

**Bible Study of Nehemiah**  
**By Rev. Norman Hiley**

**Nehemiah – The Man who put wrong things right Ch 13**

No.11

The actions of Nehemiah concerning the Temple and the worship in his day, is a reminder of the Lord Jesus who later had the same zeal for the things of God being done in a right way. Jesus did not like what he saw happening in and around the Temple, and took drastic action to clear out the tradesmen and money-changers to ensure that the Temple was a place of prayer and worship, and not of a market place for business men and other traders.

Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem 12 years earlier to rebuild the Wall, after which he set out to cleanse the Temple and the worship of God.

What at first seemed an impossible task had been successfully finished. Jerusalem was once more a city with walls and gates.

Nehemiah had finished what he was sent to do and now he had to return to the King in Babylon to give an account of his time as Governor. This probably happened c433BC, but the reason for him asking for permission to return for a further period as Governor is not stated. 13v6. It is probable that he returned about 1 year later.

But what did he find?

He had left the high Priest Eliashib in charge v4 - but he was the wrong man for the job as we shall see as we read on.

**Read 13 vv4-6**

As long as Nehemiah was with them and leading them by example he was able to direct them to do the right thing, and correct them if they did the wrong thing. He made this novice team of wall builders into worshippers of the Living God.

But the moment he left them to return and report to the King when his term as Governor was completed there were those ready and willing to go back into their old ways from which they had been set free.

Once Nehemiah was out of sight all he had taught some of them was immediately forgotten. This happens all too often. e.g. Joshua 2v6 and vv10-13.

Every Vow that they had made was broken within 1 year.

They had promised and signed an agreement that:-

- i. There would be no association with others outside of the Kingdom
- ii There would be no desecration of the Lord's Day.
- iii There would be no neglecting or forsaking of God's House.

The moment that Nehemiah was gone the High Priest set about relaxing the rules to allow his non-Jewish relatives certain privileges. v4 Tobiah was given furnished accommodation in storerooms set apart for the offerings to the Lord for his servants, the Levites.

Tobiah lived within the Temple precincts at the invitation of the high Priest – WHY? Cp. 6vv17-18 where we read of the inter-marriage of Tobiah and one of his sons to prominent Jews in the city. Eliashib and Tobiah were related by mixed-marriages and we bound to each other.

The men delegated to the task of gathering in the offerings had nowhere to put them as Tobiah had taken up residence there. Soon there were no offerings anyway, and the Levites were unable to support themselves and their families.

How Nehemiah heard about what had happened it does not say – or how long it had been going on before he realised what was happening on his absence. I think that probably reports came to him from Jerusalem, as they had many years before, that all was not as he had left it. So maybe this is the reason for him asking for a 2<sup>nd</sup> period as Governor v6 – all we are told was that it ‘was sometime later’.

v 7 – He returned and maybe the High Priest and others were alarmed as they had not expected him to return so soon, if at all.

Nothing escaped his eye. He saw what was going on and he knew the reason why it was so.

The rot had set in and he had to see that it was stopped. Whatever was wrong had to be put right again. It was even worse that he had been told, so he set about dealing with each problem one at a time.

The 1st thing to go was Tobiah. There is no place for the Devil’s men in the church vestry. The High Priest took him in – Nehemiah threw him out.

v8 Nehemiah was both angry and greatly displeased, as he had been in 5v6 when the Jews were buying and selling their own people as slaves.

Tobiah had to go – thrown out on his ear into the street – and his furniture soon followed him.

v9 the storerooms were cleaned of any defilement by their pervious occupier and returned to their former use to receive the offerings of God’s people.

Nehemiah soon discovered how deep this had gone when he realised that effective worship had stopped because there was not enough Levites to do service in the Temple. When the offerings stopped it meant that their stipends stopped.

### **Read vv10-13**

When there was no support for the Levites they had to return to their homes and find work to provide for their families. Nehemiah knew this was wrong and needed to be put

right.

v11 – ‘Why is the House of God neglected?’

The answer is when the people rob God and fail to bring in their tithes and offerings so that God’s House is full. Malachi preached against this same evil at the same time as Nehemiah was dealing with it.

So the orders go out again v11.

There was no protest by the leaders of the people. They knew that Nehemiah was right and that they had been wrong.

So v12 - the men of Judah came with their offerings again – and this time Nehemiah appointed four men he could trust with the distribution of them where they were needed.

Then the Lord was ready to ‘open the windows of heaven’ again and bless his people.

