

From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Nehemiah) ch.11 - ch.13

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being men of activity, wholehearted, and courageous warriors in the Christian life, and of offering sacrifices of praise and sharing material things with others who are in need.

Duration: 1:00:20

Scripture: Nehemiah 11:1, Isaiah 52:1

Topics: "From Babylon To Jerusalem"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenges Nehemiah faced in getting people to live in Jerusalem. The city was in a state of disrepair and lacked opportunities for financial gain. However, the leaders of the people set an example by sacrificing their own gain and living in Jerusalem themselves. They did not ask others to do what they were not willing to do. Some individuals volunteered to live in Jerusalem, and they were praised for their willingness to bear the suffering and reproach associated with being a part of God's house. This small remnant of overcomers symbolizes those who are willing to pay the price and endure hardships for their faith.

Transcript

Let's turn to Nehemiah and chapter 11. We were looking at chapter 10 in our last study. Now we come to chapter 11, verse 1. Here it tells us about how Nehemiah got the people to live in Jerusalem.

Verse 1. Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in the other cities. Now it's quite interesting to see how Nehemiah had quite a job to get people to come and live in Jerusalem, because it was not very comfortable to live in Jerusalem. First of all, Jerusalem was broken down, and then it was a city, and there was not much opportunity to make a lot of money there.

If you were out in the villages, you had your fields, and you could plough the fields and make a lot of money. It was different in the time of King Solomon, when Jerusalem was grand and glorious, and we read that even the Queen of Sheba came all the way from the south to see Solomon in Jerusalem. But now it was a despised city, and it was quite a job to get people to come there.

Everybody naturally seeks their own, and found their way to the villages where they could earn some money, and so they had to cast lots and say, well, one-tenth of you will have to come and live in Jerusalem. And it's very good to see here that the leaders lived in Jerusalem, and that is the spirit of leadership in the house of God, that the leaders are willing to sacrifice their own gain, and that's what qualifies them to be leaders, that they do not seek their own gain. They are willing to deny themselves, and they lived in Jerusalem.

They did not ask other people to do what they were not willing to do themselves. No, they came, and they were willing to bear the suffering and reproach, and then the others came, and it says here that there were some who volunteered, verse 2, to live in Jerusalem, and the people blessed the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem. They appreciated those who denied themselves.

Now, this is one of the few places in the Old Testament where Jerusalem, verse 1, is called the Holy City. We've seen that in our study of Revelation, that Jerusalem is called the Holy City. It's not found very often in the Old Testament.

There are only one or two references to the Holy City in the Old Testament. One is Daniel, chapter 9. We considered that when we studied it, and the other is here in Nehemiah, chapter 11, verse 1, and the third reference is in Isaiah 52, and verse 1. And in all these places in the Old Testament where Jerusalem is called the Holy City, it has reference to Babylon, coming out of Babylon. It's in the context of coming out of Babylon that you read of it in Isaiah 52, Daniel 9, and Nehemiah chapter 11, that Jerusalem is called the Holy City.

And one-tenth of the people came and lived there. A lot of people who came out of Babylon, but they didn't want to pay the price to come and live in Jerusalem. It's symbolic of the small remnant of the overcomers who are willing to bear the reproach and the suffering involved in being a part of God's house today.

And then it gives us the heads of the provinces who lived in Jerusalem, verse 3. Verse 4, the sons of Judah and sons of Benjamin lived in Jerusalem, and a list given of those people, and it says here in verse 6, all the sons of Pyrrhus who lived in Jerusalem were 468 able men, or as the King James Version margin says, men of activity. They had driven the spirit of lethargy far away from them. They were men of activity, and that's what Jerusalem always needs, men of activity.

Lazy people end up in Babylon, but these people were men of activity, men who were able to fight and defend Jerusalem. That's the meaning, men who were not afraid to fight the enemy. They were able men, men of activity.

And then it lists the sons of Benjamin in verse 7, a number of them, and it's listed concerning them that they were 928. It doesn't say about them that they were able men. You notice this, that the Holy Spirit is very careful to identify those who were wholehearted and those who were not so wholehearted, and we've seen that again and again in the book of Nehemiah.

In the building of the wall we saw it, and here also it says that there were certain men who were able men of activity, and then concerning the other group it just says they were 928. They were greater in number, but they were not men of activity, obviously, otherwise the Holy Spirit would have recorded it. And that's something that we need to bear in mind.

We can all sit in the same assembly, and it does not mean that the Holy Spirit has got the same opinion of every brother and sister who sits in the same assembly. He's very careful. There's no partiality in him, and he identifies those who are men of activity and those who are lazy, and he identifies those who are willing to face the battle and those who are ashamed of the reproach.

And then it speaks about the priests in verse 10, the various names of the priests, and just one other thing I want you to notice in verse 14. Concerning the priests, it says that some of these brothers, the priests, were valiant warriors, 128. There are many people there, 822 in verse 12 and 242 in verse 13, but when it comes to this group mentioned in verse 14, it says they were valiant warriors, and their overseer or elder brother was Zabdeel.

