**Broken Promises**

The reading of the word of God went on day after day. As a result there came a great revival of godliness. In their hearts the people wanted to be good and please the Lord. Three hours a day they listened as Ezra and other priests read to them; and three hours a day they confessed their sins “and worshipped the Lord their God.” Then the Levites said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.” “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Neh 9:6).

Solemnly and gratefully they thanked God for all He had done for His people from the day He called Abraham out of UR of the Chaldees to the present time. For the Exodus from Egypt; for the “laws of truth” given on Sinai; for bread from heaven; for victories in Caanan; and finally for deliverance from captivity. In all this, they said. “ Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:” (Neh 9:33). To prove they really meant to be good from now on they drew up an agreement and signed it. In this document they agreed among other things,

1. That they would not let their girls marry heathen boys; or their boys marry heathen girls.

2. That they would not buy anything on the Sabbath.

3. That they would pay so much a year to help keep up the Temple services.

4. That they would pay their tithe to the priests and Levites.

Nehemiah was the first to sign the document. Then all the other leaders signed it. What a solemn agreement it was! With the people thus pledged to do right, and the wall built, Nehemiah felt it was a good time to go back to Medo-Persia and report to the king, as he had promised to do. How long he stayed there we do not know. Certainly he must have been away from Jerusalem many months, possibly years. At last he got permission from the king to return: and it was a good thing he did. Already, so soon! The princes, priests and people had forgotten the pledge they had made. Eliashib, the high priest, had actually allowed Tobiah, one of Israel’s worst enemies, to move into the tithe room of the Temple and live there!

Nehemiah was so furious he said, “And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber” (Neh 13:8). But Eliashib had done something much worse. He had allowed his son to marry the daughter of Sanballat, of all people! Nehemiah was so disgusted that he said, “therefore I chased him from me.” As Nehemiah continued his inquiries he found that the people had not kept their promise to pay their tithes, with the result that the Levites were starving. He soon changed that! Then, he noticed on the Sabbath, which was supposed to be a holy day, the people were acting just as though it were an ordinary weekday.

They were buying and selling, harvesting and traveling, seemingly without a thought that this was God’s day. Fearlessly he went to the princes and told them what he thought. “What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?” (Neh 13:17). “ Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. (Neh 13:18). Always a man of action, Nehemiah determined to put a stop to this wrongdoing at once. So he set some of his own faithful servants at every gate, with orders to close them at sunset every Friday evening and not to open them till after the Sabbath.

He had built these gates as a protection against Israel’s enemies; now he shut them to help his people remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. So Nehemiah, the kings cupbearer, tried his best to bring Israel back to God; to keep them in the way of truth and righteousness; to save them from further punishment. Alas, but few heeded his counsel, and the sad, sad story of broken promises went on and on down the years.