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**C1339 – November 20, 2013 – Nehemiah 12:27-13:31**  
**Dedication, Departure & Return**

In Nehemiah chapter 9 and following the Israelites went through a covenant renewal ceremony following the structure of Ancient Near East treaties. This was a rededication of their lives to the God of the Covenant. The rededication began with a short Preamble (9:5) that praised the name of their God for the great things He had done. It was followed by a Historical Recitation of the great works of God on their behalf and how they had failed to respond to Him correctly (9:6-37). Then, starting with the leadership they renewed their obligation to obey Him by Accepting the Covenant under oath (9:38-10:27). Finally they cited the Stipulations they were now agreeing to follow (10:28-39). In general they agreed to follow the entire law of God given in the Torah (10:28-29); specifically they agreed to not intermarry with foreigners any longer and to keep the Sabbath day and Sabbath year holy (10:30-31). Most importantly they agreed to provide for the Temple worship which had been neglected for so long (10:32-39). This was vital since to neglect Temple worship was to neglect God Himself. The purpose of the rededication ceremony was therefore to put God first in their lives, a necessity for enjoying blessing under the Mosaic Covenant. To encourage faithfulness to the rededication a tenth of the general populace was re-located to Jerusalem along with the chief leaders involved in Temple worship and other leaders who served at designated times lived among the people in the surrounding hill country. Together as a people with a large degree of autonomy under Persia they would move forward toward obedience to God, at least that was the plan.

To kick off this new desire for obedience it was time to dedicate the wall that God had providentially enabled them to build in just fifty-two days despite the many obstacles and challenges. This dedication begins in Neh 12:27. It was a huge celebration because Israel was now back in the land more

securely and scripturally than they had been since the times of Solomon.<sup>i</sup> In Neh 12:27 you see the lengths they went too to make it a huge national celebration. **Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places.** Recall that many of the Levites lived out among the people in the surrounding hill country. Since these men were necessary to the celebration all the Levites from all the cities were **sought out.** This way Nehemiah tells us **they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres.** In other words, the only way **gladness** could be attained was if the Levites came up to Jerusalem. Why? Because they were the ones who led the **hymns of thanksgiving and** the **songs** with musical accompaniment. Observe that **gladness**, a state of the heart, is directly tied to the singing of **hymns** and spiritual **songs.** This is fascinating and evidenced in both the OT and NT. Music, like wine, brings gladness and cheer to a man. The Lord and His work on their behalf was a fitting time to sing and be joyful. Of course, there is music that is appropriate for different occasions and so the music here would be uplifting and joyous, not sad, melancholy or destructive. Music is no more neutral than the words are neutral. There is music that is appropriate for a given occasion and music that is inappropriate. When we are thankful for what the Lord has done for us it is a fitting time to express ourselves in song. The NT commands us to be filled with the Spirit and that the evidences of being filled with the Spirit are that we are speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with our hearts to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things. So music and singing is evidence of being filled by the Holy Spirit.

Also observe that in this verse there are **hymns of thanksgiving** and **songs with musical accompaniment.** The **hymns** were Psalms of praise that were done a cappella. The **songs** were also Psalms but they were done with instrumental accompaniment. Contrary to the Church of Christ doctrine that forbids the use of musical instruments, the Bible attests that worship may be done either *a capella* or with musical accompaniment. The important thing is that the music is done in a way that glorifies God, keeping Him front and center as an expression of gladness. And the point of verse 27 is that since the Levites were specifically trained in musical worship then they had to be sought out and brought to Jerusalem in order for it to be a time filled with music expressing gladness.

Verse 28, **So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites, 29from Beth-gilgal and from their fields in Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem.** The villages of the Netophathites were south of Jerusalem, the villages of Beth-gilgal were east of Jerusalem and the villages of Geba and Azmaveth were north of Jerusalem. So they came up to Jerusalem from all sides except the west. These were Levites who were specifically trained as **singers**, probably both in hymns done a capella and songs done with musical accompaniment. So they came up, perhaps even singing some of the Psalms of Ascent.

