

Correcting Broken Promises
Nehemiah 13
August 3rd, 2025

1. “Remember me for purifying the _____ of God”
(13:1-14)

2. “Remember me for guarding Your _____”
(13:15-22)

3. “Remember me for guarding _____ and the next
_____” (13:23-31)

4. Applying the Word
 - a. Live for an audience of _____.

 - b. Obey _____ acceptance not
_____ acceptance.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Nehemiah 13

1. Compare Deut. 23:3-6 to Neh. 13:1-3. How closely is the original passage quoted and applied? What reason is given for this exclusion? How does the story of Ruth narrow down the specific focus on the exclusion of foreigners? (Ruth 1:16, 22; 4:17-22)
2. Read each of the passages in Nehemiah that mention Tobiah (2:10, 19-20; 4:3; 6:12, 19). Why might it have been shocking and frustrating for Nehemiah to learn about the privilege Eliashib was showing Tobiah when he returned?
3. Why did the Levites leave their posts of service in 13:10? Who did Nehemiah reprimand for that? Although not an identical situation, how does this compare to a New Testament pastor who is paid in order to set aside more time for ministry rather than working a separate job? (1 Cor. 9:13-14)
4. Read each of the “remember me” requests carefully. (13:14, 22, 31) What questions come to mind when you read Nehemiah’s repeated request for God to “remember” him? How would you respond to someone who says that Nehemiah is being self-serving? See also Heb. 6:10; Mark 14:9; Matt. 25:21
5. What reasons does Nehemiah give for prohibiting intermarriage? (13:24-27)
6. Why is the intermarriage described in vv. 28-29 even more significant? See Lev. 21:14-15

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Big idea: Nehemiah corrected broken promises regarding marriage, the sabbath, and provision for the temple.

Intro

We might wish the book of Nehemiah ended with one of the previous chapters.

It could have ended with chapters 8, 9, and 10 - Revival and renewed commitment!

Or even chapters 11-12 – a joyful dedication of the wall and repopulation of the city!

But the Bible is more real than that. Our own experiences are more real than that.

It ends in this chapter with some failure and correction; some plans to address what went wrong.

And the transparent heart of a leader who fears God.

The recurring prayer that concludes each section of this chapter is “Remember me” vv. 14, 22, 31

What does that request mean? Is it self-serving or boastful? No, I don’t think so.

I think it reflects the heart of the one who values God’s approval over everything else.

Kidner - To Hear God’s ‘well done’ is the most innocent and most cleansing of ambitions.

Further, the plea springs from humility, not self-importance, for it is an appeal for help. God’s ‘remembering’ always implies his intervention, not merely his recollection or recognition. Nehemiah is committing himself and his cause to the only safe hands.

We’ll form the outline around these three requests for God to remember him.

1. “Remember me for purifying the ***house*** of God” (13:1-14)
 - a. Separating from foreigners in the assembly (13:1-3)
 - i. Basically quotes from Deut. 23
 1. **Deuteronomy 23:3** "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their *descendants*, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD,
 - ii. Religious not nationalistic
 1. The “excluded foreigners from Israel” but there are still foreign people in the very next verses so it isn’t that they removed them from the country but that in the assembly of the people before the Lord to hear the Word, to celebrate feasts, to sacrifice, etc., they were not included.
 - iii. Assembly not the nation
 1. There were foreign people in the nation of Israel and they were often referenced in the laws of Israel (Lev. 25:6)
 - iv. Unconverted not converted
 1. Deut 23 is stark and unqualified (Kidner) but as we look at the rest of the OT, we have an entire book that features the character Ruth the Moabitess.
 2. She joined herself to the people of Israel and followed their God. She married a man named Boaz and was in the line of king David and, therefore, in the line of Jesus.

- b. Removing Tobiah and his stuff from the temple complex (13:4-14)
 - i. After 12 years as governor, Nehemiah went back to the king of Persia in Susa, 800 miles away for some time. We don't know how long.
 - ii. Eliashib was the high priest (see also 13:28)
 - 1. **Neh. 3:1** Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred *and* the Tower of Hananel.
 - iii. Tobiah was an Ammonite and a persistent enemy of Nehemiah
 - 1. He was displeased when he heard Nehemiah was seeking the welfare of Israel (2:10)
 - 2. He mocked their work and accused them of rebelling against the king (2:19-20)
 - 3. He said a fox could knock over their wall (4:3)
 - 4. He hired false prophets to deceive and attack him (6:12)
 - iv. While Nehemiah was gone Eliashib took a large room at the temple complex that should have been used for people's offerings to provide for the priests and levites and other works at the temple.
 - v. It was displeasing to Nehemiah so he threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room and ordered they be cleansed (vv. 8-9)
 - 1. A preceding echo in the past of Jesus clearing out the money counters from the temple and overthrowing tables, there was a concern for the holiness of the house of God.
 - c. The Levites had not received the portions from the people that they were supposed to so they went back to other jobs. (13:10-13)
 - i. It is not the Levites and singers who were reprimanded but the officials who weren't providing for them.
 - ii. He gathered the levites and restored them to their posts, brought the supplies, and then put reliable men over the storehouses to prevent this from happening again.
 - d. The first "remember me" in the spirit of Hebs 6 and Mark 14:9
 - i. **Hebrews 6:10** For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.
 - ii. **Mark 14:9** "Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."
2. "Remember me for guarding Your **sabbath**" (13:15-22)
- a. They were working on the sabbath (treading wine) and buying from non-Jews who were selling on the sabbath.
 - b. They had specifically promised not to do this in chapter 10 but were violating it.
 - i. Nehemiah admonished them (v. 15) and reprimanded the nobles (v. 17)
 - c. Common question when a passage like this emphasizes the sabbath is whether it still applies to us today.
 - d. The fourth commandment was: Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy. (20:8-11)

