

## The Tragedy of Spiritual Decline # 30

Nehemiah 13: 1-14

I trust that you have been encouraged and even challenged by our study in the book of Nehemiah. Tonight we begin to consider the concluding chapter in this wonderful book. As we look back over the events and people recorded in Nehemiah, we find a solid example from which we can gain valuable insight into serving the Lord and being prosperous in our efforts. With the exception of the grievance over greed in Chapter 5 and the doubt from Judah in Chapter 6, we have studied a people who faced overwhelming odds and overcame, by the help of the Lord, for His glory. We see a people that were committed to the task at hand, a people who confessed their sins and sought restoration. We find a people who followed the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, offering worship unto the Lord. This has been a great study of triumph in the face of adversity and worship offered to the worthy Lord.

However, in this closing chapter we find a particular danger that we all must avoid. After all the people had experienced, and the victories they had enjoyed, sadly it didn't take long for the people to revert back to the old ways, seeking to please and satisfy the flesh. As we come to Chapter 13 we find that Nehemiah had returned for a time to Persia, fulfilling his obligation to King Artaxerxes. [Neh.13:6 – But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king:](#) Apparently the set time that Nehemiah had been granted to restore the city walls had expired and he had to return to Persia. In his absence, the people returned to their old way of living.

It has been some time since the walls of Jerusalem had been restored. Some estimate that Nehemiah was likely away for a couple of years as he returned to Persia. Upon his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah discovers the spiritual decline that has occurred in his absence. I want to consider the [failures](#) of the people as we think on: [The Tragedy of Spiritual Decline](#).

**I. Their Disobedience to the Scriptures** (1-3) – In the parenthetical passages ([Chps.8-10](#)) we discovered a great spiritual renewal among the people. This was due in large part to their hunger for the Word and their submission to it. Sadly in Nehemiah's absence the people have once again neglected the Word and have become disobedient to it. Notice:

**A. The Command** (1) – [On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;](#) Clearly God had given His people direction regarding their personal lives. He had specifically forbidden the mixing of Israel with those of foreign nations. Here we find a specific

reference to the Ammonites and the Moabites. These were descendents of the incestuous relationship Lot had with his daughters shortly after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

- This does not reveal any cruelty on the part of God, but rather His divine direction and compassion for His chosen people. God knew that the people of other nations would lead His people away from His holy ordinances. They would tempt the people to forsake their worship and devotion for the true and living God for the idols of the world and pleasures of the flesh.
- We are blessed to have the Word of God. It is given for our benefit. God reveals His will for our lives within His Word. We now live under grace, being saved through the atonement of Jesus Christ, but we are still obligated to live according to the will of God, revealed within His Word.

**B. The Context** (2) – [Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.](#) We don't have time to go into detail concerning the efforts of Balak, king of Moab, and Balaam to curse the people, [Numbers 22](#), but God turned that curse into a blessing. As Israel made their way from Egypt to the Promised Land, the Ammonites and Moabites refused them passage through their land and showed no mercy on this wandering multitude. They sought to curse God's people rather than help them.

- We too must guard against the influences of this world. Many have given into the temptations they present and allowed them a place of prominence in their lives. The prince of this world and those who follow him have no desire for the church to prosper. In fact, they seek any means possible to hinder the work of the Lord. God will work all things for our good, but we must exercise godly wisdom as we interact with the world.

**C. The Conviction** (3) – [Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.](#) As the Word was read again in their hearing, conviction gripped their hearts. No doubt the people were aware of their error, but until they were confronted with Scripture, they were unwilling to repent. The people then separated themselves from the mixed multitude, removing those whose influence led them away from the Lord.

- This is a biblical doctrine that many refuse to consider in our day. In many cases, it is rejected outright. If we are to be pleasing to the Lord, we must be willing to live separated lives. That is not to say we shouldn't be a witness to the world, but we are expected to separate ourselves from the world and the lure that it brings. God's Word is not given for our consideration; it is given for our submission! We must be willing to submit to the commands of Scripture.

## **I. Their Disobedience to the Scriptures (1-3)**

**II. Their Defilement of the Sanctuary (4-9)** – God had given instruction for the keeping and operation of the Temple, but the people have abandoned God’s instruction, defiling the sanctuary.

**A. The Source (4-5a)** – *And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: [5] And he had prepared for him a great chamber.* Isn’t that amazing? In the absence of Nehemiah, Eliashib the priest had made an alliance with Tobiah, the same man that sought to defeat and hinder Nehemiah and the reconstruction efforts. He had forsaken the leadership of the Lord, under the influence of one who stood against holiness.