In verse 30 ceremonial preparations were made for the dedication, the people had to be purified. First, starting with **the priests and the Levites**, they **purified themselves** following the Levitical procedures, then **they also purified the people, the gates and the wall.** This would be done by sprinkling the blood of sacrificed animals on themselves and then the people, the gates and the wall. Everything was to be cleansed unto God by blood, separated unto Him for His purposes.

In verse 31 Nehemiah set up two great choirs. These two choirs would walk upon the city walls, one in one direction and the other in the other direction, singing hymns of thanksgiving and songs with musical accompaniment and thus filling the entire city and countryside with praises to God. Since the choirs were great and walking on the top of the city walls you can see that these were not little walls; they had quite a breadth to them, wide enough for men in a procession to stand side by side and sing and play their instrument. Interestingly, this was the wall that in Neh 4:3 Tobiah mocked saying, "if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!" Yet now it is sufficient for two choirs to walk upon and these were great choirs.

Now the first choir and its entourage and path on top of the wall we find in verse 31, **Then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall, and I appointed two great choirs, the first proceeding to the right on top of the wall toward the Refuse Gate.** We're not told where they were assembled but from the geographic details given in the following verses it was probably at the Valley Gate on the west side, the same gate Nehemiah

had left from several months before when he went out at night for his analysis of the condition of the walls prior to rebuilding. So the **first** choir would assemble at the Valley Gate and proceed south on the wall **toward the Refuse Gate** at the foot of the city.

In this group we find verse 32, **Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah followed them, 33with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, 35and some of the sons of the priests with trumpets; and Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, 36and his kinsmen, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David.** So this was a large procession and with them some of them carried certain **musical instruments** that **David** had chosen to be used in worship five centuries before. Those are the instruments referred to here. Also, **Ezra the scribe went before them.** Ezra was the spiritual leader, a scribe or expert in the law, he lead this first choir. Verse 37, **At the Fountain Gate they went directly up the steps of the city of David by the stairway of the wall above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.** The first choir was proceeding in a counterclockwise motion around the city, as we said, most likely starting at the Valley Gate and going south to the Refuse Gate or the Dung Gate, then around the cape of the city to the **Fountain Gate** and all the way up the east wall to the **Water Gate.** Later in the passage they're going to join up with the other choir on the Temple Mount and so probably after this procession they will head on up to the Miphkad Gate which was a special entrance for Levites and priests to the Temple Mount.

In verse 38 we find the second choir, **The second choir proceeded to the left, while I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of Furnaces, to the Broad Wall.** So they also probably started at the Valley Gate but they went north toward **the Tower of Furnaces,** then on to where **the Broad wall** intersects the western wall, on up, verse 39 to **the Gate of Ephraim, by the Old Gate, by the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, as far as the Sheep Gate** on the north side; **and they stopped at the Gate of the Guard** also known as the Prison Gate.

And since verse 40 places both choirs **in the house of God** which is the Temple then it is reasonable to assume that they played and sang on the walls to the places appointed in the text and then proceeded on to the Miphkad Gate and entered the Temple from there. Verse 40, **Then the two choirs took their stand in the house of God. So did I and half of the officials with me; 41and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah, with the trumpets; 42and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. And the singers sang, with Jezrahiah their leader.** So now that they are on the Temple Mount they continue their singing. It was the high point in the city and their voices would have reverberated throughout the streets of the city and into the Judean countryside. It would have been an awesome sight to see the two choirs proceeding in opposite directions along the top of the city walls and then taking their stand on the Temple Mount giving praise and thanksgiving to God. And keep in mind these were not your average singers and musicians; they would have been professional vocalists and musicians, these were their vocations.

