

## A Covenant Renewal

Rosetta flinched for the last time and then excused herself from the outdoor table. Her coworkers loved to call themselves “not very religious,” and they repeatedly used Christ’s name in place of curse words. However, Rosetta reminded herself that she had done the same, at one time.

But since Rosetta had recommitted herself to Christ, she had been following Him more closely, and that had included stripping away some things—like taking the Lord’s name in vain. She had also let the Spirit show her what was needed—which included a regular, committed time in church and a heart with more grace and love.

“So, did we offend you back there?” asked Iris.

“Well, I don’t like it when the Lord’s name is used in vain,” said Rosetta.

“Hmph,” replied Iris. “I don’t think we were, but okay. I guess you won’t be at the office bowling get-together on Sunday?”

“No, sorry,” said Rosetta. “The time conflicts with my church group.”

“So, are you becoming super religious now?” Iris said sarcastically.

“Oh my, no. I hope not,” smiled Rosetta. “I have renewed my relationship with Christ, and it is the most important thing in my life.”

**1.** *What does it mean to you to be in “covenant” relationship with Christ?*

**2.** *Have you ever been in the place when you needed to restore your relationship with Christ? How can you best go about restoring a relationship with God?*

**3.** *What are the benefits of a life restored back to God?*

## All The people Commit to Obey God's Commands

*Nehemiah 10:28–33 KJV*

28 And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; 29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, 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 judgments and his statutes;

30 And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, not take their daughters for our sons:

31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

32 Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves

*Nehemiah 10:28–33 NIV*

<sup>28</sup> "The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—<sup>29</sup> all these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.

<sup>30</sup> "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.

<sup>31</sup> "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

<sup>32</sup> "We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the

yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; <sup>33</sup> For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

service of the house of our God: <sup>33</sup> for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God.

After gathering to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles and hear Ezra read the Law, the people fasted, confessed their sins, and met to make a “binding agreement” (9:38) to obey the Lord. The “rest of the people” refers to the residents of Judah who were not numbered among the leaders in 10:1–27. The people gathered to separate from all foreigners who would tempt them to disobey the law. The Jews promised to keep their sons and daughters from marriage with foreigners who do not worship God (v. 30).

The people also promised that they would not purchase food on the Sabbath (v. 31). They would return to the strict observance of Sabbath as God required. The Sabbath day reminded God’s people that God was their creator and that they were once slaves in Egypt, without any allowance for rest (Deut. 5:12–15).

God’s people also agreed to offer “a third of a shekel” for the house of God every year. Priests, who had no inheritance of land, relied on the contributions of others in order to serve God in the temple. Only through regular offerings could the temple continue to operate and give the proper sacrifices for sin.

**4.** *What promises do the Jews make in verses 28–33?*

**5.** *Why was it important for Jews to contribute to the temple?*

## All the People Commit to Care for the House of God

*Nehemiah 10:34–39 KJV*

34 And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law:

35 And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the Lord:

36 Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God:

37 And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. 38 And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with

*Nehemiah 10:34–39 NIV*

<sup>34</sup> “We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Law.

<sup>35</sup> “We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the Lord each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.

<sup>36</sup> “As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there.

<sup>37</sup> “Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. <sup>38</sup> A priest descended from Aaron is to

the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. <sup>39</sup> For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. <sup>39</sup> The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept.  
 “We will not neglect the house of our God.”

The Jewish people made four promises. First, they would supply the altar with wood for sacrifices (v. 34; see Lev. 6:12–13). Second, they promised to give the “firstfruits” of the harvest of crops and fruits (v. 35; see Lev. 23:9–14). The firstfruits supported the temple with food and were a reminder that God owned everything. Third, they promised to consecrate any firstborn livestock and firstborn male children to God’s service (v. 36). This reflected the time of the exodus, when God designated that every firstborn belonged to Him (see Ex. 13:2). Finally, the people promised to offer a tithe, meaning a tenth of their earnings, to stock the rest of the temple’s needs (v. 38). The temple’s operation depended on this financial support from all people. The section ends with an affirmative declaration from the residents of Judah: “We will not neglect the house of our God” (v. 39).

- 6.** *What were the promises expressed in verses 34–39?*
- 7.** *How did each promise care for the house of God?*
- 8.** *Why was it important to care for the house of God?*

## Restorative Obedience

As the sermon began, I settled into my seat to listen. As the pastor spoke, the message hit me: Obeying God is hard. I don't like to think about my sin, but obedience requires a level of internal recognition, requires me to recognize that I have selfish desires I need to overcome. It is easy to say that I love my spouse, but it's a lot harder to do the unselfish things, like be the one to stay up with our child, when all I want is sleep. It is easy to say that I love my neighbor, but it's hard to spend my day off helping him to move. "It's easy to go about life as if you are the center of the universe," said my pastor. As I processed those words, I found myself offering excuses. But as John says, "Let us not love with words . . . but with actions" (1 John 3:18). I don't think obedience has ever been easy.

Today's lesson displays God's restoration, the offer to return to God in specific ways. The people of Judah commit to enter marriages only within their community. They provide the priests with all the items essential for the reinstatement of sacrifices. And they seek their God through heartfelt offerings. Obedience is not a cage that confines their lives. Through obedience, the people of God find abundant life and a future hope, one that will only be fulfilled by a new covenant and the freedom it offers.

Obeying God can be hard! That's something I'm not proud to admit. When I am tired, all I can think about is how difficult it would be to serve my spouse. But obedience produces the fruit of life, and I can obey God because Jesus has set me free from the enslaving powers of sin. There is life and something good on the other side of restoration.

**9.** *What times do you find it hardest to obey God?*

**10.** *What kinds of freedoms can obedience and restoration bring?*

**11.** *What good things might God be able to do through our obedience?*

## Intentional Actions

We listen to God because He knows what is best for us. God knows what we need in order to be sustained in every season, whether in need or plenty.

► *Take a moment to consider whether you have been tempted to think that God is busy, disconnected, or unaware of your struggles. What untruth about God has threatened to keep you from faithful obedience to His ways?*

### KEY VERSE

We will not forsake the house of our God. —Nehemiah 10:39b KJV

“We will not neglect the house of our God.”

—Nehemiah 10:39b NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

#### Week of May 26 through June 1

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Proverbs 3:1–10—Honor God with Your First Fruits.

**Tues.** Hebrews 10:26–35—Struggles of Faith.

**Wed.** Hebrews 10:36–11:4—The Righteous Will Live by Faith.

**Thurs.** Acts 5:1–11—Half-hearted Giving.

**Fri.** Luke 20:45–21:4—Give Your All.

**Sat.** Revelation 6:9–17—The Martyrs’ Cry for Justice.

**Sun.** Genesis 4:1–15—Acceptable and Unacceptable Worship.