

Nehemiah 12-13

- Nehemiah has been living and working in Jerusalem for 12 years
 - He's returned Israel to a place of obedience and spiritual strength it hasn't known since the time of Joshua
 - The wall is rebuilt
 - The city is occupied
 - The temple is operating
 - And the people are working and living in submission to God's law under the Covenant
 - In less than 400 years, the Messiah will be sent to Israel
 - Which is just enough time for this reborn nation to strengthen
 - To spread out and repopulate the land
 - Though always under the authority of Gentile nations God sends in fulfillment of His promises to Daniel
 - That Israel would be held under Gentile authority until the Messiah's Second Coming
- So as we conclude the text of Nehemiah tonight, we first read through an accounting of the authority of the priestly line in Israel
 - It's important to establish for future generations of Israel that the line of Aaron is still presiding over the temple activities
 - Arguably, these people were the most important exiles to return to Israel
 - Remember, Ezra stopped during his return to Jerusalem because he noted he didn't have enough priests among the exiles
 - So he recruited more to join him
 - The priests were the one irreplaceable group of individuals within the people of Israel
 - Without this tribe, the temple services would be impossible to conduct according to the Law

- And so the Lord has ensured that the exiles that returned to Jerusalem included not only Levites, but also those in line for priest
 - Including the reigning high priest of Israel
- So Chapter 12 begins with an accounting of priests who lived in Jerusalem
 - This list can be compared to 1 Chronicles, which lists the generations that went into captivity
 - With that cross reference, we can know that the high priest of Israel was the legitimate successor to the high priest in the days before captivity

[Neh. 12:1](#) Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,

[Neh. 12:2](#) Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,

[Neh. 12:3](#) Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,

[Neh. 12:4](#) Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,

[Neh. 12:5](#) Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,

[Neh. 12:6](#) Shemaiah and Joiarib, Jedaiah,

[Neh. 12:7](#) Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah and Jedaiah. These were the heads of the priests and their kinsmen in the days of Jeshua.

[Neh. 12:8](#) The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah who was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving, he and his brothers.

[Neh. 12:9](#) Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brothers, stood opposite them in their service divisions.

[Neh. 12:10](#) Jeshua became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada,

[Neh. 12:11](#) and Joiada became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua.

[Neh. 12:12](#) Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of fathers' households were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;

[Neh. 12:13](#) of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan;

[Neh. 12:14](#) of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph;

[Neh. 12:15](#) of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai;

[Neh. 12:16](#) of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam;

[Neh. 12:17](#) of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai;

[Neh. 12:18](#) of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan;

[Neh. 12:19](#) of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;

[Neh. 12:20](#) of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber;

[Neh. 12:21](#) of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

[Neh. 12:22](#) As for the Levites, the heads of fathers' households were registered in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan and Jaddua; so were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian.

[Neh. 12:23](#) The sons of Levi, the heads of fathers' households, were registered in the Book of the Chronicles up to the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib.

[Neh. 12:24](#) The heads of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers opposite them, to praise and give thanks, as prescribed by David the man of God, division corresponding to division.

[Neh. 12:25](#) Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers keeping watch at the storehouses of the gates.

[Neh. 12:26](#) These served in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.

- In vs.1-7 are listed 22 leaders among the priests who returned with the exiles under Zerubbabel in 537 BC
 - And in vs.8-9 are priests with special duties for singing songs of thanksgiving
 - These names match those provided by Ezra in Chapter 2
 - The high priests are listed in vs.10-11
 - Five successive generations of high priests are listed, tracing back to the high priest that left Israel in captivity
 - The genealogies of these men were especially important to validating the legitimacy of the priests who served in the temple
 - The genealogical records of Israel were protected with tremendous care throughout the history of the nation
 - The records were housed for protection in the temple
 - And these records were updated when sons were registered
- Israel's emphasis on genealogies was instituted as a consequence of God's covenants
 - The nation of Israel inherited the promises of God by birthright
 - Just as the U.S. assigns the privileges of citizenship to anyone born inside our borders
 - Israel extended that honor to those born into the family

- So keeping accurate genealogies was critical for knowing who to acknowledge and who to reject
 - God was working in this fastidiousness to ensure the nation could accurately identify the Messiah when His day came
 - Jesus fit all the genealogical requirements given in the OT
 - And the Jews were able to verify this identity
- From His genealogy, we know Jesus was not of the priestly tribe of Levi, according to the Law of Moses
 - He was of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Kings
 - Nevertheless, Jesus is our High Priest, Scripture says
- And Hebrews explains that He can be our priest, though He doesn't descend from Aaron, because He comes in a better order than that created by the Law

[Heb. 7:23](#) The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing,

[Heb. 7:24](#) but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently.

