

## ***Garbage Duty***

### **Building God's Way Series (Nehemiah) – Part 7**

The Realistic Mess of Real Change

Nehemiah 13:1-31

3/20/21-3/21/21

#### **Introduction**

- **Do you remember?**
  - Do you remember that one time you took out the trash?
  - Do you remember that one time you brushed your teeth?
  - Do you remember that one time you got gas in your car?
  - No of course you don't. Because those aren't one-time events. They are designed to be continual processes.
- **Sin & Maturing** - In the same way rooting out sin isn't a one-time thing and maturing in our spiritual life is a continual process. It happens over and over. It sneaks back in for a variety of reasons. Just like taking the garbage out isn't a one-time event and neither is holy living and ridding ourselves of that which so easily entangles us. But if we give up when we see that we are flaky and unfaithful, we lose.
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Get Comfortable with PROCESS**
  - **The Yuck and complexity of Process**
    - **How human beings grow spiritually** - Life is a series of setbacks, challenges and victories. We don't grow in a straight line or an ever-increasing stairway to heaven. We are kind of all over the place.
    - **The point isn't to arrive** – The point is to transform. The more we change the more we see needs to change. The more we mature the more we realize that we need to mature more.
    - **What this means is...**

#### **CHANGE is Never a One Time Event**

- **Recap and Set Up**
  - **Pastor Brian taught us last week** that after the wall was built in Jerusalem, there was a huge celebration and a dedication to God where Israel signed a covenant with Him citing that they would be faithful and do what He wanted them to do. Everything looked awesome. But Nehemiah had to handle one more thing that was important (turn with me to Nehemiah 13:1):
    - *Ne 13:1–3 – “On that day they read from the Book of Moses [Deut 23:3-6] in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God,<sup>2</sup> for 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.<sup>3</sup> As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.”*

- **Separating from Ammonites and Moabites: The Background Stories** – Wandering in Israel and rejection by A&M, as well as the attempted curse through Balaam.
  - **Unique History of the Ammonites and Moabites** – Both people groups are related to the Jewish people. Abraham’s nephew/cousin (it’s not clear, likely nephew) named Lot, got drunk a couple times and his daughters took advantage of that and got pregnant from their father. The older one had a son and named him Moab (Moabites) and the younger had a son and named him Ben-Ammi (Ammonites).
  - **Rejection Story** - Initially Dt 2:9, 18-20 reveals that initially Israel wasn’t supposed to fight with the Ammonites. God carved out a space for them in honor of their forefather Lot. But, apparently at some point the Ammonites closed their doors to Israel. Trying to find out the specific story this ties to is difficult. There are four possibilities of what this passage is specifically talking about:
    1. **Ammonite/Amorite Connection** - The Ammonites and Amorites were closely connected (likely arriving in that area of the world at the same time, and almost impossible to discern the differences over time). That would mean this was referring to the time when the Amorite King Sihon (Num 21:21-24) rejected Israel from going through their borders and they fought.
    2. **Ammonite/Moab Connection** - The Ammonites and Moabites were closely linked as families so the Ammonites are guilty by association. This passage actually reads more about the Moabites than the Ammonites.
    3. **Ammonite Balaam Support** - It was a backward curse when the Ammonites supported the Balaam curse situation that the Moabites did. This is the most supported view by scholars.
    4. **Hospitality Curse** - It was a general curse for a kin of Israel not to go out of their way to help Israel when they were wandering in the wilderness. Lack of hospitality would be the curse here. But there’s no other evidence in Scripture to support this.
  - **Balaam Story** – Starting in Numbers 22, we read the story of Israel wandering in the desert after coming out of Egypt. They came to camp in the region of Moab. Israel was told not to harm them but the paranoid king of Moab (Balak) saw how many there were and freaked out. He sent for a quasi-Godly prophet named Balaam, to curse the Jews/Hebrews. But when he consulted God, God told him “don’t curse them”. Moab offered more money and Balaam asked again. God allowed him to go, but got mad at him for doing so (enter the talking donkey story). Finally, Balaam arrives to the Moabite king and every time he speaks over Israel it comes out a blessing over them. The king of Moab is furious but there’s nothing he can do. (later Israel interconnects with idolatry with Moab which becomes ‘Balaam’s’ issue later

on, but that's another story). Ironically, Ruth is a Moabitess who is in the lineage of Christ.

