

Nehemiah 10

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[0:00] Amen. Nehemiah chapter 10. If you remember Nehemiah chapter 9, very powerful passage in Nehemiah 9, where we looked at the latter half of that starting in verse 5. Actually, it's more than the latter half. It's the majority of it.

But starting in verse 5 and going to the end of the chapter in the 9th chapter, you have this grand prayer of repentance of God's people. In the very first verses of the 9th chapter, they come with weeping and mourning and they have dirt upon them or dust upon their bodies and they're rending their clothing and they're mourning over the sins that have become evident because of the word of God.

They had heard the word read. They had gathered together. They had celebrated the festivals. We find all that in the 8th chapter. Again, we are beyond the rebuilding of the walls. And so now we're rebuilding the people because the work of Nehemiah was not just to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. The concern of Nehemiah was the people who had returned to Jerusalem.

And we get that from Nehemiah chapter 1. I asked my brethren regarding those people who had returned to Jerusalem. So his concern was about the people. The walls were a part of that concern because they were the security and even the testimony of those people to the world around them. And uniting with Ezra, as Ezra came about the same time or a little bit prior to Nehemiah, they came together as a political leader and a spiritual leader. And now they began working and rebuilding the second phase of this work, this grand calling, and that is rebuilding the people of God.

[1:33] And we see as they open up the word and they read the word and the people come to an understanding of what God has declared to them. And they rejoice in these festivals and celebrations and now they're broken.

They had this brokenness over sin and reality that they had seen exactly what God had expected from them. They had an understanding that God had set a high standard and they also had the understanding they had fallen woefully short.

So they had this wonderful prayer of repentance recorded for us in the majority of the 9th chapter. And now we come to this time where it says that they were, because of this, in the last verse in the 9th chapter, 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.

So they're putting it in writing. This reality, because of who God is, remember, in the 9th chapter, it is declaring who God is, being astounding at the name of the Lord God Almighty.

And it is declaring what God has done, the great works he has done throughout the ages, how he was in his grand mercy and in his loving kindness, he did not fail his people, how the people had fallen and how the people had failed.

[2:45] And then this reality that since God is consistent in history, what does it look like when we can come to him with our failures and say, oh God, we have fallen short.

What do we expect from him in return? Well, we expect a consistent response, and that is one that is hinged upon his character. And that's why we need to know who God is and what he has done. So now because of all this, they're going to put something in writing, this grand document. And that's what we find in the 10th chapter. I'm going to take time to read these names. I kind of went back and forth in my mind.

I said, well, I don't want to read these names. This is a grand listing of names. But it's important. You'll see why in just a moment. So you'll bear with me in my, as we always say, my little southern dialect that I have. And we'll stumble through all these names.

There's not many, you know, Marks and Johns and Adams and Eves in here. But these are the names that we don't say quite as easy. But let's see. Now on the still document were the names of Nehemiah, the governor, the son of Hekeliah, and Zedekiah, Saria, Azariah, Jeremiah, Peshore, Amariah, Malchaziah, Hattish, Shebaniah, Malak, Haram, Miramoth, Obadiah, Daniel.

[3:55] By the way, can't they all just be Daniel? That's a grand name, right? Rejoice in the favor of God when he gives you a Daniel in the middle of those names, right? Daniel, Jinnothon, Barak, Meshulam, Abijah, Mishamin, Maziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah.

These were the priests. And the Levites, Jeshua, the son of Azaniah, Benuiah, of the sons of Hinnadad, Cadmiel, and also their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kaleidah, Beliah, Hanan, Micah, Rehob, Heshbiah, Zechariah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Benai, Beninu, and the leaders of the people, Parash, Pahath, Moab, Elam, Zatu, Bani, Buni, Azgad, Babai, Odonijah, Bigvi, Adin, Atter, Hezekiah, Azur, Hodiah, Hashem, Beziah, Herif, Anathoth, Nebiah, Piyash, Meshulam, Hezer, Meshazabal, Zedok, Jadaiah, Pelitiah, Hanan, Ananiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Heshub, Halohesh, Pilha, Shobak, Rehum, Heshbenah, Masiah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,

Malak, Hiram, Bananenu. Somewhere in there, there ought to be a Billy Joe, I think. But anyway, I can't, let's just stop right here in the middle of the text. I can't wait to get to glory to hear one of these grand Hebrew descendant people say my name. Because I know I've messed theirs up so bad. And I'm just going to say, I just want to hear how you pronounce my name.

