



## The Book of Nehemiah

### *Nehemiah's Return to Jerusalem and Ensuing Restorations*

#### *Nehemiah 13:1-31*

- I. ISRAEL'S FAILURE IN THEIR SEPARATION (Nehemiah 13:1-9)
  - A. A General Failure in Separation (Nehemiah 13:1-3)
    1. The problem stated (Nehemiah 13:3)
      - a. It would have been impossible for Israel to separate "*from...all the mixed multitude*" unless they had failed to do so previously.
      - b. This problem was a serious one and a problem that had infiltrated so deeply that Jewish males "*had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab*" (Nehemiah 13:23).
      - c. Ezra had already dealt with some of these issues, but apparently the problem was yet to be resolved (Ezra 10:10-44).
      - d. Even in this chapter, the problems would be resolved incrementally. This is not uncommon as sanctification is typically progressive in nature.
    2. The problem exposed (Nehemiah 13:1-2)
      - a. The timing of the exposing (Nehemiah 13:1)
        - (1) The declaration of timing—"On that day"
        - (2) The explanation of timing
          - a) Contextually, the most recent singular day spoken about is found in Nehemiah 12:43, which says "*Also that day*".
          - b) Going back further in the context of the chapter, reveals that that day is the day of the dedication as found in Nehemiah 12:27.
      - b. The provocation of the exposing (Nehemiah 13:1)
        - (1) The parties involved
          - a) They—likely the religious leaders
          - b) The audience of the people
        - (2) The practice involved—"they read in the book of Moses" (see Deuteronomy 31:11-12); Note: It would appear that the Jewish people viewed the five books of the law as "*the book of Moses*" (2 Chronicles 25:4; 2 Chronicles 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Mark 12:26) or as "*the book of the law of Moses*" (Joshua 8:31; Joshua 23:6; 2 Kings 14:6; Nehemiah 8:1).
        - (3) The perception involved
          - a) The source of the perception—"the book of Moses...therein was found written"
          - b) The enlightenment of the perception—"the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever" (see Deuteronomy 23:3-5)



- c. The explanation of the exposing (Nehemiah 13:2)
    - (1) They met not the children of Israel with bread and with water.
      - a) The Israelite had been admonished of the Lord to treat the Moabites and Ammonites respectfully because of their descending from Lot (Deuteronomy 2:9, 19).
      - b) It would have been proper for the Moabites and Ammonites to show kindness to Israel on its journey to Canaan by providing them with physical nourishment. They failed to do so and God took note of their lack of hospitality.
    - (2) They hired Balaam against Israel (Numbers 22:1-41; Numbers 23:1-30; Numbers 24:1-25).
      - a) They desired for him to curse Israel.
      - b) Instead, *“our God turned the curse into a blessing.”*
  - 3. The problem resolved (Nehemiah 13:3)
    - a. The cause of repenting—*“it came to pass, when they heard the law”*
    - b. The demonstration of repenting—*“they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude”*
- B. A Specific Example of Failure in Separation (Nehemiah 13:4-9)
- 1. Eliashib’s transgression (Nehemiah 13:4-6)
    - a. The timing of the transgression (Nehemiah 13:4)
      - (1) The declaration of timing—*“And before this”*
      - (2) The explanation of timing—The events of Nehemiah 13:4-5 occurred prior to the dedication of the wall.
    - b. The guilty in the transgression (Nehemiah 13:4)
      - (1) The person—Eliashib
      - (2) The position
        - a) He was the priest (Nehemiah 13:28).
        - b) He had the oversight of the chamber of the house of God.
        - c) Previously, he led Israel in doing God’s work (Nehemiah 3:1) Note: Due to Eliashib’s compromise of what was right, the service for the Lord in the temple had ceased.
  - c. The practice in the transgression (Nehemiah 13:4-5)
    - (1) Eliashib was allied unto Tobiah (Nehemiah 13:4). Tobiah was an Ammonite (Nehemiah 2:10; see Nehemiah 13:1).
    - (2) Eliashib prepared for Tobiah a great chamber (Nehemiah 13:5).
      - a) First, he had had to remove the meat offerings, frankincense, vessels, and the tithes of the corn, new wine, and oil.
      - b) Many of these things had been set aside in obedience to the command to offer provisions for the Levites, singers, porters, and for the offerings of the priests.
  - d. The opportunity in the transgression (Nehemiah 13:6)
    - (1) The statement of opportunity—*“in all this time was not I at Jerusalem”*
    - (2) The explanation of opportunity
      - a) The timing—*“in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes”*



