

Nehemiah 13

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[0 : 00] Amen. Nehemiah chapter 13, as we just bring the book to a conclusion, we'll see what the word of God has to say tonight.

It says, And I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Elisha had done for Tobiah by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God.

It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room. Then I gave an order, and they cleansed the rooms, and I returned there the utensils of the house of God with the grain offerings and the frankincense.

I also discovered that the portion of the Levites had not been given them. So the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.

So I reprimanded the officials and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? Then I gathered them together and restored them to their post, and all Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, the wine, and the oil into the storehouses.

[1 : 57] In charge of the storehouses, I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zedot, the scribe, and Padaiah of the Levites. And in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zechur, the son of Mataniah, for they were considered reliable.

And it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen. Remember me for this, O my God, that I, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.

In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys as well as wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads.

And they brought them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sowed food. And also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise and sowed them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem.

Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, What is this evil thing you are doing by profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do the same so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble?

[3 : 05] Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the Sabbath.

Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem.

Then I warned them and said to them, Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you. And from that time on, they did not come on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the Sabbath day.

For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of your loving kindness. In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

As for their children, have spoken the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people. So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair and made them swear by God.

[4 : 12] You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin regarding these things?

Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, for he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, the foreign women caused even him to sin.

Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women? Even one of the sons of Joadiah, the son of Elisha, the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sambalat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me.

Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priest and the Levites, each in his task.

And I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good. Nehemiah is indeed a man of prayer.

[5 : 20] We see that throughout the book of Nehemiah. And here we see in this last chapter before us that he is a man of spontaneous prayer. He is a man who spends days in prayer and fasting.

He is a man who spends nights in preparations. Prayer is never just an excuse for a lack of being prepared because he does them in combination. But he's also a man of great dependence. We see this dependence as it is displayed in these spontaneous prayers throughout this chapter.

But we also see kind of the tragedy that there's been a great revival. There's been an awakening. The city has been refreshed and renewed. The walls have been rebuilt. They've celebrated the rebuilding of the walls.

They've observed the festivals of trumpets, the Passover, and the festival of booths and all those matters. They've read from the Word. They've repented. They've signed their names on the covenant.

They have then celebrated the dedication of the walls. And yet here we find at the end of the book of Nehemiah that all of that effort and all of that work has still left them in the end falling short.

[6 : 24] We are reminded when we open scripture that we are looking for the faithful ones who adhere to the law and keep the law and maintain the law. And we don't find that among men until we find Jesus Christ who fulfills the law and brings full restoration to God's people.

We don't find it through their efforts. We don't find it even in signing their name to a covenant. We don't find it in their great intentions or their good intentions of wanting to do what is right.

We do not have to think that when we go into this chapter, here are people that intentionally did what was wrong. Rather, we find in this chapter the danger of worldly toleration.

So I want you to see the danger of worldly toleration. However, just a matter of time, the faithful remnant who had signed their names to the covenant have come to the place where Nehemiah is once again rebuking them, correcting them, cleansing them, pulling things, pulling their beards out, plucking out their hair.

And really is chastising them. And it is a danger that is so easy for each and every one of us. It's a danger that is really easy for any church to fall into.

[7 : 42] But it was a danger that is common among the people of God. It is when they begin to tolerate the things that are around them. And what we can find, it is easy to point it out in church history.

It's easy to point it out in any kind of study over any kind of period of time among God's people. And you begin to see what this generation tolerates, the next generation accepts.

And what that generation accepts, the next generation endorses. And then eventually it just continues to build. Toleration is not something that is left alone, but rather it is something that leads to successive measures.

So in the same manner, when we see this chapter before us, we see this danger being worked out in a number of ways. The first thing that we notice, this danger presents itself because there is a commandment broken.

We are introduced to this toleration and the outcome of it in the very first verse. On that day, they read aloud from the book of Moses. So it doesn't start because Nehemiah starts again, this great reform.

