

## Sin Hinders the Revival

**Lesson Scope:** [Nehemiah 13](#)

### Lesson Focus

God had shown Himself strong on Israel's behalf. Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem with a purpose—"to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (Nehemiah 2:10). He had provided direction and protection during the momentous task of rebuilding the wall amid the constant threats of the enemy. He had also been instrumental in reviving and establishing a national consciousness of God and His Law (Nehemiah 10:29).

After serving as governor for twelve years (Nehemiah 5:14), Nehemiah returned to his responsibilities in Babylon. At a later date he obtained an honorable release from duty and returned to Jerusalem.

A halfhearted allegiance to truth weakens the application of Biblical principles. An enduring revival pervades every aspect of the believer's life and produces ready obedience.

This lesson recounts the distresses and calamities that occur when God's Word is not honored. We also see the impact of allowing carnality in the brotherhood.

We could raise the questions "What errors come into focus in this chapter?" and "Why did they happen?" Either these people were not familiar with the Law, or else they knowingly disregarded its commandments. Stress the importance of recognizing the authority of God's Word and patterning our lives after it.

Within one generation these people failed to honor the covenant recorded in Nehemiah 10. The challenge to embrace the Scriptural burden of the conservative Mennonite churches lies before our generation.

**Lesson Aim:** To reveal errors that threaten revival.

**Theme Verse:** [2 Peter 3:17](#). Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

## Lesson Text

### The Mixed Multitude

[Nehemiah 13:1-9](#) <sup>1</sup> 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; <sup>2</sup> Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. <sup>3</sup> Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude. <sup>4</sup> And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, *was* allied unto Tobiah: <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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: <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. <sup>9</sup> 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.

### The Neglected Tithe

[Nehemiah 13:10-12](#) <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries.

### The Profaned Sabbath

[Nehemiah 13:15-19](#) <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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.

### **The Defiled Covenant**

**Nehemiah 13:23-25** <sup>23</sup> In those days also saw I Jews *that* had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, *and* of Moab: <sup>24</sup> And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. <sup>25</sup> And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.

**Nehemiah 13:28-31** <sup>28</sup> And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. <sup>29</sup> Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. <sup>30</sup> Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; <sup>31</sup> And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **The Mixed Multitude**

1. In this account, why was separation necessary?
2. What will be the result if we fail in separation?

#### **The Neglected Tithe**

3. What essential role did the tithe fill under the Law?
4. What are some attitudes that pose a threat to Scriptural concepts of giving?

## **The Profaned Sabbath**

5. What motivated Nehemiah's response to the Sabbath breakers?
6. Suggest some present-day threats to keeping the Lord's Day holy.

## **The Defiled Covenant**

7. What lessons should we learn from Nehemiah's example in dealing with the sins of his day?
8. What are some helps for developing and maintaining stable Christian homes?
9. How can we maintain concepts of revival in our churches?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

Nehemiah immediately became alarmed when he discovered Israel's failure to keep God's laws. By God's help he effectively cleansed Jerusalem from strangers. He also addressed the defilement of the priesthood, as well as the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites (Nehemiah 13:29-30). He took decisive action to restore proper Sabbath observance.

The public reading of the Law revealed God's command to remove the Ammonites and the Moabites from among Israel. The separation of the mixed multitude and Nehemiah's dealings with Tobiah were based on Deuteronomy 23:3-5. In chapter 4, we see that Tobiah was an enemy doing his best to frustrate the building of the walls. He now feigned allegiance to Israel and her God, having procured an alliance with the priest Eliashib (Nehemiah 13:4).

Eliashib displayed a lapse of perception, besides violating God's Law, when he prepared a chamber in the courts of the house of God for Tobiah's residence (Nehemiah 13:7-8). Tobiah's presence in the temple may have influenced the people to neglect the tithe (Nehemiah 13:5, 10).

