

# An Intentional Community: Nehemiah 10

Sunday, August 20, 2023  
Covenant Church  
Pastor Zack Phillips

## Nehemiah 9:38, 10:28-3

**<sup>38</sup> Because of all this we make a firm agreement in writing, and on that sealed document are inscribed the names of our officials, our Levites, and our priests.**

**\* \* \* \* \***

**<sup>28</sup> 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 adhere to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, <sup>29</sup> join with their kin, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath**

### **General**

**to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes.**

### **Specific**

**[1] <sup>30</sup> We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons;**

**[2] <sup>31</sup> and if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them on the sabbath or on a holy day;**

**[3] and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.**

**[4] <sup>32</sup> We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: <sup>33</sup> for the rows of bread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.**

**[5] <sup>34</sup> We have also cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, by ancestral houses, at appointed times, year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law.**

**[6] <sup>35</sup> We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD; <sup>36</sup> 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 livestock, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks; <sup>37</sup> and 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 soil, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our rural towns.**

**[7] <sup>38</sup> And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. <sup>39</sup> For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are, and where the priests that minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers are. We will not neglect the house of our God.**

## A. Thy Will Be Done

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. —C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

## B. Intentional Community

Aspects of “firm agreement” in Neh 10	Realities in Judean life in Neh 5 and 13
1. No intermarriage with foreigners (10:30)	Nehemiah sees intermarriages leading to children only speaking foreign languages and not knowing their mother tongue (13:23-24)
2. No buying merchandise or grain from foreigners on a Sabbath or a holy day (10:31)	Nehemiah sees people working on the Sabbath (13:15) and Tyrians selling goods on the Sabbath to Judeans (13:16)
3. Seventh year: Forego crops and extracting debts (10:31)	Charging interest has reduced the people to debt slavery (5:1-13)
4. Annual one-third shekel Temple tax (10:32)	
5. Cast lots for bringing in the wood offering to burn on the altar (10:34)	Nehemiah makes sure that the wood offering is administered (13:31)
6. Bring specific firstfruits; Levites specifically mentioned (10:35-37a)	“The portions of the Levites had not been given to them” (13:10)
7. Mechanism for tithe collection (10:37b-39)	Nehemiah appoints “faithful” treasurers over the storehouses where the tithes are collected (13:12-13)

Provision(s) in the Torah <sup>2</sup>	...as “interpreted” in Nehemiah 10
Intermarriage: Outside of Ezra/Nehemiah: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On one hand, when Israel is about to enter and conquer Canaan, the LORD forbids them from marrying women from any of the seven nations in</li> </ul>	No Israelite may marry any person in the land (10:30).

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (HarperCollins e-books): 64.

<sup>2</sup> See D. J. A. Clines, “Nehemiah 10 as an Example of Early Jewish Biblical Exegesis,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21 (1981): 111-17 for a great analysis of all seven of the interpretations here. I am relying in part on Clines’ analysis, but also deviating from or expanding it at points.

<p>the land <i>because</i> that will turn them to other gods (Deut 7:1-4). Joshua reiterates this prohibition when the conquest is almost complete (Josh 23:12-13); it is repeated when Israel fails to adhere to it (Judg 3:5-6); and it is repeated when Solomon’s error of being led astray by foreign wives is described (1 Kgs 11:2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the other hand, Joseph (Gen 41:45), Moses (Num 12:1-16), and Boaz (Ruth 4) marry non-Israelite women, and Torah allows warriors to marry captives from their conquered enemies (Deut 21:10-14).</li> </ul>	
<p>Sabbath</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not work (Exod 20:8-11; 31:12-17; 35:2-3; Lev 23:3; Deut 5:12-15; cf. Lev 16:29-31; 23:26-32). This includes gathering manna (Exod 16:23-29), gathering sticks (Num 15:32-36), pursuing your own interests (Isa 58:13), carrying a burden or bringing it in the gates (Jer 17:21-27), or selling (Amos 8:5).</li> </ul>	<p>“Work” includes buying anything from the peoples of the land on the Sabbath—or “on a holy day” (10:31).</p>
<p>Forego crops and extracting debts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Israelites are to leave their land fallow every seven years (Exod 23:10-11; Lev 25:1-7).</li> <li>• Israelites are to cancel debts of fellow Israelites every seven years (Deut 15:1-8).</li> </ul>	<p>You don’t get to choose between these law but have to observe them both</p>
<p>One-third shekel Temple tax</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LORD commands Moses to take a (seemingly) one-time collection of one-half shekel from each Israel-registered-in-the-census for the sanctuary (Exod 30:11-16)</li> </ul>	<p>Israelites are to pay one-third shekel <i>per year</i></p>
<p>Firstfruits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Israelites are to give “some” of the “first of all the fruit of the <i>ground</i>” in Jerusalem to the priest when they enter into and possess the land (Deut 26:1-11)</li> </ul>	<p>Firstfruits includes fruit of <i>trees</i></p>

“The way you know that the Spirit of God is striving with you is you’re striving too.” —Charles Spurgeon

The routines that further career advancement and participation in the habits of an affluent society can so fragment individuals that the church receives only a small fraction of the remaining time and

resources. After Christians have been drained by cultural demands they frequently lose the perspective and will to pursue the radical call of the gospel. The unqualified “yes” to God is compromised by competing interests. Eventually the great vision is reduced to what can be accomplished with the available time that is left. —Luther Smith<sup>3</sup>

[T]hose areas of life that are not lived intentionally tend to resemble the world. —David Janzen<sup>4</sup>

**Question: *What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?***

---

<sup>3</sup> Luther B. Smith, Jr., *Intimacy & Mission: Intentional Community as Crucible for Radical Discipleship* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994): 53.

<sup>4</sup> David Janzen, *The Intentional Christian Community Handbook: For Idealists, Hypocrites, and Wannabe Disciples of Jesus* (Paraclete Press; Kindle Edition.): 13.