- a) At the beginning of Nehemiah, we read that he came to Jerusalem in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1).
  - b) Nehemiah remained in Jerusalem, until the thirty second year of Artaxerxes, serving as governor of Judah (Nehemiah 5:14).
  - b) The absence—*“But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem”*
    - a) After the completion of the rebuilding of the wall and before the dedication, Nehemiah returned to Shushan.
    - b) It was during this absence that Eliashib compromised with Tobiah.
    - c) The return—*“after certain days obtained I leave of the king”* Note: We do not know how long Nehemiah was in Shushan, but it was long enough for:
      - a) The priests to abandon the temple and flee to his field (Nehemiah 13:10)
      - b) The Jews to start marriages and have children old enough to speak (Nehemiah 13:23-24)
2. Nehemiah’s correction (Nehemiah 13:7-9)
- a. Nehemiah’s learning of the problem (Nehemiah 13:7)
    - (1) The means of his learning—*“I came to Jerusalem”*; Obviously, this was after Nehemiah’s return from Shushan.
    - (2) The content of his learning
      - a) The statement of what he learned—Eliashib prepared Tobiah *“a chamber in the courts of the house of God.”*
      - b) The assessment of what he learned—*“I...understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah”*
  - b. Nehemiah’s response to the problem (Nehemiah 13:8)
    - (1) His inner turmoil—*“it grieved me sore”*; Note: Nehemiah had a great love for the things of God and displeasure when God’s word was not obeyed.
    - (2) His outer response—*“therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber”*; Note: Nehemiah had righteous anger and acted rightly in this anger (consider Numbers 25:6-11; John 2:14-17).
  - c. Nehemiah’s restitution of the problem (Nehemiah 13:9)
    - (1) The cleansing
      - a) The command given—*“Then I commanded”*
      - b) The command obeyed—*“and they cleansed the chambers”*
    - (2) The restoration
      - a) The restorer—*“thither brought I”* Note: Technically, this could mean that the actions were again done at Nehemiah’s command.
      - b) The restored—*“the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense”*



## II. ISRAEL'S FAILURE IN THEIR SERVICE (Nehemiah 13:10-14)

### A. The Perception of the Failure (Nehemiah 13:10)

1. The companion of the failure—*“And”*
  - a. Nehemiah's perception of the problem at hand is to be viewed as being in addition to the previous observations.
  - b. Had Nehemiah not perceived Tobiah dwelling in the chamber and the absence of the portions for the Levites, he would likely not have noticed that the portions were not being distributed to the Levites.
  - c. In other words, the discovery of one problem led to the discovery of another problem.
2. The manifestation of the failure—*“the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field”*
3. The nature of the failure—*“the portions of the Levites had not been given them”*;
4. Note: The Levites and the singers had dedicated their lives to God's service; however, their availability to do so somewhat depended upon the faithfulness of God's people.
  - a. The Israelites should not have viewed their giving as paying or owning the Levites, but rather as enabling the Levites to fulfill their God-called purpose.
  - b. In many ways, the same principles stand today for the support of the gospel minister.
  - c. When the Israelites failed in their obligations of giving, the ministry suffered. In like manner, churches who fail to support their ministers and enable them to give their time to the study of God's word will see that the ministry suffers accordingly.

### B. The Frustration at the Failure (Nehemiah 13:11)

1. Nehemiah's questioning of the rulers
  - a. He contended with the rulers.
    - (1) The rulers had already created trouble in Judah during the rebuilding of the wall. They did so by exacting usury of their brethren (Nehemiah 5:7).
    - (2) Even though it was Eliashib that prepared Tobiah a chamber in the house of God, the rulers seemingly went along with it and did not stop him. As such, they were complicit in the evil and just as guilty.
    - (3) The problem concerning the lack of support for the ministers was just another example of how leadership failed.
  - b. He asked why the house of God was forsaken.
2. Nehemiah's rebuke of the rulers
  - a. I gathered them together.
  - b. I set them in their place.



