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Nehemiah 13

(2021)

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Nehemiah 13.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

In 445 B.C. the Persian King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah, an Israelite who was a trusted official written permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah went with the third wave of returning Jewish exiles. There was intense opposition from other people in the land, and disunity within Jerusalem. Despite the strong opposition, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and overcame many threats. He served twice as governor and did what God had put in his heart (Neh. 2:12) (Neh. 7:5), and found that the joy of the LORD was his strength (Neh. 8:10). For an overview of the entire book see the title: "Overview of the Book of Nehemiah" (at the beginning of the index to Nehemiah).

NOTE

For information concerning the vast number of names mentioned in this chapter the reader will need to do their own research, for the focus of this study is not upon the names of those mentioned and their history etc., but upon points of interest and of significance.

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

The previous chapter firstly gives a list of the names of the chief priests, the chief of the Levites and the gatekeepers who came up in the first return from Babylon to Jerusalem. It then speaks of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, with Ezra and Nehemiah leading two great choirs with musical instruments marching in opposite directions around the wall of Jerusalem, giving thanks. At the end of the march both choirs meet in the courts of the House of God and offer great sacrifices. All including the women and children with great joy rejoice, and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. The chapter ends with men being appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits and the tithes.

NEHEMIAH 13:1-3

- **Nehemiah 13:1-3:** On that day (after Nehemiah's returned to Jerusalem from the Persian court) they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God,² for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing.³ As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

On that day: (v1) this was not immediately following the dedication of the city wall and gates recorded in the previous chapter, but after Nehemiah's second return from the Persian court to Jerusalem.

Read from the book of Moses: (v1) this reading of the law probably took place on one of the special occasions for public readings of the law, when the people's faithfulness was lacking and various violations of the law had crept into the nation that called for immediate correction. The reading may have covered the entire Pentateuch or just those laws that the priests and people had violated.

The Ammonites and the Moabites: should not come into the congregation of God forever, meaning they should not be incorporated into the kingdom of Israel, nor be united in marriage with people of those nations. The reason for this was because they did not give Israel bread

and water when they came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam to curse them, which he attempted to do three times, but God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing for His favour was toward His people.

- No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, ⁴ because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. (Deut. 23:3-4).
- But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. (Deut. 23:5).

They separated from Israel the mixed multitude: (v3) all who had joined in unlawful marriage and those who God had forbidden them to join themselves with, such as the Ammonites, Moabites and all other foreigners together with foreign children born of them. These were all cast out from the congregation of Israel, meaning the foreign husband or wife were separated from their Israelite spouse to return to their own countries with their children, and that Israel would not consider or look upon them as Israelites, nor would they be entitled to the same privileges.

NEHEMIAH 13:4-5

- **Nehemiah 13:4-5:** Now before this (reading the book of the law) (v1) Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, ⁵ prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

The following verses show that Eliashib was a high priest.

- And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me. (Neh. 13:28).
- Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. (Neh. 3:1).

Being the high priest Eliashib, by his exalted office, had the control of the chambers attached to the temple. His favouring Tobiah a family relative who was an Ammonite and notorious enemy of Israel and providing him with a furnished apartment in the House of God clearly highlights the lukewarmness of his faith and extreme lack of godly principles. Eliashib, was probably able get away with this extreme transgression because there had been an absence of priests and a cessation of temple services, and because of this vacuum he was able to turn one of the sacred temple buildings into a palatial residence for Tobiah, an idolatrous Ammonite governor and enemy of the people of Israel to reside in without any resistance.

NEHEMIAH 13:6-9

- **Nehemiah 13:6-9:** While this (Eliashib preparing a large chamber for Tobiah) (v4-5) was taking place, I (Nehemiah) was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king ⁷ and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. ⁸ And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. ⁹ Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

We are told Nehemiah went to king Artaxerxes in the thirty-second year of his reign (v6), which means that Nehemiah remained in the land of Judah twelve years as the following verse shows:

- Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. (Neh. 5:14).

