corporate praise to God.

Worship is the natural outflow of spending time in the Word and confession. Why so?

G. There was leadership initiative (4-5).

Q: By whom?

Here's how it happened...

1. *The Levites called on their God (4).*

Q: Why does the text record their names?

2. *They urged the people to do the same (5).*

Please note that they don't ask the people to do something they haven't first done themselves. Leaders must model godliness before they can command it (and they must command it, but not until they first do it).

Some Lessons for Us:

1. *Though introspective living is not the goal, it's vital to take inventory from time to time.*

Q: What is "introspective living?"

Q: What are some ways we can "take inventory?"

2. *We must take sin seriously.*

Q: How do you see this lesson in the text?

Q: What are some practical effects of taking sin seriously in our own lives?

3. *We must live God-centered lives.*

We don't tack God onto already crowded lives. That's an offense to a holy God. According to the Bible, a Christian is a person whose life revolves around God.

Discuss: What does that mean in practical terms?

Next Time...

God is the God of history. He worked in history. He revealed His Word in history. If you stop and think about it, when God gave us the Bible He didn't arrange it like an encyclopedia. It's a story. It's His story. It's *history*.

The Bible is the story of what God did in the past to form a people for His glory, a work which He continues to this day. He took over 1500 years to record this story, from Moses (1400 B.C.) to John's writing of the Apocalypse around 100 A.D.

On this day when the people in Nehemiah's day decided it was time to change, they reviewed God's work in history.

II. The change involved reviewing God's past actions (9:5b-31).

- A. You made the heavens and the earth (5-6).**
- B. You chose Abraham and made a covenant with him (7-8).**
- C. You rescued the Hebrew slaves (9-12).**
- D. You gave Your people the Law at Mount Sinai (13-14).**
- E. You gave Your people manna and water (15).**
***Disobedience: But our forefathers disobeyed You (16-17).*
- F. You didn't desert them (17-18).**
- G. You did not cease to guide them in the wilderness (19).**
- H. You sustained them as they traveled (20-21).**
- I. You gave them the Promised Land (22-25).**
***Disobedience: But they disobeyed You again (26).*
- J. You handed them over to enemies (27a).**
- K. You then delivered them from the enemies (27b).**
***Disobedience: But again they did evil (28a).*
- L. You delivered them time after time (28b).**
- M. You warned them to return to Your Law (29a).**
***Disobedience: But they became arrogant (29b).*
- N. You patiently admonished them for years (30a).**
***Disobedience: But they paid no attention (30b).*
- O. You did not put an end to them (31).**

III. The change involved recognizing the present problem (9:32-37).

- A. We are in hardship (32).**
- B. You have always done what is right (33-35).**
- C. We are slaves today (36-37).**

IV. The change involved making a resolve for the future (9:38-10:39).

READ the entire account after studying it...