

## Chapter Ten

### PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. What was included in the oath which the people took?
2. How were they to observe every seventh year?
3. What provisions were made for the support of the Levites?
4. Why was so much emphasis placed on getting firewood?

### OUTLINE

- C. The people make vows of faithfulness.
1. A list is given of the signatures on the document (vss. 1-27).
  2. The content of the document is a vow of purity from the heathen (vss. 28-31).
  3. The people pledge additionally to support the Temple (vss. 32, 33).
  4. They also arrange support for the Levites, who in turn would support the priests (vss. 34-39).

### TEXT AND VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENT

- C. The people make vows of faithfulness.
1. A list is given of the signatures on the document.

#### TEXT, 10:1-27

- 1 Now on the sealed document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and 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 were the priests.
- 9 And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;

- 10 also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiiah, Hanan,  
11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,  
12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,  
13 Hodiah, Bani, Beninu.  
14 The leaders 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.

## COMMENT

*Verse 1* begins the document. Two methods of sealing official papers are known from this period: (1) the imprint of the thumbnail,<sup>1</sup> or (2) the impression of the person's private seal on a ball of moist clay, which is then attached by a string to the document.<sup>2</sup> The signatures in the case before us were voluntary. The first and most prominent name on the list was that of Nehemiah. His title, governor, used here and in 8:9, is in the official Persian form; one translation of it is "His Severity." The title used in 5:14 and 12:26 differs from this, being Hebrew in form. Nehemiah apparently used the Persian title only for more official or solemn occasions.

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1. *Cambridge Bible, op. cit.*, p. 267.

2. *Ellicott, op. cit.*, p. 500.

Zedekiah may be another spelling of Zadok (shortened by dropping the name of Jehovah at the end: cf. Nehemiah and Nahum), who may have been Nehemiah's secretary (scribe, 13:13). Thus we would have the heads of state making the document official.

*Verses 2-8* are the names of the priests who signed, being next in status to Nehemiah, Persia's representative. If Ezra is in the list at all, the most likely place is under Seraiah: that is, the names appear to be names of families instead of individuals; several are repeated in this way in 12:12-15, and Ezra was a descendant of Seraiah (Ezra 7:1).

By giving only their family names they may be saying that the priest's office and ancestry is more important than his individual identity: compare this with the present usage of the title "Archbishop of Canterbury."

Levites are named in *verses 9-13*; six of the seventeen names we remember from those who manned the speaker's platform in 9:4, 5; three others may have been there if we allow for variations in spelling. These also may have been names of families, though this is not certain. Part of the problem is that more than one generation used the same names.

*Verses 14-27*, the remainder of the list, contain the names of the leaders of the people; we have gotten used to this classification of priests, Levites, and leaders of the people by now. Sixteen of these names are also in Ezra 2; it is supposed, then, that some are names of ancient families and others of individuals of newer families.

## 2. The content of the document is a vow of purity from the heathen.

### TEXT, 10:28-31

- 28 Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gate-keepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all

- those who had knowledge and understanding.
- 29 are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our LORD, and His ordinances and His statutes:
- 30 and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.
- 31 As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

### COMMENT

*Verse 28* takes note of the categories of persons who did not sign, but (see *vs. 29*) were represented by those who did. The "all those who had separated themselves" we would understand to be a comprehensive term for the individual groups previously mentioned. Note that men and women, young and old (reasonably young: having knowledge and understanding; it takes a little longer to acquire understanding than it does knowledge), were included. This was exceptional; note its parallel in 8:2.

*Verse 29* shows their solidarity with the kinsmen and nobles whose signatures presumably are above. The curse and oath express the solemnity of the occasion, and their awareness of its possible consequences. Next we have the vow's contents. Point number one is their obligation to God's Word: that must always be kept foremost. We have noticed before (8:1) their certainty that this was God's law which came through Moses.

There are actually three kinds of material in the full agreement. (1) Reference was made to particular laws handed down from Moses, called to their attention because these were the ones they were neglecting. They were not innovators; they were seeking to live by the ancient traditions. (2) Detail was added to spell out the methods by which these laws would be put into operation: a priest

was to be present when the Levites received tithes for example. (3) They were accepting new obligations (gathering firewood for example) in order to share with one another more equitably, probably because the proportion of their population who were priests or Levites was higher than ever before, and they did not want to neglect the support of these people. This was a personal agreement, with personal names attached, and this was their personal pledge. If it were not for this, they could simply have vowed to keep the Law in general.

*Verse 30* deals again with the nagging problem of intermarriage which always threatened to wipe out the distinctive character of their religion and even their national identity. It will be mentioned yet again.

