

XI. Nehemiah in Biblical Perspective  
*The Memoirs of Nehemiah—Arise and Build*  
“Revival, Repentance and Covenant Renewal”

Nehemiah 10

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November 6, 2011 – Morning Sermon

This is our continued study in the book of Nehemiah where God’s people renewed their commitment in a solemn assembly and a covenant renewal here in Nehemiah 10. Before I read in Nehemiah 10 this has occurred on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the month. They have come together for worship, prayer, preaching and confession of sin. When they had come together to do that this is what happens in Nehemiah 9:38 which says [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. God chose that these names would be here so I’m going to read these names that are declared, just like your name today will be declared as we make our commitments before the Lord.*

Nehemiah 10:1-29 says [1] *“On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, Zedekiah, [2] Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, [3] Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, [4] Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, [5] Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, [6] Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, [7] Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, [8] Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these are the priests. [9] And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; [10] and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, [11] Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, [12] Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, [13] Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. [14] The chiefs of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, [15] Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, [16] Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, [17] Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, [18] Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, [19] Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, [20] Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, [21] Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, [22] Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, [23] Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, [24] Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, [25] Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, [26] Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, [27] Malluch, 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, 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.* The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

Keep your Bibles open to this text and we’ll look at two other texts in this study. We are in our every member commitment season. It’s been a great year as we have had the opportunity to spend moments in inventory before the Lord and our relationship with Him in the area of stewardship. Periodically as a congregation as we take on building and facility expansion that is done with sacrificial offerings, thus stewardship is sacrifice. We have our faith promise which is an offering we sense what God is supernaturally going to give to me this year that I’m going to give to world missions that is used 100 percent for that. We hold that in February. Every year at our every member commitment our elders and deacons years ago put this in place for a couple of reasons. One is so that they have

the information to know how to plan out the coming year and its ministry as we look to next year where our focus is on evangelism as well as all those things from our National ministries. Also so they know how God's resources are to be used so we can fulfill our mission which is for God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God, to reach Birmingham, to reach the world for Christ. Our vision is for coming generations Briarwood desires to be a Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled church where every member is a missionary and every member is a minister. So that is what those resources are used for.

You give directions by doing that but more than that this is a time every year where we look at not simply a matter of my tithe and my regular giving for information. But what is my relationship with the Lord? What about my relationship with others? Am I going to consecrate them? What about my spiritual gifts? How do I spend this precious resource of my time? It's amazing that we now step into a chapter where they had their every member commitment moment as a congregation of God's people in Jerusalem. There is so much about it that I want to show you how it sets up for us how we'll use these moments at the end of our study.

Before I get there I want to back up to something else. Remember in Nehemiah 1-3, Nehemiah comes and builds the wall, everybody enters in and does it in 52 days. In Nehemiah 4-6 gives you the adversity that they overcame. In Nehemiah 7 there were new leaders appointed, they find out where the people are and they shepherd them. Nehemiah 8 is a glorious chapter where God's people come together as the leaders lead them in to the reading of God's Word, the preaching of God's Word, prayer and praise for hour upon hour where glorious things are taking place. God's people are just moved and then after that they stop and come back together with the study of God's Word and they discover things they haven't seen before. For 24 days they meet, feast and study the Word of God. Then in Nehemiah 9 on the 24<sup>th</sup> day they come together in a solemn assembly. They start confessing their sins before God and come out of this confession with a solemn covenant that they put their names upon.

Why is Nehemiah 10 so important? These last couple of weeks I've been talking with our Youth Pastor Jay and I'm so excited about what the Lord is doing. Your commitments to those facilities and your desires to put them there have pulled a trigger in our very youth group. They are praying that God would bring revival. The conversations have been absolutely remarkable. Questions like these have arisen since the last study on Nehemiah; "If the Lord answers our prayers with revival what will that look like Pastor?" What is real, heaven sent, Christ exalting, Gospel drenched, Spirit filled, sinner saving, life transforming revival? What does it look like? That's why I am glad for a text like this because it shows us what heaven sent, not man sent, revival looks like. There are man-sent facsimiles of revival that aren't revival. What does a heaven sent revival look like, not a program manipulated one, and where does it come from? What does it look like when it arrives in the lives of God's people?

