

Nehemiah Chapter 10 — Those Who Sealed the Covenant

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Nehemiah Chapter 9 ended with a prayer — a long, honest retelling of Israel’s history that moved from confession into resolve. Chapter 10 shows what that resolve looked like in writing.

This chapter opens with a list of names: priests, Levites, and leaders of the people who physically signed and sealed a document, committing themselves and everyone they represented to a binding covenant with God.

The chapter then moves from signatures to specifics. The people did not simply promise, in general terms, to “do better.” They named exact commitments — about marriage, about the Sabbath, about debts, about temple offerings, tithes, and firstfruits — turning a moment of confession into a document anyone could hold them to.

A covenant that only stays in the heart is easy to forget. A covenant written down, signed, and made specific is much harder to quietly abandon.

Nehemiah Chapter 10 teaches us that genuine repentance eventually asks a very practical question: what, exactly, will change starting now? And it does not flinch from answering that question in detail.

PART ONE: THOSE WHO SEALED THE COVENANT

I. THE PRIESTS WHO SEALED THE COVENANT

Nehemiah 10:1-8 — Leaders Willing to Be Named

The list opens with Nehemiah the governor himself, followed by Zedekiah and twenty-one priests, ending with the note, “These were the priests.”

- Nehemiah son of Hacaliah, the governor, and Zedekiah
- Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah
- Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah
- Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch

- Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah
- Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch
- Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin
- Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah

Nehemiah placed his own name first, not exempting himself from the very commitments he was asking everyone else to sign.

Cross References

Nehemiah 9:38

Because of all this, we are making a binding agreement in writing, and our leaders, Levites, and priests are signing it.

Nehemiah 8:9

Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people not to mourn or weep, for this day was holy to the Lord.

Nehemiah 1:1

These are the words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah, written in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year, while he was in the fortress of Susa.

Observation

A leader who signs his own name first, before asking anyone else to, leads by example rather than by decree.

II. THE LEVITES WHO SEALED THE COVENANT

Nehemiah 10:9-13 — Those Who Served God’s House

The Levites named here include men already familiar from earlier chapters — several had helped read and explain the Law at the Water Gate and had led the people in the long prayer of confession.

- Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui from the family of Henadad, and Kadmiel
- Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan
- Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah
- Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah
- Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu

Cross References

Ezra 2:40

The Levites included the family of Jeshua and Kadmiel, descendants of Hodaviah — seventy-four in all.

Nehemiah 7:43

The Levites included the descendants of Jeshua, Kadmiel, and Hodevah — seventy-four in all.

Nehemiah 12:8

The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who led the songs of thanksgiving.

Principle

The same men who led Israel in worship and confession were also willing to be held accountable in writing — worship and integrity were treated as inseparable.

III. THE LEADERS OF THE PEOPLE WHO SEALED THE COVENANT

Nehemiah 10:14-27 — A Wide Representation of the Nation

Forty-four family and clan leaders signed after the priests and Levites, representing households from across the returned community.

- Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani
- Bunni, Azgad, Bebai
- Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin
- Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur
- Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai
- Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai
- Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir
- Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua
- Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah
- Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub
- Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek
- Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah
- Ahijah, Hanan, Anan
- Malluch, Harim, and Baanah

Cross References

Ezra 2:3

The descendants of Parosh numbered two thousand one hundred seventy-two.

Ezra 2:6

The descendants of Pahath-moab, through the line of Jeshua and Joab, numbered two thousand eight hundred twelve.

Nehemiah 7:8

The descendants of Parosh numbered two thousand one hundred seventy-two.

Application

This covenant was never meant to bind a few religious officials alone — it belonged to every household represented by these forty-four names.

PART TWO: THE PEOPLE JOIN THE COVENANT

IV. THE WHOLE ASSEMBLY UNITES

Nehemiah 10:28 — Everyone Who Could Understand Joined In

“The rest of the people—the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants, and all who had separated themselves from the neighboring peoples to follow God’s Law—along with their wives, sons, and daughters who were old enough to understand,”

The signed document names leaders, but this verse makes clear the covenant was never theirs alone. Every category of worker and worshiper in the temple community is listed, along with families old enough to grasp what they were agreeing to.

This mirrors the wide gathering at the Water Gate in chapter 8 — Scripture and covenant alike were meant for the whole community, not a select few.

