



Finer Grounds

Nehemiah

Lesson 12: Nehemiah 12 & 13

As we near the end of our study, I encourage you to continue reading through the entire book of Nehemiah in one sitting. We have honed in on the major themes of leadership and restoration throughout this study. Now that we have arrived toward the end of Nehemiah's account, we will see what the efforts of restoration produce, as well as how God's people manage with and without the leadership of Nehemiah.

Now that we have covered the majority of the book, it might be helpful to compile a brief outline in order to remember the series of events leading up to chapter 12.

Write down one or two main events that occur in each chapter of Nehemiah so far

- A. Nehemiah 1: _____
- B. Nehemiah 2: _____
- C. Nehemiah 3: _____
- D. Nehemiah 4: _____
- E. Nehemiah 5: _____
- F. Nehemiah 6: _____
- G. Nehemiah 7: _____
- H. Nehemiah 8: _____
- I. Nehemiah 9: _____
- J. Nehemiah 10: _____

K. Nehemiah 11: _____

L. Nehemiah 12: _____

As we study each chapter individually from week to week, we can sometimes be too focused on the small details and forget the big picture. Throughout the book there are multiple occasions where lists of names and families are provided. Whether these names are given to identify the appropriate people needed to perform the work for the temple, taking a census of God's people, or historical genealogies, these lists serve a very important purpose. What is most important for us to keep in mind is not the individuals on those lists, but rather the significance of why Nehemiah recorded those lists. Chapter 12 is no exception to this concept.

Read Nehemiah 12:1-26 and Ezra 2:1-2.

From what we know of this group of priests and Levites mentioned in these passages, what is the significance of listing this lineage of priests?

What does this lineage have to do with Nehemiah's main theme of restoration?



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Nehemiah uses this section to assure us that he has ensured that the right people will be serving in the right roles. Remember from census in Nehemiah 7:63-64, there was a group of priests who had returned from Babylonian captivity but they could not prove their lineage. In order to serve in specific spiritual roles of leadership, a priest or Levite had to be a decedent from a specific family or group of people. We just finished discussing the singers and musicians in chapter 11. In that instance, it was vital for the spiritual restoration of the Jews that the singers be descendants of Asaph as originally appointed by King David. The purpose of this passage is to determine who these men are and whether they have the appropriate proof and qualifications to serve. We know these men returned from Babylonian captivity from the names mentioned in verse 1. We know men like Zerubbabel, Jeremiah (no, not Jeremiah the prophet) and Ezra returned with the first group of captives. Pay attention especially to verses 22-26. We are given clear resources for where the Levites are registered, and they can trace their lineage back to the original appointments during the time of King David. Nehemiah proves that the men are qualified and one of their first tasks is recorded next.

Read Nehemiah 12:27-43.

What is so important about having a dedication ceremony for the wall?

Why would Nehemiah record this historical account for all future generations?

Up until now, it seems that everything involving the restoration of Jerusalem and the Jewish faith has been very purposeful and intentional. The wall was built for the physical security of Jerusalem. However, the wall also served the spiritual and symbolic purpose of keeping God's people separate and holy. Every action of restoring the social order (e.g. correcting relations between rich and poor Jews in chapter 5), as well as spiritual functions of God's people has been done by going back to what God had originally commanded. So why have a wall dedication ceremony? Think about times in the history of our country when we have commemorated similar occasions. For example, when the 1st Continental Railroad of the United States was ceremoniously finished on May 10th 1869, they drove the final railroad spike in to unite the Union Pacific Line with the Central Pacific Railroad Company of California. The ceremony not only commemorated the completion and unification of the two routes, but it meant that the western territories of the U.S. could be connected more efficiently for news, capitol trade, new settlers, military and other important resources for security and development of the West. It was an important occasion to be celebrated. In the same way, God's people marked the momentous occasion of finishing the wall with a great celebration to mark an important move toward physical security and spiritual restoration (v. 43). However, the celebration was conducted appropriately by ensuring the people



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God wanted were leading the ceremony in precisely the way He wanted it to be done.

Read Nehemiah 12:44-47 and Numbers 18:21.

Why is it important for men to be appointed to manage and guard the contributions given by the people?

According to these passages, why are the priests and Levites recipients of this consecrated portion?

What is the difference between an ordinary Levite and a “descendant of Aaron” in their roles?

God had originally commanded His people through Moses to set aside a portion of food and tithes for the priests (i.e. descendants of Aaron) and Levites who dedicated their lives to the spiritual service of God and His people. As to considering why men had to be appointed to manage the tithes for the Levites, this is just like any other ministry in God’s kingdom. Appointing specific people for any position ensures not only that a task will be completed, but that the persons in church will make sure it is carried out appropriately. If no one was organizing these stores, who’s to say the task would have been completed at all? We will see later in chapter 13

what the consequences for not selecting and appointing the right men to manage these contributions were.

Read Nehemiah 13:1-14 and Deuteronomy 23:3-5.

Focus mainly on verses 1-3 for now. Why was this separation so important?

What principles do we need to take away from this section as Christians?

You probably noticed right away that the first part of chapter 13 is not written in chronological order. The phrase “now prior to this” in verse 4 indicates that the problems regarding Eliashib making a room for Tobiah in the temple occurred at some time in the recent past. This failure on the part of Eliashib the priest makes the people’s discovery in verses 1-3 such a significant revelation for them. A strict prohibition against allowing any Ammonite or Moabite into the assembly of God’s people (more specifically into the temple area) was given by God through Moses in Deuteronomy 23.

