

## ***Nehemiah: Model of Spiritual Reformation (Nehemiah 13)***

### **I. THE CALL TO BE REFORMERS: FAITHFUL WITNESSES OF THE TRUTH**

- A. In our 40-day Daniel fast, we are praying for young leaders to come forth. Leadership involves many dynamics. One of the most difficult is to be a faithful witness of the truths of God's Word. Nehemiah is a premier example of how a reformer is to impact the Church and society.
- B. The Scripture describes dynamic advances in the kingdom of God that will bring transformation to society that has continuity in the age to come. In some geographic regions, righteousness will increase and in others darkness will increase. God is raising up leaders to bring reform to the Church, and to society in the geographic places where truth and continual prayer go forth.
- C. The wheat (righteousness) and tares (wickedness) mature together at the end of the age (Mt. 13:30). Jesus is not coming to ***end the world***, but to complete the reformation of it (Acts 3:21). He will do this by shaking all that can be shaken, so that the works founded on His words alone will ***“remain”*** (Heb. 12:26-27; Mt. 7:24-25).
- <sup>26</sup> He has promised, saying, "...I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." <sup>27</sup> Now this...indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made [initiated by the flesh], that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. (Heb. 12:26-27)*
- D. Nehemiah 13 gives us a blueprint of the truths necessary for the personal lives of the reformers. Reformation in society always begins with reformation in the Church, which always begins with reformation in individuals and their families. We only have authority to release or impart to others what we walk out in our private lives. We have no authority to “bind” in our prayers and public ministry that which “binds” us in our private lives (Mt. 16:18). The unreformed saint in an unreformed Church cannot establish godly reforms in society.

### **II. THE CONTEXT OF NEHEMIAH'S REFORMS**

- A. Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would go into captivity in Babylon for 70 years (606-536 BC) and would then return to Jerusalem (Jer. 29:10-14). Isaiah prophesied that they would return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple when the Persian king Cyrus was in power (Isa. 44:28). Building the temple complex included building the infrastructure to mobilize a worship ministry.
- <sup>28</sup> He [Cyrus] is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." ' (Isa. 44:28)*
- B. From God's point of view, the temple in the past and future is His house of prayer. Isaiah referred to the temple as the house of prayer (Isa. 56:7). Jesus also called it the house of prayer. The purpose of the temple was to be first and foremost a place of encounter with God in worship.
- <sup>7</sup> For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. (Isa. 56:7)*
- <sup>12</sup> Jesus went into the temple...<sup>13</sup> "My house shall be called a house of prayer." (Mt. 21:12-13)*

- C. At the center of God’s plans for reformation is the temple, which functions as a worship center that **connects** with the worship center in heaven (Rev. 4-5). It has **continuity** with the worship center in the millennial temple (Zech. 6:13) and is used to **release power to reform nations now**.
- D. After 70 years of captivity, God sent Israel back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. He used two governors in a special way, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. Zerubbabel finished building the temple in 515 BC. Nehemiah restored the walls around Jerusalem and called the people to purity. Ezra came nearly 60 years (458 BC) after Zerubbabel completed the temple. Nehemiah’s first visit came about 13 years after Ezra and 70 years after the temple was finished (445 BC). His second trip came about 90 years after it was finished.
- E. Zerubbabel and Nehemiah’s reforms were built around a corporate worship center in the temple.  
<sup>47</sup> ***In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions [finances] for the singers and the gatekeepers [support ministries], a portion for each day. (Neh. 12:47)***
- F. After Nehemiah finished building the walls (445 BC), he and Ezra led the nation to make a **covenant with God to obey all** His commandments (Neh. 10:29). The covenant was signed by the leaders (Neh. 10:1-27) as the rest of the people expressed their agreement (Neh. 10:28). They called on God to curse them if they disobeyed this covenant and to bless them if they kept it.
- G. They emphasized four specific commands in this national covenant to obey God (Neh. 9:38-13:3). They promised to **not marry unbelievers** to uphold godly standards in family life (Neh. 10:30). They covenanted to **keep the Sabbath**, or to honor “sacred time” with God (Neh. 10:31). They committed to **financially support corporate worship** in the temple (Neh. 10:32-39) and to refuse to have **unholy alliances** or significant partnerships with unbelievers (Neh. 13:1-3).
- H. Why did Nehemiah define and emphasize these four areas? These represent themes that are emphasized in the Word and by the Spirit in bringing reformation to individuals, churches, cities, or nations. These truths equip us to be messengers, faithful witnesses, and social reformers.
- I. We must insist on these four commands when working for reformation individually or in society. We seek to understand the principle or spirit behind these commands, rather than the letter of the law (2 Cor. 3:6). The terminology is different in various passages of Scripture, but the principles implied by them are the same. The application has been different in revivals throughout history.
- J. The signing of the covenant ended with a national celebration (Neh. 12:43). After this, Nehemiah left Jerusalem to return to his position in Persia staying possibly up to ten years or enough time for the children to grow (Neh. 13:6, 24). Ezra probably died while Nehemiah was away in Persia. Nehemiah returned unannounced and saw violation of the four commands that they had emphasized in their national covenant (Neh. 10). He **confronted** these issues and took bold **action** to reverse them throughout his sphere of influence. It was unpopular and costly to him. The truths in Nehemiah 13 relate to every believer because we all have a sphere of influence, even if it is just one person.