He was a man who, obviously, it was because of the overseer, no doubt, that he gathered together such a band of brothers who were all valiant warriors. They were priests, but they were warriors, and the Holy Spirit records the fact that these people were people who took the battle seriously. It's very important that it would be good if the Spirit of God could record that about us, that we are those who took the battle in the Christian life seriously.

So as we go through these lists, though it's a long list of names here and there, we see certain statements which indicate that the Holy Spirit just doesn't take everyone in a big lot. He identifies those who are men of activity, those who are courageous warriors, and those who were not willing to take the reproach, and all these things are written for our instruction, because he makes a list exactly like that even today. And then further down in verse 16, it speaks about those who were in charge, the leaders of the Levites who were in charge of the outside work of the house of God.

The house of God is a work inside and outside. It refers to the ministry of the deacons in a church, those who have responsibility for the material aspects of God's house, and they are also listed there. The Holy Spirit takes note of all that.

And then it says in verse 17, about Mattaniah, the son of Micah, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, who was the leader in beginning the thanksgiving at prayer. What a wonderful thing for the Holy Spirit to write about a brother, that when it came to prayer, here was a brother who was zealous to lead off in praising the Lord. He didn't have the spirit of lethargy in him at all.

He'd driven it a million miles away from him, and he was zealous as soon as they went to prayer, to be the leader in beginning the thanksgiving at prayer. And back, Bukhari, the second among his brethren, and Abda, so we see that the Spirit of God also takes note of those who are zealous to sing and to praise the Lord, and to give thanks to Him in song, all various ministries that were necessary in the body of Christ. And all these things are written for our instruction, because it is the will of God that we too become men of activity and valiant, courageous warriors, and that we are zealous to shoot off in thanksgiving and prayer, because we are freed from the spirit of lethargy and the spirit of timidity.

Then we read in verse 19 about the gatekeepers. There again, we come back to the appraisers in verse 17, and the gatekeepers who kept watch of the gates. We considered that earlier, in an earlier chapter, but it's interesting to see how in the book of Nehemiah, again and again, we come back to these two categories of people, the praisers and the gatekeepers.

And we saw in our study in that earlier chapter that these are two important ministries, very important to be fulfilled in the body of Christ. Those who are zealous to praise the Lord in song and in words of praise, and

who are ready to shoot off first, second, third, fourth, it says in verse 17, who were zealous, and then those who were zealous to keep the gate narrow, to make sure that people didn't sneak in, who were not really wholeheartedly interested in being disciples. Then we see about the gatekeepers.

Then further down we read about the servants, the temple servants, verse 21. These were the Gibeonites. You remember the ordained to be servants, but even though they were servants, we find here that they were zealous enough to come back from Babylon to Jerusalem and to find a part in Jerusalem.

These were Gibeonites. And when so many other Jews stayed back in Babylon, those who are lost will end up as first very often, and those who are first will be lost. And then we read further down, in verse 25, about one of the towns, some of the sons of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba.

I just thought I'd mention this, that Kiriath Arba, another name for it is Hebron, which is the place which Caleb, the son of Judah, one of the sons of Judah, took for his possession, driving out the giants from the land. And because he had done that, the sons of Judah could now come back and possess that same town. And there we go through that list.

There's a big list of people who, from various tribes, who lived there in the various parts of Israel. Then we come to chapter 12, and here we have a list of two generations of priests. Now as we go through Nehemiah, we find that there are a number of places where we find lists of names.

We don't want to go through all those names, but we see one thing. In the book of Ezra, and in the book of Nehemiah, we find lists of names. Now we don't find a list of names like that in such a detailed list, even in the Exodus, in the book of Numbers.

But here is a much more detailed list with a lot of names. This teaches us that God takes note of each individual who has wholeheartedly left Babylon and come to Jerusalem. That's what God would have us to learn from these detailed lists of names, which appear to be so boring.

But once we understand the spiritual significance of this movement from Babylon to Jerusalem, we find that each individual who has taken that decision to move out of Babylon to Jerusalem is taken note of by God. But He also takes note of this, that among those who have come out, some are valiant warriors, and some just come along with the crowd, and some are zealous to shoot off in thanksgiving and prayer, and some just follow along. And so there is a difference.

As one star differs from another star in glory, the same opportunity everybody has, but not everybody is equally zealous to do all that God wants them to do. So there is much here for our own instruction. And here there is two lists of priests.

The first list is from verse 1 to 9, which is a list of the priests and Levites who came up in the first movement of people from Babylon to Jerusalem in the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua. And there is a big list of priests there. And then we come to a second list of priests in verses 12 to 21.

Now, when you look at verse 8, we read there in verse 8 about those who were in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. Those who were in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. There again, there is a mention of those who were leading in the singing and in the praise and in that Old Testament worship of the Lord in the temple.

