

Remember (Part 2)

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[0:00] Last week we started the book of Nehemiah's last section by looking at chapter 13 verses 1-9.

Let's go ahead and read verses 4-9 to reset the context. In Nehemiah 13, 4-9, Nehemiah wrote, Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah.

And he had prepared for him a large room where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priest.

But during all of this, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of our God.

And it grieved me bitterly, therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms, and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God with the grain offering and the frankincense.

[1:25] You can see there that Nehemiah clearly told us that the events in the final verses took place well after the wall dedication ceremony. And at least twelve years had passed.

And during that time, Nehemiah went back to Babylon and then later returned to Jerusalem at least once. Guesses for the year of Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem run from 425 B.C. to 420 B.C. And those years are near the end of the reign of King Artaxerxes. So Nehemiah must have been near 65 at that time. And when he returned to Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to address four main issues.

We saw the first issue in verses 4 through 9. And those verses documented compromise. And compromise is what we looked at last week.

You see that's already filled in on your handout. I gave you a freebie to start with on that one. You know, the compromise was letting Tobiah live in the temple precincts. And Tobiah was one of the three most often mentioned opponents of the wall building.

[2:29] He participated in schemes ranging from simply mocking the Jews to trying to lure Nehemiah outside of the city to kill him. We just read again how Nehemiah reacted when he saw what had happened.

He simply threw Tobiah and all of his possessions out. He dumped his possessions outside the door onto the sidewalk. He fumigated the room and then restored the temple articles. So just like that, Tobiah was out on the street.

We know that Nehemiah was a cupbearer and a food taster by profession. But he also knew how to do pest control. We've seen that a few times and we see that again here in these verses.

As we cover verses 10 through 31 tonight, we'll see the other declines that started with the Levite singers, gatekeepers, and priests losing their support. Nehemiah calls on the people to remember how to live according to God's commands.

He also calls on the people to remember what the religious leaders did to defile the priesthood. And he calls on God to remember what Nehemiah himself has done.

[3:35] So let's go ahead and read verses 10 through 31. This will take us to the end of the book. Starting in verse 10, it says, I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them.

For each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to the field. So I contended with the rulers and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and set

them in their place.

Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse, Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe and of the Levites, Padaiah.

And next to them was Hanan the son of Zechariah, the son of Mataniah, for they were considered faithful. And their task was to distribute to their brethren. Remember me, O my God, concerning this.

And do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for its services. In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in sheaves and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

[4:46] And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also who brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah and in Jerusalem.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, What evil thing is this that you do by which you profane the Sabbath day? 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. So it was at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath.

Then I posted some of my servants at the gates so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

Then 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. From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath.

[5:53] 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.

In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

So I contended with them and cursed them, 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, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.

Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel.

Nevertheless, pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of you doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women? And one of the sons of Joadah, the son of Eliash of the priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite.

[7:06] Therefore I drove him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan.

I also assigned duties to the priest and the Levites, each to his service, and to bringing the wood offering and the first fruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good.

We know that the compromise of letting Tobiah live in the temple precinct started the downhill slide, and that compromise led to carelessness.

So carelessness is the second thing we see from this section. And this is the thing that Nehemiah had to correct when he returned, at least one of the four things he had to correct.

If you remember back in chapter 10, verse 39, that was during the covenant renewal process, and the people promised to support the temple workers.

[8:04] Listen to verse 1039 again. It says, The last line of that verse is key.

It says, We will not neglect the house of our God. Yet, in our text tonight, verse 1310 clearly shows that the people no longer are keeping that promise.

Let's read 1310 through 14 again, just to remind ourselves of how far they'd slidden. Those verses say, I also realized that the portions 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.

So I contended with the rulers and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse.

And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse, Shalamiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Padaiah. And next to them was Hanan the son of Zechariah, the son of Mataniah, for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to the brethren.

[9:27] Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for its services. This section is headed carelessness, because nobody except Nehemiah cared enough that the temple workers had lost their support.