That's what I love about this text. We are told that the people now after 24 days in God's Word, praise, prayer and meeting in small and large groups have come to this solemn assembly where they are weeping, rejoicing and all of these emotions are present. Then they stop and confess their sins before God and they now move to repentance which moves them to obedience. That wall is now in place. God is not only rebuilding a wall

but He is rebuilding His people. He is bringing a revival not simply to a wall around the city but He is bringing revival into the lives of His people.

I want to first look at the solemn assembly. There are some things I just read that clearly need to be marked out. Here is the first one. There is a reason these names are mentioned in Nehemiah 10 and their names are on the line. There are three groups of leaders and you see a prominence of leadership. There were the nobles, the heads of families, the Levites, the leaders of the people, the political leaders of the people, the Ecclesiastical leaders of the people and they are all being named in Nehemiah 10. Then not only is there leadership prominence but there is followership separation. Are we supposed to reach people? Yes, but our fellowship is not with unbelievers so they separated from the peoples of the land into each other.

Then all who could understand, as an entire group in unity identified specific sins. We will see five of the sins they identified with. They are not only repenting of sins in a general sense for I love the way our confession puts it. When you come to Christ you repent of your sins but when you walk with Christ you repent of your particular sins particularly, where we say “These are particular sins where we have sinned against God.” They have heard the truth. God is faithful. In the last study we read where God chose Abraham, God delivered us out of Egypt, God divided the Red Sea, God upheld us, God gave us manna, God gave us water, God gave us victory over enemies in the wilderness, God gave us the Promised Land, and when we failed Him God sent judges to bring us back and to revive us. Then when we rebelled against Him He brought a nation to take us away to discipline us. God You are faithful and righteous and we are wicked. That is what we have arrived at. We confess that our God is gracious and faithful. We also confess that we are wicked and sinful and there is no good thing within us. Now they move from that general confession of sin to a specific confession of sin with repentance and a commitment to obedience. Here are our sins and our rebellion against You. Now we not only repent from our sins but we turn to obedience where our vices are, by grace bring virtue.

I want to say this so we don't miss this. We could misread this and think that this is the way you get right with God. In Nehemiah 8 and 9 God was gracious. You did this and this and this and we did that. God, we got the message. You are gracious and because You're gracious now we're free to deal with our sins. We don't have to cover them up or spin them. We can identify our sins, own them, and we can talk about the insanity, absurdity and treacherousness of our sins because of Your grace and mercy. It has freed us up to do this and it has given us a hatred for that sin. We have also realized that the reason we are slaved in our own land is because of our sin and You're a gracious God so why would we not repent of that sin and turn to You?

So out of that solemn assembly they develop a solemn covenant and they sign their names to it. In that solemn covenant they name five areas. The first area they say is they have intermarried with pagans. They have degraded the covenant of marriage. We repent of doing that and we now commit ourselves to preserve the sanctity and integrity of the covenant of marriage. Nehemiah 10:30 says [30] *We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.* They will not marry outside the covenant. This is not a racial issue. Remember Boaz? Who was his wife? It was Ruth who was a Moabite but God blessed her and you'll find her in the genealogy of Jesus. So this isn't racial because Ruth had renounced her paganism and said “Your God

is my God.” This is religious, not racial. In the New Testament Paul says “We marry in the Lord.” That is believers marry because when you marry someone you bring what they believe into the marriage.

This has volumes to say and when I was talking with our students about marriage I say “What kind of marriage do you want?” You want a Christian marriage with two believers and that should say a lot about your dating and courtship. Who would I be courting/dating? Who would I be courted/dated by? That would look toward marriage that is only in the Lord. My courting would only be in the Lord. It is something in that relationship that needs to be preserved, the sanctity and integrity of marriage. So let’s go to a second one.

Nehemiah 10:31 says [31] *And if the peoples of the land (those outside the covenant, the Gentiles) 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.* So the next thing they realize is that they have been Sabbath breakers. By the way, Isaiah has already been calling the Sabbath the Day of the Lord. “If any many will call My day holy, not do his work as he would but set it aside to worship then I will cause him to rise upon the heights of the earth and soar like an eagle.” Here is the Lord’s Day. That is looking forward to the resurrection of Christ and what we are doing today, the Lord’s Day, setting it aside and sanctifying the integrity of it. It’s not a burden. Jesus said, “I did not make the man for the Sabbath. I made the Sabbath for the man.” The people repented of their sins and realized they had allowed the merchants of the Gentiles to set up shop right in the temple and have been distracted and detoured from the Day of the Lord. We commit ourselves to keeping Your day holy.