And then in verse 9, it speaks about their brothers who stood opposite them in their service divisions, that is, who were looking after the gates. As once again, we come to these two groups of people which are repeated again, the praisers and the gatekeepers. We've seen that again and again and again in the book of Revelation.

And what we read in verses 12 to 21 is another generation of priests who were at a later time. You read in verse 24, and the heads of the Levites were so-and-so, Heshabiah, Sherebiah, and with their brothers opposite them, again to praise and give thanks. Verse 25, a list of names who were the gatekeepers keeping watch at the storehouses of the gates.

These were the people who served in the days of verse 26 of Nehemiah and Ezra. I just want you to notice one thing here. The first list of priests is in the time of Zerubbabel, which was about 90 years before Nehemiah.

There was a group of priests, but among those priests, there were gatekeepers who kept the gates narrow, spiritually speaking, and praisers who had driven the spirit of timidity and lethargy far away from them, and who were ready to shoot off in praise and thanksgiving and lead the people in praise and thanksgiving to God. And we see here that 90 years later, in another generation of priests and Levites, there's still mention of the praisers and the gatekeepers. The praisers and the gatekeepers are the ones that the Holy Spirit specially takes note of in Jerusalem.

Those who are zealous to keep the gate narrow, and those who are zealous to praise and thank the Lord at all times. And I just want to encourage every brother and sister into this ministry. All of us may not be called to gatekeeping, but all of us can be involved if we will only drive away the spirit of timidity and lethargy that clings to us like leeches.

If we would only drive it away to be zealous to praise and thank the Lord. Again and again and again in the book of Nehemiah, we find an emphasis on this. The praisers and the gatekeepers.

The praisers and the gatekeepers. And now we come down to verse 27. Chapter 12, verse 27.

Here we are told of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. They had completed the wall, and now they wanted to dedicate that wall to the Lord. And so they called all the Levites from all their places to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness.

Notice again the emphasis on hymns of thanksgiving with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres. So the sons of the singers were assembled, and the priests and the Levites, verse 30, purified themselves. And then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall.

The wall was obviously broad enough for people to walk on top of the wall. It wasn't just a thin compound wall. It's a broad city wall on which people could walk on top.

And he got these leaders up on top of the wall. And remember now, the wall is a picture of the commandments of Jesus. And here are people who have been zealous to proclaim and to do and to proclaim all the commandments of Jesus.

And now they're going to praise the Lord for it. Praise the Lord for the completion of the wall. Praise the Lord for the opportunity to do and to teach all the commandments of Jesus.

And I appointed two great choirs, proceeding in opposite directions around the wall and finally coming and meeting on the other side in front of the temple. Two great choirs, the first proceeding to the right. There's a list of those people who followed.

And the second choir, verse 38, proceeding to the left. And they had trumpets there, we read in verse 35 and verse 36, many musical instruments. The musical instruments that David had introduced into the temple.

And Ezra, the Bible teacher, went in front of them. And then the two choirs finally took their stand, verse 40, in the house of God. And the priests, verse 41, with their trumpets.

And it says here, on that day, and the singers sang, verse 42, and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy. It says here in verse 42, the last part, in the margin, it says, they caused their voices to be heard, the singers. That's a very good expression.

It's possible to sing in a meeting without causing our voice to be heard. In fact, most believers who sit in meetings often sing like that. You can't hear their voice.

But the Spirit of God takes note of the fact of people who caused their voice to be heard. That's a good example to follow. That when we sing, we cause our voice to be heard.

They were loud in their singing, and they praised the Lord, and they offered sacrifices because God had given them great joy. In Jerusalem, God had given them great joy. Even though Jerusalem was not as grand as it was in the days of Solomon, the joy was still the same.

Wonderful. And even the women and the children, there's a special note there, the Holy Spirit is made of the sisters and the children also, just in case they feel that that's not for us. No, they also rejoiced, and they praised the Lord so loud that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

An excellent example for all of us to follow, brothers and sisters, men, women, and children, that we can praise the Lord with loud voices causing our voice to be heard when we sing and when we pray, that the joy of Jerusalem can be heard from afar. It says God gave them great joy. It wasn't a self-produced thing.

God had given them. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And then, in verse 44 to 47, it speaks about their setting apart money for the Levites who served in the temple.

They praised the Lord, and they also gave contributions to the Levites who were in financial need. Now, when you turn to the New Testament, in Hebrews chapter 13, it says there are two types of sacrifices that God is pleased with. And it's important for us always to keep in mind the two types of sacrifices.

Of course, we know, Romans 12.1, that we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. But here it also says about two sacrifices that are to come forth from us, in addition to the offering up of our bodies. Hebrews 13.15, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That is the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name. God calls every one of his children in Jerusalem to offer to the Lord, how often? Continually. A sacrifice of praise.

Not just praise, but a sacrifice of praise. That means to praise God, even when I don't feel like it. There are a lot of people who will praise God only when they feel like it.

