

Nehemiah Chapter 10

This chapter is devoted to those who made covenant with God.

Verses 1-27: The list of sealed signatures on the covenant were from the leaders. Surprisingly, Ezra's name is not listed.

Eighty-four people signed ("placed their seal on"), the covenant, vowing to separate themselves from ungodly ways and be accountable for what they signed. Nehemiah's name was first, followed by the names of "priests", Levites and "leaders" or heads of homes. Just like the rebuilding of the city wall, spiritual restoration would involve all the people, not just Israel's leaders.

Verses 1-8: Nehemiah the governor and 21 priests are listed first (compare 12:1-7), the reverse order of 9:38.

Nehemiah 10:1 "Now those that sealed [were], Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah,"

That sealed the covenant, made (Neh. 9:38).

Nehemiah the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah": The governor of the Jews.

"And Zidkijah": Who seems also to have been a prince, since, without, it could not be said it was sealed by their princes (Neh. 9:38). Though some think both these were priests, and then the princes must be supposed to be among the chief of the people (Neh. 10:14). From hence to the end of the twenty seventh verse, their names follow. The names of the priests (Neh. 10:2). Who were in all twenty one. No mention is made either of Eliashib the High Priest, nor of Ezra the priest and scribe. Some think the former had not behaved well in his office, and that the latter was either sick, or returned to Babylon. Or however hindered by some providence or another. Since we hear of him both a little before and after (Neh. 8:2). Then the names of the Levites (Neh. 10:9). In all seventeen, most of which we have met with in this book before. Next follow the names of the chief of the people (Neh. 10:14). Their number in all forty four. And their names may be observed in the list of those that came out of Babylon with Zerubbabel. The whole number of those that sealed, princes, priests, Levites, and chief of the people, were eighty four.

Nehemiah was the civil leader (Tirshatha). Zidkijah here, was probably speaking of Zadok. It appears this Zadok was Nehemiah's secretary.

"Sealed" in this verse, means make a mark.

Nehemiah 10:2-8 "Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah," "Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah," "Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch," "Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah," "Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch," "Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin," "Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these [were] the priests."

These verses listed the heads of the priestly houses. It was important that they signed this covenant, because they actually were the leaders of the people in spiritual things. Seraiah was mentioned first, because he was the head of high priestly family.

Verses 9-13: As for the Levites, “Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel”, and 14 of their brethren are mentioned. Individual Levites signed in the names of their families, for two of these names appear (in 7:43). All but four of the Levites are mentioned (in 8:7; 9:4-5; and 12:8).

Nehemiah 10:9-13 "And the Levites: both Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;" "And their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiiah, Hanan," "Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah," "Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah," "Hodijah, Bani, Beninu."

Beginning with (verse 9), we see a list of the heads of the houses of the Levites, who were not priests. All priests had to be of the Levitical tribe, and they also had to be descended from Aaron. The Levites, other than the priests, did things like singing and keeping the doors. They were in service to the LORD, but in a different capacity than the priests. Binnui had taken the place of Kadmiel. Jeshua, Binnui, and Kadmiel were the three who were the chief of the families of the Levites at that time.

Verses 14-27: The “chief of the people”, actually “chiefs”, are listed predominantly in terms of the families they represented; in fact, the first 21 names (“Parosh” to “Magpiash”, verses 14-20a), closely follow the list (in Ezra 2:3-30). Some of the remaining 23 names (in verses 20-26), have also appeared as fathers’ names, that is, family names, in the list of wall builders (in chapter 3).

Nehemiah 10:14-27 "The chief of the people; Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani," "Bunni, Azgad, Bebai," "Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin," "Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur," "Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai," "Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai," "Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir," "Meshezabeel, Zadok, Jaddua," "Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah," "Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub," "Hollohesh, Pileha, Shobek," "Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah," "And Ahijah, Hanan, Anan," "Malluch, Harim, Baanah."

These lists of names in the verses above were showing the chief of each family that signed the covenant. The chief of each family signed for the entire family. Just because a member of the family did not specifically sign, did not eliminate them from keeping the covenant. They in a sense, signed when their chief signed for them.