You know, because I know, but it's that way they can have their turn to butcher my name the way I know I've butchered theirs. But their names are important. Now let's see, verse 28. Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the people of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. All those who had knowledge and understanding 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. And that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. As for the peoples of the lands 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 forgo the crops the seventh year in the exaction of every debt. We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God, 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 all the work of the house of our God. Likewise, we cast for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites, and the people, so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our father's households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law, and that they might bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the Lord annually. And to bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, and the firstborn 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. We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine, and the oil to the priest at the chambers of the house of our God, in the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.

The priests, the sons 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 storehouses. For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain and 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.

Nehemiah chapter 10. I want you to see what it looks like to restore a covenant people.

[8:26] We are restoring now a covenant people. When the people of God returned from the Babylonian captivity because of the decree issued by King Cyrus, they returned without the full knowledge of what God's expectation for them were.

They had a heritage and they knew where their land was for they returned to the land of their fathers. Some that came back at the initial journey when they initially rebuilt the temple there, found in the early pages of the book of Ezra, had seen the former temple. Some of these were the older

ones who were there before the Babylonian captivity, possibly young men and women, much like Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were youth when they were carried into the Babylonian exile. Some of these indeed did return back for they were the ones who mourned over the sight of the new temple because they had seen the grandeur of Solomon's temple, but others had never seen even a temple to begin with and therefore they were rejoicing and celebrating.

By the time Nehemiah comes on the scene, about 85 years had transpired since the issue of King Cyrus. So we can confidently say that those who are present are those who did not grow up in the land of Israel.

They were those who had been born into captivity. They were born servants and slaves of another nation. They were changed dramatically because of that. It is for that reason why when Ezra read from the law, they had to interpret the law from its original Hebrew and give the sense. For these people did not understand even what was, quote, their native tongue. For their native tongue was the tongue of the Persians.

Not only did they not understand the language, they also did not understand the customs or the expectations because, again, we know for certain that they were not walking around with copies of the Old Testament and reading it for themselves. It is Ezra that is given the credit for preserving the historical text even until we get to Bible translations later on. We saw that a little bit this past Sunday morning. We have to rejoice in the work of Ezra in the school of the scribes.

[10:43] And if it had not been for Ezra's concern to know the word and to study the word and to practice the word so that he may teach the word, then none of the people of God would have had an opportunity to repent. But it is in direct connection to hearing the word that God restores and renews the covenant with his people. By the way, hold on to that for just a little bit until Sunday morning when we start looking at the church. It is amazing how the history of the church parallels what we see happening in scripture. And that's all I will tell you right now. You have to hold on to that for just a little bit.

So while they had gone through 70 years without priests, without temples, without Levites, without anyone performing their rituals and all those things, and now a number of years, 85 years at least attached to that 70 plus, we know that they're coming now to this place of restoration. Sure, the temple has been rebuilt. The altar has been refurbished. They have begun offering sacrifices again. But that's just the doing, right? That's what they should do. They didn't know who they should be. Now when they hear the word, all of a sudden there's the realization. We're not only supposed to have these offerings on the altar, we're also supposed to celebrate these festivals. For these festivals are a reminder that we are a distinct people. And since we are a distinct people, because who in their good mind would walk out of their house and build a house temporary shelter out of tree limbs and live in it for seven days with rejoicing, if it was not the distinction that God had led them through the wilderness. And so now they are reminded that God has done some amazing things in their lives. And since he's done some amazing things in their lives, they are in this covenant relationship with this faithful God.

