

AUGUST 17

Nehemiah 12:27-13:31

This is our final day in Nehemiah. Actually, the end of Nehemiah is basically the end of the Old Testament. Some people think that Malachi wrote while Nehemiah was trying to clean things up in Jerusalem. That could be, although there is no mention of Malachi in Nehemiah; and Nehemiah was good about referring to other leaders. My opinion is that Malachi wrote sometime after this final reform of Nehemiah, when Nehemiah was no longer governor. This makes Nehemiah the final historical book of the OT, and Malachi is the final prophetic book in the Old Testament. At the end of Malachi the coming of the Messiah is foretold and the people themselves make a covenant with God. In Malachi God promised the forerunner of the Messiah, and then came 400 years of silence until an angel appeared to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist.

Nehemiah 12:27-47

Vs. 27-30 This is the general preparation for dedicating the wall. What seems notable here is that the different branches of the priests and Levites took the initiative and prepared themselves and the people. The singers found places to live close to Jerusalem, and everyone purified themselves and then made sure the people were purified.

Vs. 31-43 This must have been a great sight. The two choirs began at the same place and went in opposite directions on top of the wall and met at the temple. The choirs were followed by the leaders. It is interesting that the dedication probably began at the valley gate (Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 693). This was the same gate where Nehemiah began his midnight review of the walls when he first arrived in Jerusalem.

Vs. 31-37 Even though this is the group that Ezra led, notice that it was Nehemiah who brought up the leaders and appointed two choirs. Again, a leader doesn't just lead organizationally, but also spiritually. This was Ezra's point in 1 & 2 Chronicles, and both Ezra and Nehemiah were examples of this leadership.

Vs. 38-43 It is interesting here that the priests and Levites led the second choir. Nehemiah and the leaders hung back. Nehemiah didn't assume he had the right to lead where only the priest and Levites could function.

I can't exactly visualize this, but both groups met at the temple; and then the celebration and dedication took place with sacrifices, thanks, and a lot of joy.

Vs. 44-47 Again, for the priests and Levites to lead the people, the leaders needed to insure the tithes were given and collected.

Notice the interesting remark of v. 47. During the days of Zerubbabel and during the days Nehemiah was governor, everything was being obeyed. This shows the devotion and courage of these men. It also shows how rare these men were. Immediately after both of these men disappeared, everything began to decay. No one knows all of what Nehemiah did in those twelve years he was governor. The wall only took 52 days. There was a lot involved in making the nation healthy and spiritually viable. These must have been good years. For God to have supplied a man like Nehemiah was a sign of His grace and blessing on His people.

Nehemiah 13

Nehemiah had left Jerusalem, and we have no clue of how long that was. *On that day*, refers to a day after Nehemiah's return, on which he began to correct what had gone wrong. During the time of his absence, maybe 2-5 years (who knows), Ezra must have died. When we see what happened, it could only have happened if Ezra wasn't there. This portion in Nehemiah is a

reminder of the importance of raising up leaders, not just position holders. Beyond leadership, it is important to find people with a burning passion for God.

V. 1 Nehemiah must have returned for a period of time as governor. To me, it looks like he already knew before he arrived that there were problems. Verse 4 shows you that the time reference, *On that day*, occurred after his return. Notice that Nehemiah began with the reading of the Word, just getting the Word out to the people. This is also a sign that Ezra wasn't there. In 1 Timothy, as Timothy was sent back to Ephesus to repair what had happened there, Paul told him in 1 Timothy 4:13, *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching*. Getting the people in the Word is the beginning of drawing close to the Lord and restoring order and peace.

Vs. 1-3 They apparently had let "tolerance" go too far. The Word brought them back. As we'll see in a few verses, there is a reason that Ammonites and Moabites are mentioned.

Vs. 4-9 It's hard to understand how this could have happened. You can imagine that Nehemiah was entering one area of conflict after the next. The chambers were built onto the temple and held the food and resources for worship. They were also used to store the money and food used to pay the priests and Levites.

Vs. 10-13 The Levites had scattered because they could no longer be fed. This meant, too, that the temple worship had diminished. Notice that Nehemiah held the political leaders accountable for letting this fall. If devotion to God is not in the heart of the leadership, it will not be followed by the people.