[Heb. 7:25](#) Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

[Heb. 7:26](#) For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens;

[Heb. 7:27](#) who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

[Heb. 7:28](#) For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever.

- Jesus belongs to an eternal priesthood, one that never had a beginning and will never end
 - Unlike the Aaronic priesthood that began with the Law and ends with the end of the Law in Christ
- In AD 70, the temple was destroyed just as Jesus said would happen
 - The destruction of the greatest structure of its day also resulted in the Jews losing all their genealogical records

- Today, the Jews are unable to trace their ancestry or identify the priests accurately
- Priestly surnames can still be identified, but that is not a perfect measure
- The Lord has ensured that the Jewish people lost their ability to follow the Law, once the Messiah had come and put an end to the Law
 - They lost their ability to sacrifice in the temple
 - They lost their priesthood
 - They lost their ability to trace their lineage back to Jacob
 - This is why Paul said the Law held Israel in custody until the coming of the Seed, that is Christ
 - Once the Messiah came, the nation lost their custodian
- Still, the Covenant that put them under judgment is still in effect
 - Only after they meet its terms as a nation will the nation be relieved of its obligations
 - That day itself comes as a result of the Messiah's work, at the moment of His Second Coming
- Finally, Christians also have a genealogy to be concerned with, but ours is very simple
 - We once traced our genealogy back to Adam
 - But once we were born again by faith, we were adopted into a new family, the family of God
 - And we trace our genealogy to Christ, and no one else

[Neh. 12:27](#) Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres.

[Neh. 12:28](#) So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites,

[Neh. 12:29](#) from Beth-gilgal and from their fields in Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem.

[Neh. 12:30](#) The priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates and the wall.

[Neh. 12:31](#) Then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall, and I appointed two great choirs, the first proceeding to the right on top of the wall toward the Refuse Gate.

[Neh. 12:32](#) Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah followed them,

[Neh. 12:33](#) with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam,

[Neh. 12:34](#) Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah,

[Neh. 12:35](#) and some of the sons of the priests with trumpets; and Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph,

[Neh. 12:36](#) and his kinsmen, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them.

[Neh. 12:37](#) At the Fountain Gate they went directly up the steps of the city of David by the stairway of the wall above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.

[Neh. 12:38](#) The second choir proceeded to the left, while I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of Furnaces, to the Broad Wall,

[Neh. 12:39](#) and above the Gate of Ephraim, by the Old Gate, by the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

[Neh. 12:40](#) Then the two choirs took their stand in the house of God. So did I and half of the officials with me;

[Neh. 12:41](#) and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah, with the trumpets;

[Neh. 12:42](#) and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. And the singers sang, with Jezrahiah their leader,

[Neh. 12:43](#) and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

- Finally, the time comes for the dedication of the wall
 - The events described here probably occurred soon after the renewal of the Covenant
 - Dedications are events intended to celebrate an accomplishment
 - And formally declare it finished
 - In this dedication, the people are going to use two choirs who will stand on the wall and sing praise to the Lord
 - They will use priests to accomplish the singing

