

**Nehemiah 13:1 ¶ On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;**

**Nehemiah 13:2 Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.**

**Nehemiah 13:3 Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.**

“On that day” appears to reference the day of dedication for the wall as recorded in chapter 11. They read the book of Moses aloud to the people. Specifically noted was that they found that God had forbidden Ammonites and Moabites from being accepted to the congregation of God. Why? Because they had refused food and water to the people and had hired Balaam to curse them—but God turned this cursing to blessing. (The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-24.) Once they heard this, they separated out the foreigners from among them.

Guzik offers this explanation: “This meant to be regarded as one of the people of Israel and people of God. It meant one could fully participate in the spiritual life of Israel. An Israelite became a part of God’s covenant by birth; but an Ammonite or Moabite could not. They had to become a part of the covenant by choice - by joining with God’s covenant people and leaving their own people. This command was a powerful message - both then and now. It said to these Ammonites and Moabites, “You are not a part of the people of God by birth. You must make a choice. You cannot live the thinking and deeds of your anti-God culture, and truly join in the spiritual life of God’s people. Unless you leave one and join the other, you will never really be a part of this spiritual life.”

That makes sense to me; Ruth (King David’s great-grandmother) is a prime example.

That principle is true today. You aren’t automatically a part of God’s family at birth. You have to make a choice to become part of God’s family, a choice to accept Him as LORD and Savior of your life.

**Nehemiah 13:4 And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, *was* allied unto Tobiah:**

**Nehemiah 13:5 And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded *to be given* to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests.**

Nehemiah records that Eliashib the priest, the one who was responsible for the chamber of the house of God, was an ally of Tobiah, a primary enemy of Israel that partnered with Sanballat in trying to thwart the building of walls of Jerusalem. The priest had even prepared for Tobiah the chamber that was supposed to be used to store grain offerings, frankincense, temple vessels, and tithes of corn, new wine and oil that was given to support the Levites, singers and porters and priests.

**Nehemiah 13:6** But in all this *time* was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king:

**Nehemiah 13:7** And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

**Nehemiah 13:8** And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber.

**Nehemiah 13:9** Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

By comparing this section to chapter 2, we know that Nehemiah had returned to Babylon at some point to report back to the king. He did not come back to Jerusalem until the 32d year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon; he had come the first time in the 20<sup>th</sup> year.

*Nehemiah 2:1, 4-5 "And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king....Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it."*

After he arrived, he learned what Eliashib had done. Nehemiah notes that it made him very angry, and he had all of Tobiah's stuff thrown out of the chamber in the temple. He then commanded that they clean the chambers and restore them to their proper use.

JFB offers this explanation: "Eliashib (concluding that, as Nehemiah had departed from Jerusalem, and, on the expiry of his allotted term of absence, had resigned his government, he had gone not to return) began to use great liberties, and, there being none left whose authority or frown he dreaded, allowed himself to do things most unworthy of his sacred office, and which, though in unison with his own irreligious character, he would not have dared to attempt during the residence of the pious governor. Nehemiah resided twelve years as governor of Jerusalem, and having succeeded in repairing and refortifying the city, he at the end of that period returned to his duties in Shushan. How long [Nehemiah] remained there is not expressly said, but "after certain days," which is a Scripture phraseology for a year or a number of years, he obtained leave to resume the government of Jerusalem; to his deep mortification and regret, he found matters in the neglected and disorderly state here described."

**Nehemiah 13:10** ¶ And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given *them*: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field.

**Nehemiah 13:11** Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place.

Nehemiah also realized that the Levites had not been given the provisions that should have been theirs according to the law. This had forced them to leave and go to their own lands to provide for themselves and their families. Obviously, they were not able to continue their service at the temple.

Nehemiah confronted the rulers about their neglect of God's house and then regathered the Levites to Jerusalem to assume their responsibilities.

**Nehemiah 13:12 Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries.**

**Nehemiah 13:13 And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them *was* Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office *was* to distribute unto their brethren.**

**Nehemiah 13:14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.**

Nehemiah notes that the people of Judah once again brought in their tithes to be stored in the temple treasuries to provide for the Levites. He appointed faithful men—Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, Pedaiah the Levite and Hanan, a leading citizen—as supervisors over the distribution of the tithes. I am sure he made the group diverse as a safeguard to ensure a just distribution.

Once again we have note of Nehemiah asking God to add this action to his record of good deeds done for the house of “my God” and those that served there. Nehemiah wanted God to make secure the account of his good deeds.