There is no sacrifice of praise there. A sacrifice of praise is when I don't feel like it. It makes no difference, because I don't live by feeling in any case.

God is still on the throne. He is worthy to be praised. Whether I feel like it this morning or not, I'm going to praise the Lord.

That is a sacrifice of praise. But if I make God wait for my feelings, then I have not understood how to offer a sacrifice of praise to God. It's got nothing to do with my circumstances or my feelings.

But Lord, I will praise you. A sacrifice of praise continually, and that must come from our lips. You see, just in case we think it's only something we do in the heart, silently praise God.

No, it says the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name. It's a very important thing. In fact, it says here that we are to go outside the camp, verse 13.

Outside the camp, outside that Babylonian system. And when we come outside the camp, we are to continually offer up a sacrifice of praise. And the second sacrifice we are to offer to God is mentioned in verse 16, and that is to share our material things with others who are in need.

Do not neglect to do good and to share with others who are in need, because God is pleased with such sacrifices. So those are the two things that we see in Nehemiah chapter 12. We saw them praising the Lord.

All of them were praising. I'm sure they didn't all feel like it, but they still praised the Lord. And they were in the Old Testament, remember, and that's really something that can put us to shame, how they praised the Lord.

And then we see how they had a concern for the Levites among them who were in need. They gave contributions, and they appointed people to gather the tithes so that the Levites could be supported. And then we move on to chapter 13.

Now, chapter 13 is the last chapter in the book of Nehemiah. We've gone through these two chapters, which are mostly full of lists with a few points here and there that are instructive for us. And we see here in chapter 13, on that day, that's referring to the day when the wall was dedicated, I want you to notice as we go through this chapter, Nehemiah engaging in a ministry of correction.

And we see in this chapter seven areas where Nehemiah engaged in a ministry of correction. And the ministry of correction is a very important ministry if Jerusalem is to be built as it should. And if the walls are to fulfill their purpose, it's very important to have this ministry of correction, of rebuke and correction.

And we find here perhaps in no other chapter in the whole Bible, in one single chapter, do we see a man engaging in so many different aspects of a ministry of correction. One man who was wholeheartedly for God. It's amazing there were other people around, but there was only one man God could use who was willing to engage in this ministry of correction.

And before we look at that chapter, I want to point out a verse to you in 1 Timothy chapter 5. The ministry of correction is not a very popular ministry. It's an unpopular ministry. And that's why many people do not want to get into it.

It's a difficult ministry because it has to be exercised in love and goodness, without bitterness and without any evil intention. But it has to be exercised faithfully. And when Paul told Timothy to be a faithful elder and leader of the church in Ephesus, he tells them, he says here in verse 20, 1 Timothy 5.20, Those who continue in sin rebuke publicly in the presence of the whole church, so that others also may be fearful of sinning.

Notice that? What would you do if you see an elder brother rebuking someone publicly like that? Would you think it was unchristlike? Well, if you think that was unchristlike, that would show that you're not familiar with the word of God in 1 Timothy 5.20. It says, Rebuke those who sin publicly in the presence of others, so that others also may be afraid of sinning. Because it's a serious thing. And then Paul says to Timothy in verse 21, I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of his chosen angels to maintain these principles without any bias.

Doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. In other words, if it's a special friend of yours, as it says in the Living Bible, who needs to be rebuked, and you say, well, I won't do it in his case publicly, I'll do it privately, then you're partial. No, there must be no partiality.

If somebody's wrong, he's wrong. If somebody needs to be corrected, he needs to be corrected. Of course, it has to be a fairly serious error for the person to be corrected publicly, but there is a need for that.

Where a person will not receive a correction in private, he needs to be corrected and perhaps humiliated publicly, so that he takes seriously the authority in the church. That's, as I said, not a very popular thing to do, but that's the reason why one does not see much of Jerusalem being built in many places, because people are not willing to engage in that ministry. So keeping that in mind, we can come back to Nehemiah chapter 13 and see something of the corrective ministry that Nehemiah engaged in.

Nehemiah 13 and verse 1. They read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. And that's written in Deuteronomy 23 verse 3. They read that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the house of God, because the reason is given, they didn't meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

So it came about that when they heard the law, they excluded all the foreigners from Israel. That's the first thing that Nehemiah did. He separated out the Ammonites and the Moabites, who had no business to be there in God's house.

God's word had said, these people must not enter the house of God. But Nehemiah came into the place and he found these people were there, and he gets up and says something like that. No, this corrective ministry is not popular.

It's like, to take a situation today, an old covenant church, which has pastors and all, where you have a situation where there are a whole lot of nominal Christians who are board members and all types of things like this. And then a man who is a born again Christian, supposedly, takes over the pastorate of that church. And what does he do about all these unconverted people on the board? He does nothing usually, because he wants to be popular.

Think if there were a bold man like Nehemiah, which said, no, you've got no place here. Sorry. Doesn't matter if you're a big shot in society, you've got to leave.

