

Further Reforms

Nehemiah 13:10-14

Nehemiah 13:10-14 - *"I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. ¹¹ So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place.*

¹² Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. ¹³ And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse 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 considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. ¹⁴ 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 its services!"

Background Notes

If the events in the book of Nehemiah had been written up as an historical novel, it would probably have ended at the close of chapter 12. Up to that point, it was primarily the success story of how Nehemiah and his workers rebuilt and dedicated the city's wall.

Nehemiah gave up an important position in the Persian government and traveled to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around city. The wall had been in ruins for approximately 150 years, from the time the Babylonians conquered the city in 586BC, until Nehemiah's return in 445BC.

Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem rebuilt the wall in just 52 days. It wasn't an easy job. All kinds of obstacles and enemy opposition had to be overcome. After the wall was completed, there was a great revival. The wall was dedicated to God with a time of great rejoicing. What a success story! What a great place to end an historical novel!

But the book of Nehemiah is not an historical novel. It is the Word of God, and God tells it like it is. Nehemiah 13 reveals that the people had backslidden and failed in the very areas where they had specifically promised to be obedient and faithful.

Do you remember those areas of commitment in Nehemiah 10?

1. They promised they would not intermarry with the surrounding pagans.
2. They promised they would keep the Sabbath holy.
3. They promised they would give their tithes and first fruits offerings to support of the work of the Lord.

But these focal points of commitment had become focal points of failure.

Nehemiah had gone back to Persia after 12 years as governor of the province of Judah. We don't know how long he was gone, but by chapter 13 Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem. He probably returned because he heard of the problems that had developed, and the failure of the people to keep their commitments. They were intermarrying with the surrounding pagans, they were not observing the Sabbath properly, and they were not supporting God's servants and the Temple in Jerusalem.

So Nehemiah returned, and he set about to systematically correct the problems. Verses 10-14 describe the problem of the people's failure to support the Levites, and how Nehemiah corrected that problem.

Doctrinal Points

1. The work of the Lord suffers when it is not supported by the Lord's people.

Supporting the Levites was part of God's Law: *"Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in the land"* (Deuteronomy 12:19). The Levites were the servants of the Lord, and they were to be supported by the tithes of the Lord's people – but the Levites had been forced to find other employment (v10). The Levites had to go back to farming their own fields, because the Jewish people weren't supporting them. The people had failed to bring their tithes. Maybe they were reluctant to do so because Eliashib, the high priest, had housed Tobiah, an enemy, in a Temple storehouse for tithes. In any case, the Levites had to leave the work of the Lord because the Lord's people were not properly supporting them, and the work of the Lord suffered.

This problem exists today. And the work of the Lord suffers when the Lord's people fail to give to the Lord. Missionaries have had to return home because of financial shortfall. Potential missionaries have never been able to go where they desired because the Lord's people have failed to support them. Churches have closed because the Lord's people have not given. The Lord's work suffers when the Lord's people fail to support it.

But let's take this doctrinal point and turn it into a positive statement: **The Lord's work goes forward when the Lord's people support it.** There are missionaries in other countries today because you, the Lord's people, are supporting them! There are churches thriving today because you, the Lord's people, support them! There are ministries that are reaching out to people today because you, the Lord's people, are supporting them!

2. Spiritual leaders must take corrective steps to prevent repeated failures.

When something is good, we want to repeat it - like winning a national championship the second time. But we don't want to repeat failure. When Nehemiah got the care of the Levites corrected, he took steps to make sure that the failure was not repeated.

“Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse” (v12). That was good. But he did more than just correct the immediate problem - he took steps to prevent repeated failures (v13). He appointed treasurers to oversee the situation: to supervise the storage facilities, to make sure that the tithes were brought in, and to distribute them fairly. And notice - he appointed more than just one treasurer. He appointed **four**, for the purposes of checks and balance. After all, they were dealing with the tithes! And notice: the Bible specifically mentions that all four of these men were **faithful**. Faithfulness is important for managing a financial situation.

“Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services” (v14). When Nehemiah prayed this, he wasn't praying for a reward. He was praying that God would bless his efforts to correct the problem, and to make sure that it wasn't repeated, and that the corrective steps wouldn't fail. Prayer is very important, and it's especially important to include prayer when we take corrective steps to prevent repeated failure in problem areas.

Here's an example of taking corrective steps to prevent repeated failure in the New Testament. Remember how the apostles solved a problem that arose in Acts 6? Some of the Christian widows were not properly cared for. So, as godly leaders, the apostles said, *“Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them...”* Seven wise and spiritual men were chosen to be responsible to provide for all the needy women. The apostles got the problem straightened out, and by appointing **faithful** and **wise** deacons they ensured that the problem would not be repeated. Spiritual leaders must take corrective steps to prevent repeated failure.

Practical Applications

1. Always work towards preventing a problem from repeating itself.

We've seen that Nehemiah did more than just fix the problem; he took steps to make sure that the problem wasn't repeated. We must do the same. We must always work toward preventing a problem from repeating itself.

On a personal level, let's say you have a problem spending time with the Lord each day. That's a problem. Don't fix it just for today, by getting out the Bible and reading it. Take steps to keep from repeating the problem. Set up a regular time and place each day to read the Word and pray. Everyone has a different schedule and circumstances, so the time and place won't be the same for everyone. But all of us need to take steps to make sure that the problem of not having a time with the Lord each day isn't repeated. I know some of you use radio ministry to help you in this area, and that's good.

Some time ago, I realized that I was getting lax in praying specifically for my children. Of course I was praying for my children! I prayed for them every day, but they were general prayers. I wasn't being as specific as I should have been about their particular situations and needs. That was a problem, so I took steps to correct it. I chose my regular running time to pray very specifically for each one of my children.

Maybe you have a different problem. Maybe you're a parent, and you find a child watching the wrong kind of stuff on TV. Don't just run over and turn the TV off, and think you've fixed the problem. That's a good first move, but you have to go further. Set up firm guidelines for the TV in your home, such as the length of viewing time, program rules, etc. And then work together to prevent the problem from repeating itself.

2. Let's get our "giving" corrected once and for all!

Nehemiah was trying to straighten out the problem of **giving to the Lord**. The Levites were not properly supplied, because the Lord's people were not giving. Do you have a problem in this area? Let's get it straightened out once and for all.

In our talks from Nehemiah, we've already seen that while tithing isn't a New Testament law for the Christian, it is a **biblical principle**. Tithing goes back before the Old Testament Law. It's a biblical principle. In other words, something really is wrong if Christians are not **at least tithing**, when they sit down with their checkbook and pen.

If you have a problem in this area, how do you correct it? 1 Corinthians 16:2 gives us some helpful principles. *"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income..."*

Two principles of giving emerge from this verse.

1. *"On the first day of the week..."* - that's the principle of giving regularly.
2. *"Each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income"* – that's the principle of giving in proportion to your income.

Give regularly and give proportionately. These principles will help you correct this problem of giving.

Nehemiah and the prophet Malachi were contemporaries, and Malachi was ministering in the province of Judah at the same time as Nehemiah. One of the problems Malachi addressed was the same problem Nehemiah was correcting - the problem of **giving**.

In Malachi 3:10 we find a great promise that the Lord will bless our giving: *"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it!"*

God will bless you as you give! So - let's get our giving corrected once and for all!