Cross References

Ezra 6:21

The people of Israel who had returned from exile ate the Passover, together with those who had separated themselves from the uncleanness of the surrounding nations to seek the Lord.

Ezra 10:11

Now make confession to the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do what pleases Him. Separate yourselves from the surrounding peoples and from your foreign wives.

Nehemiah 9:2

Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners as they confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors.

Observation

A covenant is only as strong as the number of people who genuinely understand and choose it, not merely the number of names attached to it.

V. A SOLEMN OATH TO OBEY GOD’S LAW

Nehemiah 10:29 — Binding Themselves Under Oath

“joined with their families and leaders to bind themselves with a solemn oath. They promised to follow the Law of God given through Moses, the servant of God, and to obey all the commandments, regulations, and statutes of the Lord our Lord.”

This was not a vague spiritual sentiment. It was a formal, solemn oath, invoking curses on themselves if they broke it, committing to obey the whole Law, not merely the parts they found convenient.

The specific commitments that follow in the rest of the chapter are the practical outworking of this single sweeping promise.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 29:12

You are standing here today to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God, a covenant the Lord is making with you this day.

Deuteronomy 29:14

I am making this covenant, with its curses, not only with you who stand here today in the presence of the Lord our God.

Exodus 24:7

Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people, and they said, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.”

Key Instruction

A promise to obey God’s Word “in general” means little until it is tested against the specific, sometimes inconvenient details of daily life.

PART THREE: RENEWED COMMITMENTS

VI. A VOW AGAINST INTERMARRIAGE

Nehemiah 10:30 — Guarding the Next Generation

“They vowed not to let their daughters marry the people of the land, nor to take their daughters for their sons.”

This was the first specific commitment named, addressing a problem that had already surfaced under both Ezra and Nehemiah — marriages that quietly pulled the community back toward the surrounding nations’ gods.

By naming it first, the people acknowledged this was not a minor issue but a foundational one, shaping the spiritual direction of every generation to come.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 7:3

Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.

Ezra 9:2

They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, mixing the holy race with the peoples around them.

Exodus 34:16

And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons, and those daughters worship their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

Principle

Protecting a family’s faith often requires decisions made well before a crisis arrives, not scrambled corrections after the damage is done.

VII. HONORING THE SABBATH AND THE SABBATICAL YEAR

Nehemiah 10:31 — Rest for the People and the Land

“They also promised not to buy goods or food on the Sabbath or other holy days from the neighboring peoples who might bring them to sell. They agreed to let the land rest every seventh year and cancel debts during that year.”

This commitment covered both weekly rest and a much larger seven-year cycle — letting fields lie fallow and canceling debts, trusting God’s provision over continual production.

Both practices required real economic trust: turning away buyers on the Sabbath, and giving up a year of harvest and outstanding debts on schedule.

Cross References

Nehemiah 13:15

In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in grain and loading donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, and selling them on the Sabbath.

Leviticus 25:4

But during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath of complete rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

Deuteronomy 15:1

At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.

Application

Trusting God with rest — for ourselves, our finances, and even the land we depend on — is a concrete way of declaring that provision comes from Him rather than from ceaseless labor.

PART FOUR: SUPPORT FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD

VIII. A TAX FOR THE TEMPLE'S SERVICE

Nehemiah 10:32 — A Shared, Regular Contribution

“We also made regulations for ourselves, requiring each of us to give a third of a shekel annually for the service of the house of our God:”

Rather than leaving temple funding to occasional generosity, the people established a small, regular, shared obligation — modest enough for everyone to bear, but reliable enough to sustain ongoing worship.

Cross References

Exodus 30:13

Everyone who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, as an offering to the Lord.

Exodus 30:16

Use the atonement money from the Israelites for the service of the tent of meeting, as a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord.

Matthew 17:24

The collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”

Observation

Faithful giving does not always need to be dramatic — a small, dependable commitment, kept by everyone, can sustain a great deal.

IX. FUNDING THE REGULAR OFFERINGS

Nehemiah 10:33 — What the Contribution Would Cover

“for the showbread, the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings, the offerings on the Sabbaths, new moon celebrations, and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings and sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the duties of the house of our God.”

The people were specific about where their contribution would go — not a vague temple fund, but named offerings, named holy days, and the ongoing work of atonement.

Cross References

Leviticus 24:5

Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf, to be set before the Lord.

Numbers 28:3

Present to the Lord two lambs a year old without defect, as a regular burnt offering each day.

