

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

NEHEMIAH 10-13

In 1970 [Stevie Wonder](#) released a hit song entitled, “**Signed, Sealed, Delivered.**” “Here I am baby...*signed, sealed, delivered...I’m yours!*”

This is what the Hebrew leaders declare to God in Nehemiah 10.

After hearing Ezra read God’s Word, and the Levites recount their history, the Jewish leaders take an oath and make a covenant to be fully devoted to God.

We’re told in the last verse of chapter 9, “**And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it.**”

It was as if they said to God, “*signed, sealed, delivered...I’m yours!*”

Verse 1, “**Now those who placed their seal on the document were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah...**” When members of the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence their president, John Hancock, signed his name first. The fiery Hancock penned his signature in big, bold, oversized letters.

He said he wanted King George to be able to read it without his spectacles...

When the Jewish leaders signed this declaration, Nehemiah went first - and I wonder if he signed his name as large as John Hancock? He was certainly as passionate! Verses 2- 27, list the rest of the signers - 83 names in all.

Verse 28, “**Now the rest of the people - (and those who worked in the Temple), and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives... sons.... daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding... joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes:**” They ask God to bless obedience and curse disobedience. They take an oath to tie their future to the will of God.

And God brings two issues to the forefront of the people’s hearts. The first is **separation** – the second is **participation**. *And these two issues are vital to us...*

Hey, if we really want to live committed to Jesus we need to *separate* ourselves from the evil influences around us – and *participate* in the activities... and support the institutions... that will strengthen our faith. The key is *separate* and *participate*.

First, the Jews should **separate**. “**To watch out with whom you hang out...**”

Verse 30, “**We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons...**” In essence, they stopped sleeping with the enemy. They stopped intermingling their lives and families with pagans.

As we’ve talked about so often this applies to believers

marrying unbelievers. When a Christian marries a non-Christian he enters a perpetual wrestling match.

“Marry an unbeliever, and you’ll have the devil as a father-in-law.”

But beyond marriage, verse 30 teaches us that we need to be careful about any entanglement with unbelievers. How many Christians have betrayed their commitment to Jesus after adopting the wrong circle of friends?

She was an outspoken Christian until she made the cheerleading squad.

Or he was an on-fire believer until he got that big promotion.

Or they were actively involved in church until they joined the country club.

Understand, I don’t advocate isolationism. How can we reach unbelievers if we don’t befriend them, and interact with them? Jesus was called **“a friend of sinners”**.

The kind of separation we should maintain is not *avoidance*, but *attachment*. You shouldn’t avoid interacting with the world around you – just don’t get attached.

Vance Havner put it this way, **“We are not to be isolated but insulated. Moving in the midst of evil, but untouched by it...”** Keep a healthy separation.

But separation is only half of a believer’s duty. Separate and *participate*... **exercise your faith – do your part – give your best – pay your tithes.**

In verse 31 Nehemiah tells the Jews to **exercise their faith.**

“If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt.”

The Jews promised to reverence the *Sabbath day* and the *Sabbath year*.

In Exodus, God told Israel to set aside *one day in seven to rest their body*, and *one year in seven to rest the land*. Both *soul* and *soil* need to be replenished.

But both laws require faith... To take off a year, or a day to worship God - means I'm trusting God to do more with my six than I could to with seven.

I think of Chick-fil-A restaurants... They honor the same biblical principle. The Chick-fil-A website states, “**Closed Sundays. It's part of the Chick-fil-A recipe.**”

The corporation wants employees to have a day off every week to worship, to spend time with their family, and to rest from their labors. But I'm sure there are plenty of franchise owners who see the forced day-off as an exercise in faith.

They're giving up a day to Zaxbys, and trusting God to make it up in six...

Faith is like a muscle. You've got exercise it to make grow. And this is why we need to set aside a day to exercise our faith – *study, pray, worship, fellowship*.

Neglect spiritual exercise and your faith will get flabby.

