

Nehemiah 13

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 come into the assembly of God, 2 because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.

Vs. 1: 'On that day': many years later, on the remembrance day of the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem. See verse 6. 12 years after his coming to Jerusalem, he returned to the king. After that this all happened.

When Nehemiah got leave to go to Jerusalem again, he noticed all the unfaithfulness of the people and it was necessary for Nehemiah to act.

Three main areas where reformation was needed:

- Vs. 4-14: The temple service
- Vs. 15-22: The Sabbath
- Vs. 23-29: Intermarriage with heathen people

Every part ends with the prayer of Nehemiah to God: *Remember me, O my God.*

It was in these circumstances that the Israelites celebrated the day of the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem, as is described in verse 1-3.

The Book of Moses was read on that day.

They also read Deuteronomy 23:3-5. The reading of the law set off the Reformation.

4 Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. 5 And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. 6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8 And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. 9 Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

10 I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. 11 So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. 12 Then all Judah brought the tithes of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. 13 And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to

distribute to their brethren.

14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

Nehemiah himself gave a good example.

Eliashib the priest had given a room in the temple buildings to Tobiah, the Ammonite, one of the worst enemies of God's people.

Nehemiah cleansed the temple from this evil.

Even more, the Levites did not get their portions and weren't able to fulfill their task in the temple. The worship service was neglected.

Nehemiah rebuked the officials for this.

15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. 16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

21 Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

Nehemiah acts to preserve the Sabbath day as a special day.

Not keeping the Sabbath Day is often part of a wrong attitude which also is visible in other sins, see Amos 8:5: the poor are despised and other commandments are transgressed as well.

Verse 18: this attitude brought disaster on Jerusalem in the past.

23 In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel

sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. 27 Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?"

28 And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me.

29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

There had been men who married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Contrary to what they promised in 10:30 and what they did in 9:2. These people got children and many of those children, while growing up, did not learn the Jewish language, but they learned the language of their mothers, the Ammonites and Moabites.

In verse 26, he explains how the behaviour of these Israelites was like the sin of Solomon, who was led into sin by foreign women and followed the idols.

Those who had to be examples, were leaders in evil.

30 Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, 31 and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times.

Remember me, O my God, for good!

Under God's grace, Nehemiah as a leader pleasing to God brought the people back to God. God remembered him, by making him remembered for always by God's people.

Jesus Christ is our Head. He leads us. He disposes of bad leaders and He shows mercy to good leaders.

Questions for discussion:

1. Nehemiah was a good leader. The people of God was blessed by his service. It is important for the church to have good leaders. Discuss how the church members can encourage good leaders to stand up and how they can encourage men to become office bearers.
We need many more ministers of the Word. For many years already we have a shortage of men able and willing to fulfill this task. How can we as churches better encourage men to prepare for the ministry of the Word?
2. One of the three issues Nehemiah addressed was the profaning of the Sabbath Day. Through the prophets God speaks about the Sabbath Day as the sign of His covenant which He gave to His people. (See e.g. Exodus 31:13, Isaiah 57:6, Ezekiel 20:12). The other sign of the covenant is circumcision. Both with the Sabbath and with circumcision things have changed in the New Testament. However, also things have

remained the same. It is important for God's people to keep using the signs which God has given to His people as sign of the covenant.

Discuss what has changed regarding the Sabbath Day and what remains the same.

3. Nehemiah rebukes the people because of the mixed marriages. These marriages can have a devastating effect on God's people and make them assimilate to the world in which they live. Why is it important for God's people not to marry unbelievers (see 2 Corinthians 6:14)?

And what does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 about marriage of a Christian with an unbeliever, if the unbeliever doesn't allow his(her) spouse to be a Christian?