- **The Result** – purification of the new Jerusalem Inhabiting Plan. They cut out any Moabites or Ammonites from the settlement.
- **Gap Between verses 3 & 4 (Nehemiah leaves)** – when you put the story together you find out that there is a gap between verses 3 & 4. Nehemiah had gone back to his job and home working for King Artaxerxes (again? Did he go back and forth?) in his 12<sup>th</sup> year of this project. While he was gone things kind of fell apart back in Jerusalem.
  - **4 Major Problems Arose**
    1. Tobiah, the enemy all along, had been given a place to live in the Temple (by Tobiah's relative).
    2. Tithes had dropped off and Levites had to quit and go back home.
    3. People were working on the sabbath
    4. The Jews had intermarried again
  - **Leadership dropped the ball.** None of this should have happened. Nehemiah should have been able to leave without things blowing up. But the leadership (good leadership) failed to keep it going, so it required Nehemiah to come back and make it right.
    - **Illustration** - Working on my house versus working on other people's houses (renovation project sounds way better because I can leave it. I like building but not maintaining). Rarely do things stay the way you left them.
    - **Malachi** - It's believed that Malachi prophesied during this time in history, talking about a lot of the same issues that Nehemiah had to address again.
  - **How this Message Will Go** - Let's briefly look through the stories in highlights and learn a few tricks for living along the way. Then toward the end we'll spend some time talking about the complexity of PROCESS of growing as a Christian.
    - We pick up our story at Nehemiah 13:4...

## Lesson

- **Pest Control**
  - **Nehemiah Has to Kick Out Tobiah From Living in the Temple**
    - *Ne 13:4–9 – “Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah,<sup>5</sup> prepared 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.<sup>6</sup> While 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<sup>7</sup> and 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.<sup>8</sup> And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber.<sup>9</sup> Then 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.”*

- **Who's Tobiah Again?** – Tobiah was a very influential Ammonite that opposed the Jews coming back and resettling Jerusalem. He was a partner with the other main bad guy who opposed the resettlement, Sanballat (the Horonite, Governor of Syria). They were later joined by Geshem the Arab as well (and Philistines at Ashdod). This crew belittled Nehemiah and his efforts, threatened him, slandered him (lying that he was rebelling against the big King Artaxerxes of Babylon, Medo-Persian Empire) and planned an attack to kill him secretly, hired a false prophet to lead him astray, and planned a battle to fight all the Jews that came into town. Tobiah personally kept up the vendetta against Nehemiah even after the wall was built (Neh 6:17-19).<sup>1</sup>
- **Who was Eliashib and What did He do?** – Eliashib was the Jewish HIGH PRIEST in Jerusalem! He gave the enemy a place to live IN THE TEMPLE. Who is he? He was a good guy. Eliashib helped Nehemiah rebuild the wall (3:1). Why did he help the bad guys? He was connected to the bad guys by family. Not only was he related directly to Tobiah, his grandson married Sanballat's daughter! Besides, the rooms were empty at the time because the tithing had fallen to the wayside and the Levites had all gone home to family farms.
- **What was Nehemiah's solution?** - Nehemiah kicked him out and cleansed the Temple.
- **What can We Learn From This?**
  - **White Hats, Black Hats & Gray Hats** – it would be so much easier if bad guys wore black hats and good guys wore white hats. But we live in a land of gray hat people. Sometimes those we are battling are our friends, our family members, people in our own house. Some of us came from Anti-Christian families that think that you being here at church is not only absurd but wrong and they demean you for it. Some of us have friends that want nothing to do with our faith and make fun of us every chance they can get. It all gets confusing and blended. It's not like you can draw a clear line and have your opponents to your faith on one side and everyone that agrees with you on the other. It's messy. But that simply means we need to navigate carefully and orchestrate our boundaries and pushbacks delicately. It's quite the process to sift and sort influences around us. Some of our greatest opponents are related to us. Crazy process. But...
    - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Get Comfortable with PROCESS**
- **System of a Down**
  - **The Tithing System Fails and Levites Are Out of a Job**

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<sup>1</sup> Neh 6:17-19 – "Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. <sup>18</sup>For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife. <sup>19</sup>Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid."

