

PP Nehemiah: Fighting to Win Against the World
Nehemiah 13:15-22 **Part 41, 7/13-14, 2013**

PP *"The world's smiles are more dangerous than its frowns."*

Our enemies are spiritual enemies, and we saw one of them in the first part of 13... **Tobiah**
 He represents the flesh, that part in Christians that is dying, but still struggling against Christ
 It's that old nature full of wrong desires that run contrary to the heart of God

Today we will see the activity of '**Geshem the Arab**', though you won't see his name
 He was a wealthy, powerful ruler to the south and west of Jerusalem, who controlled the
 commercial interests and trade routes of the region
 Keeping Jerusalem weak and in disgrace was the key to the success of his monopoly
 He was a schemer, a killer, a dedicated, fierce enemy of God's people
 As Tobiah represents the '*flesh*', Geshem represents the '*world system*', that satanic-energized
 power that opposes God's kingdom
 They work together, under Satan's management, in a very effective manner against Christians
 Jerusalem is once again losing the battle against them, and Nehemiah steps in to fight

PP 1-The Situation

*"In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in
 heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of
 loads..."* **Nehemiah 13:15**

Nehemiah returns from Persia and sees that Geshem had overrun his people and made it into the
 city, whose wall was designed to keep him out!

In our day of media exposure, we're used to Zimmerman court trials and Boston bombings, so if
 we are honest, we're probably thinking, wow, '*They're selling food and making wine on
 the Sabbath, on Saturday, not really a big deal here.*'

So why was this such a terrible thing for the Jews to do?

PP The word '**Sabbath**' meant to cease from work, and God gave it to them for two reasons:

PP a) It was a gift to Remember to Rest and reflect

PP (show Ex 20:9-10) God never designed the human body, or any animal for perpetual work

PP '*The bow that is always bent will soon cease to shoot straight.*' Greek Proverb

Whole families, servants, animals were to enjoy the day off

PP (show Exodus 31:16-17) It was a weekly reminder that God is the Creator of all, and on that
 day we rest and reflect on His awesome acts of creation

He rested on the 7th day, not because He was winded, but because He enjoyed reflecting on His
 creative acts, so it was a day that God set apart for His creation to rest and reflect

PP b) It was also a gift to Remember their Redemption

PP (show Deuteronomy 5:15) It was a day to celebrate and remember that God saved them
 from endless toil and slavery

If a foreigner was visiting a Jewish home, he or she was to enjoy that day of rest as a gift too

And it brings us to one of the central points of the Sabbath...by honoring it Israel was shining a light to the world that their redeeming God was merciful and good
 The Sabbath was not given to the other nations, only Israel and those within her community
 No nation would stop work for a day because your earning potential decreased by 1/7th
 Yet God blessed His Sabbath-honoring people, providing for them to the wonder of the nations
 They would see that Israel's allegiance to God was greater than business, and social concerns

But let it go: ***"which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day."*** 13:15
 Gone was their witness, forfeited was the gift God had given them, they were enslaved again!
 And this is the condition of a great many Christians in our country

How do we fight the world to win?

PP 2-The Solution

PP a) Counsel

If you were about to eat something that I knew had been poisoned and would make you sick and likely die, would you want me to politely suggest that you should avoid eating it?
"I would avoid eating that if I were you, but I don't want to impose my views on you."

I think, I hope, you would want me to do all I could to stop you from eating it!
 Nehemiah knows that giving up the Sabbath gift would lead to their destruction

"I warned them on the day when they sold food" 13:15

PP ***'warned'*** means Nehemiah called to witness, testified against the people of God
 So in Nehemiah 10, the people reaffirmed their commitment to the Sabbath witness: ***"And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day."*** Nehemiah 10:31

But it wasn't long before they let go of their recommitment

How did it happen?

Geshem, the world, is pouring into your hearts a love for money...and you are losing your witness
 This is the power of preaching and the power of biblical shepherding by the elders of a church
"Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah" 13:16

The ***'Tyrians'*** lived along the Mediterranean coast and exported dried, smoked and salted fish
 They had the fishing industry tied up, and there was a gate provided for them to bring their merchandise into the city, called ***'the Fish Gate'***

Do you remember that this gate stood for the Gate of witness, of testimony, where the power of a changed life moved God's people to testify to unbelievers what our God can do?

Rather than Christians pouring out this gate to testify to the world, the world was pouring through this gate, delivering greed, and busyness right into the heart of God's people,
'Jerusalem itself!'

So Nehemiah testified to the people, warning them of what they were doing!

PP b-Confront

Sometimes, counsel isn't enough, we need to confront the problem at its root

The ones who had authority over the gates, were the *'nobles of Judah'*

"Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day?'" Nehemiah 13:17

Two words in these verses are worth examining: *confronted* and *profaning*

PP *'Confronted'* means to contend, to conduct a legal lawsuit against another

PP *'profaning'*-taking something sacred and treating it as casual and ordinary

The legal code Nehemiah invoked is the Word of God and precedence

"Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city?" 18

Spurning the gift of Sabbath was one of the reasons God brought judgment to Israel

Those in authority had thrown their gates wide, not protecting their people

Fathers, or mothers in single-parent homes, are you leading your family to regularly have a day where you rest from toil, to reflect on God's creative acts that past week, and worship the God who redeemed you and gave you life?

