

Happily Ever After?

– Nehemiah 13

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

Nehemiah 13:1-14 – ‘...by providing him a room in the courts of God’s house.’

- How can we be tempted to allow compromise and let the enemy into our lives?
- What practical steps can we take to keep our temple of God a holy and sacred dwelling place for the Holy Spirit?

Nehemiah 13:15-22 – “What is this evil you are doing—profaning the Sabbath day?”

- Do you prioritise your time with God: personal devotional time, Life Group, Sunday Mornings etc...?
- How do you make time to rest in Christ? What does your ‘Sabbath’ look like?

Nehemiah 13-23-31 – ‘Why then should we hear about you doing all this terrible evil and acting unfaithfully...’

- What temptations do you regularly battle with? How can you learn from the past to prevent making the same mistakes?
- What compromises are you tempted by? Will you let Christ perfect your heart and remove these compromises?

Sermon Overview (Happily Ever After?)

In the history of Israel, there is no occasion quite like this in terms of revival; the move of God - restoring truth and restoring worship. They have dedicated themselves to reading God’s Word and to obey it. This has all culminated in a great celebration and joy in chapter 12. This final chapter follows on, at a time of closeness to God and His commands, we should learn from the Israelites actions, and Nehemiah’s response.

All of us hope for the ‘happily ever after’ conclusion to the story. If the account of Nehemiah finished in chapter 12 we would be satisfied, things were tough, but the Israelites overcame, and it all worked out well. Yet, the last chapter of this story does not end with this happy ending we all long to see. Instead, Nehemiah returns to find compromise in Jerusalem. This book ends with the recognition that although Nehemiah had done his best – and had done a great job – he was impotent to change the hearts of God’s people. One greater than Nehemiah is needed; one who could not only teach the law of God - but write it on their very hearts. Nehemiah did a good job – but only Christ is able to fulfil the ‘happily ever after’.

House of God Compromised – Perfected in Christ (verses 6-9).

When Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem he finds Tobiah settled in the house of God. The same Tobiah who had mocked and persecuted the Jews as they rebuilt the wall – the one who had been named an ‘enemy of Israel’ was not only tolerated, but has been brought into the very heart of Jerusalem. A place set aside for worship – for singing, for praise, for adoration of God – a sacred and holy place. In the middle of this an enemy – a deceiver and liar – has worked his way in.

Nehemiah purges the house of God of Tobiah’s baggage. Throwing out all of Tobiah’s belongings, the House of God is once more filled with all that is required for the House of Worship and Prayer. This seems reminiscent of Jesus as He cleared the temple of the corruption and compromise that had been brought in. The House of God should be the home of Worship and Prayer, not of thieves, liars and robbers. The enemy of God will do all he can to worm his way in, to undermine true Worship of God.

The House of God is no longer contained in a building. The home of worship and prayer is now in a new temple for the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 6:19-20**). We have become the dwelling place of God. Each of our hearts is a sacred, holy. Don’t, therefore, let the enemy come in. The key is not just kicking Tobiah out - but seeing that this room in God’s House is filled once again with the articles devoted to the worship of God. It’s a start to stop the thing that’s causing the compromise – it’s a great start to kick the sin out - but you must see that the storerooms of your heart are filled with something greater – the Holy Spirit (**Eph 5:17-20**).

Sabbath Compromised – Perfected in Christ (verses 15-18).

Nehemiah discovers all kinds of work and trade happening on the day that is set aside for rest and worship. Despite all the other evils committed in Israel’s history, it is the profaning of the Sabbath that resulted in the exile according to verse 18. Nehemiah considers the Sabbath to be an important – and God also considers it important. The Sabbath reflects God. In creation, God worked for 6 days, and rested on the seventh. Work is good – but God established the seventh day as rest, something good in creation.. The enemy seeks to spoil this creation, and promotes restlessness - a constant working, a constant pursuit to gain money, power and respect.

Jesus also got angry at the treatment of the Sabbath (**Mrk 3:1-6**). It’s more than just not working, and it’s more than just not trading. Sabbath is about finding your rest and healing in God; stopping the usual rhythm of life to take time to enjoy the comfort of being a creature cared for by the Creator. The goal of Sabbath is not legalism and duty, it is rest in Christ. Jesus perfects the Sabbath for us: ‘come to me, come to me’. It might just be that you are spiritually dry and fatigued, because you have worked so hard, that you are physically exhausted. We need to Sabbath- we need to find our rest in Christ!

Marriage Compromised – Perfected in Christ (verses 23-28)

Nehemiah says that by marrying ‘foreign women’ they are acting ‘unfaithfully against our God’. In other words - the issue is adultery, which drifts into idolatry. This is precisely the same pattern that saw the Israelites exiled in the first place. History is repeating itself. Nehemiah ends with a plea to God: “Remember me – remember I tried my best”.

At the end of this book we realise – despite all the good that Nehemiah did – the Israelites need someone who is greater. They need one who is able to rebuild; not rebuilding walls of brick and mortar, but to rebuild hearts. We too cry for this Saviour who would rebuild our hearts. To remove our compromise, to restore our Sabbath, to remove idols and restore our faithfulness. We still await the end of the story, the longed for ‘happily ever after’. We too are crying out for Jesus, to return: ‘the Spirit and the bride say come Lord Jesus’. Come and perfect your house, perfect our rest, perfect your bride.