

14

Commitment and Accountability Nehemiah 10:1-39

In chapter 8, after a public reading of Scripture convicted God's people of their sins, they entered another time of worship and extended prayer of confession in chapter 9. In chapter 10 they took an oath, publicly promising to obey the Lord in all areas of life. God's word made them think, feel, and then act.

In their own words at the end of chapter 9,

³⁸“And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it.”

As leaders all know, folks can easily get fired up, but can just as easily fizzle out. Apparently Nehemiah met with the Levites and Priests (including Ezra) to discuss the conviction brought upon the people, and recognized that the nation needed to make a commitment. As any salesman knows, a person nodding in agreement won't always pull out their wallet.

The same is true spiritually. God isn't just looking for merely convicted sinners; He wants committed Christians to live the life.

*God is not looking for merely convicted sinners;
He wants committed Christians to live the life.*

Nehemiah and the spiritual leaders of Israel realized the time had come. The people needed to take their commitment to the next level – from talk to walk.

That's why they entered into a binding covenant and the leaders volunteered to be the first to sign it. Given that Israel already had a covenant relationship with God (from ages past); this reflected more of a covenant renewal ceremony (like couples renewing their wedding vows). King Hezekiah and Isaiah led the nation in similar covenant commitments.

Earlier, the people agreed to obey God's laws, but here they get specific. The first two promises they made to God deal with who they would marry.

³⁰We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons;

At first glance, this promise may seem racist—especially in

our racially sensitive culture today. But the issue wasn't racist, it was religious. The fastest spiritual decline in Israel's history occurred when God's people married pagans (as with King Solomon). God intended Israel to be a light to the nations. Foreigners who came to faith in Yahweh could freely join God's people – both in community and marriage. Ruth came from Moab, married Boaz, and became King David's grandmother. Some of David's most trusted Mighty Men came of other nations like Uriah the Hittite. Their shared faith in God made them welcome.

The second set of promises addressed their professional lives. They promised to not buy on the Sabbath or on a holy day from the neighboring peoples who bring their wares and all kinds of grain to sell on the Sabbath day.

³¹if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt.

One of the Ten Commandments required one day a week for resting, patterned after God Himself, Who rested after creation.

God gave a Sabbath for our benefit – to pause and refresh ourselves in what matters – family, friends, and fellowship with God. Our busyness that includes so many things like errands, projects and work related duties can wait. The Lord wants us to take a weekly break from these to refocus, refresh, and rely on God's provision and not on our own ceaseless effort.

After making promises of a personal and professional nature, the third set of promises can be categorized as public – pertaining to their church and community life. The people swore to God that they would accept responsibility for fulfilling the commands to give one third of a shekel each year for the work of the **“House [Temple] of our God.”**

³²Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:

God did command the people to care for the Temple and continue ministry work there. This care required various forms of sacrifice, worship, and service. So the people promised to provide...

³³for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.

The basic goal of their oath was to support all the work of the Temple or **“house of our God.”**

Over and over again the people declared personal allegiance to the Lord and promised to take care of his Temple (which represented His proper dwelling place among them). They determined to worship Him as He declared and deserved. Whatever His words said, they swore to do. God is looking for the same complete commitment to Him today.

Whatever God’s Word says, the people swore to do. God is looking for the same commitment to Him today.

The Hebrew language has neither capital letters nor exclamation points for emphasis; it uses repetition. Starting in **verse 32**, the phrase **“the Temple of our God”** or **“the Temple of the Lord”** occurs in every single remaining verse in chapter 10. The Temple was obviously very important.

As Americans, who can worship at innumerable churches, we cannot fathom the immense and multifaceted value the Temple had for the Jews as a national treasure.

First, Israelites treasured its location. In the holy city of Jerusalem, it stood in the very place where the Tabernacle, built under Moses following the Exodus, originally stood. Second, Israelites treasured its history. The nation’s two greatest kings are connected to it. King David initiated its construction setting the plans and gathering the materials. Following David’s death, King Solomon built the temple as the permanent site for the nations worship.

Third, Israelites treasured its patriotic value. Because of the tremendous spiritual, economic, and military success associated with the United Kingdom under David and Solomon, the Temple became like our Statue of Liberty on steroids.

Fourth, Israelites treasured its religious value. Yahweh worship had identified Israel as a nation since Moses’ day. Only there could the Jews properly worship their Lord, offering sacrifices as His word commanded.

Despite location, history, patriotism and religious value – all four, very significant reasons to revere the Temple – they pale in comparison to the single most important reason Israelites held it as a national treasure. The fifth reason, greater than all others combined, recognizes its spiritual significance. Unlike any building or location on our planet, it alone contained the Holy of Holies – God’s physical dwelling place on Earth.

For all these reasons, the Temple cannot be compared to today’s Church buildings (though some similarities exist). Theologically, the importance of the Jewish Temple is best compared to the value of human beings. The New Testament

Temple isn’t a physical building, but the physical body of a Believer – our very bodies contain the new residence of the Holy Spirit – **1 Cor. 6, Eph. 2, 1st Peter 2.**

God created us with the need to live in community and mutual accountability. The reason we have need of lawmakers is to help our communities live in accountability with one another.

The reason we have need of lawmakers is to help our communities live in accountability with one another.

The people knew that there needed to be accountability and they repeatedly said, **“WE made ordinances,”** acknowledging that they were responsible for the vows. And they knew they would need each other in order to keep these vows. Well aware that ministers have a sin nature too, the people swore under oath to make sure a priest of Aaron’s line will be with the Levites when the Levites take the tithes.

³⁸And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse.

Why? To ensure that the money was taken to the storerooms of the treasury without it disappearing along the way. This doesn’t disparage the character or reputations of those involved. Rather, it protects them from false accusations and ultimately upholds their character and reputation. It’s wise leadership.

It’s vital to be accountable when dealing with dollars. History shows us that money tempts even highly principled leaders and in a very powerful way--one that has caused the downfall of many--ministers and politicians included.

The walls which Nehemiah built were only the beginning of God’s work in the land. Nehemiah’s vision and leadership paved the way for Ezra’s teaching of God’s word. Hearts had been convicted and minds inspired to commitment. God’s work through leaders had transformed a ragtag group accustomed to being kicked around, into a strong, unified team – committed to principles and ready for battle.

The Lord can accomplish the same thing today. That work will almost certainly begin with ethical leaders who make a commitment to living lives pleasing to God and who welcome accountability and expect it of those under them.

SENATE STUDY-Tue 7:30am: Sen. Hancock’s office
HOUSE STUDY-Wed 8:30-10am (Devotional 9-9:25am): Rm 1W.14
& Wed 11:30am or Lunch Adjournment: Austin Club
CAPITOL COMMUNITY STUDY-Thu Noon: Reagan Bldg JHR 140

