

## Nehemiah 13:14-31

**What was the 3<sup>rd</sup> abuse Nehemiah discovered when he returned to Jerusalem (vv. 15-16)?** Not honoring the Sabbath. The people were working on the Sabbath, buying and selling just as they did on the other days of the week. They were treading grapes in the winepresses, and transporting the wine, along with grain ... grapes, figs, and other merchandise, into Jerusalem to sell it. They also were buying fish and other items from the people of Tyre who resided in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

**How did Nehemiah end this abuse (vv. 16-22)?** He rebuked the rulers who allowed the people to work on the Sabbath. Even the foreigners who lived among them tried to make it a market day. But the Sabbath must be kept holy, by force if necessary.

Nehemiah had the city doors ... shut on the Sabbath, beginning on Friday evening, with guards posted to see that merchandise was not brought in. Even so, some merchants stayed all night outside the walls, perhaps hoping people would slip outside in the darkness to purchase their goods. When Nehemiah heard of this, he threatened to use force against them. Then he told the Levites to help guard the gates. Illicit activity came to an abrupt halt. Again (cf. 13:14) he asked God to remember him, by showing mercy to him out of His great love.<sup>2</sup>

In rebuking their Sabbath desecration, Nehemiah referred to a similar sin in Jeremiah's day (cf. Jer. 17:19-27) calling it a "calamity" .....and that "calamity" ultimately led to God's punishment (Babylonian Exile).

**What leadership traits do we see in Nehemiah's response?** He sees something wrong, he fixes it. Not worried about political correctness. Does the right thing.

**What was the 4<sup>th</sup> and final abuse (vv. 23-30)?** Nehemiah confronted the problem of intermarrying with heathen peoples just as Ezra had done several years earlier. Read Ezra 10 – this is Deja Vu all over again

Several years earlier the foreign wives had been put away at the command of Ezra. The people had since then made a covenant to separate themselves from the heathen wives (10:30) and they had done so to a certain extent. But in time the practice of Jews marrying women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab flourished once more, even in the priesthood.<sup>3</sup>

**What was the problem that Nehemiah identified with intermarriage that was of particular concern (v. 24)?** The Jewish children weren't able to speak or understand Hebrew.

**Why was it critical for the children to speak Hebrew?** To maintain the cultural and religious purity of the Jewish nation. When coupled with their tendency to wander from God and worship other deities, failure to maintain the vernacular of their ancestors is another step in the potential extinction of the Jewish race.

**How did he end this abuse (vv. 25-27)?** He violently rebuked them. He asked God to judge them (called curses down on them) and he struck some of them physically, pulling out their hair, probably from their beards. To lose one's beard was a disgrace (2 Samuel 10:4-5). He made them swear before God that they would not continue to commit this violation of God's Law. He reminded them of Solomon's sin in marrying foreign women (1 Kings 11:1-8). This was wickedness, an act of unfaithfulness.<sup>4</sup>

In the church today, there is no ban on marriage between different ethnic groups, because Christianity is a faith embracing all peoples and tribes. But in Old Testament times, the main reason for the ban was no doubt the corrupt, false religions of the Gentile nations.<sup>5</sup>

**Why do you think the Jews found it so hard to keep from allying themselves with unbelievers through intermarriage, business dealings, etc.** Greed (economic reasons).....physical attraction (Sampson).....lack of spiritual conviction.....insufficient knowledge of the commands of scriptures. If Solomon, one of the wisest and most blessed men ever, sinned with unwise and ungodly romance then no one else should consider themselves invulnerable. Intermarriage dragged Solomon and the entire nation into a vortex of doom that led to the exile.<sup>6</sup>

**Why do many Christians today ally themselves with non-believers?** Many of the same reasons.

**What point is Nehemiah making in vv. 28-29?** Even the priesthood was contaminated by the sin of intermarriage.

**What actions did Nehemiah take (vv. 30-31)?** This problem, like the others reported in this chapter (vv. 9, 22), called for ceremonial purifying. Again the priests and the Levites were assigned their duties. He also made sure the people brought their contributions and firstfruits to the temple<sup>7</sup>

**Why does Nehemiah repeatedly ask God to “remember him?” Was he being prideful?** His motive throughout was to please and serve his God. Nehemiah wanted to do more than rebuild the wall. Nehemiah wanted to restore the relationship of Jews and God – reconcile the nation of Judah to God. Nehemiah had a clear conscience. He was essentially saying “Don’t hold me responsible.” He is asking God to bestow His blessings on him in return for his diligence.<sup>8</sup>

### **Lessons learned From Nehemiah:**

The law - that is, rules, vows, promises, covenants, and the such - are all ultimately powerless to stop sin. Only the grace of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit can give us the power to truly overcome sin and abort this cycle of blessing/disobedience/oppression.

Paul expresses this in Romans 8:3, among other places: *For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.* Too many Christians look for victory in the making of rules, of vows, of promises - and fail to find it, because all those things tend to make us look to ourselves, instead of looking to Jesus for the grace and power to lead the victorious Christian life.

Combining Nehemiah's times with his character, we get the message of this book. Nehemiah proves that seemingly impossible things are possible through prayer and hard work when people determine to trust and obey God, and when they put His interests first

Like Nehemiah, Christians need to walk by faith in these dark times (Habakkuk 2:4). We need to be as sure of God as Nehemiah was. We need to act with God, and for God, even though it means strenuous effort.

We also need to decline all compromise with those outside and inside the church. We need to trust God, to do our day's work faithfully, and to leave the future to Him. May we all follow this great man's example of faith. May we live one day at a time (Matthew 6:11).

God always works through a committed minority. Only a few thousand Jews lived in Jerusalem, yet look what they accomplished! In the same way, the 12 disciples of Jesus turned the world upside down.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene A. Getz, “Nehemiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 695–696.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 696.

<sup>3</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 492.

<sup>4</sup> Gene A. Getz, “Nehemiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 696.

<sup>5</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 492.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 65.

<sup>7</sup> Gene A. Getz, “Nehemiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 696.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.