In verse 32 the Jews promise to **do their part**. “**Also we**

made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly 1/3 of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.” A Temple tax imposed on all Jewish worshippers.

Nehemiah understood the big picture... their walk with God would ultimately only be as strong as the place where they were fed and lead... the Temple.

And what was true of the OT Temple is true of the NT Church.

We need the place we go to gain strength to remain strong. That's why it's as important that we *give to our church* as it is that we *take from your church*.

The leaders say in verse 34, “We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God as it is written in the Law.” They all took turns bringing firewood.

I think this is important. Maybe you can't support your church with gold and silver, but everyone can bring a bundle of *wood* from time to time.

When there's a need to move chairs, or vacuum, or pick up paper, or pass out announcement sheets, or serve grits in the Brook... if someone asks, “Would anyone lend a helping hand?” Why don't you step up and say, “*I would.*”

Hey, we all can bring some *wood*... “Yes, *I would!*” Let’s *do our part*.

Notice in verse 35 they **gave their best**. “And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the LORD; to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; to bring the firstfruits of our dough...” Are you following suit? *Do you give God the firstfruits of your dough?*

In the OT the first of most everything belonged to God – they gave Him their best. They brought the “firstfruits of... offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities.” Do you give to God *your first... or your leftovers?*

It reminds me of the cattle rancher who boasted in church that he’d decided to give one of his newborn calves to the Lord. Two calves were born that night, but he told his wife afterwards - “I’ve got bad news... The Lord’s calf was born dead.”

I hope you always give God the best of your time, effort, talents, and resources.

We need to *participate... exercise our faith, do our part, give our best, and pay our tithes*. Let me clarify a point... you

give an offering, but you *pay* a tithe.

The tithe is not yours – it belongs to the Lord even before you give it... Malachi 3 accuses the people of Israel of robbing God by failing to pay their tithes.

Verse 38, “And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse.” The word “tithe” means “tenth”. The people tithed to the Levites. Then the Levites tithed to the Lord.

Malachi 3 reveals that tithing is the one area of life where God challenges us to test Him. “Try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.” If you tithe, God promises abundant provision...

Let me encourage you to exercise your faith by tithing... The 10% I give each paycheck reminds me it all belongs to God. And He can do more with 90% than I can do with 100%. If you trust God with your soul, you can trust Him with a tithe.

Chapter 10 closes, verse 39, “For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are and we will not neglect the house of our God.”

I hope you leave with that last line ringing in your ears... “we will not neglect the house of our God.” *Separate* from the

world. *Participate* in your church.

And then you can sing... “Signed, sealed, delivered Lord... I’m yours!”

In chapter 11 a lottery is held to pick the families who would live within the new walls of Jerusalem. It was the first urban renewal program in history.

Verse 1, “Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities.” According to chapter 7 about 45,000 Jews returned from Babylon to the city of Jerusalem and its suburbs. Here we are told 10% - or 4500 people - were chosen to live within the walls.

“And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.” Apparently those who were chosen considered it an honor to be among the new inhabitants of the city. They voluntarily uprooted and moved.

Verse 3 through the end of the chapter 11 we have two lists...

Verses 3-24 list the names of people who settled inside the walls of the city. While verses 25-36 list the cities, other than Jerusalem, where Jews settled.

We won’t read the names, but let’s scan them for a few applicable details...

Verse 4 mentions “the children of Judah” consisting of 468 “valiant men.”

In verse 6 the Hebrew word translated “valiant” means “a

force". It sometimes applied to an army - or a man with means and resources. You've heard it said, "*He was a force to be reckoned with...*" These were men who had an impact on others.

This is what I want to be - a person of influence - *a force to be reckoned with...*

Beginning in verse 7, Nehemiah lists "**the sons of Benjamin**". There were 928.

Verse 9 tells us, "**Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer, and Judah the son of Senuah was second over the city.**"

Everybody needs an overseer, and every overseer needs a second in command – someone to help him carry the load.

Everyone wants to bat lead off, and steal the bases, and slide headfirst into home. It takes an unselfish person to bat second, and bunt the runner over.