And nobody at least cared enough to do anything about it until Nehemiah came along. And we can understand this lack of support to a point. After all, an enemy of God was now living in the very rooms designated to store the support for the temple workers.

Perhaps the people were concerned that the Levites might use their offerings for a sinful purpose, rather than for the support of the Levites and the singers. On the other hand, though, the tithe obligation remained for the people, regardless of the spiritual quality of the leadership.

We know that the tithe was a biblical command. It's a good lesson for us, though, because when the spiritual life of leaders diminishes because of sin or carelessness, God's provision for his work also decreases.

That shows that laxity in one area leads to stagnation and decline in other areas. Unfortunately, the temple workers were the ones who suffered because of this carelessness.

[10:43] The lack of support for them forced the temple workers to leave their temple duties. They had to start working the fields to support their families. Verse 10 tells us that each of the workers had gone back to his field.

And this translation fails to communicate the harshness of the situation. The English Standard Version and the King James Version do a better job of rendering the original Hebrew because both the ESV and the King James say that the temple workers fled.

Does that give you an idea of how they were pretty much driven out of the temple themselves? The Hebrew word there indicates that the Levites were pushed out of their jobs.

And that's the same word that's translated drove in verse 28 of this chapter, which tells about Nehemiah chasing away the son of Eliashib, who had married Sanballat's daughter.

Nehemiah lays the blame where it rightly belongs, and that's on the temple officials. Part of Nehemiah's greatness as a leader was his ability to apportion blame where it belonged and get to the root of the problem.

[11:51] We know that rulers are to use their position to influence people to act righteously, but these rulers weren't doing this. Like many rulers, they used their position for their own gain.

They were more interested in the privilege of their possession than they were in the responsibility of the position. Nehemiah rebuked the temple officials. He reinstated the Levites in their position, and he reestablished the system for collecting tithes.

Additional provisions for the temple had also suffered, and that was probably because of the same reason that the tithe was neglected. Nehemiah moved to correct this abuse too.

He dismissed the old custodians who would have been in charge with Eliashib, and he installed others in their places. The ones he installed were picked because these men were considered faithful.

We see that in verse 13. You also notice that the verses mention Zadok as the scribe, and that may be important. There could have been any number of scribes, of course, but Zadok is called the scribe.

[12:58] Nobody but Ezra has been called the scribe in Nehemiah before this. So most people think that likely means Ezra was no longer in the city. Perhaps he'd returned to Babylon, or maybe he was too old to officiate, or maybe he had even died at that point, but it certainly seems like he had been replaced as the scribe.

We looked at verse 14 already, but it has the short prayer by Nehemiah, and verse 14 says, Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God for its services.

The last chapter of Nehemiah includes several of these on-the-spot prayers by him, and their brief cries heavenward. And we've seen prayers of Nehemiah before, and these short prayers reveal that

Nehemiah was always in a prayerful mode.

He could pray anywhere at any time, and to be this way, he had to be consecrated to God. He must have been very devoted to the Lord to be able to speak with him at any time like this.

He had a close relationship with God, which encouraged him to speak with God at a moment's notice, and we often see him do it. A lot of people criticize Nehemiah for these short prayers, but it's important to remember that he wrote these down in his journal.

[14 : 18] It's quite likely he didn't know they were going to be read by several other people, so you could almost think that we're actually reading his diary here. And that puts a little bit different spin.

On Nehemiah putting that request down, he wasn't putting it out there for people to see. Even though the prayer was short, the prayer gives us other insights about Nehemiah.

The prayer indicated that Nehemiah was concerned about God's recognition and approval.

Nehemiah was serving for God's praise. He wanted God's praise more than the praise of anyone else.

This devotion helped Nehemiah to accomplish much for the glory of God. When men serve to gain God's praise and approval, they will serve their best. If they endeavor to please primarily men, that can corrupt their performance.

We still see that today, of course, right? Nehemiah's prayer also shows the difficulty that he had in his service. We can sense some weariness in contending with the evil and in having the previous reforms tossed aside.