Leviticus 23:2

These are my appointed festivals, the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.

Key Instruction

Knowing exactly what our giving supports tends to deepen our sense of ownership in the work it sustains.

X. THE WOOD OFFERING DECIDED BY LOT

Nehemiah 10:34 — A Fair System for a Practical Need

“We cast lots among the priests, Levites, and people to determine when each family would bring wood offerings to the house of our God at designated times each year, to be burned on the altar of the Lord our God, as written in the Law.”

Even a practical necessity like firewood for the altar was organized fairly, using lots so that no single family bore the entire burden and none could claim favoritism in the schedule.

Cross References

Leviticus 6:12

The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. The priest must add wood to it every morning.

Nehemiah 13:31

I also made provision for contributions of wood at appointed times, and for the firstfruits.

Numbers 28:2

Give the people this command: Be careful to present to me at the appointed time the food for my food offerings, as a pleasing aroma.

Principle

Even the most ordinary logistics of worship deserve fairness and careful planning, not haphazard neglect.

XI. A PROMISE OF FIRSTFRUITS

Nehemiah 10:35 — Giving God the First, Not the Leftover

“We also committed to bring the firstfruits of our harvest and of every fruit tree to the house of the Lord year after year.”

The firstfruits commitment meant giving to God before knowing exactly how the rest of the season would turn out — an act of trust as much as generosity.

Cross References

Exodus 23:19

Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 26:2

Take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil, and put them in a basket and go to the place the Lord your God will choose.

Leviticus 23:10

When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.

Application

Giving God the first portion, rather than whatever remains, is a tangible way of putting Him first in practice, not only in intention.

XII. THE FIRSTBORN DEDICATED TO GOD

Nehemiah 10:36 — Sons and Livestock Alike

“And we will bring to the priests at the temple the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as written in the Law, including the firstborn of our herds and flocks.”

This commitment reached into the most personal area of family life — the firstborn son — as well as the household’s livestock, acknowledging that every first and best thing ultimately belonged to God.

Cross References

Exodus 13:2

Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me.

Exodus 22:29

You must give me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep.

Numbers 18:15

The first offspring of every womb, whether human or animal, offered to the Lord is yours, but you must redeem every firstborn son.

Observation

Dedicating even the most personal parts of family life to God kept every household, not only the temple staff, personally invested in the covenant.

XIII. FIRSTFRUITS AND TITHES FOR THE LEVITES

Nehemiah 10:37 — Provision for Those Who Served

“We will bring the first of our ground meal, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, and our new wine and oil to the priests in the storerooms of the house of our God. And we will bring a tenth of our crops to the Levites, for the Levites are the ones who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work.”

Because the Levites had no land inheritance of their own, this tithe was their livelihood — this commitment ensured the people who served the whole community in worship would not go without.

Cross References

Numbers 15:20

Present a loaf from the first of your ground meal as an offering, presenting it as you would a contribution from the threshing floor.

Numbers 18:21

I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.

Deuteronomy 18:4

You are to give the Levites the firstfruits of your grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep.

Application

Supporting those who serve the community spiritually is a direct, practical way of honoring the value of their work.

XIV. PRIESTLY OVERSIGHT OF THE TITHE

Nehemiah 10:38 — Accountability Within the System

“A priest descended from Aaron will accompany the Levites when they collect the tithes. The Levites will bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury.”

Even the Levites, who collected from everyone else, were not left unsupervised — a priest accompanied the collection, and the Levites themselves tithed a portion onward, building accountability into every level of the system.

Cross References

Numbers 18:26

When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord's offering.

Numbers 18:28

In this way you also will present an offering to the Lord from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites.

Malachi 3:10

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven.

Key Instruction

No one, however trusted, should be left entirely without oversight when handling what belongs to God and to the community.

XV. A PLEDGE NOT TO NEGLECT GOD'S HOUSE

Nehemiah 10:39 — The Covenant's Closing Resolve

“The people of Israel and the Levites will bring their contributions of grain, new wine, and oil to the storerooms, where the articles of the sanctuary are kept, and where the priests who minister, the gatekeepers, and the singers stay. And we will not neglect the house of our God.”

The chapter's final line names the danger the whole covenant was written to prevent — quiet neglect. Every specific commitment before this verse existed to keep worship, and the people who sustained it, from simply being forgotten over time.

