

### Commitment Contract

#### Nehemiah 10:1-31

Nehemiah 10:1-31 - *“Now those who placed their seal on the document were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah,<sup>2</sup> Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, <sup>3</sup> Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah,<sup>4</sup> Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, <sup>5</sup> Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,<sup>6</sup> Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, <sup>7</sup> Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,<sup>8</sup> Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests. <sup>9</sup> The Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, and Kadmiel. <sup>10</sup> Their brethren: Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, <sup>11</sup> Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, <sup>12</sup> Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,<sup>13</sup> Hodijah, Bani, and Beninu. <sup>14</sup> The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, <sup>15</sup> Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, <sup>16</sup> Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,<sup>17</sup> Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, <sup>18</sup> Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai,<sup>19</sup> Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, <sup>20</sup> Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,<sup>21</sup> Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, <sup>22</sup> Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,<sup>23</sup> Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, <sup>24</sup> Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,<sup>25</sup> Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, <sup>26</sup> Ahijah, Hanan, Anan,<sup>27</sup> Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.*

*<sup>28</sup> Now the rest of the people—the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, 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, everyone who had knowledge and understanding— <sup>29</sup> these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes: <sup>30</sup> We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; <sup>31</sup> if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year’s produce and the exacting of every debt.”*

#### Background Notes

The year was 445BC, and a revival was ongoing in Israel. The revival followed the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem that had lain in ruins for almost 150 years, ever since Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. But God raised up Nehemiah, a great spiritual leader, to lead the people in one of the most successful building projects of all time. The city wall was completed in fifty-two days, in spite of the many obstacles and opposition that confronted Nehemiah and the builders.

When the wall was finished, a great revival took place. There was a great emphasis on Scripture and prayer - as there will be in any true revival of God’s people. At the end of their great prayer of worship and confession in Nehemiah 9, the people committed themselves in writing to obey the Lord: *“...we make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites and our priests seal it” (Nehemiah 9:38).*

In chapter 10 we read about the people who signed this document. Let's call it a "commitment contract." In it we see certain focal points of commitment – particular areas of life where they were determined to remain committed. Verses 1-27 provide a list of those who signed the contract. After Nehemiah (v1), there are lists of the priests (v1-8), the Levites (v9-13), and the leaders (v14-27). We saw many of these priests, Levites, and leaders back in chapters 7, 8, and 9, and we'll see them again in chapter 12.

Then the rest of the people joined in the contract. *"Now the rest of the people—the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, 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, everyone who had knowledge and understanding.- these joined with their brethren..."* (v28-29). They all joined in.

You might wonder why they didn't sign the document, as had the priests, Levites, and leaders. Were they only half committed, not willing to actually put their name on the document? No, that's not the idea at all! The priests, Levites, and leaders that signed were like the heads of the priestly and Levitical families and leaders. All the people were just as committed, but they didn't need to put their signatures on the document.

This was a great and solemn commitment. After the prayer of confession, they were willing to commit themselves, right down to putting the commitment in writing.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Commitment is more than a long prayer of confession.

If the people had ended their long prayer of chapter 9 without doing anything, something would have been very wrong.

#### **Confession should always lead to commitment!**

Commitment is more than a long prayer of confession, and that's what we see here. The people actually put their commitment in writing. They signed a commitment contract. They committed themselves to **observe all His commandments and obey all His Law.**

Then, from the beginning of verse 30 through the rest of the chapter, they focused on three particular areas in which they promised to be faithful. These **focal points of commitment** were: **Marriage** (v30). They promised not to intermarry with the surrounding pagan peoples. **The Sabbath** and the sabbatical year (v31). They promised that to observe the Sabbath and the Sabbath year. Verses 32-39: **Supporting the house of God and the work of the Lord** at the Temple (v32-39). They promised to be fully responsible - and they were serious about it. Their commitment was more than just the prayer of confession. They were determined.

We need to be that determined as well. We need to be fully committed to observe and obey God's Word and His will. Commitment is more than just a prayer of confession.

## 2. There are focal points of commitment.

Certain areas of commitment are **focal points of commitment**, because if we fail in these areas, the failure ripples out and affects other areas of life. There are three focal points of commitment in Nehemiah 10, and God's Word teaches us that they are focal points of commitment for us as well. What are the first two areas?

### 1. The area of marriage

Hundreds of years before, when the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land, God commanded the Jewish people not to intermarry with the pagans in the land. But this law was broken again and again throughout Israel's history. The prayer in Ezra 9 reveals what was happening in the area of marriage in Judah after the return from Babylon: *"For we have forsaken the commands you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons'" (Ezra 9:10-12).*

Now, during the revival, the people committed themselves not to intermarry with the pagans of the land. *"We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons"* (Nehemiah 10:30).

Marriage is a focal point of commitment for us as well. Christians should not marry unbelievers. *"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.... For what fellowship can light have with darkness?... What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).*

Marriage is a focal point of commitment. Failure here affects many other areas of life. Families are affected, a potential life of service may disappear, Christ-centered homes are most likely lost. If you are not married yet, wait on God. Remain committed in this area. If you have children, pray about the marriages of your children and grandchildren. God is already preparing the ideal husbands and wives for them. Pray about this!

### 2. The area of the Sabbath.

The second focal point of commitment was the Sabbath. In His Law, God set the Sabbath day apart: *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11).*

How does this apply to us? Keeping the Sabbath is part of the Old Testament Law, and *"Christ is the end of the Law"* (Romans 10:4). So Christians are not under the Law - but it's important for us to remember that the moral principles of the Law never end, because God's moral principles never change. However, the civil and ceremonial aspects of the

Mosaic Law ended with Christ, and the Sabbath was part of the Law's ceremonial rules. The New Testament doesn't command Christians to keep the Sabbath. And we're never told to make Sunday the "new Sabbath."

But there is a **principle** for us in this focal point of commitment. We'll talk more about this when we get to Nehemiah 13. As the people of Jerusalem committed to give of their time to honor God, so we should make a commitment to take time to honor God.

Is Sunday a day for you to honor God and bring pleasure to Him - or is it just another day to relax and please yourself? Do you have a particular time each day when you take time out to honor God by reading His Word and communicating with Him in prayer? That's a focal point of commitment. Give of your time to honor God!

## Practical Application

### How serious are you about commitment?

The people of Nehemiah's day were committed. They took a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law (v29). Basically they were saying, "May God judge us severely if we blow it, and if we fail here." Are you that committed?

A few years ago a Christian man came to me for counsel about a substantial amount of money he was likely to inherit. He wanted to commit to using the money for God's glory, but he was afraid that he wouldn't follow through, and he'd up ruining himself and his family. (I was tempted to tell him I knew a very needy brother, and I would be happy to relieve him of his problem - but I didn't yield to that temptation!) [Laughter.] So I suggested that we pray about it - and that he specifically pray that he would not inherit the money if he wouldn't use it for God's glory. But the man was not willing to pray that prayer! **The line was drawn between mere talk and real commitment.**

How serious are we about commitment? How serious are we about giving financially to support the work of the Lord? How serious are we about giving time to God each day? It helps to make written commitments, as the people of Jerusalem did.

Some of us have appointment books that help us remember our appointments. I have a suggestion: in your appointment book, put down a time each day when you will commit to meet with God. And when you're tempted to do something else at the Lord's special time, just remember - you have an appointment to keep! Rather than shifting God around, shift your other appointments around. Keep your most important appointment - the appointment of meeting God in prayer and in reading His Word. Making an appointment to give time to God would show that we're serious about commitment. And - don't forget to keep that commitment!

How serious are we about commitment?