Verse 43, **and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.** This was the greatest day in Israeli history since the days of Solomon and so there were a large number of **sacrifices** and much rejoicing and why? Because God had given them great joy. God had given them success in their rebuilding of the walls in just fifty-two days. God had given them Nehemiah to lead them in this project. God had given them Ezra to read to them the Law. God had given them teachers to translate and explain the Law. God had given them great joy and God gives us great joy through these same means; great leadership, great teaching, the results are great joy. And so the people **rejoiced** so that the joy of the city could be heard for miles.

Verse 44, **On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served.** The day was also chosen to be the day for appointing men over the storehouses that would hold the contributions of the people for those who would serve in the Temple that had so long been

neglected. And the people of **Judah** were pleased to give; it brought them great joy to give a tenth of their first fruits and the 1/3 shekel tithe to **the priests and Levites who served** in the Temple. This was all part of what they had agreed to do in the covenant renewal and they are pleased to fulfill their obligation on this day of dedication.

Verse 45, the priests and the Levites **performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon.** They followed the procedures that had originally been outlined by David and implemented by his son Solomon. Nehemiah, in effect, did for the second Temple what David and Solomon had done for the first and thus Nehemiah is a very important figure in Judaism even to this day.

Verse 46, **For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God.** David was a skilled musician and he appointed leaders in **ancient times**, which from this text was 500 years before. He appointed leaders to lead the music. **Asaph** was another skilled musician and possibly the most skilled of David's musicians. He is the author of twelve Psalms; Psalm 50 and 73-83.

Verse 47, **So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required, and set apart the consecrated portion for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the consecrated portion for the sons of Aaron.** This is a summary of the two **days** since the Exile that all Israel had given the portions due to keep up the daily requirement in the Temple. The first day was **the days of Zerubbabel** when he had returned under Cyrus in 538BC and began the Temple rebuilding project. After the foundations were laid and the altar rebuilt the rebuilding was halted by opposition and it wasn't until Haggai and Zechariah came in 520BC that they were encouraged to pick up the work and finish. In 515BC they did finish and so the Temple completed is often known as the Zerubbabel Temple but more commonly as the Second Temple. For some time all Israel gave portions to support the daily requirements but apparently the support waned and eventually stopped. It wasn't until **the days of Nehemiah** that the support was reinstated so that the priests and **Levites** could do their work. Recall that

the people supported the Temple work by giving a 1/3 of a shekel and by giving a tenth to the **Levites**, then a tenth was taken from that and given to **the sons of Aaron** who are the priests. This was all necessary to support the worship in the Temple which meant to keep God first in their lives.

Now in chapter 13 we come to some strange introductory words because it says, **On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, 2because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them, However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3So when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.** This sounds strange because in 9:2, just a few days before, it says that “the descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed...” How then a few days later could they still have Ammonites and Moabites among them if they had already separated from all foreigners? I would suggest that chapter 13, verse 1 is not occurring immediately after chapter 12, verse 47 but rather that there is a gap of time between chapter 12, verse 47 and chapter 13, verse 1. How long a gap of time we don’t know exactly but during that gap of time the people had broken their solemn oath to keep the covenant by returning to their old ways and allowing foreigners to assemble with them. So in order to establish the timing of 13:1 we need to read the first seven verses of chapter 13 and not just the first verse. And as we read on into chapter 13 we’ll find that indeed Nehemiah left Jerusalem for some period of time and then upon returning he found the people had broken the covenant.

