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The Kingdom of Israel  
Nehemiah: Only hearts changed cause God's ways to reign.  
A year through the Bible  
June 11th, 2023

Production Notes:

- Text in green goes on the screen.

Pastoral Prayer:

I want you to see beautiful things. See beautiful things He has made. Beach, mountains. Pause.  
I want you to walk even further into the place all beauty comes from.  
I want you to see what is keeping you from this place and deal with it.  
I want you to see beautiful things.

Opening Illustration:

Years ago, I worked with a young adult guy who honestly married poorly. Dude chose hot over holy. It didn't take long for him to discover his wife was more interested in being desired by men than building a family. He went out of his way to win her over. He stretched their budget as far as it would go to buy a home she liked, he worked tirelessly to make as much money as possible so they could go on extravagant vacations, he continually put off things he wanted to make space for her wandering heart. Eventually she was unfaithful again. He confronted her, she apologized and reluctantly agreed to share locations on their devices and add additional accountability tools into the marriage. Eventually she left completely. He was devastated. Here is what he discovered.

A heart that wants to be faithful needs no chains, no walls, and no extravagance.  
A heart that wants to leave won't stay no matter how chained down, walled in and extravagantly coerced.

Even if you battle with addictions that lead you away at times, you will return if your heart wants it.

Holiness isn't built by making more rules, it's only built by making a heart right.

Maybe it's been a friend that you worked hard to keep. You exhausted yourself trying to keep their affection, but they bailed.

Maybe it's an adult child you tried so hard to stay connected to. You exhausted yourself trying to say the right things, in the right way but nothing could pull their heart back.

Maybe it's you. You have a wandering heart. You realize your desires are flawed. No matter how you chain yourself down, wall in and limit yourself. Your own heart keeps wandering.

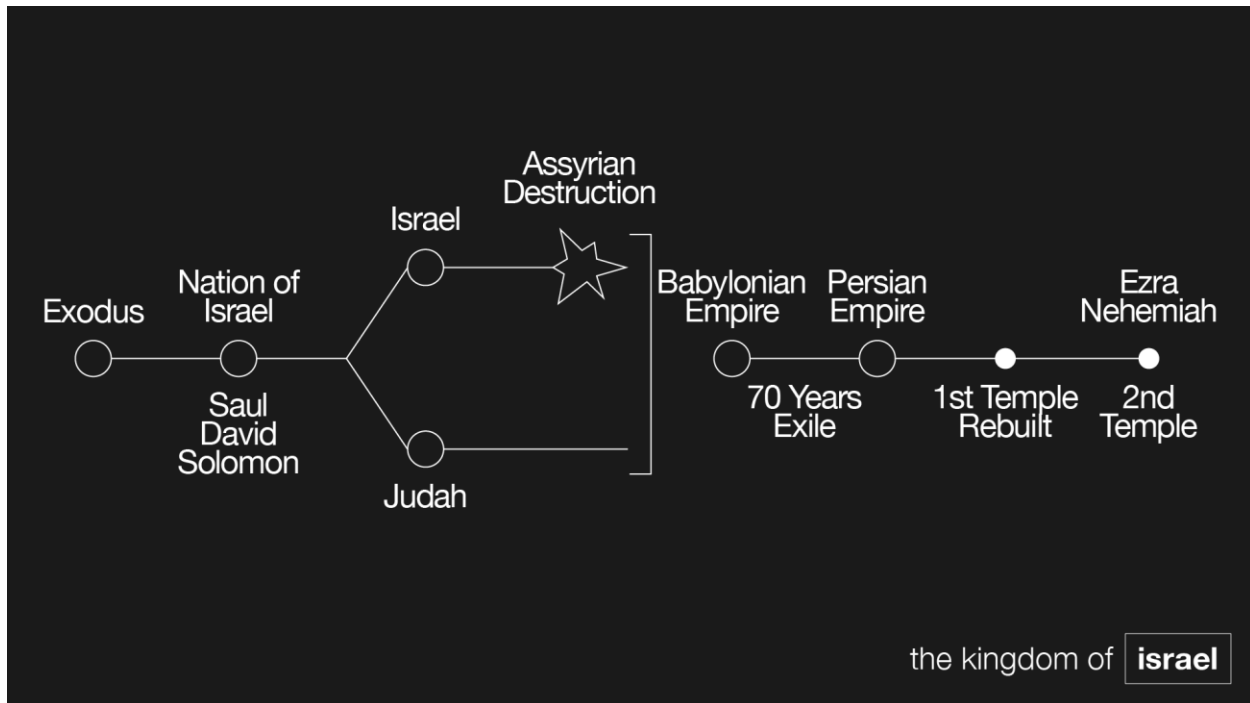
Holiness isn't built by making more rules, it's only built by making a heart right.

To the Text:

Today we will look at Nehemiah.

By the time Nehemiah rolls around there has been so much loss because of hearts poisoned by sin. Over and over again people that loved God tried to tame and contain those that didn't. Over and over again, wandering hearts find a way to rebel.

Reference the timeline below:



Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one document and were later separated into two documents. It focuses on three leaders:

Zerubbabel: Leads a group back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Ezra: Called to teach the Torah.

Nehemiah: The builder of the wall.

There is one prime hope and assumption in the Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah saga. If we build our kingdom with the laws of God made clear, the walls built high, people held accountable, and even cut out all races that aren't pure Hebrew, we will bring back our best God honoring days.

The problem... The complex rules, walls, and relational boundaries didn't work. The people kept violating the law of God (Neh. 13) with increasing strength. The final draconian ending shows that we are prone to want the darkness.

To the Text:

Nehemiah 13:23–25 (ESV)

In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of

Judah, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

- The language of Ashdod: This represents the adoption of a lifestyle from the region of Philistia. Remember the Philistines? David fighting Goliath?
- The Kingdom of Israel was called to be the bringer of light into the darkness; instead, the darkness of the outside nations was putting out the light in the Kingdom of Israel. (Isaiah 42:6)  
Here is what we learn...
- If we are going to become a holy people, we need a new heart.
- Let’s let scripture talk about the human heart.
  - “As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one;” (Romans 3:10)
  - “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23)
  - We literally need a heart transplant. “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)
- The way of heart change is the way of Jesus. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” -2 Corinthians 5:17
- Biblical love is less about an ideal feeling and more about your commitment to future actions.

Final Thoughts:

I’m sitting there with that young man all those years ago. He was desperate to develop a way to help his wife be faithful. The complexity of strategy just wouldn’t work for one prime reason.

- You can’t build big enough walls, strong enough chains, or strict enough laws to make human hearts good. To really change the world, you need to allow God to work in your heart.

So, let’s try to apply this...

- Are there any areas of your life where you are letting in the darkness? Are there any misaligned priorities that are allowing the light grow dim?
- Have you asked God openly to change your heart? Have you made real world life decisions that support that request?

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016.