

"STILL GOING!" Nehemiah 13:4-31

How many times have we seen it?

It comes in many formats:

Great harpist playing;

we're invited to send for her record.

About time we realize something's strange about this ad,

HERE HE COMES AGAIN

The energizer bunny **"STILL GOING!"**

Won't those Energizer people ever stop harping on that bunny?!

"Seems like preachers are always harping on . . . !"

Didn't start in 21st C.!

Ezra twice **Nehemiah** twice (one overlap)

Then **Malachi** comes along with same themes.

And *they* didn't start it. It went back to **the prophets** before them.

Same subjects they covenant to keep in Neh. 10:

Keep God's people distinct Keep God's day

Give God His portion of our income

Don't marry pagans.

Maybe preachers harp on it; because God is harping on it!

God's people must turn back from neglect of God's Word!

NEHEMIAH'S THREE LATER REFORMS 13:4-31

Nehemiah goes back to Babylon for a few years.

"While the cat's away, the mice will play!"

He returns to discover same reforms are needed!

Again, these are *their* issues.

Our issues are not the same issues.

But we need to pay attention to what God wants US to do!

REFORM INVOLVING THE TEMPLE 13:4-14 10:32-39

Removal of Tobiah's storeroom 13:4-9 *Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah,⁵ 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.⁶ But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission⁷ and came back to Jerusalem. I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God.⁸ I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room.⁹ I gave orders to purify the rooms, then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.*

Tobiah is committed to stop the rebuilding of Israel.

He tries to distract and destroy the man leading return.

Enemy is comfortably seated inside, respected by people.

High Priest provides a guest room in the temple!

Bad: not enough offerings to create need for the room.

Worse: to use room for private business.

Worst: allow pagan control of part of God's house.

Swindoll: Tobiah in God's house is "like possum in chicken coop."

When Nehemiah hears about this arrangement, he cleans out Tobiah's property ("*throws out his goods*"), purifies and restores rooms to their intended use.

Getz: "He had the room fumigated!"

ISRAEL'S FOUR REPEATED FAILURES:

1) FAILURE TO HONOR GOD IN OUR ASSOCIATIONS

4-9; 23-31 => 2 Cor. 6:14-17 *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?* ¹⁵ *What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?* ¹⁶ *What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."* ¹⁷ *"Therefore come out from them and be separate..."*

God cares whom we link up with, in marriage or business,
but **especially in serving God.**

They decide the time has come to work together.

This is time for building bridges, pulling together to do things.

Just one problem – God says *don't do it!*

God wants His people to be distinct, separate from pagans.

We're not to live in isolation, but we are to be distinct from people around us who don't follow Him.

Amos asks *"Can two walk together unless they agree?"*

When we start *associating* with people who walk in darkness, we start *acting like* people who walk in darkness.

Dog poster – two homely dogs look alike – clingy skin all over them

"When two spend a lot of time together they begin to look alike!"

Kids start downhill because of gang they run around with.

Adults too: Keep company with wrong crowd,
you begin to *look like* the crowd.

God wants His people to have a distinct look.

We get that look when we hang together; encourage each other—
"stimulate one another to love and good deeds."

Restoration of tithes 13:10-14

Another problem related to use of temple storerooms:

people stopped giving tithes for God's servants.

2-sided problem:

Store rooms available—not being used for anything anyway.

Eliashib's lack of commitment to do God's will gives excuse for people who aren't motivated to give anyway.

Why should they support the program

when the Priest isn't doing what God requires?

2nd FAILURE: TO HONOR GOD WITH POSSESSIONS

10-14 *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.¹¹ 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.¹² All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms.¹³ I put Shelemiah the priest, [et al]... in charge of the storerooms... because these men were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their brothers.*

Those who serve in temple go back to their farm jobs.

Israel and leaders took vow not to let this happen (10:32-39), but fail to follow through.

Nehemiah goes into action. **Three steps:**

1) Nehemiah accuses leaders of neglect. 11a

They're to fulfill commitment whether Eliashib does or not.

They're responsible to see that they obey God.

Eliashib's responsible to see that he obeys God.

2) He re-establishes plan God gave them 11b-12

3) He names trustworthy leaders to encourage people to be faithful 13

Popular concept: Focus on tithing or people won't give.

Israel focuses on law of tithing; people still don't give.

It didn't work in Nehemiah's day; it doesn't work today!

Emphasizing law *never* motivates people to give.

**When Israel obeys and gives to God,
it's always because of gratitude to God.**

We give *generously* when we recognize how God gives to us.

God's blessing follows obedience, as He promised.

It's exciting to hear stories of people who take God seriously:

LeTourneau story is known around the world.

Gene Getz: Mary Crowley of Dallas. Began as orphan. 1st marriage ends in divorce; she's left with 2 children. She lived on small income, short money to pay basic bills and bus fare.

One day, she sat at kitchen table, struggling about giving tithe. She knew there's no way to carve out 1/10 and pay bills.

As she prayed, she made commitment to give 1/10 to God.

She operates multi-million dollar home decorating enterprise.

This *is NOT* a guaranty: "give to God => get rich."

God never promises that.

He promises to bless people who honor Him with possessions.

Lack of blessing in Nehemiah's day is partly due to failure to honor God with their possessions.

