

RESTORING THE BROKEN


A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

20

Review Nehemiah 10:28-39, Israel's "binding agreement" (9:38).

Review Nehemiah 12:44-47.

Read Nehemiah 13.

1. Nehemiah recounts what followed the joyous dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.
 - a. What provisions are made "at that time" (12:44) for temple worship? (12:44-47; See also your answer to question 11 in last week's lesson.)
 - b. Chapter 13 continues Nehemiah's description of the celebration of the dedication of the wall. In response to the reading of scripture, what step is taken to ensure the purity of those worshipping at the temple? (13:1-3; * Deut. 23:3-6; Read about Balaam in Num. 22-24.)

NEHEMIAH, GOVERNOR OF JUDAH

After serving as governor of Judah for twelve years (5:14), Nehemiah returned to Babylon to serve the king (13:6). Chapter 13 tell us that "some time later" (13:6b) Nehemiah, with the king's permission, went back to Judah and served a second term as governor. "Presumably a considerable period of time elapsed [while he was in Babylon], since the problems of the final chapter are major ones and would not have happened overnight."¹

"If on his first visit [Nehemiah] had been a whirlwind, on his second he was all fire and earthquake to a city that had settled down in his absence to a comfortable compromise with the gentile world."²

Upon his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah finds that the priests, the Levites, and the people have come to disregard God's Law, neglecting the very promises they made to "obey carefully all [of its] commands, regulations and decrees" (10:29). Let's look at the wrongs he confronts.

Priestly Corruption

2. What shocking things has Eliashib the high priest done while Nehemiah was away?
vv. 4-5, 7

v. 28a

Why are these actions so shocking? (Consider your answers to question 1. Recall who Tobiah and Sanballat are in 2:10, 19; 4:1-3, 7-8; 6:1-2, 12-14, 17-19.)

3. What is Nehemiah's response to these situations? (vv. 8-9, 28b)

Is his anger justifiable? (Compare to Jesus' response in Mt. 21:12-13. 📖* Lev. 2:1-3)

Neglecting the Tithe and Other Offerings – See the promises made in 10:34-35, 37-39.

4. Verse 10 tells us that “the Levites and musicians... had gone back to their own fields.”

a. Why must they earn their own living? (v. 10)

b. What effect do you think their departure might have had on the temple and the worship that takes place there?

5. Verses 12 and 31 imply further neglect of provision for the temple, which Nehemiah successfully corrects. What does he do to restore proper temple functioning? (vv. 11, 13)

6. Nehemiah rebukes the temple officials in verse 11. Why is this lack of provision their fault? (Consider the example of Eliashib the high priest in question 2.)

“Desecrating the Sabbath” (v. 17) – See the promise made in 10:31.

7. Read verses 15-22. “The bustling scene of verses 15 and 16 shows how rapidly the trickle which must have begun in Nehemiah's absence... had become – as such trickles do – a flood.”³

a. What sinful behavior does Nehemiah encounter in these verses? (vv. 15-16)

b. Why is this particularly troubling? (vv. 17-18; 📖 Jer. 17:19-27)

c. What is Nehemiah's response to this violation of God's Law? (vv. 15c, 17, 19-22)

8. Why do you think the people have gone back on this particular promise?

How has this materialism affected their worship?

What warning does Jesus give us regarding this? (Lk. 16:13)

Marrying Foreigners – See the promise made in 10:30.

9. What consequence of the people's sin in verse 23 does Nehemiah point out in verse 24?

Why would this consequence be such a serious problem?

10. Nehemiah's response in verse 25 may seem especially harsh, but remember that this has been a recurring sin of the people. "In this case, Nehemiah did not act as radically as Ezra had done earlier when he required the Jewish men to divorce their foreign wives (Ezra 9–10). Nevertheless, he gave them a thorough dressing-down and publicly humiliated some of them, extracting renewed promises that the people would abstain from damaging marriages with foreign peoples (v. 25)."⁴
Read about Solomon in 1 Kings 11:1-9. Why does Nehemiah cite him as an example?

11. Three times throughout chapter 13 we read about purification – the purification of storerooms (v. 9), of Levites (v. 22), and of “the priests and the Levites” (v. 30). Why is purification necessary at this time?


The holiness of God and the chronic sinfulness of his people was why the laws of purification were essential. What do they point to and why do believers in Jesus no longer need to undergo this ritual? (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 9:13-15; 10:10-14)

12. “Apparently, Nehemiah did not fear to place his actions before God for judgment”⁵ (vv. 14, 22b, 31b). Nor did he fear to place certain sinful priests before the Lord either (v. 29). How is asking God to remember these things a sign of humility on Nehemiah’s part?

13. Nehemiah is the last book of Old Testament history. It will be 400 years before the people of Israel will hear from God again, when the angel appears to Zechariah to announce the birth of John the Baptist. The Old Testament era ends with the sober view we see in chapter 13 of the Jews’ repeated compromises and covenant breaking. Their sins have affected their worship of God.

Consider what compromises you make that affect your worship of God. Take time to confess these things and seek restoration in your relationship with the Lord. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving for the ways you have seen God restore what is broken.

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

 * For further study

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: an Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 135.

² Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 129.

³ Kidner, 131.

⁴ Boice, 140.

⁵ Boice, 138.