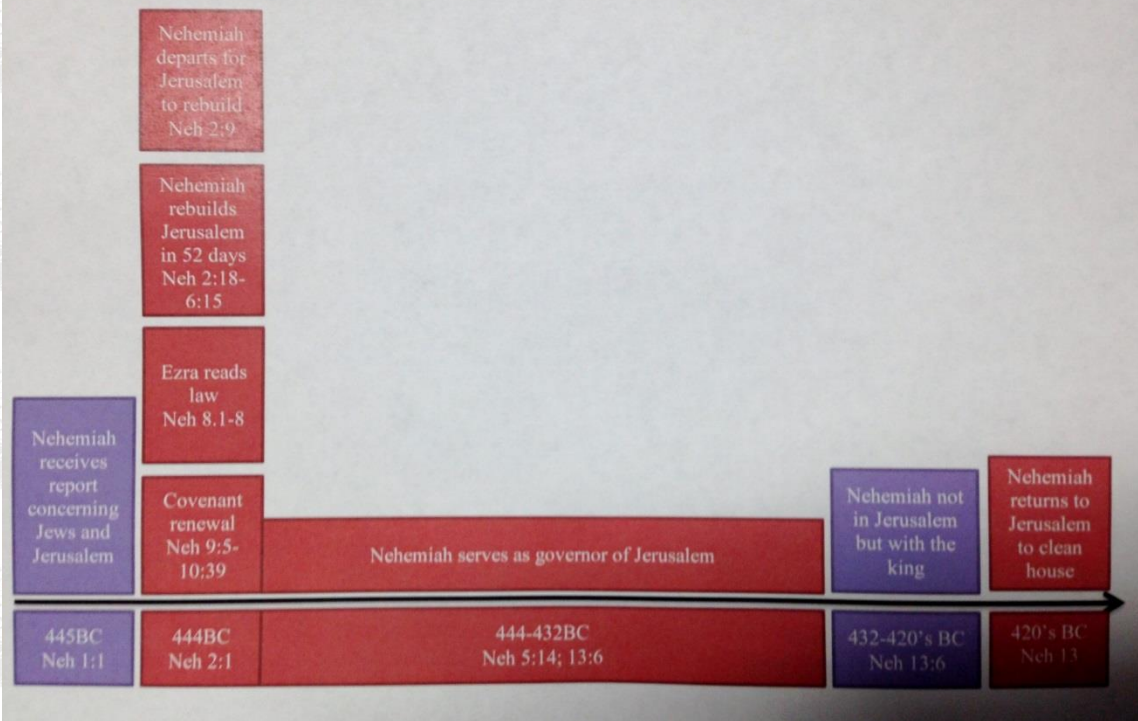
Since we’ve already read vv 1-3 let’s pick up with vv 4-7. Verse 4, **Now prior to this,** prior to what? Prior to vv 1-3, so what we’re about to read here occurred prior to vv 1-3. **Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah, 5had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. 6But during all this time I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had gone to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king, 7and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the**

**evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God.** So there you see that none of what happened in vv 1ff occurred while Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for his first term as governor but during a time when he was absent from Jerusalem because he had **gone to the king.**

Now his first term as governor was in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes which was 444BC. And 13:6 mentions that **in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes** he had gone to **the king.** So his first term of governor was from 444-432BC and apart from a possible return soon after the walls were rebuilt and the nation made the covenant renewal, all that time he was in Jerusalem, a period of twelve years (cf Neh 5:14). Then in 432BC he went to the king, wherever the king may have been, he may have been in his palace in Susa, Ecbatana or Persepolis, we aren't told, all we know is that Nehemiah left Jerusalem in 432BC for some time. The question in verse 6 is how long did he stay? The text only says **After some time** he asked leave from the king and came to Jerusalem. So how long was Nehemiah gone? We don't know for sure. There is a parallel expression in the Elephantine papyri from the same time where a man left his post for 3-4 years. So it is not unreasonable that Nehemiah was gone from Jerusalem for 3-4 years or more. Clearly it was enough time for the people to break their covenant renewal oath which they did. So I take it that the events of chapter 13 occurred in the 420'sBC and so we are very near the end of the OT canon.