And so they're renewing and restoring that covenant here. They are entering into it. Not that God had broken his covenant, for the covenant of God was dependent upon his faithfulness, not theirs. But yet they are re-entering into what God has maintained. God is keeping his word. He had kept his word in discipline, for his judgment was just. He was keeping his word in restoration, for he said, after 70 years, I will call you back from the dispersion among the nations, and you will once again be my people. And God is maintaining his word. So now all of a sudden, with the realization of that, they say, we again want to enter into, personally, this covenant with you. And so they put it in writing. I want you to see, first of all, the significance of this event. This is a rather significant event, for the people of God are joining in the work of God, and they are becoming an instrumental part of it. They are saying, we are going to look different. And it's so significant, we are told twice, at the end of the ninth chapter, and at the very beginning of the tenth chapter, it says, now on the sealed documents. It is a document that is sealed. It is not sealed as in the such that we find the tomb of Jesus sealed, and no one should break the Roman seal or steal his body away. It is not sealed in such that we see the scroll sealed in the book of Revelations, and no one is found worthy to open the seals except for the Lamb. No, the seals were like, they put their name, they signed their name

on it. They said, I am taking part in this. This was not just something they were putting in writing. This was something they were putting their name to. That's why we go through this listing of names. This is important because it is a matter, and we know exactly who puts their seals on it. We have documents such that in our own nation, the Declaration of Independence, right? We have the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and we look at whose name is on it, and because of whose name's on it, we understand what they had in mind. We can go back and read their writings and see those matters. But essentially, this is such a significant event, they said, we just don't want to talk about it.

We don't just want to draw up something, some type of papers about it. No, we want to make it a sealed document, which makes it official, and in their mind was making it binding. Now, God was already bound to be in covenant with his people, for God had called Abram out of the land of the Ur-Chaldeans, and if you read in this literal reading, it means to cut a covenant. Now, that's really a weird word for us, because they were cutting a covenant with God. But the phraseology comes from the reality that if you go back to Genesis, you see that when people would enter into a covenant with one another, they would literally cut a covenant. That is, they would take animals and cut them in half, and lay half on this side and half on this side, and then they would walk back and forth. It'd be like, if this side was half and this side was half of an animal, and you and I would walk back and forth and pass one another between the two, we were cutting a covenant. We would say, based upon the blood shed by these animals, we are bound to be in agreement. God cut a covenant with Abram. Remember that? Abram took the animals, he cut them in two, he laid one on either side, and then all of the buzzards would start showing up, and everything would come, and Abraham was running, at that time he was Abram, he's running all the birds off and getting everything away from it, and he does it so long that Abram gets tired, and he falls asleep, and then he wakes up, and he sees what? A fiery furnace going back and forth between all the carcasses. So what is going on there is that God was going back and forth in the covenant himself. Abram didn't walk at all between, so he has no part in that, and so the picture is important that God cut a covenant, but it was dependent upon who he was, not who Abram was. So he was bound to these people already. Now these people are cutting a covenant with God saying, we are going to bind ourselves with you, and it is such a significant event that they seal it, and they put their names on it. Now these are the names. The very first name is Nehemiah. We shouldn't be surprised by that. When we were in the ninth chapter, I told you to pay attention to the rather unique absence of one name that you would expect to find here, and that would be Ezra. Ezra is not in the ninth chapter or here in the tenth chapter. We don't know why he's probably back in the capital city by this time. We know that Nehemiah goes back shortly after this. We'll see that after the next eleventh, twelfth chapter. After the twelfth chapter, he goes back for some time, but either way, we see that they write their names, and they record who they are. Now some say, well, these listing of names, they're not that important. Well, they are important enough to the nation of Israel here, and they're important enough to the Lord God Almighty. These are equivalent, one translator said, these are equivalent to knowing the names of the reformers who said, we're going to take a stand and change something. These are the people who said, we're going to change something. We're going to change who we are, and they signed their name. Just in case you don't think that's important, I remember, this has been some time ago, I wasn't here. I was pastoring in Normandy, and we did a New Year's Eve service, and it was a watch night service. There wasn't many people there, but that night I had two covenants on the table in front of me, and the covenants were,