You can't have any responsibility in the church. You've got to be an old-hearted brother. You love money too much.

Sorry, you can't be here. And you know how long a pastor like that would last. He'd lose his job in a week.

And that's the reason for the Babylonian Christianity that we see around us. But Nehemiah, he was firm. He would not allow any of those people whom God had forbidden to come into the house to be there.

And he didn't care whether they were big shots, or they were important people, or whether they earned a lot of money. He said, you have no place in God's house. You've got to leave.

He was straight when it came to the purity of God's house, because God's word had said very clearly in the book of Deuteronomy that the Ammonite and the Moabite should never enter the assembly of God. And how were they in there? It says here, they excluded all the foreigners, because Nehemiah said, we've got to do it. Then secondly, we read in verses four to nine, another corrective ministry that Nehemiah engaged in.

Prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah. Now Tobiah, we had considered earlier, he was one of the enemies. You see, Tobiah was Ammonite, and he had no business to be in the house of God.

But Eliashib, the high priest, had given his daughter in marriage to Tobiah, because Tobiah was a big official. And this Eliashib, though he was a high priest, he compromised. Now if you turn back to Nehemiah chapter three, you read about Eliashib.

We considered that when we studied Nehemiah chapter three. And there's a warning here for us, that a man can start off wholehearted and end up as a first-rate compromiser. Eliashib the high priest, chapter three verse one, arose with his brothers and built the sheikh gate.

In the building of the wall, the very first person mentioned in the building of the wall is Eliashib the high priest. There he was, dirtying his hands and building the wall. And I think he was zealous.

But as time went on, he did not maintain his zeal. And that happens to leaders sometimes. They don't live in a self-judgment.

When it comes to the marriage of their daughters, they pick out someone like Tobiah, a big shot in the world, for their daughters. That's what Eliashib did. And once he got Tobiah married to his daughter, he also had to please Tobiah in some ways.

And it says here in Nehemiah 13, that this compromiser of a high priest had prepared a large room in the house of God for Tobiah, where formerly, in the house of God, they used to put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the types of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, for the singers and the gatekeepers, the contributions. He said, well, no need for all that. We need this room for a special purpose.

And he got it all cleaned out and he made a nice little guest room for Tobiah, his son-in-law, to live in. Think of that. A compromiser.

This man who started out so well, ended up like Demas, who forsook Paul because he loved money, he loved this present world. And Eliashib is written there as a warning for us of a man who started out well,

but when it came to marriage, he became a compromiser. Just like a lot of disciples backslide and become believers at the time of marriage.

They were disciples once, but when it came to marriage, they looked for worldly position and honour, and they suffer spiritually. And they seek to use their position in God's house to compromise for their unconverted relatives, and to find conveniences for their unconverted relatives, and compromise God's house, the place which was meant to receive the tithes. He cleaned out all those, all that, and gave it to Tobiah's son-in-law.

And how did this happen? And we say, how in the world could such a thing happen in the midst of this revival? And we are given the reason in verse 6. During this time, I was not in Jerusalem. That's the reason. There was only one man who could keep that place pure.

That was Nehemiah. And he had gone back to the king. You remember in Nehemiah chapter 2, he had told the king, I'd just like to take a little leave and go and build the wall.

And now he had been there for 12 years. It says here, for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, that's 12 years after he left, I had gone back to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king again, and I came to Jerusalem, and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah in my absence, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God.

You see, as long as Nehemiah was there, Eliashib was scared. But once Nehemiah had gone out of the way, he knew all these other people are not going to be so strict. And he could take advantage.

You remember the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders, in Acts 20 verse 29, he said, after my departure, grievous wolves will come into your midst. After my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and men will arise from your own selves, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. But all those things could happen in Ephesus only after Paul's departure.

Why could they not happen when Paul was there? Because Paul was a zealous, fiery man. He would not tolerate any nonsense. He had no desire to get a reputation for gentleness and meekness and mildness, and all the other type of things which a lot of believers seek a reputation for.

Just like Nehemiah, he couldn't care less whether people thought he was harsh or strict or anything, and therefore he kept the church in Ephesus pure. But once he had gone, he said, I know what's going to happen. How did he know that? He had lived there for three years, and he had seen the other elders, and he could see these people love their own honour so much, that even when compromise comes in, they won't do anything.

They'll sit there, seeking their own reputation to be gentle and kind, and they'll allow the house of God to be polluted in order to preserve their own reputation. And therefore he said, I know what will happen. And it happened exactly like that.

Thirty years later, the Lord rebukes the church in Ephesus in Revelation chapter 2, saying, you have left your first love. You've gone astray. Now that's what happened here.

Nehemiah had gone out from Jerusalem, and that's the time when Elisha took the opportunity to pollute God's house and to find a place for his son-in-law Tobiah. And there we can learn something, brothers and sisters, and that is, there is a great need in God's house, whether it is among the Sunday school teachers

or the young people's leadership or in the leadership of the church or in the leadership of the home. There is a great need for Nehemiah.