While this may sound harsh or arbitrary at first glance, it’s important to keep this in context. The Israelites are God’s people living under the Old Covenant, making them God’s people in a state of spiritual infancy, immaturity, and training (cf. Galatians 3:23-4:7). The Jews consistently misunderstood the significance of their being



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God’s chosen people, and time after time that misunderstanding led them into sin because of the influence of the Gentile nations around them. For the Jews in Nehemiah’s day, it was vital to reinforce the concept of their holiness and spiritual separation from the sinful influences of the world. This concept needed to be enforced in a very visual, physical way. Much like the physical wall around Jerusalem, the physical removal of all foreigners from the temple area and worship to God reminded the Jews what it meant to be God’s chosen people. God wanted the Jews to make sure to exclude all foreigners from their temple worship to Him.

In the New Covenant, Christians do not have a command from God for us to exclude non-believers from our worship assemblies. In fact, instructions are given regarding what can/can’t be done if a non-Christian happens to be present (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25). However, this doesn’t mean Nehemiah 13:1-14 have no applications for us regarding our worship.

What principles from this section do we need to understand when it comes to the worship of God’s holy people today?

How should we regard the influence or presence of people who do not yet have a covenant relationship with God when it comes to our assemblies?

Contrary to what many in the world of Christianity think, when you compile all the verses in the New Testament about the Sunday worship assembly it becomes very clear that the worship assembly was designed by Christ for the edification of people who are already Christians. The primary focus of the assembly was never intended to be evangelistic. Most evangelism occurred with no connection to the worship assembly.

I realize that statement flies in the face of much of the thinking in many of our churches where so much emphasis is placed on making our assemblies “seeker sensitive.” However, of all the dozens of passages about Christian worship, there is only one passage in the entire New Testament that even mentions non-Christians being there; and the language sounds more like, “If it just so happens that a non-Christian shows up, make sure you’re not all speaking in un-interpreted tongues (we referenced it above: 1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

Now, I’m NOT saying we don’t need to be considerate of non-Christians in the way we conduct our worship assembly by the way we choose our language or present ourselves (we do!). What I’m suggesting is that the desires, interests, and preferences of non-Christians should never be the primary consideration and focus of our worship assemblies.

When we look at why Nehemiah 13:4-9 was such a problem, it boils down to the fact that Eliashib the priest had compromised. Eliashib had allowed the worldly desires and interests of Tobiah (a non-Jew) to corrupt the purpose of the temple, which was supposed to be a place of worship for God’s covenant people. Likewise, it’s



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important for us as Christians to make sure that we don't allow the world's interests and desires to corrupt God's intention of our worship assembly from its original purpose and focus.

Now, let's focus our attention on vs 4-14.

What were the consequences of appointing Eliashib to manage the storage chambers and tithes for the Levites?

How was he able to get away with this misuse of power?

Remember Tobiah the Ammonite? He was one of the regional leaders against the building of the wall around Jerusalem, and his family was intermarried with families of Jewish Priests (4:3, 6:17, 18). Well, even long after the wall was completed he still maintained a corrupting influence within God's people. Stop and recall for a moment everything the Jews have been through so far. Many of the priests and Levites helped with the construction of the wall. Although it is not clear this is the same Eliashib, there is a record of a priest named Eliashib that helped build a portion of the wall (cf. Nehemiah 3:1). The priests and Levites promised God in an official document to always serve, and never to neglect, the house of the Lord (cf. Nehemiah 10).

Now it is not apparent that Eliashib signed the official documented promise to God. However, it is unlikely that he was unaware of it, because of the public nature of the assembly of

God's people leading up to the moment of signing. All that being said, it is so hard believe that after hearing God's word and restoring His commands, that Eliashib would abuse his power as manager of the temple storerooms and Levitical tithes. What is worse is that the rooms purposed for the priestly and Levitical tithes were being used to house Tobiah the Ammonite's household items; probably even Tobiah himself! An enemy of God's people was using the temple for his own personal use. This great sin was being facilitated by an appointed servant of God's people.

It is hard to imagine how Eliashib was able to get away with this abuse of power. Why didn't anyone stop him? We know from the passage that Nehemiah was away in Babylon giving a report to the king. The governor was gone...and while the cat's away the mice will play. Nehemiah would have stopped this corruption had he been there, and we will see that he fixes the problem later. What about the other priests and Levites? Surely some of them knew what was happening. It is important for us to remember thought that Tobiah was connected to many of these men through various marriages and used those alliances for leverage. This all stems back to God's people disobeying by intermarrying with non-Jews. These patterns of disobedience before restoring God's commands continued to have lasting consequences long after the restoration began.



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Just as the Jews' intermarriage with pagans had lasting consequences on God's people after they began restoring His commands, in what ways do our sins carry lasting consequences after we repent and seek forgiveness?

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, imagined how shocked, disappointed, and angry he was to find God's house neglected so soon after the Levites and priests had signed their promised statement to God. His reaction was drastic but justified in throwing away Tobiah's things (v. 8). However, Nehemiah still had a lot more to fix because of this monumental corruption.

According to this passage, why did Nehemiah have to restore the positions to the Levites again?

Why weren't they doing their jobs?

We just learned in Nehemiah 12:44-47 that the people restored tithing for the Levites, in order that they may serve God. However, Eliashib's neglect had caused the Levites to go without food or supplies, so they left. Instead of dealing with the issue appropriately and kicking out Tobiah themselves, they simply abandoned their responsibilities. Perhaps Tobiah's influence

was stronger than we realize. They went back home to their farms in the surrounding country where they were able to provide for themselves and abandoned the management of God's temple.

Time and again we see how difficult Nehemiah's job of restoring God's people was. It was often thankless, and constantly under attack from forces inside and outside of God's people. Like steering a boat, spiritual restoration is always a continual process. We must never relax our efforts of restoration or we will quickly start to drift off course of where God wants us to be.