

BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Wednesday Noon Bible Study

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The Book of Nehemiah – Chapter 10 and 11

CHAPTER 10

Israel's Covenant with God

Roster of those who signed the covenant.

(Nehemiah 10:1-8) Nehemiah and the priests signed the covenant.

Now those who placed their seal on the document were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests.

At the end of Nehemiah chapter 9, 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 covenant.

- Nehemiah 9:38 gives the sense of this: And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; and our leaders and our Levites and our priests shall seal it.

(Nehemiah 10:9-13) The Levites who signed the covenant.

The Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, and Kadmiel. Their brethren: Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Bani, and Beninu.

(Nehemiah 10:14-27) The civic leaders who signed the covenant.

The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

The terms of the covenant.

(Nehemiah 10:28-29) The making of the covenant with God.

Now the rest of the people; the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding; these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered 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:

The 84 mentioned previously sealed the covenant, but the rest of the people — that is, everyone who had knowledge and understanding — also made the covenant with God.

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.

- Many of us have done a similar thing. We probably didn't pray "God, curse me if I disobey You." But many of us have prayed, "Lord, whatever it takes I want to follow You. Whatever it takes I want to be Your man/woman." That is essentially praying the same thing, and that is a good prayer.

(Nehemiah 10:30) Their first area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to our romantic relationships.

We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons;

This promise was addressed to parents. **This is because in that day, parents made the marriage decisions, not the people getting married.**

We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land: 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.

- Many of us have remarkable stories of how we came together with our mate — some stories are romantic, and others are kind of strange. Once we are together, God wants to make that marriage something special before Him, and desires to draw the couple closer together as they draw closer to God, as the sides of a triangle come closer as they come higher up.

But if one is not now married, it is important for them to make the same kind of covenant. If one has given their life to serving Jesus Christ, there will be difficulty if they marry someone who has given their life to something else. If one is in that situation now, God can do great things, but one should never knowingly choose to be in that place from the beginning.

The whole idea of marriage is closely connected to the idea of covenant. Malachi 2:14 says, Yet she is your companion, and your wife by covenant. Marriage is a covenant, between the husband and wife, between them and all family and witness, but most importantly, between them and God.

When we understand marriage as a covenant, we have something to bond us together that is stronger than society's expectations, more constant than romantic love, and more certain than happy times — we have a covenant.

(Nehemiah 10:31) Second area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to doing business.

If the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt.

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 covenant with God to obey it.

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.

- This is a great challenge for the church today, when many are in careers where they have the opportunity to make money in ways that are wrong in God's sight. We need to have the same heart they had here, and covenant before God to only make money in ways that are obedient and glorifying to Him.

Many of us — as was true in Nehemiah's day — slip into these practices subtly. We don't wake up in the morning saying we're going to cut corners, cheat others, and defraud the system. We do it because we think we need to — bills need to be paid, the kids need things, and so on. Then we do it because it works. But we don't really need to; if we trust God, He will take care of us. We should never trust our slick ways of doing business more than we trust God in heaven.

(Nehemiah 10:32-39) The third area of decision: we will be faithful to God when it comes to supporting God's work.

Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God as it is written in the Law. And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the LORD; to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God.

They laid down a yearly tax to support the workings of the temple. They required people to bring wood to the temple on a rotating basis. They committed themselves to obey the command to bring the firstborn and the firstfruits, and the tithe (ten percent of the produce of their land) unto the house of God.

They simply did two things.

First, they agreed to give as God had commanded (the firstborn, firstfruits, and the tithe).

Second, they agreed to give as the special need required (the one-third of a shekel tax and the wood).

Firstborn and firstfruits were risky ways to give, because your land might not yield much more 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).

We will not neglect the house of our God: If before they covenanted to make money only in ways that would glorify God, here they covenant to spend their money in ways that glorify God — and beginning it all with giving unto the Lord.

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. God Himself is the greatest giver.

- If you hold on to money so tightly that you will not be a giver, than you have revealed where your heart is when it comes to money.

The New Testament speaks with great clarity on the principle of giving; that giving should be **regular, planned, proportional, and private (1 Corinthians 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians 9).**

If you are reluctant to be a giver as the Bible says you should, simply talk to those who are. Ask them if it has been a blessing or a curse in their life to give as God says to. God promises He will never owe us anything, and we cannot out-give God — though the return is often far better than dollars and cents.

CHAPTER 11

The Citizens of Jerusalem

Recruiting citizens of Jerusalem.

