



## CHAPTER TEN

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# God is Worthy of Our Best



### *Something to Plant*

Honor the Lord with your wealth,  
with the firstfruits of all your crops.

—Proverbs 3:9

**Read: Nehemiah 10:1-34**

### **A Deeper Commitment**

This chapter flows right out of the final verse of chapter nine. The people had just finished pouring out their hearts in confession. They were aware of their sin, they owned it, and they turned back to God. But they didn't stop at repentance. They went a step further—they committed themselves to obey Him.

We're told that many people sealed the agreement, and that might leave us wondering, how could so many people physically seal a scroll? In those days, scrolls were often fastened with a wax or clay seal—pressed with a signet ring or a personal emblem—as a way to officially mark and secure a document. But the word seal could also mean to formally approve or endorse something—kind of like how we sign a legal agreement today. It was their way of saying, “I stand by this.”

So, while the leaders likely placed their physical seals on the written covenant, the others—men, women, and children old enough to understand—joined in by making a solemn promise before God. They didn't seal it in writing, but they committed themselves fully. Nehemiah 10:29 tells us that they "bound themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God."

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*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.*  
—Nehemiah 10:29

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That might sound intense—and it was. In the Old Testament, covenants weren't casual promises. They came with real weight. There were blessings attached to obedience and consequences tied to disobedience (just look at Deuteronomy 28). So, when the people said they were binding themselves with a curse and an oath, what they were really saying is, "*We're choosing to obey God's Word. And if we don't, we're willing to accept the fallout.*"

They accepted that if they broke God's law, they'd face the consequences. That was the reality under the Old Covenant. But let's be honest—just like them, we can't keep that law perfectly. Not then, not now.

This was a serious moment. A united people standing before God, fully aware of what they were agreeing to. They weren't just making a public statement—they were making a spiritual commitment.

But here's where the gospel breaks in.

Fast forward to the New Covenant—Jesus steps in. He does what none of us could ever do. He lives a sinless life. He fulfills the law perfectly. And then, He takes the curse that was meant for us and lays it on Himself. The apostle Paul says it plainly:

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*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by  
becoming a curse for us. —Galatians 3:13*

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Jesus took that curse off our shoulders. He bore it on the cross. He didn't lower the standard—He met it, in full. And then He paid the price we never could.

So, when we read Nehemiah 10, we see a people doing their best to walk in obedience. But even then, their best effort needed something more—grace. That grace came through Jesus. The One who became the curse so we could be free.

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*For the law was given through Moses;  
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.  
—John 1:17*

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That's the good news. That's the gospel tucked right into the story of Nehemiah.





Galatians 3:13 tells us that Jesus became a curse for us. In light of this chapter, what do you think that means?

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### Set Apart from the World

And there’s something else in this chapter we shouldn’t miss. In verse 28, it says:

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*All who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God...*

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That’s important. You may have noticed this isn’t the first time we’ve seen that phrase. In the previous chapter, we read:

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*Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors.*  
 —Nehemiah 9:2

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Now remember, these people had been in exile for decades—even generations. Many of them had grown up surrounded by foreign cultures

and pagan worship. For some, that was all they'd ever known. And yet here they were—choosing to walk away from it all.

This was more than just cultural separation. It was spiritual. They weren't pulling away to be prideful or exclusive. They were doing it for the sake of the Law of God. This was about the purity of their worship, about getting rid of the compromise that had crept in through generations of intermarriage and idol worship. They were choosing obedience. They were saying, "We want our lives to reflect God's truth."

They weren't just hearing God's Word—they were letting it reshape their lives. That kind of surrender is never easy, but it's what true repentance looks like. It wasn't about looking down on others. It was about turning fully to God, resisting temptation, and setting themselves apart to live in obedience.

This call to separation—to holiness—is echoed throughout the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians Paul reminds us that God still calls His people to be set apart.



Read 2 Corinthians 6:14 and fill in the blanks.

Do not be \_\_\_\_\_ with unbelievers. For what do \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with \_\_\_\_\_?

This doesn't mean we isolate ourselves or look down on anyone—it means we choose not to be influenced by sin or compromise our walk with God. We refuse to partner with anything that pulls us away from the Lord.

God's invitation is clear: "Be mine. Be holy. Be set apart so I can draw near to you."

And when we respond like the people in Nehemiah 10—with repentance, commitment, and obedience—we find ourselves in the very center of God's grace and blessing.



## Something to Ponder

Because Jesus became the curse for us, we are free to walk in obedience—not out of fear, but out of love. Every step of faith, every act of surrender, and every choice to live set apart is a declaration that we belong to Him.



According to John 8:31, what is the mark of a true disciple—and how does that relate to the people’s covenant in Nehemiah 10?

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The people in Nehemiah 10 didn't stop at confession—they made a covenant. Is there an area in your life where God is prompting you to move from conviction to commitment and live more intentionally for Him?

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**Read: Nehemiah 10:35-39**

**God is Worthy of Our Best**

Before we dig into this part of Nehemiah, let's rewind a bit. Actually, let's go all the way back to Genesis chapter four—back to Cain and Abel and the offerings they brought to God.

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*Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favor. —Genesis 4:2–5*

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Did you catch the difference? Cain brought *some* of the fruit from his field. Abel brought the *firstborn* of his flock—the best and the first. And that right there is the key difference. Not because one brought produce and the other brought meat, but because one brought what was convenient and the other brought what was costly.