The Sabbath was being violated as the Jews engaged in labor, trade, and commerce on the Sabbath Day. The "men of Tyre" also seized the opportunity to do business in Jerusalem. Nehemiah required that "the gates ... be shut," thus prohibiting the entrance of anyone with business interests (Nehemiah 13:15-19). The mixed marriages produced a generation that could not identify with Israel (Nehemiah 13:24). God had specifically commanded, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them" (Deuteronomy 7:3). God desired "an holy people," those who were cleansed, to be "a special people unto himself" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

## **Principles and Applications**

### **The Mixed Multitude**

1. Disobeying God's commandments will undo the work of revival (Nehemiah 13:1-3). Those who choose to disobey God are plagued with condemnation and guilt. They forfeit peace and joy. It is imperative that we wholeheartedly obey the Word.

Sometimes we are tempted to think small deviations will not matter. But multitudes today who profess to know and honor God will find themselves barred from the glories of heaven because they embrace lifestyles and practices that violate Bible truths (Matthew 7:23).

2. Accommodating carnal associates will destroy the efforts of revival (Nehemiah 13: 4, 7-9). The devil is intent on gaining a presence in the church. We must maintain Scriptural fellowship lines to safeguard the purity of the church. When we purposely prepare "chambers" for carnality in our brotherhood, we displace dimensions of talent and influence that enhance the spiritual well-being of God's people.

### **The Neglected Tithe**

3. Failure to support one another will undermine revival among God's people (Nehemiah 13:10). The call to Christ's service resounds to every believer. Brethren who are called to roles of leadership, along with all who accept responsible positions in Christian service, should receive the support of others. The cause of truth and right is sustained when we offer our energies and resources to complement the responsibilities, meet the challenges, and supply the needs of our brethren.

4. Neglecting to provide for church treasuries will hinder God's work (Nehemiah 13:11-12). The privileges and opportunities of the church today necessitate financial contributions (2 Chronicles 31:2-4). Are we honoring the Lord with our substance and the first fruits of all our increase?

### **The Profaned Sabbath**

5. Deviating from Biblical Sabbath principles expresses a disregard for sacred things (Nehemiah 13:15-19). The challenge for many of us is not the need to refrain from physical labor and commerce but the need to dismiss material interests from our minds. We must use the day of rest for worship, devotion, and service. Are we using those hours to deepen our understanding of God and His Word? Do we engage in activities that develop spiritual talent and that strengthen and broaden brother-

hood relationships?

### **The Defiled Covenant**

6. The unequal yoke in marriage can frustrate a revival effort (Nehemiah 13:23). By God's grace one in such a situation can both enjoy and contribute to good spiritual church life. But to deliberately choose to enter into such a marriage relationship is to place one's own spiritual life and that of his children in jeopardy.

7. Homes that do not embrace Biblical principles will produce children who learn the world's culture and practice (Nehemiah 13:24). The goal of Christian marriage is God-centered homes where relationships are a priority and children are welcomed as the Lord's heritage (Psalm 127:3). Children should be able to see genuine Christian virtues in their parents. The rising generation must be taught the serious results of following the worldly practices and vanities prevalent today.

8. Sin must be addressed and dealt with for revival to continue (Nehemiah 13:25). The church has authority from Christ to exercise discipline and maintain church purity. The spiritual shipwreck of many who have chosen a less-regulated church life should increase our appreciation for Biblical church standards. Much as it hurts, we must never get to the place where we shy away from Biblically sound church discipline.

9. Making exceptions for those in responsible positions will hinder a revival effort (Nehemiah 13:28). Ungodly men may use their positions to carnal advantage, but true leaders understand that more rather than less is required of them. If exceptions are made for leaders, God's blessing is lost, the church's testimony is lost, and the spiritual vitality and inspiration of the people is lost.

10. Without God's help, all revival efforts will be in vain (Nehemiah 13:31). "It is the spirit that quickeneth; ... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). "God is able to make all grace abound."

