

CAPITOL STUDIES

MARCH 16, 2022 • WEEK 12



NEHEMIAH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM SUSA

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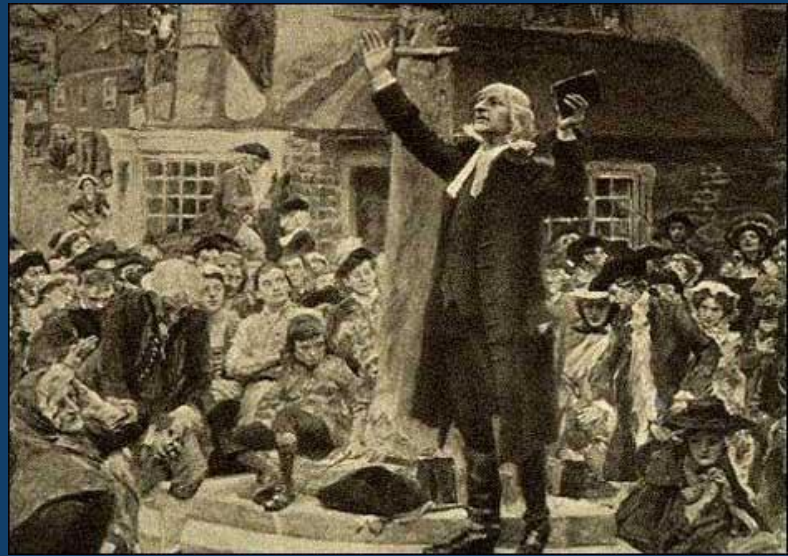


Verse of the Week

Nehemiah 10:29

...taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;

Nehemiah: Builder with Intention



NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 10 SHARES THE RESOLVE of the Jewish people to obey God's commands and follow through with a visible accountability plan. Life is filled with good intentions. We all make resolutions to improve our lives, but we need help to follow through. Let us ask God to help us in the making and maintaining of resolutions which would honor Him. It is only through His power that we will be able to remain true to our resolve: "I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

In 1722, Jonathan Edwards, pastor and Princeton College president, drew up a list of 70 resolutions, dedicating himself to live in harmony with God and others. Reading through his resolutions gives a picture of the serious sense of purpose with which Edwards approached his relationship with God. We, too, can approach our relationship to God with intention.

Pastor Arin Hess

Chaplain, Capitol Studies



Some of Jonathan Edwards' 70 resolutions were these:

- To do whatever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good....
- To do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good advantage of mankind in general.
- Never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
- To study the Scriptures steadily, constantly, and frequently.
- To ask myself at the end of every day, week, month, and year if I could possibly have done better.
- Until I die, not to act as if I were my own, but entirely and altogether God's.¹

Perhaps it would be good for us to make some similar resolutions. What are some ways we can keep ourselves accountable?

INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah 10 records the effect the Bible had on the dwellers in Jerusalem and Judea after the wall was finished and the Law was explained. Once these faithful people experienced YHWH's working in their midst, they wholeheartedly desired to renew a living covenant relationship with Him. They were earnest enough to sign their names to an oath, vowing to follow all the commands, laws, and regulations of the Lord. Their signature also meant they were willing to accept the curse of God if they failed to keep these commands. It was like a "Declaration of Dependence" document. It was a level of accountability.

Confession of sin is not popular. Many people today are caught doing wrong but refuse to acknowledge their fault. They treat sin as simply a mistake and strive to move on. They may feel remorse for the shame or guilt that disclosure brings, but they refuse to take responsibility for their actions. It is easy, and even sometimes acceptable, for them to blame circumstances or other people for their wrongdoing.

The Jewish exiles not only took responsibility for their own sins but also the sins of previous generations. Now, they publicly recorded their intent to follow the Lord. Their initial act of surrender would need to be followed by the continual activity of holy living. The same is true for us today, as the Apostle Paul says, "Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).



I. COMMITMENT: THE SIGNERS OF THE COVENANT AGREEMENT

Nehemiah 9:38-10:1

“Now because of all this we are making an agreement in writing; and on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests.” ¹Now on the sealed document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah and Zedekiah.²

This covenant document was a freewill agreement to abide by the Law (the Torah) of God. It was signed by more than 80 frontline leaders. They were delegated authorities. By placing it in writing, these signers were pledging their very lives, liberties, and honor.³ God would bless this promise. He has promised to do the same thing today. His blessing is always upon those who are committed to following Him.

A. The Political Rulers: Nehemiah and Zedekiah (Those in Civil Power or Leadership)

The KJV reads “Nehemiah, Tirshatha.” *Tirshatha* is the name for a Persian governor. Zedekiah was probably Nehemiah’s secretary, or the scribe assigned to this leader.⁴ The first people listed were civil servants. What an example they were to the rest of the people! Here were political leaders out in front of the public, yet visibly committed to God. Are you?

B. The Prominent Religious Leaders (Similar to Today’s Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Musicians, etc.)

Nehemiah 10:2-13

Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ³Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁴Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁵Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁶Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁷Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁸Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah. These were the priests. ⁹And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; ¹⁰also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹²Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³Hodiah, Bani, Beninu.

A total of 21 priests are listed. Ezra’s family is recognized first. Then 17 more Levites are recorded. Many of these had been involved in the reading of the Law in Nehemiah 8:7. Religious leaders must take a clear stand for God’s truth, especially when it is being condemned by the present culture. What are some Biblical issues that are under attack by today’s culture? Pray for your church leaders. Ask God to give them discernment to know God’s truth and courage to stand for that truth.