At the end of this twelve years and after having succeeded in repairing and refortifying the city, he returned to his duties in Shushan. Though the timeframe of the expression, "after certain days," is left indefinite, most agree that it carries the following two meanings, at the end of a year, or one full year. Putting the two together it is very likely that Nehemiah was with the king of Persia for around a year, before he returned to Jerusalem. However, since it is very difficult to comprehend that Israel would fall away from Nehemiah's reforms in such a short period of time, it may have been a longer period.

Artaxerxes (father of Xerxes): is referred to as the king of Babylon, but from the time of Cyrus to this present time the entire empire of Babylon was under the rule of the king of Persia and Artaxerxes was not the king of Babylon, but the king of Persia. Following are some reasons why he is called the king of Babylon:

- Even though he was a king of Persia, he may have been dwelling in the royal Palace of Babylon and therefore referred to as Babylon's king.
- Nehemiah had spent seventy-years in Babylon so it would be natural to refer to him as the king of Babylon, especially if he was dwelling in the courts of Babylon.
- Nehemiah may have dwelt at the courts of Babylon while he visited Persia, since Babylon was a province of the Persian king and therefore refers to Artaxerxes as the king of Babylon.

I asked leave of the king: (v6) Nehemiah obtained leave from the king to return to Judah and resume the government of Jerusalem. It is most likely Nehemiah had heard rumours of Eliaship (a high priest) wicked works and may have had some doubts concerning the truth of them, for who could comprehend such a gross transgression from a high priest, but when he did arrive in Jerusalem, he fully understood Eliaship evil in preparing a chamber in the courts of the House of God for Tobiah the Ammonite. This shines a brilliant spotlight upon the fact; when the people are destitute of a faithful, passionate godly leader their passion and zeal for the things of God wane, leaving them in danger of following deceptive and corrupt authorities in high position of power who appear (at some level) to be godly, but who led them astray.

Eliashib (probably thinking that, Nehemiah would not return to Jerusalem), began to take great liberties, especially since he was a high priest and there were none left whose authority he dreaded or submitted to. Due to these facts, and his own lack of faithfulness and integrity before God he did things extremely unworthy of his sacred office, and which, he would not have dared to attempt to do had Nehemiah been in Jerusalem.

Tobiah (an Ammonite): by making alliances through marriages Tobiah had gained to himself a notable opinion with their families and many of the people of Israel, especially those who had authority.

- He had married the daughter of Shechaniah, who was a great man among the Jews.
- His son Johanan had married the daughter of Meshullam, the son of Berechiah, who was one of the chief managers of the building of the wall of Jerusalem
 - For many in Judah were bound by oath to him (whose him), because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. (Neh. 6:18)
 - And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. (Neh. 3:4)

By these marriages Tobiah had formed an importance amongst the people and even though he was an Ammonite was looked upon by many as a notable man.

It grieved me sore: (v8) Nehemiah's deep grief stemmed from the following:

- During his absence there had been a general falling away, and there was danger of a complete national apostasy.
- That a high priest would stoop to such utter degeneracy and depravity and violation of God's law.
- That such a sacred place had been polluted.
- That a high priest, would allow an Ammonite, one of the worst enemies of Israel to abide in a sacred chamber in the House of God, especially since he should have been reforming the priesthood, the House of God and the people of Israel.
- That such a sacred place was converted to common use.
- That a chamber of the House of God was furnished for an idol worshipper and enemy to the Jews to lodge in.

I was very angry: (v8) being the chief governor, and having permission of the King of Persia to establish everything in the land of Judah according to the Jewish laws, as well as those of the king, Nehemiah's power and authority was no doubt, as large as Ezra's spoken of in the following verse.

- And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach. (Ezra 7:25).

When we understand Nehemiah's faithfulness, zeal and passion for the things of God it is easy to comprehend his anger when he saw that this sacred room in the House of God had been so blatantly profaned, some hundreds of years later we read of another who had the same zeal for his heavenly Fathers House when he saw the money changes trading at the temple of God.

- The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." (John 2:13-20).

Household furniture: (v8) would embrace all things that were placed in this chamber for Tobiah's comfort, such as chairs, tables, garments, eating and drinking vessels etc.

I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers: (v9) Nehemiah very first reform during his second visit was to stop Eliashib gross profanation of the chamber that had been polluted by the residence of the idolatrous Ammonite. After undergoing a process of ritual purification Nehemiah restored the chamber to its proper use, which was a storehouse for the sacred vessels of the temple.

