

## Supplementary Materials for KOOL Journal for Parents/Adults

Week 16: 7 May to 13 May, 2018 (pp. 130 – 137)

**7 May to 13 May, 2018: Nehemiah Chapter 9:38 –11:19.**

**Review Verse of the Week** **Nehemiah 10:39b**

*We will not neglect the house of our God.*

Date/Read	Reflection and Response (R & R)
<p><b>Mon. 7 May</b></p> <p>Neh. 9:38–10:29 {Neh. 9:38; 10:28-29}</p>	<p>‘In view of all this’ refers back to the whole summary of Israelite history (7–37), i.e. ‘because of Jehovah’s mercy in spite of our disobedience.’ After years of decadence and exile, the people once again took their responsibility seriously to follow God wholeheartedly and obey Him (10:29). Putting the agreement in writing was very useful as a public instrument to ensure compliance and having the princes, Levites, and priests affixing their seals to it made them witnesses against themselves should they be unfaithful to the agreement.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we have our own ‘binding agreement’ with God to follow Him wholeheartedly, no matter where our lot is cast?</li> </ul> <p><b>Notes:</b></p> <p><b>9:38</b> – The seal authenticates a document. Babylonian documents were often stamped with half a dozen seals or more. These were impressed upon the moist clay, and then the clay was baked. Sometimes each party to the contract stamped his seal upon a separate piece of sealing clay, which he then attached to the document by means of a string.</p> <p><b>10:1</b> – Nehemiah’s name comes first as that of the governor while Zedekiah, whose name preceded the priests, could either be an official under the Persian rule ranking next to Nehemiah, or one of royal line (e.g. of the house of Zerubbabel).</p> <p><b>10:1-27</b> – All classes were included in the agreement but the people were represented by their elders (10:14), as it would have been impossible for everyone in the country to have been admitted to the sealing. It is noteworthy that the name of Ezra the scribe was not included but he re-appeared in 12:36.</p>
<p><b>Tue. 8 May</b></p> <p>Neh.10:30 {Neh. 10:30}</p>	<p>The binding agreement had six provisions, starting with the agreement not to marry non-Jewish neighbours (10:30).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can the biblical teaching against marrying unbelievers (2 Cor.6:14) be faithfully followed by the church? Is celibacy the only alternative?</li> <li>• If our children are dating or marrying unbelievers, what should we do?</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Notes:</b>  <b>10:30</b> – Observe the first person plural (we) is here introduced and maintained to 10:39 throughout the rest of the agreement provisions.</p>
<p><b>Wed. 9 May</b>   Neh.10:31  {iNeh. 10:31}</p>	<p>The second and third provisions in the agreement were to observe the Sabbath each week and to observe every seventh year as a Sabbath year (Exo. 23:11-12) which they had been guilty of non-compliance. Such neglect is the subject of rebuke and the land had their Sabbath rests during the 70 years of captivity (Lev. 26:34-35, 43; 2 Chron.36:21).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we observe our Sabbath day or that of our foreign domestic helpers? Does it honour God?</li> <li>• In these days of telecommuting and the blurring of lines between office and home, how do we ensure we observe a day of rest? (It is not uncommon that some continue to work while on overseas vacations!)</li> <li>• How does Christ’s declaration in Mk 2:27-28 (that Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath) inform us on the observance of the Sabbath year in present day socio-economic context?</li> </ul> <p><b>Notes:</b>  <b>10:31</b> – “Any holy day” refers to days of rest from labour, such as the Passover, the first and seventh day of unleavened bread (Exo. 12:16), the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:25), etc. During the Sabbath year, the land must be let to rest from ploughing or tilling, and its fruits which grew of itself, left for the poor, and all debts cancelled. Compare Neh. 5:2-13, and note that, notwithstanding Nehemiah's curse and the people's assent to it (5:13), the practice of lending upon pledge had recommenced.</p>
<p><b>Thu. 10 May</b>   Neh. 10:32–39  {iNeh. 10:37–39}</p>	<p>The fourth provision was to pay a temple tax (10:32-33), the fifth being supplying wood for burnt offerings in the Temple (10:34) and the sixth was to give dues to the Temple (10:35-38) for the support of the Levites and priests. The necessary expenses of maintenance of the temple service had formerly been defrayed out of the treasury of the temple (1Ch 26:20), and when it was drained, given out from the king's privy purse (2Ch 31:3). A detailed and particular enumeration of the first-fruits of the ground and first-born of the womb (which was to be redeemed as in Num. 18:14-17) was made, that all might be made fully aware of their obligations, and that none might excuse themselves on pretext of ignorance from withholding taxes due to poverty or lack of piety. After years of decadence and exile, the people once again took seriously their responsibility to follow God and keep His laws wholeheartedly and not neglect the house of God (10:39).</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concept of giving God the first (best) portion of our time, treasure, and talent are still as applicable today in the same spirit that Nehemiah reinstated the dedication of the first part of the people’s yield, their first-born sons and animals to God. Do we give God our first and best or merely what is left over?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of support do we give to the house of God and his workers?</li> <li>• Which areas of our life are we withholding from God instead of giving ourselves wholeheartedly to Him?</li> </ul> <p><b>Notes:</b></p> <p><b>10:32 – “a third of a shekel”</b> was to be given for the service of the house of God annually. The imposition of such an annual poll-tax of <math>\frac{1}{3}</math> shekel would be cheerfully accepted at the time of religious reformation under Ezra. In later times, when the power of the High Priest became more absolute and the prosperity of the Jews grew, the tax was raised from <math>\frac{1}{3}</math> to <math>\frac{1}{2}</math> shekel (equivalent to two drachmæ, Matt.17:24), in imitation of the occasional ‘census’ tax (Exo. 30:11-15) which had become obsolete, but whose memorial existed in Exo. 30:16). Thus this verse shows that Ezra and his colleagues, although establishing the authority of the written law, were ready to expand or modify it according to the requirements of the time.</p> <p><b>10:34 – “the casting of lots”</b> was the means generally employed to ascertain God’s will, e.g. to choose the goat on the day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8-10), to distribute the Promised Land (Joshua 14:2; 18:10), to select the first king (1 Sam. 10:19), to distribute the offices among the 24 priestly houses (1 Chro. 24:5) and priestly duties among the individual members (Luke 1:9), etc. Here the lot was to decide how much <b>wood</b> everyone should bring in to maintain the fire continually upon the altar to burn the sacrifices; and in what order it should be brought; and at what times of the year. This "wood offering" was a new ordinance. After the return from the exile the scarcity and expensiveness of fuel for the sacrifices made it necessary to draw up special regulations by which each family took it in turn to supply the wood. The burden was thus distributed over the community.</p>
<p><b>Fri. 11 May</b></p> <p>Neh. 11:1–19 {Neh. 11:1–4 }</p>	<p>Although the city wall had been rebuilt and safety strengthened, most Jews rather chose to live in the country than at Jerusalem. As they were generally shepherds and farmers, the country was more suited to their manner of life than the city. Moving meant investment of time and money to rebuild their homes and reestablish their businesses besides the risk of further troubles from their enemies who were against Jerusalem rising to its former splendour. Living in Jerusalem also meant stricter obedience to God’s Word because of greater social pressure and proximity to the Temple. Thus “sacred” lots were cast (Pro. 16:33) to compel every 10<sup>th</sup> person to relocate his family to repopulate the city Neh.7:4) to provide an adequate population for the custody of the buildings and the defense of the city. Those who volunteered to go and dwell in Jerusalem were not chosen ‘by lot.’ They went of their own accord, moved by public spirit. They were worthy to be honoured, because they denied themselves, and their own safety and profit, for the public good, and the glory of God; seeking the restoration of their nation, the defence of their city, and the welfare of their country. The blessing of their countrymen shows the enthusiasm aroused by their patriotic action. However, the leaders, by virtue of their very office in the government of the community, were obliged to and able to afford to dwell in the capital city.</p>