## C. The Correction of the Failure (Nehemiah 13:12-14)

1. The actions taken by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:12-13)
  - a. The restoration of provisions (Nehemiah 13:12)
    - (1) The restorers of the provisions—*“Then brought all Judah”*
    - (2) The nature of the provisions
      - a) The tithe of the corn
      - b) The tithe of the new wine
      - c) The tithe of the oil
    - (3) The place of the provisions—*“unto the treasuries”*
  - b. The institution of organization (Nehemiah 13:13)
    - (1) The appointment of treasurers—*“I made treasurers over the treasuries”*
    - (2) The identity of the treasurers
      - a) Shelemiah, the priest
      - b) Zadok, the scribe
      - c) Pedaiiah, of the Levites
      - d) Hanan, the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah
    - (3) The character of the treasurers—*“they were counted faithful”*
    - (4) The mission of the treasurers—*“their office was to distribute unto their brethren”*
2. The desires expressed by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:14)
  - a. The expression of these desires
    - (1) Simply put, prayer is talking to God.
    - (2) In Nehemiah’s expression of his desires, he made them known by communicating them to God and in doing so, this expression was made in the form of a prayer.
  - b. The nature of the desires
    - (1) Remember me...concerning this; Note: Obviously, this was in reference to his restoring of the portions for the ministers.
    - (2) Wipe not out my good deeds.
      - a) That I have done for the house of my God
      - b) That I have done for the offices thereof
    - (3) Obviously, Nehemiah desired to receive some merit in the eyes of the Lord for the actions he had taken, but the actions he took were for the good of God’s house and God’s ministries.
  - c. The hearer of the desires—*“O my God”*
    - (1) Nehemiah addressed the Lord as *“my God.”* In fact, he did so twice in this short prayer.
    - (2) In doing so, he manifested that he had a personal and close relationship with God. God was not just the God of Israel, He was Nehemiah’s God.
    - (3) Practically and personally speaking, the language of our prayers often exposes the health of our relationship with God. A man who speaks of God as being afar off and distant exposes that he lacks a closeness to God.



### III. ISRAEL'S FAILURE CONCERNING THE SABBATH (Nehemiah 13:15-22)

#### A. The Perception of the Failure (Nehemiah 13:15-16)

1. The timing of the failure—*"In those days"* (Nehemiah 13:15)
  - a. Again, this must have been around the time of the dedication of the wall and after Nehemiah's return from Shushan.
  - b. From everything we read about Nehemiah, he seems to have been a man of action who struggled greatly with what he saw as a failure on the part of others to do what they were supposed to do.
    - (1) Having come to Israel with Zerubbabel and assisted with the initial work of rebuilding after captivity, Nehemiah was sorely disappointed to find out that more had not been accomplished in his absence, having returned to serve in Shushan (Nehemiah 1:1-4).
    - (2) He seemed quite aggravated at the thought of having to deal with the likes of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Nehemiah 2:19-20; Nehemiah 4:1-5). He likewise seemed aggravated at the fear shown by the nobles in response to their foes (Nehemiah 4:14).
    - (3) He made specific mention that the nobles of the Tekoites refused to put their necks to the work of their Lord (Nehemiah 3:5).
    - (4) He was aggravated with the bondage some Jews were putting upon other Jews in the taking of their lands and vineyards (Nehemiah 5:1-13).
    - (5) He was somewhat bothered about how other leaders had taken from the people in spite of their desperate conditions (Nehemiah 5:14-19).
    - (6) He was frustrated with the lies spread by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem that had been created to smear Nehemiah and stop the work (Nehemiah 6:1-9).
    - (7) He was greatly bothered at Shemaiah's suggestion that he should stop his work and enter into the temple to hide and spare his own life (Nehemiah 6:10-14).
    - (8) He hated the fact that many in the land were sworn unto Tobiah and were passing information to Tobiah about Nehemiah and to Nehemiah about Tobiah (Nehemiah 6:16-19). He obviously had no desire to hear about Tobiah, nor did he want Tobiah to hear anything about him.
    - (9) Upon his return to Jerusalem, after having to make a trip to Shushan, he was aggravated to find that Tobiah was living in a chamber of the house of God, causing provisions to be removed, thus prompting the ministers to vacate to the fields (Nehemiah 13:4-14).
  - c. The uncovering of a problem with the way Israel was approaching the sabbath was yet another frustration on top of all the others.



