

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 18TH - 19TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

A PLEDGE (NEHEMIAH 10:1-29)

IN LIGHT OF OUR CURRENT SITUATION

Because the Jews realized that they were incapable of making it without God, they **committed to living for God** and signed a pledge to be **held accountable**.

- **In view of all their sin and arrogance against God they took steps to change**, and Nehemiah chose to place them under an oath to ensure they'd keep their word.

THE LEADERS WERE HELD INTO ACCOUNT FIRST

The long list of names are of the governor (Nehemiah), the priests, the Levites, and all "heads of the people" that put their seals on the document to ensure their allegiance. The "rest of the people" took a "sworn oath."

- **We're all responsible for a relationship with God, but spiritual and civic leaders will be held to a stricter judgment** (Jn. 3:1).

"...TO FOLLOW THE LAW OF GOD"

Their oath was to follow the commands of God given to them by Moses. The importance of following the law was to set them apart as **holy**.

- 1 Pt. 2:9 echoes the principle of **being a "chosen" and "holy" people that are set apart to proclaim the truth of God to the world. This is shown in our obedience to God's teachings and principles.**

YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO BE BORN INTO IT

Many of the people committing to this were not Jewish by blood, but foreign converts to the true God. **Our distinction in the world is not from nationality, skin color, or how we dress, but from how we live.**

- **Regardless of our backgrounds we can become instruments for God's kingdom if we will submit to the King.**

SPECIFICS | PART 1 (NEHEMIAH 10:30-34)

"WE WILL NOT GIVE OUR DAUGHTERS..."

V30 is a promise to not let their children marry people that don't believe in their God. It has nothing to do with color or nationality, but the "unequal yoking" (2 Cor. 6) of opposing theologies.

- Gen. 2:24 says we "become one flesh" with our spouse. **If we know better but "yoke" ourselves to false belief in marriage, we compromise our faith.**

WORK AND PERSONAL BALANCE

Another promise was to not conduct business or work on the Sabbath. This was a command from God because He knows we need rest.

- **Setting intentional time to rest not only settles us down, it reminds us of God's provision. This intentional time to recharge spiritually helps us be set apart for God's use.**

SABBATH IS NOT VEGGING OUT

Sabbath literally means cessation, or coming to a close. Though it is often the end of a week, it can be on any day at any time. Sabbath is a way of living and honoring God through intentional and spiritual rest.

- **Sabbath is not Netflix or girls night out, it is the purposeful time to meditate, read, and praise God in order to refuel.**

COMMITMENT TO BENEVOLENCE AND GRACE

Every 7th year the land would be given time to rest and all debts would be cancelled. This honored the land God had given the people and it blessed those who were in debt.

- **The point was to cultivate grace and benevolence to others and to also steward the earth well.** How are we doing with these two things?

TAKING CARE OF THE TEMPLE

The 8% Temple Tax mentioned in V32-33 is not mandated by God, therefore "impose[d]" on themselves. This tax would pay for all of the needs of the building and for the festivals throughout the year.

- Later we will see that the tithe (10%) went to pay the priests. Nowadays we just tithe and that covers all expenses.

GOING EVEN FURTHER

So, not only did the people give 18% to the work of the ministry, they also "cast lots" to take turns bringing in the wood necessary for the sacrifices on the altars in the temple.

- Besides the tithe, all of the giving was above what God had commanded them. This is important because it shows the gratefulness and willingness of the people.

SPECIFICS | PART 2 (NEHEMIAH 10:35-39)

BRINGING OUR BEST TO GOD

The "firstfruits" were literally the best fruit from the fruit trees around Jerusalem. The Jews would bring these offering first to symbolize God's ownership of everything the Jews had.

- **The key is to remember that everything we have is only stewarded by us, but it belongs to God.** With this mindset it is easy to bring our best to Him.

EVEN THEIR SONS AND LIVESTOCK

So, not only the harvest, but also the livestock and the firstborn son of the family are to be offered to God. The offering of the son wasn't literal, but they would give an extra payment to the temple for every firstborn son.

- This is another reminder that **all we have has been entrusted to us by God and we must lean on Him to steward it well.**

OFFERING WHAT THEY HAD MADE

V37 mentions the offering of man made things like bread, wine, and olive oil along with grains and the produce of the crops.

- This shows us that **we must also submit our talents and abilities as an offering to God. God has given us skills that we are to use for the Kingdom and to bless others.**

TAKING CARE OF THE VOCATIONAL MINISTERS

From the man-made offerings the Levites would be provided for. As the people gave 10% to pay the salaries of the pastors, the pastors would also give 10% back.

- There were also accountability measures put in place from "a priest from Aaron's descendants" that would make sure the tithe was used ethically.

"WE WILL NOT NEGLECT THE HOUSE OF OUR GOD"

The chapter ends with a summary of what the people swore to do in order to strengthen the church community: **commit to living by God's commands, be held accountable, protect Sabbath time, and use their resources wisely and to honor God.**

HASN'T THE HOUSE CHANGED?

- 1 Cor. 3:16 says that we are now the "temple of God," but the point is still the same: we must purposefully keep ourselves holy and set apart for God to use us.
- The Christian is responsible for themselves, the church, and the reputation of both amongst non-believers in the world.

WE CANNOT NEGLECT THE HOUSE

- We must **choose to commit** to a relationship with God and the building of His Church/Kingdom.
- To effectively do this **we must live distinct, separate, and holy lives.** This doesn't mean isolation, but **an insulation by living and thinking with a biblical worldview.**
- We must also welcome **accountability.**
- We must give God our best. This doesn't mean we can't enjoy life, but that we **"seek first" His Kingdom before our passions.**
- The "firstfruits" we are to bring to God are our **time, finances, and talents/abilities.** If we will steward these resources well, we will live with joy and be a blessing to those around us.

THE COST OF NEGLIGENCE

- If we neglect our relationship with God, we forfeit not only wisdom, peace, and joy offered to us in this life, we forfeit eternity.
- **Our individual negligence also bleeds onto those around us.** The negligence of the individual affects the health of the church, and the health of the church affects the health of the community.

A SIMPLE INVENTORY

- Are we committed? Would we swear by it?
- Are we giving God the "firstfruits" of our time, finances, and talents?
- Are we offended when held accountable?
- Do we understand the ramifications of neglecting the upkeep of the "house?"
- What will we do differently after this moment?