## NEHEMIAH'S CAREER



In order to be clear let's recap by looking at the handout. First, in 445BC Nehemiah received the report concerning the Jews and Jerusalem. Second, in 444BC the whole series of things took place that we have studied in Neh 2-12, Nehemiah went in before the king and requested return to Jerusalem to rebuild, he departed for Jerusalem, arrived and rebuilt the walls in fifty-two days after which Ezra read the law and the people entered into a covenant renewal. Then we know that Nehemiah served as governor for another 12 years in Jerusalem until 432 even though we don't have any divine revelation about this period of his rule. Then in 432BC he left Jerusalem to go to the king, remaining with him for some time, presumably at least 3-4 years and then returned to Jerusalem in the 420's. When he arrives the events of Neh 13 occurred and so he had to clean house as we'll see. So there is a gap of about 15 years or more between chapters 12 and 13. And that's why when you read verse 1, **On that day** you're not to connect that with verse 47. It was not on the day of the big celebration which was above 15 years before. **On that day** is just a general reference to the **day they read aloud from the book of Moses**. There was an official day they did this, probably the Sabbath. And I don't know if they'd been consistently reading it aloud or not while Nehemiah was absent. From the tenor of the text they hadn't been reading it or the people hadn't been attending. In any case they were in

attendance this day and suddenly, just as had happened 15 years before, the people realize, “Hey, we’re violating the word of God.” The thing to take away from this is they couldn’t keep the law. Nobody could keep the law. If righteousness were by the law then when Christ came He died needlessly. Why the law then? The law was a tutor to point men to Christ. It was never a means of attaining righteousness with God. It showed them their sin; it didn’t prove them to be righteous. There is none righteous, no not one! Why couldn’t they keep the law? What’s underneath their inability to do good? They were depraved just like you and I. Nobody can please God. Our entire being is naturally disposed to evil. You don’t have to teach kids to do evil, it comes quite naturally. And here are these people, they meant well, they made a covenant renewal 15 years before, “Oh, we’re going to obey God. We’re going to do all the law. We’re going to be good little boys and girls now.” No you’re not. I hope you saw this coming. That’s why last week in the application I said, “You may consider the possibility of re-dedicating your life.” And I qualified it by saying, “If you’re going to re-dedicate yourself to anything re-dedicate yourself to living by grace and not by works.” Because if you make some big re-commitment that you’re going to obey and you’re going to be a good little boy or girl now all that’s going to happen is you’re going to break that commitment. You are just setting yourself up for failure. The sin nature presses against law in order to sin. And so while the desire is good the ability to carry out that desire is not within you. It wasn’t within them either. Sure, as long as Nehemiah was around town to hold their hand and enforce it they did alright. It’s the same thing with kids, as long as they’re in the house and you’re there to hold their little hand and enforce obedience they walk pretty much down the line, but what happens when they get out of the house? What happened when Nehemiah left Jerusalem? They went off track, way off track. That’s always been the problem and will always be the problem unless people are trained to live by grace, trained to understand that this isn’t about them working up some obedience, it isn’t about them putting on operation boot strap and doing better this go around. That will never work and if you train people to live that way you are just setting them up for failure. The way to train people to live is to train them in God’s grace, meaning train them to depend upon Him and to submit to His will and live by faith. But here you see they didn’t have all that grace available. They did have some grace. Sometimes people get it in mind that they didn’t have any grace but John 1:16 teaches that they did have grace, just not the degree of grace we have available in the NT, we have a greater grace.

So what are we reading in vv 1-3? How when Nehemiah left they fell flat on their faces. There are five issues where they fell flat on their faces and all of them relate to the five things they promised they were not going to do anymore back in chapter 10. So they went back to doing the same sins, the same old stuff and I bet in your life you keep falling flat on your face in the same old stuff. What's new? There's nothing new under the sun and each time you fall you say what? I'm going to do better; I'm not going to fall on my face again. And what happens? You fall on your face again. You haven't mastered living by grace. You're still trying to live by works. You're trying to do it yourself. So it's just that it takes time to learn to live by grace, it's a process. Learning the principles for living by grace isn't so much a process, it's just knowing and understanding that you have to depend upon Him and submit your will to His will and live by faith. But the ability to do that consistently is a learned process that takes place gradually over your lifetime. So you are still going to fall but you don't give up exercising the grace principle of living, you more and more consciously depend upon Him and more and more over time you see gradual victory over these sin patterns. So don't get the defeated mentality that I tried the Christian life and it didn't work for me. No, just keep moving it does work, it's just not an instant fix to perfectionism.