I'm sure Zichri appreciated Judah's willingness to serve as second. I know I'm thankful for Pastor James. God called me to oversee, and James has served as *second in command*. He's been bunting me over for years... *and I appreciate it*.

Verse 19 mentions "**the gatekeepers**". With new gates you need gatekeepers.

At Calvary Chapel the ushers serve as the gatekeepers. They open doors, and direct traffic, and help people who are having problems, and provide security.

It reminds me of the little boy who was running down the halls. An usher had to quiet him down. Later, the boy said, "**When I grow up, I want to be a husher!**"

Verse 22 tells us, “Also the overseer of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi.”

Trust me, nobody messed with Uzzi! He was a straight-shooter - the kind of guy who'd blow you away. When he made a decision it was automatic. Uzzi was a great guy... always a blast! *Thought you'd get a bang out of that!*

Again, verses 25-36 mentions the villages outside Jerusalem...

Chapter 12, “Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel...” Ninety years before Nehemiah, Zerubbabel led the first wave of Jews from Babylon to rebuild the Temple. Verses 1-24 list those who served...

In verse 24 we're told they served “to praise and give thanks, group alternating with group, according to the command of David the man of God.” In the days of David, the priests were so numerous they were organized into groups. Each group served alternating shifts. Nehemiah reestablished David's method.

In verse 27 the list of priests end, and the subject changes... Nehemiah tells us about a parade. It's “D-day” – or *dedication day* for the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem.

And everybody loves a parade!

When my kids were tots every July 4th, Kathy and I would pack up, and head to the village of Stone Mountain for the annual Independence Day Parade.

Trust me it was lame... a few clowns - horses - a few

antique cars - and the SM High School beauty queen. If you brought your bike you could join the parade.

Hey, when the Mayor is the main attraction... it's a pitiful parade.

But my kids didn't see it that way. They would stand on the curb with wide-open eyes - and gaze and gawk at everything that came down Main Street. They were thrilled. And it proved to me that deep down inside... everybody loves a parade.

You certainly would've loved the parade that Nehemiah organizes here...

Verse 27 **“Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites”**

“From the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem.”

Notice the singers and musicians lived together in worship communities. They must've been fun places! Imagine the jam sessions that broke out in these towns.

Verse 30, **“Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall. So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall**

toward the Refuse Gate.” This group was led by Ezra. They marched south passed the Refuse Gate, on to the Fountain Gate, where they climbed some stairs to the top of the wall. Verses 32-36 lists the people in Ezra’s group...

Nehemiah led another group. They marched northward on top of the wall.

Verse 38, **“The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison.”**

Apparently, both parades met at the Temple. Verse 40 tells us, **“So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God...”** Remember, chapter 4, when Tobiah scoffed at Nehemiah and his attempt to rebuild the walls.

He laughed, and mocked him, **“Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.”**

Nehemiah remembered that remark. That’s why he organizes two parades to march on top of the walls. The wall the critics said couldn’t hold the weight of a fox supports two Thanksgiving parades!

Imagine, the enemies of Nehemiah – Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem – standing off in the distance – looking at the walls - watching the parade of people, and hearing the praises of God. It was a witness of *Nehemiah’s faith* and *God’s faithfulness!*

Look at verse 42. I'm sure Josh wants me to mention this point... "The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director." Nobody likes to sing alone. I'm sure it encourages the leader when we sing loudly. I can't *sing good*, but I *sing loud*.

Verse 43, "Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off." They raised the roof. They sang joyfully and loudly! We're told they sang so loud they were heard "afar off".

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place."

Prayer is personal – *but praise is a public act!* Whisper your prayers, but shout out your praise! When you pray go into your room and shut the door – but when you praise God roll down the windows, baby... and let the neighbor's hear...

In chapter 10 the Jews were instructed to pay tithes and support the Temple.

They obeyed. In verses 44-47 Nehemiah makes arrangements to count the offering. Under Zerubbabel and Nehemiah the Jews supported the Temple.

