

Nehemiah

Chapter 10

The People Who Sealed the Covenant

“On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, Zedekiah, 2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8 Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests. 9 And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; 10 and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13 Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. 14 The chiefs of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, 18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, 19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, 23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, 24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, 25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, 27 Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

10:1–27 A legal list, bearing the official seal and containing a roster of 84 names. (CSB)

10:1 List of signatories was headed by the name of the governor (5:14). Ezra did not appear among the priestly signers, though “Azariah” (v 2) is an alternate form of his name. (TLSB)

Zedekiah. In the Hbr text, this name is preceded by “and,” suggesting he might be Nehemiah’s assistant or scribe. (TLSB)

The list of those who sealed the agreement is in four parts: two officials, twenty-one priests, seventeen (or fifteen) Levites, and forty-four laymen. Many of these are names of ancestral families, not of contemporary individuals. For instance, at the head of the list of priests is the name Seraiah, who was high priest at the time of the exile in 587 BC (2 Ki. 25:18-21; 1 Chr. 6:14-15), almost a century and a half before this time (445 BC). Thus the name Seraiah was intended to include that high priest’s descendants, including the current high priest, who was Eliashib (Neh. 3:1, 20-21). Similarly, the names of a number of laymen are names of ancestors, taken from the list of ancestral families in Ezra 2:1-70/Neh. 7:6-73). The names of these ancestors indicates that the entire family descended from that ancestor pledged themselves to uphold the solemn agreement. (CC)

10:2–8 About half of these names occur again in 12:1–7. (CSB)

priests. Some of the names of the 21 priests occur again in 12:1–7. *Jeremiah ... Obadiah ... Daniel.* Common biblical names. Prophets by these names were not in Jerusalem at this time. (TLSB)

10:9–13 Most of these names appear also in the lists of Levites in 8:7; 9:4–5. (CSB)

Levites. List of 17 Levites includes some named in 9:4–5. (TLSB)

10:14–27 Almost half of the names in this category are also found in the lists of 7:6–63; Ezr 2:1–61. (CSB)

The Obligations of the Covenant

28 “The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, **29** join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes. **30** We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. **31** And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. **32** “We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: **33** for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. **34** We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers’ houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. **35** We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD; **36** also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; **37** and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. **38** And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. **39** For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God.”

chiefs of the people. Lists 44 lay leaders in the community, the “heads of fathers’ houses of all the people” (8:13). (TLSB)

10:28 *rest of the people.* Those who did not sign the document (9:38) but agreed with it. (TLSB)

Levites. Its Hebrew title, *wayyiqra’*, is the first word in the Hebrew text of the book and means “And he [i.e., the Lord] called.” (CSB)

gatekeepers. Usually Levites (1Ch 9:26; 2Ch 23:4; 35:15; Ne 12:25; 13:22). They are mentioned 16 times in Ezra-Nehemiah and 19 times in Chronicles. Their primary function was to tend the doors and gates of the temple (1Ch 9:17–27) and to perform other menial tasks (1Ch 9:28–32; 2Ch 31:14. (CSB)

Temple assistants. Cf 1Ch 25–26. (TLSB)

wives ... sons and daughters. Women did not usually participate in assemblie, but were brought, together with children, on such solemn occasions (Dt 31:12; Jos 8:35; 2Ki 23:2). (CSB)

separated themselves. Cf 9:2. (TLSB)

all who have knowledge and understanding. Could refer to older children (cf 8:2), but certainly describes those listed here who were instructed and committed to God’s Word (9:38). (TLSB)

10:29 *join with their brothers* – The whole assembly was willing to “enter into the sworn covenant of the Lord” (Deut. 29:12), invoking a curse on themselves should they break their pledge (Deut. 28:15-19). (TLSB)

10:30-39 The specific stipulations of the agreement fall into three broad categories: refraining from intermarriage with pagans (10:30), honoring Sabbaths (10:31), and support for the temple (10:32-39). The first two are short and receive only one verse each. The stipulations concerning the support of the temple are much longer and more detailed. This is because this agreement is part of Nehemiah’s campaign to populate the city as the holy city where the temple of God is situated. A prosperous Jerusalem includes a prospering temple, which in turn requires that the needs of sacrifices and of priests be well-supplied. While the issues of intermarriage and honoring the Sabbath are important and come first, the support of the temple takes precedence in terms of the amount of attention devoted to it. (CC)

10:31–33 Perhaps a code drawn up by Nehemiah to correct the abuses listed in 13:15–22. (CSB)

10:30 *not give our daughters.* People vowed to refrain from intermarriage with foreigners (13:23–27; Ezr 9:1–2; 10:11). (TLSB)

The agreement not to intermarry with the surrounding people reinforces the action by Ezra a dozen years earlier (Ezra 9-10). Like that action, this was not simply a mechanical application of the Pentateuchal laws that forbade intermarriage with certain nations. Instead it recognized that the spirit of the Teaching was to forbid marriages that would have a potential to lead Judeans away from their God into apostasy and idolatry, to the worship of false gods. Since this agreement does not mention divorce or putting away foreign wives, we may conclude that the practice of intermarriage had not led to a large number of proscribed marriages, yet such mixed marriages still loomed as a threat to the Judean community and to the people’s retention of the biblical faith – that is, a threat to their salvation. (CC)