### **Important Teachings**

1. Disobeying God's commandments will undo the work of revival (Nehemiah 13:1-3).

2. Accommodating carnal associates will destroy the efforts of revival (Nehemiah 13:4, 7-9).

3. Failure to support one another will undermine revival among God's

people (Nehemiah 3:10).

4. Neglecting to provide for church treasuries will hinder God's work (Nehemiah 13:11-12).

5. Deviating from Biblical Sabbath principles expresses a disregard for sacred things (Nehemiah 13:15-19).

6. The unequal yoke in marriage can frustrate a revival effort (Nehemiah 13:23).

7. Homes that do not embrace Biblical principles will produce children who learn the world's culture and practice (Nehemiah 13:24).

8. Sin must be addressed and dealt with for revival to continue (Nehemiah 13:25).

9. Making exceptions for those in responsible positions will hinder a revival effort (Nehemiah 13:28).

10. Without God's help, all revival efforts will be in vain (Nehemiah 13:31).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. In this account, why was separation necessary?

Separation was necessary because the Jews' relationships with the heathen violated God's commands. They needed to break these ties in order to experience blessing. The mixed marriages resulted in a generation that knew not the Lord. The presence of the heathen defiled the covenant.

2. What will be the result if we fail in separation?

We will be subject to wrong influences. The truth will become obscure to us, and we will embrace the enemy's counterfeits. We will lose Biblical concepts and appreciation for our godly heritage. The work of the church will be hindered, and her testimony lost to the world.

3. What essential role did the tithe fill under the Law?

Under the Law, the people's tithes supported the Levites so that they could give sufficient time to spiritual service. This included teaching the people as well as carrying out all the ceremonial activities of temple worship. When the tithes were withheld, the Levites were forced to limit their spiritual activity in order to provide for their families.

4. What are some attitudes that pose a threat to Scriptural concepts of giving?

"I will wait to give until I am well established financially." "I have

needs of my own that are perhaps even greater than those the church is assisting." "I look out for myself, and if some others would be more careful (or more diligent), they would not need financial help." Indifference toward the Christian day school, evangelism, or the church's position on insurances will hinder cheerful giving.

5. What motivated Nehemiah's response to the Sabbath breakers?

Nehemiah knew what the Law commanded regarding the Sabbath. He knew that Judah's violation of those laws was a major factor in her defeat and captivity by the Babylonians. Now it was obvious that the people had failed to learn from history and were doing the same sins again. God would surely bring judgment.

6. Suggest some present-day threats to keeping the Lord's Day holy.

We might make plans or mentally focus on earthly pursuits. Our activities might reflect an overemphasis on social or recreational interests. We might slip into a pattern of reasoning that some unnecessary work and occasional purchases are allowable.

7. What lessons should we learn from Nehemiah's example in dealing with the sins of his day?

As a faithful leader, Nehemiah observed trends among his people. He took issue with sin, addressing those who were responsible regardless of their status. He followed through by making sure his directives were enforced. He looked to God for His help and blessing.

8. What are some helps for developing and maintaining stable Christian homes?

We must marry "only in the Lord." Companions must be sought from among those of "like precious faith." We must follow God's headship order. We must exemplify and teach appreciation for the Bible and the church. Our lifestyle must be distinctly different from those of the cultures in which we live.

9. How can we maintain concepts of revival in our churches?

We do this by emphasizing practical, everyday obedience to God and His Word. We do it by building respect for our forebears and their time-proven applications to Biblical principles. We must reject the influence of pietism, which promotes spirituality independent of Scriptural church standards and discipline. We must identify the world and relate to it as pilgrims and strangers.

## **Summarizing the Lesson**

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11-5:11). May God enable us to carefully monitor our own hearts. We need divine wisdom to interpret the activities and testimonies of others.

## **Research Guide**

1. Read Nehemiah 10:28-39. Israel had made a covenant that they later violated (see chapter 13).
2. Read 1 Corinthians 4:18-5:13. The apostle Paul needed to address sin in the Corinthian churches.
3. Research Bible accounts where individuals were penalized for transgressions.