This is a natural reaction to one whose life before God is judged by his obedience to God's law. How blessed we are to be seen before God as righteous through the precious blood of Jesus. Our eternal future is secure because of what He has done—not anything we have done or can do.

**Nehemiah 13:15 ¶ In those days saw I in Judah *some* treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all *manner of* burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified *against them* in the day wherein they sold victuals.**

**Nehemiah 13:16 There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.**

**Nehemiah 13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing *is* this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?**

**Nehemiah 13:18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.**

Once again Nehemiah confronts the leaders of Judah for not honoring the Sabbath as a holy day in accordance with God's command. Work was going on as usual and buying and selling were conducted in Jerusalem, instigated it seems

by men from Tyre that lived there. He was quick to remind them that their fathers had sinned in the very same way and God had judged them. He then asked them if they really wanted to bring more of God's wrath against Israel because they chose to profane the Sabbath.

I liked Guzik's observation: "The New Testament makes it clear we are not under the law of the Sabbath in the same sense Israel was under the Old Covenant; but we are certainly under the same obligation to make honoring God more important than making money or spending money."

*Colossians 2:16–17* "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

**Nehemiah 13:19** And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and *some* of my servants set I at the gates, *that* there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day.

**Nehemiah 13:20** So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

**Nehemiah 13:21** Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do *so* again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no *more* on the sabbath.

**Nehemiah 13:22** And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and *that* they should come *and* keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, *concerning* this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Nehemiah ordered that once the gates of Jerusalem were closed as dusk approached on the evening marking the beginning of the Sabbath, they were not to be opened until after the Sabbath. He also positioned guards at the gates to ensure his edict was enforced. Many merchants and sellers camped outside the city once or twice. Nehemiah confronted them and told them that if they came again, he would get rid of them by force. The merchants didn't come back on the Sabbath after that; Nehemiah was known to be a man of his word.

Nehemiah commanded the Levites to make themselves ceremonially clean and come and guard the gates to protect the observance of the Sabbath.

Once again Nehemiah asks the LORD to remember his actions and spare him in accordance with His great mercy.

Each time I read this I am so thankful to know that I am secure in Jesus!

**Nehemiah 13:23** ¶ In those days also saw I Jews *that* had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, *and* of Moab:

**Nehemiah 13:24** And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each

people.

**Nehemiah 13:25** And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.

**Nehemiah 13:26** Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.

**Nehemiah 13:27** Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?

Nehemiah saw that once again some of the Jews were intermarrying with the people of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. He also noticed that the children of these unions spoke in the foreign tongues but could not speak in the language of the Jews. It seems that Nehemiah publicly confronted them, cursing and beating them and pulling out their hair. He made them swear by God to stop taking marriage partners for themselves, their sons or daughters from among the heathen nations. He reminded them that this was the great sin of Solomon, one of the nation's most famous kings and beloved by God. His wives, however, caused him to sin. Nehemiah was determined that the people not follow Solomon's example and become corrupted through the sin that resulted from such intermarriage.

Ironside made this observation on verse 24: "This is ever the fruit of such a yoke in marriage. The children soon follow the ways of the unregenerate parent and use the language of the flesh. Too late is the error realized. Too readily they follow the example and speech of the parent who knows not God."

**Nehemiah 13:28** And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.

**Nehemiah 13:29** Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.

**Nehemiah 13:30** Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business;

**Nehemiah 13:31** And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

As Nehemiah's record comes to an end, he notes that one of the sons of the high priest was married to the daughter of Sanballat, one of Israel's archenemies; and he did not allow him in his presence. He asked the LORD to hold these men accountable for defiling the priesthood and their covenant before Him. Nehemiah records that he cleansed the priesthood and Levites by getting rid of all the strangers among them. He made a duty roster and appointed them to serve accordingly. He also made provision for taking the wood offering and firstfruits at the designated times.

Once again Nehemiah asks the LORD to remember all that He had done for good on behalf of his people.

I liked Ironside's summary of Nehemiah: "Nothing was too great for his faith, and nothing was too insignificant for his consideration if it concerned the house, the people, or the honor of the Lord his God. This was indeed 'a faithful man, and one that feared God above many' -just such an one as the times demanded, and he held on his way unflinchingly to the end, neither cajoled by flattery nor intimidated by opposition, for to him the approbation of the God of Israel was infinitely more than the good opinion of carnal or natural men."