[8 : 44] Nehemiah shows up and says, wait a minute, what's going on here? It is this awakening. It is this renewal because they again have a day, a specific day. We don't know exactly when it is.

When they gather together and they read the book of Moses in the hearing of all the people. And this reform that is about to come, this renewal and this commitment that has to take place, begins with the hearing of the word.

Now, their word would be the Pentateuch, the first five books of scripture. It would be the law. So they're reading from the law, the commandments of God. And the portion in which they are reading

in particular is from the book of Deuteronomy.

And they read there and they hear there. Then in the book of Deuteronomy, there it was found written that in no time, no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God.

So they found something that they were not previously aware of. Something that had been permitted. Now, if we were to go back and we were restudying everything that had happened up to this, we know that Sambalot, Tobiah, these are Moabites.

[9 : 46] These are Ammonites. Tobiah is an Ammonite official. So the people that are introduced to us in this chapter are indeed Moabite and Ammonite people.

And they find written very clearly in the word of God, that God says that they should not receive into the company of God's people, any Moabite or Ammonite, because they refused to bring the bread and bring the water to the people of God when they were on their way.

Remember that? But yet they hired Balaam. Now, it seems a little judgmental this many years after that event to say, well, that shouldn't happen. Well, and we also understand the danger that happened.

God did it. He said, now they're welcome into it if they would repent, if they would come, if they would genuinely come confessing the Lord God Almighty, and they would be dedicated to him and his purposes after the 10th generation, which we are very clearly beyond the 10th generation here. But what God is saying is, don't bring the spirit of the Ammonite or the Moabite into the assembly of God's people. And be careful to guard that. And they find this because they are reading the word of God.

[10 : 55] And they understand that this really direct commandment of God to his people, given in the book of Deuteronomy, has indeed been broken among them. It is something we've seen in our own study in scripture, in our study in the church history, and even in the Baptist life, is that all true reform begins with the adherence and the hearing of the word of God.

All true reform finds its roots in scripture. It is not, well, man decided we need to do this. No, it is, it was found written, or it was heard declared, and it was seen in the word of God.

The question, I was just discussing it with Thomas, that I was asked last Sunday night, is, was I so kind of bold to say that for 1600 years, all of Christendom did something wrong?

And since, and now we're not going to go back and rehash that, because we did settle the fact that we cannot say all of Christendom, because that's a very broad word. We can talk about Western Christendom, and in particular we were talking about the Lord's Supper, and my answer to that was yes.

I said, well, how could you answer yes? How could people do something wrong for 1600 years? It's because, and it wasn't until after 1600 years, that the average church member could pick up the Bible, and read what the word of God said, and say, wait a minute, this seems wrong.

[12 : 15] This seems inaccurate. Up until that time, the person before them was saying, this is what you should do, and that's the only thing they had, that's the only confidence they had.

They had to trust the person before them, and if that's what they say to do, then that's what we do. But it is very telling that the moment man was given the word in their language, man was given the word in accessibility, when men began to read the word, men and women began to read the word, all of a sudden these reforms start happening.

Why? Because it was found written. This is why even at this time, they could be living, and they could have all these relations with the Moabites and Ammonites, and we say, well, how could they do that?

The word of God said they shouldn't do that. They didn't know. But it is the revelation that there was a commandment that had been broken, and that commandment that had been broken, and all of a sudden begins this awakening.

So it says that when they heard this, so when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel. Take note of that. That was more than hearing. It was as the book of James says, there was some doing connected to it.

[13 : 24] Reform happens when we hear the word, or we read the word, and then we act in accordance to the word. So they heard the commandment. Wait a minute. We didn't know that was supposed to happen.

And then they took action upon the commandment. How do we begin to do this thing of worldly toleration? It is a clear breaking of the commandments of God, sometimes unknowingly, sometimes

knowingly.

