

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 18TH - 19TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

THE SIGNERS OF THE COVENANT (NEHEMIAH 10:1-29)

In chapter 9, the people of Israel in Jerusalem assembled to confess their sins, pray, repent, and to make a "firm covenant in writing" before the Lord (9:38).

- That covenant was a renewal of their obedience to God and His Word.
- It's one thing to offer God passionate prayer and worship during a church service, but it's a different matter to live an obedient lifestyle.

THOSE WHO SIGNED-

- **Nehemiah and the priests** (vs. 1-8)- the leaders of the people were willing to go first to put their name on the line of the covenant before God.
- **The Levites** (vs. 9-13) - the ones who had helped explain the Torah and served as teachers and temple workers.
- **The civic leaders** (vs. 14-27) - the chiefs of the people also vowed their obedience to God.

THE TERMS OF THE COVENANT (VS. 28-29)

The 84 names mentioned sealed the covenant, but the rest of the people ("all who had knowledge and understanding") also made a covenant with God.

- In making this covenant, they agreed to accept a curse from God as a form of His correction if they did not obey His law (vs. 29).

Taking a solemn oath before God was a serious matter because it involved invoking the name of God (Num. 30:2) and put someone under God's judgment if they broke their oath.

- Jesus warned against using empty oaths (Matt. 5:33-37) and Solomon did also (Eccl. 5:1-7).
- Commitment through a public covenant (baptism, marriage) is a serious thing.

"But isn't this just legalism?" No. These people are entering into a covenant with God after already being mercifully redeemed as a people and allowed to return from exile to Jerusalem.

- This covenant was a sign of their commitment to respond to the mercy that had been shown to them through obedience.
- When we have been truly redeemed, our heart is changed so that we desire to respond to God's mercy through obedience.

COMMITMENT #1: FAITHFULNESS TO GOD IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS (NEHEMIAH 10:30)

This promise was for Jewish parents, because it was the parents that made decisions regarding marriage, not the people getting married.

- This prohibition isn't a proof text against interracial marriage - the intent of this promise was to keep the Jews spiritually pure, not racially pure.
- Often the pagan practices of other nations would creep into Israel through marriage (1 Kings 11:4-5)

There are two very important principles behind this promise for believers today.

- The first is that a born-again Jesus follower should only marry someone who is also a committed follower of Jesus.
- If there is an, "unequal yoke" in a marriage between a believer or non-believer, it will lead to conflict, compromise, and sometimes even conformity to the ways of the world instead of Christ.

The 2nd principle is that we are to be totally devoted to God and committed to Him above any and every cultural practice, influence, and mindset.

- We are not to give ourselves or our families over to the "peoples of the land"- we are to live differently, holy, set apart, and distinct from those around us who don't know God.
- It is so easy to get allured into compromise by a culture that claims to be "Christian"

In the media we consume, in the language we use, in the way we spend our money and time, in the attitudes we display, in the way we treat people, in the way we parent our children, in our marriages, and in every area of our character and lifestyle - we MUST live differently.

- This isn't legalism - this is us living according to our true identity in Christ!
- Have you given yourself to the "peoples of the land"?

COMMITMENT #2: FAITHFULNESS TO GOD IN BUSINESS (NEHEMIAH 10:31)

Most civilizations in the ancient world depended heavily on agriculture for survival and economic growth.

- Farming was a constant, 24/7 business - if you wanted to get ahead, you had to be willing to work harder than everyone else.
- In the midst of this economic structure, God gave His people some very baffling commandments concerning work.

The command was this- "On a certain day of the week, on certain days of the year, and on certain years - you are not to do business."

- Keeping the Sabbath was a declaration of trust in Yahweh.
- Sabbath keeping was to obey God and rest, trusting that obedience to God would be better than being productive.
- There were several aspects to this command.

1: A COMMITMENT TO NOT PRACTICING BUSINESS ON THE SABBATH

Even if, "the peoples of the lands" brought in goods or any grain to sell on the Sabbath or a holy day, the people of God committed to not practice any business, but to rest and worship.

- Imagine the opportunities they had to miss because of their devotion to the Lord.
- Commitment always involves sacrifice.

2: A COMMITMENT TO HONORING GOD IN THE SABBATH YEAR BY FORGOING THE CROPS.

