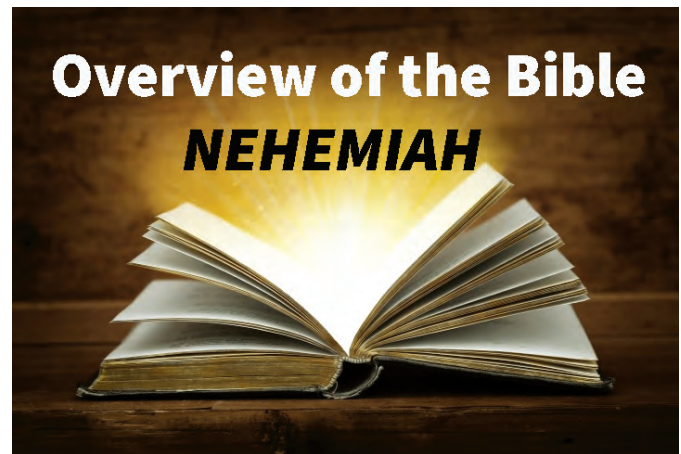


# THE MESSAGE OF NEHEMIAH

## NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 10

Wednesday, August 2, 2023



### Recap of Chapter 9

#### Outline

- 9:1–6 *God is great and worthy to be praised*
- 9:7–17 *God chose and cared for Israel*
- 9:18–22 *God led Israel*
- 9:23–30 *God rebuked Israel*
- 9:31–38 *God gave Israel grace*

## Nehemiah 10

### Outline

- 10:1–27 *The covenant signers*
- 10:28–29 *The covenant promises*
- 10:30–39 *The covenant stipulations*

### I. The covenant signers (10:1–27)

The names of those who signed the covenant are headed by Nehemiah who is presented as governor. Indeed, the title *tirshāthā'* is of Persian origin and it occurs five times in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65, 69; 8:9; 10:2). The word identifies the Persian governor in post-exilic Israel. Zedekiah's duties are unknown, although some suggest he might have been Nehemiah's secretary. The list includes twenty-one priests, seventeen Levites, and forty-four lay leaders.

### II. The covenant promises (10:28–29)

God's people realigned themselves with God and His Law, and they covenanted together to walk in God's Law and to observe His commandments, rules, and statutes. The idea of "walking" in God's Law is present throughout the Old Testament. Joshua exhorted the people who entered the Promised Land to walk in God's Law (Josh. 22:5), and the Psalmist classified as "blessed" those who do the same (Ps. 119:1). On the other hand, those who did not walk in God's Law went on to do evil in the sight of the LORD (2 Kings 10:31), and eventually were carried into exile (Jer. 32:23). The concept of keeping God's commandments and statutes is also ever-present in the Old Testament, beginning with the Pentateuch and ending with the Writings (Deut. 4:40, 11:1; 26:17; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chron. 34:31). The words "rules" and "statutes" appear together frequently in all three parts of the Old Testament. They appear twenty-seven times in the Pentateuch, twenty-seven times in the Prophets, and ten times in the Writings.

The people's oath was reinforced by a curse. Williamson asserts that "this was probably the ritual acceptance of some form of judgment which they knew would justly fall upon them if they transgressed the terms of their undertaking." This was not an individual spiritual incursion, but rather, the people join with their families to covenant together to follow God and His Law. Indeed, if the people wanted a renewed relationship with God, they had to return to complete and unwavering obedience to His Law.

### III. The covenant stipulations (10:30–39)

The issue of intermarriage was addressed first, and the people pledged to keep themselves holy to the Lord by not allowing their children to intermarry with Gentiles. While the oldest law (Exod. 34:11–16) specifically prohibited marriage to the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, Nehemiah expanded this law to include all foreign nations. Clines correctly observes that:

“The spirit of the law can be more rigorous than the letter. A more literalistic interpretation of the Pentateuchal law would have allowed marriages with Ashdodites, Ammonites and Moabites—for they are not explicitly mentioned among the prohibited nations. Ezra, Nehemiah, and the scholars of the Nehemian age adopted an interpretation according to the spirit (as we might say), since plainly the intention of the Pentateuchal laws was to forbid marriage with nearby foreigners (Canaanites, Palestinians).”

Second, the people vowed to keep the Sabbath and to treat it according to the original intent, namely, to keep it holy. Until now, God’s people had ignored His command regarding the sabbatical year. According to the Law, in the seventh year the land was to remain uncultivated (Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:2–7), but the people grossly disobeyed this command and the Chronicler records that this was one of the reasons for the exile. “He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, ‘until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years’” (2 Chron. 36:20–21). This change also prompted the people to cancel the collection of debts during the sabbatical year, as stipulated in the Pentateuch since the time of Moses (Deut. 15:1–3).

For the temple to function effectively the people were formerly required to contribute half a shekel (Exod. 30:13). The change to a third of a shekel could be explained by the fact that the Persian monetary system was different than the one used in pre-conquest times. This offering ensured that the showbread would be provided for the Holy Place, and that resources would be available for offerings and the celebration of feasts. The casting of lots to decide who would bring the wood necessary for the offerings is not mentioned in Leviticus (1:17; 6:12ff), even though casting lots to decide who was responsible for a certain task was not a foreign concept in the Old Testament (Josh. 18:6–10; 1 Sam. 14:42; 1 Chron. 25:8; Jonah 1:7).

In order for the temple personnel to accomplish their tasks, food had to be provided by the people from their firstfruits. The requirement of firstfruits for these offerings was initiated in the time of Moses (Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 26:1–11), thus, what might be perceived as the people’s generosity was simply a return to obedience to God’s Law. Furthermore, the tithes that were declared holy to the LORD (Lev. 27:30) were intended to benefit the Levites (Lev. 27:30). In Nehemiah’s time, the Levites were both the recipients and collectors of the tithes. The promise “we will not neglect the house of our God,” could be read as “we will not neglect the house of our God anymore.”