

Nehemiah 10

Which three groups of people signed the binding agreement/covenant of 9:38 (vv. 1-27)? Nehemiah's name heads the list (v. 1), again setting an excellent example for the people, followed by the priests (vv. 2-8), the Levites (vv. 9-13), and the leaders of the people (vv. 14-27).¹ In doing so, they agreed that they would obey the stipulations of the Mosaic Law (v. 29).

What did the rest of the people do (vv. 28-29)? Even though they did not place their seals on the written agreement, they did join in and agreed to the point where they entered into a curse (that called down calamity if they failed to carry through on their agreement) and an oath to walk in God's law. They agreed to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord. They made this covenant publicly. They were just as serious as those who initially signed the agreement.

A public covenant implies? Accountability.....to God and each other.

What were their chances of keeping this covenant? They had no ability to keep any commandments in their own strength. That's one major reason why the Ten Commandments were given – to show them their sin (Romans 3:20) and their need for a Savior.

What was the first specific condition of the covenant made by the people (v. 30)? They promised not to give their daughters in marriage to the peoples around them or take their daughters for their sons.

Which family members were making this covenant? This promise was made by the parents. This is because in that day, *parents* made the marriage decisions, not the people getting married.

What was God's purpose in limiting the Jews contact and involvement with non-Jews? To preserve the spiritual, racial and cultural purity of His chosen people. To avoid the extinction of Israel/loss of identity/cease to exist through spiritual compromise. Like what happened to the 10 northern tribes which were dispersed by the Assyrians and were never heard from again. Our God is a jealous God. Commandment #2 -- "*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.*" He is jealous for His chosen people.

What's the application for today? This preserved the important principle that a follower of God should only marry another similarly committed follower of God. It is obvious by experience and observation that it is important to carefully and prayerfully choose your spouse. The most important ingredient in a marriage is spiritual oneness. Marriage above all is a spiritual relationship; it is a Covenant relationship between two people and God (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

2 Corinthians 6:14 *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?*

Malachi 2:14 *Yet she is your companion, and your wife by covenant.*

What was the second condition of the covenant made by the people (v. 31)? We will be faithful to God when it comes to doing business. **In what ways?** Under the Old Testament 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 covenanted with God to obey it.

What was the Jew's motive for breaking this law? They could make more money selling on seven days of the week than they could on six days. This was a covenant to only make money in ways that were obedient and glorifying to God.

They also agreed to not work the land on the seventh (Sabbath) year and to cancel all debts that same year.

What was the Sabbath year? The final year of a seven year cycle.

What was the purpose of the Sabbath year? Leviticus 25:4-7 *But in the seventh year the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.* Whatever the land yields during the Sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten, i.e., whatever grows wild.

How would people survive without planting for a year? Leviticus 25:20-22 *You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in. Requires trust in God to provide.*

What was the third condition of the covenant made by the people (vv. 32-39)? We will be faithful to God when it comes to supporting the house of our God. This was a stewardship issue.

In what specific ways did they promise to be faithful?

- **vv. 32-33?** They imposed a yearly gift/tax of one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God....to support the workings of the temple.
- **v. 34?** They required people to bring wood to the temple on a rotating basis for the sacrifices.
- **vv. 35-36?** They committed themselves to obey the command to bring the firstborn, children and animals to the house of the Lord.
Firstborn and firstfruits were risky ways to give – they required trust in God to provide - because your land might not yield plentiful produce, and your cow or ewe might not give birth again - yet the first still belonged to God, and was given to the priests. God promised to bless this giving of the firstfruits and firstborn in faith: *Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.* (Proverbs 3:9-10). The principle is that God will honor the faithful steward.
- **vv. 37-38?** They committed themselves to the tithe (ten percent of the produce of their land) unto the house of God.
- **v. 39** If before, they covenanted to make money only in ways that would glorify God, here they covenanted to spend their money in ways that glorify God - and beginning it all with giving unto the Lord.

The Old Testament talks about giving in the form of a tithe of 10% of your livestock, grain, fruit, etc. What does the New Testament say about giving? It should be regular, planned, proportional, and private (1 Corinthians 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9:7). **How much should a New Testament believer give?** That is between the Holy Spirit and you. Remember, God is after our hearts more than our money.

The bottom line is that God owns it all; He has given it all to us to be stewards of. God doesn't need our money. He wants our hearts above all and how we deal with our material wealth is a real test that reveals where our hearts are. If you hold on to money so tightly that you will not be a giver, that is an indicator of where your heart is when it comes to money. You are essentially saying -- I don't trust You to provide. I don't believe as the Bible says that You will bless me if I give generously.

Malachi 3:10-11 *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.* I.e., If you tithe, I will bless you and everyone will see I and, in the end, I will be glorified.

Application: We are going to handle our finances God's way. We will not neglect the house of our God. Simply said, the Bible says we need to be givers. Not so much for the sake of those we give to, but because giving sets our heart right about material things.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 489.