

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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WE WILL NOT NEGLECT THE HOUSE OF OUR GOD

Nehemiah 9:38 and 10:28-29; 34; 39

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INTRODUCTION: Before we begin our lesson on Nehemiah 8, let's recap what we have learned.

- The walls of Jerusalem were still in ruins.
- When Nehemiah heard about this, he prayed for God's favor and committed himself to the rebuilding.
- King Artaxerxes approved his request for leave and resources.
- Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem, examined the ruined walls, rallied the people, and delegated the work.
- Despite enemies from without and problems from within, the wall was completed in record time.
- Nehemiah appointed people to be in charge, set up rules for guarding the city, and conducted a census to determine resources and manpower.
- Nehemiah and the prophet Ezra gathered the people to celebrate the new year, recommit themselves to God's word, and to worship.
- The people spent time recapping the faithfulness of God to the nation of Israel and remembering their own unfaithfulness.

The Israelites had a strong sense of national identity. They took responsibility for the sins of their ancestors as well as their own sins. They recognized how the individual impacted the community. Sufficiently convicted, they repented and made a pledge to the Lord to do better. Today, we will consider their promises and how they apply to us.

My message has four points:

- The Israelites pledged to live differently.
- They promised to give financially.

- They vowed to provide physical resources.
- They committed to care for God’s servants.

1-THE ISRAELITES PLEDGED TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 9:38 and 10:28-29

“In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”

10:28 *“The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—²⁹ all these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.*

EXPLANATION: After God rescued the Israelites from the land of Egypt, he gave them the Law. The Law, which we find in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, includes legal and spiritual principles, rules, and commandments. Just like the Constitution and Bill of Rights help define the identity of the United States, these regulations distinguished Israel from the surrounding nations. In his wisdom, God gave the Israelites rules that may have seemed ridiculous to other nations, but God always has a purpose.

God wanted the Israelites to be different, to live distinctly. This was for their own good and for his glory. He wanted to protect them from the dangers of foreign entanglements. He wanted to protect the Sabbath day so that the people could have a day of worship and rest. He wanted to provide for less fortunate members of the community.

The Law, also known as the Law of Moses, was extensive and thorough. It defined God’s righteous standard. It matured their culture. And God wanted to bless the world through these people who had been set apart.

During the time of Nehemiah, the Law had been neglected. After being reminded of all the ways they had failed to obey God, the people pledged to live differently.

APPLICATION: We are not under the Old Testament law, but it is still important for believers today because it gives historical and cultural context, moral guidance, and wisdom. However, the coming of Jesus Christ ushered in a new covenant between God and humanity. The law was fulfilled and superseded by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Galatians 3:23-25 says, *“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”*

So, all the rules that applied to the Israelites do not necessarily apply to us. However, just as God called the Hebrews to live differently, he calls us to live differently as well.

Ephesians 4:22-24 says, *“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

1 Peter 1:15 says, *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.”*

ILLUSTRATION: Someone once posed the question, “If you were taken to court today and accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” God calls his followers to be different.

From my Air Force world, I heard a person talking about how leaders come and go. He remarked that those who professed to be Christians were kinder leaders.

Our lives should not be defined by our culture. The way we live is determined by the word of God. God does not call us to fit in; he calls us to be different, which to the world, might look odd.

- The Israelites pledged to live differently.

2-THEY PROMISED TO GIVE FINANCIALLY

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 10:32-33

“We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God.”

EXPLANATION: Temple work was 24/7/365, and it came with a price. If the Israelites wanted spiritual reform, they had to put their money where their mouth was.

Remember, these were the same people who were suffering from over-taxation, the same people who had complained that they could not afford food to eat. Most of the people who signed this pledge were not wealthy individuals, but they vowed to give financially anyway because the work of the temple was important.

ILLUSTRATION: Industry research indicates that the average American spends about \$3000 each year eating out. We spend about \$1300 a year on cell phones or phone plans and about \$600 a year on streaming plans.

APPLICATION: A famous politician (Joe Biden) once said, “Do not tell me what you value; show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value.” Could your budget be submitted as evidence to prove that you’re a Christian, or would it serve the opposite effect? How we spend our money says a lot about us.

- The Israelites pledged to live differently.
- They promised to give financially.

3-THEY VOWED TO PROVIDE PHYSICAL RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 10:34

“We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.”

EXPLANATION: In addition to financial giving, practical resources were needed to maintain temple operations—animals for the sacrifices, food for the priests, and wood for the fires. Specifically, fuel was required to burn all the sacrifices. The people devised a plan by which they could take turns bringing wood. This was not only a gift but a personal sacrifice of time and energy. The families who brought the wood were the ones who chopped it.

ILLUSTRATION: In the early 20th century, an Italian named Vilfredo Pareto observed that approximately 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population. Somehow this observation was later applied to economic and business productivity. You’ve probably heard it said that “20% of the people do 80% of the work.”

APPLICATION: While those percentages are not necessarily accurate, there is a lot of truth in the statement. Generally speaking, the majority of the work in a church is accomplished by a small percentage of the congregation.

Money is important to the work of the Lord, but so is service. The average Baptist church not only ministers to the members, it also ministers to the lost, to the needy, to the community. The staff has responsibilities, but there are many unpaid roles that must be filled: Bible Study Group teachers, nursery workers, VBS directors, and other volunteers.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us that individual believers are like parts of the body. Just like your body would not function in the same way if you were missing a hand or an eye or a kidney, the body of Christ does not function as well when members fail to do their job. God has gifted each of us with the ability to contribute. If you do not, then everyone suffers.

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4-THEY COMMITTED TO CARE FOR GOD’S SERVANTS

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 10:39

“The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept. We will not neglect the house of our God.”

EXPLANATION: According to the law, the priests and Levites were not supposed to have any land of their own. The people were supposed to provide for their needs. The Israelites recognized that the priests and Levites were set apart by God for specific duties. If they were not provided for, they could not do their jobs. In order to take care of the people, the people had to take care of them.

APPLICATION: The church is composed of all Christ-followers everywhere, but we do meet together in smaller, local congregations like Tusculum Hills. We do not have priests, but we do have pastors, worship leaders, and staff that serve the body.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 says, *“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*¹⁸ *For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 says, *“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.”*

Spiritual leaders today are no less worthy of care than the spiritual leaders of Israel. Care is not limited to financial provision.

- You can care for your spiritual leaders by praying for us.
- You can care for us by encouraging us and showing appreciation for our efforts.
- You can care for us by supporting us and respecting our downtime.

The Israelites did not just think about it. They did not just say it. They had their promises written down and properly signed and sealed the document. They put their names to it because it was important.

- The Israelites pledged to live differently.
- They promised to give financially.
- They vowed to provide physical resources.
- They committed to care for God's servants.

They pledged to not neglect the house of their God.

INVITATION: Could you make a similar pledge? If you are a Christian, then you already have. God has called us to live differently, to give financially, to serve the body, and to care for God's servants. These are not suggestions. They are commands. If you were taken to court today and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

The altar is open if you want to come pray. If you have never made a commitment to Christ, please come forward. Let me tell you about our Savior and what he's done for you.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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