[15 : 26] You'll remember that he had dealt with all of these problems before, and then when he left town, they came back, and now he's having to deal with them again. We know that there are plenty of difficulties in serving God, and these difficulties can weary even the hardest worker, like Nehemiah.

Often the results and appreciation seem small, but we can be encouraged by the writer of Hebrews, because in Hebrews 6.10, the writer says, God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love.

So that's an important lesson for us. Men may forget what we do for God, but God will never forget. And, of course, God is the one who counts anyway.

Unfortunately for Nehemiah, he had to deal with worse things, though, than compromise and carelessness. In the next section of the lesson, we see that Nehemiah had to address commercialism.

So commercialism is the third thing that he faced. This commercialism was inappropriate because it took place on the Sabbath. Dislike of the Sabbath was nothing new in the life of Israel.

[16 : 36] 300 years earlier, the prophet Amos had accused Israel of chafing at the shutting down of business on the Sabbath. You can read about that in Amos 8.5.

150 years earlier, the prophet Jeremiah had described beasts of burden carrying loads in and out of the city on the Sabbath. And that's from Jeremiah 17, verses 19 through 27.

The description we have here in Nehemiah's day, so soon after the reform had come to Jerusalem, is sad and it's graphic. Listen again to Nehemiah 13, verses 15 through 22.

Nehemiah wrote, In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in sheaves and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah and in Jerusalem.

[17 : 42] Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, What evil thing is this that you do by which you profane the Sabbath day? 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. So it was at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut and charged that they must not be opened until after the Sabbath.

Then I posted some of my servants at the gates so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

Then 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. From that time on, they came no more on the Sabbath.

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.

[18:53] We can see that Nehemiah took four actions to address this particular problem. First, he rebuked the nobles who were responsible for the city's life, warning them that because of such abuses, the judgment of God had come down on the people years before.

It was characteristic of Nehemiah to work through those who were officially in charge. In speaking to the nobles in this way, Nehemiah gives them a reason for his reprimand, and he challenges them with their failure to exercise proper responsibility.

He also shows, by means of history, the dire consequences of their failure to lead the people in the paths of righteousness. The nobles really appear apathetic, so you have some carelessness here, too.

Apparently, they're not willing to take decisive action, and that leads to Nehemiah's next action. We know that Nehemiah can be decisive when he wants to be, and he's going to be decisive here again.

The second thing he did was that he locked the gates on the Sabbath, placing some of his own men over them. So you can see that the concept of a lock-in actually is a biblical concept.

[20:08] He's locked the people in the city. So this was a practical device by a practical man. If the gates could not be opened, then obviously no merchandise could flow into the city through them.

Make it kind of hard to buy anything, wouldn't it, if nobody can get in. Nehemiah could give these orders about shutting the gates on the Sabbath because he was still the governor of Judah.

He had the authority to shut the gates, and unlike the rulers who we saw earlier who did nothing about the unclean temple, Nehemiah used the power of his governorship to promote righteousness.

Third, when the merchants, probably the merchants from Tyre, camped outside Jerusalem hoping for a change in the Sabbath regulations or perhaps looking for a way around them, Nehemiah threatened them with forceful action if he did not move on, or if they did not move on.

He prevented temptation from hanging around the city's perimeter. It says once or twice the merchants spend the night outside the city. Some writers believe that the noise they created brought on Nehemiah's warning in verse 19.

[21:20] Nehemiah's language here of lay hands on you didn't involve Nehemiah in fistfights with the merchants. As governor, he was threatening their arrest if they violated his orders.

Think about when the apostles were preaching at the temple in the New Testament and talked about the religious leaders laying hands on them. That was one way to describe being arrested.

The merchants heeded his warning. Verse 21 tells us, from that time on, they came no more on the Sabbath. So it's interesting that when Nehemiah speaks, they pay attention to that.

They obviously know that he means what he says. The fourth thing he did is he instructed the Levites to purify themselves and then take over the task of guarding the city gates on the Sabbath. He wanted this to be the Levites' responsibility. He probably did that for a couple reasons. One, he knew that he and his men would not always be around to do it for them.