V. 14 This sounds like a man under stress, working desperately.

Vs. 15-22 So, what was the purpose of the Sabbath? It was to remember the covenant God had made with Israel. It was to rest knowing that God would take care of them. The people lost this focus. It is amazing how we let our physical needs control us. That seems silly to say, because if we don't meet our physical needs, we die. But even though Jesus didn't tell His disciples to keep the Sabbath, He did tell them not to be anxious about their lives and to seek His kingdom first. Dependence on God is foreign to the body of death. Preoccupation with our needs destroys spiritual perception. These people were what Paul called, "men of the flesh."

Notice that Nehemiah had to resort to force to make this work. The reason for the force was that he feared God, knowing that if the people disregarded the Sabbath, God would again remove them from their land.

V. 22 Another cry to the Lord.

Vs. 23-27 This again. You wonder what happened that this intermarrying with pagan women wasn't stopped by the leaders. It's interesting to see what Nehemiah says about Solomon. As with Solomon, these women didn't give up their gods, they just added Yahweh to their list of gods to worship. They were still worshiping idols.

V. 28 This is what destroyed the influence of the priests and infected the people.

V. 29 Nehemiah was probably praying at all times, as he walked, while he knelt, and as he was on his face crying out to God for his people.

Vs. 30-31 Every generation needs leaders who are passionate in their love for God as they follow Christ in this lost world. Spiritual truth is just as real as gravity or the circulation of blood in the body. Violation of spiritual truth is just as deadly as jumping off a building or cutting an artery. There are many abilities and skills that can be taught and transferred; but passionate discipleship, loving Christ, risking all for His mission, perceiving life spiritually, is caught, not taught. This is why we are in the Word, in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. Nehemiah is a

great example of a disciple. Our job now with our amazing advantages (the Word and the Spirit) is to make disciples, who will passionately make disciples, who make disciples.

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

Welcome to some great theology and murky waters. This part of chapter 11 is one of those dark little closets in the letter (and Bible) that people prefer to keep closed. You may as well read the first two verses along with these.

First, some introduction into this particular issue. This was a very Jewish church. The women had never participated in synagogue worship. It had been a man's club. The church was something different; and women suddenly had a lot of liberty and privilege, in spite of what their husbands might have preferred. But you know, if God gives your wife a prophet's gift (like Philip's daughters in Acts 21:9), what are you going to do? Just like we've seen in some of the other issues in Corinth, when certain people came to the liberty of knowing Christ, they took it way too far. That will be the case here and also at the end of chapter 14 regarding the role of women in the church. Both of the issues raised in this chapter were things done in public worship. In fact, public worship will be the stage for most of chapters 11-14.

V. 3 These roles are solid biblical teaching. Paul says this also in Ephesians 5:22-23.

Vs. 4-5 Notice that the use of prophecy identifies this as being public. Paul talks about how prophets were supposed to take part in the public service in chapter 14.

What you can say definitely here is that a man was not to pray publicly or prophesy with his head covered, and a married woman was not to pray or prophesy publicly with her head uncovered. Even though the Greek word for "woman" is used here, she is a wife because she would be dishonoring "her head" or husband. This means positively, that women were allowed to participate in the public service, as prophets, and it didn't violate what Paul taught elsewhere about women not teaching or having authority over men.

V. 6 This shame would not only have been on the wife, but also on the husband, perhaps suggesting she had been punished for some crime like adultery. Spiritually speaking, Paul is saying she's doing the same thing by not wearing a veil; she is shaming her husband.

Vs. 7-10 So, we have some pretty great and mind-blowing teaching here and it is not oriented to culture, but to God's created order. Whatever Paul and the Spirit are saying here, it is still in force. We're just not sure what it all means in terms of how it plays out visually in every culture, yet the truth of this teaching is unshakable.

Apparently some Corinthian women who participated in worship over-reacted to their freedom by showing a lack of respect and submission to their husbands. Put another way, they finally had the opportunity to show their stuff and that their husbands were not at their level. In a sense, that is probably what Eve felt between the time her eyes were opened and Adam sinned. She was superior to him and that is reflected in God's curse on her. Anyway, whatever the cause, what the women were doing in Corinth was obvious and it was wrong. The thinking is that in that culture, a married woman wore a head covering to show she was under the authority of her husband. When they became Christians, some of these women burned their head coverings. The Spirit is saying that when women participate in worship in praying and prophesying, they still need to show that they are under the authority of their husbands. It could be that the veil was a symbol of submission in that culture and in another culture there might be another symbol. That is stretching it a little. The problem is that a man was not to cover his head at all while praying publicly and that seems universal.

