

Nehemiah 10 & 11

Read Nehemiah 10:1-29: This is like the second re-entry to the land of Canaan. In the first re-entry (after 40 years in the desert), the children of Israel were told by Moses to not deviate from God's plan for their lives.

However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. ¹⁷ Completely destroy^(a) them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹⁸ Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18)

Unfortunately the people did deviate from God's plan; and they paid double the price. The failures were as recent as 70 years previous (at Babylonian invasion). We do not like rules; unless we are the ones who are protected. We tend to not like rules that protect others from our impact on their lives. We like to see a Highway Patrolman roll up on some dangerous drivers; but we do not like him on our rearview mirror.

The Law of Moses can be described as blessings and curses. It is an intimidating thing to the man who is trying to live his life with a lot of moral latitude. It is a comforting thing to us when it is about our neighbors being kept in line. It keeps the abusers in check. In this case; the people all knew that there was a massive departure from God; and they wanted to re-establish boundaries (to avoid repeating it).

“Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”¹⁵ “Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”¹⁶ “Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor’s boundary stone.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”¹⁷ “Cursed is anyone who leads the blind astray on the road.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”¹⁸ “Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”¹⁹ “Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his father’s wife, for he dishonors his father’s bed.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”²⁰ “Cursed is anyone who has sexual relations with any animal.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”²¹ “Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”²² “Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his mother-in-law.” Then all

the people shall say, “Amen!”²⁴ “Cursed is anyone who kills their neighbor secretly.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”²⁵ “Cursed is anyone who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”²⁶ “Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!” (Deuteronomy 27:14-26)

Have our people sensed the trouble that they are in? Our foundations are being eroded. Our public discourse and national debate are childish and disturbing. Our people are heartily following advice of the ungodly and insensible critics.

Now that all had heard the Law of Moses read out loud clearly; they swore to be bound by it. They had no more allusions about the social ideals that they had imagined before. God let them have their fill of their idols. You really have to get pounded hard by life in order to buy into the need for God’s plan for our life and society. For those who saw their society previously go down the drain; a strict code was a welcomed sight. This group who took the oath to keep the law included Nehemiah, the priests, the Levites, the leaders of the people, the gate-keepers, musicians, temple servants, and all who disconnected from the local unbelieving mixed peoples. How much effort is warranted in our own society; if we can turn our ship around? Life as we know it; could be erased quickly.

Read Nehemiah 10:30-39 : Those who still had their hopes in God recalled what went wrong in their previous society. They were anxious to place security measures in areas that were the first to unravel previously. That is **the value of experience**. Some people might feel that this was too restrictive. Others were happy to secure previous areas of failure in a society that tends to forget God. It is like a person who knows the nature of mankind who is writing a will to provide some control from the grave. Our constitutional framers were very familiar with corrupt government. Somehow we lose that understanding over time.

The people specifically bound themselves to keep some specific items in the Law that had previously had led to their undoing.

- They would **not intermarry with the Canaanites**. God does not require us to marry within our race today. At that time; the outsiders were all idolaters. We do need to marry a Christian; or live a life of stress and problems.
- The Jews would **not do business on the Sabbath**. The Jews would observe **the land Sabbath** every 7th year. They had let 490 years go by without

observing a land Sabbath. That is why they had just spent 70 years in captivity. This was a catch-up for all of the land all of those missed land Sabbaths. In addition, all debts were to cease at the end of 7 year cut off. This 7-year cycle is called **the shmita**. The 7-year period was to be a regular interval; for re-setting mistakes. All slaves who were indentured servants were set free every 7 years. All debts were zeroed out every seven years as well. Today we take out long-term loans and become indentured to our commitments for life. To make that work, debts could only be established for short-term commitments. Our nation might be in better shape if we had those limitations today.

- The people committed to start providing the **temple tax, and the sacrificial presentations of grain, burnt offerings, Sabbath offerings, and sacrifices that went with monthly and annual feasts.**
- The **priests would use a fair lottery system** to see who was responsible that month to chop, split, dry, stack and haul in wood for the continual offerings.
- The people would **bring in the first of the harvest to God**. They would also give God the first-born of the livestock; and dedicate the first-born children to God or sacrifice an animal in their place. To hold on to it removes God as your business partner.
- They would **tithe all of the first fruits** crops harvested. A priest would collect the tithe and store the money or food.

Nehemiah 11

Read Nehemiah 11: Jerusalem is at the core of Jewish personal identity. Without a functional Jerusalem; they are at a loss to define their selves. The Jews had sacrificed much to come back to Jerusalem to rebuild their lives. The Jews purposefully made Jerusalem their capital; as it had been before. They had returned home to re-establish their temple and their city. . The government leaders made their homes in Jerusalem. Some people had to forego being able to return to their home towns and property. The temple and the city required people to run them. The common people drew straws to see who would stay in Jerusalem. Their first choice was to go back to their own property, elsewhere in Judah. The city required a minimal population to have any protections; and function properly. 1/10th of the citizens settled in Jerusalem; and 9/10^{ths} of the citizens lived in other cities. Jerusalem and Judah was heavy on priests and Levites.