To restore and cleanse the chamber to their former sanctity, would have involved a formal purification, perhaps by the water of separation spoken of in the following verse:

- And a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and deposit them outside the camp in a clean place. And they shall be kept for the water for impurity for the congregation of the people of Israel; it is a sin offering. (Num. 19:9).

And by such other means and rites as were then usual in such cases. Once the rites of purification were completed Nehemiah returned all the sacred vessels with the grain offering and the frankincense etc., to this holy room in the House of God.

NEHEMIAH 13:10-11

- **Nehemiah 13:10-11:** I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field.
¹¹ So I confronted the officials and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them together and set them in their stations.

The portion of the Levites and singers had not been given them: (v10), which was totally contrary to the promise they had previously made, spoken of in the following verses:

- We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD; ³⁶ also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; ³⁷ and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. (Neh. 10:37).

However, following are four possible reasons the people may have withheld their tithes:

1. Eliashib the corrupt high-priest misspent the money put into the temple treasury to convert the sacred chambers into a dwelling place for Tobiah an Ammonite idolator and for his own and Tobiah’s use and their allies
2. Disillusioned with the priesthood, the people kept their tithes for themselves.
3. The people were so offended at Eliashib’s corrupt abuse of sacred things, especially since he was a high priest, that they detested and loathed to pay tithes to the Levites and singers because they felt they would only be used to further Eliashib’s own desires and corrupt ways.
4. Religious duties and temple services had fallen into such neglect, that the people had no godly inspiration or religious motivation to pay tithes to the Levites and singers.

Everyone fled to his field: (v10) those who performed the service of the temple should have been provided for by the tithes of the people, but since such tithes were lacking, they had to flee to their own pasturelands apportioned to them in the Levitical cities and spend their time cultivating the land to provide food for their families.

- Command the people of Israel to give to the Levites some of the inheritance of their possession as cities for them to dwell in. And you shall give to the Levites pasturelands around the cities. (Num. 35:2).

Nehemiah strongly rebukes the officials for the neglect of their duty, saying, “Why is the House of God forsaken?” (v11) so that there are only a few or no Levites or priests to attend to the temple services.

I gathered them together: (v11) referring to the Levites and singers that had fled to seek their own livelihood and were dispersed in the countries surrounding Jerusalem. Nehemiah gathered all these together at Jerusalem and set the singers in their proper positions in the choir and the priests and Levites in their places of service in the temple.

SNAP SHOT: this story of Eliashib shines a brilliant spotlight upon the truth, that just because a believer holds an extremely high position in the Kingdom of God does not mean they are doing right before the LORD. An outward religious appearance and wearing religious garments is no guarantee that those wearing them are not serving their own selfish ambition.

NEHEMIAH 13:12-13

- **Nehemiah 13:12-13:** Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. ¹³ And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable (faithful in KJV), and their duty was to distribute to their brothers.

Upon Nehemiah return he:

- Condemned Eliashib's and Tobiah's disgraceful and profane actions.
- Sharply rebuked the priests that the service of the temple was committed to for the total neglect of their duties and the violation of the promises they had made to him prior to his departure from Jerusalem.
- Rebuked the Levites and the people for withholding their tithes from those they were by law required to pay them to, and for neglecting the service they were called to.
- Awakened them to such a sense of duty, godly sorrow and devotedness that they returned to their sacred work.
- Restored the temple services.
- Called back the scattered Levites to their service and duty at the temple, which resulted in the majority of people, perceiving that their tithes and offerings would no longer be improperly used, so they once again willingly brought in their tithes as before.
- Appointed godly men of integrity and good character to act as trustees of the sacred treasures, re-establishing honest services in the temple.

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Judah brought all the tithe of corn, new wine and oil: (v12) when the people saw that a reformation had been made, and all things were set in their proper place, and their tithes would be put to their proper use and allocated to the proper people who were now reinstated in their proper ministries and because of the great respect that they had for Nehemiah, the people of Judah willingly brought all the tithe of the corn, the new wine and the oil to the temple storehouse.

Hanan: one of the treasurers was a layman named Hanan: (v13) whose name was one of the names written on the seals of the covenant the people had previously made with Nehemiah.