God is very clear about that, even in the Old Testament, even through the book of Deuteronomy. He said that if you sin, and you don't know that you've sinned, and when you hear the word of God, and the word of God is declared to you, and your sin is found out, then you are to repent of your sin. You are to bring the sacrifice. And maybe you did it unknowingly, unwillingly. Maybe you weren't intentionally doing it. Then you are to bring that sacrifice. But the word of God says, but he who sins with a high hand, that is, the one who looks to God says, I don't care what you say, this is what we're going to do.

To him there is no sacrifice in the Old Testament law. So there was a difference, right? There was this revelation, and they saw it, and they said, okay, well, wait a minute. We've done it. But we must be careful, for the toleration had already created a problem.

[14 : 34] Braden, I'm only going to say this one time. Stop. Got it? Thank you. If you can't, you can sit right here. That'd be the only time.

Asher, if you can't, you can sit right here with him. Thank you. Sorry. I'm a squirrel guy. Now, let's go back to it. Once it had been tolerated, once it happened, there's an outcome.

There's an overflow of it. So let's notice what happened. So the commandment had been broken, but that's not it. You can't say, oh, well, too bad. Let's go on with it. Now we've got to see the fruits of this.

So here are the fruits. The second thing that we noticed is there was a concession that was given. Once toleration begins to take place, we begin to concede something.

When worldly influence is allowed to come into the people of God, we are intentionally or unintentionally conceding something.

[15 : 32] And here's what the word tells us. That when they did that, now prior to this, prior to hearing the commandment, prior to their repentance of it, prior to this, Eliashib. This should cause our attention.

Because even the faithful, and given enough time, can falter a little. Eliashib was a priest.

He is also the first name listed in the reconstruction of the wall. He's the first one to say, I will rebuild. He was praised for his building efforts.

He was praised for the activity that he did. And now here we find him being the one who makes this great concession and allows something.

It says, prior to this, Eliashib, the priest, who was appointed over the chambers, notice, I want you to see this, the chambers, and the house of our God, being related. Now being related just means he had a close connection to Tobiah.

[16 : 33] I'll go ahead and put it together for you before we find it at the end of the chapter.

Eliashib's grandson, marries the daughter of Sambalat. Tobiah is Sambalat's servant.

So Eliashib's connection is, my grandson married Sambalat's daughter, so now we're pretty close. We're not really family, but we're pretty close. So the word related means just to be next to.

And so here's what he does. Since he's the keeper over the storehouse, evidently Tobiah ran up on hard times and didn't have anywhere to stay. I don't know why, because Jerusalem was only about 20% occupied at this time.

It was only at 20% capacity. Maybe Tobiah didn't really want to reconstruct a house that had been torn down, but Eliashib said, hey, I got an idea. I'm the keeper over the storehouses in the temple, and what I'll do is I will empty out a storehouse, and there you go, Tobiah.

Notice what he's conceding here. I'm going to give you space in the temple. He's not just welcoming him into his life, an Ammonite, but he is giving him a place inside the temple.

[17 : 47] Friendliness replaced faithfulness. Eliashib was called to be faithful in maintaining the storehouses, but Tobiah's a good guy, and friendliness replaced faithfulness.

Maybe he's fallen upon a hard time. We don't know. My grandson has married his master, because Samballot is seen as the leader. Tobiah is his servant.

His master's daughter, he seems to be a good guy. The family's going well, so I'll provide him a room in the temple. Be careful what we concede, because what's going to take place is now out of our control.

There was the commandment broken, and as a result, a concession was given. And the third thing that you notice is there were the consequences that followed.

What did Eliashib give up? The storehouses in the temple. Storehouses. What were put in the storehouses?

[19 : 03] The tithes, and the offerings, and the grain. Well, who were the tithes, and the offerings, and the grain for? It was for the Levites, and the gatekeepers, and the singers, and all the people who did the work.

