

PP
Nehemiah 13:1-14

Nehemiah: Fighting to Win!

Part 40, 7/6-7, 2013

We've been looking in Nehemiah at an incredible worship service that took place on the day that they dedicated the wall of Jerusalem

After the music faded, the Word of God was preached: ***"On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent."*** **Nehemiah 13:1-3**

Ammonites and Moabites were two people groups that came from Abraham's nephew Lot. Lot's daughters got him drunk on two consecutive nights, and took turns sleeping with their father so they could get pregnant and each have a child.

From that illicit union came the older daughter's son Moab, and the younger daughter's son who became the father of the Ammonites.

They settled beside the Israel, their language practically the same as the Hebrew language, but **PP** they opposed God's people and so God commanded: ***"No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever"*** **Deuteronomy 23:3**

Understanding this, verse 4 shows us a serious situation that developed, but in order to understand it, we need to see three back stories threading through our passage.

The first one is a man we have met a few times in this study...Tobiah, who is...an Ammonite! One of three enemies who had worked tirelessly to try and prevent Jerusalem's wall being rebuilt. Look with me again at **2:19**, ***"But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said"***

Sanballat is the ringleader who *represents Satan*, the chief enemy of every Christian.

Geshem the wealthy Arab ruler, *who represents this world system that opposes God*.

And then our Tobiah, the governor of the Ammonites ruling east of Jerusalem, the servant of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria up north.

Tobiah had integrated himself right into the heart of the city and politics and religion.

And he *represents the flesh*, the old nature, that part of every Christian that still seeks to set itself up against God and disobey Him.

The second backstory is that all through the book, Nehemiah represents someone as well: Jesus. Notice that Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king of Persia, Jesus took the cup from the King of Kings, His Father.

He wept over the state of Jerusalem, Jesus did the same.

Nehemiah was sent and empowered by the King, as was Jesus.

They both left high positions to rescue their people, both were mocked and opposed by enemies.

They both rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and both were falsely accused.

Neither would burden their people, and instead each set slaves and captives free.

Nehemiah each cleansed the temple of those who should not have been in there.

PP Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus is the master builder of our salvation, *‘the founder and perfecter of our faith’ Hebrews 12:2*

The parallels are so significant that one must see in Nehemiah, a type of Christ

Briefly, the third backstory is that while God’s *‘house’* in Nehemiah’s day was the temple, today it is both the *heart* of every believer, and the gathering of His people to serve and worship Him, called the *church*

So here we go: Tobiah represents the flesh, trying to subvert God’s people and God’s glory
Nehemiah represents Christ, who is working to defeat the flesh in God’s people
And that battle is taking place, both in our hearts, and in our churches

PP 1-The Situation

“Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.” Nehemiah 13:4-5

‘Eliashib’ allows Tobiah, their enemy, have a room right in the house of God!

Not just a room, but *‘a large chamber’*, a palatial estate, a penthouse suite!

Remember the back stories: Eliashib allows the Tobiah the flesh to be right at home in the church, the way we so often allow it to be at home in our hearts

Where was Nehemiah all this time, how could he let this happen?

“While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem...” Nehemiah 13:6-7a

He had come to Jerusalem in the 20th year of Artaxerxes’ reign, was called back in his 32nd
After some time back in Persia, he returned to Jerusalem, to find that enemies of God had been successful at getting inside the wall into the city, right into the House of God!

The Tobiahs of our flesh never, ever yield, and will look for a way to get behind the wall and lodge in our hearts, disrupting our love, worship and service to our God

Thankfully, Nehemiah shows us how to respond and deal with our flesh, that stubborn old nature and in every part, he shows us what Jesus Christ will do to help us fight to win!

PP 2-The Solution

“and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.” Nehemiah 13:6-7

PP a) Catch

Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem, and like he did the first time, he looked around at the state of affairs, and discovered that Tobiah had been given a room in the very House of God!

He was given a *‘large chamber’* (13:5); not a place when he visited, but a home

The Temple had at the very center, the House of God

Built all around that were courts, large, made even more massive in the days of Herod
 Built into the courtyards were chambers and rooms for all sorts of purposes
 Tobiah was given a large storage room, converted for residential use
 This is the size of a small warehouse, a penthouse suite, with multiple rooms (13:9)

How could **'Elaishib'** do this?

Verse 4 gives us a clue in that he was **related** to Tobiah, likely through intermarriage
 Dishonoring God's word always makes room for the flesh!
 And the flesh knows how to make sin look good as Tobiah's name means *Jehovah is good!*

Also, this is Eliashib the High Priest, the one who rebuilt the Sheep Gate, the Gate that represents
 the Gospel, the core of Christianity
 Whose name, incidentally, we do not find anywhere on the reaffirmation covenant of chapter 10
 Eliashib grew tolerant and tolerance removes the distinction between the world and Christians
 Tolerance leads to apathy, which in turn leeches away our power of a witness of Christ
 Our enemies are incredibly patient, unfolding their strategies over months and years
 Satan baits the hooks of temptation with the lures of the world that appeal to our flesh!

But Nehemiah **discovered** this, implying that he was examining the house of God and saw it
 Jesus, as Revelation 2-3 shows us, walks around in the midst of His churches, looking for what
 pleases Him and what displeases Him

PP J. Vernon McGee once wrote, *"In the history of the church we have seen that when the devil
 could not destroy the church by persecution, the next thing he did was to join it!"*

Jesus examines our churches, and He looks deeply into each of our hearts as well
 And when He discovers the Tobiahs of our flesh lodging in them, He acts

PP b) Confess

Notice the first response of Nehemiah: ***"And I was very angry"***

You gotta love Nehemiah!