[18:08] I covenant to read the Bible this year, and the other one was, I covenant to be faithful to the church this year, and I asked people who were willing, I didn't compel anyone, to come sign their names to those covenants, and by the end of that evening, I picked them up. I'm going to tell you, and I don't mean this despairingly, very few people signed those covenants. Why? Because it doesn't matter until you have to put your name on it, and you know the moment you put your name on it, it matters, and so they were like, and it wasn't that they had any bad intention. It wasn't that they were wrong or had any animosity. They were faithful to the church that year. It just, they understood the weight that if I sign that, I am committing to do exactly what it says. It shows significance. These people signed it and listed their names on a historical document that's been preserved from antiquity to show us we

think this is important. Look at the significance of this event.

Secondly, notice the separation of the people. Those who signed it were not all those who were entering into it, for they were representative of the grander body. It says now the rest of the people, that is everyone who had gathered together when mourning and weeping and realized their sin, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, and the singers, the temple servants, and all those, look at this, all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, they understood the reality that to be the people of God, you have to be a distinct, separate people. That by entering into this covenant, they were saying, we are not like everyone else. And we don't really get the weight of that here in our passage in the English language. But you will get the weight of it when you understand it when it says Nehemiah the governor. You say, oh yeah, Nehemiah is the governor. Well, the governor, that word governor there is a Persian word. It's a Persian title in its original language.

So Nehemiah is not the governor because he went to the ballot and they voted for him. He is the governor because the king of the Persian empire had appointed him to be the governor of that land, which that title alone is a reminder that they are not an independent people. They are still the people of God living under the rule of the Persian empire. And he has a Persian title.

And it's just this constant reminder that this title that he possesses means that they are very much a part, quote unquote, of the people of the land, but they're setting themselves apart from them.

Now, if you're not careful, you call that revolt or anarchy, right? That, well, we're not part of the people of Persia anymore. We're going to separate ourselves, but they're separating themselves from.

[21:26] And when we go on down just a little bit further into the 29th verse, there's this phrase here that is unique for the first time in the book of Nehemiah. Now, Nehemiah, you see this continual announcement of the name of God, the Lord God Almighty, or God of heaven, or God, this, the God Almighty. We don't take his name easy or lightly. It's just this continual reference to Elohim, Elohim, Elohim, who is the creator Almighty God. And then when we get ready to build the walls, they start speaking of Yahweh, that is the covenant God, when he's talking in particular to the people of God, because this is covenant God. But now all of a sudden something unique happens in verse 29.

In the New American Standard, it says it this way. It says that they were coming together, then verse 29, are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse, and oath, we'll get to that in just a moment, to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe, here it is, all the commandments of God, our Lord.

Now, really, it's, that word God there is Yahweh, usually rendered, if you have it in your translation, it's Lord, our Lord. So it's Yahweh. New American Standard made it God, but has a subscript on it. The Legacy Standard keeps it Yahweh. I think the King James says, Lord, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, and then Lord, our Lord, L, lowercase O, lowercase R, lowercase D. It's just a unique phrase there, because here's the phrase, it means Yahweh Adonai. The second Lord there is Adonai.

It's a proper name of God, so it's Yahweh Adonai. So when we put those two together, and we're talking about the separation of the people, Yahweh is the covenant God. Adonai means the sovereign ruler of all the events that transpire on earth. I know that's a long title, but that's what it means, the sovereign ruler of all that's happening. So let's put the name together.

[23:26] He is our covenant God who is the sovereign ruler of everything that happens on earth. Now, if you have a king over you, as in the Persian Empire, that king is to be sovereign.

You begin to separate yourself when you realize there is but one sovereign. And he is the Lord God they were in covenant relationship with.

