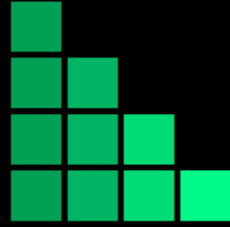


NEW LIFE ONE STUDIES



Series: “Nehemiah: Rise & Build”

Week 9 Study Guide

Message: “First Things First”

SCRIPTURE

Main Text:	Cross References:
<i>Nehemiah 9:38- Nehemiah 10</i>	<i>Deuteronomy 7:3–4 Deuteronomy 15:1–11 Leviticus 25:1–7 Leviticus 6:12–13 Deuteronomy 26:1–11 Luke 6:46 Matthew 6:31–33 1 Corinthians 12:7 Colossians 3:16</i>

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

*(This section focuses on understanding what the text means —
before jumping to what it means for us.)*

Read Nehemiah 9:38–10:29

Main Idea: Israel’s confession becomes a concrete commitment to reorder their lives around their covenant with God.

Commentary:

Chapter 10 cannot really be understood apart from chapter 9. Israel has just retold its history and recognized a painful pattern: *God remained faithful while His people repeatedly wandered*. Their response is not simply emotional regret. Nehemiah 9:38 says, “*In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement.*” Confession moves into commitment.

The long list of names at the beginning of chapter 10 is essentially the signature page of that agreement. Nehemiah, priests, Levites, and community leaders place their names on the document as representatives of the people. That detail matters: the leaders do not merely tell everyone else what needs to change. They publicly identify themselves with the responsibility to obey.

Verse 28 then widens the circle to the rest of the community—men, women, sons, and daughters “who are able to understand.” That phrase deliberately connects this moment with Nehemiah 8. There, the people heard and understood God’s Word. In chapter 9, that Word led them to confession. Now in chapter 10, understanding brings a commitment to obey what they understand about God’s commands.

They bind themselves with “a curse and an oath.” That sounds harsh to modern ears, but it reflects the seriousness of biblical covenant language. They are publicly acknowledging that belonging to God carries real obligations and consequences. They are not negotiating new terms with God; they are recommitting themselves to the covenant God had already given through Moses.

And verse 29 calls Him “the Lord our Lord.” That title gets to the heart of the chapter. God is not merely someone Israel believes exists. He is their covenant Lord—the One with rightful authority over their lives.

Think About It:

1. Why does chapter 10 begin with a written commitment immediately after the confession of chapter 9?
2. Why do you think Scripture preserves the long list of leaders who sealed the agreement instead of simply saying, “The leaders agreed”?
3. What is significant about the repeated phrase “able to understand” when compared with Nehemiah 8?
4. What does binding themselves by an oath reveal about how seriously Israel understood its covenant relationship with God?
5. How does calling God “the Lord our Lord” help explain everything that follows in the chapter?
6. Looking across chapters 8–10, what progression do you see from hearing God’s Word to understanding it, responding to it, and obeying it?

Takeaway:

Repentance becomes visible when confession begins changing the way we live.

Read Nehemiah 10:30

Main Idea: Putting God first required Israel to protect its covenant loyalty even in its closest relationships.

Commentary:

The first specific promise concerns marriage: “We promise not to give

our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.”

It is important to understand what this command was—and what it was not. The Old Testament concern was not simply ethnicity. Foreigners such as Ruth could join themselves to Israel and worship Israel’s God. The issue was **allegiance**.

Deuteronomy 7:3-4 specifically warned Israel about marriages with people devoted to other gods because “they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods.”

Israel’s history had demonstrated exactly that danger. Relationships with people devoted to surrounding gods repeatedly became pathways through which idolatry entered the community. The issue was not, “They are different from us.” It was, “Will this relationship pull our covenant loyalty away from the LORD?”

That makes this first promise especially revealing. Israel does not begin with an abstract statement about putting God first. They begin identifying the places where compromise had repeatedly entered their lives and saying: *We are not going back there*. Their commitment to God has implications for the most personal decisions they will make.

Think About It:

1. According to Deuteronomy 7:3–4, what was the central danger God identified in marriages with the surrounding peoples?
2. Why is it important to distinguish the biblical concern about idolatry and covenant loyalty from a prohibition based simply on ethnicity?
3. Why might relationships be one of the first areas Israel addresses after recommitting itself to God?

4. What does this promise reveal about Israel's understanding of how deeply relationships can shape worship, values, and allegiance?
5. Why would genuine repentance require them to recognize not only past sin, but patterns that repeatedly led them back toward that sin?
6. What does this verse teach about the difference between saying "God is first" and allowing God to have authority over deeply personal decisions?

Takeaway:

Putting God first means refusing to enter into the things that pull our hearts away from Him.

