

GETTING IT RIGHT Sunday, August 25, 2013

Unifying Topic: SABBATH REFORMS

Lesson Text

I. **Sabbath Violations** (Nehemiah 13:15-16)

II. **Confronts The Nobles** (Nehemiah 13:17-18)

III. **Honoring The Sabbath** (Nehemiah 13:19-22)

The Main Thought: And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. (Nehemiah 13:22, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People sometimes make demands of those who are breaking community rules. Which community rules are important enough for everyone to follow consistently? Keeping the Sabbath was so important to the welfare of God's community that Nehemiah ordered the gates shut to prevent the Israelites from breaking this law.

Lesson Aim: To acquaint students with the problem of Sabbath violation in the nation of Israel both before and after the exile

Life Aim: To demonstrate to students the importance of finding times of rest so that they can learn to rely on the Lord's provision.

13:15 In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.

13:16 There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?

13:18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.

13:19 And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day.

13:20 So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

13:21 Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath.

13:22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

HISTORY:

Nehemiah 12:44-47— The dedication of the city wall was characterized by joy, praise, and singing. Nehemiah repeatedly mentioned King David, who began the custom of using choirs in worship in David's day. Israel was then a vigorous God-fearing nation. These exiles who had returned wanted their rebuilt Jerusalem to be the hub of a renewed nation, strengthened by God. Therefore, they dedicated themselves and their city to God.

Nehemiah 13:1-14—

13:1 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;— ¹Twelve years after the people rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to Persia. Some time later, he asked the king to allow him to return to Judah. "On that day" seems to mean a particular day after Nehemiah returned to Judah. It seems that, until then, the people had neglected to read the law of God. And when Nehemiah returned on that particular day, they heard the law. This section of the Law was read dealing with the Ammonite and Moabite should not join the people of God (referring to Deut.23:3). The Ammonites and Moabites were descendants from the sons of Lot and his two daughters.

13:2 Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he

¹ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/nehemiah-lbw.htm>

should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. ²The Ammonites and Moabites were forbidden to come into the assembly of God because they had refused to give food and water to Israel and had hired and paid Balaam to call down a curse on the Jews (Deut.23:4). But God did good things for the Jews instead (Num.23:11-12, 19-20).

13:3 Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude. So the people obeyed God after hearing the Law and they separated themselves from all foreigners. God had strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses for the Israelite men to marry the daughters of foreigners.

13:4 And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah:— Before the above law was read, and observed and acted upon, Eliashib the high priest being responsible for the rooms of the house of God became allied to Tobiah. ³Tobiah had established a close relationship with Eliashib the High Priest, whose grandson had married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite.

13:5 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. So Eliashib, the high priest (Neh.3:1) used his influence to get this special room for Tobiah. Tobiah along with Sanballat were the ones who had opposed the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and its walls under Nehemiah's governorship. And here Eliashib allows him to have his own room in the Temple. The rooms of the house of God were to be used as a storehouse to keep the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil offerings which were to be given to the Levites, singers, and porters.

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:— Eliashib had been appointed custodian over the Temple chambers and Nehemiah explained that he was not in Jerusalem but in the king's palace of Babylon when this situation occurred, referring to the thing with Eliashib and Tobiah. Twelve years after the people rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to Persia. Nehemiah had returned in the 32nd year of the Persian king Artaxerxes of Babylon. Some time later Nehemiah obtained leave; permission to leave the king to return to Jerusalem.

13:7 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. And upon returning to Jerusalem, Nehemiah learns of the situation with Tobiah. Nehemiah says that Eliashib had done something evil—that of preparing a chamber in the courts of the house of God for Tobiah. This seems to be like the same sin they were to separate from in verse 1. This Tobiah was an Ammonite, one of the very kind of people that we just read should be put out from the assemblies of God's people.

13:8 And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber. Tobiah had furnished his "chamber" as a dwelling-house. In order to accommodate Tobiah, they had moved the articles of the house of God from their rightful place to make provisions for one who opposed the very rebuilding of Jerusalem and put idols in the temple courts. Nehemiah is upset! And he exploded with righteous indignation, throwing all of Tobiah's belongings out of the chamber.

13:9 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. Nehemiah's response to the desecration of the temple was similar to Christ's almost 5 centuries later (Matt.21:12, 13; Jh.2:13-17). Nehemiah commanded the chambers be cleansed to bring back the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

13:10 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. In Nehemiah's absence, the Jews violated their previous covenant with God regarding offerings (10:35-40). The people had not been faithful in supporting the work of the Levites. Consequently, the Levites were discouraged and had left the Temple to work in the fields to make a living.

13:11 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. Nehemiah gathers the rulers together and asks why they had disbanded their commitment to serve the Lord? Why is the house of God forsaken?. It was the rulers who were responsible for the continuation of

² <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/when-the-cats-away-the-mice-will-play/>

³ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobiah_\(Ammonite\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobiah_(Ammonite))

God's worship. The people had probably lost confidence in the spiritual leadership because of the lack of integrity of the high priest Eliashib. They couldn't store any of the offerings in the chambers to support the Levites because of what Eliashib had done. Nehemiah brings the Levites back to Jerusalem and puts them in their proper position of serving God in the Temple.