Now as I said there are five areas they fell back into. The first one is verses 1-3, the formal assembly with foreigners. Under the law they were not to allow foreigners in the formal assembly. Now the law in specific stated that no Ammonite or Moabite<sup>ii</sup> could ever enter the assembly of the Lord but that an Edomite could enter after the third generation because Edom came from Esau, Jacob's brother. So some foreigners could enter when certain conditions were met. But no Ammonite or Moabite could ever enter (Deut 23:3-6). And this had a reason behind it, verse 2, **because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them, However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.** This is the story in Numbers 22 where they did not bless Israel and the one who blesses Israel will be blessed and the one who curses Israel will be cursed. So it was an outworking of the principle of Gen 12:3; they cursed Israel and so they were cursed, they could never enter the assembly, not even after ten generations of being a part of Israel. **So, verse 3, when they heard the law,**

**they excluded all foreigners from Israel.** So they did act at this time once more and **excluded** them, got this straightened out.

The second one is verses 4-9 and this one involves two men who had a close association, it says they were **related** but it could have just been a business relationship. Notice verse 4, **Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah, had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.** So he took a room, a big room, in the inner courts of God's house and gave it to this Tobiah character. And this Tobiah was not a good guy. He had opposed the rebuilding of the walls 15 years before (cf Neh 4:3, 7; 6:1, 12, 14, 17, 19). And now he's got him a nice apartment in the house of God. This was obviously egregious sin; you don't take one of God's rooms in His house that He designated to be a storehouse for His servants and give it to someone else. And yet did anyone say anything about it? No, nobody said a thing; everyone just went on like nothing ever happened. Typical, nobody wants to make waves so they all just turn a blind eye. Not Nehemiah. He loved God. In verse 6 he makes clear he wasn't in town when this sham was going on because if he had been around he would have kicked the guy out on the streets. He was a hard as nails kind of character. And you always have very few people it seems who will stand up and actually do something about it. And when they do nobody else likes them but they're all little fraidy cats who don't want to rock the boat because it might hurt somebody's feelings. Well, not Nehemiah. When he got back, in verse 7 he says, **I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's crap out on the streets.** He just threw it out. He didn't care. This guy was living in God's house. So Nehemiah cleaned out God's house. Verse 9, **Then I gave an order and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned there the utensils of the house of God with the grain offerings and the frankincense.** You can see there were multiple rooms involved which Eliashib desecrated by allowing Tobiah to move in so they all had to be cleansed and re-stocked with the proper items.

The third issue is verses 10-14 and this one is the tithes of the produce. The people had vowed to keep up the tithes so that the Levites and priests could perform the service properly in the Temple. But they didn't keep that one either. Verse 10, **I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given *them*, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.** What are you supposed to do when people won't support the ministry? Go make a living some other way. Verse 11, **So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts.** <sup>12</sup>All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine and oil into the storehouses. <sup>13</sup>In charge of the storehouses I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen. He appointed reliable men to these posts implying that reliable men had not been in those posts before. In verse 14 he prays, Nehemiah was a prayer warrior. **Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.** His prayer essentially is one of the promises of God because God has promised OT saints to reward them for their deeds. And so he prays in accordance with God's will for the Temple worship. And from all this you see that Nehemiah was obviously not in this world to be a man pleaser; he was in this world to be a God-pleaser. It was that mentality that was behind his deeds and behind this prayer.

