

CRACKS IN THE WALL

NEHEMIAH 13:4-14 | Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, ⁵ prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

⁶ While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king ⁷ and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. ⁸ And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. ⁹ Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense. ¹⁰ I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. ¹¹ So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations.

¹² Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.

¹³ And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. 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 his service.

And they all lived happily ever after. You wish! But this is not a fairy tale. *When the cat's away, the mice will play.* Nehemiah went back to Persia just long enough for Israel to go back on four of the covenant pledges they had made in the Water Gate Revival (NEH 8-10). They are neglecting the house of God (13:1-14), mismanaging the tithes (5, 12), profaning the Sabbath (15-22), and marrying foreigners—again! (23-29).

They're not just neglecting God's house. They've also defiled it. Eliashib the priest gave Tobiah a spacious chamber in the temple to live in (13:7). Tobiah got his foot in the door, it seems, by marrying into Eliashib's family (13:4). This is probably not Eliashib the high priest, but another priest of the same name. But Tobiah we know as one of Israel's worst enemies (2:10, 19; 4:3-8; 6:1-19). He had friends in high places and a knack for infiltration and intrigue (6:17-19). So it's not surprising that his promotion to prominence coincides with the wholesale dispersion of the Levites and the disruption of worship in the temple (10-11).

Heightened Alert! There are cracks in the wall. Eliashib's compromise threatens Israel's survival. It's hard to imagine such a lapse of reason by any spiritual leader. Nehemiah had prayed so hard and worked so long to make Jerusalem a place where God would be pleased to dwell with his people once again. And God came back. But now this! *Why is the house of God forsaken?* (11)

Holiness is not negotiable (DEREK KIDNER). Either Tobiah must go or God will go—again. Characteristically, Nehemiah controls his anger and channels it into corrective reform. He unceremoniously evicts Tobiah from the temple and ceremonially cleanses the chamber (8). He replenishes the storehouses, reinstates the Levites, and appoints faithful men to distribute the tithes (9-11).

What was said of Jesus when he cleansed the temple also expresses the heart of Nehemiah: *Zeal for your house has consumed me* (PS 69:9; JOHN 2:17).

WALL OF DUTY

■ What consumes you? Online shopping, gaming, movies, porn? Don't blame the pandemic. Boredom is not the problem. Don't blame the devil. The headquarters of hell can never prevail against the Church that Jesus builds. The greatest threats are internal, not external. At the personal level, the greatest pitfall lurks within, not without. God is faithful. We are fickle. God is a promise-keeper. We are promise-breakers. Reflect on this insight from *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges: *Too often, we say we*

are defeated by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated. We are simply disobedient. It might be good if we stop using the terms victory and defeat to describe our progress in holiness. Rather, we should use the terms obedience and disobedience. When I say I am defeated by some sin, I am unconsciously slipping out from under my responsibility. I am saying something outside of me has defeated me. But when I say I am disobedient, that places the responsibility for my sin squarely on me. We may in fact be defeated, but the reason we are defeated is because we have chosen to disobey.

Search your heart. Journal your confession and prayer of repentance. Intercede for others you know who are struggling to obey. *Our worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace* (JERRY BRIDGES).

■ What consumes us? May it be zeal for God, his name, and his house: God-fearing discipleship-in-community that instills right thinking and right living. Church ministries that raise up no-nonsense disciples who turn our city right-side up for Jesus. Church discipline as an essential expression of apostolic authority, pastoral care, and discipleship. Zero tolerance for whatever is unbiblical, unethical, or immoral. Zero tolerance for the abuse of spiritual authority. May it be! *The well-being of tomorrow's church is directly linked with the discipline we exercise in the church today* (JI PACKER).

■ Holiness is not negotiable. And *there is no shortcut to holiness. it must be the business of our whole lives* (WILLIAM WILBERFORCE). *As we grow in holiness, we grow in hatred of sin; and God, being infinitely holy, has an infinite hatred of sin* (JERRY BRIDGES). Heed the Word: *Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity* (2 TIM 2:19). *For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household* (1 PET 4:17).