



VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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Study 34: A COVENANT OF CONSECRATION

Nehemiah 10:1-39

The prayer and fasting programme in the previous chapter was ended with a solemn covenant (Nehemiah 9:38). Realisation of the past faithfulness of God, recognition of their plight and a determination to change their circumstances for the better were some of the motivating factors that led them into that covenant. By covenanting they demonstrated their consecration to constrain themselves to obedience – a necessary condition for divine blessing and prosperity. This chapter gives details of the signatories to the covenant and the terms of the covenant.

1. SIGNATORIES TO THE COVENANT: *Nehemiah 10:1-29*

Topmost in the list of the signatories is Nehemiah the leader. The priests, the Levites, the chief of the people and the rest of the people including the porters, singers and Nethinims (temple servants – both Gibeonites and battle captives originally given by David to Levites; Ezra 8:20) also signed the covenant. Both men and women, young and old partook of the covenant so long as they were capable of “having knowledge, and having understanding”. This condition was perhaps crucial in that covenant with God is a serious matter as God does not take delight in childish utterances and unfaithfulness to covenant obligations (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6; Numbers 30:2-15).

It is also important to note that all the participants in the covenant fulfilled another important criterion of separating “themselves FROM THE PEOPLE of the lands UNTO THE LAW OF THEIR GOD”. The separation was not due to problems in human relationship but was a deliberate act embarked upon with the aim of being able to keep the law of God. It is impossible to walk with God and at the same time sport with the devil; neither can one be the salt of the earth and at the same time the sugar of the world. Those who attempt to achieve such incompatible mix eventually end up becoming “strangers to true pilgrims” rather than “strangers and pilgrims” in the world (I Peter 2:11).

Following separation from strangers, “THEY CLAVE TO THEIR BRETHREN, THEIR NOBLES... TO WALK IN GOD’S LAW...” What a model for Christian unity! They united with the leadership entirely on the basis of God’s law. There was no manifestation of ethnic sentiments, ego, personality clashes (Note that personalities only clash when they are defective), selfish carnal interests, stubbornness and rebellion that would destroy the unity of the Spirit. They did not substitute God’s law for personal experience, worldly opinion, earthly wisdom, and norms of the society or traditions of the elders as basis for achieving unity. Personal preferences did not constitute a hindrance. They gave the word of God the rightful place it deserved, and God honoured His word.

Your Spiritual Welfare Is Our Concern

2. SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT: *Nehemiah 10:29-39*

The content of the covenant is a summary of the commandments of God. They covenanted themselves “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 God, and His judgments and his statutes...” This was the sum total of the scriptures. However, they also specified details covering certain areas they were prone to failing God. This was to serve as a constant handy reminder (a mirror) of their weaknesses and a restraint from further transgressions. Believers ought to know themselves enough to be able to capitalize on their strengths and watch over their weak points. The Jews’ special concern included:

- i) Refraining from intermarriages with strangers. God commanded this. Disobedience to this commandment was the cause of Solomon’s fall (Deuteronomy 7:3-9; 1 Kings 11:1-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Solomon may have considered it wisdom to intermarry but the end result proved that the wisdom of the world is foolishness before the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:19).
- ii) Observing the Sabbath to keep it holy and free of commerce (vs. 31; Isaiah 58:13,14). Sabbath was the seventh day which God instituted in the Old Testament as a day of rest and worship. This was Saturday in the Old Testament times (the equivalent of which in the New Testament is Sunday for Christians). There were always enough temptations (e.g. reduction in prices, cheap labour, etc) to seduce the Israelites to disobey this commandment (Nehemiah 13:15-21). The devil has not abandoned his strategy in the New Testament, and those temptations are still very much real to contemporary Christians. Believers therefore ought to discipline themselves to overcome this temptation at all cost. The Israelites had ‘good’ reasons for disobeying God regarding Sabbath, but those ‘good’ reasons did not spare them from God’s judgement. Similarly, we do well to remind ourselves that no matter how ‘good’ and ‘plausible’ our reasons may sound today, we cannot disobey God’s word and escape the penalty of disobedience.
- iii) Giving for the service of the house of God (v. 32-39; Malachi 3:8-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Nehemiah 13:10-13). Their giving included money, shewbread, meat offering, priests to provide wood, first-fruits of the trees, flock and firstborn, etc. They also gave tithes and tithes of tithes as well as themselves. “... and we will not forsake the house of our God.” What a commitment!

The action of these Jews is a challenge to all today to consecrate ourselves despite position or privilege, to unite with the leadership according to the word of God and to obey the scriptures. We ought to particularly watch over those areas of besetting sins. As we do this, divine blessings will flow unceasingly to our benefit.