C. The Patriarchal Representatives

Nehemiah 10:14-27

The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahathmoab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁵Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁶Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁷Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁸Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ¹⁹Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²⁰Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²¹Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,





²²Pelathiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²³Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁴Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁵Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁶Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

There are 44 of these names listed. The patriarchal representatives were leaders of the people groups (family clans, tribes, districts, city-states, possibly council members, commissioners, etc.).

Some were listed in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. This list places responsibility of leadership on the father of each home, especially in spiritual matters. Even secular statistics tell us that children who have a strong, present father in the home will be much more successful in school and much more compliant and happier than those whose fathers are absent or weak leaders. God's Word is true and speaks to all important aspects of life.

II. COMMITMENT: THE SUPPORTERS OF THE COVENANT AGREEMENT

Nehemiah 10:28-29

Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants 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, all those who had knowledge and understanding, ²⁹are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;

A. The Rest of the People

These were "the rest of the people." This included the remaining religious and civic leaders as well as the families of the leaders. All "who had knowledge and understanding" joined in taking this oath. Even children who could understand were included.

B. Proselytes

Some were proselytes, those outside the Jewish people, who had become followers of YHWH. They had separated themselves from among the heathen and embraced worship of the one true God.

"What they were doing was making an oath and submitting to the authority of Scripture. The Word of God became their charter of liberty, changing their system of values, and providing their basis of government."⁵ This vow was sincere and strong. Would you be willing to submit yourself to the curse of God for not walking in His Law and obeying His commandments?

In our world, it is easy to see blatant resistance to the authority of Scripture. Are there ways that even professing Christians show disregard for God's Word?



III. COMMITMENT: THE SPECIFICS OF THE COVENANT AGREEMENT

A. The Sanctity of Marriage

Nehemiah 10:30

and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

In the Mosaic law, the children of Israel were forbidden to marry any from the idolatrous nations around them. (Exod. 34:14-16; Deut. 7:3-4). God wanted His people to be pure. He knew that intermarriage would bring false gods into Israel, and consequently, lead into apostasy (Numbers 25:1-2). This is what had happened to Israel, bringing about their captivity. After hearing God's Law, the Jewish people repented of their sin. They recognized the destruction these relationships had brought and realized that marriage to unbelievers had contributed to the breakdown of their families.

The New Testament also cautions against any kind of partnership with unbelievers. "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17a).

How should this principle guide believers today?

B. The Sanctity of God's Holy Days

Nehemiah 10:31-33

As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. ³²We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.

The Jews had allowed every day to become common. There was no real difference between the Sabbath day and any other day of the week, and feast days were forgotten. Buying and selling continued. Business went on as usual. Little care was given to the Temple or its workers. The people had disregarded God's laws regarding rest for themselves (the seventh day) or rest for their land (every seventh year). They had become greedy and did not care to erase the debts of their fellow Israelites at the time of Jubilee. "When spiritual realities [had] been set aside, moral





values [had] deteriorated, and greed, selfishness, and oppression [had] become the order of the day. This... led to disunity and the deterioration of their national identity.”⁶ Now they put themselves “under obligation” to keep the Sabbath as a holy day of rest and to remember other times of offerings and holy celebration.

Nehemiah 10:34-39

Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law;³⁵ and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the Lord annually,³⁶ and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God.³⁷ We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.³⁸ The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.³⁹ For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.

C. The Sanctity of God's House

For years the people had not made the worship of God in the Temple a priority. There was little thought of bringing tithes and offerings to God. His temple servants were not given the provisions they needed to live and to serve. Now the Jews vowed to change that. They would honor the Lord with their “first fruits,” their “firstborn,” and their tithes. They would care for the needs of the Temple and those who served there. They would “not neglect the house of [their] God.”⁷

CONCLUSION

The final statement to “not neglect the house of our God” (v. 38), was a passionate pledge to not forsake the Lord's house. Many of the post-exilic prophets, including Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, consistently preached this message. This message is the same for us today. Hebrews 10:25 admonishes us to not forsake “our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Unfortunately, because of the extreme circumstances in the last couple years, many have grown accustomed to observing church services online. God says, however, that corporate fellowship with other believers is



necessary for encouragement and accountability. Personal connections bring special blessings that all of us need.

Today we need to be just as intentional in our worship and obedience to God as the Jews of Nehemiah's day were. Worship begins in a heart that is filled with the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit comes to live in the life of a believer at the time that believer recognizes his or her need of Jesus Christ to save from sin and its eternal punishment. In talking to the Corinthian believers, Paul asks, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Though the Holy Spirit will never leave the true Christian, each believer will determine how much of his or her life the Spirit controls. This is not a one-time commitment. It must be renewed each day. With the help of God's Holy Spirit and the encouragement of other Christians, we can keep this commitment.

Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards*, Andrew Wright, for S. & E. Butler, 1804, pgs. 5-9. Adapted for modern reading.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
3. If you noticed, this is an allusion to the final lines of the American Declaration of Independence: "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."
4. Peter Stevenson, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, BJU Press, 2011, pg. 168.
5. Cyril J. Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership*, Loizeaux Brothers, 1976, pg. 142.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Some portions of outlines are borrowed from John G. Butler, *Nehemiah: The Wall Builder*, LBC Publications, 1998, pgs. 250-265.

Personal Study Notes



*Verse of
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Nehemiah 10:29

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