- [Ne 13:10–14 – “I 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.<sup>11</sup> So I confronted the officials and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them together and set them in their stations.<sup>12</sup> Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.<sup>13</sup> And 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.<sup>14</sup> Remember 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.](#)
  - **What’s the Problem?** – No one was bringing in the tithe and getting it to the temple workers so they had to quit and go back home. The system had failed. It was set up by God to bring health to the nation and they let it fall apart. There’s always going to be terrible consequences when we ignore God’s spiritual systems.
  - **What’s Nehemiah’s Solution?** – get better leaders to handle it and restart the tithing process for the nation.
  - **What can We Learn From This?**
    - **Systems for Living** – Do you realize that the reason I have been following the Lord for my whole life and been in ministry for so many decades is because I’ve been forced into healthy systems that keep me going? I would love to say that I could live your lifestyle and still be as dedicated as I am, but the truth is, that I struggle just like everyone else and sometimes it’s only the systems around me that keep me healthy. What do I mean by systems? I’ll give you four:
      1. **Healthy Support System** – I chose a godly wife. I raised godly kids. I remained close to my godly mom. I have an Intercessory Prayer team praying for me consistently. I have some godly friends. I have a wise and godly staff. It would be nearly impossible for me to be picked off by the enemy all by myself.
      2. **Accountability System** – I chose to be heavily involved in an occupation that has high demands on me remaining close to God. I don’t have a job that encourages me to cheat or compromise. I have decided to live in the most transparent way possible so that leaders around me can see into my heart.
      3. **Encouragement System** – I chose men and women to join the staff here at church and partner with me that are encouraging and that I love to be around. Laughter fills my bucket and hopefulness keeps me encouraged. The amount of screwing around, making jokes and laughing at ourselves that occurs while we are all working really, really hard, is significant.
      4. **Serving System** – I am forced to serve. I am forced to be about other people. I am demanded to show up every day and make it about other people than myself. My calendar is full of people who need me to get out

of my own head and serve them. Without that system I could easily drift into selfishness. The system keeps me focused.

- **The Bottom Line** – Being human means that you and I will ebb and flow, rise and fall, hot and cold. It's part of the natural process of being part of this world. Therefore, we need external systems that support those fluctuations and keep us healthy and vibrant.
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Get Comfortable with PROCESS...And then compensate for it.**
- **Holy...Failure Batman!**
  - **The Sabbath is Ignored**
    - *Ne 13:15–22 – “In 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. <sup>16</sup> Tyrians 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! <sup>17</sup> Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? <sup>18</sup> Did 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.” <sup>19</sup> As 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. <sup>20</sup> Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. <sup>21</sup> But 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. <sup>22</sup> Then 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.”*
      - **What's the Problem?** People were working on the Sabbath and the local merchants (Tyrians) that weren't Jewish, were hanging around and making it worse. This was a consistent problem in Israel through their whole history.
      - **What was Nehemiah's Solution?** – Rebuke the leadership, remind them that's how we got into this mess, lock the gates, chase off the foreign vendors and make the Sabbath holy again.
      - **What can We Learn From This?**
        - **A.) Cycles of Sin** – One of the most aggravating things about growing as a Christian is struggling over and over with the same sins habitually throughout our lives. It makes us feel like the process doesn't work. It makes us question our commitment. I'm not saying that we shouldn't look at the fruit of our lives and ask some questions, I'm saying that when you are doing your best, there are still cycles of temptation and sin that you are going to wrestle with.

But instead of seeing it as a mystery, let's just call it as it is: Process. There are certain sins that our personalities and life situations are prone to. That's going to bring them around over and over. It's not magical, it's not failure. It's part of the process.

