

Broken and Restored

An Exposition of Nehemiah

²³ In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon *and* Moab. ²⁴ As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people^a. ²⁵ So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.” ²⁶ Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin. ²⁷ Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women^b?” ²⁸ Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me^c. ²⁹ Remember them, O my

^a 13:23-24 **In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon *and* Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people.**

Ashdod was located in Philistine country to the west of Jerusalem and Ammon and Moab to the east. Some might wonder why having children unable to speak the native tongue of Judah was a problem. The controversy was not about education. It was about worship.

God has always targeted the nations. There are foreign women in the genealogy of David and, hence, in the genealogy of Jesus. The trouble was that these men had failed to teach their own children the Hebrew Scriptures. If the children did not know the Scriptures they could not know the God of the Scriptures. The mandate to teach your own children goes back to Moses:

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:6-8

^b 13:25-27 **So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin. Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?”** Nehemiah used force, demanded compliance and taught a history lesson. He asked these men if they thought they were beyond falling, when even the great, wise Solomon had been brought down by his lusts.

Do not use this text as an excuse to whack annoying sinners around. Nehemiah was in a position of authority and his passion was for the glory of God more than it was for local law and order. Our King Jesus had the same passion for His Father’s house:

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*. and He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business. John 2:13-16

^c 13:28 **Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me.** We saw earlier in this chapter (13:4-

God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites^a.

³⁰ Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, ³¹ and *I arranged* for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits^b. Remember me, O my God, for good^{c, d}.

9) that Tobiah's Ammonite influence came into Jerusalem by marriage and here Sanballat the Samaritan gained the same influence by giving his daughter in marriage to one of the priests. Nehemiah made sure that priest was removed from office.

^a 13:29 **Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.** The law of Moses strictly required that the high priest (and, Ezekiel says, all the priests: Leviticus 21:13-14; Ezekiel 44:22) marry Israelite virgins. They were not even permitted to marry widows. While this did not apply to the rest of the men of Israel, it certainly did to the men in question here. God's word did not suit their tastes so they ignored it. Nehemiah asked God to vindicate Himself.

^b 13:30-31 **Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits.** The word for "purification" (*taher*) is the same word used by Jacob when he told his family to purge their household of all idols (Exodus 35:2). It was used of priestly ceremonial purification like the ritual following healed leprosy (Leviticus 14). This kind of compromise at the heart of Israel's leadership was national disease in need of healing.

If the leaders of worship are not examples, the congregation suffers. It suffers because such behavior communicates that God's commands are negotiable. That is why bishops have strict character qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

^c 13:31 **Remember me, O my God, for good.** As an attribute, the memory of God is an aspect of His omniscience. He is the just judge because He knows you better than you know yourself. He will not forget your work in His kingdom.

^d 13:23-31 Compare his actions to Jesus driving the moneychangers out of the temple. What is it about the Father in heaven that prompted such emotional actions?

God is so pure and has revealed Himself so clearly that it should seem illogical that people would ever fail to honor Him and bow the knee to Him and worship Him as He has directed. For instance, God had shown Himself to be holy to Israel and He always kept His word. But in Nehemiah's day congregational leaders decided that God's word was optional and that not much could happen if they chose another path. The same thing is happening in our day.

Here are some ways to combat a culture of compromise in the church:

1. Set your focus on how worthy to be followed is our God. Then pass that on to your children. Obedience does not start with rules but reverence. The beginning of wisdom is not good rules but a vision of who God is.
2. Prioritize the spiritual training of children. Has God called you out of darkness? How will that happen if your family does not regularly hear the Scriptures from you—Scriptures which are able to make them wise to the point of salvation?
3. Seek to learn from the failures of others. Do not think that you are above failure. The people had forgotten the consequences of King Solomon's compromise.
4. Promote the development of church leaders. This includes those who are leading now as well as those who may have desires, gifts and character qualities useful in leading the flock. The church needs to build a multi-generational faith.

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