

Ordinances and Offerings

Nehemiah 10:32-39

Nehemiah 10:32-39 - *“Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for 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. ³⁴ We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers’ houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God as it is written in the Law.*

³⁵ And we made ordinances to bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the Lord; ³⁶ to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; ³⁷ to bring the first fruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. ³⁸ And 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.

³⁹ For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God.”

Background Notes

Nehemiah 7-10 is the record of one the greatest revivals of the Old Testament. It took place near the close of the Old Testament period, in about the year 445BC. The Jews who returned from exile in Babylon had just completed rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. The Temple had been rebuilt, but the city wall had lain in ruins for almost 150 years, ever since the Babylonians conquered and demolished Jerusalem in 586BC.

The rebuilding of the wall was a great accomplishment. Everyone got involved, and under Nehemiah’s godly leadership the job was completed in just 52 days! The completion of the wall sparked a revival among God’s people – a revival that was centered upon an emphasis on God’s Word and on prayer. As it was then, so it is today. Revival of God’s people will always be focused on God’s Word and on prayer.

In chapter 10 the people committed themselves in writing to obey the laws of God. They were so determined to follow the Lord that they composed and signed what we call a “commitment contract.” This contract had three primary areas of commitment - “focal points of commitment.” They are critical areas of commitment for us as well. If we fail in one of these points, the failure ripples out and begins to affect many other areas.

In the first half of Nehemiah 10 we discussed two of these focal points of commitment and how they apply to us. The people promised not to intermarry with the pagans (v30). They would only marry believers – and that applies to us as well. They were also committed to keeping the Sabbath (v31), and that it applies to us as well. We should commit to carve specific time out of our busy days and weeks to honor God.

In the second half of Nehemiah 10 we see the third focal point of commitment: **caring for the house of the Lord**. The people were determined to care for the house of the Lord and support all the work associated with the Temple. It's very significant that every verse, from verse 32 through the end of the chapter, mentions "*the house of the Lord*."

They promised to give money for all the offerings and sacrifices at the Temple (v32-33). They promised to provide wood for all the sacrifices (v34). They promised to bring the first fruits of their harvest, and the firstborn of their flocks and herds, according to the Law (v35-36). And they promised to bring their tithes in support of the Levites (v37-39). Notice what they said in verse 39: **"And we will not neglect the house of our God."**

Doctrinal Points

1. God's people have a responsibility to support God's work.

Support for "the house of the Lord" in that day was exactly that. Although God doesn't need our help to support His work, He has chosen to do His work through His people, and by the support of His people. Of course God could have angels do all the work, and He could have money grow on trees, but He has given us the privilege of working with Him and providing support for His work. And we not only have that great privilege - we have a responsibility to be involved in the Lord's work, and to support the Lord's work!

Are you one of God's people? Are you just attending church once a week - or are you involved in supporting the Lord's work in some way? God's people have a responsibility to support God's work – with our money, with our time, and with our talents.

2. Tithing is not unbiblical.

The people of Jerusalem committed themselves to support the work of the Temple, "*the house of the Lord*," with their tithes. When we talk about support for the Lord's work today, invariably questions arise about tithing. Is tithing appropriate for Christians today? Some Christians say that tithing was part of the Old Testament Law, and as Christians we are free from the Law. Well, let's put it this way: Tithing is not unbiblical.

God's people in the Old Testament people were to tithe. Tithing was commanded in God's Law. It's true that, as Christians, there is no "law" that we must tithe. In the New Testament, tithing is not mentioned as a law for Christians. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, the great chapters on "giving," tithing is not mentioned once. 1 Corinthians 16:2 says, "*On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper*" - but there's no mention of tithing.

However, if a Christian is not at least tithing, something is wrong! Here are two reasons why Christians should **at the very least** be tithing:

1. Tithing is a biblical pattern. Tithing didn't begin with the Law God gave to Moses – it began before the Law. Hundreds of years before the Law was given, Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18-20). If tithing was practiced in the Bible before the Law was given, **tithing is a biblical principle!**

2. The New Testament teaches that Christians should give 100% - not just 10%! We are stewards of **all** that we have! We're responsible before God for 100% of all that He has given us: 100% of our time, 100% of our talent, and 100% of our treasure.

As Christians, we're responsible before the Lord for how and where we spend our money. We're responsible before the Lord for how much we give to His work, and how and where it is used. This doesn't mean that when we get to the "check writing" stage, we need to donate 100% of our money to the local church! No. But it does mean that we are responsible before the Lord for the proper use of all our money.

So, since we're stewards for 100% of all we have, we come back to this point: **if a Christian is not giving at least 10%, then something is wrong!** Some serious questions should be asked. If God's Old Testament people were required to give 10% to the Lord, shouldn't Christians give at least 10% as well? Are we really acting responsibly before the Lord with our finances? Do we give, do we only "talk" about support of the Lord's work? The rubber meets the road when our wallets are involved.

In Nehemiah's day, **everyone** in Jerusalem was committed, and everyone was involved in supporting the work of the Lord (v38). Even the Levites had to give a tithe of the tithes! Everyone was involved - even those who served the Lord in the Temple. Tithing is not unbiblical - so if a Christian is not at least tithing, then some serious questions should be asked.

Practical Applications

1. Are you willing to "chop wood?"

"We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God" (v34). The people cast lots among themselves for bringing wood to the Temple. All the people - including the priests and the Levites!

Have you ever tried to chop a big enough supply of wood to keep a campfire going all the time? It's a lot of wood. A lot of wood was needed for the Lord's work at the Temple. A lot of wood was consumed in the offerings and sacrifices. There was a continual burnt offering every day, and the fire on the altar was never to go out (Leviticus 6).

Chopping wood was not the most glamorous job connected with the house of the Lord. There were more exciting jobs and more upfront jobs than chopping wood - but chopping wood was very **important** and very **necessary**. The priests, the Levites, and the people were willing to do the mundane job of chopping wood.

Are you willing to “chop wood”? There are many boring, unexciting, and unglamorous jobs to do in the Lord’s work. Are you willing? I learned this lesson early in my Christian life. I was on summer staff at a Christian family camp, and I thought my worst job would probably be washing pots in the kitchen - but I ended up doing jobs like cleaning bathrooms – and clearing out clogs in the sewer lines that led to the septic tank! But these jobs were all necessary parts of the Lord’s work in camp ministry - the “chopping wood” side of the ministry. Are you willing to “chop wood?”

2. Are you willing to give “your first and your best” to the Lord?

The people promised to bring their “first fruits” - the first of the harvest - to the Lord, according to the Law (v35). They promised to give the firstborn of their flocks and herds, and to dedicate their firstborn sons to the Lord (v36-37). This was considered giving “the first and the best.” After all, there might not be much of a harvest later on, and there might not be any more flocks or any more children! So giving your first fruits and your firstborn was considered as giving the first and the best to the Lord.

Are we willing to give our “first and best” to the Lord? We can apply this in a lot of ways. Certainly it has to do with our priorities. But let’s apply it to our lives. Are you willing to give the first and the best part of your life to the Lord? This doesn’t mean that you have to quit your job - but what are you doing with your extra time? How about your energy? Where is your energy being directed? Give your first and best to the Lord!

Some Christians say, “When I get older and retire, then I’ll study the Bible more, and I’ll serve the Lord more.” But why not **now**? Don’t end up in old age regretting that you squandered a lot of your time and energies in other pursuits. It will be too late then to give your first and your best to God!

Are you willing to give your first and your best to the Lord!