

AUGUST 16

Nehemiah 11:1-12:26

(Don't forget the charts.)

Nehemiah 11

There are a couple of things happening in this chapter. First, there is the selection of people to live in Jerusalem. Second, we are given the location of people who lived in the surrounding towns. The real issue here was the establishment of worship at the temple and security of God's nation. Everything that was strong in Israel was to emanate from the personal devotion of its people to the Lord. The cultivating of that kind of personal devotion came through the regular sacrifices and in the feasts three times a year. The center of that worship was the temple. Nationalism wasn't a concern on the minds of men like Ezra and Nehemiah. They were concerned about the people following God.

Vs. 1-2 When we think of a city, we think of life and vitality. Jerusalem, up to now, was more like a ghost town, dangerous and sparsely populated. Also, the way most common people lived was from what they grew. It was a sacrifice to move into Jerusalem, especially knowing that so much animosity and violence had been aimed at rebuilding the walls. What we need to remember is that Nehemiah would be the governor of Judah for twelve years. This was within his first year. Since Nehemiah governed out of Jerusalem, it would have been a very good place to live.

Vs. 3-6 These are the chief rulers and the head men of the tribe of Judah, the leading tribe.

Vs. 7-9 Benjamin also has a place of honor, not only because they were the tribe of the first king and they represented Joseph; but also because when the kingdom divided, they remained with Judah.

Vs. 10-14 Now we have the real focus here. In order for the worship to grow and nurture the people, the priests and the Levites had to be near the temple and be provided for. These are the priests.

Vs. 15-18 The Levites taught and assisted the priests in their sacrificial duties, serving the people and the Lord.

Vs. 19-21 We have already seen that the gatekeepers were important and may have had a function in organizing the people who came to Jerusalem to worship. Notice that those who didn't live in the city lived in the surrounding towns.

Vs. 22-24 Notice that the singers were given a special provision. Because these Levites worked full time in the temple leading worship, they were given a special provision. I'm not sure how often there was music played, but they practiced, performed and trained other musicians. Apparently, music accompanied the sacrifices every day.

Vs. 25-36 This is the disbursement of the people in the surrounding towns. Most of these were less than a day's journey.

Nehemiah 12:1-26

This is another accounting of the priests and Levites. This is a lot of detail, but if you understand the heart of it, in terms of the nation's health and survival, the organization of worship around the temple was critical. There was to be a constant cultivation of the hearts of Israel's people. And too, since they had come out of exile they wanted to get all of the written records compiled and sorted out. In Samaria anyone could be a priest or serve at their temples. In Israel that was not the case.

Vs. 1-7 Of note here is Jeshua. Everything will be measured from him. Apparently he was the first high priest after the exile. Notice too, Iddo. He had a famous son.

Vs. 8-11 Here we have some singers, but more importantly we have Jeshua's son, Joiakim, who apparently fathered the line of high priests.

Vs. 12-21 These are the days of Joiakim. Notice that Iddo's son is Zechariah. Zechariah is one of the two prophets used to inspire the rebuilding of the temple, and Zechariah wrote the book of Zechariah. When we read his book at the end of the year, parts of it will sound just like Revelation.

Vs. 22-26 These are the days of Eliashib the son of Joiakim. Jeshua was already gone when Ezra arrived, but Eliashib and Joiakim were probably both alive when Ezra and Nehemiah were in Jerusalem.

For us as disciples, our lineage only has to go back to our Lord. Our qualification for service begins with our salvation, the Great Commission and Acts 1:8. If those are actively being honored, the church becomes a community in the harvest. Disciples are harvesting and coming together weekly for encouragement, strengthening, and refocusing on the love of Christ. Their devotion and love for Christ is nurtured, and they are being blessed for their work in the harvest. This is all that a house church in China has, but it is essential church. These churches have to make disciples and they reach out under threatening circumstances. This is all our Savior is asking of His followers. If this isn't essential church to His disciples, then, like Israel, it is easy to quickly lose focus.

1 Corinthians 10:14-11:2

1 Corinthians 10:14-33

Vs. 14-22 This is revisiting chapter 8. In their "knowledge" and "freedom," some of the believers were participating in pagan gatherings thinking they were immune to the worship going on because these weren't "really" gods. Paul is saying that there are still spiritual entities behind pagan worship. These believers were actually participating in idolatry, worshiping demons. Later, Paul will say to these people, *Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.* In chapter 8, Paul mentioned them eating in pagan temples. Here, Paul showed them that their knowledge had led them into a snare.