They had separated themselves because now he is Yahweh our Adonai. He is the God we're in covenant relationship with, and he is our sovereign king.

We are a distinct people. But notice they didn't just separate themselves from, they separated themselves from the peoples of the land to the law of God. Biblical teaching tells us that every time we are delivered from something, we are also delivered to something. He brought them out of Egypt in order to bring them into the promised land, remember? And now they separate themselves from

the peoples of the land to the law of God. It would be just as the parable that Christ teaches, the man who has an unclean spirit.

It is not enough to cleanse yourself of the unclean spirit. He says if he casts the spirit out of him and says, well, get out of me, but he doesn't fill himself with something else, then the spirit will go around wandering from place to place and come back and find that man's life all clean and kept in an order and there being more room there than was before. And he goes and finds seven other more spirits and the latter state of the man is worse than the first state. What Jesus is saying is if you get rid of the wicked, but you don't go to something holy and righteous, then you're going to end up worse than you were to begin with.

[25:12] If you separate yourselves from something that is wonderful and grand, but it does not fulfill the picture until you are separated to something else. If you are separating yourselves from distractions and people who hinder you, then you have to separate yourselves to those who will build you up into the things of the Lord. And this is exactly what happens here. And just in case you think that it's an Old Testament principle, all throughout scripture, the people of God are called to be a covenant people who are in the world, but not of the world and separated from the world to him. He is still our Adonai, our sovereign one.

I read recently that faithfulness and endurance is not found in our circumstances and situations or even being freed from the trials and tribulations, but rather it is resting in the reality that the sovereign one that knows us and loves us is in control of each and every one of them.

His sovereignty, that is his lordship over every area of our life ought to produce an endurance and perseverance within us that says he is sovereign and I am his. So come what may, it's all his leading.

He is Yahweh Adonai. They separated themselves and we do that when we restore our covenant people. The third reality that we see here is not only is it a significant event and it is a separation of the people, we see that they support, they support the temple. It is the support that is promised to the temple.

It says in verse 32, we also placed ourselves, that is, we placed ourselves, we chose, we entered into a willing covenant. We placed ourselves under obligation to contribute and then it goes to the listing of things that they're going to contribute.

[27:11] There is the contribution of the wood for the offerings because that's the fire that's going all the time. There's the contribution of the first fruits and of the third of the shekel, which by the way is not the full tax that God had mandated in the book of Leviticus.

Some people say, well, maybe because of the severity of the plague that was upon the land, that's all they could afford. Some people like to say, well, maybe the shekel weighed more during this time in Nehemiah's time than it did, so the amount was equal.

But I think that's kind of like skimming off the top for inflation. I don't know. I just think that they were saying, God, this is what we can give you. This is what we can sacrifice and God accepts that. For they were doing it with a willing heart. They put it on themselves.

And so they say, we're going to give financially to the temple. We're going to support the temple. We're going to provide. We're going to bring all of our contributions and our offerings to the temple. We're going to support the Levites and the priests in the midst of doing that.

For in the rural areas, we'll get to the 11th chapter and we'll realize that only a remnant of the people actually stay in Jerusalem. Many of them go back out into the countryside. Well, that's where the Levites are. Remember all the Levite cities and the cities of refuge.

[28:15] So we'll bring our offerings to the Levites and the Levites will be supported by that. The Levites will bring a 10th of that, a tithe of the tithe, back to the priest at the temple. And the Levites will do their job.

So what you're seeing here is they are supporting the worship of the temple and supporting the workers of the temple. Because one thing that we notice historically when we read about the people of God is that when they begin to forsake the temple, it is a sign that they are already forsaking the Lord their God.

It's when they fail to provide for the sacrifices or the wood and all these other things. Go back to the book of Judges in your mind with me.

In those days, there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes. Remember that? And then there's this tribe, this tribe of Dan that ends up with their own priest. And the reason they end up with their own priest, anybody remember why they end up with their own priest there at the end?