Verses 28-39: This section contains the general oath of obedience and fills out the declaration made (in 9:38), by the whole company and sealed on their behalf by their leaders. Three points in the oath were stressed:

- (1) No intermarriage with heathen (compare 7:3);
- (2) No commerce on the Sabbath or other holy days (compare Amos 8:5);
- (3) Faithful observance of the seventh year, the Year of Jubilee (compare Exodus 23:10-11; Deut. 15:1-2).

The rest of the section deals with the support of the temple.

“The third part of a shekel” (verse 32), was a reduction from the requirement of one-half a shekel originally given (in Exodus 30:13; compare Matt. 17:24). Perhaps the poverty of the people called for a lower tax rate. The “wood offering” (verse 34), was for the continual altar fire (Lev. 6:12; compare Neh. 13:31). The “tithe of the tithes (verse 38), was a tenth of the tenths, referred to (in Num. 18:26). It showed that the Levites, as recipients of the tithes of all Israel, had to tithe what they received and pass on this tenth share to the priests. The Levites outnumbered the priests in Moses’ day, but now it was not so. Thus, the disproportionate number bore heavily on the priests. This system of mutual support soon disintegrated and had to be restored by Nehemiah again (in 13:10-14). The phrase “we will not forsake” [“abandon”, “forget”], “the house of our God” sums up not only the paragraph but much of the concern of the postexilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Verses 28-31: Before Israel entered the Promised Land, God had forbidden intermarriage with people from nation outside the covenant (Exodus 34:12-16; Deut. 7:3). The parents in Nehemiah’s day pledged they “would not give our daughters unto the people of the land”. The people further vowed to separate “themselves” from the world, submit to the Word (“Law”), of God, and keep the Sabbath (“we would not buy it”). Similarly, God calls Christians to make themselves distinct from the world today (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Nehemiah 10:28 "And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinim, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;"

“The rest of the people” (see note on Ezra 2:43-54).

“That had separated themselves”: These are those who:

- (1) Had followed the demand of Ezra and Nehemiah to divorce pagan spouses or;
- (2) Had been left in the Land but never joined themselves to any heathen, thus remaining separate.

Intermarriage with the nations had previously precipitated an influence in Israel which had culminated in Babylonian slavery, thus playing a major role in Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant.

This seems a little unusual to separate these out, but they were not really separated. The people (in verse 28 above), each had a chief of their family who signed the covenant for them. The priests here, are sons and grandsons of the head of each priestly family. The head of the family signed for them. This is saying, that these people (in verse 28), had all been signed for by the heads of their families which were listed individually (in the verses through 27).

Nehemiah 10:29 "They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into 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 judgments and his statutes;"

“A curse, and into an oath”: Covenants characteristically were ratified by an oath ceremony in which the parties swore to the terms of the covenant. A curse rite was often included wherein the slaughtering of an animal indicated similar consequences for the covenant breaker. Israel’s pledged adherence to the law was thus solemnly affirmed.

This is saying, they verbally agreed to live by the covenant agreement the heads of their families signed for them. They had heard the agreement read aloud, and they agreed to the conditions of the covenant. They were saying they accepted the mark their leader had made as a binding agreement on them. They were aware there would be curses, if they did not keep the commandments of the LORD. They knew they would be blessed if they kept the commandments.

Nehemiah 10:30 "And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:"

“Not give our daughters ... nor take their daughters”: Parents controlled marriages, so this part of the covenant came from them. Again, it stressed the serious matter of marrying a heathen from an idolatrous people (see Ezra chapter 10).

One of the very serious promises they made was not to intermarry with the heathens around them. They were to marry only other Hebrews.

Nehemiah 10:31 "And [if] the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, [that] we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and [that] we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt."

The people also sought to reinstitute the sabbatical year, a practice of giving the land rest every “seventh year” (Lev. 25:1-7) and forgiving (“would leave ... exaction of”), debts in that year (Deut. 15:1-2).

This was saying they would keep the Sabbath holy. They would not buy or sell on the Sabbath, or on any holy day. It was also saying they would keep the sabbatical year holy. They would let the land lie in rest on the seventh year. This spoke of the Jubilee at the end of the seventh seven years as well. Every debt would be canceled at that time, as the Levitical law prescribed.