One of the fundamental laws in physics is *the second law of thermodynamics* – or the law of entropy. Entropy states that natural processes - when left alone – move toward decay and disintegration. In other words, *stuff breaks down*.

I am a prophet... I predict your car will break down sometime in the future.

You don't need to be a prophet to know it's the tendency for all things to break down – go from order to chaos - *unless energy is added from outside the system.*

Of course, entropy doesn't just apply to physical stuff it's true in the spiritual realm. If you ignore faith long enough it will eventually break down, and decay, and deteriorate. Faith has to be fed, and cultivated, and exercised to last.

And entropy also affects a church. William Booth, once said to a group of new leaders, “I want you young men always to bear in mind that it is the nature of a fire to go out; you must keep it stirred and fed and the ashes removed.”

In other words, spiritual fires go out unless leaders keep fanning the flame.

Nehemiah was in Jerusalem 12 years. Chapter 2:1 says he left Persia in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. Chapter 13:6 says he returned in the king's 32nd year.

But when Nehemiah leaves trouble starts in Jerusalem. Entropy sets in...

Chapter 10 was the high watermark for the Jews. They promised to follow God. *Signed, sealed, delivered* they were His! But without Nehemiah's leadership the people picked up bad habits, engaged in sinful practices, and broke promises.

Nehemiah 13 tells us what happened when he returned again to Jerusalem...

“On that day they read from the Book of Moses (Deuteronomy 23 was the exact passage) in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or

Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God...”

Though they were both distant relatives to the Israelis – the Ammonites and Moabites were never considered part of God’s chosen family. They were of a different spiritual breed – notorious idolaters. God banished them from Israel.

Verse 2 tells us how they treated Israel when they came out of the wilderness.

”They had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them...” You can read about Balaam in Numbers 22-24.

Balaam was an occult practitioner – an ancient witchdoctor. He conjured up demons to apply curses on people, and play havoc with their lives. That’s why the king of Moab hired Balaam to place a curse on Israel. *Balaam wanted to cash in...*

But verse 2 ends, **“However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.”**

Four times Balaam opened his mouth hoping to utter a curse on Israel, but each time God trumped him – and he uttered a blessing instead of a curse.

This proves God won’t allow a curse to be placed on someone He has chosen to bless... If you’re a Christian you’re immune to voodoo, demonic curses.

Though God wouldn’t let Balaam curse Israel, he told the Moabite king what he could do to cause God to curse them. Just send in the *Moabite babes* to lure Israel into adultery - and God will curse them in response to their sin and

disobedience.

This was happening in Nehemiah's day. The Jews were once again sleeping with the enemy. They were fraternizing with people who were an evil influence.

And when Nehemiah returns he reads the Law. Verse 3 shows its effect...

“So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.” They immediately banished the pagan influences.

Verse 4, **“Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah.”** Both these names, **Elisahib** and **Tobiah**, should ring a bell. We've seen them before.

In chapter 3 when the workers on the wall are listed, the name **“Eliashib”** appears first. He was the High Priest – supposedly a man zealous for God.

The name **“Tobiah”** should also be familiar, but for the opposite reason...

Tobiah was an Ammonite - and one of the 3 stooges - who along with Sanballat and Geshem - had opposed Nehemiah, and the construction of the walls.

That's what makes this union such a travesty! This is like Benjamin Netanyahu and Osama Bin Laden buddying up for dinner. Nehemiah saw it as high treason!

How could the high priest, no less – ally himself with the enemy?

Verse 28 reveals the answer... Flip ahead and you'll see Eliashib's grandson had married Sanballat's daughter. The

Jews were *sleeping with the enemy*.

Verse 5 tells us what Eliashib did for 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 priests”

Around the outside of the Temple were storerooms - and Eliashib had allowed Tobiah to use one as his apartment in Jerusalem. Nehemiah can't believe it – he's been gone a few months, now his archenemy is being aided and abetted by his countrymen. *God's kids invite the devil's kids to God's house for a sleepover!*

Nehemiah tells us in verse 6, “But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the 32nd 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 God. And it grieved me bitterly...” I'm sure it did!