- On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, Zedekiah, ²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah. (Neh. 10:1-39).

The majority of the treasures were faithful priests and Levites, and are mentioned in connection with the building of the wall.

Shelemiah and Zadok: (v13) both Shelemiah and Zadok were priests, but Zadok was also a scribe as Ezra was both priest and scribe, meaning besides being a priest they were also an expert in the law and fully qualified to instruct others in it.

The Levites Pedaiah and Haran: (v13) were counted faithful men of good report by all who knew them, such men of loyalty and trustworthiness are clearly fit for such a trust. Their duty was to calculate and apportion to their brethren their share in the tithes and first fruits etc.

- I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan, for they were considered reliable (faithful in KJV), and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. (v13)

Nehemiah appointed new treasurers since the others previously appointed were either dead or removed from their positions because of their unfaithfulness and lack of integrity. We are told that these men were considered reliable (faithful in KJV): (v13), for anyone to receive such a good testimony, means they had proved themselves faithful in smaller matters and in other positions of responsibility, and in this way shown themselves faithful to those who knew them and by their loyalty won their approval.

- For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 3:13).

Those who are placed in positions of importance, authority and power should have a track record that shows them to be worthy of such an important position. The service of these treasurers was twofold:

1. To receive the tithes.
2. To distribute from the tithe, the wages of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants.

It is certain Nehemiah took extreme care to appoint faithful men, since he had now seen the destructive results upon the nation because of deceitful ambitious men being placed in such important positions.

SNAP SHOP: as soon as the people saw the Levites faithfully carrying out their work, they willingly brought their offering, sacrifices and tithes into the temple, as a result of this the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and temple servants were able to focus all their attention on the godly service they were called for and not stress or worry about providing for themselves and their families. The principal to learn from this is that faithful believers of God will readily obey, if their ministers honestly and with integrity do their duty, before the LORD.

NEHEMIAHS PRAYER

NEHEMIAH 13:14

- **Nehemiah 13:14:** Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

Nehemiah's prayer occurs three times in this chapter, each prayer is a single verse at the close of each section. The beginning of his prayer is here in verse fourteen, the second verse is:

- Remember this also in my favour, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love. (according to the greatness of thy mercy in KJV). (v22).
- Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the covenant of the priesthood and Levites, and remember me, O my God, for good. (v29-31).

Nehemiah in prayer, firstly highlights the following things:

- All his good works concerning God's temple and His people.
- He performed all his services with a good conscience.

- On every occasion he looked up to God, and committed himself and his service to Him.
- All that he had done he did with a loyal and devoted heart for God's House and His service.
- In all that he did he looked to God for His favour, because God's favour was his reward.

Nehemiah is not boasting of what he had done or attempting to justify himself or depending upon his good works to be counted righteous as if he had made God his debtor by his good works.

The words, "Spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy" show that Nehemiah had no false notion of his own goodness; for, while he asked for reward for his good deeds, he nevertheless clearly knew himself, for anyone who prays, "spare me" must know themselves to be in danger of destruction, and whoever asks God for, "His great mercy," must be consciously aware of the sinful aberrations and dysfunctions that dwell within all of us and that we are judged according to God's justice, not our own.

The words, "Spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy" also show that Nehemiah's was conscious of his weakness and sin which is a central part of his prayer. Having such insight into one's own nature, removes any possibility of self-righteousness. It matters not how worthy and sure we might be of receiving a reward for our good works and acts of love for the spread of God's honour maybe, we must still be looking for the mercy of God and trusting in His grace and Christ's righteousness and not our own to be counted worthy of eternal life and everlasting happiness.

Nehemiah desired to be judged according to the abundant mercy of God, and not according to any merits of his own, for he was fully aware that despite all his good works, he still remained a sinner before God, and as such knew that it was only by God's abundant mercy that whatever sinful dysfunction and aberration that dwelt within him could be forgiven. God's reward for any kindness that is shown to His ministers and His people and whatever they do to further His causes and His Kingdom, is at this present time returned into their inner most being in the hidden joy they have dwelling there through the consciousness of having done well and having glorified God, and is also stored up in heaven to be received on the glorious day of the Lord Jesus Christ return and our resurrection to eternal glory.