PP c) Correct

PP Bill Gates, explaining why he didn't believe in God, said *"in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning."*

If I want that promotion, I need to be fully accessible to the boss every day of the week

If I am going to get that raise, I need to over-perform and outperform my coworkers

I feel more competent with work than I do with personal relationships, so work is my refuge...I am vacationing!

Nehemiah would be coming to you and warning that you're making idols, forfeiting grace, and robbing yourself of the power of your witness of Jesus Christ

There is a point in battle where words are not enough, and just plain old action takes over

To win the battle against Geshem we have to correct the problem and close the gates!

I recently took a week off and actually turned off my phone's email sync feature

Some of you married to workaholics didn't know you can do this

Sorry honey, the emails just come through and I have to check...it might be someone whose had an accident and bleeding all over the road

Technology was supposed to lessen the work week, but it has ironically increased it

The world is not going to produce anything to help us rest, reflect and worship

25 years ago, Americans worked 40 hours a week, now the average is 50

A recent survey discovered that more than half of professionals work on their vacations:

answering calls, reading and responding to emails and texts

So I turned off the email, and shockingly found that the church didn't self-destruct!

God wants us to rest, reflect and worship, and if we open the gates to the world, he will close them one way or the other: stroke, heart attack, or diminishing returns

“As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day.” 19

The Sabbath day started at sundown when three stars appeared in the night sky, ending the same
When Nehemiah saw those stars in the darkening sky, he slammed those gates shut and placed
his own servants as gate guards

Gatekeepers in every era have been vulnerable to bribery, so Nehemiah sets up trusted guards
Watch what happened... ***“Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. But I warned them and said to them, “Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you.” From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath.”*** Nehemiah 13:19-21

The delivery chain of the world’s goods have to be interrupted by forceful decisions!
Gates let the right people in and kept the wrong people out
In order to overthrow the city, you didn’t attack the wall, you attacked the more vulnerable gates
PP Capture the gates, you capture the city: ***“And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,”*** Genesis 22:17

Parents, three of the biggest ways Satan delivers the raw materials of the world is through
television, the Internet and video games
We are the trusted servants who guard these gates
One of the best things we did as parents was years ago, shut the gate of TV
We aren’t hiding from the world in a Christian sub-culture
Our kids have Netflix, X-box and the Internet
But we know that they are busy gates through which Satan can import the world’s goods, so the
television we shut down, and the games and internet we monitor
For many Christians and Christian families, these are virtually unguarded

PP d) Consecrate

Are you thinking about now that one day a week, you have to sit around doing nothing but going
to church and praying and singing old hymns with an afternoon nap?
Here was the Sabbath was intended to look like for the people of God
The day was consecrated, set apart, to not just stop ordinary labor, but to joyfully celebrate
They weren’t allowed to fast, or mourn on that day
It was set apart not by what was not done on it, but by what was done, to enjoy life!
To feast and drink and celebrate their freedom and their God and their friends and family
To lose this, was to lose the battle against the world, and to lose their witness to their God

“Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy.” Nehemiah 13:22

How do we ‘*keep the Sabbath day holy*’ in our age?

PP (show Colossians 2:16-17) The Sabbath command was fulfilled in Christ

The Sabbath day was a shadow, marking the approach of the Son of God, the giver of eternal rest
 We do not toil in good works hoping desperately to earn the paycheck of salvation
 We can find our Sabbath rest in Christ, Who earned our righteousness for us
 To trust in His work, is to enter that rest by faith!

PP He invites anyone to ***“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”***
Matthew 11:28

Knowing the Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ, the early church made the first day of the week,
 Sunday, a day to observe these same principles without the legal obligation
 They gathered to honor God; went home to rest; enjoyed fellowship and remained a witness to
 the world which took no day off
 The legal obligation to observe the Sabbath command expired with Christ’s redemption
 Yet the moral law, the reason it was given, the goodness of it, endures for us today
 The Moral Law, written on enduring stone, by the infallible finger of God, endures forever

It is to be a regular, consistent rhythm of rest, reflection and worship with our church
 This is one reason we started a Saturday evening service, for those who cannot make it Sundays
 By enjoying it, we demonstrate our trust that He will provide for us, we’ll get the work done in 6
 Though enjoying it we are lights to this dark world, our God is the Creator and Redeemer
 Come and look on Him and see His great love!

It is to be a day that is a blessing, not a burden...we are a freed people, not to live to ourselves,
 but to love God with all our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves

A day that strengthens our faith to fight this battle against our spiritual enemies

PP B.B. Warfield said, *‘Christ took the Sabbath into the grave with Him and brought the
 Lord’s Day out of the grave with Him on the resurrection morn.’*

The flesh wants to profane our worship with God by letting sin dwell in our hearts
 The world wants to distract us away from worshiping God
 A regular day a week, to rest, reflect on our great God and worship Him with His family is a gift
 to strengthen us for this battle!
 Have you let that go?
 Listen to the counsel of God; confront the open gates in your life and close them; correct what
 needs to be corrected and consecrate one day a week, set it apart to rest, reflect and
 worship

Pray