Verses 32-39: The remainder of the conditions the people made in their covenant involved matters of the temple. As a central part of their renewed covenant, these Israelites made giving to God and supporting the temple a priority. Their “ordinances” included a yearly deduction for the “service of the house of ... God” and a pledge to give God the first of everything (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 26:2). The task of bringing firewood for the offerings was assigned by lot.

Nehemiah 10:32 "Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;"

“We made ordinances for us”: What the people were committing themselves to by covenant turned into law requiring a one-third shekel temple tax. The Mosaic ordinance required one-half of a shekel (see Exodus 30:11-16), but the severe economic straits of the time led to the reduced amount. By the time of Christ, the people had returned to the Mosaic stipulation of one-half of a shekel (see note on Matt. 17:24).

This was a special voluntary tax that all of the people imposed upon themselves to take care of the service in the temple. The 1/6 of an ounce was a very small amount, but even the poor had to pay this once a year.

Nehemiah 10:33 "For the showbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the Sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy [things], and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and [for] all the work of the house of our God."

To defray the expenses of the twelve loaves, which every week were set on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:5).

"And for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering": For the daily sacrifice, morning and evening, which always had a meat offering along with it (Exodus 29:38).

"Of the Sabbaths, and of the new moons": On which were additional sacrifices (Num. 28:9).

"And for the set feasts": Of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. In which also were offered other sacrifices, besides the daily one (Num. 28:16).

"And for the holy things": Which were both by way of thanksgiving to God, and that they might feast and rejoice together.

"And for the sin offerings, to make an atonement for Israel": For the whole body of the people, and so were made at the public expense.

"And for all the work of the house of our God": Whatever else was necessary that is not mentioned.

The showbread was very important. It symbolized the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. This small amount of money they would bring in would not be enough to pay for animals for the burnt offerings, but it was symbolic that all of the people should support the temple, regardless of how poor they were. This way they would feel they were a part of it. All of these offerings and feasts were to be practiced again. They were going back to the letter of the law. The showbread was 12 small loaves each week. The continual meat offering was flour and oil mingled together. It was offered twice a day. The offering of the sabbath was two lambs with meat and drink offerings. On new moons, the offerings were two bullocks, one ram, seven lambs accompanied with the meat and drink offerings. The set feasts were Passover, Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), and Tabernacles. The sin offering was for Day of Atonement. Each of these feasts had specific offerings mentioned in the book of Numbers.

Nehemiah 10:34 "And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring [it] into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as [it is] written in the law:"

The carrying of the wood for the constantly burning altar (Lev. 6:12), had formerly been the duty of the temple servants, but few of them had returned from Babylon (7:60), so more people were chosen to assist in this task.

Someone had to provide the wood to burn the offerings. The families responsible for bringing in the wood at a certain time were decided by casting lots. Wood was hard to find at that time, it had to be thought of as a ministry.

Verses 35-39: Laws for all the offerings and tithes were reinstated so as not to “neglect the house of our God” (verse 39).

In the Old Testament, much giving was “in kind” rather than in the form of money. The “tithes” meant to support the “Levites, priests”, and “house of our God” and came mostly in the form of animals, produce, and crops (Num. 18:12-13; 15-18; Deut. 15:19-23; 26:1-11). The Levites collected the various tithes and in turn tithed “a tenth” from those gifts to the temple storerooms.

Verses 35-37: “Firstfruits ... firstborn ... firstlings”: These laws required the firstfruits of the ground (see Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 26:2), the firstfruits of the trees (see Lev. 19:24; Num. 18:13), the firstborn sons redeemed by the estimated price of the priest (see Num. 18:15), and the firstborn of the herds and flocks (see Exodus 13:12; Num. 18:15, 17). All of this was kept at the storehouses near the temple and distributed for the support of the priests and Levites. The Levites then gave a tenth of what they received to the priests (compare Num. 18:26).

Nehemiah 10:35 "And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD:"

Not that they cast lots to do this, but they bound themselves with an oath, according to the law, to do it. This is the first of all the fruits of the earth (Exodus 23:19). Though Aben Ezra restrains it to the sheaf of the firstfruits, and to the two wave loaves (Lev. 23:10).

"And the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees": Which, as Aben Ezra observes, their wise men restrain to the seven kinds only mentioned (in Deut. 8:8).

Firstfruits offerings were required of everything that was grown. It was a very good way to be sure you would have a good crop abundantly provided by God. Even this had been dropped for years. The practice was re-instated to keep the law.