Vs. 11-12 These verses do not "neutralize" what is going on here. They are saying that there is an equality and interdependence before God for both men and women. So, there is no arrogance to be shown by men or disrespect from women. The order of v. 3 still stands.

Vs. 13-15 Getting murkier. This is not an argument away from a veil or saying that long hair takes the place of a veil. This illustration actually intensifies the idea of a woman wearing a head covering. This is simply an example from nature that God knew would probably get certain people mad. Did you realize that God thinks that if men have long hair it is degrading to them? Was that just cultural for that time? I don't know. I do know that all the pictures we have of Jesus show Him with long hair, and Paul probably had seen Jesus and wouldn't have said this if Jesus really had long hair. And then, what about women with short hair? O Weh!

V. 16 This is not an escape clause. Paul meant that what he taught here is what he taught everywhere.

Right now, some people reading this probably need the spiritual version of the Heimlich maneuver.

So, if you're discussing this as a group, try to get some things in order. First, write down everything that is clear from this passage. Then write down your questions. It is worth thinking about what the Spirit says about men and women. There is very good theology and teaching in this section. Men should concentrate on what it says about men. Women should focus on what it says about women. All of this should be kept in the context that we have been saved to be disciples on earth during this time, to live for Christ and to follow Him in the harvest. This life is not about us having rights or treasure on earth.

These verses and the simple meaning of them have led some theologians to ask their wives to wear a head covering during worship services. Yet, if a wife cannot participate publicly (and in most churches, for worship, only a few people do anything public) this is a moot point. Most worship services in the western world do not allow this kind of participation anyway. Ironically, the churches in which women wear veils do not allow them to speak at all, taking away the need for a veil.

It could be that this would be necessary in a home group, but even there, there is nothing in most home Bible studies that looks like what Paul outlines in chapter 14. So really, culturally for us, it might be a total non-issue. For some people who choose to ignore thinking about these verses, knowing that most churches in the world do not have their women wear veils (and everything appears fine), seems to get them off the hook. One thing still challenges me on these verses. The children of Israel never kept the Sabbatical year and from Joshua to Nehemiah, they never kept the Feast of Booths, making people live in little houses made of branches. Why? Was it because these things were so impractical? I mean, what would the neighbors think? And besides, everything was fine. Right? Wrong.

Psalm 35:1-16

When we read of David running from Saul all of those years, we don't have any sense for the lies and rumors that were spread throughout Israel about David. If we look at our media today we can get an idea. For ten years Saul and his government had to justify their hatred for the boy whom Samuel had anointed king and who had delivered Israel by killing Goliath.

As you read this, notice all the uses of *let*. Also, since there is a parallel between David's experience and the suffering of Jesus, you can see some of what Jesus must have felt in these verses. And you think of Paul too, *that I may... share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death*. Paul was despised even by people in churches that he planted, like the church in Corinth.

Vs. 1-3 This is David's cry for the Lord to come to his rescue. David needed comfort and assurance.

Vs. 4-6 David didn't just want justice; he wanted it to be apparent to all that *the angel of the Lord* was contending for him.

Vs. 7-8 Notice that David is asking for them to be judged as they had planned and sought to harm David.

Vs. 9-10 David already knew this to be true, but there is something about seeing it happen that brings relief and confidence and resolution. Notice the impact of v. 9. Is that "Christian?"

Vs. 11-14 When David lived in Saul's palace, married to his daughter, David knew many people and thought they were his friends. Once Saul planned to kill David, to stay in Saul's favor - you had to betray David.

Vs. 15-16 This is the depth of the betrayal David felt. We'll see tomorrow as we finish this psalm, that Jesus felt that same kind of betrayal. These two verses would have been true of Jesus as He hung on the cross.

Proverbs 21:17-18

V. 17 seems clear enough. For us as disciples, the challenge is to look at ourselves in terms of culture and what we expect as "normal" to our lives. I'm still challenged by what Jesus told His disciples about the seed cast among thorns. Luke 8:14 - *And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.*

V. 18 A suggestion here is that the wicked and the traitor afflict the righteous and the upright, but when justice is finally passed on them, the righteous are set free or vindicated by that judgment. Notice the "release" of v. 9 in Psalm 35 above. When the wicked are punished, the righteous feel the freedom.