



Nehemiah - Chapter Ten

IV Nehemiah 7:73b-10:39 - The Reading of the Law, and Covenant Renewal (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Ten

Many of the people agree to the new covenant that has been drawn up by Nehemiah and signed by the leadership. It commits them to walking the ways of God and following his written laws. In addition, they agree to keep themselves segregated from the Gentile nations and they accept the responsibility of funding the temple's activities, both through an annual tax supplemented by regular offerings.

IV.d Nehemiah 9:38-10:39 - Signatories and Specific Commitments

Refer to the chapter summary above

IV.d.i Nehemiah 9:38-10:27 - Those Who Signed the Covenant

The people had come to a place of decision and now, collectively, the nation was going to do something about it by entering into a new covenant with God. This first subsection is a list of the main signatories to the covenant.

^{9:38} Because of all this we make a firm agreement in writing, and on that sealed document are inscribed the names of our officials, our Levites, and our priests.

Nehemiah 9:38

To mend the situation, the people will now enter a firm agreement or solemn covenant, Hebrew *'amanah*. Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is and knowing who they are, they come and make a new covenant with God - even writing it down - to commit themselves to his ways. The word used for

firm agreement is not the usual word for covenant, which is *berit*, but a rarer one that emphasises faithfulness; the people pledge to keep faithfully what they now undertake.

We make a firm agreement in writing. The fourth sure sign of revival - after brokenness of heart, after reflection on God's goodness, after recognition of sinfulness, is a renewal of obedience to God. People must come to a place of decision so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience but something that shapes the person's future. God's work in each person often must come to a place of decision, one where he wants them to make a stand for him and against some other things.

Nehemiah 9:38 is v.1 in the Hebrew and 10:1 is v.2.

¹ Upon the sealed document are the names of Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah; ² Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ³ Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests. ⁹ And the Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; ¹⁰ and their associates, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹ Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹² Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³ Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. ¹⁴ The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahathmoab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁵ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁶ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁷ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁸ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ¹⁹ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²⁰ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²¹ Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, ²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵ Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁶ Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷ Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

Nehemiah 10:1-27

Upon the sealed document are the names. The long list of those who put their names to the covenant is designed to show that the entire community – priests, Levites, and lay leaders – was wholeheartedly behind it. These are prominent people in the community; many of their names have appeared before in Nehemiah especially those in vv.20-27.

It was wonderful for the nation as a whole to feel that something had to be done about the sin problem among them. However, it was meaningless unless individuals came forth to say, “we will do something about this.” Here are the leaders, eighty four in all, willing to put their name on the line for the covenant before God.

These people in Nehemiah's day knew what covenants were all about and how important they were to God. They remembered that God had made a covenant with Abraham, promising that both a nation and the Messiah would descend from him; God made a covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel when he gave them the law at Mount Sinai; God made a covenant with King David, promising the Messiah would come from his family. But the greatest covenant, the New Covenant instituted by the Messiah, was yet to come.

IV.d.ii Nehemiah 10:28-39 - Summary of the Covenant

The people essentially undertake to keep the entire Mosaic Law. The enumeration of laws is selective, however, highlighting major issues of their day.

²⁸ The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to adhere to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, ²⁹ join with their kin, their nobles, and enter into a curse and 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 ordinances and his statutes.

Nehemiah 10:28-29

The rest of the people. The range of those who solemnly agreed to the covenant is now widened to include all groups in the community. The eighty four mentioned previously sealed the covenant but the rest of the people - that is, all who have knowledge and understanding - also made the covenant with God.

Enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law. In making the covenant, they agreed to accept a curse from God if they did not obey his law. They accepted the curse as a form of his correction, to bring them back to obedience. The two expressions convey together the people's serious intention to keep their commitment. The curse refers to some terrible but just penalty, perhaps performed as a ritual, that they accept as their due if they fail: <<*But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!'*>> (Ruth 1:16-17), <<*Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow'*>> (1 Kings 19:2), <<*And those who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that*

they made before me, I will make like the calf when they cut it in two and passed between its parts>> (Jeremiah 34:18).

Christians can be secure in the knowledge that, as the spiritual descendants of Abraham, they, along with the Jews, are in receipt of the promises of God: <<*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise*>> (Galatians 3:29). However, the promises of God have always contained both blessings and curses. Once a person commits to following Jesus they need to fulfil their commitments or else they need to rely on the grace of God not to become the recipient of the curses.

Their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding. They made this covenant publicly; although its most significant meaning was between the individual and God, it was also important that other people be witness to the covenant. A public covenant meant accountability.

To observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes. Mount Sinai is the place of the Mosaic covenant, where God gave the Ten Commandments and other rules, ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, i.e. detailed instructions applying the force of the Ten Commandments to many cases in life.



Mount Sinai

³⁰ We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons; ³¹ and if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them on the sabbath or on a holy day; and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

Nehemiah 10:30-31

We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. The Mosaic prohibition of intermarriage with the Gentiles as worshippers of other gods is in the forefront because it was such a problem in the recent past; refer to Ezra Chapters 9-10.

This promise was addressed to parents. This is because in that day and culture, parents made the marriage decisions, not the people getting married. If this covenant were to be repeated today, in many western cultures it would not be

focused towards the parents but towards the individuals who wanted to get married.