Nehemiah had only one motive – v14 which he expressed in a short prayer.

He had opened up the right way to serve the Lord and the work was back on track again. However, there were still others things that were wrong and needed putting right.

### **Read vv15-22**

v15 – The Lord’s Day was being abused.

Unnecessary work was being done – such as wine-making; bringing farm produce to Market.

v16 there was unnecessary trading on the Sabbath which the Gentile fish merchants from Tyre took advantage of.

It was to those who allowed such deterioration in respect for the Lord and his Day that

Nehemiah addressed himself – v17 –He spoke to the nobles of Judah.

He told them that their actions were inviting God’s judgement –

‘Don’t you know that you are no better than your forefathers whose disobedience attracted a calamity on this city- which was judgement sent by God.’

Can you imagine the smell of not-so-fresh fish in the Temple precincts at the height of the noonday sun?

So – v19 He locked the gates at sunset as the Sabbath day began, and they remained shut until it was over.

It took 2 weeks before the fish merchants from Tyre got the message. They hoped that they could keep trading outside the city wall. But the Wall kept them out and the closed gates kept the Israelites in.

v21 Nehemiah issued another warning to them - ‘If you comeback again I will lay hands on you- - You will be arrested.’

So they didn’t come back as Nehemiah continued to have the gates guarded by the

Levites.

Action like this was followed by prayer v22.  
It is a good thing to seek God's approval of all that we do in his Name.

But Nehemiah was not finished yet –

**Read vv23-28**

He became aware of the many mixed-marriages which the Lord had forbidden.  
The children of such marriages could not speak Hebrew.  
We are not told what Nehemiah said, but it must have been very harsh words – because the men were convicted to the extent that he 'pulled out their hair' v25b

Commoners copy kings – Followers do what their Leaders do.

Nehemiah reminded them of Solomon, whose kingship was ruined by the many foreign wives he had. These women from foreign countries are described in the A.V, as 'outlandish women' i.e. not of the land of Israel.

It might appear that in this case the families were not split up as was the case on a previous occasion, but the command was not to let it happen again.

There was however, one exception. The son of the High Priest had married the daughter of Sanballat. He of all people should have known better – and that what he did was in direct contradiction to the promises made by his father and the others leaders.

S, like Tobiah he was thrown out as well – He was driven away i.e. probably exiled because he had defiled the priesthood,

Again it is a matter of justice – the higher the authority breaking the law the greater the responsibility for the consequences and also the judgement.

Again the action was followed by prayer – v29 – and this led to the purifying of the entire priesthood of everything that was 'foreign' and they were reassigned their duties in the service of God.

The fact that they were re-instated to God's service is a pointer to the grace and forgiveness of God - even to those who lead others and should have known better themselves.

When there is disobedience of the Word of God this leads to deterioration of the people of God, and only such a radical leader like Nehemiah can be relied upon to reverse such a downward trend.

He had the determination to put wrong things right.

The result – v30

- i He purified the priests and gave them their duties to do in the service of God.
- ii. He made sure that the sacrifices were available as given to Moses even to providing the wood for the fire on the altar.

So he could say after it all v31 – ‘Remember me with favour, O my God.’

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What have we learnt from this remarkable man of God?

He was a Man of Prayer; Purpose; Principle; Persistence; Planning - and finally the Man who Prevailed.

He was fearless as well a prayerful;  
He was zealous as well as righteous;

He was a Leader, who knew above all what God had put in his heart to do.

We cannot but be impressed by his unflinching loyalty to God in every situation he faced.

No sacrifice was too great, and no task too difficult for him when he was sure that what he was doing was God’s Will - and that God’s hand was with him to help him to do it.

We may wonder if his actions against those who worked against what pleased God in the worship and service, were too severe, but he would not allow anything that compromised faith in God to remain unchallenged.

He attempted the impossible by beginning well – continuing despite all opposition – working continuously night and day – and encouraging others to share his vision and seeing God’s Name re-established among the people that God called his own.

Every church needs to have a leader like Nehemiah – Called and enabled by God to whatever needs to be done to bring about new life in the Church which is based on God’s word and Will.

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Let me finish this Series with a poem that says it all –

“Someone said that it couldn’t be done,  
But I with a smile replied –  
Maybe it couldn’t be done – but I’d not be the one to say so until I had tried.

So I buckled right in with a smile and a grin  
If I worried – I hid it.

I started to sing as I tackled the thing  
That couldn't be done -and I did it.”

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