

The Covenant Sealed

Nehemiah 10

Confirmation: *Nehemiah 10:1-31*

Signers

The Jews were in the middle of a revival and in this chapter we find them making a commitment to serve the LORD. This was due to the reading of God's Word, which produced conviction that led to confession resulting in commitment (Hebrews 4:12). Together, they made a covenant before the LORD to follow after His ways. The importance placed on this covenant is seen in the fact that the entire nation sealed it, with the rulers leading the way. It was a great day in the land, God's people looked to Him (Psalm 105:4).

Those in positions of leadership led the way in following the Word of God, with Nehemiah going out in front. His example encouraged others to follow the LORD. God fearing rulers are a blessing to those they lead. Next we find the priests were listed, a total of 17. These descendants of Levi and Aaron were responsible for serving the LORD in the temple. By joining Nehemiah in sealing the covenant they helped unite the nation after the LORD. The Levites were also involved in the signing, 21 total. They were descendants of Levi but not Aaron, so they worked in the temple but were not involved with the

*"The greatest and best men in the world must not think themselves above their Bibles."
Matthew Henry*

sacrifices. Finally, the Bible mentions the leaders of the people. Since it was impossible for every person to sign the covenant, these men signed for those they represented. Israel was blessed with good rulers. A nation is only as strong as its leaders. When those that rule honor God, the nation will be blessed (Proverbs 14:34).

Sincerity

The rest of the people joined the leaders in the covenant. They did not actually sign it but that did not make their commitment any less important. The scriptures point out that some people separated from the world to join in the covenant, foreigners that gave up their idols to worship the LORD (Leviticus 19:4; Ezekiel 14:6). Those that committed to God had understanding and knowledge. This implies that young people were allowed to take part in the covenant. It also tells us that the people were not deceived into making an emotional decision, but knew exactly what they were getting into. Because of this they willingly entered into an oath with God. It was a commitment to walk according to His law, meaning they promised to follow His commandments, judgments, and statutes (Proverbs 6:23).

Sincerity can be seen in their decision to separate from the world. It's one thing to talk about our love for God and another thing to live for Him (Psalm 116:9). A commitment was made to refrain from marriages with people of the world. This had been a problem in times past, so they planned to eliminate it (Ezra 9:1). Sin will remain an issue until separation occurs, which the Jews finally understood. Another issue of neglect was the Sabbath, which they promised to keep according to God's law (Exodus 20:8). No business would be transacted on the Sabbath, meaning nobody would be allowed to buy or sell.

Chapter Outline

I. Confirmation: *Nehemiah 10:1-31*

A. Signers: *Nehemiah 10:1-27*

B. Sincerity: *Nehemiah 10:28-31*

II. Commitment: *Nehemiah 10:32-39*

A. Ordinances: *Nehemiah 10:32-33*

B. Obligation: *Nehemiah 10:34-39*

Instead of seeking personal gain, they would focus on spiritual matters. Also, the seventh year would be a time of restoration. The ground would not be worked that year but remain untilled (Exodus 23:10-11; Leviticus 25:3-7). The soil required rest to be recharged, so this was important for the well being of the land. Consequently, the neglect of this command determined the amount of time spent in captivity, 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:21). Another problem addressed was that of oppression (Nehemiah 5). It was determined that debts would be released in the seventh year (Deuteronomy 15:1-2). Cleaning the slate in this manner protected the people from oppressive practices. With a great desire to serve God, the people confessed their sin then promised to separate from it. Understanding the teachings found in the Word of God, they aligned their conduct to please the LORD. It does no good to simply know the Bible; we must also live by it (James 1:22).

Commitment: *Nehemiah 10:32-39*

Ordinances

This was a serious situation, the people planned to make changes to the way they lived. Ordinances were established so they could maintain a walk with God. To begin with, they decided to fund the services performed in the house of God. This willingness to part with money speaks volumes. Today, selfishness with finances still plagues churches (1 Timothy 6:10, 17-19). Evidently the treasury at the temple was empty. This was not a command from Nehemiah the Governor, but a decision made by the people. It was a selfless display of submission to God (James 4:10). Most find that it's easy to give back to God when the heart is right with Him (Psalm 9:1).