- They will stand along the entire length of the city wall, as if they were a part of the wall itself
- They will sing their praise in unison, accompanied by instruments
- In other words, the entire procession will be big, grand and bound to catch the attention of the surrounding peoples who may be working nearby or passing through
- The entire assembly met at the temple for a period of ritual cleansing under the Law to ensure all the priests were eligible to serve the Lord
 - They then separated into two great choirs
 - The first choir climbed to the top of the wall at the Valley Gate and walked around it counterclockwise, forming a ring of voices
 - Then a second group mounted at the same place, but proceeded clockwise around the other side of the wall
 - This is the same wall that Israel's enemies said couldn't hold the weight of a fox
 - But it's plenty strong enough to serve its purpose, so they sang as they went in great joy
- This must have been quite a sight
 - I wonder how long they sang on that day
 - I wonder how many eyes were tearing up as they looked around and saw this marvelous scene
 - I wonder what it sounded like to have so many thousands of voices singing from atop that wall?
 - Besides being a remarkable scene, this moment gives us a beautiful picture of the fruit of God's restoration
 - When God takes rebellion, breaks it and brings it back to Himself, He does so to produce fruit
 - And the fruit He expects is of a particular kind
 - He expects us to become instruments of praise for the sake of His Name before the nations of the world

- First, consider the setting for this moment of praise
 - The priests are declaring the faithfulness of the Lord in building this wall of stones
 - And they declare this from the temple of God, the home of the glory of Israel
 - And they declare it in every direction, North, South, East & West
- Can you see the picture that is fulfilled in us and anyone who is restored by the Lord's kindness?
 - Remember the words of 1 Peter

1 Pet. 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- We are called living stones, by Peter
 - Just as those singers stood atop that wall and became living stones
 - We are called to be living evidence of the restorative work of God
 - Nehemiah didn't come to rebuild the wall, but instead to rebuild a people
 - And as that project came to a close, the people became instruments of praise to the Lord
 - In the same way, the Lord has come to do a work in us
 - So we're called to be instruments of praise to the Lord as we live
 - The Peter goes one step further

1 Pet. 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

1 Pet. 2:10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

- Peter tells us we are all priests to the Lord
- We are set apart to serve the Lord by interceding on behalf of the world

- We are the people of God, and as we were called out of darkness,
 - Now we call others out of darkness as well
 - Finally, we gain our audience by standing up, being willing to stand out and making the most of that opportunity by praising God as we go
 - Some of us may turn to the left while others turn to the right
 - But no matter where we go, the Spirit of God will live in our midst, in our very bodies
 - And we stand as a city on a hill, as Jesus calls us
- You see, God's plan of restoration was never about Israel
 - It was about declaring the Lord's greatness before the nations of the world
 - For Israel to be a city on a hill, declaring the wonder of His works
 - To call the world out of darkness
 - But the people were too distracted by their own sin to truly fulfill that purpose
 - Except for perhaps this one moment
 - There is simply no better moment in Israel's history than this one
 - When all the city was singing to the world of the Lord's glory
 - So as v.43 says, "the joy of Jerusalem is heard from afar"
 - The next time something like this happens in Israel won't come again until the Lord is living and reigning over the world in Jerusalem
 - Then once again, the people of Israel will serve as a beacon on earth, celebrating the Lord's goodness

Zech. 14:9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

Zech. 14:10 All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses.

Zech. 14:11 People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.

- Following the celebration, Nehemiah thought it was probably the right time to ensure the people kept their responsibility to care for the priests, as the Law required

[Neh. 12:44](#) On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served.

[Neh. 12:45](#) For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon.

[Neh. 12:46](#) For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God.

[Neh. 12:47](#) So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required, and set apart the consecrated portion for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the consecrated portion for the sons of Aaron.

- These are the temple services David instituted to support the work of the priests
 - The change from tabernacle to temple brought the need for additional support, since the number of those serving necessarily increased
 - As government grows, so do the taxes to support it
 - So these demands were in keeping with the Law
 - But David and Solomon established the rules for how to accomplish the requirements of the Law
 - These verses are important because they represent the final duties Nehemiah presided over before leaving to return to his duties under the king
 - It was important for Nehemiah to return after being away so long
 - If he waited longer than the time he promised, then he would be judged a rebel to the king
 - The king would naturally be concerned that a man in his position might entertain delusions of grandeur
 - So his return was his duty, and it had to come about

- But when the cat's away, the mice...well, we know the rest

Neh. 13:1 On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God,

Neh. 13:2 because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

Neh. 13:3 So when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.

Neh. 13:4 Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah,

Neh. 13:5 had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

Neh. 13:6 But during all this time I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had gone to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king,

Neh. 13:7 and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God.