Could it be that one reason some of us seem to have "dried up," and don't enjoy blessing is because we've stopped giving? Gratitude and giving go together—it's a continuous circle.

Gratitude > Giving > Blessing

> Gratitude > Giving > Blessing > Gratitude

REFORM INVOLVING THE SABBATH 13:15-22 <=10:31

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day?¹⁸ 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."¹⁹ When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day.²⁰ Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem.²¹ But I warned them and said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath.²² Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy...

Along with neglect of temple came neglect of Sabbath.

This too they had vowed to stop=<10:31 *“When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day...”*

Not only are they allowing pagan marketers to sell on Sabbath, they themselves are back to working on the Sabbath.

Pagans are back in force. Many Jews are working
Nehemiah takes **four steps to correct offense:**

- 1) **He warns leaders:** reminds them this led to captivity 17-18
- 2) He **orders gates closed** from dusk before Sabbath 19
- 3) He **threatens** people who attempt to set up outside. 20-21
- 4) He **orders Levites to purify selves**; & guard gates. 22

3) FAILURE TO HONOR GOD WITH OUR TIME

Like tithe, law of Sabbath is never repeated in N.T.

Gathering of God's people changed from Sabbath (7th day = Sat.) to 1st day, day of our Lord's resurrection.

We aren't under that law anymore.

Like many areas, we confuse grace with libertinism.

**We spend *little* time worshiping God, serving Him,
in fellowship with other believers, and our families.**

Heb. 10:24-25 *Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

We avoid this at our own risk.

REFORM INVOLVING MARRIAGE 13:23-31 10:30

During Nehemiah's absence, many Jews marry pagans.
Separation and purification of God's people is lost.

4) FAILURE TO SEEK GOD'S PLAN IN OUR MARRIAGE

Prohibition of intermarriage 13:23-27 23-25 *I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab.²⁴ Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah.²⁵ I rebuked them... 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.*

Nehemiah responds in anger.

He warns: this problem harmed God's people in Solomon's day **26-27** *Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women.²⁷ Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"*

Removal of priest 13:28-31 *One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. And I drove him away from me.²⁹ Remember them, O my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites.³⁰ So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties...*

Most offensive intermarriage: grandson of High Priest, heir to office with daughter of Sanballat, opponent of God's people. Marriage is symbolic of how far down things have gone!

Nehemiah puts him out.

NEHEMIAH'S THREE PERSONAL APPEALS:

Nehemiah's zeal produces cleansing; restores fellowship.

They're able to ask God for His blessing.

Nehemiah seeks to faithfully follow God; he expects blessing.

Appeal repeated 3X, individual & representative.

Concludes each reform effort Nehemiah leads:

"Remember me, O my God"

14– ". . . and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services."

22– ". . . and have compassion on me according to the greatness of thy lovingkindness."

31– ". . . for good."

Effect of Nehemiah's actions among God's people:

They're following Him.

They can expect God to bless them.

Nehemiah's appeal for God to remember *his* deeds goes along with appeal to remember those who aren't faithful. 29

As *he* expects to be *blessed*, *they'll* be *judged* for unfaithfulness

Though the people respond positively, Nehemiah's prayer represents his zeal, more than *the desire of the nation*.

Israel returns to same state of neglect;

fails to experience blessing Nehemiah anticipates.

When Malachi comes, he has to deal with same issues again.

The nation will have to wait again for God's blessing.

When deliverance is over, memories of God's blessing fade, we begin to take Him for granted.

"Foxhole" prayers are soon forgotten.

APPLICATION TO OUR LIFE TODAY:

One lesson from observing Israel's history: if we fail to pay attention to what's important to God, things get worse.

We must actively care about the things God cares about!

What areas in our life need to be straightened out?

Are there things we need to pay attention to, to assure we're living the way God wants His people to live?

We're not asking pagans to live like Christians.

Challenge is to God's people.

Are we different than people around us?

Or, are we trying to look like everybody else?

What does God want us to work on to identify ourselves as His?

For Israel it includes:

- * Keeping God's enemies out of God's house.
- * Giving to God what's necessary to support His servants
- * Giving God back His day—no work on Sabbath
- * Rejecting mixed marriages, so His people look different.

Probably none of these are issues God wants to talk to US about, but there *are* things God wants to change in our lives.

What will *WE* do about what He's after US to straighten out?

When are we going to stop *talking* about it, and start *DOING*, what God wants us to do?

As leaders, we must make an issue about things that matter to God.

Tough times demand tough measures, and courageous faith.

Nehemiah has to confront those who're going astray in love.

He can't ignore it! Neither should we!

He keeps harping on same old problems

because God is still concerned about the same old problems.
Like that energizer bunny, He just keeps going.

That's what God wants from us when it comes to doing His will.
He wants us to keep going, even if it means harping on same old issues, until we complete the course set before us.

As God's people, we must inspect our lives to assure
that every area of our lives is turned over to Him;
that we're committed to do God's will!

We must dedicate ourselves to do whatever He wants us to do.

Whether in our associations, . . .

. . . in our use of our possessions,

. . . in our use of our time,

. . . in following God's plan for our marriage.

Will WE finish the race?

Will WE have reason to say,

"Remember me, O my God, for good!"