This preserved the important principle that a follower of God should only marry another similarly committed follower of God: <<*Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?*>> (2 Corinthians 6:14). It is obvious by experience and observation that it is important to carefully and prayerfully choose a spouse. The whole idea of marriage is closely connected to the idea of covenant. Scripture states: <<*Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant*>> (Malachi 2:14). Marriage is a covenant, between the husband and wife, between them, their family and witnesses, but most importantly, between them and God. When marriage is understood as a covenant, the couple have something to bond them together that is stronger than society's expectations, more binding than the legal requirements, more constant than romantic love, and more certain than happy times - they have a covenant.

The Sabbath commandment recorded in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15 was no doubt important as a key marker of Israel's identity compared with the surrounding groups of people who did not acknowledge Yahweh as their God. Trading with these people on the Sabbath must have been a temptation, refer to Nehemiah 13:16-22. Under the OT law, God said that no one could buy or sell anything on the Sabbath day. These citizens of Jerusalem had been breaking this law and they now enter into a new covenant with God to obey it.

We will not buy it from them on the sabbath or on a holy day. The motive for breaking this law was clear. They could make more money selling on seven days of the week instead of six days. This was a covenant to only make money in ways that were obedient and glorifying to God.

Because Christ has fulfilled the requirements of the law, individual Christians are permitted to choose whether or not to keep dietary laws or observe special days; this includes shopping, entertainment or work on a Sunday - the replacement Sabbath for many. The only provision is that people need to be careful not to cause offence or lead other Christians astray in doing so and to honour God in the choices they make. However, when it comes to the ways in which a Christian should make money then it has to be undertaken through honest and ethical endeavour.

The crops of the seventh year. The Sabbath idea extended to the seventh year, when the normal work of cultivation was prohibited; refer to Leviticus 25:2-7.

³² We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the rows of bread, the regular grain-offering, the regular burnt-offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations, and the sin-offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

Nehemiah 10:32-33

One-third of a shekel. No Pentateuchal law requires this tax, so it is a new commitment. Refer, however, to Moses' particular levy in Exodus 30:11-16. The purpose was to support the service of the house of our God; God's people must be true to their calling as a worshipping community. This is intended as a comprehensive list of the offerings and occasions of temple worship.

For the rows of bread or the showbread. Twelve loaves of showbread or bread of the presence were to be baked fresh each week and placed before the Lord inside the Tabernacle and later the temple. The bread that was then removed could only be eaten by the priests. Refer to Leviticus 24:5-9.



The Showbread on its table

³⁴ We have also cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood-offering, to bring it into the house of our God, by ancestral houses, at appointed times, year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law.

Nehemiah 10:34

The wood-offering. Again, no specific law requires this tax, but the need for it is implied in Leviticus 6:12-13; for this reason it is said, it is written in the Law.

³⁵ We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord; ³⁶ also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks; ³⁷ and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the

tithes from our soil, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our rural towns.

Nehemiah 10:35-37

We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree. These verses summarise the agricultural offerings made to supply the temple personnel, as specified in various Pentateuchal laws, e.g. Exodus 23:19 and 34:26, Numbers 18:12-13 and Deuteronomy 26:1-11. These offerings were not always paid: *<<I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who had conducted the service, had gone back to their fields>>* (Nehemiah 13:10).

The firstborn of our sons. In fact, these were 'redeemed' by sacrifice: *<<Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem>>* (Exodus 13:13b), and: *<<All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. No one shall appear before me empty-handed>>* (Exodus 34:20b).

The firstlings of our herds and of our flocks. This was a risky way of giving especially for a person with a single animal or small herd/flock. What if the cow or the ewe only gave birth to one young and then stopped? God, of course, calls his people to act in faith and trust that he will provide. The giving of the firstborn to the priests was a way to demonstrate that faith. Refer to Numbers 18:15-18 and Deuteronomy 15:19-23 for the stipulation of this ordinance.

To bring the first of our dough. The dough offering is given to the Lord by presenting it to his priests: *<<The first of all the first fruits of all kinds, and every offering of all kinds from all your offerings, shall belong to the priests; you shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, in order that a blessing may rest on your house>>* (Ezekiel 44:30). This is a holy offering to the Lord; the blessing that is returned is therefore a holy blessing: *<<If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy>>* (Romans 11:16).

Tithes are due to the Levites according to Numbers 18:21-24, although the laity participates in a celebration of the tithe at the sanctuary in accordance with Deuteronomy 14:22-27.

³⁸ And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. ³⁹ For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are, and where the priests that minister, and

the gatekeepers and the singers are. We will not neglect the house of our God.

Nehemiah 10:38-39

The Levites shall bring up a tithe of the tithes to the house of our God. This refers to the Levites' offering of part of the tithe to the priests as stipulated in Numbers 18:25-32. Even those who serve in the temple were responsible to give to God from what they received.

We will not neglect the house of our God. To maintain the temple personnel is at the same time to care for the temple and to honour God, and thus to foster covenant faithfulness.

God's people are called to give not so much for the blessing of those who receive but for the blessing it gives to the giver by setting their heart right before God and before others: <<*In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"*>> (Acts 20:35).