[22:18] And also, enlisting the Levites in the task and ensuring they caught its spiritual nature by urging them to purify themselves before doing it reinforced the notions that the city gates and the Levites' task in guarding them were holy things.

Essentially, Nehemiah's extending the holy space of the temple to encompass the whole city. This was really motivational leadership at its best sort.

Nehemiah is urging them to engage in a difficult task, one that's liable to bring a measure of disdain from the merchants. And he reminds them to do that by recalling that they're serving the Lord and not serving themselves.

We know that personal purity is a vital prerequisite for serving in God's work. And we see that Nehemiah asked them to purify themselves too before they took on this task.

Today, though, this requirement is not given a lot of attention. We know, though, that a lack of purity will greatly hinder God's work. And that leads to a couple of questions.

[23:22] One is, why restrict the liberty of the Jews? And if it was so important for them to keep the Sabbath, why isn't it binding on us today? The reason is that the Sabbath was a day of rest.

As early as Genesis 2-2, it symbolized cessation from exertion and work. In ancient Israel, the seventh day of the week, Saturday was set aside as a holy day.

Work on that day was expressly forbidden. And the keeping of the Sabbath was a sign between a covenant-keeping God and his people. The whole history of the Jewish Sabbath was designed to serve as an illustration for us.

It dramatized the spiritual rest into which we may enter when we cease from our own work after holiness and rest in the provision that God has made for us in Christ. The reason for the legalistic enforcement of the Sabbath in the Old Testament was to preserve God's example intact for us. So, we remember that things done in the Old Testament were served as examples for us, and we see that here, too. But think about how it relates to our day.

[24 : 36] Today, it's difficult to tell Sunday from any other day of the week when we see the activities of most of the people in our land, and sometimes even the activities of the members of our churches.

We need to remember that Sunday is not a Christian Sabbath, but it is a special day which was made so by the glorious resurrection of Christ from the grave. Every time we gather on Sunday, we're remembering the resurrection, not just on Resurrection Sunday once a year.

No doubt there have been a lot of well-meaning but mistaken efforts to insist on rigid observance of the Sabbath-type day, but the need for a seventh-day of rest is impressed on both our physical and our spiritual nature.

And the important thing to remember is that devout hearts joyfully will find their best rest in Christian worship and service. The early church made a special day out of the first day of the week, and they set the precedent for us.

Those who are devoted to the Lord will see the wisdom, both physically and spiritually, of having Sunday be a far different day than the other days of the week. The greatness of the Sabbath sin in our text and in our society emphasizes the greatness of the decline in spiritual devotion that we see across both Israel and our nation today.

[25 : 58] The final section of verse 22 has the second of Nehemiah's short prayers in this chapter. It's very similar to the one we looked at earlier. He said, Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of your mercy.

So it's similar, but there's something we really need to notice about this because the feature that's especially significant about this prayer is Nehemiah's plea for mercy.

Nehemiah had done great and wonderful deeds in reforming the behavior of the Jews, but he does not seek to be spared because of his good works. He pleads the mercy of God for his sparing.

We can see a gospel message here. Just like Nehemiah, we may do wonderful deeds of kindness and a moral reformation, but they will never save us.

No matter how many good deeds we've done, Christ still needed to die for us. The Apostle Paul stated it well when he said, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.

[27 : 05] And of course, that's a piece of Titus 3.5. The only merit that will save us is the merit of the work of Christ on Calvary. We should never plead our own merit for salvation or for being spared from any divine judgment.

We should always plead the mercy of God. Our merit is never enough to spare us, but his mercy is enough to spare any sinner, no matter what they've done, from judgment.

So we've reminded ourselves of the compromise, we've studied the carelessness, and we've studied the commercialism. In the last nine verses of Nehemiah, we see the corruption.

So corruption is the fourth thing he dealt with. These verses give us two examples of how Israel's decline had corrupted the spiritual life of the nation.

The first is marriages with pagans, and those marriages involve the general population. Looked at verses 23 through 27 again.