Vance Havner once wrote, “Today the world has so infiltrated the church that we are more beset by traitors within than by foes without. Satan is not fighting churches – he is joining them.” Hey, it's always been Satan's strategy... *if he can't beat us, he'll join us*. He'll come in incognito and wreak havoc!

Nehemiah was “grieved... bitterly”, and in verse 8 he tells us

what he did... “Therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room.”

Notice Tobiah wasn't given a warning – or even an eviction notice so he could clear out his stuff. Nehemiah didn't try to *convert him*, or *tolerate him*, or be *patient with him* hoping he'd repent - or even *try to control him* and *keep him in his place*.

No! Nehemiah tosses Tobiah out on his ear! He boots him out of the Temple.

Hey, Nehemiah didn't even pray about it beforehand. He took quick, and decisive, and deliberate action. He excommunicated the enemy of God...

And not only that, Nehemiah tells us in verse 9, “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.” He fumigated the place.

Nehemiah didn't even want the lingering odor of Tobiah to contaminate the Temple. He got rid of *his smell*. He cleansed the rooms Tobiah had occupied.

This reminds me of 1 Corinthians 5:6, when Paul talks about ridding the church of corrupting influences, he says, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” In other words, **one bad apple can spoil the whole bunch!**

When a heretic is on the rampage - or a blatant rebel – gets loose in a church great damage will be done. That's why the evil influences have to be tossed.

Hey, if truth matters we can't wink at defiant sin. Nor can we be afraid to hurt someone's feelings, when they're hurting the

church. *Say goodbye to Tobiah!*

And I'm not just talking in theory... Recently the elders of our church had to ask a man to not come back to Calvary Chapel until he repented from hurting others.

"A church is like a ship, made to be in the water, but if water gets into the ship it sinks." The church is in the world, but let the world get in the church and it'll sink.

"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?"

Remember the last line of chapter 10. The Jews vowed, **"We will not neglect the house of our God."** But entropy had set in... it had effected their giving.

We're determined to give God His 10% until the budget tightens – the kids have a need - vacation rolls around...
Lord, I'll pay double next payday...

While Nehemiah was away the Jews stopped giving of their tithes and offerings to the Temple - and as a result the Levites and singers had to abandon their post.

They took up jobs working in the field to make a living...

What if you ordered from Dominos... and James delivered your pizza. CC couldn't pay its pastor because the people were no longer giving their tithes.

Nehemiah tells us, **"And I gathered them together and set them in their place."**

In other words, he brought the Levites back to Jerusalem,

and reestablished their ministries in the temple... *and reminded the people to support God's work.*

“Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse.” Nehemiah’s rebuke revived the flame of generosity. The Jews were so responsive “I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse...” He lists them in verse 13 - and we’re told “they were considered faithful...”

Nehemiah prays in verse 14, “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!” *Notice this is the first time Nehemiah prays in the chapter!*

Leaders today pray about whether God wants them to take action. Nehemiah takes action to set the house of God in order - and once he gets the place cleaned up - *then he prays*. When there’s obvious sin in the camp it’s not time to pray – it’s time to act. After the sin has been dealt with, then we can pray and seek the Lord.

Verse 15, “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.”

They were breaking another promise. They were working on the Sabbath.

Verse 16 gives us more detail, “Men of Tyre (who also lived

on the north coast of Israel - famous fishermen) **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.**"

Hey, there was something fishy going on in Jerusalem on the Sabbath.

"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."

One of the reasons God judged them, 150 years earlier, was their failure to keep the Sabbath. Now it's a new start, and they're making the same mistake.

"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." On Friday night Nehemiah locked the gates of the city, and posted guards to keep the merchants from entering the city, and setting up market the next day. *It was bold leadership.*

Nehemiah nipped the problem in the bud. He didn't just ask the people to stop, or wait on God to lay it on their hearts to change – He shut down the activity.