This closing resolve gathers every earlier promise — tithes, firstfruits, wood, offerings — into a single guiding commitment for the future.

Cross References

Malachi 3:8

Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, “How do we rob you?” In tithes and offerings.

1 Chronicles 9:26

These four Levite gatekeepers were entrusted with the responsibility for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God.

Haggai 1:4

Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?

Principle

Neglect rarely arrives as a single dramatic decision — it accumulates through many small omissions, which is exactly why this covenant named its commitments so specifically.

XVI. THE GREAT MESSAGE OF NEHEMIAH 10

Nehemiah Chapter 10 is a covenant turned into a checklist, and that is precisely its strength. Confession in chapter 9 could have remained a beautiful memory of a single emotional day. Instead, the people wrote down exactly what would be different from now on.

They named the temptation toward intermarriage. They named the neglect of the Sabbath and the sabbatical year. They named the slow erosion of temple support that leaves God's house, and the people who serve it, quietly forgotten.

Every name on this list — priest, Levite, family leader — put their own reputation behind a promise that could be checked against their actual behavior in the months and years ahead.

A covenant that names its commitments specifically is far harder to quietly abandon than one that only speaks in general terms.

KEY LESSONS FROM NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 10

1. Spiritual Commitment Must Be Both Personal and Communal

The leaders and all the people entered into a written covenant, showing that true revival involves unity and shared responsibility.

Nehemiah signed first, and then priests, Levites, and forty-four family leaders followed, before the rest of the community joined in with a solemn oath — no one was exempt, and no one stood alone.

Genuine spiritual commitment holds together what one person resolves and what an entire community agrees to share.

2. Obedience Involves Practical Reforms

They made specific commitments to honor the Sabbath, avoid intermarriage with pagans, cancel debts, and uphold justice.

None of these commitments stayed abstract. Each one named a concrete behavior the people intended to change, starting immediately.

Real obedience eventually becomes specific enough to be checked against actual behavior.

3. God's House Deserves Intentional Support

The people pledged offerings, tithes, firstfruits, and labor to ensure the continual worship and maintenance of the temple.

They planned even the smallest details, like a fair system for wood offerings, rather than assuming worship would simply sustain itself.

Worship that continues faithfully over time is almost always the result of intentional, ongoing support, not accident.

4. God Desires Holiness in Everyday Life

Their promises covered business dealings, family relationships, agricultural practices, and worship—all aspects of life.

Marriage, commerce, farming, and giving were all treated as spiritual matters, not separate from the community's relationship with God.

No area of ordinary life sits outside the reach of a genuine covenant with God.

5. Faithfulness Requires Structure and Sacrifice

They organized offerings, scheduled wood donations, and shared duties, showing that sustained devotion requires thoughtful planning.

Good intentions alone rarely sustain a community for long. This chapter shows a people willing to build systems — schedules, oversight, shared costs — sturdy enough to carry their commitment forward.

Lasting faithfulness is usually built, not merely felt.

XVII. ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY — NEHEMIAH 10

Question 1

Why does Nehemiah 10 record so many individual names before listing any actual commitments?

Naming the priests, Levites, and family leaders who sealed the document made the covenant a matter of public, personal accountability rather than an anonymous group decision.

A promise attached to a specific name is far harder to quietly walk away from than one made in a crowd.

Question 2

Why did Nehemiah place his own name first on the list in verse 1?

As governor, Nehemiah could have simply required the commitment of others without binding himself the same way. Instead, he signed first.

Leadership that asks for commitment carries far more weight when it begins with the leader's own name.

Question 3

Why does verse 28 specifically mention wives, sons, and daughters “old enough to understand”?

This detail shows the covenant was not limited to household heads or religious officials. It reached into every family capable of grasping what was being promised.

Question 4

Why did the people bind themselves with a solemn oath in verse 29 rather than simply agreeing informally?

A solemn oath, invoking consequences for breaking it, carried far more weight than a casual intention. It signaled how seriously the people took this commitment.

The seriousness of a promise is often measured by how willing we are to be held to it.

Question 5

Why did the people specifically address intermarriage before any other commitment in verse 30?

This issue had already caused spiritual compromise under both Ezra and Nehemiah, quietly reshaping families' faith across generations. Naming it first reflected how foundational the leaders understood it to be.

Question 6

What does the commitment to Sabbath rest and the sabbatical year in verse 31 reveal about the people's trust in God?

