

A Promise to Obey
Nehemiah 10
July 20th, 2025

1. Putting _____ to the commitment (10:1-28)
2. General promise: We will _____ God (10:29)
3. A promise to obey in who they _____ (10:30)
4. A promise to obey on the _____ (10:31)
5. A promise to obey in their _____ (10:32-39)
6. Applying the Word
 - a. Look for _____ ways to apply God's Word to your life when you study it.
 - b. Stand on the gospel of _____, not your best efforts to obey.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Nehemiah 10

1. How is the pattern of Bible instruction (Neh. 8), confession (Neh. 9), and application (Neh. 10) a helpful model for us to follow?
2. What are some possible reasons why Nehemiah includes such a detailed list of names in 10:1-28? Consider also the wall-builders in chapter 3, the returned exiles in chapter 7, and the list of Levites in chapter 8.
3. How is their separation in v. 28 both *from something* and *to something*? How does that idea of separation relate to the concept of holiness in Lev. 20:24-26? How are we as Christians both separated from something and separated to something?
4. What parallels do you notice between the oath that Israel swears in Neh. 10:29 and the people of Judah in 2 Chronicles 15:12-15?
5. Why was the Lord so concerned about intermarriage with unbelievers? (Neh. 10:30; Deut. 7:1-4; 1 Cor. 7:39) Why should single Christians who desire marriage take this warning seriously today?
6. Read Nehemiah 13:10-11, 15-17, 23-24. How did the Israelites do at following through with their commitments? How does this illustrate the way in which the law functions like a tutor to lead us to Christ in Galatians 3:23-24?

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Big idea: Specific commitments should follow Biblical conviction but it won't produce lasting results apart from Christ.

Intro

In 2009 the tallest apartment building in San Francisco was completed. It was 58 stories tall, slender at 14,000 sq ft per floor (about the same as our whole building), and was covered in gleaming modern glass. The units sold as much as \$13 million.

But by 2016 they had a problem, it began to lean.

Like much of San Francisco, it was built on in-fill soil not on bedrock.

The builder sunk concrete columns 60-90 feet into the fill and into the sand below, but didn't go down all the way to bedrock, which would have been about 200 feet. He then built a concrete slab on the columns and built the apartment building on top of the slab.

The idea was that the soil underneath should compact some (no more than 4" was the estimate) and it should be even.

Well, it hasn't been even and it has been more than 4". One corner has dropped by 18" leading to a 28" lean at the top of the building. Residents have heard loud cracking sounds. Windows have shattered. Engineers have verified that it is still structurally safe for now.

They have added more foundation supports to that corner to even out the foundation, but the problem is that it appears to be sinking more in the middle.

Our own efforts at self-reform are often like sinking piers into sand. We need to get down to bedrock. The bedrock is the unmovable righteousness of Jesus.

This passage is one more example of that in the Bible.

Chapters 8-10 describe a period of revival for the people of Israel.

In chapter 8 they gathered to hear the Word of God taught all day long.

In chapter 9 they confessed all the ways they had failed to follow God's Word as a people throughout their history, leading to their present circumstances a just consequence for their sins.

In chapter 10 they promise to do better. They commit to follow God's Word in several specific areas that they had fallen short. It's commendable that they want to take action after they were convicted by the Word of God.

But what we will see is that it didn't take long for them to break these commitments as well.

1. Putting ***names*** to the commitment (10:1-28)

a. The section actually starts with the last verse in chapter 9

i. **Nehemiah 9:38** "Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document *are the names of* our leaders, our Levites *and* our priests."

b. The first 27 verses of chapter 10 list all of these names.

i. 84 names in 3 main groups – priests, Levites, leaders of the people

1. Some of these names are found in earlier lists we have already seen in Nehemiah.
13 of the names were found in the list of wall builders in ch 3. 21 names were found in the lists of the returned exiles in chapter 7.

