

Legacy of Leadership

Nehemiah 13



Week Thirteen

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Nehemiah 10-13

SIGN HERE

Nehemiah 9 left off with the prayer of remembrance. Like the conclusion of the prayer of chapter 1, the latter prayer also concludes with a spirit of surrender. Verse 36 reads, “Here we are, servants today!” (NKJV). The corporate body enters into a covenant, or a contract, with God. Chapters 10–13 technically do not fit into the chiasmic structure; they act more like appendices to chapter 9. Chapter 10 contains a list of names of those who essentially were signing off on the contract. These names included Nehemiah the governor, priests, Levites, and the leaders of the city.

From verse 28 to verse 39, chapter 10 then outlines four areas in which the people entered into an oath and the attending curses should these oaths be broken. The first area was the realm of marriage, where they promised not to marry the non-Judean people of the land (verse 30). The second was the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath (verse 31). The third was the return of the tithe (verses 35–37). And the fourth was the care of the house of God (verses 38, 39).

Within the time frame of about twelve years, Nehemiah returned to the land of Judah and found every single covenant oath broken, in the opposite order of which they were made (like another chiasm!). What is a leader to do now?



inScribe

Write out Nehemiah 13:6–25 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Nehemiah 13:14, 22b, 29, 31b. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline it, or mind map the chapter.

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Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases



Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

Are there areas of compromise in your life? Do you see compromise creeping into your home life? Your church life?



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TEMPLE AND TITHE

Chapter 13 establishes in verses 1 and 2 that the Ammonites and Moabites were never to enter the house of God for their historical unkindness to the children of Israel. One relentless enemy of the rebuilding project and of Nehemiah was Tobiah the Ammonite (remember him?). How shocking would it have been for Nehemiah that upon his return to Jerusalem from the court of Artaxerxes after twelve years, the Ammonite sidekick of his arch nemesis was sitting in the inner offices of the house of God (verse 7)! Verses 8 and 9 record Nehemiah throwing Tobiah's things out of the house of God and commanding that the rooms be cleansed. (Note: Just because such an act is recorded in Scripture does not justify manhandling others' personal property.)

Then Nehemiah perceived that the Levites were not being given the tithes from the land. So, he restored the tithe system and the storage of the tithed goods while establishing the personnel of treasurers (verses 11–13).

Why was Nehemiah so vehement in his actions? This behavior might not go over well in the twenty-first-century postmodern context. Not worried about political correctness, Nehemiah may have had a couple of things on his mind. First, the house of God and the tithe were holy. The tenth of all increase was a holy portion. The holy portion went to the Holy God. The holy portion for the Holy God had a holy purpose. And the holy portion for the Holy God had the holy purpose of sustaining the holy priesthood of the house of God, which itself was holy.

Second, Nehemiah remembered that he had signed his name on the covenant made with the leaders of Jerusalem. If they had kept it, they would have been blessed; but in breaking it, they were inviting curses. As a result, throughout this chapter, Nehemiah attempts to restore the four covenantal elements, concluding each time with the prayer, "Remember me, O my God." In other words, Lord, don't include me in the curse section, because I don't subscribe to this rebellion.

SABBATH AND MARRIAGE

The narrative in Nehemiah 13 continues where Nehemiah saw the Sabbath being broken. Here we see the principle of neither selling nor buying on the Sabbath day. Commercial exercises were being conducted on the day when the Lord commanded that no work be done (verses 15–18). Nehemiah invoked their ancestors, just as the prayer of remembrance did in chapter 9, asking, “Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city?” (verse 18, NKJV). Though Nehemiah commanded the gates to be shut, the merchants waited in food trucks outside the wall. Seeing their intent, he threatened to “lay hands” on them (verse 21), which is not a reference to ordination. (Note again: Just because it is recorded in Scripture does not justify the “laying on” of hands in this manner!)

Predictably, the last area of reform that Nehemiah contended for was the area of marriage. Because they were intermarrying with the peoples of the former enemy coalition (Ashdod and Ammon), he was concerned that the next generation would not be able to read Hebrew. Transcending the racial purity argument, Nehemiah was concerned that the inability to understand Hebrew would affect their understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, which would prevent the revivals of chapter 8 from occurring. So, he “struck some of them and pulled out their hair” (verse 25) and invoked the story of Solomon and his multiple foreign wives. (Final note: Just because it is recorded in Scripture does not justify the plucking out of others’ hair!)