So Eliashib was in control of the storehouses. The storehouses, let's just go ahead and put it in our layman's terms, were the bank accounts to hold the payroll for the workers in the temple. They didn't pay them with money. They paid them with grain. They paid them with food. They paid them with the offerings, and with the tithes. And the people of God were to bring in a tithe so that it would maintain the workers inside the temple. And it took these things to run.

And they had to have them to live on. So what's the next discovery that Nehemiah makes? I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given them. Why? Because there's nowhere to store them because Tobiah is there.

Tobiah is living where the portions were supposed to be stored. And when there's no portions that have been, you can't store, then there's no one who gives them. So that, notice this, the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.

[20 : 12] Why did he go to his own field? Because if he cannot get grain from the storehouse, he can't go hungry. So the natural outcome, the consequences that followed, were the workers had to go back to the field.

And when they returned to the field because they had to get grain from somewhere, but the storehouses couldn't provide the grain because Tobiah was there because Elisheb was next to him and he felt bad for him so he let him do that and it was all because they didn't know what the word of God said.

And a small concession in giving someone space led to the consequences of the workers going home. Because now we don't have the provisions to pay the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, those who did the work and since we don't have the means to pay them and we don't want to see them starve and they are not going to starve, there's a void in their life so the void has to be met. Somehow they all still own fields, if you remember that, they willingly move there upon faith that the people of the Lord would provide and it would be stored there and their needs would be met. So now they still have families, they go back to their fields because, hey, a man has got to eat. And his family's got to eat. And so now the workers go. But it doesn't stop there.

[21 : 35] Because when the workers go, something else happens. Fourth, notice the conviction that begins to fade. The conviction that begins to fade.

Because we ask ourselves, how did it get so bad? How did Nehemiah come back after a short time away and find it so bad? There was a man who felt bad for another man who gave him a house inside the temple storehouses.

He said, hey, I'm the guy over there. And that storehouse didn't need room to hold the offering so the offerings weren't brought in. So the Levites and the singers all went home. And what that did is it brought temple worship to a standstill.

They went home. Who's singing now? Who's accepting the offerings and skinning them so that the priests can lay them on the altar? There are no workers in the temple for they all went home.

And we read, in those days, notice the repeated refrain, in those days, they were building on top of one another. In those days, I saw in Judah some who were trading the wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing insects of grain and loading them on donkeys as well as wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads.

[22 : 53] And they brought them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I admonished them on that day. Also men from Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise and sold them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem.

Notice the conviction of conscience that is fading. The Sabbath is not even important anymore. Why? Because those who were leading them in temple worship aren't leading anymore.

And since there is no true worship going on, there's no conviction. Conviction is rooted in consistency. And when we begin to be inconsistent in our practice, when we begin to be inconsistent in our worship, then we begin to fail in our conviction.

It is faithfulness and consistency of character that provides the fortitude to hold on to your conviction. Convictions grab a hold of you on the inside.

And you cannot change your conviction until you change who you are. But you change who you are by changing what you do. And when worship begins to cease and when temple worship is no longer there because the Levites and the singers went home, all of a sudden the Sabbath becomes just a normal day.

[24 : 01] All the reforms, all of the signing of the covenant, that meant nothing. No longer is it important because we don't have those same convictions because that's not what we do anymore.

And so they began to change and it was a little concession here and a little toleration there and a little giving. And then all of a sudden we're selling on the Sabbath. We have people coming in on the Sabbath.

Now we're looking at Old Testament time, right, where God says do not profane the Sabbath. And they are profaning it over and over and over again. And there's no conviction. No one's upset about it. The inhabitants of the city are doing it.

They're welcoming in the men of Tyre. They live among them. Hey, there are great merchants there. Walmart is always open in Jerusalem and they can bring anything in they want to. And then Nehemiah sees this and he has not been living this manner.

So all of a sudden it bothers him. And I love what verse 17 says, then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, listen friend, this was a leadership problem. It might not have been the nobles doing it but they were the ones getting reprimanded because this was a leadership problem.