It’s kind of like the tithe. It’s hard to do that, isn’t it, unless you really trust the Lord because in our lives we think we need seven days to get done what needs to be done. God says “No, it’s one and six and watch what I do with the sixth when you set the one aside. Don’t let the Gentiles take My day and make it their day because if you do the other six days, they’ll take those days and you won’t give Me those days either. If you can’t give Me the one, you won’t give Me the seven.” It is God’s gift to us. So they realize they have broken the Sabbath and they now say they will honor the day of the Lord but they don’t stop there. Let’s go to a third one.

Nehemiah 10:31b says [31b] *And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.* Remember when they were oppressing the poor and Nehemiah said “you can’t do that. You can only let people go into debt if they can repay you. In order to do this you’ll have to forgive their debts every seven years.” Debt is not sinful but you can be sinfully in debt. By the way you can sinfully loan money too. If you can’t lend money where people can pay it off in seven years then you don’t do that because that puts people in bondage. So they are going to preserve the sanctity and integrity of the Sabbath year and the divinely designed mercy ministry for the poor. The ministry to the poor was so important that God put in a Sabbath year so that debts would be forgiven and you’d leave the land alone. You would give the land a Sabbath year. You would take a year off from that planting and live off what God had given you the previous six years but that’s not all.

As that land is growing up on its own you’re not tending it and you’re also not harvesting it because in that entire year the poor have the opportunity to just come and take what’s on that land in order that they might live as well. God, we repent of having

abandon in the name of our own personal advancement and greed of not following Your divinely designed method to minister to the poor, to give the land a rest and to also establish relationships in the forgiveness of debts. Then he goes to a fourth one.

The fourth one is they make a solemn covenant and commitment to preserve the sanctity and integrity of regular worship and care of the Lord's House and His servants. Nehemiah 10:32-34 says [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: [33] for 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. [34] We, 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.*

So in other words, what have they done? For the sake of the house of the Lord they will carry on regular worship, care for God's people, and care for those leading the worship. We are going to give something beyond the tithe so here is the third part of the shekel. We'll take turns, cast lots, find wood and find ways to make sure the house of the Lord is open, doing business for the worship and praise of God and its various ministries. Then there is a fifth thing.

The last and fifth thing is to preserve the sanctity and integrity of consecrating the first born, the first fruits and the tithe. Why? It's in Nehemiah 10:35-39 which says [35] *We 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; [36] also 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; [37] and to bring the first of our dough (bread), 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. [38] And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. [39] For 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."*

That is their summation statement. We are going to bring all of the tithe. We will bring our first born because that is making the declaration that you have us and all of our family. Here are the first fruits and here is the tithe. It is the first fruits from the ground, the trees, my work, my first born and here is the tithe. We gladly bring it all here. We commit ourselves to it and put our names so that the house of the Lord is fully supplied in order that it maintains its ministry in a way that honors the Lord and moves forward to the glory of God.

Stop and think with me before we leave Nehemiah 10. I want you to answer with me the question that the young man from our youth group asked. He said "Pastor, where does it come from? What does it look like when revival comes?" What does heaven sent, Christ exalting, Gospel drenched, Spirit filled, sinner saving, life changing revival look like? Here is the first thing. I love my elders, deacons, pastors and the men and

women who serve on teams throughout this church and I'm not bringing this with any axe to grind but I'm just bringing this because the Bible unmistakably five times in Nehemiah brings before us that nothing happens until the leadership shows up. Whenever God does something He always raises up a leader. He raises up leaders around that leader.

Please hear my burden and hear my heart. My country is in desperate need of a Gospel awakening. I want good political decisions, Wall Street reformed, Hollywood reformed and all that but none of that will make any difference or ever happen without a Gospel Awakening in our culture. That will never happen until the church is revived. The fact is the world is the world and it will always default to rebellion against God in a death spiral. The only thing that keeps it is the salt and light of the revived church of Jesus Christ. So if we see what is happening in this culture, we don't point the finger somewhere else. We have to point the finger at ourselves. The reason there is an attack on the marriage, family, life and on all of this is because that is what the world does. The only time it doesn't do it is when the Gospel penetrates it and permeates it. The only time the Gospel penetrates and permeates the culture is when it has penetrated and permeated the church of Jesus Christ. That condition of the world is there because of our condition of Biblical illiteracy, spiritual impotency and basically we have done some Jesus added lifestyle.