People who are really strict and whom others fear. One God-fearing man can put a fright into an entire assembly. And that's how it was with Nehemiah.

He was a God-fearing man, and he wouldn't allow any nonsense in God's house. And we need more and more people like that, who fear God so much, that they won't allow any nonsense in God's house. And it says here, when he came back and he saw this, that had happened, he had just gone for a short period.

And in that short period, all this happened. So he came back. And it says when he came back, he was grieved.

He was very displeased. No doubt he was hurt in his heart. And then he didn't just do nothing about it.

He took action. He went to Tobiah's room, and he did exactly what Jesus did in the temple to the changers of the money and to the sellers of the doves. He took this fellow's luggage and furniture and threw it all out.

Think what a man he was. He didn't just tell Tobiah, listen, I think you should vacate. He had none of that.

That spirit of Christ there was in him. He said, this is not the place for you to live. I don't care if you're the son-in-law of the high priest.

And he threw it out. He said, get out of here. I don't care if you're a big official.

Think of that boldness that Nehemiah had. And then I called all the people and got the rooms cleansed. And he said, this place is for the utensils of the house of God and the grain offerings and the frankincense, not for this Ammonite to come and settle down.

And they knew he meant business. And Tobiah meekly went out and Eliashiv did not complain because there was a man who was determined to purify God's house. There is an Old Testament example of the cleansing of the temple.

What Jesus did was done by Nehemiah in the house of God, in the Old Testament. He cleaned out these money lovers and money changers, people who were seeking their own out of the temple. So that's the second corrective ministry that Nehemiah engaged in.

Then we see here further in verse 10 to 14, he discovered that the Levites had left their ministry and had gone each to his own field because the people were not paying their tithes. The place where the tithes were to be accumulated was occupied by the son-in-law of the high priest Tobiah. There was no place to put the tithes and the Levites were not being supported and they were starving, their families were starving.

And so they went out to work in the fields themselves. And so he got a hold of the rulers. Of course, it was not right for the Levites to leave.

If the Levites had faith, they would have trusted the Lord and said, well, Lord, if you want us to do a particular ministry, whether people give us the tithes or don't give us the tithes, we will do that ministry. We will not seek our own. But they didn't have that faith.

And in any case, when Nehemiah came, he, first of all, rebuked the leaders. He didn't rebuke the Levites. Verse 11, he called the rulers and said, why is the house of God forsaken? Look at the burden of this man.

Why is the house of God forsaken? Why have you allowed the Levites to go and look after their own fields? You people should be supporting them. Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts. And he says, you've got to obey the Old Testament law, which says you've got to bring your tithes into the storehouse and support these Levites.

And all Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine, oil into the storehouses. And then Nehemiah was very careful to appoint honest treasurers over this tithe. It's very important that in the house of God, we have honest, upright people who are dealing with the money.

And in charge of the storehouses, I appointed Shalemiah, the priest, Zedok, Pideah, and in addition to them, Hanan, for they were considered reliable. They were considered faithful. And it was their task to distribute this to their kinsmen.

Here was a man who organized this in such a short time. He came back and he saw these things all in chaos and he rebuked the leaders and things started moving immediately. And he says a short prayer.

Nehemiah was a man of short prayers. You know, he prayed briefly when he was standing before the king in Nehemiah chapter 2. And here's another short prayer in the middle of this. Remember me for this, oh my God.

He doesn't say reward me. He just says, remember me, Lord. Do not blot out my loyal deeds, which I've performed for the house of my God and its services.

He did not seek his own. He was willing. We could say, Lord, remember me when these people think that I am too harsh and too hard and too strict.

Lord, you remember me and you know why I did it. It was not for my own name. It was for the purity of your house.

And in those days, another corrective ministry that Nehemiah engaged in, verses 15 to 18. This was corrective ministry number four. And that was to restore the sanctity of the Sabbath day.

Now these are all Old Testament instructions that we're going through. The first was the driving out of the Ammonites from the Moabites. And the second was the turning out of the son-in-law of the high priest who had no business to be there in God's house, being an Ammonite.

And the third was to restore the tithes to the Levites. And the fourth was to restore the sanctity of the Sabbath, verse 15 to 18. It says here, in those days I saw in Judah some Jews who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath.

Now the word of God, it said very clearly in the Old Testament, one of the Ten Commandments was, particularly to the Jews, that on the Sabbath day they were not to do any work. And not only that, it very clearly said they were not to make their animals do any work either. They were not to load their donkeys and their asses and horses and all and get them to do work for them.

They were not to do any work, and their animals were not to do any work, and their servants were not to do any work. But the love of money made these people work on the seventh day as well. They were

treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in sacks of grain, loading them on their donkeys, wine and grapes and figs, and they brought them to Jerusalem on the Sabbath day to sell.

Their shops were open, they were making money, and I rebuked them on the day they sold food. He said, I don't care if it's food. You've got six days to do all that.

