

# OpenTheo

## July 31st: Nehemiah 10 & John 6:1-21

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Making the firm covenant. Feeding the five thousand.

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## Transcript

Nehemiah 10. On the seals are the names of Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hekeliah, Zedekiah, Sariah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pascha, Amariah, Malkijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malak, Harim, Merimoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnathon, Beruk, Meshulam, Abijah, Midyamin, Meaziah, Bilgai, Shemiah. These are the priests.

And the Levites, Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binuai of the sons of Henedad, Kadmiel and their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kalita, Peliah, Hanan, Micah, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zakkah, Sherubiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Benai, Benaynu. The chiefs of the people, Perosh, Pehathmoab, Elam, Zatu, Benai, Benai, Asgad, Bibai, Adonijah, Bigvi, Adin, Eter, Hezekiah, Azer, Hodiah, Hashem, Bizai, Hereth, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshulam, Hesiah, Meshazabel, Zadok, Jada, Pelatiah, Hanan, Aniah, Hosheh, Hananiah, Hashab, Halohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Reham, Hashabnah, Measiah, Ahaiah, Hanan, Anan, Malak,

Harim, Beanna. The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and His rules and His statutes.

We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons, and if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day, and we will forgo the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. We also take in ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God, for the Shobret, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. We, the priests, the Levites, and the people, have likewise cast lots for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, according to our Father's houses at times appointed, year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law.

We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our ground, and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord. Also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks, and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God, and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground. For it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labour.

And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi, shall bring the contribution of grain, wine and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, and the gatekeepers and the singers.

We will not neglect the house of our God. On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, the people had gathered together to confess their sins, and to make a firm covenant in writing before the Lord. After the long prayer of confession and petition to the Lord in chapter nine, in chapter ten we have the firm covenant itself, and the list of the people who were signatories to it.

Nehemiah and Zedekiah top the list. Nehemiah is the governor, and Zedekiah, who might be identified with Zadok the scribe in chapter thirteen verse thirteen, is another

official. A list of the priests who committed themselves to the document are found in verses two to eight.

There is considerable overlap between the names mentioned here and the names that we see in Nehemiah chapter twelve verses one to seven and twelve to twenty-two. James Jordan has used the close similarities between the names on the two lists to argue that the signing of the covenant occurred at a time when many of those who had returned with Zerubbabel, mentioned in chapter twelve, were still living. This very much goes against the conventional chronology for which the events here are dated some sixty years later.

Those that follow more conventional dating generally argue that the names that we have here are the names of ancestral houses, not of individuals. Zariah, for instance, was not a living individual. He was high priest when Judah was taken into exile.

His name represents those who are descended from him. The names that do not match with the names that we see in Nehemiah chapter twelve might be of persons contemporary with Nehemiah, who were leaders of their own households, but within larger houses that did not sign up to the covenant. The names of the Levites that follow in verses nine to thirteen seem to be of persons living at the time.

Most of the names mentioned here are also mentioned in chapters eight and nine as persons who assisted in the reading of the law and in the ceremony that had preceded the sealing of this document. Jeshua, Biniuai, Ubenai, and Kadmiel had headed the list of the Levites in chapter nine verses four and five, and just as they had led the group of the Levites there, they head the list of the Levites committed to the covenant document here. The forty-four names of the chiefs of the people that followed may also include ancestral names, in addition to the names of persons still living, and perhaps also the names of cities like Anathoth.

Once again, there are many similarities to be observed between this list and the list of the first returnees from Babylon in Ezra chapter two verses three to twenty. Many of the names mentioned here are also mentioned in the list of the builders of the wall in Nehemiah chapter three. Along with the two officials, the priests, the Levites, and the chiefs of the people, the rest of the people who do not seal the document themselves also bind themselves to the observance of the covenant with a curse and an oath, committing themselves to the law of Moses.

This renewal of the covenant goes hand in hand with their commitment to set themselves apart from the peoples of the lands that surround them. The rest of the chapter gives the stipulations of the covenant that they have bound themselves to. As in the book of Ezra, one of the chief concerns is to avoid intermarriage with pagan neighbors.

The compromising effect that such intermarriage could have was already manifest in the influence that Tabar the Ammonite had within the community on account of the intermarriage of his family with leading figures. The commitment here goes back to the covenant of Sinai itself. In Exodus chapter thirty-four verses twelve to sixteen, for instance, Take care lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst.

You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their asherim. For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous god. Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods, and make your sons whore after their gods.

The second commitment of the covenant is to keeping the Sabbath and the Sabbath year. It seems as though the people of the surrounding lands were bringing in goods and grain into the city to sell on the Sabbath day. They were encouraged to do so because the people were buying their wares.