I think it's appropriate to bring Jesus into it. When Jesus comes into our life there is an absolute renovation. There is an absolute change and it's not just God You gave manna, water, etc but look where we stand. God, You have given Your Son now we give ourselves. We repent. In other words, there will not be a Gospel Awakening without a revived church. There will not be a revived church until we confess our sins, repent of our sins, consecrate ourselves to obedience out of love to Christ who has been gracious to us and I don't believe that happens without the prominence of leadership. Leadership leads in worship. Leadership leads in evangelism. Leadership leads in stewardship. Leadership leads in disciple making. Leadership leads. The church will not go beyond its leadership. It is so important that we call upon God for leaders who are absolutely abandoned in everything for Christ.

The second thing I would observe from the text is the unmistakable evidence of a heaven sent revival which begins with the confession of sin with trust in God's grace. Because God's grace has freed us we can identify our sins and we confess our sins in a no spin zone. It's not I did this but it was my dad's fault or something else's fault. It's not if you took this wrong then please forgive me. We have seen the treachery, absurdity and insanity of sin and how can we do that when God has been faithful. We have acted wickedly. We are not spinning it. We did it. We are here because of what we have done in the face of Your grace to us so we confess our sins before You. We identify them and we're not stopping there. Here are specific sins that we repent of. God put those specific sins away. Christ is all and in all in my life. I repent of my sin in order to come to the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Then there is an intentional obedience. Repentance is a 180 degree turn. The first time I preached on repentance I said "Repentance is radical, it's a 360 degree turn." But it's not 360 degrees because you'd be right back where you started. It is 180. Here is where I was headed and here's where I'm going. It's not to do better to get saved but it's to live more consistently and grow in grace to honor my Savior. Here is my marriage. I

preserve the sanctity and integrity of it. Here is the Lord's Day. Here is the Lord's House. Here are the Lord's people. Here are the resources You have given me. Here is my first born. Lord, I have taken those things and made idols of them. I repent of that. All good gifts have come from You. Now God here they are, I'm giving them all to You and I put my name on it. This is Yours because I am Yours. Until that burns in our soul we are going to continue to limp in this culture and never make a difference in Jesus Christ.

That is a heaven sent revival. A man centered revival focuses on the experience. Let me have an experience in a worship service. A heaven sent revival focuses on the effect. God's glory and honor is the heart beat of our soul and nothing is held back. Our leaders have led us. Our people have joined. All have come together and said "Jesus who gave all, You now have our all." It is that heaven sent revival that is seen in confession, repentance and in an intentional commitment to obedience. There is one last thing.

Where does that come from? This is what I would answer to that youth student. Nehemiah 10 came from Nehemiah 8 and 9. Protracted prayer, Word and praise are what leads to revival. We don't believe in protracted prayer, Word and praise. We believe in compartmentalized prayer, praise and Word but the truth of the matter is you don't get to the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the month where this solemn commitment of this one's rational, emotional, volitional, all is laid on the line in relationships and everything is given without the first 23 days where they were in God's Word. It was preached. They were praying and praising God. They were in small and large groups. In fact, you don't get there without the 15 years of Ezra's studying the Word and preaching it that led to these moments.

We just want instantaneous. Lord, we'll have a service and call it a revival, stick in the microwave, punch it out and here it comes. In church history and the Word of God, whenever God brings revival there is a protracted commitment to prayer, to the Word and to the praise of God. Then God gives birth to something from heaven instead of something manipulated by man. Then it's not the experience that is idolized. It is the effect for the Kingdom that is embraced.

