

The House of God – Nehemiah 10:39

I. Introduction:

- A. Our theme for this evening comes from the last four words of this chapter.
1. Remember, this is a part of the “*sure covenant*” Israel was making with God – **Nehemiah 9:38**.
 2. In its conclusion, these humble, sincere, repentant Jews vowed **to NOT forsake** the “*house of our God.*”
 3. Lord willing, I will come back to the “*not forsaking*” part of this verse next Sunday night.
 4. But right now I’d like to focus merely on the “*house of our God.*” What does that mean?
- B. The word “*God*” is what you’d expect – “*Elohim.*” There is certainly nothing surprising there.
1. But the very **common** word “*house*” is interesting, because it has some very **uncommon translations**.
 2. It is rendered “*house*” 1,881 times. As I say, it is a **common** word.
 3. But 16 times it is translated “*prison,*” which is not a place most people would like to call “*home.*”
 - a. But Joseph’s Egyptian home for a few years was a prison.
 - b. And by the way, our Hebrew word is translated “*home*” 25 times.
 4. Then as you might expect from its use here, the word is also translated “*temple*” 11 times.
- C. But the Hebrew word isn’t confined to a building – it also speaks of the residents within that building.
1. In fact, it is translated “*within*” 22 times.
 2. Its second most common rendition, after “*house*” is “*household,*” and it is even translated “*family.*”
 - a. **Psalm 68:6** – “*God setteth the solitary in families...*”
 - b. Many of God’s people claim this verse after becoming members of one of God’s churches.
 - c. For some people, it is the only family they have in this world.
 3. And do you remember the virtuous woman of **Proverb 31**?
 - a. “*She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.*”
 - b. “*She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.*”
 - c. “*She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.*”
 4. Her “*household*” is the word translated “*house*” here, and it is obviously speaking about those living within her house.
- D. The Bible speaks of the “*house of GOD*” more than a hundred times, including several in the New Testament.
1. And those words always refer to either the original tabernacle or one of Israel’s temples, and in the New Testament, to a specific **local church** or to **churches in general**.
 2. With that last statement in mind, Monday I wandered back over the promises Israel was making in this chapter, applying what they said to what we know to be “*house of GOD*” today.
 3. And therein lays our devotional for this evening.

II. What does Israel’s covenant teach us about our “*house of God?*”

- A. As is the case inside most homes – inside the house there is a **family**.
1. “*And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, & all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; They clave to their brethren...*”
 2. I know there is a theological aspect as well, but Calvary Baptist Church is a family.
 3. We are made up of brothers and sisters; I think of some in our church as daughters, and grandchildren.
 4. We have singers and porters – musicians and technicians – there are young people and older people.
 5. We have those who feed us and those who clean up after us.
 6. We have supporters and those who need support for one reason or other.
- B. And everyone within this family – the members of this church – have, in a sense, separated themselves from the world in order to become a part of this family.
1. And they did so with “*understanding*” – deliberately choosing to enter into this relationship.
 2. They submitted to the pictorial death of baptism – surrendering to the shame of wet hair and wet clothing.

C. And they submitted themselves to one another.

1. *“They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God’s law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes.”*
2. About a hundred leading men of Israel signed this *“sure covenant.”*
3. But hundreds more subsequently joined the family and later committed themselves to the agreement, entering into the curse and oath.
4. They agreed to walk in God’s law and to observe and do all the commandments, judgments and statutes of the Lord.

D. In my historical reading over the last 5 years, I have seen several old documents called *“church covenants.”*

1. These were agreements within church families about the behavior and decorum of the members.
2. I have been considering leafing through my books and bringing them all together, because they present lessons about some of the problems and promises of God’s people in different places and different eras.
3. Even our church has something we call a *“church covenant,”* but many – if not most of us – have never read it, and we certainly didn’t sign it or *“cleave”* unto it.
4. I’m not even sure that we’d all be willing to sign it, because it no longer reflects Christianity in today’s world.
5. But I think there should be standards and characteristics within the family.
6. And ultimately, it should be a promise to *“observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes.”*

E. It should include a vow to give our hearts to the Lord rather than to the world.

1. *“That we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons.”*
2. Aren’t children one of the main purposes for creating a family? It’s certainly the Biblical purpose.
3. And aren’t sons and daughters near the center of our hearts?
4. Don’t we want the best for our children – the younger members of our families and our church?
5. Well then, how are we raising those children and what are we teaching our kids?
6. Is compelled church attendance enough to teach them to love the Lord with all their hearts, souls, minds and strength?
7. Sure we take them to church, but after church aren’t they permitted to let their hearts take them back to the world?
8. How often do we see them turn toward *“the people of the land”* for entertainment, exercise, ego and endearment?
9. Shouldn’t there be a covenant with God about such things?

