

*Series: Rebuild; Sermon: **When Things Fall Apart**; Delivered by Josh Moody, senior pastor, on December 13, 2020*

Bible text explored: Nehemiah 13:1–31

¹On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, ²for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

⁴Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, ⁵prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. ⁶While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king ⁷and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. ⁸And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. ⁹Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

¹⁰I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. ¹¹So I confronted the officials and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. ¹²Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. ¹³And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers.

¹⁴Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

¹⁵In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. ¹⁶Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! ¹⁷Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? ¹⁸Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”

¹⁹As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. ²⁰Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. ²¹But I warned them and said to them, “Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you.” From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. ²²Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.

²³In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. ²⁵And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. ²⁷Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?”

²⁸And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me. ²⁹Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

³⁰Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; ³¹and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits.

Remember me, O my God, for good.

[ESV]

Review and application:

Nehemiah must have been confident (verses 6-7a) that the reforms he instituted as governor freed him to return to the Persian court. The religious and political leaders had promised to obey the Law of God (Nehemiah 10:1-25), with the rest of the people adding their vows (10:28-29). He had provided for maintaining Temple worship and community purity (10:30-39 and 12:44-47). But things still fell apart!

1. What (*verses 4-7*) was the situation Nehemiah discovered on his return?
How (*verse 8*) did he react emotionally?
Why was his zeal a positive response on the passive-to-passionate continuum?
How did Jesus respond to failures to maintain the holiness of God’s house?
(See *John 2:12-17; Mark 11:15-17*.)
Are you more angry about your reputation or about God’s honor?
But why is anger a dangerous emotion? (See *Ephesians 4:26-27*)
2. What did Nehemiah do to properly care for the Temple?
3. How (*verses 10-13*) did Nehemiah deal with the financial requirements for ministry maintenance?
Do you agree that every church member and regular attendee should contribute something to its budget?
4. How (*verses 15-22*) did Nehemiah respond to the profaning of the Lord’s Day he encountered?
Do you agree with Pastor Moody’s assertion that sports involvements are the biggest barrier to consistent church attendance?
Are you willing to take a stand on this issue in your family?
5. What (*verses 1-3*) had the people learned from the Scriptures read during the dedication of the reconstructed city walls?
How (*verses 23-27*) can we know that interreligious, rather than interracial marriages, were at issue? (See *2 Corinthians 6:14*.)
Is Jesus at the center of your family?

6. Whose approval (*verses 14, 22, 29*) motivated all Nehemiah's efforts?
In what do you invest your time and energies?
Who was forsaken (*verse 31*) that you might be remembered?
(See *Matthew 27:46* and *Luke 23:42-43*.)