

## NEHEMIAH – FACT SHEET 9



### Chapter 13:

As we conclude our studies in Nehemiah, we could be forgiven for expecting a happy ending; especially after the heartfelt pledges of the people in chapter 10 (10:28-39) and the wonderful dedication of the wall in chapter 12 (12:27-47). However, with a wonderful realism, the scriptures reveal to us, not only how awesome God is; but how fickle and inconsistent His people can be. Under TWO headers, we can consider chapter 13 in the following ways:

#### Firstly – Learning from the Problems & Sins of the past: 1-3:

The first 3 verses start chapter 13 off well; with the people reading and hearing God's Word (13:1). They are reminded of the historically negative influence and opposition that two groups of people, the Ammonites and Moabites, had had on them and their progress in the Lord. The Ammonites and Moabites had a dubious ancestry (Gen 19:30-38), being the incestuous offspring of Lot and his daughters. Subsequently, they had opposed the progress of God's people in the wilderness (Numbers 21-25) and were then directly excluded by the Lord, from the assembly of His people (Deut 23:3-4). Verse 2 of chapter 13 summarises this and reminds the people of these troublesome folk; to which their response is one of obedience as they, '...excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent' (13:2). It is important to note that it was their associated *practices* that were not acceptable; the scriptures gracefully reveal Ruth *the Moabitess* being grafted into the very line of Jesus Himself (Matthew 1:5).

Sadly, this exclusion had not been a consistent exercise; and so it is with no surprise that throughout the scriptures; the Moabites and Ammonites appear amongst God's people and against God's plans. Within our Nehemiah studies, we are well familiar with the schemes of Tobiah, the Ammonite (2:10,19, 4:3, 7, 6:1, 12, 14, 17-19). The people had clearly not learnt from the mistakes of their ancestors, nor from their recent experience of the Ammonite influences; but these first three verses present us with a hopeful start to this final chapter.

This leads us to consider **Secondly**, how Nehemiah **deals with the problems and sins of the present: 4-31:**

The heartfelt pledges of chapter ten were fourfold; to follow God's Laws carefully (10:29), not to entertain intermarrying (10:30), to honour the Sabbath as a trade-free day given over to God's worship (10:31) and to give to God's work in support of His work and people (10:31-39); ultimately summarised in the promise that they would, 'not neglect the House of (their) God' (10:39).

Verse 6 of chapter 13 reveals to us that for a period, Nehemiah had not been in Jerusalem, but had, 'returned to the King' (13:6) in Persia; presumably to update him and give him a personal progress report. On his return, he finds four situations in direct contrast to the earlier pledges:

- A large room in the temple, that was to be used to store the people's offerings for the support of the Levites, Singers, Gatekeepers and Priests; was now housing Tobiah, the Ammonite (13:4-5);
- The Levites had not received their support and so were having to work back in the fields to support themselves (13:10);
- People were trading on the Sabbath (13:15);
- Intermarrying had resumed (13:23-24).

As an ironic reminder of the people's pledge in 10:39, Nehemiah now asks, 'why is the House of God neglected?' (13:11).

To deal with these, Nehemiah approaches the situations in varying ways:

- He calls sin what it is, 'evil' – 13:7, 17, 27;
- He takes radical action – 13:8-9
- He rebukes those involved – 13:11, 15, 17, 21, 25
- He put God's things back in the centre – 13:9, 12, 19, 30
- He appoints trustworthy men in key areas – 13:13
- He puts plans in place that honour God – 13:13, 19, 22, 30, 31

Following his radical and necessary action, Nehemiah reminds us that all of this is for the honour of God's Name, asking the Lord to 'remember me' (13:14, 22, 31); our ultimate goal being to serve and please the Lord.

### **For further study:**

Study the following passages detailing the activity of the Ammonites & Moabites – should the people have listened to the Lord in Deuteronomy 23:3-4?: Judges 3:13-15, Judges 10:6, Judges 10:9, 1 Sam 12:12, 2 Sam 10, 1 Kings 11:1-7, Ezra 9:1, Zephaniah 2:8, Numbers 22, 2 Sam 8:2,

### **Further Reading/Bibliography – My thanks go to!**

- *The Holy Bible – (first of course!)*
- *The Message of Nehemiah, R Brown – IVP*
- *Overcoming challenges, B Hybels – Zondervan*
- *A Passion for Faithfulness, J Packer – Crossway*
- *Ezra & Nehemiah, D Kidner – IVP*

*"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word"*

*Psalm 119:18*