

“Why Is The House of God Forsaken?”

Introduction:

1. There is so much to be learned from a study of the Old Testament, Romans 15:4.
2. That there is much to be learned from a study of the Old Testament is especially evident when we examine events pertaining to God’s people who lived under the Law of Moses, and then draw analogies to God’s people who live in this the Gospel age.
3. One very significant Old Testament story is recorded in the book of Nehemiah; it pertained to the Israelites (the people to whom the law of Moses was given (Deut. 5:1-2), but who became guilty of forsaking the house of God!
4. Lesson Title: “*Why is the House of God Forsaken?*”
5. Text: Nehemiah 13:11.

Discussion:

I. The Historical Background.

- A. God’s people requested a King, I Samuel 8:5.
 1. Their excuse: Samuel was old, and his sons did not walk in his ways, I Sam. 8:1,3.
 2. Their motivation: To be “*like all the nations,*” I Sam. 8:5.
 3. The One whom they had really rejected was not Samuel, but God, I Sam. 8:7.
 4. But God granted them their request, and thus began the united kingdom, with Saul, David, and Solomon reigning as king, each of whom successively ruled for 40 years.
- B. The United Kingdom Became a Divided Kingdom, I Kings 12, around 931 B.C.
 1. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, consisting of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, I Kings 12.
 2. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, consisting of ten tribes.
- C. As time progressed:
 1. The Northern Kingdom lasted around 200 years, and went into Assyrian Captivity, 2 Kings 17.
 2. The Southern Kingdom lasted a little over 300 years and ultimately went into Babylonians Captivity, in three stages, 606, 597, and 586 B.C (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36: Jeremiah 52.
 3. But Jeremiah prophesied of a return from captivity, Jer. 29:10,14.
- D. The Return to Jerusalem.
 1. Was begun in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, around 536 B.C., as prophesied by Isaiah, Isa. 44:28-45:1.
 2. The return was begun under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra 1,2, around 536 B.C., continued by Ezra, around 459 B.C., Ezra 7:6-10, and completed under the leadership of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 1-10, around 445 B.C.

II. Nehemiah, the Man, was one of the Heroes of Old Testament times.

- A. He was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, Neh. 1:11; 2:1.
 1. Being the king’s cupbearer, his was a trusted and honored position.
 2. Artaxerxes ruled as king of Persia (465-425); he was a son of Xerxes, and step son to Queen Esther.
- B. He was concerned about the Lord’s people, Neh. 1:2-4.
- C. He was a man of prayer, Neh. 1:4-6; 2:2-4.
- D. He was a man of action, Neh. 2:11-20.
- E. He did not let opposition stop him, Nehemiah 4, 6.
- F. He was filled with righteous indignation, Nehemiah 13.

III. God Blessed the Collective Labors of Nehemiah and the Jewish people.

- A. The Wall was finished in 52 days! Nehemiah 6:15.
- B. The people were urged to follow the Law more closely, Nehemiah 8.
- C. The People confessed their sins, Neh. 9:1-3.
- D. The people said “*we will not neglect the house of our God,*” Neh. 10:39.
- E. Nehemiah, after a 12 year leave of absence, returned to the King, Neh. 2:1; 13:6.
 1. A short time later he returned to Jerusalem, Neh. 13:7, and discovered that “*the house of God*” had been “*forsaken*” in such a short time, Neh. 13:11!

IV. Why Was the House of God Forsaken?

- A. They did not respect the boundaries of fellowship.
 1. Eliashib the priest was “*allied with Tobiah,*” Neh. 13:4. Cf. Deut. 23:3.
 - a. Tobiah was an Ammonite; from the beginning he was “*deeply disturbed*” when he learned that Nehemiah had come to seek “*the well-being of the children of Israel,*” Neh. 2:10.
 - b. He, with Sanballat, had mocked the efforts of Nehemiah and the Jews, Neh. 4:3; then he and others “*conspired...to attack Jerusalem,*” Neh 4:8.

- c. He had tried to “frighten” Nehemiah, Neh. 6:13.
- B. They Compromised with the enemy, Neh. 13:5,7.
 - 1. The motivation for such may have come about through marriage, Neh. 13:23,28.
 - a. In violation of Neh. 13:1; Deut. 7:1,3.
- C. They perverted God’s organization, Neh. 13:10.
 - 1. The priests were to be provided for through the tithes of the people, but this was ignored.
- D. They perverted the worship of God, Neh. 13:15.
- E. They perverted the purpose of God, Neh. 13:23-24.
 - 1. God wanted to preserve a people devoted to Him; He knew that pagan mates would tend to lead the people away from God, Neh. 13:25-27.
 - 2. **Note:** Nehemiah was a man of action. He went about correcting these abuses. He threw out the household goods of Tobiah, 13:8; he shut the gates of Jerusalem and forbade any work or selling on the Sabbath (v. 19-20); he pulled out the hair of those who had intermarried (v. 25); in essence, he cleaned house!

V. Why Is The House of God Forsaken?

Note: God’s house in this dispensation is the church, I Tim. 3:15, the church built by Jesus, Matt. 16:18.

Note: Study “church history,” and you will discover that the very principles which resulted in God’s house being “forsaken” in Nehemiah’s time accomplish the same sad results today!

- A. Many do not respect the boundaries of fellowship.
 - 1. Eph. 5:11; I John 1:5,6.
 - 2. We hear much about unity in diversity. Some even avow that Romans 14 tolerates “contradictory doctrinal and moral sins!” In spite of Rom. 13:14 and Rom. 16:17, which serve as “book ends” to Romans 14,15.
- B. Compromise with the enemy.
 - 1. Now-a-days it is not very uncommon to hear of “churches of Christ” holding joint sunrise Easter services with denominational bodies, etc.
- C. Perverting God’s organization.
 - 1. Sponsoring church arrangements, in violation of I Peter 5:2.
 - 2. Institutionalism, in violation of Eph. 1:22-23.
- D. Perverting the worship of the church.
 - 1. Instrumental Music.
 - 2. Having “traditional worship” and “contemporary worship” at different times.
- E. Perverting the purpose of God.
 - 1. The mission of the church, I Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:12.
 - 2. Often times “churches of Christ” are becoming involved with the “social gospel” and all its trappings.

VI. Lessons for Us. Rom. 15:4.

- A. Remaining right involves more than merely promising to do right. Neh. 10:39; I Cor. 10:12.
- B. Remaining right involves more than merely possessing good intentions, Heb. 3:13.
- C. Being sound today is no guarantee that we will be sound tomorrow, Gal. 1:6.
- D. It doesn’t take long to depart from the faith, I Tim. 4:1.
- E. Apostasy tends to follow a general pattern (to be noted by examining Nehemiah 13 and reading “church history”).

Conclusion:

- 1. We need more people like Nehemiah today!
- 2. It is not enough to just be concerned when the house of God is under attack, when the house of God is in dire straits; we need to be people of prayer, concern, faith, and action!
- 3. If we are Christians we are a part of a “kingdom which cannot be shaken,” Heb. 12:28. Man cannot destroy it; it will be delivered up to God the Father when Jesus returns, I Cor. 15:24. But in the mean time, let us “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear,” Heb. 12:28. Let us seek to preserve the soundness of the church, and let us seek to win others to Jesus.
 - a. But it is very difficult to “win others to Jesus” if we ourselves have not been won! Matt. 11:28-30.

--Bobby Witherington, August 14, 2016