[25 : 09] We started with the priest who gave a room to Tobiah. and now we have no conviction that we're doing anything wrong.

And Nehemiah calls them out. But when conviction starts failing, here's the fifth and final one. The children are influenced.

The children are influenced. Nehemiah brings his reform. He reforms the Sabbath. He reestablishes it. He sets his guard.

He tells the men of Tyre, hey, don't keep coming here anymore. He has his men guarding the door. But notice this refrain again in verse 23. In those days, these are people without conviction now.

In those days, I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And as for their children, the tolerations of the one generation will become the norm for the next.

[26 : 15] it's going to happen. It says, as for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah.

That next generation of children, Nehemiah is saying, were losing their identity as the people of God. They couldn't speak their native language.

That means they could not read the word. They could not hear the word. And we've just seen that this reform began because of the reading of the word.

Now, this is why we have the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew scripture. This is why we get it. This is why Ezra and those around said, we've got to do something about this.

These children, they can't speak our language. They're going to lose their identity. But friend, listen to me. The tolerations of this generation will influence the children of the next.

[27 : 20] Absolutely. And it will become the norm for the next. And it will become the welcomed acceptance of the next generation. And we cannot change that.

And so Nehemiah says, these children couldn't even speak their native language. They are no longer even going to be identified as the people of God. They look just like everyone else around them. There's no separation.

They can't read the word. They can't heed the word. They can't hear the word. They can't respond to the word for they don't even know what it says. So now there's this great danger.

So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair.

Nehemiah had a right. He was just in doing this. And made them swear by God that you shall not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.

Does this seem judgmental in your eyes? It probably is. But understand it is the command of God's people to be pure at this time in history, Old Testament time. And God wanted a distinct people for his glory.

[28 : 25] And the people were coming. God is not an unwelcoming God. We see that in scripture. We see it all throughout the Old Testament. The same Lord God Almighty who declared that his people should be different and distinct was also the one who made provisions for the stranger, who made provisions for the ones who joined them, who was the one who was calling the nations to

repent, who was the one calling his people.

But you cannot call people to repent if you look just like them. And so he's challenging them. We are supposed to be different.

repent. And it cost a lot for them to do that. So much so it says in verse 28, even one of the sons of Joadiah, the son of Elishib, that's his grandson, the high priest was son-in-law of Sambalat, the Horonite.

So I drove him out. This effect or influence on the children extended even to the priesthood. And should that surprise us, for it was his grandfather that said, Tobiah, do you need a place to live? Be careful of worldly toleration. It's a challenge that I bring to myself each and every day because what we tolerate begins to dictate.

[29 : 47] And as I've tried to explain to our kids growing up, and I've tried to explain still continuing to Braden, we have the right to make a choice of our actions, but we do not have the right to dictate the consequences of our actions.

Once we make that choice, the consequences are already set in motion. But we only have the right to dictate the choice. And unfortunately, the people of God, they did it in ignorance, but their choices were to tolerate.

And the outcome was nearly devastating had God not had his Nehemiah. And we see that God is bringing his people, continuing to be faithful.

He always has his remnant. We don't judge the people for they did it. We don't say, oh, there they go. No, we stand, as it tells us in the New Testament, heeding the warnings of the ones that went before us and saying, okay, Lord God, how then shall I live?

What should my life look like? And we see it on Nehemiah 13. Let's pray, and then we'd be dismissed. Father, I thank you for this day. I thank you for your faithfulness to us.

[31 : 11] I thank you for your goodness. And Lord, I readily admit there are moments that I tolerate what I shall not. Lord, and I want to live as you've called me to live so that I can be the testimony and the witness that you've called me to be.

May that be the heart cry of each and every one of us, not to walk in legalism, but to walk in a loving relationship with our Lord and Savior who has called us to himself.

May it bring glory and honor to your name. And Lord, may you continue to mold and shape us to look more and more like you each and every day. And we ask it all in Jesus' name.

Amen. Thank you, guys.