Read Nehemiah 10:31

Main Idea: Israel's obedience reaches into its economy, calendar, and security—places where trusting God could become costly.

Commentary:

Verse 31 brings several Old Testament commands together: **Sabbath observance, the seventh-year rest, and the release of debts.**

The Sabbath was more than simply taking a day off. It was woven into Israel's covenant identity. Every seventh day, Israel stopped producing and acknowledged that life did not ultimately depend upon endless work. When surrounding merchants arrived ready to sell, obedience required Israel to say, in effect: business does not get the final word over the day God has set apart.

The same rhythm expanded into the seventh year. Israel's Law required the land to receive rest (*sabbatical year*), while Deuteronomy 15 commanded the release of debts among Israelites. These laws

limited the endless accumulation of wealth and prevented vulnerable people from remaining permanently crushed under debt.

All of these commands required trust. Stopping work could mean lost income. Letting land rest could feel economically risky. Releasing debt could mean surrendering money legally owed to you. That is why this part of the covenant is so revealing. Israel's allegiance to God is being tested not merely in worship songs or prayers, but in what they do when obedience appears economically disadvantageous.

The Sabbath principle repeatedly reminds Israel: *you are not ultimately sustained by your ability to keep producing. You are sustained by God.*

Think About It:

1. What common theme connects Sabbath observance, the seventh-year rest, and the release of debts?
2. Why would refusing to buy and sell on the Sabbath require trust, especially when merchants were ready to do business?
3. What did the seventh-year practices teach Israel about ownership, productivity, and dependence upon God?
4. How did debt release protect the vulnerable and prevent Israel's economy from becoming completely dominated by those with greater resources?
5. Why do you think obedience to God reaches into areas as practical as business transactions, land use, and debt?
6. What does this passage reveal about the relationship between obedience and trust?

Takeaway:

Trust becomes visible when we choose God's way even when His way feels less secure.

Read Nehemiah 10:32–34

Main Idea: The worshiping life of God's community becomes a shared responsibility rather than something maintained by a few religious leaders.

Commentary:

The covenant now turns toward the practical needs of Israel's shared worship. The people commit to an annual contribution for the temple ministry: bread, sacrifices, offerings, festivals, and the ongoing work connected with Israel's worship. This is especially important in the post-exilic period. Jerusalem has been devastated, the community is rebuilding, and there is no wealthy Davidic monarchy funding the temple system. The people themselves accept responsibility for sustaining the worship God has commanded.

Interestingly, Nehemiah records a contribution of one-third of a shekel, while Exodus 30 mentions a half-shekel sanctuary contribution. The text does not explain the difference. It may reflect the economic circumstances or currency standards of the Persian period. The important point here is not the exact amount but the community's statement: "We assume the responsibility."

Then comes one of the most ordinary-sounding commitments in the whole chapter: firewood. The Law required the altar fire to remain burning, which meant sacrifices required a continual supply of wood. So the community develops a practical schedule. Families cast lots to determine who will bring wood and when. It is almost intentionally unglamorous.

But that is part of the point. A worshiping community is sustained not only through dramatic spiritual moments but through ordinary people faithfully contributing what is needed. Someone has to bring the wood. The priests have responsibilities. The Levites have responsibilities. And the people have responsibilities. *Worship is something the whole covenant community participates in sustaining.*

Think About It:

1. Why do you think the people phrase their commitment as “*We assume the responsibility*”?
2. What does this section reveal about the practical resources required for Israel’s communal worship?
3. Why would shared responsibility for worship be especially important in a community rebuilding after exile?
4. What is significant about families being assigned something as ordinary as supplying firewood?
5. What does the wood offering teach about the relationship between seemingly ordinary acts of service and the larger worshiping life of God’s people?
6. How does this passage challenge the idea that worship is primarily something religious leaders provide while everyone else receives?

Takeaway:

Shared worship requires shared responsibility.

Read Nehemiah 10:35–39

Main Idea: Israel commits to giving God the first and best rather than whatever remains after everything else has been taken care of.

Commentary:

The repeated word throughout these verses is first: firstfruits, firstborn, the first portion of grain, fruit, wine, and oil. The principle of firstfruits ran deeply through Israel's worship. The first portion of the harvest was brought to God before the entire harvest had been gathered. That made firstfruits both thanksgiving and trust. It looked backward: *"What I have come from God."* And it looked forward: *"What I will need next is still in God's hands."*

Deuteronomy 26:1–11 even connected the firstfruits offering to Israel's salvation story. An Israelite brought produce and retold the story of God rescuing His people from Egypt and giving them the land. Giving was not merely financing ministry—it was a confession that everything they possessed was ultimately received from God.

The mention of the firstborn sons does not mean children were sacrificed. Israel's Law explicitly required firstborn sons to be presented to God, and ceremonially set apart as one of the people of God. The language emphasizes that even Israel's families and future belonged first to God.