Here is one takeaway. Remember the last verse of Nehemiah 9. It was because of an awareness of God's grace. An awareness of God's grace joined to an awareness of their sin moved the people of God out of love to God to reverence 'the House of God.' The text was clear. Nine times in that passage I read it says 'we do this for the House of the Lord.' Don't stop there because I'm not talking about this building as the House of the Lord. The House of the Lord is something else. Take this trajectory and if we commit ourselves to the House of the Lord, what does that look like 2500 years after Nehemiah? I Corinthians 3 tells us what it looks like. I am not going to read this text from the English Standard Version or the New American Standard Version because both of them fall woefully short of the proper translation of this text.

I'm going to read this text from the superior translation called the Southern American Standard version of the Bible. I Corinthians 3:16-17 says *[16] Do all ya'll (you) not know that all ya'll (you) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in all ya'll (you)? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and all ya'll (you) are that temple.* That is not talking about the individual Christian. II Corinthians 6 talks about the individual Christian where you are a temple of

the Holy Spirit but this passage is a ya'll. If this is talking about you then temple would have to be plural but temple is singular.

He is saying to the church at Corinth that 'ya'll,' My church, are a temple of the Holy Spirit. So out of love to Christ I repent of my sins and out of devotion to His church I love Your church which You have purchased. It's not my specialty religious shop. It's not just my go to for spiritual rehab. I love Your church, the army of the Lord, the Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, in all of her inadequacies on this side of eternity. I love Her which is headed into the new heavens and the new earth, the church of Jesus Christ. I love Her covenants, Her oaths, Her ministries, Her worship and all of those things about Her so out of my love to the House of the Lord, Your church, the temple of the Lord, I give myself to You.

What makes the church so special? I want to look at one other passage, John 1:14. Have you noticed in our culture how we make nouns into verbs? When you get on Facebook what do you do? You friend somebody and a gift is now a verb when they say "I'm gifting you" but the Bible was ahead of you. The Bible takes a noun and turns it into a verb. John 1:14 says [14] *And the Word became flesh and dwelt (templed, tabernacled) among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* So where are we? We now come out of devotion to Christ. He is the House of the Lord's glory. The House of the Lord in Nehemiah is a shadow and type of Christ where the glory of the Lord dwells without measure. The glory of the Lord is in us with measure. The glory of the Lord is in Jesus who owns this church without measure.

So who am I ultimately responding to with confession, repentance and obedience? It is to Christ who first loved me, now I love Him so here is my first born. Here is my first fruit. Here is my tithe. Lord, I trust You. You tell me to test You in this, I'm committed. I trust You and love You. So this is my opportunity to tell not just inform elders and deacons so they can make good decisions (praise the Lord for good decisions) but the Lord that I love Him. You're the House where the glory of my trust is and that is in You.

Cindy and I made our commitment publically about what we're giving to the capital funds and Frank did that before us I believe five different times. I also found out Frank gave a testimony about his tithe, how supernaturally he looked to the Lord for his faith promise and how he and his wife Barbara made sacrificial commitments. They didn't know where it was all going to come from for these various building campaigns that were here. He said that it seemed like every time they made those commitments that God fulfilled them through an inheritance. So I said to my wife "That is the way God made an inheritance so let's make this commitment and call all of our family and make sure somebody is ready to go." But the tithe is simply this; Lord, it's the first fruits. I won't rob You. I trust You. I look for the alms to the ministry to the poor. Here's my field. Here are the corners and here's Your tithe. I love Your House. I love Her worship. I love Her missions. Next evangelism is the focus. I love all of that but I love You and that's what I want to say. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord, we have come to this moment and my heart immediately thinks of those who are stepping into a wonderful moment in the life of our congregation today but yet it's not the

tithe that needs to come first for them for they are seeking. It's just them and they have heard today that Jesus went to the cross and died for their sins and He loves them. If you heard that today and realize it's not the next technology or vacation or house that will fill the emptiness of your life but there is a Savior who will not only fill your life but will give you life then you come to Him today. Simply say "Jesus I come. I confess I'm a sinner and I surrender to You as my Lord and Savior." In these last few moments we'll have the opportunity to join the names of those in Nehemiah 10 and declare "here are my relationships, my time, the first, and the tithe that I bring to the storehouse, in worship and praise to You and in anticipation of how You're going to use it." O Lord, bless these Your people I pray, not with simply a desire for the effect but with an unstoppable love for Christ. The Lord has come among us. He, we love and trust and now follow. Lord, we do this with joy and solemnity for we are on holy ground, in Jesus' Name, Amen.