(Nehemiah 11:1) Those who will live in Jerusalem.

Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities.

It wasn't enough to see the city walls rebuilt and the spiritual renewal of the people of Jerusalem; now they concerned themselves with getting more people into the city.

For a city to prosper and be great, it must be populated. And for more than seventy years, Jerusalem had been nothing but a ghost town. Now, over the last eighty or so years, it has been repopulated, with a new temple built (under Ezra) and the walls rebuilt (under Nehemiah). But the city still needed more people.

Nehemiah also knew the bigger the population of Jerusalem, the greater the resources for defense and strength in battle. He didn't rebuild the walls just to see some conquering army come and break them down again!

It was good that the leaders of the people set the example by living in Jerusalem. Leaders must set the pattern by their lives. They had no right to expect the people to live in Jerusalem if they themselves were not living there.

One out of ten: The rest of the people submitted themselves to a lottery system, where one out of ten would be selected to move from the surrounding regions into the city of Jerusalem. So, in the end, at least ten percent of Judah's population would live in Jerusalem.

(Nehemiah 11:2) Blessing the citizens of Jerusalem.

And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

Apart from the leaders (who had a special obligation) and those selected in the lottery (who were also obligated), there were all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. These men had a special blessing.

- They had the ability to endure some measure of hardship or discomfort to accomplish a greater work for God's kingdom.

To dwell at Jerusalem: If such a blessing is reserved for those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem, there was something special about the challenge of living in Jerusalem.

To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-order your **view of material things**. You had to give up land in your previous region and take up some kind of new business in Jerusalem.

To live in Jerusalem, you had to **re-arrange your social priorities**, certainly leaving some friends and family behind in your old village.

To live in Jerusalem, you had to have a **mind to endure the problems in the city**. It had been a ghost town for 70 years, and was now basically a slightly rebuilt, somewhat repopulated ghost town. The city didn't look all that glorious and it needed work.

To live in Jerusalem, you had to live **knowing you were a target for the enemy**. There were strong walls to protect you, but since Jerusalem was now a notable city with rebuilt walls, the fear was more from whole armies than bands of robbers. The old village was nice, but not in much danger from great armies.

The Bible tells us there is a city coming down from heaven to earth, when God is done with this earth as we know it, and it calls that city New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). People don't want to be citizens of the New Jerusalem for the same reasons many didn't want to be citizens of Nehemiah's Jerusalem.

Roster of those living in Jerusalem and in Judea. (Nehemiah 11:3-24) Leaders who lived in Jerusalem.

These are the heads of the province who dwelt in Jerusalem. (But in the cities of Judah everyone dwelt in his own possession in their cities; Israelites, priests, Levites, Nethinim, and descendants of Solomon's servants.) Also in Jerusalem dwelt some of the children of Judah and of the children of Benjamin. The children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the children of Perez; and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. All the sons of Perez who dwelt at Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men. And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah; and after him Gabbai and Sallai, nine hundred and twenty-eight. Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer, and Judah the son of Senuah was second over the city. Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joarib, and Jachin; Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, was the leader of the house of God. Their brethren who did the work of the house were eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, and his brethren, heads of the fathers' houses, were two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, and their brethren, mighty men of valor, were one hundred and twenty-eight. Their overseer was Zabdiel the son of one of the great men. Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the heads of the Levites, had the oversight of the business outside of the house of God; Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the leader who began the thanksgiving with prayer; Bakbukiah, the second among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred and eighty-four. Moreover the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren who kept the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two. And the rest of Israel, of the priests and Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, everyone in his inheritance. But the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel. And Ziha and Gishpa were over the Nethinim. Also the overseer of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha, of the sons of Asaph, the singers in charge of the service of the house of God. For it was the king's command concerning them that a certain portion should be for the singers, a quota day by day. Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was the king's deputy in all matters concerning the people.

This extensive list includes tribal leaders (of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin), military men, priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and civil and royal servants.

(Nehemiah 11:25-36) Jewish villages and towns throughout Judea.

And as for the villages with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt in Kirjath Arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, Jekabzeel and its villages; in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, Hazar Shual, and Beersheba and its villages; in Ziklag and Meconah and its villages; in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages; in Lachish and its fields; in Azekah and its villages. They dwelt from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom. Also the children of Benjamin from Geba dwelt in Michmash, Aija, and Bethel, and their villages; in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah; in Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim; in Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat; in Lod, Ono, and the Valley of Craftsmen. Some of the Judean divisions of Levites were in Benjamin.