

Separation from the World

Nehemiah 13

Sin Recognized: *Nehemiah 13:1-9*

Reading of the Law

On a certain day, the people gathered to hear the reading of God's Word. This would produce conviction, which would lead to repentance and reform. It's the Word of God that leads to changed lives (Hebrews 4:12). Upon hearing the word it was discovered that the Ammonite and Moabite were not allowed in the congregation (Deuteronomy 23:3-5).

This was due to their cruel conduct towards Israel, denying them necessities and hiring Balaam to prophecy against them (Numbers 23:11). Because of their hostility towards Israel they were not allowed to join with them. This was for Israel's protection. The LORD looked out for His people even when they did not realize there was trouble.

After gaining knowledge of God's demands, they immediately separated from those that did not belong (James 1:22). Though it may have been difficult, the people separated from the mixed multitude, which included marriage and business relationships. By doing this, they not only lived according to God's direction but also ensured that only those that loved the LORD were part of the nation. Today, churches can learn from this example. Unbelievers should not be allowed membership in the church. If so, the church will struggle because unbelievers will eventually attack doctrine and practice. Instead of following the LORD'S ways they will bring the world into the church, which will produce troubles. Separation is difficult because the world frowns upon it, but it is necessary if we want the LORD to bless (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). We find that the reading of God's Word changed their lives. It convicted their conscience, challenged them to live correctly, and eventually dictated their conduct.

Reaction to Sin

In this passage Eliashib's wicked conduct was revealed. Being the high priest, he oversaw the temple and influenced many people. Sadly, instead of using his position to glorify God he chose to entertain worldly Tobiah, who had no love for God or His people. Tobiah the Ammonite had previously aligned with Sanballat hoping to keep Jerusalem in ruins (Nehemiah 4:3, 6:1,12). After this failed he did his best to join with the Jews. Eliashib befriended Tobiah and prepared him a private place in the temple. He had the rooms in the store chambers cleared out so Tobiah could live comfortably in Jerusalem. This enemy of the Jews was treated with great respect and honor. Eliashib made no attempt to hide his unlawful alliance and like many leaders, he probably believed his conduct would never be questioned. He would find out that sin would catch up to him (Numbers 32:23).

Chapter Outline

I. Sin Recognized: *Nehemiah 13:1-9*

A. Read the Law: *Nehemiah 13:1-4*

B. Reacted to Sin: *Nehemiah 13:5-9*

II. Sin Removed: *Nehemiah 13:10-22*

A. Restored: *Nehemiah 13:10-14*

B. Reinstated: *Nehemiah 13:15-22*

III. Sinful Relationships: *Nehemiah 13:23-31*

A. Confrontation: *Nehemiah 13:23-25*

B. Challenge: *Nehemiah 13:26-31*

"The better the work, the greater hindrances are found, and that where God proposes something good, the devil does not rest, but sows tares with it."
John Lange

Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem during this time, which explains Eliashib's behavior. After governing in Judah for 12 years Nehemiah reported to the king (Nehemiah 5:14). In his absence, problems quickly arose. It does not take long for sin to find a way in, so guard your life, home, and church (Ephesians 5:15-16). When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem he grieved over the situation, then addressed the issue. Tobiah's belongings were immediately removed from the temple. This decision was not based upon how wicked Tobiah or compromising Eliashib would feel, but on what was correct. Yes Nehemiah offended them but righteousness will always offend the wicked. We are to be kind towards others but we are never to compromise truth. After Tobiah was gone, Nehemiah ordered the rooms to be cleansed and the vessels returned. It is evident sin disgusted Nehemiah, so he would not allow it to occur on his watch. Thank the LORD for those that stand for right in this world of sin.

Sin Removed: *Nehemiah 13:10-22*

Restored

When Nehemiah noticed the Levites in the fields he probably knew something was wrong. These men of God had fled the temple because they no longer received their portion. With Tobiah taking up the space used for their goods, the Levites were unable to live while serving in the temple, so they went to work. There was nothing wrong with what they were doing but it was not the work they were called unto. Instead of laboring in the fields these men should have been serving in the temple. It's discouraging when men of God are unable to serve Him because of the neglect of others. Through the years many pastors have been unable to serve the LORD because their congregation was unwilling to give. How a church treats their pastor is a direct reflection of the church's spirituality.