NEHEMIAH 13:15-17

- **Nehemiah 13:15:** 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, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. ¹⁶ 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, in Jerusalem itself! ¹⁷ Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

When Nehemiah arrived in Judah, he saw the most deliberate sacrilege and violations of the Sabbath Day, which also extended into the city of Jerusalem where the following defilements were being carried out on the Sabbath Day:

- Treading out winepresses and working in their fields, vineyards and farmland.
- Gathering in sheaves from the wheat fields (being the time of harvest).

- Carrying goods on their shoulder or loading them on donkeys to be carried from place to place and sold.
- Gathering wine, grapes, and figs (being the time of gathering in the fruits of the earth).
- Bringing in all kinds of products to sell at the markets in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Had the people been doing these things on any other day, they would have all been lawful and good for the prosperity of the individual and the nation. This shows how far away the people of Israel had fallen away from the things of God, for they could have done all these things lawfully six other days of the week.

Jewish history: much of the history of Israel shows that many of their reforms depended upon the godly influence of one man. This was certainly the case with Nehemiah. We know he served as governor for twelve years in Judah, and are told he returned for “certain days” to the king at the court of Babylon. We are not given the time that he was away from Jerusalem, but it was long enough to let a vast amount of his good work be undone. Much time and effort were needed to restore it once again to the godly order in which it was when he left Jerusalem. The book of Nehemiah begins with Israel having enthusiast high hopes of Jerusalem’s future, but now at the end of the book all Nehemiah work is focused upon restoring violations of God’s law and proper Sabbath observances.

SNAP SHOT: a similar principal could be likened to the Christian Sunday, the Lord’s Day, it’s a beautiful thing when believers gather together in faith to share the word of God, fellowship and sing praises and worship the Lord together, but if they are adhering to Sunday church services because they believe they must to maintain their salvation, it becomes and offence to the LORD, because sole trust for one’s salvation must only be in the Lord Jesus Christ, the moment we begin to trust in anything else is the moment we deny all that Jesus achieved for us on the bloodstained cross of Calvary and the moment we make his death count for nothing.

I confronted the nobles of Judah: Nehemiah was governor for the Persian king, which means he had the highest authority to judge the nobles. He warns them against profaning the Sabbath Day, telling them that breaking God’s covenant was the reason God brought disaster on their fathers and the city of Jerusalem, referring to their seventy-year captivity to Babylon and the destruction of Jerusalem. Nehemiah is warning them that God will not allow such transgressors of His law to go unpunished and if they continue as they are, they will bring even more wrath on Israel.

NEHEMIAH 13:19-21

- **Nehemiah 13:19-21:** 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.²⁰ Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.²¹ 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.

To prevent trading in the holy city on the Sabbath Day Nehemiah ordered the city gates to be shut, prior to the Sabbath Day and not to be opened, until it was past. To ensure that this would be carried out, he stationed some of his own servants as guards, to prevent any merchants and various dealers bringing in their goods on that day. However, sin always seeks a way, the traders, after hearing that they would not be permitted entry into the city, set up booths (huts or tents) outside the walls, in the hope they would still be able to trade with the common people passing by.

but Nehemiah threatened to forcefully remove them, if they continued to trade on the Sabbath Day, and stationed Levitical sentries to guard the gates to protect the sanctification of the Sabbath Day. One most necessary step to maintain sanctification is to cut off (as far as possible) opportunities that lead to temptations to sin. If the gates are shut there will be no trade within the city. It is true that people cannot be made virtuous by legislation, however, it is also true that they may be delivered from temptations if such temptations are removed.

Nehemiah fully understanding this principal took practical measures by shutting the city gates on the eve of the Sabbath, and putting some of his own servants as a watch. Despite Nehemiah's efforts, greed finds a way, the merchants and sellers camp outside the walls to sell their goods on the Sabbath Day, and all work on the Sabbath Day was forbidden no matter where the people of Israel lived. I say greed, because these traders had six other days, they could have done this lawfully. Nehemiah hears of their wickedness, and gives a very plain and strong warning, "If you do this again, I will lay hands on you," meaning he will have them removed by force.