In the two Creation accounts of Genesis, the first account climaxes with the gift of the Sabbath (Genesis 1:1–2:4), and the second account apexes with the gift of marriage (Genesis 2:5–25). “Then marriage and the Sabbath had their origin, twin institutions for the glory of God in the benefit of humanity.”¹ One represented the platform where humanity and divinity could coexist in the realm of time, while the other was the establishment of two beings coexisting in the realm of matter, or one body.

For Nehemiah, these were more than rules that had to be kept. The temple, tithe, marriage, and Sabbath all symbolized holy institutions that pointed to the teachings of salvation, the preparation for the coming of Christ, and the joy of His communing presence. But these were forgotten by the people, and Nehemiah took to extreme measures to protect the covenant of God.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?



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1. Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1952), 340.



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Gen. 1:1-2:25

Mal. 3:8-10

1 Pet. 2:21-25



What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Nehemiah 13?

Review your memorized verse from Nehemiah 13.

LEGACY OF THE LORD

Leaders come and go. Those who seemed so powerful and mighty through their positions of leadership are just as easily forgotten when others succeed them. Sometimes people will forget what leadership has done. Biblical leaders do not find their legacy in monuments, obituaries, or memorial libraries. Rather, they find their legacy in the mind of God. Nehemiah prayed three times to God to remember him and once to remember the evil deeds of the people. Despite having worked his lifetime in public service for the king and for the governance of the people of Judah, his prime concern was what God thought of him in the end.

As exceptional and admirable as Nehemiah was as a leader, he was still human. His frustrations got the best of him in the last chapter, where he started to get physically abusive with the people. Additionally, by the time of Christ's first advent, his reforms had become radicalized. While Nehemiah faced a people who leaned too liberal, Christ faced a people who swung too conservative. Too afraid to violate these four areas again, they built extraneous rules to prevent their transgressions. Tithing laws were nitpicky unto mint and anise, purity laws prevented almost anyone from approaching the sanctuary, marriage laws inhibited any social contact at all with non-Jews, and the extra Sabbath laws made the Sabbath itself a burden! Now Jesus had to battle a mind-set where the pendulum had swung the other way, full of exclusivity, legalism, materialism, and pride.

In the end, Nehemiah was a mere shadow of the ultimate leader, Jesus Christ. No human leader was, is, or shall be as ideal to the character and ministry of our Lord. First Peter 2:21 states that Christ is our only example, "that [we] should follow His steps" (NKJV).



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Meditate on Nehemiah 13 again and look for Jesus in the chapter.



How does Christ's leadership surpass that of Nehemiah?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?



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Review your memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

—————→
As you have studied this
week, what personal
applications have you been
convicted of in your life?

What are practical applications
you must make in your school,
family, workplace, and church?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
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ONLY ONE PATTERN

“Jesus was a perfect pattern of what we should be.

He was the strictest observer of His Father’s law,
Yet He moved in perfect freedom.

He had all the fervor of the enthusiast,
Yet He was calm, sober, and self-possessed.

He was elevated above the common affairs of the world,
Yet He did not exclude Himself from society.

He dined with publicans and sinners,
Played with little children, and took them in His arms and blessed
them.

He graced the wedding feast with His presence.
He shed tears at the grave of Lazarus.

He was a lover of the beautiful in nature and used the lilies to illustrate
the value of natural simplicity in the sight of God, above artificial
display.

He used the occupation of the husbandman to illustrate the most
sublime truths. . . .

His zeal never degenerated into passion
Nor His consistency into selfish obstinacy.

His benevolence never savored of weakness
Nor His sympathy of sentimentalism.

He combined the innocence and simplicity of the child
With manly strength, all-absorbing devotion to God with tender love
for man.

He possessed commanding dignity
Combined with winning grace of humility.

He manifested unyielding firmness
With gentleness.

May we live daily in close connection
With this perfect, faultless character.

We have not six patterns to follow, nor five;
We have only one, and that is Christ Jesus.”¹

1. Ellen G. White, In Heavenly Places (Washington, DC, Review and Herald®, 1967), 54



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



How do we keep our eyes on Christ amidst the faults of human leadership?

Though Nehemiah may have been absolved from the curse of the covenant, what happened to the guilty people?

How does Christ come to take away the curse of the covenant?

Where is our house of God today?

Why is returning tithe difficult?

How does the Bible state we should keep the Sabbath properly?

Why is marriage under threat today?

How can we thank leaders biblically? Have you thanked or remembered your leaders recently?

How has Jesus practically been your personal leader?