13:12 Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. By rejecting the tithe, the people failed to support the Levites and the rulers failed to implement it. But now, once again Judah is able to bring the tithe of the corn, the new wine, and the oil unto the treasuries. They were now able to fill the chambers to store the provisions and offerings—all that was needed to restore their worship unto God.

13:13 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. Nehemiah recognizes that the people need strong leadership. Therefore, he appoints faithful men into this office over the people to supervise and oversee the storehouses for the tithes and offerings. Note that these men represented the priests, Levites, scribes, and laymen. They were also responsible for distributing the needs and necessities to the Levites.

13:14 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. Nehemiah then prays, asking God to remember him; to not forget him concerning all that he is trying to do. Meaning that when God looks upon him, that God would not to wipe out all the good things he's done for the house of God, and for its services. He wanted the tithes and the offerings to continue in the temple. God remembers everything but He doesn't hold everything when we give it to Him!

LESSON:

Nehemiah 13:15-16 Sabbath Violations

13:15 In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. This was a day or time to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy that Nehemiah had come across the people treading wine, bringing grains loaded on donkeys; wine, grapes, and figs apparently to be sold. God had told Moses that the Jews must not work on the Sabbath Day. The Jews must keep that day to rest and worship God (Exodus 20:8-11). He found them not only doing business on the Sabbath, but also doing their daily work and carrying unnecessary burdens. This went against God's covenant and Nehemiah began to rebuke them.

13:16 There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. There were even merchants from Tyre bringing fish and all kinds of goods to the children of Judah and in Jerusalem to be sold on the Sabbath. You can't fault the men of Tyre. They were not breaking the law; they didn't observe Sabbath because they had no covenant with God. The sin was that of Israel, who allowed the buying of fish and wares on the Sabbath. They were willing to open the gates to let them in and violate the Sabbath Day.

Nehemiah 13:17-18 Nehemiah Confronts The Nobles

13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?—Nehemiah took three steps toward changing things with the people. Earlier, he had approached the rulers (v.11) and asked for accountability. Now he goes a little bit higher and gathers the elite of the community; the nobles together, rebuking them concerning their sin. He called this an evil thing, the same as when confronting Eliashib (v.7).

13:18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. Nehemiah reminds the nobles of Judah that it was because of their desecration of the Sabbath that God had judged Israel. Jeremiah had rebuked their fathers for the same things (Jer.17:21). By such acts their fathers had brought the misery of exile and oppression, and they were doing the same—increasing God's wrath against them by profaning the Sabbath.

Nehemiah 13:19-22 Honoring The Sabbath

13:19 And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded

that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. This is the third change. Nehemiah begins to enforce—Sabbath Day Worship—setting guards at the gates of Jerusalem to shut them when the Sabbath begins and to prevent anyone from bringing materials to buy or sell. The Sabbath begins on Friday night or evening about dark and goes to Saturday night about the same time. No burdens were to be brought in on the Sabbath day. These burdens refer to the food and materials that people were selling and buying.

13:20 So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. That means once or twice the merchants and sellers had to reside outside of Jerusalem.

13:21 Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. Nehemiah warned the merchants of their being outside residing around the wall on the Sabbath. ⁴Nehemiah threatened to arrest the merchants, who came to Jerusalem and waited outside the gates. This made a noisy Sabbath, and Nehemiah would not allow this. He would arrest them because the Sabbath would not be broken without or within the city walls of Jerusalem. This kept them away.

13:22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. Nehemiah also commands the Levites to be cleansed; sanctify themselves again for their task of keeping the gates and re-establishing worship. These Levites were already assigned this duty, when the gates were re-built. He asks God again to remember and show favor toward him, spare him according to God's greatness of mercy.

SUMMARY:

⁵ Nehemiah saw some on the Sabbath day treading winepresses; others brought all kinds of burdens on the Sabbath to Jerusalem; while still others sold victuals. And men of Tyre sold fish and other wares to the people on the Sabbath. During Nehemiah's absence the Law of God was no longer read, or they could not have fallen into this evil if so. This entire downward slope begins with the neglect of the Word of God.

Then Nehemiah contended with the nobles. The question was asked, *"What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath."*

Again, Nehemiah not only rebuked the evil, but acted upon it! ⁶Nehemiah gave orders that people must not trade on the Sabbath day of the week. He ordered the guards in Jerusalem to shut the gates of the city during the Sabbath day. He also spoke to the people from other nations who brought goods to sell. He warned them not to come on the Sabbath day of the week. He told the Levites to make themselves clean and holy and to guard the gates of the city. Nehemiah prayed again. He remembered God's great love. And Nehemiah asked God to show him His kindness.

APPLICATION:

Getting it right will always take us putting the Lord first. We can't get on track and then continue to get off track. If we don't have anyone to keep us accountable, we still must follow what we've been taught concerning God.

⁴ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/nehemiah/14.html>

⁵ <http://swartzentover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Gaebelein/AnnotatedOT/Nehemiah.htm>

⁶ <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/nehemiah-lbw.htm>