[28 : 07] Nehemiah wrote, In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

So I contended with them and cursed them, 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, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.

Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel.

Nevertheless, pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women? As we discussed last week, foreigners were always allowed into Israel if they renounced their pagan lifestyle and began following the true God.

Anyone from the pagan nations who truly wanted to worship the Lord was allowed. As we mentioned last week, the biblical Ruth is a prime example of that. Ruth was from Moab, and she was welcomed readily into Israel.

[29 : 26] She married Boaz, an Israelite, and even became part of the line of Christ. So the issue is allegiance rather than nationality. The women from Ammon, Moab, and Ashdod, who the Jews were marrying here, were all ungodly women.

They were enemies of God's people and God's work, and they were addicted to heathen idol worship. While confronting the offending Jews, Nehemiah cites the condemnation of history. He points to the wisest man of all time and says, in effect, do you expect to fare any better than he did when he committed this sin? Solomon's marriages ruined him and also led to the dividing of the kingdom of Israel.

His unholy marriages caused a split in Israel's kingdom, which lasted for several hundred years. We see in these verses tonight that half of the children of these inappropriate marriages did not know even how to speak the Jews' language.

And we'll see shortly that the problem extended upward into the families of even the leaders of the city. The problem got Nehemiah so angry that he not only confronted them and cursed them, it says he beat some of them and pulled out their hair.

[30 : 41] Cursing in this context involves both the strong rebuking of the sin and an invoking of divine curse on the sinner. Sometimes people need a strong verbal rebuking for their sin and an awareness that their sin is under a divine curse.

Men often mock the seriousness of sin, but when a sinner truly realizes that a divine curse is upon that sin, he will run to the throne of grace in repentance. So sometimes the best thing we can do for somebody is to point out how their sin puts them at risk for the wrath of God.

When it talks about Nehemiah striking the people, it likely would be meaning that he ordered an official beating inflicted by government order such as instructed by the law in Deuteronomy 25. Nehemiah may have whipped these people themselves, but most likely he had others do it based upon his orders. The eyestruck language in our text doesn't necessarily mean that he did it himself, but he ordered it himself.

So in effect, he was the one striking them even if he didn't hit them personally. In another act of punishment, it says Nehemiah plucked off the hair of some of the offenders in the mixed marriage problem.

[31 : 56] The Hebrew word translated pulled out in our text literally means to peel off or pluck out or to polish and make bald. So Nehemiah could have done this to the culprits themselves, but just as in the case of the striking, he more likely ordered others to do it.

And the purpose of removing the hair of the head or beard was both to bring great disgrace upon the guilty and also to show that person and show his sins to the people because hair, especially the beard, was a great honor to men in those days.

The actions here will always be too strong for some people who never want to deal with sin in such a forceful manner, but Nehemiah's strong action in evicting Tobiah, his strong action against the merchants and now his strong action involved in those with improper marriages was the only language that these sinful people understood about their evil.

Sometimes we need to speak to evil people in the language that they understand if we're ever going to get them to see the evil of their ways. The second example of corruption is the corruption of the priesthood.

We see that in verses 28 and 29 and this corruption was also caused by a pagan marriage. 28 and 29 say, And one of the sons of Joadah, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat, the Horonite.

[33 : 25] Therefore, I drove him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Do you remember Sanballat, the Horonite?

He was one of the cohorts of Tobiah. In fact, he was often the ringleader of all of the problems caused for the Jews.

And you can see why Nehemiah would be so upset that somebody had married into that family, especially somebody from Israel. So in a third short prayer, Nehemiah turns over the guilty priest to God for judgment.

These priests had defiled the priesthood by their marriages and they deserved to be turned over to God. The law gave the priests some very strict standards for selecting wives.

You can read about that in Leviticus chapter 21. And the high priest was given even stricter requirements. By marrying pagan women, these disobedient priests not only failed to keep the laws for the priests about marriage, they also broke the laws of marriage for the laymen.

