

Bible Studies

Numbers 1-4

What Does God Want?

Robert Linthicum tells how he needed a Biblical theology as big as the city itself. He found his answer in Deuteronomy's covenant (ch 5-11) and its statutes and ordinances (ch 12-28). There he found God's purpose for the religious, political and economic systems. He also found God's will for the prophet (Dt 18:15-20) and for the people (Dt 7:7-11).

1. **R**ead Dt 10:12-16 and 11:18-21. What does the Ord require of us (v. 12)? What symbols of the religious system were commanded? (10:16; 11:18-20)?
2. **R**ead Dt 16:18-20. How do justice and bribes relate to the political system? Are campaign contributions bribery?
3. **R**ead Dt 15:1-5. Should the economic system include any poor (v. 4)? Does forgiveness of debts every seven years result in redistribution of wealth? Should we support such redistribution today?

"The clearest exposition of the development of the systems of Israel's corporate life may be found in the book of Deuteronomy. ... Moses told the people in Deuteronomy 6, you are to go into a new land to possess it. It will be a land of pagans who will not accept or even appreciate your way of life; instead, they will oppose it. The new land will be filled with cities of great wealth, which you will appropriate; that wealth may erode your way of life. That new land will bring you much prosperity so that you will think you have made yourself strong rather than perceiving all as a gift from God; that power will undermine your dependence on God."
Linthicum, Robert C., CITY OF GOD - CITY OF SATAN, Zondervan, 1991, p. 47-48.

What Went Wrong?

Study Number Two

Evangelicals tend to personalize all sin as individual, but Ezekiel didn't. He also showed his concern for institutional sin as the major problem. Does this mean that we need to concentrate our witness as much on social justice as on personal evangelism? Listen to the Lord's words to Ezekiel on their unclean land.

Note how Ezekiel ties the princes to lions and the officials to wolves. Real life photos of lions and wolves in Wyoming are found in SPIRIT OF THE ROCKIES by Thomas D. Mangelson, 1999.

1. **R**ead Ezekiel 22:25-27. Identify the princes (vv. 6-7,25), the religious (vv. 8,9,26) and the economic (vv. 12-13, 27) systems. What have these systems done? How do lions and wolves kill?
2. **R**ead Ezekiel 22:28-29. What has happened to the prophets (v. 28) and to the people (vv. 8-11, 29)?
3. **R**ead Ezekiel 22:29-31. What is God's reaction (see also vv. 14-16)? How do we "stand in the breach" (v. 30)? Should this be a priority as high as evangelism?

"Thus, Ezekiel teaches, Jerusalem's entire spirituality is corrupted. When the systems and the prophets and the people are all seduced, there is no one left who has eyes to see and ears to hear. All in the city have been seduced by Satan and have given themselves over to the sustenance and service of the demonic. Thus is the godly spirituality of a city destroyed, replace by all that is dark, grasping, and evil life." Linthicum, Robert C., CITY OF GOD - CITY OF SATAN, Zondervan, 1991, p.62.

Power to the People

Study Number Three

In a footnote on Leviticus 25:35, the New Revised Standard Version (NSRV) of the Bible states that the "meaning of Hebrew uncertain." The The New International Version (NIV) translates the verse the same way as have other English translation. They fit the charity model instead of the empowerment model. Of twelve translations, words used are support (2), maintain, uphold (3), relieve, help, sustain, and assist (3). Actually the word means "strong, stout, mighty" (Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 305). The passage is really about the powerless and power with encouragement to be strong!

1. **R**ead Leviticus 25:1-38. The year of jubilee hasn't been embraced by acculturated Christian scholars. Do you think it should be preached and followed?
2. **R**ead Leviticus 25:35. How would you translate this verse? (see below) Do you believe in limiting witness to charity or do you include empowerment?
3. **F**aith-based community organizing recognizes the importance of people power and strength. Do you agree this verse within the jubilee principles is a key verse?

Stephen Mott translates v. 35 as follows; *"If members of your community become poor in that their power slips with you, you shall make them strong ... that they may live with you. ... Literally, hand (yad) metaphorically means power (Hans Walter Wolff. ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, Fortress, p. 68) Used in this way, yad expresses several aspects of power, as seen in the following examples: oppression, often regarding deliverance from it (Judg. 6:9); total domination (Dt. 3:3); control, authority (Gen. 39:6); ... Gen. 39:21-22, Deut. 8:17-18; Ps. 89:13, Num 6:21, Num 21:26, Gen 9:2)"* A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICAL THOUGHT, Oxford, p. 14, 230-1.

Confrontation and a Great Assembly

Study Number Four

Israelites survivors who had escaped the Babylonian captivity were powerless over their city of Jerusalem. The city walls were down and the gates destroyed (Nehemiah 1:3). The king's cupbearer, Nehemiah, through prayer and appeal made his peace with God and the King to return to Jerusalem to lead the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 1:4 - 2:8). Through masterful organizing Nehemiah as "lead organizer" led the people to rebuild the wall despite enemy resistance (Neh. ch 3-4). After this great achievement, oppression developed within the Israelites and that is our study.

1. **R**ead Nehemiah 5:1-13. What were the issues that the people faced (v. 1-5)?
2. **T**he nobles and officials were confronted by an angry Nehemiah and then by the people. How? (v. 6-7)
3. **A**t the great assembly what were the demands and how were they responded to and sealed? (v. 6-13) Can Christians confront officials as the Israelites did?

"From this confrontation we can learn a great deal about how to confront our friends. Nehemiah dealt with them, honestly and directly, exposing their sin. But he never attacked the profiteers personally. He separated the sin from the sinner, the people with the problem (v. 6-13). He never accused the wealthy Jews of being exploiters of the people, like the Gentiles before them; he accused the wealthy Jews of engaging in exploitation. There is a profound difference! One can stop an action - and the wealthy Israelites did stop their usury when their sin was exposed to them." Linthicum, Robert C., CITY OF GOD - CITY OF SATAN, Zondervan, 1991, p. 217.

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