- That is all too common in our day. The house of God is being defiled due to the church’s association and allegiance to the world. We cannot abandon biblical principle for the approval of this world. There is too much at stake. We must abide by the Word and live for God!

**B. The Suffering (5)** – *And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests.* Eliashib had forsaken the sacredness of the Temple and neglected the servants of the Lord in an effort to please Tobiah. We will deal with this neglect further in a moment, but the defilement of the sanctuary brought spiritual and physical suffering to the people.

- When we abandon the ways of God in an effort to please the world, there will always be adverse consequences. When we grieve the Spirit, we bring spiritual suffering to the congregation. When our focus is on men instead of pleasing the Lord, we neglect those whom God has called us to minister to. Living apart from the will of God will bring suffering.

**C. The Sorrow (7-8)** – *And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. [8] And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber.* This greatly grieved the heart of Nehemiah. He was devastated by what he saw in Jerusalem, particularly within the Temple.

- We need godly sorrow in our day as well. It ought to grieve our hearts as we consider the state of affairs around us. Society continues on a downward spiral. The church has grown complacent and apathetic to the needs of our day. In many cases, God’s house has become an entertainment center rather than a place of worship, sharing the gospel.

**D. The Sanctification** (9) – Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense. Unwilling to compromise his convictions, Nehemiah cleansed the Temple, sanctifying it once again unto the Lord. He refused to participate in these ungodly practices.

- We need that same commitment and courage today. The church needs those who refuse to compromise for the approval of men. We need those who will boldly stand in the truth of God's Word, proclaiming that truth with confidence and compassion. This is the house of the Lord and we ought to respect it as such, as well as, expecting others to do the same!

### **I. Their Disobedience to the Scriptures** (1-3)

#### **II. Their Defilement of the Sanctuary** (4-9)

**III. Their Disregard for the Servants** (10-14) – Nehemiah also recognized the neglect of the servants of the Temple. God had given instruction for their care, but the servants were neglected.

**A. The Violation** (10) – And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. The people were commanded of God to care for the Levites. They had not received an inheritance in the land. They depended upon the people to meet their needs. The Levites had been forced to abandon the work of the Lord in an effort to supply their needs.

- I am thankful for the care that I receive here, but I also realize that all churches do not care for their pastors as you do. Many still have the attitude: if we keep him poor, we'll keep him humble. The church will never prosper by neglecting God's man. When he has to devote much of his time meeting physical needs, he is forced to neglect the spiritual needs of the church.

**B. The Confrontation** (11) – Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. Again we see the boldness of Nehemiah and his determination to handle things as God would have him to. I want to emphasize again that we need those who are willing to stand for truth, even if the majority refuses to do the same. I can assure you that you will not be popular among men, but you can have the confidence of knowing that you have stood for the Lord. He will honor those who seek to honor Him and stand for His Word.

**C. The Restoration** (12-13) – Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. [13] And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren. You will have to admit that things looked desperate when Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, but he was unwilling to allow this injustice and rebellion to continue. He chose to take a stand, and his efforts brought about much needed restoration.

- Things surely look bad in our day as well, but hope is not lost. We could see spiritual change in our land if we would only seek the Lord and be willing to stand upon our convictions. This will never happen as long as we go along with the demands of the world, but if we would seek the Lord and determine to live for Him, we could see revival and restoration!

**D. The Supplication** (14) – Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof. Now on the surface it appears that Nehemiah is seeking the blessing of God for his efforts, and there is application for that, but I see much more than that in this prayer. Nehemiah took a stand when no one else was willing to do so. It must have seemed as if he was standing alone. Nehemiah is seeking wisdom and strength to stand in the face of increasing opposition. He knew everyone didn't share his vision, and he knew he would need God's grace and help to continue the fight.

- What a powerful thought to conclude our study this evening. We need the grace and help of God to press on in this difficult day. We are opposed on every hand. Satan seeks to bring opposition within the church itself. We will never endure the difficulties we face without the help of the Lord. Seek Him for strength and guidance!

We have covered a lot of ground tonight, but I see a clear application for our day. Many of the problems and issues that were prevalent in Nehemiah's day remain among us. Everyone does not desire to serve the Lord and please Him. We are a majority in the Lord, but there are fewer believers today than before. We must stand together united for the cause of Christ. We need the help of the Lord to prevail.

God desires to strengthen us today, but we must seek Him. Are there needs in your life? I am sure that we all have needs. Why not bring those to the Lord and allow Him to carry your burden? Why not seek the Lord to provide for your needs? He is ready, willing, and able if we will only come to Him.