

## GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD

### **TEXT: NEHEMIAH 13:1-31**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah cover the same period of time, after the Babylonian captivity when Israel had returned to Jerusalem and had begun again the worship of Jehovah in the restored temple.
2. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book.
3. Ezra, the priest, led an early return to Israel and restored worship in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Nehemiah, who was a contemporary of Ezra, led a later return.
4. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah had ministered to the people before that time and had urged them to build the temple, and Ezra went back to restore the worship of that temple.
5. Nehemiah was not a priest like Ezra, nor was he a prophet like Haggai or Zechariah. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes, and he was sent by the king to rebuild Jerusalem.
6. The book of Nehemiah is an historic account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem which took place in the fifth century before Christ.
7. But Nehemiah did more than just rebuild the walls. The book of Nehemiah is also the story of rebuilding people. This book is the restoring of a people from ruin and despair to a new walk with God.

#### **I. SEPARATION FROM EVIL**

1. Separation is an important part of God's building program. Way back in Genesis 1:4 we read, "God divided the light from the darkness," and God has dividing the light from the darkness ever since (cf. Eph. 5:1-8).
2. The Bible teaches that lost sinners are in spiritual darkness. John 3:19 says, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."
3. When Nehemiah heard about the deplorable condition of Jerusalem he was grieved. Nehemiah 1:4 says, "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."
4. Nehemiah understood that the fall of Jerusalem was the judgment of God upon a sinful, backslidden nation (cf. Neh. 1:4-11).
5. Therefore, Nehemiah encouraged the people to get right with God and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

6. Nehemiah 13 begins with the Word of God being read "in the audience of the people" (13:1, 2). Getting right with God means getting back to the Word of God! And the Word of God teaches separation from evil.
7. The reason the LORD did not want Israel accepting the Ammonite and the Moabites into the congregation of God was that these heathens would corrupt Israel and lead them astray.
8. The insidious counsel of Balaam (13:2; cf. Numbers 31:16) was for the Moabites to intermarry with the Israelites, which would mean that soon Israel would be just like the Moabites, and would follow their gods.
9. By the way, the counsel of Balaam is referred to three times in the New Testament. In II Peter 2:15 it is called "the way of Balaam." In Jude 11 it is called "the error of Balaam." And in Revelation 2:14, it is called "the doctrine of Balaam."
10. These Scriptures are given as a solemn warning -- God's people are not to mix with the devil's people.
11. This is what happened with King Solomon. He married heathen wives and they led him into idolatry (13:26).
12. Before we move along, it should be noted that repentant Moabites, such as Ruth the Moabitess, were accepted into the congregation of Israel.
13. In fact, Ruth is even included in the genealogy of David and the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:5 and 6 says, "Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king..." etc.
14. This is also brought out at the end of Ruth chapter 4.
15. But those Moabites and other pagans who would not give up their foreign gods would only serve to pollute Israel spiritually. Therefore, they had to be excluded.
16. Nehemiah 13:3 says, "Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude."
17. As we see in the New Testament references to the counsel of Balaam, these Old Testament Scriptures have a New Testament application. The LORD wants His people to separate from "the mixed multitude."
18. Whenever believers mix with the unsaved there will be trouble; there will be compromise, and there will be tragedy (cf. II Cor. 6:14--7:1).
19. Amos 3:3 says, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"
20. Eliashib was the high priest at that time, and he was associated with the wicked Sanballat, as well as his friend Tobiah (13:4).

21. We are first introduced to Sanballat and Tobiah in Nehemiah chapter 2, and we see throughout the book of Nehemiah that these men were trouble-makers, determined to hinder the work of God in Jerusalem,
22. Nehemiah was sorely grieved that Eliashib had actually given Tobiah some of the chambers in the court of the house of God (13:5-8).
23. By giving Tobiah one of the chambers, Eliashib had polluted the house of God. Whenever you have leadership that refuses to practice Biblical separation, the house of God is polluted. This is why so many churches today are weak and worldly. There are too many pastors who refuse to separate from worldliness and wickedness.
24. I read an interesting article recently. The author (a pastor) said, "The second law of thermodynamics states that in a closed system, things move toward the maximum state of entropy, or disorder. That physical law has a parallel in the spiritual realm: Even among God's people, unless we are constantly fighting against it, things tend toward the maximum state of spiritual entropy. We live in a spiritually and morally permissive society. Unless we constantly wage war against the flesh, we tend to become more and more like the spiritual degeneracy that surrounds us."
25. Then, after mentioning all of the immoral filth on television, the author said, "If we think that this cultural degeneracy has not damaged the church, we're blind!" (Steven J. Cole, [www.fcfoonline.org](http://www.fcfoonline.org)).
26. Nehemiah understood that the cultural degeneracy and awful wickedness of Israel's heathen neighbors were a bad influence, and he insisted that the Israelites separate themselves.
27. Nehemiah 13:6 says Nehemiah was out of town at the time, but when he returned to Jerusalem from Persia he was grieved and he "cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber" (13:6-8).
28. There are some people here this morning who need to cast some stuff out -- nasty music, filthy literature, DVD's with immoral sex and bad language, ugly violent video games, immodest clothing, etc.
29. Nehemiah was "grieved" (13:8) because God was grieved. Ephesians 4:30 says, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God."
30. Verse 9 says Nehemiah then "commanded, and they cleansed the chambers." We need cleansing in our churches, and in our homes, and in our lives.
31. In 1936, J. Edwin Orr was preaching at a revival meeting in New Zealand. It took him less than five minutes to write these words:

*Search me, O God,  
And know my heart today;*

*Try me, O Savior,  
Know my thoughts, I pray.  
See if there be  
Some wicked way in me;  
Cleanse me from every sin  
And set me free.*

## **II. DEDICATION TO THE LORD**

1. Under the poor leadership of Eliashib, the people withheld their tithes, so that "the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field" (13:10).
2. The Levites and the singers had to go work out on the farm to support their families. Today many pastors and missionaries are struggling financially because God's people are not dedicated. When believers are not consecrated, and are not good givers, the Lord's work is hindered.
3. The problem is a lack of faith -- they do not believe the Word of God.
4. Our Lord said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).
5. Our Lord said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).
6. Second Corinthians 9:6 and 7 says, "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."
7. There is a connection between revival and giving, and it can be traced throughout the Bible. For example -- the revival under King Hezekiah (cf. II Chron. 31:4-10).
8. Malachi 3:10 says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."
9. The temple services had ceased. Nehemiah contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" (Neh. 13:11).
10. Today many churches are cutting back and many are closing their doors altogether.

11. Nehemiah restored the temple services. He recalled the dispersed Levites to the regular discharge of their duties (13:11).
12. Meanwhile the people got right with God, and they willingly brought in their tithes into the treasuries (13:12).
13. Nehemiah then appointed "faithful men," men of integrity and good report to act as trustees of the sacred treasures, and thus order, regularity, and active service were re-established in God's house (13:13, 14).

### **III. CESSATION FROM COMPROMISE**

1. The backslidden Israelites were profaning the sabbath day (13:15-18).
2. Furthermore, the Jews were marrying heathen wives (13:23-26).
3. It is interesting to see this same pattern in Nehemiah 10 -- separation from evil (10:28), dedication to the LORD (10:29), and cessation from compromise (10:30, 31).
4. There are two major compromises here -- profaning the sabbath and intermarriage with unbelievers.
5. Regarding the sabbath, the Lord's Day and the Lord's tithe go together, because the Bible teaches that God's people are to set aside at least one day for the Lord, and we are to set aside at least ten percent of our income for the Lord.
6. Israel was a theocracy. America is not, though it was built on Christian principles. When I was a child practically all the stores were closed on Sunday, the Lord's Day.
7. Israel was a theocracy and Nehemiah had the authority to order the city gates to be shut, and not to be opened, till the Sabbath was past (13:19). Nehemiah had authority from God and from the king of Persia.
8. In order to ensure the faithful execution of this order, Nehemiah stationed some of his own servants as guards at the city gates, "that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day" (13:19b).
9. Since the city gates were shut, the merchants and sellers lodged outside the walls hoping to attract business on the sabbath (13:20).
10. When Nehemiah saw this he threatened to "lay hands on" them (13:21).
11. Nehemiah's plan worked. Verse 21 says, "From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath."
12. Nehemiah also dealt with the serious sin of Jews marrying heathen wives. The children of these mixed marriages were "half in the

- speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language" (13:23, 24).
13. When believers marry unbelievers it not only affect them, it also has a negative impact on their children.
  14. The children from mixed marriages were speaking a mixed dialect — half-Philistine, and half-Hebrew. And so it is today in many churches. Children speak half-Christian and half-heathen.
  15. They say they are saved but they look like heathens -- ear rings on the boys, immodest clothing on the girls, etc.
  16. Have you ever seen interviews with these worldly hip-hop singers and other entertainers? They speak a strange mixture of heathenism and Christianity. May I say their "Jesus" is not the Jesus of the Bible!
  17. And many so-called Christians are like that today. They live like worldly heathens, and they talk like worldly heathens but they say, "Hallelujah! I'm blessed! Thank you Jesus, Praise God!" etc.
  18. It is an abomination.
  19. The Bible is very clear that we are to be separated from heathens -- especially in marriage -- "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (II Cor. 6:14).
  20. Nehemiah 13:27 refers to mixed marriage as an "evil...transgression."
  21. Marrying heathen wives was led to King Solomon's downfall (Neh. 13:26). And it has ruined many other believers as well.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. Strong men like Nehemiah are needed today, because today our churches lack strong leadership (cf. 13:8, 11, 17, 19, 21, 25, 28).
2. Some people today would accuse Nehemiah of being too rough, even uncouth (cf. vss. 25, 28, etc.) but he was not rough or uncouth.
3. Our Lord certainly was not rough or uncouth when He overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, or when He pronounced woes on the scribes and Pharisees, and called them hypocrites, and blind guides, and whited sepulchres (Matthew 21; 23).
4. The apostle Paul was not rough or uncouth when he told Elymas the sorcerer that he was full of all subtilty and all mischief, and called him a child of the devil and an enemy of all righteousness, and guilty of perverting the right ways of the Lord.
5. Furthermore, after that strong rebuke, Paul struck him blind (Acts 13:9-11). Today we need more men like Paul and more men like Nehemiah because sometimes sin needs to be confronted strongly and head on.

6. Nehemiah was strong because he was a great man of prayer. His prayer in chapter 1 is one of the most beautiful prayers in the Bible, and we see him praying repeatedly throughout chapter 13 as well (cf. 13:14, 22, 29, 31).