
NEHEMIAH 13: 1 On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that an Ammonite and a Moabite should not enter into the assembly of God forever,

The law is read, which commands that the Ammonite and Moabite should be separated from the congregation, on which they separate all the mixed multitude, Neh 13:1-3. Eliashib the high priest having not only joined opinion with Sanballat, but being also allied to Tobiah the Ammonite, and having given him some of the chambers in the court of the house of God, Neh 13:4, Neh 13:5; Nehemiah casts out the goods of Tobiah, and purifies the chambers, Neh 13:6-9. He rectifies several evils; and the people bring the tithes of all things to the treasuries, Neh 13:10-12. He appoints treasurers, Neh 13:13, Neh 13:14; finds that the Sabbaths had been greatly profaned by buying and selling, and rectifies this abuse, Neh 13:15-22; finds Jews that had married strange wives; against whom he testifies, and expels one of the priests who had married the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite, Neh 13:23-29. He cleanses them from all strangers, makes a final regulation, and prays for God's mercy to himself, Neh 13:30, Neh 13:31.

Verse 1

On that day - I am quite of Calmet's mind that the transaction detailed in this chapter did not immediately succeed the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem. It is most likely that, when this dedication was ended, Nehemiah returned to Babylon, as himself particularly marks, Neh 13:6, for he did return in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes; and then, after certain days, supposed to be about the term of one year, he got leave to return to Jerusalem to see how matters were conducted: and there he found the evils which he mentions in this chapter, and which he redressed in the manner himself describes. See the introduction to this book.

Should not come into the congregation - That is, Ye shall not form any kind of matrimonial alliance with them. This, and this alone, is the meaning of the law.

NEHEMIAH 13: 2 because they didn't meet the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, to curse them: however our God turned the curse into a blessing.

NEHEMIAH 13: 3 It came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

Verse 3

They separated from Israel all the mixed multitude - They excluded all strange women, and all persons, young and old, who had been born of these illegal connections.

NEHEMIAH 13: 4 Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the rooms of the house of our God, being allied to Tobiah,

Verse 4

Eliashib the priest - Perhaps this was a different person from Eliashib the high priest; but there is no indubitable evidence that he was not the same. If he was high priest, he was very unfaithful to the high charge which he had received; and a reproach to the priesthood. He had married his grandson to Sanballat's daughter: this produced a connection with Tobiah, the fast friend of Sanballat; in whose favor he polluted the house of God, giving him one of the chambers for his ordinary residence, which were appointed for the reception of the tithes, oblations, etc., that came to the house of God.

NEHEMIAH 13: 5 had prepared for him a great room, where before they laid the meal offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the grain, the new wine, and the oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the wave offerings for the priests.

NEHEMIAH 13: 6 But in all this, I was not at Jerusalem; for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king: and after certain days asked I leave of the king,

Verse 6

Was not I at Jerusalem - Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, and remained there till the thirty-second year, twelve years: then returned to Babylon, and staid one year; got leave to revisit his brethren; and found matters as stated in this chapter.

NEHEMIAH 13: 7 and I came to Jerusalem, and understood the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing him a room in the courts of God's house.

NEHEMIAH 13: 8 It grieved me severely: therefore I threw all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the room.

Verse 8

I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah - He acted as Jesus Christ did when he found the courts of the Lord's house profaned: He overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of those who sold doves.

NEHEMIAH 13: 9 Then I commanded, and they cleansed the rooms: and there brought I again the vessels of God's house, with the meal offerings and the frankincense.

NEHEMIAH 13: 10 I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them; so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled everyone to his field.

Verse 10

The portions of the Levites had not been given - Hence we find they were obliged to abandon the sacred service, and betake themselves to cultivate the land for their support. This was the fault of the rulers, who permitted all these abuses.

NEHEMIAH 13: 11 Then I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is God's house forsaken?" I gathered them together, and set them in their place.

Verse 11

Why is the house of God forsaken? - They had all solemnly promised, Neh 10:39, that they would never forsake the house of their God; but, alas, how soon is this forgotten! Nehemiah used their own words here by way of reproof.

NEHEMIAH 13: 12 Then brought all Judah the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the treasuries.

NEHEMIAH 13: 13 I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were counted faithful, and their business was to distribute to their brothers.

Verse 13

They were counted faithful - They were reported to me as persons in whom I could confide; they had been steady in God's ways and work, while others had been careless and relaxed.

NEHEMIAH 13: 14 Remember me, my God, concerning this, and don't wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its observances.

Verse 14

Wipe not out my good deeds - If thou wert strict to mark what is done amiss, even my good deeds must be wiped out; but, Lord, remember me in thy mercy, and let my upright conduct be acceptable to thee!

NEHEMIAH 13: 15 In those days saw I in Judah some men treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day in which they sold food.

Verse 15

Treading wine-presses - The Sabbath appears to have been totally disregarded.

NEHEMIAH 13: 16 There lived men of Tyre also therein, who brought in fish, and all kinds of wares, and sold on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

NEHEMIAH 13: 17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, and profane the Sabbath day?"

Verse 17

I contended with the nobles - These evils took place through their negligence; and this I proved before them.

NEHEMIAH 13: 18 Didn't your fathers do thus, and didn't our God bring all this evil on us, and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

NEHEMIAH 13: 19 It came to pass that, when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut, and commanded that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. I set some of my servants over the gates, that no burden should be brought in on the Sabbath day.

Verse 19

When the gates - began to be dark - After sunset on Friday evening he caused the gates to be shut, and kept them shut all the Sabbath; and, as he could not trust the ordinary officers, he set some of his own servants to watch the gates, that no person might enter for the purpose of traffic.