As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem: the gates were closed, meaning when the shadows from the houses in Jerusalem, and mountains close to the city and surrounding it appeared on the gates as the sun was declining the gates were to be shut until the end of the Sabbath Day.

- As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore. (Psalm 125:2).

This means that the gates were closed at the sunset of the day before the Sabbath; since the Sabbath was regarded as commencing on the previous evening and remained shut until sunset the next day.

NEHEMIAHS PRAYER CONTINUED

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NEHEMIAH 13:22

- **Nehemiah 13:22:** Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love (according to the greatness of thy mercy in KJV).

It is very likely and understandable that Nehemiah would have had very little trust in the common gatekeepers and therefore to make sure the gates were closed and opened according to his command felt the need to appoint Levites to oversee the closing and opening of the gates

The Levites should purify themselves: (v22) for the following two reasons:

1. Because the focus here is the Sabbath Day which was to be kept holy it was right and proper that the Levites in charge of the gates should be purified for their service when performed on a Sabbath Day, because a Sabbath Day was considered a sacred day of service as were all the services performed on the Sabbath Day.
2. Purifying themselves before the LORD would instill within their mind and heart that the work, they were doing was a work of the LORD and not just of man.

O my God, spare me according to your love and mercy: (v22), for information concerning Nehemiah's pray see the notes following the title: NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER (v14) (above)

NEHEMIAH 13:23-25

- **Nehemiah 13:23-25:** In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ And I confronted (contended in KJV) them and cursed them and beat (smote in KJV) some of them and pulled (plucked in KJV) 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.

Ashdod: the city of Ashdod was a Philistine city, and these Jews had married wives from them, and the mothers had instilled into their children their own language which means it is also certain they instilled in them their culture and religion. The following verse shows that not long before these men took wives from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab they had promised Nehemiah that they would not marry foreign women:

- The people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, ²⁸ Join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes. ³⁰ We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. (Neh. 10:28-30).

To make matters even worse priests who should have been setting the example had also taken foreign woman for wives, even though mixed marriages were an open violation of the law.

I confronted (contended in KJV) with them: meaning Nehemiah sharply admonished and reproved them. Nehemiah’s punishment may sound harsh to us today; but the meaning of them seems to be only as follows:

I cursed them: (v25) meaning he pronounced on them an anathema which demanded excommunication from the society of Israel and all privileges of God’s people.

I beat them: (v25) means he ordered the officers to beat some of the most notorious offenders with rods or scourges, according to the following law:

- Then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence with a number of stripes in proportion to his offense. (Deuteronomy 25:2).

I plucked off their hair: (v25) the hair was esteemed a great ornament among the eastern nations, likewise, baldness was accounted a great disgrace. The expression, “I plucked off their hair,” does not mean that Nehemiah literally pulled their hair out, but rather that to put them to shame he commanded them to be shaved, which also made them look like loathsome slaves. The following verses show that the hair was an ornament and ensign of liberty among the eastern nations; and baldness was a disgrace and token of slavery and sorrow.

- Instead of perfume there will be rotteness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty. (Isaiah 3:24).
- An oracle concerning Moab. Because Ar of Moab is laid waste in a night, Moab is undone; because Kir of Moab is laid waste in a night, Moab is undone. ² He has gone up to the temple, and to Dibon, to the high places to weep; over Nebo and over Medeba Moab wails. On every head is baldness; every beard is shorn. (Isaiah 15:1-2).
- For every head is shaved and every beard cut off. On all the hands are gashes, and around the waist is sackcloth. (Jer. 48:37).
- Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre. Every head was made bald, and every shoulder was rubbed bare, yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had performed against her. (Ezekiel. 29:18).

Nehemiah had a sufficient provocation to inflict these punishments upon them and was justified in doing so, since marrying pagan women from nations, was a blatant act contrary to the clear law of God, and their own covenant and promise they had previously made before Nehemiah and before the LORD.

- We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. (Neh. 10:30).

I made them take an oath in the name of God: (v25), that they would not give their daughters to foreign sons, or take foreign daughters for their sons or for themselves.

