

A Challenging Conclusion # 32

Nehemiah 13: 23-31

Tonight we come to the end of our study in the book of Nehemiah. This has been a lengthy study, but I am convinced that it was well worth all the effort. We have discovered many truths that are relevant to our lives today. We are not dealing with the physical despair and destruction that the people of Jerusalem were, but the spiritual applications are as relevant today as they were in Nehemiah's day. We find ourselves in the midst of a spiritual crisis, and the need is great for those to assume positions of leadership and resolve as we seek to overcome the adversities we face.

Our final study does not end like the well known fairy tales of our day. It does not conclude with "they lived happily ever after." In fact, we are continuing to consider the spiritual decline that occurred in Nehemiah's absence. I will admit that I would have enjoyed a happy and encouraging conclusion, but this stands as a stark reminder of the difficulties we all face. As long as we live in bodies of flesh, we will be tempted to stray from the ways of God and there will be times when we miss the mark. We may choose to ignore the realities of our lives, but that doesn't remove them. We are just as susceptible to failure as the people of Jerusalem were. We would do well to understand their failures and seek ways to avoid them in our lives.

As we conclude our study of Nehemiah, I want to consider the [struggles](#) he faced as we think on: [A Challenging Conclusion](#). Keep in mind, the same struggles remain in our day as well.

I. The Defilement of the People (23-24) – As Nehemiah continues to evaluate the residents of Jerusalem, he discovers more spiritual decline. Consider:

A. Their Corruption (23) – [In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab](#): The men of Jerusalem had taken wives of Ashdod, the capital city of the Philistines, as well as from Ammon and Moab. All of these were enemies of Judah. They served idols and false gods, promoting an idolatrous lifestyle contrary to the teachings of Jehovah.

- We have discussed the issue of intermarrying with the gentile nations before, but I want to remind us that this was expressly forbidden of God. He knew the influence of these ungodly people would have a detrimental effect on Israel. God desired to keep His people away from such influence and temptation, in order to maintain purity before Him.
- There are many applications we could make in regard to this, but I want to keep it simple and to the point. We must refrain from anything that would cause us to wander from the ways of God and hinder our fellowship with Him. That certainly would include unwise relationships and marriages, but it isn't limited to that. We must stay focused and avoid temptation when possible.

B. Their Communication (24) – [And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.](#) Keep in mind these were God's chosen people. He had called them unto Himself. They were set apart from the nations of the world. He had given them His Word in their language. There was a sense of national pride among them due to their unique relationship with God. As Nehemiah surveyed the city, he found Hebrew children speaking the language of the Philistines half the time. Can you imagine the hurt and disgust this brought to Nehemiah? They were forsaking the language through which God communicated with them for the dialect of the world. If one didn't know, they would've had a hard time telling whether they were speaking to a Hebrew or a Philistine.

- We must be cautious of seeking to apply a literal application for us from this passage. I see no harm in learning another language. God allowed Peter and the apostles to speak in other tongues at Pentecost. Missionaries today learn the language of the people they hope to reach. However, there is a profound spiritual application. We must ensure that our communication reveals the Lord. It is sad when the world has a hard time discerning whether or not we are a Christian because of the language we use. We should seek to communicate in a way that edifies Christ at all times. We shouldn't speak out of both sides of our mouths, one way at church and another way among the world. [Philip.1:27 – Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;](#) 2 [Pet.3:11 – Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.](#)

C. Their Confusion (24) – Nehemiah understood what he had encountered, but it must have been confusing for others. They would have a hard time discerning with whom they spoke. Jerusalem was the holy city, the beacon of light to a dark world. This corruption would've caused confusion and hindered their influence among the world.

- We see these tragic results in our society today. It is no wonder that many are skeptical of the church. They have encountered too many who speak both languages. It will do us no good to witness to someone after we have engaged in the conversation of this world in front of them. We need holiness and purity to present a clear witness and avoid confusion.

I. The Defilement of the People (23-24)

II. The Disapproval of Nehemiah (25-28) – It didn't take long for Nehemiah to express his disapproval and displeasure. Notice:

A. The Rebuke (25a) – [And I contended with them, and cursed them](#). As we saw with the nobles of Judah in our last study, Nehemiah immediately contended with them. He confronted them because of their sin. He was not going to look the other way. This was open sin and he felt compelled to confront it.

- We have also considered this before, but there will be times when we must stand for truth and righteousness. There are times when we should speak up and speak out against sin. The Christian has been silent for too long. We are aware of the plague of iniquity we face, and yet most just look the other way. We need boldness of God to stand for truth and confront sin.