- c. Verse 28 broadens it to the “rest of the people.”
 - i. The language spills over itself to emphasize the broad nature of this commitment.
 - ii. It included wives, sons, daughters – all who were old enough to understand what was going on (similar to chapter 8 with those who heard the Word).
- d. They are the people who had separated themselves. (v. 28)
 - i. Two aspects of this separation –
 - 1. *From* the peoples of the lands
 - 2. *To* the law of God
 - ii. God separated Israel out as a people.
 - 1. **Exodus 19:5-6** 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."

2. General promise: We will **obey** God (10:29)

- a. They take on themselves “a curse and an oath” to walk in God’s law.
 - i. They are related terms so that some translations collapse them into one phrase “they have sworn an oath.”
 - ii. The idea is that they commit themselves by an oath to follow God’s law and accept that God’s justice would fall on them if they fail to keep their oath.
- b. They specify “the law which was given through Moses, God’s servant.”
 - i. The Lord spoke the 10 commandments directly and audibly to the people.
 - ii. Afterwards they said, in v 19,
 - 1. **Exod. 20:19** Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die."
 - iii. In Exodus 21-23 that’s what we have – God speaks to Moses and then He brings these words to the people.
 - 1. Other ceremonial aspects of the sacrifices and priests are developed in Leviticus. The law is reiterated in Deuteronomy just before they enter the land of Israel.
- c. They affirm that they will follow all of it, but they also recognize that there are some specific ones that they as a people have neglected and they commit to those.
 - i. It’s the difference between a commitment to “get healthy” and a plan to stop eating an Amazing Glaze donut each morning and a 600 calorie Starbucks Frappuccino each afternoon.
 - ii. A general commitment is good, but a specific commitment shows that you realize where you are going wrong.
 - iii. In every culture the people of God face specific temptations. All temptations are common to man but they vary depending on where and when you live and the specific vices around.

- iv. Some areas might be violence, drugs, gossip, materialism, racial or caste based prejudice, self-centered lifestyles, fear of shaming your parents that keeps you from obeying God's Word, etc.

3. A promise to obey in who they **marry** (10:30)

- a. The obedience of the nation starts with obedience in each home.
 - i. Intermarrying with those who didn't follow the Lord would pull the people away from the Lord as it always has.
 - ii. The problem isn't interracial or intercultural marriage, it is marrying those who don't follow the true God.
- b. **Deuteronomy 7:1-4** "When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, ² and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. ³ "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. ⁴ "For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.
 - i. There are different "-ites" in the land in the time of Nehemiah. The Hittites and the Girgashites are gone, but there are other people in the land who worship other gods. The principle stays the same.
 - ii. The concern is they would "turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods."
 - iii. That's exactly what happened over and over again in Israel's history.
- c. That's a principle that remains in the NT as well.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 7:39** A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.
 - 1. The context is remarriage, but the principle on who to marry is more general – she's free to marry whom she wishes, only in the Lord.
- d. There might be other good questions to ask about a potential husband or wife – are they a hard worker? Do we like the same things? Am I actually attracted to them?
 - i. But the first and most important filter question is simply, "are they a Christian?"
 - ii. That's not the same thing as, "are they willing to go to church with you?"
- e. Why does it matter?
 - i. Because if the goal for a Christian is to honor Christ in every part of their life – work, home, marriage, parenting, money – partnering in life with someone who does not share those goals will make it very, very hard.
 - ii. Someone might find themselves in a marriage with a non-Christian, maybe because they came to Christ after they were married or because they thought the person was a Christian when they married or they made a disobedient choice because they liked other wonderful things about the person.

- iii. The Biblical teaching is to stay in the marriage. Don't leave the marriage just because of that. And you can learn to honor Christ within your home on your part.