*Verse 31* enforces the strictness of their observance of the Sabbath day and holy days; they would not buy or sell with foreigners; of course it goes without saying that there would be no commercial dealings with each other on those days. The Sabbatical year would be observed with equal strictness; two of its features were that crops were not to be planted (the land was to be given a rest; there are certain ecological considerations which a man owes to the soil, as well as concerns for the poor: Lev. 25:3f; Ex. 23:10f), and no one was to be pressured for payment on his debts.

### 3. The people pledged additionally to support the Temple.

#### TEXT, 10:32, 33

- 32 We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:  
33 for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.

## COMMENT

The one-third shekel in *verse 32* appears superficially to be at variance with the requirement of Ex. 30:13, specifying a half-shekel. The amount is also known to us from Matt. 17:27. The simplest explanation is that different standards of weight had been introduced by the Persians so that what had been a half-shekel before was now only a third of a shekel.<sup>3</sup> This was to be used for the public services of the Temple.

*Verse 33* probably is in addition to this, and they pledged to take care of these expenses also. It is not likely that the fraction of a shekel yearly from each male over twenty would be sufficient for all these supplies, including repairs to the building.

4. The people also arranged support for the Levites, who in turn would support the priests.

## TEXT, 10:34-39

- 34 Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites, and the people in order that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God as it is written in the law;
- 35 and in order that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually,
- 36 and bring to the house of our God the first-born of our sons and of our cattle, and the first-born of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God.
- 37 We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our

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3. *Interpreter's Bible, op. cit.*, p. 764.

ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.

- 38 And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.
- 39 For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil, to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers, and the singers. Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.

### COMMENT

*Verse 34* makes provision for a supply of wood. A fire was to be kept constantly burning on the altar (Lev. 6:12f). There is no previous mention of where this wood came from; what has been everybody's business may have become nobody's business; so now they made a personal pledge outside the framework of the Law, and arrived at a fair means for replenishing the supply periodically through the year. Wood was always in short supply in Israel; houses of stone were much less expensive than those made of wood; so this was no small item. All the clans (fathers' households) would draw straws or use some other random method merely to determine the part of the year in which they would fulfill this obligation.

In *verse 35* they accepted a similar obligation to supply food. A part of each field crop, and one year's crop from each new tree, had been specified by the Law as the Lord's portions (Ex. 23:16; Lev. 19:24; 23:14). They recognized this as a necessity for the support of the Levites.

*Verse 36* reflects their knowledge of the law that all firstborn belonged to the priests; for sons, a redemption price of five shekels was substituted (Num. 18:15f).

*Verse 37* indicates that certain rooms of the Temple were used for the storage of these crops. A distinction is made between the

first fruits, which went to the priests, and the tithes, the tenth portion of all their yearly increase, which were designated for the Levites. It was the responsibility of the Levites to teach religion throughout the land and not in Jerusalem only.

*Verse 38* adds a new detail to facilitate these collections. A priest would be on hand so that the Levites could quickly take a tenth of the tithe which they received and pass it along to the priests (Num. 18:26). Thus those who received tithes would in turn give tithes.

In *verse 39* the people pledged to relieve the priests of the responsibility of collecting or transporting the contributions; they would bring them to the storage chambers of the Temple where all the utensils used in the service of worship (see Ezra 1:9, 10) were kept. Priests, gate keepers, and singers would be available to add in handling the produce.

The pledge is closed with the people's promise not to neglect any of these things, which would be tantamount to neglecting the house of God.

## WORD STUDIES

**DOCUMENT:** see AMEN, in the Word Studies for chapter 8. **SABBATH** (vs. 31): the basic idea is to cease, interrupt, stop; thus the manna ceased (the verb form of this word): Josh. 5:12. If work stops, there is rest (Ex. 23:12).

The word applied to the seventh day (Ex. 20:11); to the seventh years, when no crops were to be sown (Lev. 25:2); to the first and last day of the festivals that lasted for a week, regardless of the day of the week (Lev. 23:39); to the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:32) or Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24); or in the plural as a synonym for weeks (Lev. 23:15) or for seven-year periods (Lev. 25:8).

## SUMMARY

A document was drawn up and sealed with the names of Nehemiah, the heads of priestly families, Levites, and leaders

of the people, in behalf of all the adult religious community, male and female. This pledged them to walk in God's Law, specifically to keep all His commandments and not to intermarry with foreigners nor to violate the Sabbath or holy days by trading with them on those days. They would also keep the Sabbatical year.

They pledged also to support the Temple with money and materials, to provide wood for the continual fire on the altar, to bring the firstfruits of their crops and herds to the priests, to offer their tithes to the Levites who in turn would give a tenth to the priests, and to see that the needs of the house of their God were not neglected.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What part did Nehemiah take in these proceedings?
2. How much was each man to give for the service of the Temple each year?
3. How did they decide who was to supply wood for each portion of the year?
4. Were the Levites, who received tithes, also to tithe?