

Backslidings

Text: Nehemiah 13:1-31

Introduction:

1. This chapter documents the spiritual decline of the nation during Nehemiah's leave of absence (Vs. 6). Nehemiah had been governor in Judah for 12 years (5:14). "after certain days" Nehemiah returns to find that there has been deterioration amongst the people of God.
2. In chapter 10 the people made promises to God in a number of areas (e.g. separation from the heathen, support for God's house & godly marriages) but now they have backslidden from those commitments.
3. We will note the backslidings of the people of God in four areas and Nehemiah's steps to bring about spiritual recovery.

They were backslidden in their...

I. Separation (Vs. 1-9)

There was a breakdown of separation amongst:

A. The People (Vs. 1-3)

1. The specifics of the problem
 - a. "the mixed multitude" = the mixed multitude also caused Moses problems (Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4). A collapse of separatism always involves a "mixing" of evil with good. In this chapter we see mixed multitudes (Vs. 3), mixed marriages (Vs. 23) and mixed speech (Vs. 24). When evil is mixed with good, evil exerts its pernicious influence, not the other way around. Illustration: Mixing pure and impure water.
 - b. "Ammonite and the Moabite" = decedents of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters and avowed enemies of God's people. They were forbidden entry into the fellowship of God's people (Deut. 23:3). To fail in the area of separation is to fail in the area of obedience to the Lord and His Word.
2. The solution to the problem
 - a. "read in the book of Moses" (Vs. 1) "when they had heard the law" (Vs. 3). The reading of the Word of God was what brought about spiritual revival and reformation.
 - b. "on that day" = almost reads as if this took place during dedication ceremony of chapter 12 but Vs. 4 and 6 indicate that this took place as a separate incident.

B. The Priesthood (leadership) (Vs. 4-9)

1. The specifics of the problem (Vs. 4-5)
 - a. Unholy friendships (Vs. 4)

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- i. 'allied' = translated elsewhere 'near' over 30 times and 'nigh' 12 times. They had a close friendship.
 - ii. Why was Eliashib allied to Tobiah? Answer found in 6:17-19 & 13:28
 - iii. Prov. 13:20 *"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."*
 - b. Unholy priorities (Vs. 5)
 - i. Misuse of authority and God's property for evil.
 - ii. Enemy of God's people (rebel) given priority over God's servants, the Levites (Vs. 10)
 - iii. Butler: "This cruel action is not unique. Rather, it is the typical action of those who honour the world above the things of God. Whenever room is made in God's house for the ungodly, the godly will be cruelly pushed out. Whenever honour is given by the church to the carnal, the spiritual will be dishonoured."
2. The solution to the problem (Vs. 6-9)
- a. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem (Vs. 6). In the absence of a godly leader, the compromises rise up and seek to peddle their wicked agenda.
 - b. Nehemiah was grieved (Vs. 7-8). Nehemiah's response was right and correct. Compromise in the house of God should make us upset and heart-broken.
 - c. Nehemiah took action (Vs. 8b-9). Nehemiah literally threw Tobiah's things out of the chamber and cleansed the temple. In this he was a type of Christ who twice cleansed the temple during His earthly ministry (John 2:13-16; Matt. 21:12-13)
 - d. Butler: "Many will not approve of Nehemiah's strong action here. They will accuse him of being harsh, unkind, uncharitable, unchristian and unloving. But the same bunch will never lift up a protest about Eliashib's actions. Eliashib was harsh, unkind, uncharitable, unchristian, and unloving to the Levites, the true servants of God, when he brought Tobiah into the Temple. That is the action to condemn, not the action of Nehemiah throwing out of the Temple the furnishings of Tobiah the arch-enemy of God and His work. Do not accuse the pastor and other leaders of the church of being unchristian when they take a strong stand against sin and apostasy. It is those who sin and embrace apostasy that are unchristian."

II. Support (Vs. 10-14)

A. The Retraction of the support (Vs. 10)

1. In chapter 10:39 they had promised "we will not forsake the house of our God."
2. When compromise comes into the church, a problem in the giving of the people arises.
3. Priority had been given to the enemy over the godly men.
4. The consequence was that these men had to go and find other ways to support themselves. The word 'fled' is the same word translated 'chased' in Vs. 28. These men were forced out of their position due to Tobiah's presence.