	<p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How ready are we to relocate (out of our comfort zone) or disrupt our career to serve God better? (Some of our Brethren leaders had previously set the example by relocating to be closer to the new churches that were being planted at some costs to them.)</li> </ul> <p>“A true servant is motivated by compassion, and willing to bear the cost.” (Dr. Hooi Shing Chuan, Sermon notes, 29 Apr 2018)</p> <p><b>Notes:</b>  <b>11:3-19</b> – The list differs from that in 1 Chro.9:2 (despite the same preamble) which apparently aims to give the names of the families who had either remained in Judea at the time when the mass of the people were transported to Babylon, or had returned to their own country either from exile or from voluntary flight in Egypt and the neighbouring nations. The purpose of the list in Neh. 11:3-19 is apparently to state the number of the inhabitants either before or after the measures taken to augment them in Nehemiah’s time. Although the majority of the returned exiles belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, they are here called Israelites (11:3) because a large number out of all the tribes were now intermingled, and these were principally the occupiers of the rural villages, while none but those of Judah and Benjamin resided in Jerusalem. The actual number of the inhabitants, after the efforts recorded in Neh.11:1-2 was probably not much short of 20,000</p>
<p><b>Sat./Sun. 12–13</b>  <b>May</b></p>	<p>To recap, Nehemiah had a spiritual impact on the people he governed. Success in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem despite opposition had helped them realize that their God truly was among them, as small as their people and land had become. And then, Nehemiah had the whole people assemble to hear the Word of God read and explained by Ezra (8:1-18). The new sense of God’s presence, combined with the realization of what God required, led to national repentance and recommitment. The national prayer (Neh. 9) of repentance follows a familiar pattern. What is new is that the people determined to make a “binding agreement’ with God, even putting it in writing and affixing their seals to the document which outlined their vows (10:30-39). The commitments listed there reflect both the sins that had been committed and the intentions of the people of the land to correct them.</p> <p><b>R &amp; R:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is important that we too clearly define (document) our intentions as we make fresh starts in our spiritual lives so that we will be more likely to follow through. Do we do so and have someone we trust to hold us accountable?</li> </ul>

**References**

Tyndale House Publishers, **Chronological Life Application Study Bible**, 2004.

<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/nehemiah/10-39.htm>

O. Richards, **The Teacher’s Commentary**, 1987, Victor Books.