

Cursed, Slapped, Plucked and Chased

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We have come to the final chapter of Nehemiah. It is a sort of housecleaning chapter, a time to redress some of the issues of the past and try and safeguard the nation.

Moabites and Ammonites (Neh. 13: 1-3)

Nehemiah 13:1 (KJV) 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;

2 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. 3 Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

When it opens there is a sort of flashback, a looking over the shoulder to the time when Israel reached the Promised Land and were preparing to move in to claim their inheritance. In doing so they had to pass through Moabite and Ammonite land.

If you have been following the study of Ruth you will have learned that the nations of Moab and Ammon were the offspring of the incestuous union between Lot and his daughters in the cave of Zoar after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. But these national roots were not the only points of contention between Israel and them. We know Lot chose the well-watered plains of Jordan and Abraham settled for less fertile lands when their herdsmen quarreled. That may have created a grudge. But when Israel attempted to reclaim the promised Land the Moabites and Ammonites barred their way, refused to give them bread and water and even hired Balaam to curse them.

During the reading of the Law it was discovered that no Ammonite or Moabite should enter the congregation of God. Once discovered it turned into an opportunity to exclude foreigners from Israel. A more precise reading of the Law however, would only exclude the foreigners for 10 generations. Ezra and Nehemiah were both concerned for the purity of the Jews religion and the racial purity of Israel.

The Ouster of Tobiah (Neh. 13:4- 9)

Nehemiah 13:4-9 (KJV)4 And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: 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. 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: 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. 8 And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. 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 returned to the court of Artaxerxes for a while in this chapter after 12 years in Jerusalem and began his second administration as governor. On his return he found things not exactly as he liked them.

One of the thorns in the side of Nehemiah was a character named Tobiah, an Ammonite. During Nehemiah's absence and probably with some secrecy Tobiah one of the conspirators against Nehemiah's reforms, had been given living quarters in the temple of God. He was living in the very chambers where the sacred treasures and the sanctified materials were kept and entrusted to the Levites.

When Nehemiah learned of the matter he took swift action. He threw out all the belongings of Tobiah out of the temple. Then the area was purified and the sacred things brought back and stored in their rightful place. How swiftly the revival had degenerated when an enemy, although related by marriage, was allowed to take up residence in the Holy Place.

The Reorganization of the Levites (Neh: 13:10-14)

Nehemiah 13:10-14 (KJV) 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. 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. 12 Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. 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. 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 is not merely asking for credit for doing something, but he would like his reform, done because of his love for God and the temple, to have some permanence. We would be the same. Who likes washing the car twice a day or painting it twice a month. How many women like to bathe their 4-year old more than twice a day. When we work hard at something we don't want to see it undone the next time we look at it.

The Restoration of the Sabbath (Neh 13: 15-22)

Even though Nehemiah and his leaders had tried to keep the nation on track the people were still dishonoring God. Work seemed to be everything and even the Sabbath was not observed. Moreover, the nation had been so slack that other traders knew they could do their business in Jerusalem on any day of the week .

Nehemiah 13:15-22 (KJV)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. 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. 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? 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. 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. 20 So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. 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. 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.

The governor had the right to do these things. One notable point is that again Nehemiah asks to be remembered by God for what he has done. It may seem self-serving and a definite works-righteousness kind of attitude, but it does show that what Nehemiah was trying to accomplish was rooted in his religion and his desire to see his nation return to God.

Family court: The Legacy of Solomon (Neh. 3:23 -29)

Nehemiah had one last task to do . He had dealt with the religious life of the nation and the business practices of the people. But their personal lives were also in disarray and in violation of the introduction of this chapter. The men of Israel had married women from Ashdod (Philistines). This would make David turn over in his tomb. Joshua would have been enraged to know that the Moabite and Ammonite language was better known among some Jewish kids than their own tongue.

Nehemiah had enough.

Nehemiah 13:23-29 (KJV)23 In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: 24 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. 25 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. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. 27 Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? 28 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. 29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of

the Levites.

Nehemiah took the offenders to court, pronounced a religious curse upon them and read the law. He got physical with some of them: slapped them and tore their hair out. Leviticus 21:14 prevents the high priest from marrying a foreigner. Yet the high priest's grandson had done so and thus placed the whole high priestly lineage in jeopardy. Moreover, he was married to the daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite, the archenemy of Nehemiah. He expelled him. There is a Jewish story that says the temple on Mount Gerazun was built by Sanballat for this son-in-law when Nehemiah expelled him. Then NEHEMIAH PRAYED AGAIN.

Conclusion : The book ends as it began, with a prayer. Nehemiah because of his desire to bring the nation back under God, had instituted many reforms. He disciplined the nation to bring them under the dictates of the Law.

One point needs to be underscored. Nehemiah's actions, especially in the last chapter, tells us that once we come to Christ we must abandon the trappings of our former life. It is too easy to let the Tobiahs and the Sanballats exercise influence. It is too easy to profane God by keeping the same business practices and it is too easy to neglect the house of God. We must be careful of our associations for the day will come when we will give no account to God.

Nevertheless, it must have been a tough life for these people. So many rules to follow. So many sins to avoid and so little power to do things. Paul was right the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to God. Praise God for the plan of salvation found in

Acts 2:38 Acts 2:38 (KJV) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

So often Nehemiah prayed, Lord remember me for what I have done. How much it has changed for us. We pray Lord show me your mercy for Jesus sake. The apostle Paul would explain it well, The Law was fulfilled in Christ and the new age of grace would not only bring to us the forgiveness from our sin and a new righteous standing before God, but also the power of the indwelling Holy Ghost to create the Christ-life within us to the glory of God.

Jesus was cursed to remove my curse of sin !

Jesus was slapped by the mob as He fulfilled prophecy!

Jesus beard was plucked by the mocking crowd!

But on the cross He changed my destiny! He dealt with sin so that no longer will you and I be chased, but we are free to love and serve Him!!

Folks we are so fortunate to have come into the truth of this wonderful apostle message of Acts 2:38, 39 Let us get the message out to a lost and hurting world. Let us learn from Nehemiah to rebuild our lives, families, churches etc with this message and to help others to do the same. Let us have compassion for the lost and hurting of our world and win one soul at a time. Let us persevere and be committed to serving the Lord as Nehemiah did in rebuilding the wall of

Jerusalem and bringing the people together of all walks of life. Let us be in unity and one accord as the scriptures teach as well. Let us be submissive to the Lords will always and to our pastors and leaders whom God places over us as long as they are in truth and anointed by Jesus .

God bless

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