

Nehemiah: Building a City Within the City, week 15
Change and Covenant (Nehemiah 9:38–10:39)

June 24, 2007

Pastor Mark Driscoll

“ . . . we make a firm covenant in writing . . . to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.”

— Nehemiah 9:38–10:29

During the great urban revival that was recorded in chapters eight and nine of Nehemiah, two very important events transpired and then culminated in a third important event. First, the Scriptures were rightly regarded as the means by which God spoke most clearly to His people. Through hearing the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) preached and taught, God's people heard God. Second, the people responded to God in humble repentance of sin. Third, this week we see that their repentance included a written covenant between one another and God in which they committed themselves to living ongoing lives of repentant obedience to God's Word.

Covenant Signers

9:38 “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.” *10:1* On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, Zedekiah, ²Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ³Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁴Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁵Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁶Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁷Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁸Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests. ⁹And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; ¹⁰and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹¹Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹²Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹³Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. ¹⁴The chiefs of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, 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, ²⁶Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁷Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

28 The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, *29* join with their brothers, their nobles,

Those who signed the covenant include the leader Nehemiah and his assistant, along with the priests (our equivalent of elders-pastors), who are listed by their family names because they signed on behalf of their extended families (10:2–8), the Levites (our equivalent of deacons), who helped the priests to teach and care for the people (10:9–13), followed by forty-four prominent leadership families (our equivalent of key members and leaders) (10:14–27), along with everyone else who was faithfully serving God in this Old Testament church in various ministries

(the equivalent of our members) (10:28–29). In summary, essentially all of God's people agreed to sign a covenant binding them to certain obligations.

Covenant Obligations

1. We will obey Scripture.

and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.

2. We will lead our families.

³⁰*"We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.*

3. We will worship our God.

³¹*And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.*

4. We will give generously.

³²*"We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³for the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. ³⁴We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. ³⁵We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD; ³⁶also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; ³⁷and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. ³⁸And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithes of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. ³⁹For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God."*

In closing, God's people were willing to make what at first glance appeared to be great personal sacrifices so that they could live in obedience to God and see Him made known to those who did not yet know Him. In doing so, they were demonstrating faith that God would provide for them in every way. At Mars Hill, we face the same temptations to disobey Scripture, marry non-Christians, forsake the corporate worship of God for business and recreational opportunities,

and not give generously to the cause of Jesus Christ; however, we are encouraged by their example to repent of our own sins and demonstrate that repentance by ongoing lifestyle change that reveals what Jesus has done in us. After all, it is Jesus who obeyed all Scriptures, leads His family the church, glorifies the Father in ceaseless worship, and gave nothing less than His own life to enable us to follow in His example by empowering grace.

Next week: Nehemiah 11:1–36