

Nehemiah 13:15-22 – Cleaning the Sabbath

Clarke, Geneva, Gill, TSK, HebrewLexicon, Armstrong, Gaebelin, Handfuls, Barnes, Delitzsch, Maclaren, Henry, Poole, Trapp, INT
Brothers and Sisters in the Lord: Within a short time of Nehemiah going back to serving the Persian king in Shushan, **the Jews forgot the vows they made to support worship – which you saw last week - and they stopped attending worship on the Sabbath.**

How quickly they fell!

They had loved the Sabbath so much, they starting naming their children after the Sabbath – Shabbethai (Ezra 10).

Nehemiah had to deal with this.

Our headings are:

Nehemiah recognized Judah’s failure to keep the Sabbath

Nehemiah reminded Judah of the danger of Sabbath breaking

Nehemiah removed hindrances to Judah’s Sabbath keeping

Our goals are: **That you will prize, protect, and promote the Sabbath so the Lord will receive his due praise and you will receive its promised benefits.**

Nehemiah recognized Judah’s failure to keep the Sabbath

15 In those days I saw **people in Judah treading wine presses 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.

1. Nehemiah saw the people of Judah making wine on the Sabbath and bringing in sheaves of grain and other produce.

Notice on whom they focused on the Sabbath: On themselves.

Wine was to make the heart glad.

Grains and fruits to make the belly full.

But “who cares” about the Sabbath?

More, **this walking on grapes would have tired them out!**

These people had no fear of breaking the Sabbath in Jerusalem, the center of the covenant people, where the judges, Levites, priests were!

They should have remembered:

Exodus 34:21 "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.

2. There were similar problems before the Assyrian captivity of Israel and the Babylonian captivity of Judah. God had to warn them.

Isaiah 58: 13 "**If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath**, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, **And call the Sabbath a delight**, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, 14 Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, **And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father**. The mouth of the LORD has spoken." Jeremiah 17:20 "and say to them, 'Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. 21 'Thus says the LORD: "**Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day**, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;

So God said to his people: "You want to work for 7 days? That's okay, **but you will do it without pay in slavery!**

3. With the people not worshipping God on the Sabbath, but working, meant their children and animals worked too, so no one attended worship, so no tithes were given, so priests and Levites had to go out and work to support their families.

5. And since the Jews started doing this, they attracted business people from foreign countries as Tyre (only about 18kms away), who also came to do business on the Lord's Day.

The Tyrians brought fish and other goods into Jerusalem and the Jews bought them, so the Jews even caused foreigners to break the Sabbath Day.

They loved their exotic foods. (Guess they weren't Dutch.)

Dried fish was always a delicacy.

But they also imported salted and smoked fish.

The Jews even made a special gate for bringing in fish to Jerusalem-on the Sabbath.

What contempt of God!

More, the Jews started developing friendships with those who had contempt for God!

Ezra 3:7 They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa...

This was okay for business, but not for friendships.

5. Lessons:

a. The Sabbath is not for cleaning. It is for resting, worshipping, and celebrating the work of the Savior! It is a day for showing mercy.

Unfortunately, the Sabbath was corrupted, very corrupted and it had to be cleaned.

You must use it for its intended purpose, even if you are busy!

Are you setting a good example for your children and neighbors...and each other of what to do and not do on the Sabbath?

b. There is a strong backsliding regarding the Sabbath Day today.

Many now believe in 9 laws. Others believe the Sabbath is still required, but the requirements of sanctifying it have gone.

But the historical meaning goes back to Eden, and it continues.

The 4th command begins with, "Remember!"

This backsliding was why it was easy to abandon worship during the Covid saga.

c. Love other people and don't try to make them work on the Sabbath!

d. There is never a good Christianity without a good Sabbath!

Nehemiah reminded Judah of the danger of Sabbath-breaking

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."

1. Nehemiah then strongly warned the Jews again not to do business on the Sabbath and desecrate it.

This was breaking covenant with God, and the covenant was the means by which God gave grace to his people.

2. Nehemiah expanded his warning to remind them of the disasters that come when a nation violates the Sabbath Day.

To violate or desecrate the Sabbath is to hold God in low repute. It is to steal from God.