Every 7th year (the year of sabbath rest), the Jews were to let the land lie idle so that it might restore itself (an excellent ecological principle).

- The people needed a great deal of faith to trust God for food for two years, but God always promised to take care of them if they practiced obedience (Lev. 25:20-21).

3: A COMMITMENT TO CANCELING DEBTS

Probably the most difficult thing about the Sabbath year was that God commanded the Jews to release any and all debts that were owed to them.

- Forgiving debts required Israel to believe that God provides and God makes rich.
- It also prevented inequity and injustice, as lenders couldn't make themselves rich through exacting massive interest rates on a person for life.

As a follower of the God of Israel, your practices of business and commerce would've seemed a bit bizarre to the surrounding nations.

- The principle is that God calls us to honor Him by practicing integrity, honesty, trust in Him, and balance in our working lives - and these principles might not always make sense in the marketplace.
- When we honor God, He honors us.

COMMITMENT #3: FAITHFULNESS TO GOD IN SUPPORTING HIS WORK (NEHEMIAH 10:32-39)

The phrase, "the house of God" is used several times in this section and refers to the restored temple in Jerusalem.

- The people are committing to obey God and provide for what was needed for the ministry at the temple.
- God doesn't live in houses or buildings, but the way in which we care for our church and contribute what is needed for God's work indicates our priorities.

THE TEMPLE TAX (VS. 32-33)

The annual census of the people was also accompanied by the collecting of a tax to be used to support the ministry of the house of God (Ex. 30:11-16).

- Verse 33 describes how that money is to be used- for regular and special ministries of the temple.
- We're not under any obligation to "pay a tax" to our church, but if we're walking with God, we will have a desire to do our part in supporting the ministry there.

THE WOOD OFFERING (VS. 34)

Lev. 6:13 states: "The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously, it must not go out."

- This required a steady supply of wood, so the leaders drew lots and assigned the various clans the times when they were to bring wood for the altar.
- The idea was participation among everyone to make sure things didn't go neglected.

THE FIRSTFRUITS (VS. 35-37a)

The Jews were to give God their first and best of everything God gave them.

- Because God saved the firstborn from death in Egypt, the firstborn sons and cattle belonged to the Lord (Ex. 13, Lev. 27).
- The firstborn son had to be redeemed by a sacrifice because that child belonged to God (Ex. 34).
- Are we giving God our first and best?

THE TITHE (VS. 37b-39)

The word tithe means, "a tenth", and the Jews were to bring a tenth of their produce to the Lord each year for the support of the Levites (Lev. 27:30-34).

- Then the Levites were to give a "tithe of the tithe" to the priests (vs. 38).
- Other contributions to the temple service were also to be given (vs. 39).

"WE WILL NOT NEGLECT THE HOUSE OF OUR GOD."

Much blame can fairly be cast for the decline of the American Christianity on the shoulders of its pastors, elders, leaders, etc.

- But when the people of God forsake the upkeep of the local church by neglecting to regularly attend, give, serve, support, and pray for God's work there- some of that blame has to be shared.
- As Christians we're never called to simply be consumers that take and never give.
- **Romans 12:1** - In response to God's mercy & grace, we are called to commit ourselves completely to Him.

Commitment 1: I will be committed to God and His Word above any and every person, cultural practice, influence, and mindset.

- In our romantic or dating relationships, are we committed to God by refusing to date or marry someone who isn't a follower of Christ?
- Are we shaped more by the world (E.G., unbelieving friends or family, T.V., talk radio, social media, music, movies) than we are God's Word?

Commitment 2: I will honor God in my work, business, and finances by committing to integrity, honesty, and balance.

- Do I ever cave into the temptation to get ahead in my work by fudging numbers, charging more than what's owed, or taking shortcuts?
- Do I make money unjustly by getting paid when I'm not actually working?
- Have I put my work before family, God, and my church?

Commitment 3: I will not neglect the house of God. I will honor God by supporting His work in my church by regularly attending, giving, serving, supporting, and praying.

- Do I have a desire to do my part in supporting the ministry that God is doing through the local church? Or do I just expect others to serve me?
- Am I bringing to God my first and my best in worship? Am I alert, engaged, and am I willing to take what I've learned and apply it to my life through obedience?