

NEHEMIAH 10

A SOLEMN COVENANT

In Exodus 24, when God's people of Israel was first brought into covenant with Him, it was done by sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood. But here it was done by the more natural and common way of sealing and subscribing of names to the written articles of the covenant, which bound them to no more than what was already their duty. This chapter gives a record of the names of those public persons who – as the representatives and heads of the rest of the congregation – set their hands and seals to this covenant which had been made in the last verse of chapter 9. Nehemiah himself, who was the governor, signed first; and therein he showed his eagerness in this work, and set a good example for others. After Nehemiah, 22 priests subscribed their names; and then 17 Levites also signed this covenant. Following the signatures of the Levites, 44 of the chief leaders among the people signed the covenant for themselves and for all the rest of the people – thereby binding themselves to keep God's commandments. Their names were left upon record here, to their honor, as men who were eager and active in reviving and endeavoring to perpetuate religion in their country. The memory of such men shall be blessed.

It is noteworthy to observe that most of those who were mentioned as heads of households in chapter 7 were mentioned here as being among the first of the chief of the people who signed this covenant. Those who are in a position of leadership must use their influence and power for the Lord. The rest of the people concurred with their princes, the priests, and the Levites; they signified their consent to what their leaders did. It is also said that the people entered into a curse and an oath – solemnly appealing to God concerning their sincerity, and imprecating His just revenge if they dealt deceitfully with Him and failed to keep their word concerning this covenant.

This covenant did not lay upon the people any other burden than something which they were already obliged to do – namely, to walk in God's law, and to obey all His commandments. Some of the particular articles of this covenant were recorded here, and they were truly adapted to the present temptations that the Jews were facing at this time. For example, they covenanted that they would not intermarry with the heathen. They promised that they would hold no market-days on the Sabbath Day, or on any other day of which the law had said, "You shall do no work therein." Nor would they encourage the heathen to sell on that day, by buying from them. The profaning of the Lord's Day is an inlet to all other kinds of profaneness. This day is a market-day for our souls, but not for our bodies. The people also resolved that they would not be severe in exacting

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A record of the names of those who signed and sealed the covenant – verses 1-27
- ❖ A record of those who signified their consent with the covenant – verses 28-29
- ❖ A record of the articles of the covenant itself – verses 29-39

debts from their brethren; they would observe the seventh year as a year of release, according to the law.

Having covenanted against the sins which they had been particularly guilty of in the past, the people proceeded even further by obliging themselves to revive and observe the duties which they had neglected. We must not only cease to do evil, but also learn to do well. They resolved, in general, that the Temple-service should be carefully kept up, and that the work of the house of God should be done in its proper times, according to the law. They also resolved that they would never forsake the house of their God, as they and their forefathers had done. They promised to generously maintain and support the Temple-service, and they pledged that all those things which the Divine law had appointed for the support of the priests and Levites would be properly paid in. This would encourage the Lord's ministers to attend to their holy business, without being under any temptation to neglect it for the earning of necessary provisions for their families. The work of the house of God is likely to go on well when those who serve at the altar live comfortably by means of the altar. The people promised to bring in the firstfruits justly – the firstfruits of their fields and trees, the firstfruits of their dough, the firstlings of their cattle, and the firstborn of their children (that is, the money wherewith they were to be redeemed). They also promised to bring in their tithes, which were given to support the Levites – with a tenth part out of those tithes being given to the priest. This was the law of the Lord, according to Numbers 18:21-28; but these dues had been withheld. This was what the prophet Malachi was referring to (Mal. 3:8-10) when he charged the people with robbing God, and encouraged them to be more just to Him and His priests and Levites – with a promise that if they brought the tithes into the store-house, He would pour out blessings upon them. This, therefore, they resolved to do, so that there might be food in God's house and abundance in the storage-chambers of the Temple. Although they paid great taxes to the kings of Persia, and had many hardships put upon them, they would not make those things an excuse for not paying their tithes to the Lord; rather, they would render to God the things that were His, as well as to Caesar the things that were his.

Let us thank the Lord for bringing us into His Church, and making us a part of His covenant-family! As part of His chosen people, we can do no other than avow the Lord to be our God, and set down our names as those who promise to worship and serve the One Who has redeemed us with His own precious blood!

Lord, we ask for grace to stand – in Your strength – against the sins which we have been guilty of in the past, and also to revive and observe the duties which we have neglected! Amen.

