

14.12.2019 BACKSLIDDEN PEOPLE

“And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!” Nehemiah 13:22

The returning Jews consecrated themselves to God and His will after hearing the reading of the Law and also at the dedication of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. They made a covenant to be faithful to God. They acknowledged that their captivity had been a consequence of unfaithfulness to God and His will for them. They promised to restore Temple worship, keep the Sabbath and separate themselves from the heathen and their practices. This separation included separating from the pagan spouses (Ezra 10, Nehemiah 10).

Nehemiah 13 shows us how easy it is for us to fail at keeping our promises. As long as we trust in ourselves to be faithful to God, no matter how sincere we are, we will always fail. We must always be distrustful of ‘self’ even when doing good, for *‘that which is born of flesh is flesh’ John 3:6.*

I ask, How can I present this matter as it is? The Lord Jesus imparts all the powers, all the grace, all the penitence, all the inclination, all the pardon of sins, in presenting His righteousness for man to grasp by living faith--which is also the gift of God. If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason. EG White: MS 36, 1890

‘God’s work of entire sanctification, which He performs with the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1: 17-20), is able to immerse the soul into a supernatural life that saves the children of God from the futility of self-effort. If it were not for this supernatural provision, our call to manifest the light of Christ’s divine nature would be a source of utter frustration, presenting the sorry spectacle of a sincere idealist constantly thwarted by his own inadequacy.

The cutting off of the flesh-life is something that man cannot do. The fire must come down from heaven and consume the carcass of the flesh before the glory of the Lord can fill the temple of our body. This is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.’ *The Saving Life of Christ: W Ian Thomas*

After the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12), Nehemiah returned to the Persian court (Nehemiah 13:6). When he returns to Jerusalem a few years later (he arrived first around 444 BC and was governor for 12 years before returned to court. His return to Jerusalem is dated at approximately between 430-425 BC). Within these few years (less than a generation), he discovered that time had dulled the Jews’ memory of the great events that marked God’s decisive actions to re-establish his people in the land. The result was the re-appearance of sins they had sworn to renounce (see Nehemiah 10:30-39).

The issues:

1. Non-separation from heathens and heathen practices. 13:1-4
2. Corruption of the Temple by a leader (the High Priest). 13:4-9
3. Neglect of the Temple (the House of God). 13:10-14
4. Desecration of the Sabbath. 13:15-22
5. Unfaithfulness to God. 13:23-31

Nehemiah rebuked them for each of their failings. Each rebuke was followed by a prayer (13:14, 21, 31). The verb translated “**rebuked**” in Nehemiah 13:11 (Heb. *riḇ*, see also 13:17, 25) is typically used in the context of a lawsuit. It was often employed by the prophets to describe God’s dispute with his wayward people who have broken the covenant.

The unfaithfulness extended to include all the people and therefore, the discipline included all the people.

The priests use their holy office to further the interest of the enemy of God (4).
The rulers neglect the house of God (11).

The nobles take the lead in profaning the Sabbath (17).
The people form unholy alliances (23).

Nehemiah and the people read the Law and discovered their sin (13:1-4). Nehemiah responded to this. He refused to allow pagan alliances being practised by leaders (13:5-9). He challenged the people to provide for the Levites and Temple storehouse (13:10-14). He reinstated Sabbath keeping as God had commanded (13:15-22). He confronted sinful relationships (15:23-31).

The prophet Malachi, ministering at about this time, faced many of these same problems: corrupt priests, a treacherous and unfaithful people. He called upon them to be ready for the coming of Messiah, the Sun of Righteousness who would purify them so that they could offer themselves to the Lord *'an offering of righteousness'* (Malachi 4:2; 3:1-3).

Remember me, O my God...(13:14, 22, 31). Nehemiah did not ask for his works to be revealed or rewarded but only that God would remember them. Nehemiah was not seeking personal glory. He was asking God to remember that all his actions were motivated by a deep desire for God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Holiness cannot be maintained in the church when once evil has made itself manifest. Practical holiness of the church can only be maintained by the exercise of discipline that deals with the different issues as they arise. As described in Nehemiah 13, they seem harsh to the worldly mind. Nevertheless, those who seek first the Kingdom of God, His righteousness and His glory recognise the reason for God's discipline.

"My son, do not despise the discipline of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him. For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."... Now no discipline seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:6, 11

'In regard to Israel it was God's purpose to have His house in the city of Jerusalem, in the midst of a people dwelling in His Land. Connected with this purpose are three important principles. With the House, there is the thought of God *dwelling*; with the City, God *ruling*; and with the Nation and the Land, God *blessing*. Where God dwells there God must rule; and when God rules, God blesses. It is thus God's purpose to dwell in the midst of a redeemed people, ruling over them for their blessing.

The Book of Nehemiah presents the story of a remnant of the nation acting in the light of God's original purpose for the whole nation, while waiting for the future fulfilment of the coming of Messiah.

To-day the kingdom of Israel has its spiritual counterpart in the Church. We know that the Church is presented as the house of God (1 Timothy 3:3); and as the city of the living God (Hebrews 12:22). Moreover, believers are viewed as "an holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). So today, we can say, it is God's thought to dwell in the midst of a redeemed people, ruling them for their blessing. God's purpose for the Church will be fully realised in the heavenly Jerusalem.' *H Smith (paraphrased).*

Conclusion:

Like the Jews of old, today the majority of God's people are comfortable in spiritual Babylon. Even when they *'come out Babylon'* they fall into unfaithfulness, making alliances with Babylon and following the practices of spiritual Babylon.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Therefore,

“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Revelation tells us that in the last days only a remnant will truly come out of spiritual Babylon and seek the holiness of Jerusalem. Like Nehemiah, they seek the holiness and glory of God; they live under His rule and authority and seek God’s blessing for His people. They will not fall into unfaithfulness, for they have learnt from the example of ancient Israel that their only hope of righteousness is not in their own strength or sincerity, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. So, they live as Christ lived, by faith and in total dependence upon God.

Though they are faced with opposition and great difficulties, they remain faithful to God’s purpose for their individual lives and for the Church. They are a people who *‘love not their lives unto death’ Revelation 12:11*. They have the faith of Jesus, they do God’s will (keep His commandments) and endure unto the end (Revelation 14:12). Of them it will be said, *“Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” Revelation 19:9*

Additional Note:

Does ‘coming out of Babylon’ mean that we have no interest in the peoples of the world?

In a single word, “No”! Not at all.

We need to recognise that though there are some in the world (Babylon) who have deliberately chosen to be citizens of the kingdom of Satan and have rejected Christ, far more people are ignorant of the great issues involved in the controversy between Christ and Satan.

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:3

God is keenly interested in the salvation of all men. His Son is *‘the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world’*. He wants His House to a house of prayer for all people (see Isaiah 56:1-8). Christ’s great commission to us is *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel.”*

Our task is to be a witness to the inhabitants of Babylon; to tell them the good news that God has translated them from the Kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:12-14).

We are to be **‘light’** – reflecting Christ, the true Light which lightens everyone who is come into the world.

We are to be **‘salt’** – adding savour and reducing moral decay in the society we live in.

As we go the peoples of the world, we must be conscious of needing the power and protection of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:10-18) as Satan will war against us for he does not wish to lose any of his citizens.

The word God spoke to His people before they reached the Promised Land is still true for us today as we wait for the Heavenly Canaan:

“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me; that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” Deuteronomy 4:5, 6
