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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1930 ~ A Revival of Godliness.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

In today's *Bible Adventure*, the wall around the city of Jerusalem in Judah is now completed, but the gates hadn't yet been hung. Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, plus his friends, changed their bullying tactics and tried to get rid of Nehemiah himself. They sent friendly messages to him, asking him to meet them in a place outside Jerusalem, where there they intended to harm him. God's enemy, Satan, is always most dangerous when he pretends to be your friend! Nehemiah refused their invitation four times.

Then Sanballat sent an unsealed letter to Nehemiah, with every intention that other people would read it before he did. The letter alleged that Nehemiah was now plotting to become the next king of Judah. This false rumour was designed to get Nehemiah into trouble with King Artaxerxes, as no other kings were tolerated within the Persian Empire. Sanballat wanted the king to become suspicious of Nehemiah. However, Nehemiah told Sanballat that his letter was totally false.

Sanballat and Tobiah's final scheme against Nehemiah was to try and frighten him into seeking refuge inside the Temple of God, where only the priests were allowed to enter. So they hired a false prophet named Shemaiah and they tried to convince Nehemiah that his life was in great danger. But Nehemiah knew that only a false prophet would try to convince a layperson to enter the Temple and in so doing, sin directly against God. This action would discredit Nehemiah in the eyes of the Judean people and they would no longer respect him as their leader. But in spite of this scheme, Nehemiah ignored it and he continued on with his building and guarding work.

Finally, at long last, the wall around the city was completed! It had lain in ruins for the most part of 150 years, but rebuilt in just 52 days with God guiding His servant Nehemiah and the Judean exiles. Even the surrounding nations recognised the enabling of Israel's God on their efforts, and so they lost their own self-confidence to hurt God's people. But Sanballat's friend, Tobiah, decided to marry a prominent Judean so that he and his family could undermine Nehemiah's leadership from within the Jewish community. Nehemiah soon recognised that it takes more than a strong wall to make a secure city!

About a week after the wall was finished, all the people from the surrounding towns came to Jerusalem so they could hear Ezra the Scribe read to them the book of the Law of Moses. The people realised that the Law of Moses was a gift of God's grace to them so they might live prosperous and happy lives. Furthermore, Ezra was fully qualified to teach the people such truths and he praised God before he started the reading. A number of Levites were also there to instruct the people and give them the meaning of the words Ezra read. As the people began to understand what they heard, they started to weep. Weeping is a common reaction when the Holy Spirit bring the conviction of sin and a sense of godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Repentance is quickly followed by salvation of one's spirit from the penalty of death with no regrets, and the joy of the Lord dwells within them. For believers in the Lord Jesus, this joy is a sign of God's Holy Spirit now living within them.

Nehemiah told the people to stop mourning, because it was a sacred day to the Lord. He told them to celebrate instead, with a feast of rich food and to share these gifts of food with those who had nothing prepared to eat. He said: "The joy of the Lord is your strength!" This occurred at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles or Shelters, and the people had discovered this for themselves while Ezra read to them.

A week after that festival, the people again gathered together to publicly confess their sins to God. To demonstrate to God their deep sorrow and distress of their sin, they fasted and prayed, wore sackcloth and put dust on their heads as expressions of humility, mourning and repentance. Most of Chapter 9 in the Bible book, Nehemiah, is taken up with a long prayer of confession, as the people remembered God's faithfulness and graciousness to them throughout their history and their own repeated unfaithfulness. The people further agreed with the prayer of confession prayed, which together with the reading of the Law of Moses, was an important step towards spiritual restoration and a renewal of their covenant with God. The people made a binding agreement to do this and said that they would keep it.

The Judeans also agreed to not intermarry with the other pagan people living in the land; they would not to let any merchant sell goods on the Sabbath Day; and they would obey the command to pay the annual Temple tax to cover everything necessary for the work done in the Temple. They further agreed to bring to God the first part of every harvest each year, and one-tenth of all their land produced.

In Chapter 12 of Nehemiah, there was a great dedication ceremony held for the wall now surrounding the city. The Levites came in from the country towns where they lived to prepare music and songs, while the priests performed various rituals of purification for themselves, the people, the gates and the wall. On this day of dedication, Nehemiah assembled two groups of priests, Levites, singers and leaders on top of the wall. People could walk four abreast, side-by-side. One group was led by Ezra along the top of the wall while Nehemiah went with the second group in the opposite direction. They met where the steps led down to the Temple of God. All the people celebrated with great joy and so much noise that the ceremony festivities could be heard miles away.