III. Can we see a parallel between these verses and New Testament scriptures?

A. *“If the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.”*

1. I know that our relationship to the Sabbath is different from Israel’s, but there remains an eternal principle.
2. The world needs to see us give at least one day a week to our heavenly King.
3. We must not permit the Lord’s Day to be like any other day.
4. For example, we must determine that the Lord’s Day is not a day for commerce and merchandise.
5. And we need to make sure that the Lord’s day begins and ends with Lord of that day.
6. The Sabbath was one thing which made Israel different from the world, and our treatment of the Lord’s Day should tell the world that we, too, are different.

B. *“Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God.”*

1. This was something extra and voluntary.
2. When Israel was permitted to take a census, every man was to give a half shekel.
3. That money went toward the maintenance of the house of God.

4. But censuses didn't take place every year, every two years, or every ten years.
5. They were extremely rare and were only to take place when God ordered them.
6. Here in *Nehemiah*, this was not a census, but an offering of a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of God – promised to be kept yearly.

C. *“Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;*

1. *For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.*
2. *And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law.”*
3. Isn't it nice and warm in the auditorium this evening, and isn't it a more pleasant heat than it use to be?
4. It cost several thousand dollars to install our heating and cooling system; it took many shekels.
5. And it also costs additional shekels to keep the lights on, the heaters running and water in the restrooms.
6. What if everyone in the family decided to let Joe pay for these things?
7. We wouldn't have them, because there are no one in our family named *“Joe.”*

D. *“And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD.”*

1. I suppose there are several ways to apply *verse 35*.
2. But one of them has to be that God deserves our best – our first – our hearts before our hands and feet.
3. *“And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.”*
4. Every member of the family needs to recognize his roll in maintaining that family.
5. The tithe on that child's small allowance is as important as the tithe given by his father, the goldsmith or the judge. And it must come from the *first fruits* of our dough, not the *last slice* of the loaf.

E. *“Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God.”*

1. The firstborn of our sons.
2. Israel was to sacrifice the first lamb, the first bullock, and the first dove of the season, because every harvest was a gift from God.
3. And that included the first born son of the family – like Isaac.
4. But gracious Jehovah, unlike some of the gods of the heathen, permitted Israel to make a substitute for the child – there were no human sacrifices in Israel.
5. And yet the principle still applies... we must be willing to give up our children to the ministry of the Lord.
6. When God calls that young man, he shouldn't be forced to become a wealthy lawyer or doctor to take care of you in your old age.
7. Send him to the mission field with your blessings, your prayers and your support.
8. There are far greater riches in the service of Christ than there are in the service of the world.

F. *Verse 38* reminds the Levites to tithe on *their* income. There are no exceptions for priests and Levites.

1. And it makes no difference if their income comes from the tithes of the nation.
2. I must tell you that I tithe just the way you do, even though I buy my food out of the income I receive from your tithes.
3. Not only do I tithe, but I give to missions and other causes over and above my tithes.
4. I say that not to boast but for your information and hopefully for your edification.

- G. Furthermore, our church tithes on the offerings it receives.
1. I have instructed our treasurers to take 10% of our general offerings and add that amount to what you give to missions.
 2. We tithe on our tithes. It is a Biblical principle.
- H. *“For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.”*
1. It was the concluding point of Israel’s covenant to *“not forsake the house of God.”*
 2. As I say, I am planning on coming back to this verse on Sunday, so I won’t address it right now.
 3. Instead I will close with a conversation my wife and I had the other day.
 - a. Judy was talking about a Christian friend of hers, who was offended when she heard that the Oldfield’s always try to go to church when we are on vacation.
 - b. Being the cynic that I am, I don’t expect to find a church in Podunk Holler that I’d be comfortable joining.
 - c. But I am going to try to find somewhere to worship the Lord even if it’s as shallow as a grave and backward as whatever goes backwards.
 - d. If we have to drive from Portland to Salem to attend church, we’ll do that – we have done that.
 4. The point is, even if we are on vacation, the Lord is not, and He deserves our worship no matter where we happen to be.

IV. Conclusion:

- A. I know that I haven’t mined this vein very deeply, but I believe there lessons for Christians and Christ’s churches here in this covenant which Israel made that day.