10:31 *sell on the Sabbath.* Though Ex 20:8–11; Dt 5:12–15 do not explicitly prohibit trading on the Sabbath.. (CSB)

not buy. They pledged not to buy from outsiders who were selling on the Sabbath. (TLSB)

we will forego the crops...seventh year ... forgo working the land ... exaction of every.(The Israelites did not practice crop rotation, but the fallow year (when the crops were not planted) served somewhat the same purpose. And just as the land was to have a sabbath year, so the servitude of a Hebrew slave was limited to six years, apparently whether or not the year he was freed was a sabbath year. Dt 15:1–11 specifies that debts were also to be canceled in the sabbath year. The care for the poor in the laws of Israel (see Ex 23:11) is noteworthy. See 23:7, 35; Dt 31:10; Ne 10:31.) The Romans misrepresented the Sabbath and the sabbath year as caused by

laziness. According to Tacitus, the Jews “were led by the charms of indolence to give over the seventh year as well to inactivity.” (CSB)

Law required that land should lie idle every seventh year. (TLSB)

10:32–39 Final section of the document required contributions for the support of temple worship and its ministers. *third part*. A half shekel was required by law (Ex 30:13). If computed according to Persian currency, the obligation that the people laid on themselves was perhaps equal in value to the required civil tax. (TLSB)

10:32 *third part of a shekel*. Ex 30:13–14 speaks of a “half shekel” as “an offering to the LORD” from each man who was 20 years old or more as a symbolic ransom. Later Joash used the annual contributions for the repair of the temple (2Ch 24:4–14). In the NT period Jewish men from everywhere sent an offering of a half shekel for the temple in Jerusalem (Mt 17:24). The pledge of a third of a shekel in Nehemiah’s time may have been due to economic circumstances. (CSB)

10:33 *showbread*. Often called the “bread of the Presence.” It represented a gift from the 12 tribes and signified the fact that God sustained his people. It was eaten by the priests (24:9). (CSB)

10:34 *cast lots*. See notes on 11:1; Jnh 1:7. (The casting of lots was a custom widely practiced in the ancient Near East. The precise method is unclear, though it appears that, for the most part, sticks or marked pebbles were drawn from a receptacle into which they had been “cast.”) (CSB)

wood offering. Though there is no specific reference to a wood offering in the Pentateuch, the perpetual burning of fire on the sanctuary altar (Lev 6:12–13) would have required a continual supply of wood. Josephus mentions “the festival of wood offering” on the 14th day of the fifth month (Ab). The Jewish Mishnah (rabbinic interpretations and applications of Pentateuchal laws) lists nine times when certain families brought wood, and stipulates that all kinds of wood were suitable except the vine and the olive. The Temple Scroll from Qumran describes the celebration of a wood offering festival for six days following a new oil festival. (CSB)

Law stipulated that “fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually” (Lv 6:12–13). People devised a system of casting lots to determine who would supply the wood. (TLSB)

10:35 *firstfruits*. Brought to the sanctuary to support the priests and Levites (Ex 23:19; Nu 18:13; Dt 26:1–11; Eze 44:30). (CSB)

First of the crop belonged to the Lord, the giver of all good things. (TLSB)

10:36 *firstborn*. The economic importance of pack animals allowed for their redemption through sacrificing a lamb. (CSB)

10:37 *chambers*. Chambers in the courts of the temple were used as storage rooms for silver, gold and sacred articles (cf. vv. 38–39; 12:44; 13:4–5, 9; Ezr 8:28–30). (CSB)

Storage rooms in the temple (13:5, 9). (TLSB)

tithes. The Levites collected the tithes with which the people supported them. (TLSB)

The provision for tithes also shows similar interpretive touches in order to implement the laws of the Pentateuch in fifth century BC Judea. According to Num.18:21, 24, the tithes belonged to the

Levites. In turn, the Levites were to give a tithe from what they received to the priests (Num. 18:26, 28). However, the Pentateuch has no provision appointing the Levites as the collectors of the tithes. Indeed several passages in the OT command or assume that the tithes would be brought to the temple (e.g., Deut. 12:5-7; 14:22-26; Amos 4:4; 2 Chr. 31:12) or, every third year, to the towns to provide for the Levites and disadvantaged who dwelled there (Deut. 14:27-29; 26:12). In order to ensure that the Levites received their tithe and that the priests received the Levites' tithe, the solemn agreement designates the Levites as the collectors of tithes, and the priests as supervisors of the collection. In this agreement the people no longer brought their tithes to the temple or to their towns. The only tithes brought to the temple were to be the Levites' tithes to the priests. (CC)

Levites. Tithes were meant for their support (13:12–13; Nu 18:21–32). (CSB)

Levites were supervised by priests. (TLSB)

10:39 *vessels.* Used for various purposes in the temple, including storage of grain, wine, and oil (13:9, 12). (TLSB)

Ch 10 People offer thanks to the Lord for the blessings of the covenant and the atonement provided through the sacrifices. As the Lord blesses us, we also respond with offerings of thanks for His gracious gifts in Christ. • We will not neglect Your house, O God, by which You bless us in the hearing of Your Gospel. Amen. (TLSB)