- **B.) The Temptation of More** – Why wouldn't Israel (or us) want to rest more? Why wouldn't the Sabbath be a GREAT idea? Because it stops us from something we like, which is what? More. We work to get stuff. We are addicted to stuff. We want more stuff. When we stop working, we don't get as much stuff. When we don't see a value in the reason for the stopping accumulation, we rebel against it. Israel clearly didn't value the concept of Sabbath enough for it to overwhelm the greed for more/different. I'm not blaming them as if I don't have the same problems, I do. Why don't I just kick back and relax more? Usually, it's because things get out of control and it causes me more work after the break. But deep down I crave advancing and feel less than when I don't advance. Until that is ministered to by Christ's nature being formed in me and the inclusion of His identity, I will always struggle with this type of rest.
- **Bottom Line** – It's human nature to want more. It's human nature to continue to battle the same sins over and over again. That doesn't mean that you don't love God. It doesn't mean that you don't want to do different. It's part of the process.
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Get Comfortable with PROCESS**
  - **Natural, Not Best** - But, although it's natural doesn't mean it's best. Christian process means that we allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us out of natural patterns and disciple us out of worldly living. It means that we see the patterns of sin coming and make different decisions this time and eliminate the footholds of the devil. It means that we mature to understand that more will never be enough so we need to stop trying to chase phantoms, and learn to be content with what we have and live with gratitude. That way when God calls us to a better way of living our identity in Christ allows it.
- **Like a Dog to It's Vomit**
  - **Israel Falls into the Pattern of Inter-marriage Again**
    - *Ne 13:23–31 – “In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. <sup>24</sup> And 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. <sup>25</sup> And 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. <sup>26</sup> Did 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. <sup>27</sup> Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?" <sup>28</sup> And 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. <sup>29</sup> Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. <sup>30</sup> Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; <sup>31</sup> and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good."

- **What was the Problem?** Intermarriage – leaders had intermarried their children with forbidden foreigners.
- **What was Nehemiah's Solution** – beat some offenders, got rid of the worst offenders and rebellious, made them promise to not do it again and restarted the purity process (cleansed them from everything foreign). Not sure how he did that logistically (Ezra demanded divorces, but it seems like Nehemiah's reforms just made them stop, moving forward from that point).
- **Nehemiah's Extreme Actions/Reactions** – Pulling out people's beards, cursed them, beat them? Wow! What is Nehemiah's doing here? Well, look back and you see he was intense the whole way through: Throwing Tobiah's Furniture out on the street; Confronting leaders publicly about the Tithing System failure; threatening bodily harm for foreigners violating the Sabbath; and now this!
  - **We have 2 choices on what's happening?** 1.) Nehemiah is just a brutal and abusive leader out of control; 2.) The stakes are too high to mess around and he has to get his point across.
    - **Jesus got extreme as well.** 2 areas come to mind: 1.) When He overthrew the moneychangers' tables in the Temple and made a whip; 2.) When He said that if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off.
    - **Are these unstable abusive leaders?** No.
    - **People are playing with fire.** Cutting off someone's hand, arm or leg is super extreme but if there's gangrene that's going to take over and kill the whole person, it's a necessary surgery.
    - **What Nehemiah & Jesus Knew** – Nehemiah knew that it was because of patterns of sin like this that the entire nation of Israel was removed from their homeland and exiled to pagan territory with countless thousands of deaths and worldwide humiliation. They had only gotten back into the land about 93 years so far. They were just starting back up again. If he let this go, God would just wipe them out again. The stakes were too high. In the same way Jesus knew that the moneychangers were taking advantage of a selfish and hateful perspective that the Gentile court didn't matter and they could profit off God's stuff for their gain. They didn't think it was big deal but it was. Jesus knew that if sin is allowed to remain, it doesn't sit idle, it's like a gangrene that can turn a body septic and kill you. If anything



the responses seem appropriate in light of the true violations occurring.

