

BACKGROUND AND THEOLOGY OF NEHEMIAH'S SABBATH POLICY

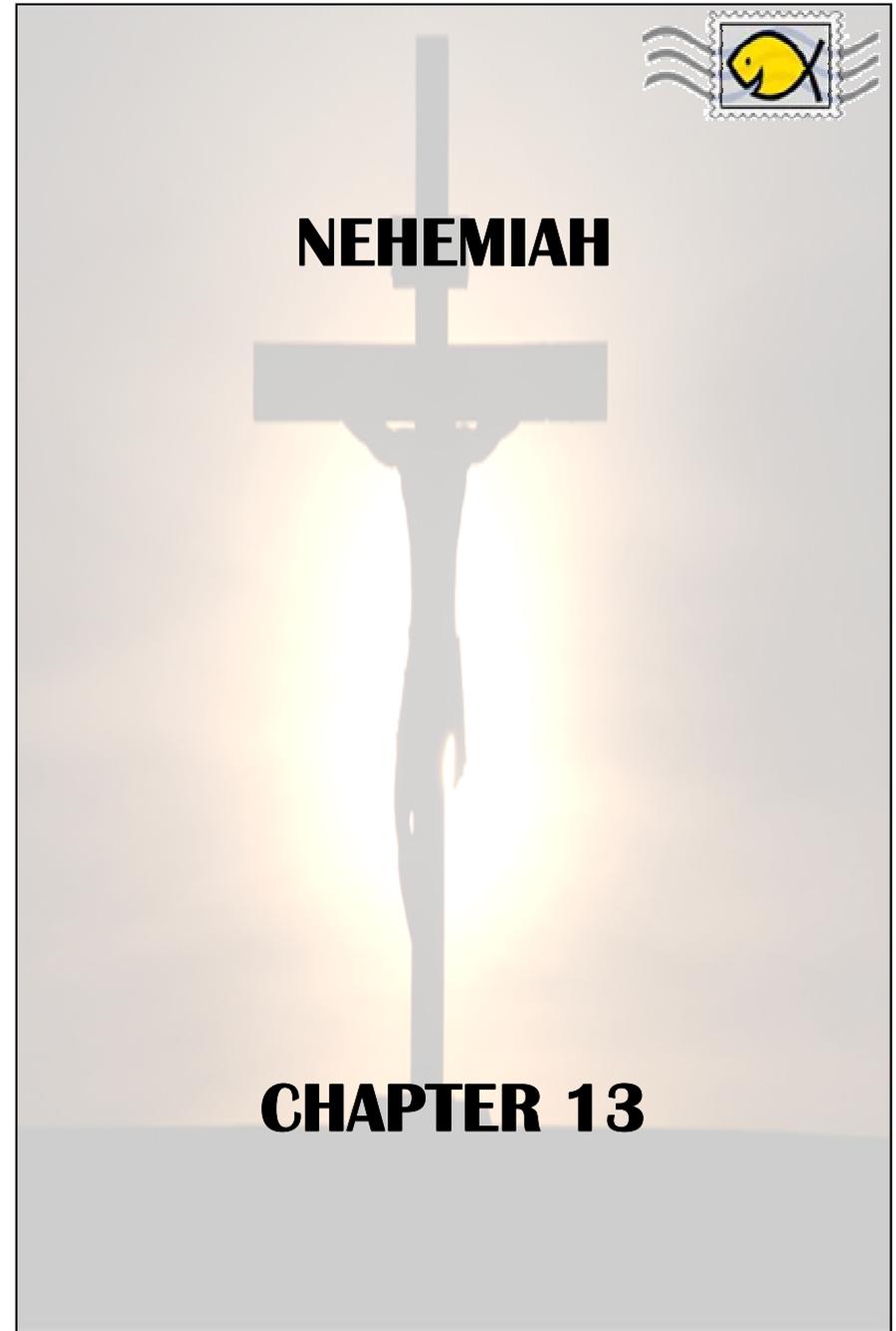
Exodus 31:12-17 (esp. vs13, 17), indicates that the Sabbath is a "sign." It marked out Israel as unique, for other peoples did not have the Sabbath. Strangely, perhaps in reaction to later legalism, there is a negative view of the Sabbath in the contemporary church. Even the Protestant church, though holding a kind of tolerance for the Sabbath, has more interest in bolstering the case for why we don't need to adhere to the fourth commandment.

But note Exodus 20:8-11. The Sabbath is a gift because they stop work (Ex. 34:21). Only a free people does that. In Egypt they didn't dare stop work! But when God freed them from bondage, He enabled them to cease from work – every week! The Sabbath is a sign of grace and freedom, not of bondage. Slaves work all the time, but free people have the liberty of rest: including servants, livestock and sojourners! Here is the social benefit of the command. So, when you insist on cluttering the Sabbath with work:

- It is a failure of faith, because by working and not resting, you're saying that you can't trust God to provide but must keep working because all your life rests on your efforts.
- It is a failure of compassion, because then your dependents (family, servants, livestock) will not enjoy rest. See Deuteronomy 5:14 for this social argument.
- It is a choice of bondage, for you are deifying work, subjecting yourself to a continuous treadmill which God meant to interrupt weekly. You are saying, "No, I want to be a slave, I want to return to Egypt; I want to run, frustrated and exhausted, to Buntings on the Lord's Day. I want to pay bills then, I want to complete assignments then, I want to work on my income tax. I want to be a slave! I do not want rest or quietness or solitude - I might meet God."

God's pattern is: work six days and stop for one day. It is a way of saying that work is not your god. These principles remain for the people of God, even though our culture and government is non-covenantal and pays no attention to them, **we do**.

R. D Davies



NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 13

WHAT'S GOING ON?

(13:1-3) Separation

(13:4-31) Failure of the People and further reforms of Nehemiah

Note: Verse 4, is better read as "in the face of this.. " or " in the presence..."

As per Crosby (Lange's Commentary) - Eliashib was acting in defiance

WHAT'S BEING SAID OR DONE?

Note the work that Nehemiah had to do:

- Purge the impurity in the Temple (13:4-9)
- Renew the Tithes (13:10-14)
- Enforce the Sabbath (13:15-22)
- Discipline the unfaithful (13:23-29)

All of this had already been dealt with 12 years earlier (Neh 10) with the restatement of the Covenant, which begs the question...

"WHERE IS THE ISRAELITE WHO WILL NOT FAIL?"

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? WHAT DOES THIS TEACH US?

HOW DO WE APPLY THIS TO OURSELVES?

SUMMARY