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Nehemiah 13

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 19

"The Test of Time"

Pastor Gary Hamrick

If we are not careful, things in our lives will suffer over time, including important things like relationships, principles, and convictions. Sadly, things and people we once valued and cherished can become neglected over time. This is exactly what started to happen in Jerusalem during Nehemiah's 10-year absence. When he returned to Jerusalem he found that the Jews had allowed four things to become neglected over time. In today's final message from the book of Nehemiah, as well as the final message in the Ezra and Nehemiah series, Pastor Gary challenges us about never allowing time to erode our values, convictions, and principles. His charge to every Believer is to continue to remain true to the Lord and his Word.

Historical Background

1. Nehemiah was the overseer of the rebuilding project, as well as the governor, for approximately 12 years.
2. Nehemiah returned to Babylon and stayed there approximately 10 years, at which time he asked permission to return to Jerusalem to see how things were going.
3. Pastor Gary said: "The sign of a healthy nation, spiritually speaking, and for that matter, the sign of [being spiritually healthy individually], is not measured in a single event; it is measured in terms of time. Does it have sustainability? Is it enduring? Are the changes that [are] made a continual progression of change in the right direction, or was it a one-time thing?"

- a. The health of a marriage isn't defined by the wedding day; it's defined over time.
 - b. The health of a business isn't defined by the day of the grand opening; it's defined over time.
 - c. The health of your career isn't defined by the day you signed a contract or your first day on the job; it's defined over time.
 - d. The health of a church isn't defined by the day it was launched; it's defined over time.
4. When Nehemiah returned, he found a number of neglected things that were having a negative effect on the spiritual health of the Jews.
 5. Time has a way of eroding things like a romance or marriage, jobs, the values of our country, individual convictions, or the principles of the Church.
 6. During the ten years Nehemiah was living in Babylon, there was noticeable erosion concerning the promises the Jews made, regarding their values and their convictions.
 - a. **Nehemiah 10:28-29** - *"The rest of the people - priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand - all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord."*

The People Neglected The Temple

7. **Nehemiah 13:4-9** - *"Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests. But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the*

rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.”

8. Tobiah was one of the primary enemies of the Jews during the rebuilding project, and not only that; he also was an Ammonite, a people who were specifically prohibited from entering the Temple!
 - a. **Deuteronomy 23:3-4** - *“No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you.”*
9. Pastor Gary said: “The building itself is never to be worshiped or idolized... We are building a new building, [and] it’s a beautiful building, but we are not going to worship the building. We worship the God of the building. But, the God of the building cares about what goes on in his building, and we need to care about what goes on in the house of the Lord. If you don’t think that’s true, you need to remember the Gospels. Because not once but twice, when you put [them] together, [the] Gospels tell us that at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and also at the end of Jesus’ ministry, he drove out the money-changers from the house of God. [They] had turned the house of God, which was supposed to be a house of prayer, into a den of thieves. They made it into a flea market! And Jesus [came] through on one of the occasions and the Bible [tells us] he braided a whip. [He was] not Sunday school Jesus! [He was] not meek and mild Jesus! [He was] Jesus who [was] ticked-off, [and had] righteous indignation. God cares about what happens in his house.”

The People Neglected The Tithe

10. **Nehemiah 13:10-11** - *“I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. So I rebuked the officials and asked them, ‘Why is the house of God neglected?’ Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts.”*
11. We need to remember that 100% of everything we have belongs to the Lord.
12. The tithe is a God-honoring principle for every Believer today, because the tithe is a reminder that everything belongs to the Lord and we are to look to the Lord as our provider.

13. The spirit of the law is still valid today, but the letter of the law is no longer valid, which means we are not obligated to give a tithe (a 10th of our gross income).
14. Jesus endorsed the tithe as a New Testament principle.
- a. **Matthew 23:23** - *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”*
 - b. The tithe was to be given, in part, to support those who served in the Temple.
15. **Nehemiah 13:12-14** - *“All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms. I put Shelemiah the priest,¹ Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their brothers. Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.”*

The People Neglected The Sabbath

16. **Nehemiah 13:15-18** - *“In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, ‘What is this wicked thing you are doing - desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn’t your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.’ ”*
17. Sabbath rest was put in place when the Ten Commandments were given to Moses.
- a. **Exodus 20:8-11** - *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor*

¹ Nehemiah replaced Eliashib with Shelemiah.

your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

- i. Technically, the Sabbath is from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.
 - ii. We practice a day of worship and rest on Sundays, because we honor the ongoing commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - iii. [Acts 20:7a](#) - *“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.”*
18. Sabbath is not a day, because we are not under the Law, however, the Sabbath is a good principle for us to experience and practice.
- a. [Colossians 2:16-17](#) - *“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival a New Moon Celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”*
19. We are to honor the Lord and rest one day out of the week.
- a. [Mark 2:27](#) - *“Then [Jesus] said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’ ”*
20. Pastor Gary said the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2010 that 30% of American adults (40.6 million people) are overworked and sleep deprived.²
21. [Nehemiah 13:22](#) - *“Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.”*

The People Neglected The Sanctity Of Marriage

22. [Nehemiah 13:23-26a](#) - *“Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God’s name and said: ‘You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned?’*

² <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6116a2.htm>

23. [Nehemiah 10:30](#) - *“We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or to take their daughters for our sons.”*
24. The problem is not one of interracial marriage or intermarriage with someone from another nation; it is a spiritual problem.
25. People from these neighboring countries worshiped false gods, so marriage with someone from a pagan culture was a major conflict because there would have been spiritual incompatibility.
26. Pastor Gary said: “Being on the same page spiritually is not only good biblically, it is good practically. Two people who understand Lordship in a marriage - where Jesus is Lord of [the] marriage - will have a unity about things where unity is simply not possible when one [person] is a Christian and one is not... When you have Jesus as Lord of your marriage [and] Lord of your family, you will have agreement and unity on the big issues. Big issues like how to manage money, how to raise kids, how to prioritize life, [and] how to love and forgive each other, which, can only come because you know Christ, as the one who forgives [you].”

The Conclusion

27. We must never let time erode our values, convictions, or principles.
28. We must always remain true to the Lord and his Word.

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Nehemiah 13:6-7a](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. What are some of the areas in your life in which you have allowed time to erode concerning your walk with the Lord?
4. How have the compromises you made cost you?
5. How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 when it comes to the way you handle money according to the biblical principle that the Lord owns everything?

6. If your financial accounts were analyzed in great detail, what would the most interesting finding be?
7. Read and discuss [Hebrews 10:24-25](#) and [Exodus 20:8-11](#).
8. How has the Lord blessed you because you remained true to biblical values and principles?
9. What are some of the non-negotiable values, convictions, and principles you hold dear?
10. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).