- To understand this section, we need to read it backwards, in a sense
 - Nehemiah left the city after 12 years, to return to king Artaxerxes
 - He originally arrived in 444 BC
 - Then after 12 years, Nehemiah leaves in 432 BC
 - He is gone for about a year, before returning to the city again in 431 BC
 - While he was away, the people began to slide back into disobedient behaviors, especially as it related to the corrupting of leaders
 - First, Eliashib the high priest begins to show favor to one of his relatives in a way that violated the David's instructions for the temple
 - The relative is a man we've heard before, Tobiah
 - He is a Jewish Ammonite
 - He was a Jew who had married into an Ammonite family
 - And he became a ruler over the Ammonites, and therefore, an enemy of his own people in Israel

- We've seen him already working to stop the rebuilding of the wall
- But now that the wall has been built, and the city is an attractive place to be, he has wormed his way in by using his family connections
 - And the high priest seems willing to allow it, perhaps to build a stronger alliance
 - But space is tight in the cramped city
 - And a foreigner living among the Jews would not be tolerated by the people
 - So the high priest clears out a storeroom in the temple to make a small apartment for Tobiah
 - Formerly, this space was used for grain storage and other materials and tools used by the priests
 - If Tobiah is now living in the space, then those other items must be stored elsewhere
 - Reducing the space available for the priests to store their food and necessities
 - Clearly, this is not a good situation
- So then, Nehemiah returns to the city to discover Tobiah living in the temple
 - And he is not pleased, of course
 - On that day, he commanded a reading of the Law concerning the prohibition against associating with Ammonites and Moabites
 - This is found in Deut. 23

[Deut. 23:3](#) "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, **[Deut. 23:4](#)** because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

[Deut. 23:5](#) "Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you.

- The Law recounts how on two occasions the Ammonites and Moabites conspired against the Jews while they wandered in the desert
 - In the first case, the people of Israel wished to pass through the land of Edom, but Edom refused
 - This forced Israel into a long and dangerous journey around the Red Sea
 - In the second case, King Balak of Moab feared the people of Israel and tried hiring a prophet, Balaam, to curse the people of God
 - Instead, God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing
- Despite these prohibitions, we know Ruth, a Moabitess, was brought into Israel and into the line of Messiah
 - Ruth was a Moabite, barred by Law from becoming part of Israel
 - By her faith in Israel's God, Ruth was redeemed by Boaz when he married her
 - Her faith removed the curse of the Law against her, and by her marriage to Boaz, she could become a member of the nation
- The prohibition in the Law uses masculine nouns when describing Ammonites and Moabites
 - Women could be allowed in, if they accepted the God of Israel and married a Jewish man
 - Since we know Boaz is a picture of Christ, then the book of Ruth teaches that what Law could not achieve in redeeming the Gentile, faith made possible
 - Ruth was redeemed by Boaz when he made her his wife
 - And the Gentile Church is redeemed by Christ when, by faith, we are made His Bride
 - That's why Paul says to us

[Eph. 2:12](#) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[Eph. 2:13](#) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[Eph. 2:14](#) For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

[Eph. 2:15](#) by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

- But in this moment, we do not see that kind of redemption and reconciliation
 - We see an illegitimate attempt to assemble in conflict with the Law
 - So at the re-reading of this Law, Nehemiah brings the people's mind back to the requirements of God's Word
 - And so they act to remove all the foreigners from in the city
 - Apparently, Tobiah wasn't the only interloper
 - Nehemiah personally takes care of the Tobiah problem

[Neh. 13:8](#) It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room.

[Neh. 13:9](#) Then I gave an order and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned there the utensils of the house of God with the grain offerings and the frankincense.

[Neh. 13:10](#) I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given them, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.

[Neh. 13:11](#) So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts.

[Neh. 13:12](#) All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine and oil into the storehouses.

[Neh. 13:13](#) In charge of the storehouses I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen.

[Neh. 13:14](#) Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.