It's because there's a Levite who's walking around looking for work is what happens. He left Jerusalem. He left his Levitical city. And he was looking for work where there happened to be a man out there.

[29:25] Remember this man who told his mama, Hey, mom, remember all that money that you said got stolen? Well, it didn't get stolen. I stole it. And she says, Oh, praise be the Lord, which is really a sign of the times. And so she gives it to him and he builds this altar.

And so then he said, one of his sons is his priest, but he's the fortune shined upon him because he found a Levite walking around, made him his priest in the tribe of Dan comes and takes him away and his altar. You remember all that, right? But do you know how all that began?

It's because the Levite had to go start looking for work. So it began years before when the temple started being forsaken. And nothing was going on.

And people weren't bringing to the temple and the people weren't bringing. And so now all of a sudden, when they forsook the temple, the workers would forsake the work. And then we just have this downward spiral, right?

And so what they're realizing here, the people are realizing, because surely they probably read that. You say, how do we know they read the book of Judges?

[30:23] Because if you remember their penitent prayer there in the ninth chapter, they talk about how often they failed, but God would raise up a deliverer. That's the book of Judges. And so now the people realize, wait a minute, we need to support this.

And it says in the last verse there, thus we will not neglect the house, look at this, of our God. It's subtle, but the implication there is, we're not just talking about that's the work they do.

No, that is our temple where our worship is at, and it's who we are. The corporate worship of the body of God's people is an inseparable reality to them.

The temple wasn't just a part of their life, their life centered around it. So now this is important. We'll see this again Sunday morning too. In the Old Testament, people were to be, this is a good word for you, we don't use it much.

They were to be in a theocratic union, okay? So theocratic means God was their king. There was a theocracy. God is their king. They ended up wanting a monarchy, so they made man their king, but the intention was that God had set aside people where he would be their king.

[31:38] What does he tell Samuel? They've not rejected you, they've rejected me from being their king. So the central part of that theocracy was worship. And so the nation was connected to worship. And so now they're saying, we're not going to neglect that.

We're not going to forsake that. We're going to support that. And we're going to remain who we are as the corporate people of God. And we're going to be talking about that. Which leads us to the fourth and final thing. We'll see that this is the standard with which they will be judged.

This standard is what will actually judge them. Because when we get to the 13th chapter, we'll find Nehemiah, and I'm kind of getting ahead of myself.

I've jokingly said this, you know, we get to where Nehemiah's plucking beards out and all the good stuff. But what happens in the 13th chapter is Nehemiah comes back from the capital city of Susa. Because he had to go report to the king. Because if you remember, he told the king, I will be away for X amount of time. Evidently, X amount of time, he gave him a definite amount of time. And he came, and he went back.

[32:42] And he was gone for 13 years. He comes back. And when he's back, he walks back into Jerusalem. And you know what he finds? No one's brought their tithe. No one's brought their wood.

The Levites aren't serving. And the priests are gone. And they're intermarrying with the people. Everything they promised they will not do, and everything they promised they would do, they didn't. And so when Nehemiah judges them, when Nehemiah gets angry at them, when Nehemiah, you know, begins plucking out beards, and throwing people and casting people out of the temple, this is not big, angry Nehemiah.

Nehemiah is holding them to their word. This is the standard with which they will be judged. Why? What does it say in the word of God?

Be not quick to enter into an oath, and fail to fulfill that oath. I told you we would come back to it in just a moment. Look at what it says.

[33:47] It says in verse 29, We are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath. Do not take lightly commitments to the Lord God Almighty.

Where we say, Oh God, we're going to do this. And then fail to do it. For that is the standard of judgment.

God said it's better not to make an oath. For in claiming an oath, you're also taking upon yourself the curse. You say, Well, Pastor, we enter into an age of grace, and an age of mercy, and an age of forgiveness.

You're absolutely right. We are. But the same God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament as well, and God will not be mocked. The holiness of God is not diminished just because we go from Malachi to Matthew.

