

## NEHEMIAH 13

## REFORMATION NEEDED – AGAIN!

It was the honor of the Jews that they were to be separate from the heathen nations. The Lord's law concerning this (Deut. 23:3-5) was read on the same day of the dedication of the wall, in the audience of the people. They read that the Ammonites and Moabites were not to settle among them, nor unite with them, because they had endeavored to bring a curse upon the people of God (Num. 22-24). The Jews readily complied with and obeyed this law.

After 12 years (454-442 BC), Nehemiah's leave of absence from King Artaxerxes Longimanus expired; and he was obliged to leave the holy city and return to Persia. At length, however, he was able to secure permission from the king to go back to Jerusalem again. But when he arrived, he found a mess on his hands! The perfect order in which he had left things did not last long after his departure. The people quickly backslid. This chapter records the terrible state in which Nehemiah found things, and the measures that he took to reform them.

Tobiah was an enemy of the Jews, who had opposed the work of building the city walls. How wicked it was, therefore, for Eliashib the high priest to allow Tobiah to become a lodger in the very courts of the Lord's Temple! Out of several chambers which had been used as storerooms for the tithes, he took down the partitions and made one great apartment for Tobiah. But Nehemiah bravely evicted Tobiah, threw out all his personal belongings, and restored the chambers to their proper use. He was sorely grieved that God's house should be thus profaned. In the same way, our Savior cleansed the Temple, so that the house of prayer might not be a den of thieves. And those who desire to expel sin out of their hearts must repent and throw out all those things that are the fuel of lust.

The Levites and Temple-singers had been grievously wronged, because their portions of the tithes had not been given to them for their support. So these men were forced to earn a livelihood elsewhere, since they could no longer support themselves and their families in their sacred profession. Nehemiah laid this fault upon the rulers, who should have taken care that the Levites fulfilled their business and received all due encouragement therein. He made no delay to bring the dispersed Levites to their places again, and he also obliged the people to bring in their tithes to support them.

Nehemiah also found it necessary to revive the proper observance of the Sabbath day; for to his great grief, there was a general profaning of that holy day by buying, selling, and laboring. Nehemiah contended with the noblemen of Ju-

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ *The separation of the Lord's people from the heathen – verses 1-3*
- ❖ *Nehemiah evicts Tobiah from his apartment in the Temple – verses 4-9*
- ❖ *He secures the support of the people for the priests and Levites – verses 10-14*
- ❖ *He restrains the profaning of the Sabbath, and sanctifies it – verses 15-22*
- ❖ *He checks the growing evils of intermarriages with the heathen – verses 23-31*



dah about this, and took measures to reform the situation. He ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be kept shut from the evening before the Sabbath to the morning after, and he set his own servants to watch and make sure that no merchandise was brought in on the Sabbath. The merchants resorted to camping outside the city walls; but Nehemiah threatened them that he would lay hands on them if they continued to do so, and this deterred them from coming anymore.



The latter portion of this chapter records yet another instance of Nehemiah's pious zeal for the purifying of his nation. He found that many of the Jews had corrupted themselves again by marrying heathen wives from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and he also found that their children had learned the languages of their mothers, and so they could not speak the Hebrew tongue. This meant that when these families went to worship at the synagogues or the Temple, the children would be unable to listen to the Word of God being read. Nehemiah showed himself highly displeased at this corruption, and he took immediate measures to purge it out. He cursed those who were guilty of this sin – that is, he denounced the judgments of God against them, and showed them what their sin deserved. He then picked out some of them who were more obstinate than the rest, and fit to be made examples of; and he smote them, to which he added a further mark of disgrace by pulling out their hair. He made them promise with an oath that they would never do this sin again. But Nehemiah found that a branch of the high priest's own family – one of Eliashib's grandsons – had married a daughter of Sanballat, the notorious enemy of the Jews. Nehemiah chased this man out of his presence, and expelled him from the honor of the priesthood; and then he again posted the priests and Levites in their respective offices.

The issues that Nehemiah had to address have their counterpart in our spiritual lives. Are there rooms in our hearts, which belong to God, that we have “rented out” to idols? It's time to kick those idols to the curb. Have we allowed our hearts to be pulled away from the Lord by friendships and relationships with the people of this world? Even though Nehemiah's work of reformation began in chapter 1, we see from this chapter that there must be *continual* reformation. The Reformers referred to this as *Semper Reformanda* – “always reforming!” No doubt there are many areas in our lives that would not pass a reformation-inspection. But let us take comfort in the remembrance that the work of reforming does not belong to us! It cannot be done in our own strength. The Holy Spirit is the One Who makes us conform more and more to the image of Christ. Reformation does not occur in our lives because we are perfect, or because we can make ourselves perfect; rather, it is *only* because we have a perfect Savior!

*Thank You, Lord, for dwelling in our hearts, as in a Temple! We pray that the living temples of our bodies would never be desecrated by anything worldly. Amen.*