It is coveting what God has. Look how the Jews desecrated God's worship:

Malachi 2: 10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another **By profaning the covenant of the fathers?** 11 Judah has dealt treacherously, And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, **For Judah has profaned The LORD'S holy institution** which He loves...

3. Lessons:

a. Give others a warning about violating the Lord's Day.

If you don't love them enough to speak, **love the Lord enough to speak up for his day!**

b. Keeping the Sabbath is keeping the covenant! Yes, Jesus kept the Sabbath for you. He kept all the commands for you.

You are now obligated, because you have been renewed in the inner man, to keep all of God's law. Don't ignore this one.

c. Ignoring the Sabbath brings wrath on you and your family. I have no other way to say this nicely.

Jeremiah 17:27 "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, **then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.**"

Nehemiah removed hindrances to Judah's Sabbath-keeping

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!

1. After the warning, work came, and Nehemiah commanded the gates of Jerusalem to be shut Friday evening and not be opened until Saturday evening when the Sabbath was over.

(And in fact, it probably wasn't opened in the evening, but opened the next day for security reasons.)

The Sabbath was from evening to evening and it started with the blowing of a trumpet...6 blasts.

2. Then Nehemiah posted guards to make sure no one brought in goods on the Sabbath.

Warnings were great, the **work** was essential, but **continuing to watch** so the Sabbath was kept pure was also necessary, and that is what Nehemiah did!

3. When businessmen tried to stay outside of the city to sneak in or even to impatiently wait there on the Sabbath, Nehemiah went after them and threatened them.

They were too eager for money!

So Nehemiah threatened to arrest them for doing that.

They stopped.

4. Doing these things did not make Nehemiah popular, but he was not called to be popular as a leader.

He was called to do what was right! **He surely couldn't run for office today!**

5. Nehemiah further ordered the Levites to cleanse themselves and then go and guard the gates of the city and the gates to the temple so the Sabbath could be kept holy before the Lord.

Some of the city gates went directly to the temple for easy access for animals sacrifices or removing refuse from the temple.

The Levites have to cleanse themselves because it was symbolic preparation to show the heart was ready – cleansed – to worship God.

6. Nehemiah then pleaded with God for his reward, based on God's mercy.

He acknowledged he had obeyed God, **but his obedience could never measure up to God's standards.**

7. Lessons:

a. Talk is relatively cheap. Those who talk about church and don't attend are revealing their hearts.

If you are too tired from being up late last night, that was a bad action.

Your talk must match your actions.

If you need to turn-off your phones or your TV, or your computer Saturday night, do it!

Do you need to cancel some extra activities? Do it.

Do you need to flick the switch on Netflix? Do it!

b. As routine, make sure your mind and your soul are clean when you come to worship.

This is the spiritual preparations you must make.

A shower might not hurt either! Be fresh to focus!

c. Leaders—fathers, mothers, and elders play a most important role of helping guide believers and children in keeping the Sabbath.

Don't fail your family!

Little eyes are watching.

Conclusion:

Nehemiah **recognized the Sabbath-breaking problem**, so he **reminded the Jews of the danger of Sabbath-breaking** and the blessing of Sabbath-keeping, and then he **removed hindrances to Sabbath-breaking!**

He fixed one of the worst violations of the covenant...something that had caused them to be sent into slavery.

Brothers in the Lord Jesus:

1. Prize the Sabbath. Show how much you love it by gathering for worship.

Celebrate it in your home.

2. Protect the Sabbath against the onslaught of opposition.

Ask people how could 1 of the 10 permanent laws be fulfilled and not the others.

Urge them to keep all 10 so Canada will be blessed again!

3. Promote the Sabbath – the earthly and the eternal Sabbath- for the glory of God and the good of man.

Let the world know about it so **they can come to Christ and find eternal rest and earthly rest**, and that he will take care of them.

Finally: The Sabbath is a picture of our eternal rest that is coming for us.

If you aren't a Christian, you will have eternal suffering.

The way out for you is to receive Christ's work in his life and in his death as your own.

Then God will assure you of eternal rest and you can prepare for eternal rest by the Sabbath Day of rest.