In Chapter 13, Nehemiah then brought in various reforms. In the book of Moses, it's written that no Ammonite or Moabite, who were descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot, should ever be permitted to enter the Jewish community. Their ancestors had refused to supply food and water to the Children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land. So, all those people of foreign descent were immediately excluded. When Nehemiah finished his 12-year term as governor, he returned to serve King Artaxerxes again in Babylon. But things didn't stay going well for the Judean community in Jerusalem after Nehemiah had left. The people simply didn't keep the solemn promises they'd made to God before.

Nehemiah sorted out the problems on his return to Jerusalem, and again, he restarted the Temple functions in the way they should be done. All the things that the people had promised to do right before God but now weren't must have been a big discouragement to Nehemiah. An important truth about this story is that reforms in one generation don't necessarily continue on to the next. Each generation is responsible for their own actions. It takes only one generation to forget God by failing to teach their children about God and become pagan.

Everything Nehemiah did was motivated by his desire to serve and please his heavenly Master. Nehemiah never asked God to remember him for building the wall. Instead, he asked to be remembered for helping the poor, for promoting true worship and for keeping the Sabbath. Even though Nehemiah was most famous for building the wall, that wasn't what was most important to him. He wanted to be remembered for his spiritual accomplishments. And if we follow his example we can be encouragers of other believers in love and holiness. This will help build up the body of Christ in our generation.

In time, the Judean people fell back into doing all the wrong things again and so this time, God sent them the last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, to speak to them. By now, the people of Judah were questioning whether God still loved them or not. It is God's love for us that makes our relationship with Him possible. In 1st John, Chapter 4, it says: "We love because he first loved us." God sent His only Son the Lord Jesus to die on the cross as full payment for our sins against Him. Those who have experienced forgiveness and new life in Christ no longer need to question how much God loves them.

The people of Judah questioned God's love for them first; but God also questioned their love for Him. He told them that they weren't even showing Him the respect a son shows to his father. They were disrespecting God by bringing to the Temple damaged animals for sacrifice, and the priests didn't stop them for doing so. Can we despise the Lord's name when we offer Him less than what He's asked for? We humans often think it's better to give God "something" rather than nothing, as we think that lukewarm service is better than no service at all. But Christians would do well to ask: "Would God want to shut the doors of our church? Are our worship, our service and our lives acceptable to Him? Or do we offer Him only routine ritual and nothing from our hearts?"

Again, the men of Judah had been marrying foreign wives who continued to worship their idols. God said that every man who'd done this would be cut off from the nation of Israel. God then further told Judean husbands to be faithful to their wives. He said, "So guard your heart, remain loyal to the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce!"

The Judeans in Malachi's time thought that God had abandoned them and that it was Him who had broken His covenant with them. But God said in Malachi's book, Chapter 3: "I am the Lord and I do not change." Even though Israel had been unfaithful to God, God never abandoned them. He always preserved a remnant of believers in Him so that the descendants of Jacob would never be completely destroyed. He said to them: "Return to me and I will return to you." To return to God, the Israelites had to repent and turn away from all their sin. The problem was: they didn't really believe that they needed to repent. Neither do most people think that today either!

God gave the people an example of their sin: they weren't bringing to Him their required tithes and offerings. In effect, they were robbing God by withholding what rightfully belonged to Him for they had promised to do this. The people may have excused themselves from giving their tithes to God because of hard times, but the hard times had come because of their refusal to give their tithes in the first place. So God instructed the people to bring all their tithes into the Temple. He said: "If you do, I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!" God then promised to guard their crops from insects and disease.

While this is all true, there's also a danger we must guard against: we must not worship and obey God for the sake of His rewards and blessings to us in this life; we must worship and obey God for the sake of God alone. Although it's not possible in this lifetime to worship God with totally unselfish motives, with the Holy Spirit's help, we must press on towards that goal. Christians have long debated about tithing whether God requires them to pay a tenth of their income to Him or whether we can just give sacrificially to the Lord's work.

In the last chapter of his book, Malachi spoke of the end of world history and God's coming Day of Judgment. In 2nd Peter, Chapter 3, Verse 14, it says: "So dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight." Don't wait! Call on the Lord Jesus to save you from your sins today!

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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