[34:33] In verses 30 and 31, Nehemiah ends the book by summarizing how he dealt with the problems in the priesthood. He says, therefore I cleanse them of everything pagan.

I also assign duties to the priest and the Levites each to his service and to bringing the wood offering and the first fruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good.

Once more, Nehemiah shows his desire for divine approval and praise. Nehemiah was unconcerned about whether or not men remembered him for his holy stand against evil.

He was only concerned that God did. That brings us to the end of the book of Nehemiah. So as we look back over the material we've covered, we should compare this chapter with the signing of the covenant in Nehemiah chapter 10.

There the people pledged themselves to maintain the house of God, to provide for the priesthood, to preserve the Sabbath, and to abstain from intermarriage with the heathen.

[35:37] We see here, though, that during Nehemiah's first administration that these regulations were adhered to, but here, as soon as he left for Babylon, spiritual decline set in, and these were the things that they are not doing.

So now they were not doing the things that they promised to do. So this is a good reminder for us of how quickly spiritual decline can set in if we allow it. In comparing the situation of Nehemiah's time with our own, we see that there's a marked parallel because we too need capable leaders, and Nehemiah provides our leaders with an example to follow.

He was committed to practicing the truth, and this gave him a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. It also gave him the capacity to take decisive action.

When he acted, it was with courage based upon conviction. Nehemiah always began by working through existing leaders. We saw that tonight in verses 11, 17, and 25.

But where the leadership was inadequate, he took steps to replace it with reliable personnel. When faced with moral apathy and spiritual indifference, he exercised righteous indignation.

[36:51] Nehemiah lived his entire life in the presence of the Lord. He was conscious of God's eye upon him, and he did everything with the view of receiving God's approval. Since the first lesson of this book, we've talked about how Nehemiah would show us the importance of three things.

Do you remember what those three things are? Prayer is one of them. We said that Nehemiah would remind us to pray. We also said that Nehemiah would teach us to plan.

And the last thing we said that Nehemiah would teach us was to persevere. And he definitely did all of those things. In fact, we see all three of those things still being done by him in this last chapter.

Nehemiah had no other plans for his life than to do what God had for him to do. He could have said with Jesus, not as I will, but as you will. And that quote from Jesus comes from Matthew 26, 39.

Nehemiah clearly saw the ultimate goals and the objectives leading to them. He never deviated from any of them, even for a moment. The problems Nehemiah faced were all different, he did not have standard pat answers for the problems.

[38:03] He handled each problem wisely with the wisdom that came from God. Because Nehemiah was serving God and not man and because he knew that the purposes of God will always ultimately triumph, Nehemiah never was afraid to act boldly.

His boldness left his enemy stammering, confounded, and in awe. We saw several times in this chapter where Nehemiah asked God to remember him.

So did God answer Nehemiah's prayers for God to remember him? That's exactly right. God remembered Nehemiah so much that God included Nehemiah's personal memoirs in Scripture for us.

We are the ones, though, who need to be urged to remember Nehemiah. We need to remember his faith and his great leadership characteristics. This final section also teaches us something about the people.

In spite of all of the efforts of the governor and Ezra before him, the people of God are still people and sinful people at that. The ending is depressing given the flories of the previous chapters.

[39 : 13] You know, it would have made more sense for Nehemiah to stop at chapter 12 and end on a high note, but he was honest enough to say how the country had backslidden in the time that he was gone.

None of this backsliding, though, should discount what Ezra and Nehemiah did, but it does demonstrate the fickleness of the people of God. Despite the location of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Bible, this actually is Scripture's last record of history until the coming of John the Baptist.

So the ending sets up the need for a true Israelite whose word is never broken. Israelites in Nehemiah's day were all too capable of making covenants only to break them, but Jesus, in contrast, was obedient even to the point of death.

The one who sits on the throne is called faithful and true in Revelation 9-11, and we may be prone to wander and stray, but Jesus is a rock. Listen to Romans 9-33.

That verse says, As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense, and whoever believes on him will not be put to shame.

[40 : 22] .! Thank you.