

NEHEMIAH

STAYING ALERT - SAME PROBLEMS - DIFFERENT TIME

INTRODUCTION

A. Review

1. Nehemiah saw the need because he was a man under authority
 - a. He had a proper view of God
 - b. He sought a proper relationship to God.
 - 1) Through prayer
 - 2) Through knowledge of the Word of God.
 - 3) Through obedience to the Word of God.
2. Nehemiah set priorities that placed people before projects.
 - a. His primary task was to affirm the covenant.
 - b. His greatest task was to build up the people of God.
3. Nehemiah had leadership skills that allowed him to pursue excellence.
 - a. Taming the task demanded strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation.
 - b. God deserves our best.
4. Nehemiah stood firm despite problems.
 - a. Opposition can come from without and within.
 - b. He demonstrated leadership qualities as he overcame opposition.

B. Repeat

1. Nehemiah returned from Persia to encounter the same problems again.
2. Chapter 13 demonstrates consequences of poor leadership, Eliashib, verses 4 and 7, and the unnamed son of Joiada, verse 28.
3. Nehemiah gave 12 years to building up the people and returned several years later and had to apply his leadership skills again.

RECURRING PROBLEMS DEMAND ACTION

A. Reforms by Nehemiah, chapter 13

1. *Foreigners excluded from the assembly (1-3), 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 enter the assembly of God, because they did not meet the Israelites with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.*
 - a. The Ammonites' failed to help - sin of omission
 - b. The Moabites tried to hinder - sin of commission
 - c. They obeyed the law and excluded foreigners, note, Deuteronomy 23:4-6, *because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. (Yet the LORD your God refused to heed Balaam; the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you.) You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live.*
2. *Tobiah expelled from the temple (4-9), Now before this, the priest Eliashib, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large room where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. While this was taking*

place I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes of Babylon I went to the king. After some time I asked leave of the king and returned to Jerusalem. I then discovered the wrong that Eliashib had done on behalf of Tobiah, preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the room. Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

- a. Eliashib the priest had made an alliance with Tobiah and had given him an apartment within the sacred temple, a clear violation of the Law of Moses.
 - b. Eliashib leadership was a strong contrast to that of Nehemiah who pursued covenant obedience.
3. Support of the Levites resumed by the people (10-14), *I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who had conducted the service, had gone back to their fields. So I remonstrated with the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses the priest Shelemiah, the scribe Zadok, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan son of Zaccur son of Mattaniah, for they were considered faithful; and their duty was to distribute to their associates. 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 his service.*
- a. They were to be supported by the gifts of the people.
 - b. Instead, they had to go work their fields.
4. Honoring the Sabbath required (15-22), *In those days I saw in Judah people treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys; and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I warned them at that time against selling food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of merchandise and sold them on the sabbath to the people of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I remonstrated with the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day? Did not your ancestors act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath." When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the sabbath. And I set some of my servants over the gates, to prevent any burden from being brought in on the sabbath day. Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem once or twice. But I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.*
- a. The covenant people were working on the Sabbath.
 - b. Traders were buying and selling.
5. Mixed marriages dissolved, 23-31, *In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?" And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I chased him away from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; and I provided for the wood offering, at appointed times, and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.*
- a. There were children who couldn't speak Hebrew.
 - b. The covenant people were becoming pluralistic.

B. Leadership traits of Nehemiah in chapter 13

1. He was motivated by truth.
 - a. The Word of God was his guide (3), *When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.*
 - b. The Lord God is the One he wants to please, 14, 22, 29 and (31), *and I provided for the wood offering, at appointed times, and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.*
 - c. The Word of God is clear concerning proper conduct (26), *Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin.*
2. He was confrontational when necessary.
 - a. He reprimanded the officials for forsaking the house of God (11), *So I remonstrated with the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations.*
 - b. He admonished traders and the nobles for profaning the Sabbath, 15-18 and (20-21), *Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem once or twice. But I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath.*
 - c. He cursed those who married outside their covenant and pulled out their hair (25), *And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.*
3. He was action oriented.
 - a. He cleaned out the temple (8), *And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the room.*
 - b. He restored the Levites to their posts (11-13), *So I remonstrated with the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses the priest Shelemiah, the scribe Zadok, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan son of Zaccur son of Mattaniah, for they were considered faithful; and their duty was to distribute to their associates.*
 - c. He ordered the gates shut during the Sabbath and that the Levites be gatekeepers (19), *When it began to be dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the sabbath. And I set some of my servants over the gates, to prevent any burden from being brought in on the sabbath day.*
 - d. He reestablished the priests in their positions and supplied basic needs (30), *Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work;*
4. He delegated responsibilities.
 - a. The temple rooms were cleansed (9), *Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.*
 - b. He appointed faithful men to be in charge of the storehouse (13), *And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses the priest Shelemiah, the scribe Zadok, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan son of Zaccur son of Mattaniah, for they were considered faithful; and their duty was to distribute to their associates.*
 - c. He set his servants at the gates (19, see above).

CONCLUSION

A. Nehemiah had qualities we need to develop in our lives by God's grace.

1. To see needs through God's perspective.
2. To set priorities so that people come first.
3. To tame the task by taking one step at a time.
4. To face opposition empowered by a deep trust in God.
5. To stay alert knowing that opposition is around every corner.

B. Historical perspective

1. The Book of Nehemiah completes the Old Testament account.
2. There is 400 years of biblical silence from this point, except for some allusions to this period in the Book of Malachi.
3. The next view of the covenant people is in the New Testament.