- i. “Sabbath” is a word we bring directly over from Hebrew – it means “stoppage/stopping/cessation.”
 1. Remember the “stopping day”
- ii. We get the command (v. 8), specifics of what it means to keep the command (vv. 9-10), and the reason for the command (v. 11).
 1. **Exod. 20:8-11** ⁸ "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹ "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.
- iii. Command:
 1. Remember – not a purely cognitive thing – just like “remembering” your anniversary isn’t merely to think about it –
 2. This remembering is to keep the day holy – set apart from common labor and for worship and rest.
- iv. Specifics:
 1. The duty to work as image bearers of God is implied as well – on 6 days you shall labor – God governs our work as well as our rest.
 2. But the 7th day is a Sabbath “of the Lord your God” – it is a day for Him in a unique way.
 3. The details of you, son, daughter, servant, sojourner (foreigner) aren’t exhaustive but they are meant to clarify that this rest is a blessing for everyone – you can’t “rest” by putting the work on other family members or even servant.
 - a. This command has been called the first worker’s bill of rights because it commanded a day of rest be given to the servants as well.
 - b. **Mark 2:27** Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.
- v. Reason:
 1. God’s example of work and rest in creation – not because He was tired, but it does establish a pattern for us of work and rest.
 2. They are to remember their time in slavery. (Deut 5:14-15)
 3. A sign for the mosaic covenant (Ex 31:13-14)
 - a. By stopping work one day a week to worship it provided a regular weekly reminder for everyone – they demonstrate openly that they are keeping the covenant.
- vi. We aren’t under a sabbath law in the new covenant in Christ.
 1. **Colossian 2:16-17** Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- ¹⁷ things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

2. In what way is the Sabbath a shadow of the substance that belongs to Christ?
3. **Hebrews 4:9-10** So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.
4. The Sabbath provided a day of physical rest and worship of God. Jesus provided true spiritual rest, rest from working for God's approval.

vii. However,

1. God's example of a pattern of work and rest predated the giving of the law.
2. The NT church began a pattern of gathering not on the Sabbath (the last day of the week) but on the Lord's day (the first day of the week) as that was the day Jesus rose from the dead. (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).
3. Building a day into our schedule for rest, worship, assembling with God's people is wise and good even if not a "law" that we are under.

3. "Remember me for guarding **marriage** and the next **generation**" (13:23-31)

- a. We dealt with this in chapter 10 when they promised to obey in this area.
- b. The emphasis here is on the effect on the next generation.
 - i. They couldn't speak the language of Judah –
 - ii. Loss of access to the Word of God – we are a people of the book – today the full Bible has been translated into 756 languages (according to Wycliff) and the NT into an additional 1,726 languages – but that was not the case in Nehemiah's time – the Word of God was in Hebrew and to not know the language would cut the next generation off from access to God's Word.
 - iii. Kidner – a single generation's compromise could undo the work of centuries.
- c. When a single person is thinking about who to marry, they would be wise to ask the question, "would I want to raise children with this person?"
 - i. Not just – are they attractive, are they driven, do we like the same hobbies
 - ii. For the believer, the key concern should be whether they would be committed to doing all that they could to see their kids follow Jesus.
- d. Nehemiah's reaction might seem extreme
 - i. He cursed them – not "screaming profanity" but reminding them of God's divine sanction against their actions.
 - ii. He struck some and pulled out their hair – an act of shame and disgrace.
 - iii. Notice that he said they are committing a great evil, acting unfaithfully against God?
 1. This is not merely an unwise thing or something that will simply lead to a harder marriage.
- e. Even the high priest's grandson was in on it, marrying the daughter of another one of the named enemies from the book of Nehemiah, Sanballat the Horonite.
- f. Remember me - consistent prayer, request that God remember him indicate that Nehemiah is primarily concerned about the Lord's approval not the approval of any people.
 - i. Who could have been upset by Nehemiah's actions?

- ii. Neh 13:3 – foreigners who lived in Judah but did not follow YHWH and were excluded from the assembly
- iii. 13:4 – Eliashib the priest (high priest?) who gave a room to Tobiah, embarrassed by such a public rolling back of his actions
- iv. 13:5 – Tobiah who was kicked out of a room at the temple
- v. 13:11 – the officials who were reprimanded for forsaking the house of God
- vi. 13:13 – whoever was previously in charge of the storehouses, if there was one
- vii. 13:15 – those who were bringing things to sell on the sabbath
- viii. 13:16 – men of Tyre who imported fish
- ix. 13:17 – the nobles of Judah who were reprimanded
- x. 13:20 – the traders and merchants who spent the night outside Jerusalem
- xi. 13:23 – the Jews who had married foreign women, the foreign women who had married Jewish men
- xii. 13:28 – The grandson of Eliashib the high priest who was driven away for marrying a foreign woman; Eliashib himself and his son, Joiada, who could have been offended and embarrassed by this action; Sanballat the Horonite who was also related by marriage

4. Applying the Word

- a. Live for an audience of **one**.
 - i. The repeated refrain of “remember me, O God” points to Nehemiah’s main concern to please God.
- b. Obey **from** acceptance not **for** acceptance.
 - i. This closes the historical books of the OT. The next account in the canon of scripture is the coming of the Messiah
 - ii. **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
 - iii. **John 1:17** For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.



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Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

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