He rebuked them, and then the heathen, the heathen of people were also taking advantage of this, and they brought fish and all kinds of merchandise and sold them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath in Jerusalem. And he rebuked, first of all, the nobles of Judah. Notice again, he starts with the leaders.

He says, it's you leaders who should be an example in this, and he rebukes them. He says, what is this evil thing you're doing by profaning the Sabbath day? We've got to get a picture of this man Nehemiah. He wasn't a great prophet.

You never hear one sermon that he preaches. He's one of those great men of God in the Old Testament who was not a preacher. Most of the great men of God in the Old Testament were preachers among the Jews, beginning with Moses and ending with Malachi.

But here was one man who was not a preacher. He couldn't preach, but he was a man who feared God and decided to sort things out when things were wrong. Very important ministry in God's house.

And he couldn't care less if a man was a leader or just a servant. Just the same to him. There was no partiality in him.

And he knew that the problem always begins with the leaders, so he reprimanded the leaders. He contended with them. He says, what's this evil that you're doing? Didn't our fathers do the same thing? He gave them a warning from history.

He says, do you know why God sent the Israelites to Babylon? Because they didn't keep the Sabbath. And now you fellows have come back from Babylon and you're disobeying the thing all over again. Don't you know that our fathers did just like you and God brought trouble on the city? And now you're adding wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.

And it came about, right on to verse 22, we read this corrective ministry, just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem, before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and they should not be opened until after the Sabbath day. He says, I couldn't care less if a man wants to go out or come in. The gates are going to be closed and nobody's going to go out or come in on the Sabbath day.

And then just to make sure, he stationed some of his own servants, because he couldn't trust all those other people there, at the gate that no Lord should enter on the Sabbath day. And then he saw on Friday night, once or twice, the traders and merchants hanging around outside the walls of Jerusalem, hoping that they can bribe some gatekeeper and get in and make some money on the Sabbath day. And Nehemiah, he had a sharp eye.

He went around the walls to see who these people were hanging around on Friday evening. And I warned them. And he said to them, why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, you don't realize what I am.

I'm not like these other fellows who were here before me. I'm going to use force against you. He says, then they got scared and they didn't come back again after that.

Here was a man who was willing to use force. Just think how he would have lost his reputation if he used force on all these traders. But he couldn't care less.

He only said, remember me, O God. I'm not bothered what these people say. Remember me, O God, the deeds that I do for your house.

And so he says, from that time on, they didn't come. There was a man who was really wholehearted. And I commanded the Levites, verse 22, that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the Sabbath day.

He says, now you people should be the gatekeepers and don't let any of these people come inside. For this also, remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of thy lovingkindness. You can imagine how delighted God was to have one man in Jerusalem who was wholehearted, who couldn't care less for his reputation.

He lived before God's face and kept the standards. And he didn't care whether he had to use force or rebuke the elders or do anything. Now, we haven't finished yet.

You just wait and see what he does next. It's even worse than what we have read so far, according to a carnal understanding. And then, now the fifth corrective ministry, he found that a lot of Jews had married heathen women.

Now he had the job of separating these husbands from their wives. They had children. And the word of God had clearly taught that you were not to marry a heathen.

Alright? So he now turned his attention to this. Think of all the things that happened in Jerusalem, just because Nehemiah went away for a short time. Just because he went away for a short time, all the evils came back in.

Just like Paul told Ephesus, I know what's going to happen after I leave. Brothers and sisters, there's a tremendous need for strictness in the house of God. The severity of God is something that this generation of Christians needs to know.

And he says, I saw that their children, verse 24, spoke half in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people, married to unbelievers, married to people who are Babylonians, and saw the children suffering. And he says, look at him now, verse 25, I contended with them, and cursed them. That means he brought the curse of God down upon them, because God had cursed those who were disobedient to his word, and struck some of them, remember me, O God, for this, and pulled out their hair, remember me, O God, for this as well.

He slapped them on their face, and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, you're not going to give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Now, just picture this in your mind, one man, and all these big shots, and so many people slapping them, and pulling out their hairs, and saying, send your wife away, and your half-converted children. That was the Old Testament law.

But they were not to marry heathen. And then he gives them a lesson from history. Here was a man who couldn't preach much, but he knew his Old Testament.

And he says, didn't Solomon do the same thing? Among the nations, there was no king like him. What a king he was. He was loved by God, and God made him king.

Nevertheless, the foreign woman caused even him to sin. And now you are doing exactly the same thing. You committed this great evil, by acting unfaithfully against our God, by marrying foreign women.

All I want to say is just a word of warning here. Don't try to imitate Nehemiah. Because God doesn't call everyone to that ministry.

But there is a need for that, in every church, if it is to be kept pure. Then we come into corrective ministry number six. And that we read in verses 28 and 29.

Here we read about him cleansing the priesthood. He first sorted out all the other people in Israel who had married the heathen. And now he cleanses the priesthood.