Our challenge is to walk alertly through this life and avoid things that put us under spiritual influence. Most of us are "smart" enough to stay away from tarot cards, palm readers, Ouija boards, TM, yoga and the like; but there are other things that can bring us under spiritual domination if we let them.

Notice that in this section there is a lot of positive teaching, too, regarding the Lord's Supper.

Vs. 23-24 Paul is repeating their words from chapter 6. In Romans 14 Paul answers the question as to what is "right" to do regarding a weaker brother. He says, *It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.* Romans 15 and the words here both point to our responsibility as disciples to strengthen and edify others. That prepares and assists others in growing in Christ. Flaunting our knowledge and preferences says more about us than we'd like. It shows immaturity and a lack of understanding of our work following Christ in the harvest on this dying planet.

Vs. 25-30 Some meat that was offered in sacrifice to idols was sold in the meat market. Obviously, when they were following Judaism they only bought kosher. Now as believers, they could buy everywhere, but how could they know if the meat came from a sacrificed animal. Paul is giving them advice, and really, he is saying that the meat is OK. Their conscience would be the only factor.

In the case of the dinner situation, it seems like a weaker believer was sitting with them and had found out that the meat came from a sacrifice, in which case, for that weaker brother, they should decline to eat.

Vs. 29-30 are a rationale for eating without questioning. Again, it is usually the weaker, ardent in their beliefs, who pass judgment on those who have liberty in a spiritual way. We saw this in Romans 14. Paul is saying that out of concern for the weak, he would abstain in a particular situation. But as a general rule he would not allow his liberty to be determined by the weak consciences of the judgmental. A passage to look at in this connection is:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

Vs. 31-33 These verses should be understandable in terms of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Our job is not to show how smart we are. It is to make disciples across the board, following our Lord through any and all cultural challenges He leads us through.

1 Corinthians 11:1-2

This is sort of an unfortunate choice of verses. Verse 1 goes with today and tomorrow, but v. 2 only belongs to tomorrow and the traditions mentioned in chapter 11.

Yet, v. 1 is a command to them and to us. One interesting thing about Jesus' call to us as disciples is that we are to make disciples. We are to lead and model what it means to be imitators of Christ. Each of us needs to be spiritually comfortable as makers of disciples to say what Paul says here. This confidence comes naturally with following Christ in the harvest over many years. Experienced soldiers naturally help and teach younger soldiers. Experienced harvesters naturally help and teach younger harvesters. Experienced disciples naturally help and teach younger disciples. It's natural. Paul's authority came from deep humility, many persecutions, years of service, and all of this from having followed Christ in the harvest.

Psalm 34:11-22

This is continued from yesterday.

V. 11 is David teaching from his long, grueling experience in trusting and following the Lord. In a way, David is saying that those listening should follow his example. As I read these verses I can sense some of his loneliness, brokenheartedness, longing, waiting and crying out. But what I also feel is the love of the Lord for those who seek Him and follow. Look at all the deliverance mentioned in these verses. Look at what David says the Lord does beginning in v. 15. That is quite a list. But as we've seen before, you can't know the deliverances without knowing the trials in the harvest.

Vs. 12-14 The answer to v. 12 is seen by the behaviors of vs. 13-14.

Vs. 15-18 Notice the emphasis on the Lord watching and being near. These are the things we forget when we get in a jam or an emotional panic. It should steady us to know this truth.

Vs. 19-22 This is a promise. There will be affliction. There will be deliverance. The wicked will experience the same things and be judged and condemned. The Lord will redeem and will not condemn.

V. 20 is prophetic having to do with Jesus.

So what would you say a disciple is to do in all of this? A phrase in v. 12 grabbed me as I read over it, *desires life*. What do we learn to seek and desire in life?

Proverbs 21:14-16

V. 14 can't be an encouragement to giving bribes, so it must just state a fact. It almost sounds like Jesus telling His disciples to make peace quickly with an offended brother. Since the issue here is *anger* and *wrath* and not averting *justice*, this might be closer to the meaning of this proverb.

However, v. 14 could also be in contrast to the next two verses on justice. Where a bribe might give the look of justice or relief, only true justice brings joy; and those who wander from good sense and try to live by bribes and circumventing justice eventually find themselves in a (the?) bad place. God loves justice and has built it into mankind. Even the worst person loves justice for himself, which actually is a judgment to his own injustice toward others. So anyway, if people really don't enjoy justice, they're not going to like God. So, the bad place would really be better for them. Right?