Abel's offering was an act of faith. Giving the firstborn meant giving before he knew what else he'd have. It was like saying, "God, I trust that You'll take care of the rest."

Now imagine getting your very first paycheck and deciding to give it all to the Lord. That's the heart of Abel's offering. It's trust. It's surrender. It's putting God first.

Cain, on the other hand, brought *some*—not the first, not the best. Just... something. It wasn't that his offering was from the ground. It was that it didn't reflect a heart of worship or devotion. It was giving out of surplus, not sacrifice.

Fast-forward to Nehemiah 10:35–39. The people of Israel are doing what Abel did. They made a covenant to bring the firstfruits of their harvest and the firstborn of their herds to the temple. This wasn't just about following a law—it was a statement of faith. They were saying, "We will put God first and trust Him to provide."

And friend, this principle still speaks to us today. We may not be farmers or shepherds, but the call to give God our "first" is still part of living a life that honors Him.

It might look like starting the day with prayer and Scripture before you scroll your phone. Or giving the first portion of your income before spending on anything else. It could mean building your weekly schedule around worship instead of fitting it in when it's convenient.

There's even an old tradition that helps us picture this: some farmers used to tie a string or ribbon around the very first fruit that ripened in the field. That marked piece wasn't just produce—it was a declaration. This one belongs to the Lord.

We don't tie ribbons on apples anymore, but we can still set things apart. We can still live with hearts that say, "God, You come first."



Why was Abel’s offering better, and how does this challenge the way we give today—whether it’s our time, resources, or priorities?

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And here’s where it gets even better—this theme of firstfruits continues into the New Testament. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:20:

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*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

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Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection. His rising from the grave is the promise that we, too, will rise. Just like the first part of the harvest pointed to more to come, His resurrection guarantees the future for every believer. His victory is our hope.

So when we give God our first and our best, we’re not trying to *earn* His love—we’re responding to it. We’re saying, “Because You gave everything, I will give You my first and my best.”

Alongside their firstfruits, the people also committed to bring a tithe—a tenth of their produce—to support the Levites (Nehemiah 10:37). This wasn’t random or symbolic—it was practical, specific, and rooted in obedience.

The word tithe literally means a tenth. Both the Hebrew word ma'aser and the Greek word dekate point to this: ten percent or a tenth part. The first time we see it in Scripture is in Genesis 14:20, when Abram gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High. That happened long before the Law was given, showing that this wasn't just a legal obligation—it was an act of honor.

Later, under the Law of Moses, tithing became a formal part of Israel's worship. The tithe was used to support the Levites—the tribe called to serve in the temple and care for the spiritual life of the people. There were other tithes mentioned in the Law as well, but the heart behind all of them was the same: to provide for God's work and to keep the community aligned with His priorities.

Today, we don't live under that same system, but the principle still matters. The New Testament calls us to give—not out of pressure, but out of joy.

All of this—the firstfruits, the tithe, the promises they made—point to one simple truth: God is worthy of our best. Not what's leftover. Not what's convenient. Our best.



Read 2 Corinthians 8:7–12. What are three (or more) things Paul teaches the church about giving in this passage?

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EACH OF YOU  
SHOULD GIVE  
*what you have*  
*decided* IN YOUR HEART  
TO GIVE,  
NOT RELUCTANTLY OR  
OR UNDER COMPULSION,  
for GOD LOVES A  
*Cheerful*  
*giver.*

2 CORINTHIANS 9:7





# Answer Key

## CHAPTER TEN

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**Galatians 3:13** tells us that Jesus became a curse for us. In light of this chapter, what do you think that means?

It means that Jesus took the penalty we deserved for breaking God's law. He bore the curse of sin on our behalf so that we could be redeemed and brought back into right relationship with God.

**Read 2 Corinthians 6:14** and fill in the blanks:

Do not be **yoked together** with unbelievers. For what do **righteousness** and **wickedness** have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with **darkness**?

**According to John 8:31**, what is the mark of a true disciple—and how does that relate to the people's covenant in **Nehemiah 10**?

The mark of a true disciple is continuing in Jesus' Word. This relates to the covenant in Nehemiah 10 because the people committed themselves to live in obedience to God's Word and to walk in His ways faithfully.

**The people in Nehemiah 10 didn't stop at confession—they made a covenant. Is there an area in your life where God is prompting you to move from conviction to commitment and live more intentionally for Him?**

This answer will be different for everyone.

**Why was Abel's offering better, and how does this challenge the way we give today—whether it's our time, resources, or priorities?**

Abel brought the firstborn—the best he had—while Cain brought some of his produce, likely without sacrifice or priority. The difference was in the heart behind the offering. This challenges us to give God our best, not what's convenient or leftover.

**Read 2 Corinthians 8:7–12. What are three (or more) things Paul teaches the church about giving in this passage?**

- Giving is a grace to grow in (v.7).
- It's a reflection of genuine love (v.8).
- Jesus is our ultimate example of sacrificial generosity (v.9).
- Desire and follow-through both matter (vv.10–11).
- God accepts the gift based on willingness, not amount (v.12).

**Can you think of an area in your life where God might be calling you to trust Him more deeply by giving Him your “first” rather than what’s left over?**

This answer will be different for everyone.