- He literally threw Tobiah out and all his stuff with him
 - Then, all the proper material was returned to the store house
 - Once again, Nehemiah is instrumental to gaining the people's obedience
- Besides Tobiah, Nehemiah learns that the people had begun to retreat from their promise to support the priests

- The priests who served the people in the temple were not receiving their promised support from the people
- As a result, they had no choice but to return to the fields to make a living for themselves and their family
- This is the inevitable result of God's people muzzling their spiritual ox
- They are only hurting themselves in the long run, by preventing their appointed ministers from devoting their time to that service
- So Nehemiah issues a reprimand against the officials of Israel
 - This was a failure of leadership in the nation
 - The people are sheep, and they need their leaders to direct them into obedience
 - With Nehemiah gone, obedience waned
 - So Nehemiah changes out the leaders, finding men he felt were more trustworthy to enforce the rules
 - Notice, the people go back to tithing without complaint – it's not as though the people rebelled against the idea of tithing
- What lesson can we draw from this incident?
 - Notice that the offense is one of the things the people specifically said they would avoid doing in the future
 - When they renewed the Covenant, they said they wouldn't forsake the priests and temple
 - They wouldn't abuse the Sabbath
 - And they wouldn't intermarry with the Gentiles
 - Yet here, we see them doing the very thing they promised not to do
 - Is obedience in Israel a hopeless goal?
 - Until faith comes in the heart, obedience to Law is always a challenge, certainly

- But the bigger lesson is the need for God's leaders to keep God's Word ever-present before God's people if obedience is to stand a chance
 - Notice that the people were not unwilling to obey the commandment
 - When they heard what the Law said, they immediately recognized what they had to do in removing the foreigners
 - And they seem to fall into line in supporting the priests when the new leaders are appointed
 - But earlier, when the high priest neglected to live according to the Word and failed to teach it, the people drifted
 - This happens anytime leaders set aside the Lord's Word
 - Men will inevitably return to doing what is right in their own eyes
- A key barometer of whether the Word is sufficiently valued and understood among God's people is their degree of tolerance for assembling with the world
 - When we can feel comfortable assembling with the world, then we have lost sight of the Word's call for us to stand apart
 - To be clear, the Bible doesn't command us to cease associating with the world
 - Paul makes clear that we are to associate, so that we may bring the message of the Gospel
 - But associating and assembling are two different things
 - Scripture says that in the last days of the Church, it would fall away from the Word of God, and as a result, the Church would begin to assemble with the world
 - Jesus says

[Matt. 13:31](#) He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field;

[Matt. 13:32](#) and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES."

- As the Kingdom of God has grown over the centuries, in the form of the Church, it has begun to attract the birds of the air
- Birds are often used as a picture of believers and unbelievers
- The sense is, that the tree is big enough to allow both types to rest in its branches
- This is the apostasy of the last days that Paul says will come upon the Church
- How can this be? When the Word of God has become so diminished that it doesn't call us out for who we are

1 Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, **1 Tim. 4:2** by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

- Furthermore, Paul says a few verses later, that the solution is the same antidote that Nehemiah applied

1 Tim. 4:6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

- Constant nourishment on the Word of God and sound doctrine are essential
- This scene also presents a picture of Christ, to a degree
 - If we consider Nehemiah as a picture of the Lord for the sake of this moment, then we can find parallels to Christ's First and Second Coming
 - Just as Nehemiah's first coming was in secret and for the purpose of building a wall of living stones, as we said
 - Then Nehemiah's departure gave opportunity for the leaders of God's people to wander away from the truth
 - And the people were allowed to drift away from God's Word
 - But then at his return, Nehemiah sets all things straight
 - He throws out those who are not his people

- He restores all things to the proper order
- He is an exacting judge in his return
- Consider these statements by Christ regarding his return

[Matt. 24:46](#) "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.

[Matt. 24:47](#) "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

[Matt. 24:48](#) "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,'

[Matt. 24:49](#) and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards;

[Matt. 24:50](#) the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,

[Matt. 24:51](#) and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[Matt. 13:27](#) "The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'

[Matt. 13:28](#) "And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?'

[Matt. 13:29](#) "But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.