2. The manifestation of the failure—“*saw I*” (Nehemiah 13:15)
3. The nature of the failure (Nehemiah 13:15-16)
  - a. From within—“*in Judah*” (Nehemiah 13:15)
    - (1) Some were treading wine presses.
    - (2) Some were bringing in sheaves and lading asses.
    - (3) Some were bringing in wine, grapes, figs, and all manner of burdens.
  - b. From without—“*men of Tyre*” (Nehemiah 13:16)
    - (1) Men of Tyre brought in fish and all manner of ware.
    - (2) They sold them unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem.
4. The explanation of the failure—“*on the sabbath*” (Nehemiah 13:15, 16)
  - a. The problem of the sabbath
    - (1) None of the issues mentioned above would have been deemed a problem six out of the seven days during the week. In fact, they would have very much been in the right because of how God views man’s responsibility to labour and provide for himself.
    - (2) The problem arose because these things were being on a day that had been set aside for the people’s rest and for the Lord’s praise. Note: One little detail (the day of the week chosen) took that which was right and made it wrong. This is true of many things in life.
  - b. The provisions concerning the sabbath
    - (1) The sabbath day was the seventh day of the week, or at the end of the week—“*but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath*” (Exodus 16:26).
    - (2) It was to be a holy day of rest unto the Lord—“*To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD*” (Exodus 16:23).
    - (3) It was a day to remember and keep holy—“*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8).
    - (4) It was a day where no work was allowed and it was to be kept by all, including the stranger—“*in it thou shalt no do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates*” (Exodus 20:10).
    - (5) It was to be a perpetual covenant throughout all Israel’s generations—“*Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant*” (Exodus 31:16).
    - (6) The keeping of the sabbath was renewed in the covenant the people made in the first year of the return under Zerubbabel (Nehemiah 10:31).
    - (7) Technically speaking, the sabbath was for Israel’s benefit and offered them rest from a week’s labour; however, their failure to honour this day as commanded in the scripture indicated a problem or breach in their relationship with God. The greater problem was not their lack of rest, but their lack of respect of God’s commands.





B. The Frustration at the Failure (Nehemiah 13:15, 17-18)

1. He testified against their actions—*“I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals”* (Nehemiah 13:15).
2. He questioned their understanding (Nehemiah 13:17-18).
  - a. The nature of questioning—*“I contended”* (Nehemiah 13:17)
  - b. The people of questioning—*“the nobles of Judah”* (Nehemiah 13:17)
  - c. The subject of his questioning (Nehemiah 13:17)
    - (1) What evil thing is this that ye do?
    - (2) Why do ye profane the sabbath day?
  - d. The reminder of his questioning (Nehemiah 13:18)
    - (1) The deeds of the fathers
      - a) The fathers acted wrongly toward the sabbath.
      - b) Their actions forced God to bring evil upon the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.
    - (2) The deeds of the present nobles—*“ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.”*

C. The Correction of the Failure Nehemiah 13:19-22)

1. The actions taken by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:19-22)
  - a. The establishing of boundaries (Nehemiah 13:19)
    - (1) The time of the boundaries
      - a) When the gates began to be dark before the sabbath
      - b) Till after the sabbath
    - (2) The guidelines for the boundaries
      - a) The gates should be shut—when it began to be dark before the sabbath
      - b) The gates should be opened—after the sabbath
    - (3) The securing of the boundaries—*“some of my servants set I at the gates”*
    - (4) The purpose of the boundaries—*“that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day”*
  - b. The introduction of fear (Nehemiah 13:20-21)
    - (1) The boldness of the merchants (Nehemiah 13:20)
      - a) The persons identified—*“merchants and sellers of all kind of ware”*
      - b) The actions identified—*“lodged without Jerusalem once or twice”*
    - (2) The boldness of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:21)
      - a) The manner of his response—*“I testified against them”*
      - b) The message of his response
        - a) His question—*“Why lodge ye about the wall?”*
        - b) His promise—*“if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you”*
      - c) The accomplishment of Nehemiah’s response—*“From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath.”*