Turning away buyers on the Sabbath and giving up a full year of harvest and debts required real economic trust that God would provide even when normal production paused.

Consider what this kind of trust asks of a community:

- A willingness to lose short-term income for the sake of obedience.
- Confidence that God's provision does not depend on ceaseless labor.
- A rhythm of rest built into the community's whole economy, not just individual lives.

Question 7

Why did the people commit to a small, regular temple tax in verse 32 rather than relying on occasional generosity?

A modest, shared, predictable contribution could sustain the temple's ongoing needs far more reliably than sporadic large gifts.

Consistent, shared giving often accomplishes more over time than infrequent bursts of generosity.

Question 8

Why did the people organize the wood offering by casting lots in verse 34, rather than simply asking for volunteers?

Casting lots ensured the responsibility was distributed fairly across families, without favoritism or the burden falling repeatedly on the same willing few.

Question 9

What is the significance of giving God the "firstfruits" in verses 35-36, rather than a portion of whatever remained at the end of the season?

Giving first, before knowing how the full harvest or family would turn out, was an act of trust as much as generosity.

Giving God the first portion, rather than the leftover, is one of the clearest ways to put Him first in practice.

Question 10

Why did the covenant include a priest overseeing the Levites' collection of tithes in verse 38?

Even the Levites, who were trusted to collect from everyone else, were not left without oversight. Accountability was built into every level of the system, not assumed automatically.

Question 11

Why does the chapter end in verse 39 with the phrase "we will not neglect the house of our God"?

This closing line names the real danger every specific commitment in the chapter was meant to guard against — not a single dramatic failure, but slow, quiet neglect over time.

Consider how neglect typically happens:

- It rarely arrives as one clear decision to stop caring.
- It accumulates through many small, unnoticed omissions.
- Specific, written commitments make that drift much harder to ignore.

Question 12

What would it look like for you to turn a general spiritual intention into something as specific as the commitments in this chapter?

The people of Nehemiah 10 did not simply resolve to “be more faithful.” They named exact behaviors — in marriage, rest, giving, and service — that would prove whether their repentance was genuine.

Consider your own commitments to God:

- Is there a general intention you hold that has never been made specific?
- What would it look like to write it down clearly enough to be checked against your actual behavior?
- Who in your life could hold you accountable to it, the way this covenant held the whole community accountable together?

Personal Reflection

Nehemiah 10 could easily be skimmed past as a list of unfamiliar names and administrative details. But underneath the names is one of the most practical chapters in the entire book.

A nation that had just spent an entire day confessing centuries of failure did not stop at feeling sorry. They asked exactly what needed to change, and then they wrote it down, signed it, and organized themselves to carry it out.

They addressed their families, their rest, their money, and their worship — leaving very little of ordinary life untouched by their commitment to God.

This is the difference between a feeling and a covenant. A feeling fades. A covenant, made specific enough and shared widely enough, gives a community something to return to when the feeling has long since passed.

Your own repentance and renewal, like Israel’s, will only last as long as it moves from emotion into specific, sustainable practice.

And a covenant made in the light of God’s faithfulness is far more likely to endure than a resolution made in the heat of a single emotional moment.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for a faith that does not have to stay vague. Like the people who signed their names to this covenant, we ask for the courage to make our commitment to You specific.

Show us where our good intentions have never been turned into concrete practice — in our families, our rest, our finances, and our worship.

Where we have quietly neglected what belongs to You, forgive us, and give us the same resolve this community showed to name it plainly and change course.

Teach us to give You the first of what we have, not merely the leftover, and to trust that rest and generosity offered in faith will never leave us without provision.

Build into us the structure and sacrifice that lasting faithfulness requires, so that our devotion to You is sustained by more than a passing feeling.

May our commitment to You be written as clearly on our lives as this covenant was written on their page. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“And we will not neglect the house of our God.” — Nehemiah 10:39

This single closing line gathers every specific commitment in the chapter into one guiding resolve — a promise not to let devotion to God quietly fade over time.

Central Truth

A covenant with God becomes lasting when general devotion is turned into specific, written, shared commitments that a community can be held to over time.

Nehemiah Chapter 10 in One Sentence

Priests, Levites, and family leaders signed a binding covenant on behalf of the whole community, naming specific commitments about marriage, Sabbath rest, and support for the house of God, so their repentance would be lived out in practice, not merely felt in the moment.