Verse 20 **"Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of**

wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. So 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!"

And Nehemiah isn't talking about laying hands on them for prayer!

If they keep trying to lead God's people into sin, he's going to roll up his sleeves, and bust them in the chops. He was a pastor with a good left jab.

Hey, who says pastors have to be wimps! Nehemiah was a *hands-on* leader.

Notice the effect his threat had on the merchants, verse 21, "From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath." *They didn't want to mess with Nehemiah.*

"I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and...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...." Again, the Jews had become unequally yoked with unbelievers.

"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." This broke Nehemiah's heart. As he walked around Jerusalem he noticed kids on the playgrounds who didn't even speak Hebrew.

The Bible was written in Hebrew. These mixed marriages were raising a future generation that would never read God's Word, and fail to obey God's Law.

It was a tragedy! If Nehemiah didn't act, Israel would lose a whole generation. The distinctiveness of Hebrew culture and religion could be lost forever.

“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.”

Pastor Nehemiah goes ballistic. He punches and pulls hair.

(pic)

Hey, Nehemiah is a radical guy. He isn't afraid to mix violence and virtue.

He's so upset at what the Jews are doing he slaps a few guys around - pulls out their hair - makes them promise not to do it again. He doesn't play around.

Imagine if Nehemiah was your pastor? Too many false moves, and you'd get your hair yank out of your head! Nehemiah knew how to get his congregation's attention. Verse 25 was definitely a hair-raising experience for these people!

Remember Nehemiah's sidekick was Ezra. When Ezra faces a similar situation he tells us his response in Ezra 9:3, **“I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.”**

Ezra tore his own clothes, and pulled out his own hair. He wept and repented. Whereas, Nehemiah tore other people's

clothes, and pulled out their hair.

Two godly men face the same problem, but respond in different ways. This is how the body of Christ functions. God wires us uniquely. He gives different gifts.

Some of us are like Ezra – sinful situations cause us to *bawl* - and pray, and repent. Others of us are like Nehemiah – sinful situation causes us to *brawl*. We confront the sinner and deal with the sin. *Some have compassion on the sinner – others anger toward the sin.* And both reactions are needed and valid.

Nehemiah not only uses his fists and his hands to get the people's attention.

He also uses an example. Verse 26 tells us, “**Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?**” Solomon's downfall was his pagan wives - 1000 wives and 700 concubines... When he signed a peace treaty with a neighbor he'd followed the ancient practice of taking the rival king's daughter as a member of his harem.

Most men collect guns, baseball cards, postage stamps... Solomon collected wives. *Ladies, before you complain about hubby's hobby remember Solomon!*

But when a new wife moved in, she brought with her the idols and false religion of her homeland. Over time Solomon's wives had set up idols all over Jerusalem.

Verse 26 continues... “**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?"

Solomon was the wisest man in all the earth – but his inability to look away from a beautiful babe - turned him stupid. The same tendency has made a lot of men stupid! Solomon yoked with unbelievers – *don't you follow in his footsteps!*

Verse 28, "And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me."

Nehemiah had guts. He was no respecter of persons - and wasn't afraid of powerful people. He drove off the high priest's grandson, and didn't think twice.

It's interesting to note the 3 sins Nehemiah radically opposed... intermingling Jews with pagans - neglecting to pay tithes - and irreverence for the Sabbath.

Nehemiah was so successful in creating a disdain among the Jews for these three offences they went overboard. They became self-righteous and legalistic.

By the time of Jesus these were the primary preoccupations of the Pharisees.

They hated gentiles - stringently paid tithes – and constructed a rigid system of observing the Sabbath. Ironically, Jesus had to correct them on all three counts.

Nehemiah closes with a prayer, "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.” What a great statement for a spiritual leader to be able to make... He got rid of all the pagan influences.

“I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times.” And Nehemiah finishes with a prayer, and a request... “Remember me, O my God, for good!”

And I'm certain God answered his prayer!