And the standard of God is not changed. God's faithfulness is maintained with his people, and his people stand up and say, God, we've seen your word. We've heard your word. We understand your word because it tells us those who enter are those who had knowledge and understanding.

[34:57] We know what you're calling us to do, and God, we're going to covenant with you that we will do it. And then they don't. This is another reminder, by the way, that the best intentions and the greatest efforts of man will never fulfill the standard of God.

I don't think these people were insincere when they made this covenant, or they wouldn't have signed their name. I don't think that they took it lightly, or they wouldn't have put their stamp of seal upon it. I think that they had great intentions, and yet it only took about 12 to 13 years for them to fall completely away.

Why? Because pretty soon, the wonder and the splendor became mundane. What was marvelous all of a sudden became normal.

And they started taking it for granted. And they started thinking lightly of it. And then the standard of judgment fell upon them, for they were not doing what God had called them to do.

Understand, friend, that it is Christ alone who fulfills the commandments, and it is Christ alone who fulfills the word. But when he calls us as his people and sets us apart, and we enter into that covenant through the blood of Jesus Christ, we dare not stand in boastful pride and say, well, I'm going to do all this and not keep our word.

[36:27] I read something, and I'll say this closely, or I heard it or something somewhere. R.C. Sproul, one of the great Christians of the past, said one time that very early on, he was a seminary teacher, seminary professor, and it was his duty to teach incoming freshmen, Old Testament theology, and teaching in that way.

And he had a group of freshmen in there, and he gathered these freshmen around and said, okay, I'm going to give you my syllabus. And he told them all, this is what you've got to do. These are the quizzes. These are the grades. And the papers will do on September.

There's one due in October, and there's one due in November. And he told them the dates they were doing. He said, if you do not bring that in, it's an F. If you don't bring it in that day, it's an F. He said, everybody understand that? Yes. I said, okay, there'll be no second chances.

It's due that day. If you don't bring it, it's an immediate F. It's okay. He said, the first date came. He said, all these people came in. They had all their papers. He said, there were about five of them, or maybe it's 10 of them that didn't have them. And they were standing in the back room.

He said, oh, they were crying. They were weeping and saying, oh, Professor Sproul, we didn't have them. you know, it's busy. We're freshmen. We hadn't really adapted. He said, okay, I'll give you three more days. He said, boy, they were relieved. And they brought them in.

[37:33] He said, the next time came, he said, what used to be an overwhelming majority had them. He said, now the majority have them, but there were more who didn't have them that second time. And I looked at him. I said, you don't have your papers.

They said, no. He said, you know, it's spring break and all our fall break and all this stuff is going on. And he said, they begged for mercy. I said, okay, I'll give you three more days. He said, man, they were loving me and they were rejoicing.

And I was the best professor ever. He said, the third paper came. He said, the overwhelming majority of the class didn't have them with them. And they walked in and they were all casual and confident.

And I asked him, I said, do you have your papers? He said, no. He said, okay, that's an F. He said, someone in the back said, that's not fair. He said, who said that? And he called them out.

He said, weren't you one of the ones at the beginning who didn't have your papers? He said, yes, sir, I was. He said, he said, I'll go back to the first one. I changed yours to an F. If we want to talk about fairness, he said, because the standard hasn't changed.

[38:34] But what happened is you took mercy lightly. And you took grace as expectation, which was once given as a grand display of grace and mercy you took for granted.

And now it means nothing to you. So it's an F. I believe they got their lesson in Old Testament theology really quick. But we have the same problem, right?

We think, oh, well, we can make promises and covenants all day long and fail to keep them. That's the standard with which we will be set. And we see that happening with the people of God here. And we see it as they restore themselves as a covenant people. We praise God for that. But we do not lose sight of the reality that they're going to fail, though God will stay true until Christ comes. And we see it in Nehemiah chapter 10. Thank you, brothers. Thank you, brothers. Thank you, Thank you,