Nehemiah gathered the rulers to find out what had been going on in his absence. He held the leaders accountable for the conduct of the people. Apparently these men enjoyed their positions but not the responsibilities that came with them. The Levites were immediately restored to their positions and again received their portion. The important service of these men had been neglected for too long. To ensure their portion would be given, Nehemiah assigned faithful men over the treasury to distribute the portion unto the Levites. Those that handle money need to be faithful and diligent. Having good men overseeing the money would prevent Eliashib, or any other man, from attempting to clear out the storehouses. After restoring the Levites Nehemiah appealed to God. Notice he did not ask for his works to be revealed or rewarded but only that God would remember them. Nehemiah was not seeking personal glory but God's approval (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Reinstated

Much had been neglected in Nehemiah's absence, including the breaking of the Sabbath. Nehemiah saw all sorts of work being done on the day of rest, such as treading wine presses, gathering the harvest, and carrying burdens. He even witnessed business transactions occurring on the Sabbath. Their sinful conduct was widespread, with many getting involved. It does not take long for sin to become part of society. Once it is tolerated it will soon be acceptable. Nehemiah went to the nobles with the problem. Being the wealthy landowners in Israel, if they ignored or condoned sin it would continue. He accused them of being guilty. They may not have personally broken the Sabbath but did nothing to prevent others from doing so. The nobles had it within their power to end the wrong, but

because they did not restrain the people from sin, they were guilty (James 4:17). It's good to remember that leaders will be held accountable for what they allow. They were also reminded of the seriousness of breaking the Sabbath. If they continued in this direction, they could expect divine judgment.

Instead of waiting for the nobles to act, Nehemiah shut the gates of the city during the Sabbath. He set his servants over this task, probably because he knew they were trustworthy. This ensured no business would be transacted. Apparently this was the only way to put an end to this problem. For two Sabbaths the merchants waited outside the gates of Jerusalem, probably hoping the people would come out to buy or sell. Nehemiah put an end to this temptation by threatening the businessmen with force. They got the message and remained away during the Sabbath. The best way to deal with sin is to eliminate the temptation. He ordered the Levites to cleanse themselves and then guard the gates. Once again Nehemiah appealed to the LORD, asking to be spared. Nehemiah believed he deserved worse, destruction, and that only God could spare him. He did not present his works but looked for God's mercy (Psalm 116:5).

*"It is better to choose strife and retain truth, than to choose peace and sacrifice the truth."
Anonymous*

Sinful Relationships: *Nehemiah 13:23-31*

Confrontation

The people also married those that belonged to the world; the men had taken wives from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. It was forbidden for them to marry those that served strange gods, but they did so anyway (Malachi 2:11). The result of these unbiblical unions was seen in the conduct of their children. They were not raised after the LORD but after the ways of the world, which was evident in their language. The next generation was growing up without the LORD. Nehemiah understood the dangers of this so he addressed it. Today it's important to marry the correct person. A believer should marry someone that is also saved by God's grace (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Nehemiah reacted differently to this problem than Ezra had (Ezra 9:2). Maybe he was upset because the people knew better, being taught by Ezra. He contended with them and cursed them. Some he smote; had them beaten rods, and others he plucked their hair. This may seem cruel but it was probably the only way to get through to these hardened sinners. Nehemiah made them swear by God, not to take wives of the world. The people promised to live correctly concerning this matter.

Challenge

They were reminded them of Solomon's mistake (1 Kings 11:1-8). The wise king was wrong when he married women that did not serve the LORD. This sin hindered his relationship with the LORD and eventually hurt the nation, which ended up divided. He is an example to learn from – Solomon, the king of Israel who was wise and beloved by God, was unable to overcome the effects of an unbiblical marriage. If he could not, neither can anyone else.

In a powerful demonstration of his seriousness, Nehemiah chased out Eliashib's grandson that married Sanballat's daughter. This man was a priest that married one that opposed the Jews. Perhaps he was stubborn or obstinate and unwilling to change. With his departure, he would no longer be a

burden upon the nation. Nehemiah put an end to sin and did not permit those in sin to continue in the city. He led the people to look to the LORD and live after His ways.

Questions for Consideration

What law was discovered concerning the Ammonite and Moabite and what was the result?

Why did Tobiah receive a private residence in the temple?

What affect did this have on the Jews?

How long was Nehemiah away?

Why were the Levites working in the fields?

What did Nehemiah do to the Levites?

In what ways was the Sabbath broken?

How did Nehemiah correct the breaking of the Sabbath?

What was Nehemiah's request to God concerning his works?

Why did Nehemiah deal harshly with those that married people from the world?

Points to Ponder

Is separation important?

Yes. We do not separate for the sake being different but because it is wrong to unite with those that oppose God.

We cannot worship with someone that denies Jesus Christ or His work. You must decide whom you will serve, the world or God.

Who are your friends?

Your friends will influence your conduct and affect your relationship with the LORD.

Good friends will be a blessing, while worldly friends will be a burden. Make sure you choose your friends wisely.

What does your conduct say?

Eliashib claimed to be righteous but his conduct said otherwise. He served the LORD but befriended the world. He ignored sinful men and allowed them to be involved in the work of the LORD. Your actions speak louder than your words.

Are you aware?

Nehemiah witnessed the problems with his own eyes. He did not act on hearsay, but paid attention to his surroundings and noticed the problems. He was an involved leader, so he was informed. You will know more if you are involved.

What's your appeal?

Nehemiah did not appeal to God based upon His works. There was no boasting of his works or exalting of his goodness. He did not think too highly of himself or his abilities, but approached the LORD with humility instead of pride. There was no self-righteousness to be found.