Nehemiah 10:36 "Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as [it is] written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God:"

Such as were unclean, as Aben Ezra notes, as the ass, etc. And are distinguished from clean ones mentioned in the following clause. Now both these, their sons, and this sort of cattle, were to be redeemed by a price paid to the priests. As it is written in the law (Exodus 13:2).

"And the firstlings of our herds, and of our flocks": Clean cattle, which were to be offered (Num. 18:17).

"To bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God": A price for the one sort, and the other for sacrifice.

The firstborn son had to be purchased back from God with a silver shekel. He belonged to God. All of the firstborn cattle, herds, and flocks must be offered on the eighth day.

Nehemiah 10:37 "And [that] we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage."

According to the law in (Num. 15:20).

"And our offerings": Their heave offerings (Num. 18:8).

"And the fruit of all manner of trees": Bore by them on the fourth year after their planting (Lev. 19:23).

"Of wine and oil": To which Aben Ezra restrains the fruit of the trees (see Num. 18:12). All these they were to bring:

"Unto the priests, to the chambers the house of our God": There to be laid up for the use of it. And oil and wine were frequently used in sacrifices.

"And the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our village": The tenth part of the produce of their agriculture everywhere throughout the land (see Num. 18:21).

This was not limited to the fruit of the trees, but included all things that grew of nature. The first of the crop belonged to God. These offerings were for the Levites to live on. They shared with the altar. The Levites did not own land. They lived off the offerings.

Nehemiah 10:38 "And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house."

There was always to be a priest with the Levites at such times, to take notice what quantity they received. That they might not be under any temptation, or lie under any suspicion of defrauding the priests of their due. Who were to have a part in the tithes, as follows.

"And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house": Which were in the court of the priests for that purpose. For out of the tithes of the Levites there was another tithe or tenth part taken, and given to the priests (see Num. 18:26).

All of the tithes were taken to the temple and turned over to the priests. The priests allotted the offerings out between all of the Levites.

Nehemiah 10:39 "For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where [are] the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God."

In the temple.

"Where are the vessels of the sanctuary": To put the said things into, that they might be ready at hand when wanted. As they often were for the meat and drink offerings.

"And the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers": Who dwelt there when in their ministrations, and were supported by the above tithes and gifts.

"And we will not forsake the house of our God": Neither forsake the assembling themselves there for worship. Nor neglect to make the necessary provisions for the service of it, as they had too much done, but now resolve for the future to behave better.

This was a promise from these Israelites to take the responsibility of the support of the temple upon themselves. They turned their offerings of corn, wine, oil, and all of their other things they brought as a tithe to the temple. The temple treasury would be in the sanctuary. All of those called to the service of the LORD, whether they be priests, porters, singers or other workers would live of the offerings.

There is a lesson in this for the Christian. When we become Christians, we go into covenant relationship with God. We must take responsibility for our portion of the care and upkeep of our church. We must not shirk our duty of giving our portion of money to the church we attend.

Nehemiah Chapter 10 Questions

1. Nehemiah was the _____ leader.
2. What other name was he called in verse 1?
3. What was another name for Zidkijah?
4. In verse 1, what did "sealed" mean?
5. Verse 2 through 8 list whom?
6. Why was it so important for them to sign this covenant?
7. Why was Seraiah mentioned first?
8. Who are listed in verse 9 through 13?
9. Who were the three of the chiefs of the Levitical families at that time?
10. Who were listed in verse 14 through 27?
11. Beginning in verse 28, who were the people mentioned?
12. Verse 29 was saying, they verbally agreed to live by what?
13. What were they aware of?
14. They agreed not to marry the _____.
15. What times did verse 31 say, they would remember and observe?
16. What was one of the things that happened on jubilee?
17. What voluntary tax did they impose on themselves?
18. What were some of the things the tax would be used for, mentioned in verse 33?
19. What was the showbread?
20. What was the offering for new moons?
21. How did they decide who would provide the wood?

22. The firstborn son was purchased back from God with a _____ .
23. What of their firstfruits were they supposed to bring to the temple?
24. Who were the tithes turned over to, to distribute?
25. What was the promise in verse 39 really?
26. Where was the temple treasury?
27. What lesson for the Christians do we find here?