NEHEMIAH 13: 20 So the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside of Jerusalem once or twice.

Verse 20

So the merchants - lodged without Jerusalem - They exposed their wares for sale on the outside of the walls.

NEHEMIAH 13: 21 Then I testified against them, and said to them, "Why do you stay around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on, they didn't come on the Sabbath.

Verse 21

I will lay hands on you - I will imprison every man of you. This had the desired effect; they came no more.

NEHEMIAH 13: 22 I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember to me, my God, this also, and spare me according to the greatness of your loving kindness.

Verse 22

Spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy - By some Nehemiah has been thought to deal with God too much on the principle of merit. That he wished God to remember him for good, is sufficiently evident; and who does not wish the same? But that he expected heaven because of his good deeds, does not appear. Indeed, the concluding clause of this verse proves the contrary, and shows that he expected nothing from God but through the greatness of his mercy. Shame on those who, with this evidence before them, brand this good man with the epithet of workmonger! a man who, in inward holiness, outward usefulness, and genuine love to God and man, was worth ten score of such self-called believers.

NEHEMIAH 13: 23 In those days also saw I the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab:

NEHEMIAH 13: 24 and their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.

Verse 24

Half in the speech of Ashdod - There were children in the same family by Jewish and Philistine mothers. As the Jewish mother would always speak to her children in Hebrew or Chaldee, so they learnt to speak these languages; and as the Ashdod mother would always speak to her children in the Ashdod language, so they learnt that tongue. Thus there were, in the same family, children who could not understand each other; half, or one part, speaking one language, and the other part another. Children of different wives did not ordinarily mingle together; and the wives had separate apartments. This is a better explanation than that which intimates that the same child spoke a jargon, half Ashdod and half Hebrew.

NEHEMIAH 13: 25 I contended with them, and cursed them, and struck certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves.

Verse 25

I contended with them - Proved the fact against these iniquitous fathers, in a legal assembly.

And cursed them - Denounced the judgments of God and the sentence of the law upon them.

Smote certain of them - Had them punished by whipping.

And plucked off their hair - Had them shaven, as a mark of the greatest ignominy.

And made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give - Caused them to bind themselves by an oath, that they would make no intermarriages with those who were not of the seed of Israel.

NEHEMIAH 13: 26 Didn't Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, and he was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless foreign women caused even him to sin.

Verse 26

Did not Solomon - Have you not had an awful example before you? What a heavy curse did Solomon's conduct bring upon himself and upon the people, for a conduct such as yours?

NEHEMIAH 13: 27 Shall we then listen to you to do all this great evil, to trespass against our God in marrying foreign women?"

Verse 27

Shall we then hearken unto you - If God spared not Solomon, who was so much beloved of Him, shall we spare you, who by your conduct are bringing down God's judgments upon Israel?

NEHEMIAH 13: 28 One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.

Verse 28

One of the sons of Joiada - This was Manasseh, brother of Jaddua, son of Joiada, and grandson of Eliashib the high priest.

I chased him from me - Struck him off the list of the priests, and deemed him utterly unworthy of all connection and intercourse with truly religious people.

NEHEMIAH 13: 29 Remember them, my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.

Verse 29

Because they have defiled the priesthood - God, therefore, will remember their iniquities against them, and punish them for their transgressions. These words of Nehemiah are to be understood declaratively.

NEHEMIAH 13: 30 Thus I cleansed them from all foreigners, and appointed duties for the priests and for the Levites, everyone in his work;

NEHEMIAH 13: 31 and for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the first fruits. Remember me, my God, for good.

Verse 31

For the wood-offering - This was a most necessary regulation: without it the temple service could not have gone forward; and therefore Nehemiah mentions this as one of the most important services he had rendered to his nation. See Neh 10:34.

Remember me, O my God, for good - This has precisely the same meaning with, O my God, have mercy upon me! and thus alone it should be understood.

Of Nehemiah the Jews speak as one of the greatest men of their nation. His concern for his country, manifested by such unequivocal marks, entitles him to the character of the first patriot that ever lived. In the course of the Divine providence, he was a captive in Babylon; but there his excellences were so apparent, that he was chosen by the Persian king to fill an office the most respectable and the most confidential in the whole court. Here he lived in ease and affluence; he lacked no manner of thing that was good; and here he might have continued to live, in the same affluence and in the same confidence: but he could enjoy neither, so long as his people were distressed, the sepulchres of his fathers trodden under foot, the altars of his God overturned, and his worship either totally neglected or corrupted. He sought the peace of Jerusalem; he prayed to God for it; and was willing to sacrifice wealth, ease, and safety, and even life itself, if he might be the instrument of restoring the desolations of Israel. And God, who saw the desire of his heart, and knew the excellences with which he had endowed him, granted his request, and gave him the high honor of restoring the desolated city of his ancestors, and the pure worship of their God. On this account he has been considered by several as an expressive type of Jesus Christ, and many parallels have been shown in their lives and conduct.

I have already, in several notes, vindicated him from all mercenary and interested views, as well as from all false notions of religion, grounded on human merit. For disinterestedness, philanthropy, patriotism, prudence, courage, zeal, humanity, and every virtue that constitutes a great mind, and proves a soul in deep communion with God, Nehemiah will ever stand conspicuous among the greatest men of the Jewish nation, and an exemplar worthy to be copied by the first patriots in every nation under heaven.

It has already been observed that, in the Jewish canon, Ezra and Nehemiah make but one book; and that both have been attributed, but without reason, to the same author: hence the Syriac version ends with this colophon - The end of the book of Ezra, the scribe, in which are contained two thousand three hundred and sixty-one verses.