- **What Can We Learn From This?**

- **Why Israel Did It** – Why did Israel intermarry? They kept getting into trouble for it, so why bother? Why not just stick with their own crew and move on? To be honest I don't know. I don't know if the Bible clearly lays out why, so I am going to make educated guesses why by looking at human nature and historical context. Here are my main guesses:
  - **Better Options** – in this particular case, we have a very limited group of Jews in the same area. That means there are very, very few options for marriage for their kids. When it's a very tight knit community (like Jews tend to be), you know everyone and everyone knows you. That familiarity is good for some things but perhaps not for options for marriage.
  - **Possible Advancement** – Some of the Jews that came out of Babylon and came back to Jerusalem, seemed to come back with some money (where they got it I don't know), but they put a lot into the building of the Temple and now the building of the wall. Yet, the majority of the Jews were poor (remember the taxation problem where people were selling their kids into slavery to make ends meet). Is it possible that the surrounding nations were wealthier and marrying their kids into a better situation to better the family was tempting?
  - **It's No Big Deal** – I am absolutely certain that not all the Jews bought into the rules and regulations that were being put on them. They knew generally about God and about what the old ancient documents said, but now it was about their own modern lives. I would guess that tailoring your current life with an ancient book was a struggle. If it's not that big of a deal (marrying another Jew) then why do it? Why sacrifice and limit yourself if it's not that big of a deal?
  - **Other Reasons** – I'm sure there's a lot of other reasons, but you get my point.
- **Why We Do It** – So why do we intermix with the world around us? It may not be technical intermarriage issues, but it's certainly fusing into the secular culture around us. So why? Is it not the same reasons as Israel intermarried?
  - **Better Options** – Why do good Christians keep dating those who don't know the Lord? Is it because there are more and better options of people to date?
  - **Possible Advancement** – Why do Christians compromise and cut corners when they know what God desires for them? Isn't it because you can get a little bit more if you do? Isn't it that your career will go further, your bank account will grow or your influence will increase?
  - **It's No Big Deal** – Why do Christians ignore what the Bible says? Isn't it because it's only an opinion, and an ancient one at that? God doesn't really care about that stuff right? That stuff is for the religious fanatics,

right? You are a normal person so different rules apply, right? Besides if you mess up God will just forgive you, right?

- **Making Difficult Choices isn't only for a season, it's for a lifetime.** The built in process demands that we say no to things that are tempting to say yes to things that are best.
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Get Comfortable with PROCESS**

### Let's Make it Personal

- **Why Do Others Keep Failing Us** (like they did to Nehemiah)? **Heck, Why do We Keep Failing All the Time?** (spiritual ups and downs)
  - **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Get Comfortable with PROCESS**
- **How do we build forward when we take so many steps back?**
  - **Demotivational Living** - It's demotivating when we are surprised that we have to keep growing. We live in disappointment when we think arrival is the point.
    - **Simon Sinek's point of view** (Thrive SBO Conference at Bayside Online) – *The Infinite Game* Book - finite vs. infinite games in life.
      - **Finite games** = players are clear. Rules are fixed. There are winners and losers. It's like games in sports.
      - **Infinite games** = there are known and unknown players, changing rules, staying in is the goal. There are No winners and losers.
        - **In infinite scenarios there's no such thing** as “climbing to #1.” Compared to what? We've been taught in business to “play to win” but that's not our actual game scenario in business.
        - **His Point – in Business**, we are actually playing an infinite game. We are trying to be our best, not 'beat the other guy and be #1'. The minute you are number one in one category you may not be in another (financially strong but morale is ruined). There's no clear #1 to shoot for. We need to view it as an infinite game where we do everything, we can to be the best we can be and stay in the game solidly as long as we can.
      - **My Point Here** – Life and Christian Growth are Infinite Games. It's not a dash, it's a marathon. Our goal is to continually refresh and continually grow and continually rest and continually rebound, etc. Don't fall into the fallacy of believing the end is on the other side of the hill and not plan for beyond.
    - **Seasonal Refreshment** – Another pitfall we fall into is expending a lot of energy and saying we are 'done.' Let's say that you and I don't manage our energy well and we do expend it all in a season. What's great about how God designed our infinite game, is that fresh energy comes again from the Holy Spirit. When you feel stuck and like nothing matters, opportunity to reignite and restart is just around the corner. **The Holy Spirit is managing our Process.**

### Conclusion

- **Ups and Downs are how it works.**

- **If we're going to build God's way we need to...Get Comfortable with PROCESS**
  - **God's not shocked by our unfaithfulness**, although he won't leave us there.
  - **God isn't horrified by our humanity**, but He's given us His Spirit so we are more than that.
  - **God can handle failure and repeated sins**, but Jesus died so that we would be free of them.
  - **The Best Kind of Process**, and the only one we are interested in is the one that propels us forward. It may be slow, but if God has anything to say about it, we are always advancing.
- **Rooting out sin isn't a one-time thing**. It happens over and over. It sneaks back in for a variety of reasons. Just like taking the garbage out. If we give up when we see that we are flaky and unfaithful, we lose.