

“Continuing Renewal”

Nehemiah 13:1-31

CONTEXT OF NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 13

1. This chapter serves as an ‘addendum’ to Ezra-Nehemiah.

- The OT books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally compiled together as a history.
- Nehemiah wraps up at the end of chapter 12 with the dedication ceremony for the wall. Then...

2. The events of chapter 13 happen some time later than the earlier chapters. Ref. 13:6-7a

- Nehemiah had 2 visits to Jerusalem.
- Time of his first visit is more certain: from the 20th to the 32nd year of Artaxerxes (445 to 433 BC). 5:13
- Time of his second visit is less certain. Commentators guess he returned 8-13 years later (425-420 BC).
- James Montgomery Boice estimates Nehemiah’s age during his 2nd visit: about 65 years.

WHAT NEHEMIAH FOUND WHEN HE RETURNED TO JERUSALEM

- The people were wavering in their commitments. They had gone back on the promises they made.

1. The same old enemies. 13:4-9 Ref. 2:10, 19: 4:3-7; 6:12-19

- Eliashib the priest gave Tobiah space to live in rooms attached to the Temple. v.4-5
- This happened when Nehemiah was away in Babylon. v.6
- Nehemiah discovered it upon his return. v.7 (“evil”)
- Nehemiah threw out Tobiah’s furniture, cleansed the rooms, and filled them with tithes. v.8-9

2. The people had stopped tithing. 13:10-14 Ref. 10:32-39; 12:44

- The Levites “had fled each to his field.” v.10
- Nehemiah confronted the officials and put appointed men to collect and distribute the tithes. v.11-13

→ Why is the house of God forsaken? v.11

3. The people were breaking the Sabbath. 13:15-22 Ref. 10:31

- People were working and doing business on the Sabbath. v.15-16
- Nehemiah confronted the nobles. v.17-18
- He stopped commerce from happening on the Sabbath day. v.19-22

4. The people were intermarrying with other nations. 13:23-29 Ref. 10:28-30

- Their children could not speak “the language of Judah.” v.24 I.e., language of God’s Word
- The concern with intermarrying was not about race, but because of the debased religion of other nations.
- No objection in OT to marrying foreigners as long as both husband and wife worship the God of Israel.
 - Ruth was a Moabite. Boaz (a Jew) married her. (Read the story in Ruth 1-4)
 - Rahab was a pagan prostitute, but she converted to Judaism and married Salmon. (Ref. Matthew 1:5)

OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS...

1. “Backsliding” can happen over time. Ref. Revelation 2:2-5

- Our commitments... to the Lord, in our marriage, in our congregation, in purity, in daily devotions.
- HIS commitment... Ref. Psalm 24:3-4

2. Our attitude toward sin...

- Nehemiah ‘cleanses the Temple’ – compare with Jesus in Matthew 21:12-13

Recommended reading (an excellent resource on education from a Christian perspective):

The Closing of the American Heart—What’s Really Wrong With America’s Schools, by Ronald H. Nash.
(Probe Books, 1990)