

## A Covenant Community – Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

When was the last time you signed a binding agreement? A mortgage, lease, loan, letter of intent, work contract, marriage license, etc.

What is a covenant? The root of this Hebrew word literally means “to cut”.

To enter into a covenant literally means, the 2 contracting parties would cut an animal in half & then pass between the pieces - covenanting together.

It was an agreement made w/ blood, declaring that if one of the parties were to break the covenant, “let what was done to this animal be done to them!”

*How would practicing this today change the way we view our binding agreements?*

God had entered into a covenant relationship with His people, God’s people broke their covenant vows & they were literally cut in two (2 kingdoms) and then they were eventually cut off as a people/nation (the exile) all together.

But as we learned last week in CH. 9, God never cut them off completely. He continued to provide for them, He protected them & He eventually restored them once again as a people, even though they did not deserve it!

Isn’t this also true of us today? Consider what God has done for us in Christ. We broke covenant with God, but God took our punishment upon Himself!

We were the guilty ones, but He (Christ) was cut down in our place.

Neh. 9:38– B/c the people of God in Neh.’s day recognized God’s covenantal faithfulness, it renewed a desire in them to covenant with God once again!

It started with the leaders, the Levites & the priests putting it in writing, then signing & sealing it (10:1-27). The rest of the people followed (vs. 28). A covenant was signed & sealed! And it was made w/“a curse & an oath.”

*Why do you think a signed & sealed binding document was necessary?*

Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart is deceitful above all things, & desperately sick; who can understand it?”

**What did this covenant w/God include? What did the people commit to?**

- 1) “To walk in God’s Law...” (vs.29)
- 2) To not allow their children to intermarry (vs. 30)!
- 3) To honor the Sabbath day, the seventh year, & the year of Jubilee (vs. 31)

- 4) To provide for the house of God - Temple tax, wood, firstfruits, tithes!

*Why were these 4 commitments of utmost importance- to the people, & to God?*

- 1) To “walk in God’s Law” meant they would hold up the Word of God as supremely authoritative & therefore obey it above all else!

God’s Laws were never meant to be God’s great suggestions, they are God great commandments for His people! They are nonnegotiable!

*Do we give such supreme authority to God’s Word today?*

- 2) To not allow their children to intermarry was an issue of idolatry!  
It wasn’t about race (skin color, etc.), it was about religion!

The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”

*Do we obey this command in our relationships, & with our kids today?*

- 3) To honor the Sabbath, meant that the people would set aside one day a week to God, for the sacred assembly, for worship, for rest, for doing good  
This command came out of the example God set at creation, & it was also given for the purpose of setting the people of God apart from other nations

Though Jesus did fulfill the ceremonial law, meaning that we today do not need to keep the Sabbath, the principles of the Sabbath endure with the institution of “the Lord’s Day”. Do we set a day aside as holy to the Lord?

- 4) To provide for the house of God meant the people were committed to providing for the needs of the Temple, for the sacrifices, the feasts, for the work of the Priests & the Levites, & for meeting the needs of the poor.

If the people of God do not support the Temple/Church, then how else will it get supported? The temple tax, firstfruits, tithes were the means by which God’s people could fulfill their calling of being a worshipping community!

It’s important to note that the Priests & Levites also obeyed this command!

In Neh. 10, the people of God wanted to be in covenant relationship w/God! Therefore they “cut” a covenant w/Him. The truth is that God has & will always keep covenant w/His people, the question is will His people keep covenant w/Him? The Church is God’s covenant people today, how will we be known?

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### **Sermon Based Questions for Nehemiah 10 – 3/18/18**

- 1) What kind of binding agreements have you entered into? What were the “blessing” & the “curses” of keeping or breaking those agreement?
- 2) How has this idea of “cutting” a covenant in Scripture, with the symbolism of walking between two pieces of a slaughtered animal, changed the way you look at the binding agreements you enter into?
- 3) How has God been faithful to His side of the covenant throughout history, even when God’s people have broken covenant with Him?
- 4) How has what God has done for us in Christ displayed His past, present and future covenantal faithfulness?
- 5) Why is it so significant that it was the people who initiated this covenant with God instead of the other way around? What did that reveal about the hearts of the people?
- 6) Why is Jeremiah 17:9 important to remember when we are thinking about entering into a binding agreement?
- 7) Of the 4 commitments that the people were making in this covenant with God in Neh. 10, which one(s) stuck out to you as most significant?
- 8) What questions do you have about these 4 commitments, their meaning, their significance, and their application to our lives today?
- 9) What are some practical ways that we can apply these 4 commitments into our covenanting with God today?

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