4. A promise to obey on the ***Sabbath*** (10:31)

- a. The Sabbath was a covenant sign for the people of Israel to tangibly set them aside from the other people. It was a blessing, an opportunity to rest, all the way down to the servant who worked in their household. It isn't in effect today for Christians as a binding command, although the principle of carving out a day for worship and rest is good.
- b. The people of the land don't follow these commands so on the Sabbath, like other days, they would come to the city to sell their goods. There would be a temptation to buy, but that is in disobedience to what God says, even if the people of the land would say, "What's the big deal? It's just a little business transaction?"
- c. On the 7th year they would leave the ground fallow in obedience to God.
 - i. In Lev. 25 this is described as a sabbath for the land.
 - ii. It was good for the land but even more it was another opportunity to set themselves apart from the people of the land and focus more on worship than work for that year.
- d. Forgiving of debts in those years was also a need, as already evidenced in Nehemiah 5.

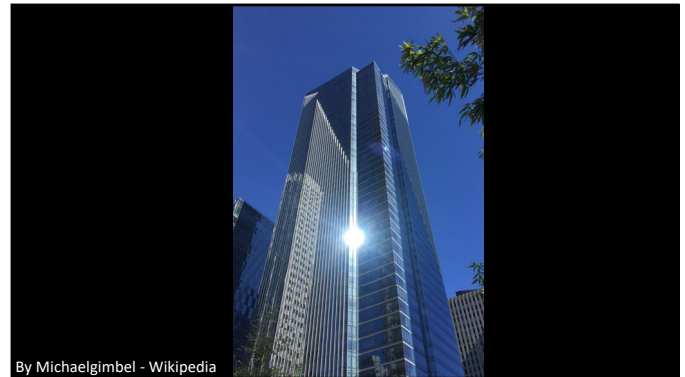
5. A promise to obey in their ***giving*** (10:32-39)

- a. "we placed ourselves under obligation"
 - i. Shows the whole community bearing the responsibility to support the work in the temple.
- b. They committed to give a 1/3 shekel to temple work (vv. 32-33)
 - i. This was not required by law. In Ex 30 a half-shekel tax is levied upon them during the census for the tabernacle, the portable predecessor to the temple. There were free-will offerings that the people would give. But here they are committing to this practice for the ongoing support of the work.
- c. Cast lots to bring wood for the altar (v. 34) – had been the work of the temple servants but there are few of them remaining so they are dividing up the work among the people.
 - i. There's a saying, "If everyone is responsible, no one is responsible." So, they wisely divided up who is responsible to provide the wood to burn on the altar for the sacrifices.
- d. They committed to bring the 1st fruits to the Lord (vv. 35-38)
 - i. First of dough, money, fruit, new wine and oil
 - ii. Honoring God first out of their abundance as a way to recognize that it all comes from Him
- e. They promised to not neglect the house of the Lord – difficult to do as they rebuilt society.
 - i. There would have been needs pulling at their wallets from every direction – their own homes, their farms, children, clothing, food, etc.
- f. How did they do at following these commitments?
 - i. We don't have to wonder for long. Nehemiah 13:10ff
 - ii. We learn earlier in chapter 13 that Nehemiah left for a while and went back to serve the king. When he returned, it was not good.

1. Levites had not been paid so they went home – the house of God was neglected (13:10-11)
 2. Working and selling on the Sabbath (13:15-17)
 3. Intermarried with people of the land (13:23-24)
- iii. Their commitments didn't last. This is the problem with the law. It doesn't change the heart; all it does is expose the heart.

6. Applying the Word

- a. Look for **specific** ways to apply God's Word to your life when you study it.
 - i. If their commitments fell through, what can we learn from this passage? Don't make commitments to God? You can just marry whomever you like because God's grace covers anyways?
 - ii. No – the desire and intention to obey is good. We are consistently called to specific application of scripture.
- b. Stand on the gospel of **grace**, not your best efforts to obey.
 - i. **Romans 3:19-20** Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.
 - ii. **Galatians 3:23-24** But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our tutor to *lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.



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