SNAP SHOT: following are some reasons why Israel was not to take foreign sons and daughters for their wives:

- Ungodly parents will do nothing to influence their children to follow God and, in most cases, lead them away from God or to a false god.
- Wives of foreign nations in most cases lead their husbands away from God and in many cases to follow their own pagan god.
- Mixed marriages were forbidden because the inheritance of the land was to remain within their tribes.

These Jewish children raised by a foreign mother could not even speak the language of Judah which means we would be justified in thinking they also knew very little of Israel's God and many most likely knew nothing at all.

NEHEMIAH 13:26-28

- **Nehemiah 13:26-28:** Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. ²⁷ Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?" ²⁸ And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me.

There was no king with such wisdom, grandeur and riches as Solomon, yet he was snared by his idolatrous wives and his heart, was turned after other gods.

- He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. (1 Kings 11:3).

To show the harmful consequences of marrying foreign women Nehemiah cites their own Scripture concerning Solomon because all Israel would have been familiar with his transgression's concerning mixed marriages. Israel's history and the fall of great men are recorded, for us to learn from and take warning to avoid being overcome by the same temptations. Solomon was famous for wisdom, yet, when he married foreign wives, his wisdom could not save him from the snares of such relationships. He was beloved of God, and king over Israel, but his conduct concerning women, threw him out of God's favour, he lost his house and ten of the twelve tribes. Nehemiah is using the story of Solomon to say, "You claim you can marry foreign women and retain the purity of our faith, yet one of our greatest and wisest kings, Solomon himself fell into all kinds of transgressions because of such unlawful marriages."

Joiada and Eliashib: (v28) it is supposed that Eliashib died before Nehemiah returned from Persia, and that his son Joiada succeeded him as high-priest, and was one of the sons that had taken a foreign woman for his wife.

Sanballat: (v28) it is supposed by some that the son in law of Sanballat was Manasseh who, Sanballat gave approval to build the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, and whose priests had married foreign wives, or were guilty of some other violation of God's law and led others into the same corruptions

I chased him from me: (v28) meaning from his presence and from the temple, the court, the city, the society of Israel and all the privileges of the priesthood and from the whole congregation of Israel.

NEHEMIAHS PRAYER CONTINUED

NEHEMIAH 13:29-31

- **Nehemiah 13:29-31:** Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated (defiled in the KJV) the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.³⁰ Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work;³¹ and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

God chose the tribe of Levi for Himself, especially the house of Aaron, and as the following verses show every priest was to be holy to the LORD.

- They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the LORD's food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. (Lev. 21:6).
- You shall sanctify him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I, the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy. (Lev. 21:8).

The words, "remember them O my God," (v29) carries the following idea remember their wicked works and punish them according to their works. In this prayer Nehemiah commits those priests and Levites who defiled the priesthood and God's law to God for punishment.

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Remember me, O my God, for good: it might seem to some that Nehemiah is boasting of all his good deeds, but this is far from the truth, for God will never forget any good work that His people do. However, since Nehemiah was under the law there would be a strong consciousness of being rewarded for doing what was right before God, for their whole national law was based upon God blessing them if they kept His law and bringing wrath on them when they didn't.

For those today under the Gospel of grace, it brings no glory to us or to God to boast of our good deeds, especially before the Lord, since no matter how good they maybe they are all stained with sin. However, it is the Lord's glory to crown our good deeds with rewards that will be received in the new eternal world to come. At this present time these rewards are being stored up for us in heaven. Though it is true that, "we are saved not by works, lest any man should boast," it is also true that faithful Christians will be rewarded according to their works. For information concerning Nehemiah's pray see the notes following the title: NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER (v14) (above).

The covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites: in numbers chapter thirteen we read of a godly man named Phinehas (son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest), taking a spear in his hand and piercing a sinful Israelitish man and Midianite woman through her belly stopping a plague that had killed twenty-four thousand people of Israel. (Num. 25:7-8), after which the LORD said to Moses:

- Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy.¹² Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace,¹³ and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel. (Num. 25:9-13).

Now at the time of Nehemiah the meaning is that the priests and Levites had broken the covenant of the whole tribe of Levi, who were set apart for divine ministries, by taking foreign wives and thereby entering into unlawful marriages.

Remember me, O my God, for good: (v31) for information concerning Nehemiah's pray see the notes following the title: NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER (v14) (above).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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