

Nehemiah – Leadership Principles

Lesson 8 – Staying the Course

Leader Notes

Read or have others read the paragraphs below before going into the questions.

Luther says “that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (Significance of Baptism) Luther knew that the Old Adam of sin comes back again and again to bring setbacks in our Christian life. This will never end on this side of heaven.

Leadership involves making constant adjustments and improvements. It involves sometimes going over what seemed to be set in place. New problems also come up that need to be addressed. Leadership is never without problems. That was certainly true for Nehemiah. Nehemiah returned to Babylon after events in chapter 12. There appears to be an interval of about fifteen years between chapters 12 and 13.

1. 13:1-3

- a. What was it about the Ammonites and Moabites that caused such a strong prohibition?

The Ammonites and Moabites were inextricably linked by their parentage. Both ethnic groups were descendants of Lot by his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38), and both repeatedly exhibited hostility toward Israel. In this biblical book this animosity was especially evident in the opposition shown by Tobiah the Ammonite against Nehemiah (Neh. 2:10, 19; 4:3; 4:7).

- b. Was their being banned a forever thing?

However, this did not absolutely exclude these people of mixed ancestry from God’s kingdom of grace. If they heard the promises of God in the OT, they could grasp the promise that someday God would send His Messiah and that anyone may enter His kingdom through faith.

The exclusion of any peoples from worship in the congregation of God would end of course with the ministry of Christ, whose genealogy included names of a Canaanite woman and a Moabitess (Ruth), who were Gentile converts to the faith (Mt. 1:5). He “has broken down the dividing wall” between Jew and Gentile, and

brings all believers – even Ammonites and Moabites – near to God by His blood (Eph. 2:13-14).

c. Who was Balaam and how did he fit into this situation?

Moabite King Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel (although God turned the curse into a blessing). This is a short summary of the account of Balaam in Numbers 22-24. God, the omnipotent God of Israel, cannot be subjected to such manipulation. Instead he exerted His power over Balaam (and his donkey) so that they spoke what He desired them to utter. Balaam pronounced a series of four blessings upon Israel, with messianic promises (notably Num. 24:17-24) and predictions of the destruction of Israel's enemies (e.g., Num. 24:17-24).

2. 13:4-14

a. What was the problem here?

A priest named Eliashib was guilty of defiling the temple by assigning rooms to Tobiah the Ammonite (13:4, 7). It is not known whether this Eliashib was the same as the high priest.

Eliashib provided Tobiah a storeroom as a favor to a relative. We know from Neh. 6:18 that Tobiah was married to a Judean woman.

Tobiah was one of the men who had opposed Nehemiah's rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple (2:10, 19; 4:3; 4:7), and had been provided one of the larger storerooms in the temple. These rooms were intended to store items used in worship and the tithes that supported the temple personnel.

b. How long had it lingered?

This had been going on before Nehemiah even got there for the first time.

c. What did Nehemiah do about it?

Nehemiah, first of all, threw out Tobiah and all his belongings. Then had the rooms purified and the equipment that belonged there restored. Next Nehemiah restored the portions that had not been given to the Levites. He followed this by rebuking the officials who had allowed these wrongs. Lastly, Nehemiah restored the process of tithes for the temple.

3. 13:15-22

a. What was the problem here?

The people were trading and working on the Sabbath. They were even bringing merchandize into Jerusalem.

b. What was the underlying motivation that caused the problem?

Money.

c. What did Nehemiah do about it?

First he warned them. He rebuked the nobles for their lack of leadership in this matter. He ordered the doors to the city be shut as the evening shadows approached and not be opened until the Sabbath was over. Nehemiah warned those merchants who stayed the night waiting for the doors to open and threatened them physically if they persisted in this practice. Lastly, he had the Levites purify themselves and guard the gates.

4. 13:23-28

a. What is the problem here?

The intermarriage with foreigners.

b. Where has this problem showed up before?

The problem of marrying outside their Jewish race had been dealt with by Ezra some thirty years earlier, also confronted Nehemiah. That the problem could crop up again may indicate that in the years since 445 BC, when Ezra read the Teaching of Moses and participated in the dedication of Jerusalem's wall, Ezra had died. It is hard to conceive of this practice taking hold while Ezra was still alive, since he would have spoken out against it.

The most troublesome marriages appear to have been those with the people of Ashdod. The language of Ashdod, "Ashdodite," was most likely a dialect of Aramaic. This would have made it more distant from Hebrew (Judean") than the languages of the Ammonites and Moabites, which were very closely related to

Hebrew. Nehemiah's concern appears to have been that the children who had learned only the language of their mothers would not have been able to learn the Word of God, since they could not readily understand Hebrew.

c. What did Nehemiah do about it?

Nehemiah rebuked them, called curses down on them, beat some of the men and pulled their hair out (A sign of disrespect and contempt). Then he made them take an oath in God's name to not do this again. Nehemiah taught them the seriousness of the sin by referencing Solomon.

d. How did he insure that it would not crop up again?

According to Lev 21:14 the high priest was not to marry a foreigner. The expulsion of Joiada's son followed either this special ban or the general prohibition against intermarriage. The union described in this verse was especially rankling to Nehemiah in the light of Sanballat's enmity (see 2:10).

Nehemiah struck him off the list of the priests, and deemed him utterly unworthy of all connection and intercourse with truly religious people.

5. 13:30-31

a. What are some last steps Nehemiah took to establish a solid Christian community and country?

Nehemiah purified the priests and Levites of everything foreign. He then assigned them tasks unique to each one of them. He also made provisions of wood at designated time and for the first fruits.

(Though there is no specific reference to a wood offering in the Pentateuch, the perpetual burning of fire on the sanctuary altar (Lev 6:12–13) would have required a continual supply of wood. Josephus mentions "the festival of wood offering" on the 14th day of the fifth month (Ab).

First fruits were brought to the sanctuary to support the priests and Levites (Ex 23:19; Nu 18:13; Dt 26:1–11; Eze 44:30).

b. How might these lead to a stable environment?

These actions insured that the worship life would be proper and this would give stability to the whole community.

6. In, summary, list the various learnings you have learned in this lesson?

These are going vary. Accept with them with thanks.