

Mixing and Separating: Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-31

Sunday, September 10, 2023
Covenant Church
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Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-31

¹ On that day they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, ² because they did not meet the Israelites with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³ When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

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²³ In those days also I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; ²⁴ and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples. ²⁵ And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair; and I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶ Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. ²⁷ Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?”

²⁸ And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I chased him away from me. ²⁹ Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites.

³⁰ Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; ³¹ and I provided for the wood offering, at appointed times, and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

A. Introduction

13:1-3: Reform #1: Separating from all those of foreign descent

13:4-9: Reform #2: Eliminating Temple corruption (throwing out Tobiah)

13:10-14: Reform #3: Giving the Levites their portions

13:15-22: Reform #4: Prohibiting buying, selling, and burden-bearing on the Sabbath

13:23-29: Reform #5: Dissolving (?) mixed marriages

13:30-31: Conclusion

B. No Foreigners in the Assembly (1-3)

Deut 23:3-6 ³ No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD, ⁴ because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. ⁵ (Yet the LORD your God refused to

heed Balaam; the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you.) ⁶ You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live.

The Balaam-Balak story is in Numbers 21-24 and is referenced a few others times in Scripture (Josh 13:22; 24:9–10; Mic 6:5; 2 Pet 2:15; Rev 2:14).

Deut 23:7–8 You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin. You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land. The children of the third generation that are born to them may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.

Yes, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites to be slaughtered and displaced (Exod 23:23-33; 34:11-16; Deut 7:1-2; 20:17-18) and, yes, and Israel is “set apart”/ “separated” for the LORD (Lev 20:24; cf. Deut 7:6), but...

... “Resident aliens” have been incorporated, at least to some extent, within Israel (Exod 12:48)! They have been allowed to celebrate Passover (Exod 12:48), offer sacrifices (Lev 22:17-19) and firstfruits (Deut 26:11), and celebrate the festivals (Deut 16:11, 14). They are commanded to, e.g., keep Sabbath (Exod 20:10; Lev 16:29)

Exodus 12:48a If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the passover to the LORD, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land...

Lev 19:33–34 33 When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. 34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Deut 23:1 No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.

Jer 39:16-18 ¹⁶ Go and say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian: Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to fulfill my words against this city for evil and not for good, and they shall be accomplished in your presence on that day. ¹⁷ But I will save you on that day, says the LORD, and you shall not be handed over to those whom you dread. ¹⁸ For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but you shall have your life as a prize of war, because you have trusted in me, says the LORD.

C. No Mixed Marriages (23-29)

Lev 21:14b–15 14 ...[A priest] shall marry a virgin of his own kin, 15 that he may not profane his offspring among his kin; for I am the LORD; I sanctify him.

Deut 7:3–4 3 Do not intermarry with [the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites], giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly (cf. Exod 34:16).

But what about Ruth and Boaz? Moses’ wives (Exod 2:21-22, Num 12:1-16)?

D. Possibilities

1. Did God direct Nehemiah to do this?
2. Did God intend this to be a time/context-limited command?
3. Does the text withhold details, including exceptions?

F. Conclusion

1. God loves all people

Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:17-18); Abraham the father of “many” nations, blessed to be a blessing to “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:1-3; 18:17-18; 22:18; 26:4-5); Amos 9:7; Jesus’ genealogy

Gal 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

2. Nothing should be above our absolute loyalty to God—and we need to be vigilant and preemptive about what might be

Deut 10:12–13 12 So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.

3. It is a timeless, non-negotiable part of our life’s calling to pass on the language of the faith

Phil 2:9–11 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

4. We must ask: Is now a time of separation (Nehemiah) or not (Jeremiah)?

Question: What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?