He didn't just get angry, he got **'very angry'**, righteously angry!

He knew Tobiah, and he didn't want him anywhere near his people or his God

Let's ask ourselves this question: Is this our attitude toward our flesh?

Do we get angry at our wrong and sinful desires, at how they are robbing us of joy and
 fellowship with God?

***"And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the
 chamber."*** Nehemiah 13:8

Nehemiah didn't consult with anyone, he didn't pray about it, he acted!

The flesh acts like it has our best interests in mind, like it just wants to help us be happy

But it really wants to destroy us, to kill our faith, to render us ineffective

Christian, our old self, the sin nature, the flesh, is very active in our lives

Ruthlessness and hatred of the old man is called for, not kindness and gentleness

The old Puritans understood this and taught their people to mortify the flesh

Sounds a little ominous, but the word *mortify* means to subdue or deaden

But they understood, the flesh is our enemy, not our friend, and a violent response is warranted

PP Jesus spoke metaphorically when He said ***“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away”*** **Matthew 5:30**

Dealing with sin must be an instantaneous, ruthless action done by the grace and power of God!

All of the belongings of the Tobiah of our flesh must be thrown out, by the act of *confessing sin*!

Nehemiah would have had them taken through the Dung Gate and thrown into the Valley of Hinnom and burned!

We confess by going through that Dung Gate again, casting our sin to the mercy of Christ, turning around and locking that gate so we do not bring it back with us!

And one day, our righteously angry Savior will completely pull that old man out of our hearts, and will give us forever a heart that has no Tobiahs pulling us down

For now, our flesh battles, and we are shown the next step to take in this fight to win

PP c) Cleanse

“Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers,”

When we confess sin at the Dung Gate, God will take us to the Fountain Gate to be cleansed

PP ***“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** **1 John 1:9**

This is the gate of the Holy Spirit, where He cleanses and restores our fellowship with God

When Nehemiah called the priests to cleanse the chambers, it was a clear message that not only did Tobiah not belong there, he was a defilement to God’s people

The room had to be purified for the Lord

There is not to be any part of us that is allowed to be a pocket for sin and defilement and God will relentlessly work in getting them clean

When Jesus helps us discover sin, and our hearts get angered toward it, and we throw it out of our hearts through confession, the Spirit comes in and scours our hearts clean, making room for what Nehemiah does next

PP d) Change

“and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.”

When we subdue and deaden the old nature, we must fan into flames the new nature

Expelling sin creates a vacuum, and if it isn’t filled with new desires, it will refill with sinful

So Jesus moves the confessing Christian from the Fountain Gate to the Water Gate, where the Holy Spirit changes the desires of the new nature by His powerful Word

The new nature is the nature of Christ that the Holy Spirit deposits into your heart the very moment you put your trust in Him

You see this is where so many of us go wrong when we try to defeat sin in our lives

We confess a sin that defeated us, and we do nothing else with it

We must move to the Fountain Gate of the Spirit's filling, so He can pour in the Water Gate of His Word, to give us new desires
Satan baits the hooks of temptation with the lures of the world that appeal to the desires of our flesh!

When the Holy Spirit pours His Word into our hearts, the old bait the devil uses no longer works

I've fished Lake Nockamixon three times, twice with a guy that had every bait ever used
We tried them all...fish literally jumping out of the water all around our boat, laughing, showing off, spitting water in those little arcing fountains like at the World of Coca Cola Museum in Atlanta

We couldn't hook them, they wouldn't bite, we didn't have what they wanted

We are partnering with Christ to subdue the old nature, that part of us that responds to the baited hooks, but then we must fill our hearts with new desires or the victory will be short-lived
Nehemiah had caught the enemy, cleared him out of the temple, cleansed the chamber and now brings back into it what was supposed to be there...for the worship of God!

Paul said it like this in Colossians, take off your old clothes, get the Tobiahs out of your heart!!

PP *"Put to death therefore what is earthly in you... now you must put them all away... put off the old self with its practices"* Colossians 3:5, 8, 9

PP But then you have to redress with the clothes the King has given: *"put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."* Colossians 3:10

What are those clothes??

PP *"Put on then...compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another...forgiving each other...And above all these put on love"* Colossians 3:12-14

Why many of us fail and fall again, is because we take out and don't bring the new desires in!

PP e) Coordinate

"I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" Nehemiah 13:10

When sin is allowed to lodge in a church, it will affect the whole church, and when it finds a pocket to live in our hearts, our whole lives are affected

Nehemiah discovered that the House of God was forsaken by the people, as they were no longer supporting the ministry of the Lord

When Tobiah was thrown out, the people again began to faithfully give and support the ministry
Friends, many of us have realized this truth: you cannot have joy and cherish sin at the same time

PP It was after David confessed his sin that he prayed *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."* Psalm 51:12

"And I gathered them together and set them in their stations....And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses...for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers." Nehemiah 13:11, 13

The solitary Christian is an aberration in the kingdom of God!

Paul knew this, Jesus taught this, we must learn it!

To fight to win the battle against the Tobiah of our flesh, we must coordinate a team approach

Tobiah is relentless and we must learn to fight to win!

PP (summary slide of 5 steps) When we catch the flesh in action in us, we learn to immediately confess it to the Lord

He will cleanse our hearts, and change them by helping us put on new desires

And then we must coordinate others to come around us to walk faithfully with God!

Pray