The people now commit themselves not to engage in any such commerce on the Sabbath. Even if the peoples of the surrounding lands could not be effectively prohibited from engaging in such commerce, the refusal of any of the people to purchase anything on the Sabbath would be an effective discouragement. While Persian rulers such as Darius and Artaxerxes had provided for the building of the temple and for its sacrifices, giving in some cases longer term provision and in other cases large once-off gifts, the continued financial support for the service of the temple and its upkeep would have to be provided by the people themselves.

This support for the temple would be achieved through the payment of a yearly tax of a third of a shekel. In addition, they cast lots for the provision of wood for the offerings at appointed times of the year, and they also commit themselves to the consistent offering of the first fruits of their produce. As Exodus chapter 23 verse 19 commands, The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.

The first fruits were part of the means by which the Levites themselves were provided for. Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 1 to 4. The Levitical priests, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel. They shall eat the Lord's food offerings as their inheritance.

They shall have no inheritance among their brothers. The Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them, and this shall be the priest's due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep. They shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach, the first fruits of your grain, of your wine and of your oil, and the first fleece of your sheep you shall give him.

Similar things are said about the tithes in Numbers chapter 18 verses 20 to 24. And the Lord said to Aaron, You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.

To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting, so that the people of Israel do not come near the tent of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the people of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

For the tithe of the people of Israel, which they present as a contribution to the Lord, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel. If the people were faithful the Levites would be fairly well off.

However, as the Levites depended upon the people's commitment to the law for their provision, their material conditions might have been a significant indicator of the spiritual state of the nation. A question to consider. Of all the commandments of the law of Moses, why do you think the stipulations mentioned in this covenant document are so foregrounded? John chapter 6 verses 1 to 21.

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat? He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many? Jesus said, Have the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.

Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated, so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world. Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum.

It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened.

But he said to them, It is I. Do not be afraid. Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going. At the beginning of John chapter 6 we read of Jesus' fourth and fifth signs.

The first of these is the feeding of the five thousand, the second the walking upon the waters. The feeding of the five thousand is a story found in each of the four gospels. As such, it is one of a few that finds its way into each of the accounts.

Reading stories found in multiple gospels, especially one found in both the Synoptics and John, we should note the differences in the ways that they are told and situated within the larger frames of the gospels. The different framing of such stories can help us to see different facets of them. While they can usually be easily harmonised, sometimes there are ways in which certain details of the stories are thrown into sharper relief.

For instance, in John's account here, the story begins with a crossing of the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias. Jesus is followed by a large multitude, a crowd that have seen the signs that he has been doing. He goes out to a mountain and there he sits down with his disciples.

And all of this is around the time of the Passover, the Feast of the Jews. By this point, all of the alarm bells that alert us to typology should be ringing loudly in our heads. Around the time of the Passover, crossing over the sea, followed by a great multitude, going into the wilderness, going up a mountain, and then feeding people with bread.

This is the story of the Exodus. It's an Exodus pattern and it's all taking place at the time of the Passover. When seeking to provide for the crowd, Jesus first of all asks Philip where to buy bread.

This is the only one of the gospels that records Philip being asked this question. And it makes sense because Philip comes from the area of Bethsaida in which this miracle was performed. Such details can give us a greater sense of the historicity of the biblical text.

Philip of course cannot provide food, but he presents the scale of the problem. Even 200 denarii of bread would not be enough for each person to get a little. Jesus needs to feed such a great number of people with his disciples and there's no immediate source or

means by which they're to do so.

At this point, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, brings forward a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. One can imagine that this is done almost with some embarrassment. What use is one boy's packed lunch for such a multitude? Jesus instructs his disciples to get the people to sit down and it is observed at this point there is much grass in that place.

It's an interesting and strange detail to mention. I suggest that this is a detail that makes sense when we read further on in the gospel. It will help us to understand why this is mentioned here.

I think it's because Jesus talks about leading people out so that they might find good pasture as the good shepherd, that the much grass is mentioned here. Like Moses first led his flock to Mount Horeb where he met with the Lord in the burning bush and then led the flock of the people as the shepherd of Israel. So the Lord leads the people out as a shepherd into the wilderness and now he's going to provide them with the food that they need.

The men are instructed to sit down. There are about 5000 of them It's interesting that it's just the men that are counted. You'd think if you were feeding people you would count the men, the women and the children.

But yet it's just the men. The numbering of the men alone might be associated with the counting of a military. When Israel was being numbered in the wilderness they were numbered by the men of fighting age.