B. The Rectification of the support (Vs. 11-14)

1. Nehemiah confronted the problem source (Vs. 11a).

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- a. 'contended' = 3 times in this chapter it is said that Nehemiah contended with compromise (Vs. 11, 17, 25). Sin and compromise has to be confronted boldly.
- b. 'rulers' = the primary ones responsible for the situation
2. Nehemiah restored God's servants to their office (Vs. 11b)
3. Nehemiah appointed faithful oversight (Vs. 12-13) "counted faithful" = the indispensable qualification for handling God's money
4. Nehemiah prayed to God (Vs. 14). This was not Nehemiah's words before men but his plea before God. Nehemiah's desire was for God's approval upon his service. Nehemiah's godly walk and prayer life again highlighted.

III. Sabbaths (Vs. 15-22)

A. The Pollution of the Sabbath (Vs. 15-16)

1. There was working (Vs. 15a) The Sabbath was being treated like any other work day (e.g. harvesting, fruit gathering)
2. There was selling (Vs. 15b). 'victuals' = provisions, food
3. There was purchasing (Vs. 16)
4. Note: The N.T. Lord's Day is not a "Christian Sabbath." However, the principle of setting aside the every day things of life (e.g. shopping, maintenance, work etc...) is applicable. The early church made Sunday special. It was a day for the assembling of the church, the reading and preaching of God's Word, observance of the ordinances, fellowship and worship.

B. The Preservation of the Sabbath (Vs. 17-22)

1. Nehemiah warned of sin and its consequences (Vs. 17-18). He named sin for what it is, 'evil'. He reminded them of God's past judgment of the nation for such sins. We need to warn God's people of both the character and consequences of sin.
2. Nehemiah set a watch on the gates (Vs. 19). Nehemiah was proactive in taking steps to eliminate compromise from the people of God.
3. Nehemiah rebuked those who persisted (Vs. 20-21). There will always be those who test the line of separation that has been drawn by God's man. They hover like flies on the fringes in the hopes they will draw some away from the protection of the walls of separation.

IV. Spouses (Vs. 23-31)

A. Unequal yokes in the people (Vs. 23-27)

1. The specifics of the problem
 - a. Marriage to women of 'Ashdod' = key city of the Philistines
 - b. Marriage to women of "Ammon & Moab" = decedents of Lot

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- c. These unholy unions bore fruit in the children. Their speech was mixed (Vs. 24)
 - d. These unions would be the equivalent to unequal yokes as they apply to us today. Note: Not teaching interracial marriage is wrong. Rahab, Ruth and Moses' Ethiopian wife examples of ladies from other nations who married into Israel.
2. The solution to the problem
- a. Nehemiah confronted them (Vs. 25)
 - b. Nehemiah cursed them (Vs. 25). Doesn't mean he lost his cool and uttered foul language. It means he invoked a Divine curse (judgment) upon them for their actions.
 - c. Nehemiah chastised them (Vs. 25)
 - i. 'smote' = likely a flogging in accordance with the rules outlined in Deut. 25:2-3
 - ii. "plucked off their hair" = to make bald, to shave. This was a great shame in those days (See 2. Sam. 10:4-5)
 - d. Nehemiah corrected them (Vs. 26-27). He reminded them of the fact that heathen women had been the ruination of Solomon, a man who experienced God's favor and blessing like few others (e.g. wisdom, peace, prosperity)

B. Unequal yokes in the priesthood (Vs. 28-31)

- 1. Grandson of Eliashib (Vs. 28)
- 2. Nehemiah's last prayer (Vs. 29-31)
 - a. Remember them (Vs. 29). This is the most powerful action Nehemiah took in relation to the compromises. He handed them over to the Omniscient, All-powerful God for His just dealings.
 - b. Remember me (Vs. 30-31). Book ends in prayer with Nehemiah again asking God to look upon his service favorably.

Conclusion:

- 1. Has there ever been a time in your life when you were closer to the Lord than you are now? If so, you are likely backslidden.
- 2. Are we backslidden in any of these four areas? Separation? Support of God's house? The Lord's Day? Choice of marriage partner?