The details of the offerings use, is found in the passage. It was for the shewbread, twelve loaves of bread prepared weekly for the table of shewbread (Leviticus 24:5-9). It went towards the offerings, which consisted of a morning and evening sacrifice (Exodus 29:38-42). It was used for the Sabbaths and new moons (Numbers 28:9-15). The offering funded the feasts, such as the Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles. On these occasions special sacrifices were offered along with the daily ones (Numbers 28:16-31 29:1-39). It was for the sin offering, which was made for the entire nation. The money was also used for anything needed in the temple services. It is important to note that the nation was poor. The Jews did not have the wealth or resources they once enjoyed so this was a real sacrifice for them to make.

Obligation

The service to God was taken seriously. Wood was required for the sacrifices, so a plan was developed to ensure there was plenty for the priests to use. On their turn each person was responsible for gathering wood to store in a room inside the Temple.¹ Everyone was involved in the LORD'S work, the priests were not expected to do everything and the work was not delegated to a select few. Likewise it's important for believers to serve the LORD in their local church. Because the Jews understood the importance of giving to God, they determined to

*"There are many men, who have a plenty of money when they are going to build houses for themselves, but a great scarcity of it when any is wanted for churches or anything else to promote God's glory."
John Lange*

¹ John Gill, "Gill's Commentary on the Bible: Nehemiah," (Bible Truth Forum: E-book, 2005) p. 74

give Him their best. They decided to give God the firstfruits of the ground and fruit trees. When the harvest rolled around the LORD received the first and best of what the people had. They were satisfied with what remained (Philippians 4:11). Their firstborn sons were also given then redeemed with a sacrifice (Exodus 13:2, 13-14). The plan of redemption was already seen in God's dealings with Israel (John 3:16). The firstborn of their cattle, flocks, and herds were also given and redeemed with a sacrifice (Numbers 18:17-18). The firstfruit of their dough and offerings, heave offerings, also went to God (Numbers 15:20-21, 18:8-11). Finally, they determined to give the best of their oil and wine to the LORD (Numbers 18:12). Unlike many, the Jews did not give God what they no longer wanted but the best of what they possessed.

These offerings were given to the Levites, according to the law (Leviticus 23:17, 27:30). We discover that they reinstated the tithe, which had been neglected (Malachi 3:8-9). When one is right with God, everything will be done according to His direction. That's evidence of a heart after the LORD (Psalm 119:10-11). A priest was to be with the Levites when receiving tithes. This practice ensured nothing was taken, avoided any misunderstandings, and produced a good testimony before the people. Since money given to the LORD belongs to Him, it should be handled correctly and used wisely. The Levites paid a tithe on what they received, so everyone was required to give a tenth unto the LORD. When it is remembered that everything we have is from God, it becomes easier to give unto Him. Times were difficult but they did not excuse themselves from giving unto the LORD, instead they gave their best. This is a good example for us to follow. Be willing to give your best for God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Questions for Consideration

How did Nehemiah set an example for the rest to follow?

Why is it important for rulers to lead by example?

Why was it important for the nation to be united concerning the covenant?

What was promised concerning marriage?

Why was it important to separate from the world?

What was promised concerning the Sabbath?

What did they plan to do every seventh year?

What were the firstfruits?

How can we give our best to the LORD?

What does the covenant say about their commitment to God?

Points to Ponder

Do you respect God's Word?

The Jews did, so they chose to live by His standard not the world's. Today God's Word is greatly disrespected. Believers ignore it, churches neglect it, and the world mocks.

However, it remains the LORD'S word so do your best to know it and follow it.

Are you faithful to God?

The faithfulness of the Jews suffered with the neglect of God's Word. It can be seen in their attitude towards the Sabbath, which they failed to keep. Sunday service is not the Sabbath, however when we drift into the world church services are often neglected. Remain faithful.

Is sin addressed?

The Jews were honest concerning their conduct. Instead of ignoring their sin, they dealt with their neglect of God's Word. This was because they wanted to make all things right with the LORD. You must be willing to address sin if you want forgiveness.

Is the LORD given your best?

The Jews decided to give the LORD the firstfruits, which included their best. This was done from a desire to please God. Are you giving the LORD your firstfruits – the best of your finances, talents, and time?

What produces revival?

Revival has nothing to do with numbers or excitement but obedience to God. The people decided to live by God's Word, so they separated from the world and dedicated their lives to Him. Following the LORD'S word produced revival in the land.