When Israel left Egypt they went out in ranks of 5 or 50 entering into the promised land in the same way. Counting the people in such a manner and dividing them into groups as we see in the other gospels is a sort of military arranging of the company. We see something similar in the story of chapter 18 of Exodus as Moses according to the advice of Jethro divides the people into various groups under the leadership of elders.

The feeding of the people with the manna is mentioned only a couple of chapters before this so perhaps there's a joining together of these two events within the account of the feeding of the 5000. Jesus feeding of the 5000 will also lead to a discourse concerning manna. The division of the people is also under the leadership of his disciples.

Jesus blessing and breaking the bread and distributing it to his disciples who distribute it to the multitude is a good picture of what will happen later on in the story of the church. In taking the loaves, giving thanks and distributing them to those who are seated what we can see is a playing out of the pattern of the Eucharist or the pattern of the supper. We do not have an institution of the Lord's Supper within John's Gospel but what we do have are a number of supper themes particularly within this chapter.

I've already mentioned the possibility of a panel structure for the seven signs of John's

Gospel with the first, second and third signs paralleled with the fourth, fifth and sixth signs. If the first sign is paralleled with the fourth sign then we have a parallel between the turning of the water into wine and the provision of bread at this point which would certainly be a suggested parallel. Jesus is providing both wine and bread.

Once everyone has eaten his fill Jesus instructs the disciples to gather up the leftover fragments. They gather them up and fill twelve baskets with the fragments from the five barley loaves. Interestingly each one of the Gospel accounts mention the fact that there are twelve baskets of fragments gathered up.

This is clearly an important part of the story and Jesus talks to his disciples about it afterwards. The number twelve in addition to being a number associated with Israel corresponds with the numbers of the disciples themselves. Each one of them has a basket corresponding with them.

Seeing this great sign the people proclaim him to be the prophet who has come into the world. Once again there are themes of the exodus. The prophet is the one like Moses.

Moses spoke for a prophet to come who would be like him and now here is a man doing all of these exodus type deeds. Recognising this figure like Moses the people want to make him into a king. Yet they fundamentally misunderstand the sort of mission that Jesus is undertaking.

Should he submit to them their agenda for his mission would be completely at odds with the mission given to him by his father. Yet of course there are ways in which Jesus' action is one of a king. Here for instance we might recall David on the run from King Saul coming to a Himelek, the priest at Nob and requesting food for him and his servants.

He gives a surprisingly specific number. Now then what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread or whatever is here. In this story Jesus the son of David is given five barley loaves which is what they have on hand.

Perhaps the people themselves recognise some echo of this story in the actions of Christ. Seeking to evade the crowd Jesus goes off alone to the mountain. The disciples however go into a deep depression.

Jesus had not yet come to them and the sea becomes rough and a strong wind is blowing. We might think about the wind over the water of the original deep or the wind in the crossing of the Red Sea. The disciples then see Jesus coming to them on the sea.

As he nears the boat they are frightened. Once again this is a sign. What might the sign be? In some respects we might see this as an anticipation of the resurrection.

In the other gospels we have some sort of anticipation in the way that Jesus sleeps in the boat during the storm. Outside there is an earthquake. All of these things are greatly



troubling the disciples.

And then Jesus rises up and brings peace and calm. That's the event of the resurrection presented in the symbol. Here I think we're seeing something similar but in a less clear form.

Jesus is the one who brings peace when they are in trouble in the boat. He's the one who presents himself. It is I. Be not afraid.

This statement it is I or I am is a statement of his divinity in part. And so they take him into the boat and immediately they're at the land to which they were going. I believe that this is a story that anticipates other events that will happen later on.

It's also a statement for the church. The church is in many respects like a boat that's gone out to sea. When we think about the disciples that Jesus calls in the New Testament the most prominent among them are fishermen.

In the Old Testament things are dominated by shepherds. In the New Testament it's dominated by fishermen. The church is a body that has gone out to the sea of the Gentiles.

And in the storms and the unsettled situation of that Gentile world God still is in control. We see this in the story of the shipwreck at the end of Acts for instance. Just as we see in the story of Jonah which is concerned about a mission to the Gentiles.

So in the New Testament there are stories of shipwrecks, storms at sea, struggles at sea. These are stories that have to do I believe with a Gentile mission. The church which is originally a part of the land has been set forth upon the sea.

And I think this is partly what the sign of this passage is supposed to represent. We can see in the feeding of the 5,000 a mosaic theme, a theme of ecstasy, things that might remind us of the Lord's relationship with Israel. Here however we see the Lord's power over the waters.

Perhaps this is representing the extension of the mission to Gentiles. A question to consider. If you were to ask one of the people in this chapter why they were thinking of making Jesus king by force, how do you think they would have answered you?