- c. The ordering of the keepers (Nehemiah 13:22)
  - (1) The giver of the orders—*“I commanded”*
  - (2) The receivers of the orders—*“the Levites”*
  - (3) The details of the orders
    - a) The Levites were to cleanse themselves. Note: Even the simple and seemingly carnal task of keeping the gate demanded that its doers were clean. If that is the case, we should understand that God wants all His workers, regardless of how seemingly insignificant a task may be, to be clean when they do a job for Him.
    - b) The Levites were to come and keep the gates.
  - (4) The purpose of the orders—*“to sanctify the sabbath day”*
- 2. The desires expressed by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:22)
  - a. The expression of these desires
    - (1) Simply put, prayer is talking to God.
    - (2) In Nehemiah’s expression of his desires, he made them known by communicating them to God and in doing so, this expression was made in the form of a prayer.
  - b. The nature of the desires
    - (1) Remember me...concerning this also; Note: There is no doubt that Nehemiah saw the severity of his actions. However, he believed to the best of his ability that he was doing the right thing. As another layer of protection, he asked the Lord to consider his actions and spare him according to the greatness of God’s mercy.
    - (2) Spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy
  - c. The hearer of the desires—*“O my God”*

#### IV. ISRAEL’S FAILURE CONCERNING THEIR HOMES (Nehemiah 13:23-31)

##### A. The Perception of the Failure (Nehemiah 13:23-24)

- 1. The timing of the failure—*“In those days also”* (Nehemiah 13:23); Note: This must have been a rough time for Nehemiah. As soon as he addressed one problem, another one became clear. They were all there from the beginning, but Nehemiah dealt with them one at a time.
- 2. The manifestation of the failure—*“saw I”* (Nehemiah 13:23)
- 3. The nature of the failure (Nehemiah 13:23-24)
  - a. The actions addressed—*“the Jews...married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab”* (Nehemiah 13:23)
  - b. The results noted (Nehemiah 13:24)
    - (1) The presence of other languages—*“their children spake half in the speech of...”*
    - (2) The absence of their own language—they *“could not speak in the Jews’ language”*; Note: It would appear that their speech was part of everything and therefore they were incapable of communicating fully in the Jewish language.



B. The Frustration at the Failure (Nehemiah 13:25-27)

1. He testified against their actions (Nehemiah 13:25).
  - a. His actions toward them
    - (1) I contended with them.
    - (2) I cursed them.
    - (3) I smote certain of them.
    - (4) I plucked off their hair.
  - b. His request from them
    - (1) The nature of the request—*“made them swear by God”*
    - (2) The content of the request—*“Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.”*
2. He questioned their understanding (Nehemiah 13:26-27).
  - a. The reflection upon the past (Nehemiah 13:26)
    - (1) The greatness of Solomon
      - a) Among many nations was there no king like Solomon.
      - b) He was beloved of his God and made king over Israel.
    - (2) The fall of Solomon
      - a) Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?
      - b) Even him did outlandish women cause to sin.
  - b. The concern for the present—*“Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?”* (Nehemiah 13:27)

C. The Correction of the Failure (Nehemiah 13:28-31)

1. The actions taken by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:28-31)
  - a. He chased a man away (Nehemiah 13:28).
    - (1) The person—*“one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib”*
    - (2) The problem—*“was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite”*
  - b. He prayed for them (Nehemiah 13:29).
    - (1) The request in his prayer—*“Remember them”*
    - (2) The recipient of his prayer—*“O my God”*
    - (3) The cause of his prayer
      - a) They had defiled the priesthood.
      - b) They had defiled the covenant.
  - c. He cleansed them from all strangers (Nehemiah 13:30).
  - d. He appointed wards (Nehemiah 13:30-31).
    - (1) Of the priests and Levites (Nehemiah 13:30-31)
      - a) Every one in his business (Nehemiah 13:30)
      - b) At times appointed (Nehemiah 13:31)
    - (2) For the wood offering and for the firstfruits (Nehemiah 13:31)
2. The desires expressed by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:31)
  - a. The expression of these desires—again, this was prayer
  - b. The nature of the desires—*“Remember me...for good”*
  - c. The hearer of the desires—*“O my God”*