### III. REFUSING UNGODLY ALLIANCES IN THE WORK OF GOD (NEH. 13:1-9)

- A. Nehemiah confronted making ungodly alliances or significant partnerships in the work of God (Neh. 13:4-7). This includes ministry or business alliances. Israel had committed to God to not allow people of other faiths to participate in the temple celebrations (Neh. 13:1-3). Eliashib violated this commitment by giving Tobiah the Amorite a residential suite in the temple (v. 5).

*<sup>4</sup> Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. [an Ammonite] <sup>5</sup> And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the...tithes...which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers...<sup>6</sup> But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes [433 BC]...I had returned to the king. Then after certain days...<sup>7</sup> I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah...<sup>8</sup> And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. (Neh. 13:4-8)*

- B. Sanballat and Tobiah fiercely resisted Nehemiah and God's purpose (Neh. 4:1-3, 7-8; 6:1-4).

*<sup>7</sup> When Sanballat, Tobiah...and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored...<sup>8</sup> All of them conspired to...attack Jerusalem... (Neh. 4:7-8)*

- C. Tobiah gave political and economic favor to nobles of Judah who made pledges to him.

*<sup>17</sup> In those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah...<sup>18</sup> For many in Judah were pledged to him...<sup>19</sup> They reported his good deeds before me... (Neh. 6:17-19)*

### IV. GIVING TO SUPPORT CORPORATE WORSHIP AND PRAYER (NEH. 13:10-14)

- A. Nehemiah confronted the lack of financially supporting corporate worship (Neh. 13:10-14).

*<sup>10</sup> I also realized that the portions [financial support] 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. <sup>11</sup> So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" I gathered them together and set them in their place. <sup>12</sup> Then all Judah brought the tithes... (Neh. 13:10-12)*

- B. Nehemiah demanded that they financially support singers to minister to God as an occupation. God commanded Israel to provide financially for the singers to lead worship as their occupation (2 Chr. 8:14; 31:5-16; Neh. 10:39; 11:23; 12:45, 47; 13:5, 10-11). David provided financially for 4,000 musicians and 288 singers (1 Chr. 9:33; 16:37; 23:5; 25:7).

- C. Nehemiah understood the significance of establishing a day and night worship center in God's eternal purposes and its dynamic effect in reforming the nation. The theme of the temple (church functioning as a house of prayer) is a sacred theme in Scripture. God has zeal for this because it is a dynamic place of encounter with Him. He takes it personally when His people have zeal for this. The "Levite worship calling" was an occupation that pictured on earth the 24/7 worship that occurs around God's throne (Rev. 4:8) based on the revelation of the worth of God.

V. KEEPING THE PRINCIPLE OF THE SABBATH: SACRED TIME (NEH. 13:15-22)

- A. Nehemiah confronted their failure to keep the Sabbath. The principle today speaks of our sacred time with God. Resting from our work is not about recreation, but about resting from our work in establishing our personal resource base (finances, influence, and honor) to spend time with God.

*<sup>15</sup> I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath...<sup>16</sup> Men of Tyre...brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah...<sup>17</sup> Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said, "What evil thing is this that you do...?"<sup>18</sup> Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath"...<sup>19</sup> I commanded the gates to be shut...<sup>20</sup> Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.<sup>21</sup> I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!" (Neh. 13:15-21)*

VI. UPHOLDING GODLY FAMILY VALUES (NEH. 13:23-28)

- A. Nehemiah confronted the failure to uphold God's order in marriage with godly family values (Neh. 13:23-28). The application of this pertains to those who are married to uphold God's Word in the lifestyle and practices in their marriage.

*<sup>23</sup> I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.<sup>24</sup> Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah...<sup>25</sup> I contended with them and...struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons..." (Neh. 13:23-25)*

- B. Their children could not speak Hebrew and thus could not read the Scripture or participate in corporate worship. In principle, this is occurring in many Christian homes today.

VII. NEHEMIAH'S PRAYERS: ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE (NEH. 13:14, 22)

*<sup>14</sup> Remember me, O my God, concerning this [raising money for the singers], and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services...<sup>22</sup> Remember me, O my God, concerning this [demanding that they honor the Sabbath] also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy! (Neh. 13:14, 22)*