The fourth issue is verses 15-22 the Sabbath. The people had also vowed to keep the Sabbath holy by not buying and selling goods and services on the Sabbath. But what had they done? Violated it. Verse 15, **In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading *them* on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought *them* into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished *them* on the day they sold food.** They weren't supposed to do that. They were supposed to rest on the Sabbath from their daily work as God had rested on the Sabbath from His daily work of creating. Verse 16, **Also men of Tyre were living there *who* imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold *them* to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem.** That's why we

think they named the gate near the NW corner the Fish Gate, because the fishermen from Tyre imported their fish into Jerusalem through that gate. Verse 17, **Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day? <sup>18</sup>“Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath.”** See, the nation was already facing God’s curses for all these violations. They were under divine discipline. They had sworn an oath involving a curse that if they broke these commandments they would willingly take God’s discipline and they already were. So, verse 19, **It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the sabbath day.** He had to take these measures otherwise the people wouldn’t obey. He had to hold their little hands and enforce it, like a big daddy. Otherwise they’d just keep running into trouble. And notice what happened in verse 20, **Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. <sup>21</sup>Then I warned them and said to them, “Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you.” From that time on they did not come on the sabbath.** So he shut down that little operation. This is a man who gets things done. This was a man who stood up for principle. This was a man who loved God. Verse 22, **And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day.** Finally another prayer, **For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness.** It wasn’t easy to do these things, it’s never easy to take a stand but when you take a stand for the word of God you’re appeal and sometimes the only one in your court is God. Don’t forget me God while everyone else forgets me.

And finally, the fifth problem in vv 23-31, mixed marriages again. They had a habit of falling into this trap about every fifteen years. For some reason they couldn’t stop marrying those sweet Gentile girls and handsome Gentile boys. Verse 23, **In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. <sup>24</sup>As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the**

**language of Judah, but the language of his own people.** So they were losing their Hebrew. That's what tends to happen when you marry foreign girls. Since the woman is typically home with the kids the kids learn her language. So they were losing their Hebrew, couldn't speak it at all, all spoke foreign languages. And with another language comes another culture, so don't kid yourself, it's not just words, words carry a thought form, a culture, a way of thinking. Verse 25, **So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.** As John Wayne would say, "Nehemiah was pretty rough!" But sometimes you have to get rough to get people to wake up! The discipline they were going to get from God was a lot worse than a few missing hairs and bruises. So he socked it to them. Verse 26 he backs up his action with a Scriptural argument. **"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin.** So no matter how much favor you have with God that doesn't stop you from sinning and that doesn't stop God from disciplining. Because Solomon married foreign wives his heart was turned aside and he went headlong into idolatry and God cursed him by dividing the kingdom, it was a terrible time, the entire economy went down the tubes, it almost caused a civil war. That's what idolatry will do; it will tear a nation apart. Verse 27, **"Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?"** And it wasn't just among the general populace, notice verse 28, **Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me. Sanballat the Horonite** was one of the chief enemies fifteen years back when they were trying to rebuild the walls (Neh 4ff). He was evidently the governor of Samaria and he did everything he could to oppose Israel and now his daughter has married the high priest's son. All when Nehemiah stepped out of the picture for a few years. The enemies of God are always trying to infiltrate and corrupt and that's what you see here, an attempt to bring idolatry into Israel through intermarriage and it was happening in the high priests own household. That's one reason a strong leader is necessary, to cut this stuff out. Verse 29, **Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of**

the priesthood and the Levites. <sup>30</sup>Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, <sup>31</sup>and *I arranged* for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good. Now that's a leader. He took a stand and took action. So **remember them**, the enemies, for their evil and **remember me**, for my good. To the end Nehemiah stood squarely on the word of God and was therefore able to see the issues are black and white. And he's one of the few in the nation, if not the only one, who not only saw it but applied it. He stood up for the word of God which is the law. People probably didn't like him but it was because of him they were spared. May it be that people in the Church realize the importance of such men and not shun them but embrace them. And may God remember them for their good and reward them accordingly!

What can we learn? First, depraved hearts won't obey. Second, sometimes a leader needs to clean house.

We're going to pick up with the intertestamental period to get the background for the gospels and then the Gospel of Matthew. No class next week. Happy Thanksgiving!

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<sup>i</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ne 12:31). Galaxie Software.

<sup>ii</sup> Ruth could enter because she was a believer. So this law did not prohibit believers from entering, only unbelievers.

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