One of the sons of Joriada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanbalat, the Horonite. You see, Eliashib had got his daughter married off to Tobiah, and his grandson had gone off and married the daughter of Sanbalat. And of course, the grandfather couldn't say anything when his grandfather had done the same thing himself.

You know, we can't correct something in our children which we have done ourselves. And so they couldn't do anything. But this man, Joriada, was supposed to be the next high priest, because he was the grandson of Eliashib, the high priest.

But he had gone off and married completely contrary to the word of God. He had gone and married a heathen woman. And what did Nehemiah do? It says he chased him away from there.

Imagine chasing the high priest with all his turban and robe and say, Get out of here, you compromiser. And chased him away. And he says, Remember me, O my God.

I don't care what these fellows think, but just remember me, O God. These people have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. They call themselves believers.

They call themselves elders, first-rate compromisers. Chase them out of here. This Nehemiah was the same man he was twelve years ago.

He started this work more than twelve years earlier. Now he was much older in age, but just the same fiery zeal to keep the house of God pure. And blessed are we if we can keep the house of God pure like that, year after year after year.

There was no partiality towards the leaders. He just chased out this man who claimed to be a leader. We see a difference here between Nehemiah and Ezra.

You know, in Ezra chapter 9, we read, we looked at this before, that when Ezra heard that the people of Israel had married heathen wives. Somebody came to Ezra, Ezra 9, verse 1 and 2. Verse 2, they said, Some of these people have taken the daughters of wives of these heathen. Verse 3, Ezra says, When I heard about the matter, I pulled the hair from my own beard.

And that was the difference between him and Nehemiah. He pulled the hairs from his own beard and sat down and wept. And verse 6, O my God, he said, I am ashamed, embarrassed.

And now he says, Have mercy upon us. But Nehemiah had another ministry and that was to take action. And it's very wonderful to see how Ezra and Nehemiah could work together in this restoring Jerusalem and building their walls.

Two completely different personalities. And that's something we see that whenever God seeks to build a church in any place, he brings together, just like in marriage he brings together a husband and wife who are opposites, he brings together to build a church two people who are temperamentally opposite so that they can build God's house and give a balanced picture of Christ in whom the glory of God was seen full of grace and truth. And in Ezra and Nehemiah together, not if you looked at them alone, but if you looked at both of them together, you could see grace and truth.

And so it must be in the church today. Then number seven, the final ministry of purification that Nehemiah engaged in, we read here in verse 30. Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites each in his task.

Here was a man who had an administrative gift to get a hold of these Levites and say, now you do this, you do that, you do that, you do that, you do that. He gave every single person a task. They were just floating around, not knowing what to do.

And Nehemiah got there and organized the whole thing and gave each person a responsibility to do. And so it is in the house of God, each person has a responsibility. And then he arranged for the supply of wood at the appointed times.

Think of the details this man took care of. He had all these other responsibilities on his shoulders and yet he could think of, well, the wood needs to be supplied. Even that he made sure that somebody took care of that because his mind was always occupied, not with how he can make more money or with his reputation before the others.

His mind was occupied with, is there something that's needed in the house of God? A little wood is needed in the house of God for the sacrifices. He arranged for that. He got someone to do that.

He gave that, say, you take care of that. And at the appointed times. And he again says, remember me, oh my God, for good.

There's a beautiful picture we have in this chapter of what true corrective ministry is and how Nehemiah fulfilled it faithfully and again and again. He knew, I'm sure he sensed, people are probably misunderstanding my strictness. That's why you find again and again in this chapter, this phrase coming up, remember me, oh God, I'm living before your face.

I'm doing it for your glory. I'm doing it for your house. Just remember me, that's all.

Just assure me that you're with me in this and it doesn't matter what the other people think. And that's the thing that gave him the boldness to stand against all those people. It didn't matter who opposed him.

The walls were built and the inside of Jerusalem was purified and people were brought to the place where they could obey God's word. Now the sad thing is that after a few years, you find by the time you reach the

time of Malachi, which we'll study next, declension sets in again. Nehemiah has probably gone back or died or something.

And once again, the others haven't taken a lesson. God has not been able to find another man to replace him. This has been the grief of God through the years.

It says in the book of Joshua that the children of Israel served the Lord during the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived Joshua. And then the other leaders were just compromisers. And that's how it's been in the history of the church through the years.

It's been difficult for God to find a Nehemiah. And that's why the walls are not built and Babylon comes flooding into Jerusalem. And so it's very important, brothers and sisters, that we learn the lesson that God wants us to learn through this book and seek to fulfill that ministry in the church that God has raised up here to keep the walls high, to proclaim all the commandments of Jesus, to be exact in keeping everything that God has commanded, and to be willing to offend people, to hurt people for the glory of God, to purify the house, to drive out the money changers, to drive out the merchants, so that God's house is kept in purity at all times.

That ministry of Nehemiah, I would say, is almost the greatest need in Christendom today.

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