B. The Retribution (25) – [And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves](#). Nehemiah didn't just point out their sin, he dealt with it. He disciplined those who had erred. He made them swear that they would refrain from such activity in the future.

- This is not encouraging physical abuse. These are dreadful times that anyone who is right with God would rather avoid. I do not like confrontation, and I have never enjoyed having to administer discipline. There were those in Nehemiah's situation that would not heed a word of warning. Some refused to listen so discipline was necessary. This should never be the first option when confronting sin, but there are times when discipline is necessary. Consider [Matthew 18:15-17](#). We should not relish in discipline or seek to administer it unjustly, but if it is necessary we must be willing to stand for truth and confront sin at all costs.

C. The Reminder (26-27) – [Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. \[27\] Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?](#) Nehemiah offered a biblical example of the devastation caused by such activity. He pointed them to the Word of God, reminding them of the dangers of sin. He warned that they were in danger of judgment because of their error. He could not overlook it because God had spoken against it.

- This should be our guide as well. When we confront sin, we should always have Scripture to confirm our stand. Most will reject that as well because they are not interested in living according to God's Word, but we can stand on it because it is our sole authority for all we do. We need to remind those who stray that God has not changed. Sin is still sin and God will ultimately judge sin. If God's Word says it, that settles it! If the Bible says it's wrong, it's wrong; if the Bible says it's right, it's right!

D. The Reprisal (28) – [And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.](#) We all remember the deception of Sanballat and the difficulty he brought to Nehemiah. One among them was Sanballat's son in law. Apparently he held the same views as Sanballat and sought to promote his agenda. Nehemiah determined to have no part of that or allow any to remain who agreed with that line of thought. Nehemiah removed him from the people. This seems harsh, and in a way it is, but this too was necessary. Nehemiah had to remove the source of contention if things were to improve. If he was allowed to stay, he would've sought to undermine Nehemiah's authority.

- This should always be a last resort, after every other avenue has been exhausted, but if a false teacher exists among the church, he must be removed if he will not repent and turn from his ways of deception. If we are ever confronted with this issue we are obligated to address it. The church is too important to allow something like this to continue. [Rom.16:17 – Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.](#) [Titus 3:10-11 – A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; \[11\] Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.](#)

I. The Defilement of the People (23-24)

II. The Disapproval of Nehemiah (25-28)

III. The Desire of Nehemiah (29-31) – The closing verses of Nehemiah reveal a prayer he offered unto the Lord. We find that the prayed for:

A. Correction (29) – [Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.](#) Some had defiled the priesthood and their covenant with the Lord. Nehemiah had done all he could to correct the wrongs he discovered, and he prayed that God would deal with those who sought to defile the temple and the people. He could confront and even discipline, but he knew that God would have to chastise some if they were to change.

- We can live our lives as best we can, seeking to honor the Lord and point others to Him, but we can't force people to change. We can do all we can to promote an atmosphere of righteousness within the church, but God will have to deal with hearts for real change to happen. We should spend more time in prayer and dependence upon the Lord instead of fretting and worrying about difficulties we face.

B. Cleansing (30-31a) – Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; [31] And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Nehemiah desired holiness and purity among God's people, especially at the house of God. He desired that all would live pleasing to the Lord and in service to each other. He genuinely desired the holiness of God to permeate their being.

- That should certainly be our desire as well. If we would seek the righteousness of God and place a premium upon holiness, many of the problems we face would be nonexistent. We will have to admit that many of the problems we face result from allowing the flesh to rule our lives instead of living submitted to the Lord. If each of us sought holiness and purity, we would see a drastic change in our services and our lives.

C. Comfort (31b) – Remember me, O my God, for good. Nehemiah closed his thoughts with a prayer for God to remember him. He may have concluded the inspired writing, but his work was not over. He knew he continued to need the grace and comfort of God to face the challenges that lay ahead.

- We too need the grace and comfort of God to endure and face the challenges of life. Things are not going to get any easier for the Christian. We live in a world that is increasingly intolerant of our faith with each passing day. The presence and lure of sin surrounds us. If we are to continue for the Lord, we will need His help every moment. Seek Him for the grace and comfort you need to persevere in this difficult environment.

I have enjoyed our time in Nehemiah and I trust that it has been a blessing and help in your life as well. It is apparent that one who is committed to the Lord can make a significant impact on those around him. Will you determine to be a Nehemiah in our day? Will you commit to standing for truth and holiness, seeking to lead others unto the Lord we serve? Our world needs more Nehemiahs. We can make a difference as we serve the Lord in this life!