[Matt. 13:30](#) 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

[Matt. 25:31](#) "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

[Matt. 25:32](#) "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

[Matt. 25:33](#) and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

- The Lord's return will be met by leaders taking advantage of the people
 - And the people are abused by these leaders
 - The abuse is a failure to feed Christ's sheep
 - For as He said, if you love the Lord, then you will feed His sheep
- But at Christ's return, the world will be separated from among God's people
- As you might expect, the people haven't just forsaken the first promise
 - They have gone back on all three of them
 - Next, they are violating the Sabbath

[Neh. 13:15](#) In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food.

[Neh. 13:16](#) Also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem.

[Neh. 13:17](#) Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day?"

[Neh. 13:18](#) "Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath."

[Neh. 13:19](#) It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the sabbath day.

[Neh. 13:20](#) Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem.

[Neh. 13:21](#) Then I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath.

[Neh. 13:22](#) And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day. For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness.

- The people of Israel were working on the Sabbath day, despite promising to respect it
 - They were doing manual labor and conducting commerce
 - These things were prohibited by the Law
 - Also, the merchants of the surrounding people were allowed to work within the city on the Sabbath
 - But the Law required that the sojourner also cease from working
 - So once again, Nehemiah steps in to stop the abuse of the Law
 - He rebuked the people and the merchants
 - He barred the doors of the city on the Sabbath and arranged for priests to guard the doors
 - And he threatened the traders who collected outside the city on the Sabbath, for they posed a temptation for the people

- In the earlier example, Nehemiah was intent on restoring the people's respect for the holy places God has established
 - Here he is intent on restoring the holy times He had appointed
 - The people were allowing worldliness to erode their commitment to the Lord in these matters
 - And once again, we can blame the leaders who allowed the people to drift away from the Word of God
- Finally, they people disobeyed their third promise against intermarriage

[Neh. 13:23](#) In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab.

[Neh. 13:24](#) 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.

[Neh. 13:25](#) 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.

[Neh. 13:26](#) "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.

[Neh. 13:27](#) "Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?"

[Neh. 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.

[Neh. 13:29](#) Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

[Neh. 13:30](#) Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task,

[Neh. 13:31](#) and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

- Some of the Jews had begun to marry Gentiles
 - And as they married these Gentiles, they began to speak the Gentiles' language
 - In fact, some families were raising kids who lacked the ability to even speak Hebrew
 - This behavior would be the beginning of the end of Israel were it allowed to continue

- So Nehemiah takes his strongest stand yet
 - He physically attacks those who have violated this law
 - He curses them, strikes them and pulls out hair, a painful act designed to cause shame, but it's relatively harmless
 - Finally, he makes them swear by God not to give more family to the Gentiles
 - This kind of promise was punishable by death, so it settled the matter
- Nehemiah uses the example of King Solomon to remind the people that greater men than they have made this same mistake and paid dearly for it
 - So if Solomon couldn't prevent the harm that came from marrying foreign wives, then how could they expect to do so?
 - They should understand the dangers and run from them
 - In fact, we see once more that the high priest had allowed his own son to marry the daughter of one of their chief enemies
 - We can safely assume Sanballat had arranged the marriage to corrupt the people by absorbing them into their own culture
 - The enemy never gives up the fight against God's people
 - He will try force, guile and intimidation
 - And if all that fails, he will tempt us to walk away from obedience to God's Word so that we might become weak, and eventually, we look like a tare
 - It takes leaders who remind us of the Word of God and enforce its provisions to save us from that outcome
- As we reflect on the story of Nehemiah, and its place in the history of the canon, we can see it fit into a familiar pattern
 - Often, when God moves in Israel to accomplish a good purpose, He brings a new Word through a new Leader
 - He brought Noah
 - He brought Moses
 - He brought David

- He brought Nehemiah
- But, He also wants us to understand these men aren't bringing the full solution
 - These men are not the Messiah, though they point to the coming Lord
 - And that point is made in each case by showing how the people failed to turn from their sin, despite the leader's influence
 - Noah's son sinned after the flood
 - Israel in the desert sinned, despite Moses' leadership
 - The people of Israel fell into sin time and time again after David and Solomon
 - And they do that here as well, under Nehemiah
- There is no solution for sin apart from Christ Himself
 - Yet still, the Lord is good to send us leaders like Nehemiah who can call us to live in pleasing ways
 - So that we may receive the blessing of restoration and reward