Tithes and offerings also supported the Levites and priests whose ministry allowed Israel's worship life to continue. Their generosity therefore had both a vertical dimension—honoring God—and a communal dimension—making possible the worship and ministry of God's people.

Then the entire covenant commitment lands on one final sentence: *"We will not neglect the house of our God."* That statement summarizes much of the chapter. Israel's history had been marked by forgetting God, wandering from Him, and allowing His worship to move toward the margins. Now they commit to making Him central again.

There is an important distinction for Christians: Israel's temple should not simply be equated with a modern church building. In the New Testament, the temple theme ultimately finds its fulfillment in Christ and in God's Spirit dwelling in and among His people.

But the underlying challenge remains powerful: *Will God receive the first and best of His people—or simply what remains after everything else has been prioritized?*

Think About It:

1. What is the theological significance of giving firstfruits rather than waiting until the entire harvest has been gathered?
2. How does giving something first express both gratitude and trust?
3. See: *Deuteronomy 26:1–11*. How was the firstfruits offering connected to remembering Israel's larger story of rescue and provision?
4. How did these offerings support not only individual worship but the worshiping life of the entire community?
5. Why is "We will not neglect the house of our God" a fitting summary statement for the commitments made throughout this chapter?
6. Compare that statement with chapter 9's repeated description of God refusing to forsake His people. What response might the author want us to see?
7. Across chapter 10, where do you see evidence that putting God first affects far more than specifically "religious" activities?

Takeaway:

God does not receive the leftovers of a surrendered life

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Nehemiah 10 makes it difficult to keep “God comes first” as a vague spiritual slogan.

Israel’s commitment becomes visible in:

- Their relationships.
- Their calendar.
- Their work.
- Their money.
- Their possessions.
- Their worship.
- Their shared responsibility.
- Their future.

They do not simply add God to an already organized life. They begin reorganizing life around Him. That brings us to three questions from the message:

1. WHO GETS THE FINAL SAY?

If Jesus is Lord, His Word has authority to disagree with us. It can correct us. Challenge our priorities. Change our plans. Tell us no.

The question isn't simply: *“Do I believe the Bible?”*

It is: *“When God's Word disagrees with me, who wins?”*

2. WHAT AM I TRUSTING IN?

Israel's Sabbath commitments forced them to stop producing and trust God. We face the same heart-level question in different ways:

Can I obey God when obedience feels costly?

Can I live generously when fear tells me to hold tighter?

Can I rest when anxiety tells me everything depends on me?

Can I do things God's way even when His way feels less secure?

Jesus says:

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.” and “Your Heavenly Father knows what you need.”

Putting God first means obeying Him—and trusting Him with what happens next.

3. WHAT AM I BRINGING TO THE FIRE?

Israel's families literally brought wood so the altar fire could continue burning. We are not bringing wood to a temple altar today, but the image gives us a powerful question:

What has God placed in me that can strengthen the worshiping life of His people? Maybe it's:

- A spiritual gift.
- Time.
- Generosity.
- Service.
- Encouragement.
- Prayer.
- Your faith.
- Your praise.

God has given His people gifts “for the common good.” Don't leave everything He has given you packed away.

Reflection Questions:

1. If someone looked only at your calendar, spending, relationships, and priorities, what would they assume comes first in your life?
2. Where is God's Word currently challenging something you would rather keep doing your own way?

3. What decision have you already made that you may actually need to place back under Jesus' authority?
 4. Where are you most tempted to believe that your security depends entirely upon your own planning, productivity, money, or control?
 5. What would trusting God enough to obey Him look like in that area?
 6. Does God generally receive the first and best of your time, resources, attention, and energy—or whatever remains?
 7. What has God placed in you that could strengthen someone else's faith but has mostly remained unused?
 8. Which question do you most need to wrestle with right now: Who gets the final say? What am I trusting in? What am I bringing to the fire?
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LIVING IT OUT

Putting God first cannot simply be something we say. It becomes an order for our lives.

1. COME UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD.

Identify one area where you've mostly asked: *"What do I want?"*

Instead ask: *"What has God said?"*

Let Scripture—not preference—have the final word.

2. IDENTIFY WHERE FEAR IS DRIVING YOU.

Ask: *"What am I afraid will happen if I fully obey God here?"* Name the fear honestly. Then pray:

"God, I will do this Your way and trust You with what happens next."

3. GIVE GOD SOMETHING FIRST.

Don't wait to see what's left. Give Him intentional priority in one concrete area this week: Your time. Your finances. Your attention. Your energy. Your worship. Practice firstfruits, not leftovers.

4. BRING SOMETHING TO THE FIRE.

Ask: “What has God given me that could strengthen His people?” Then use it. Bring your gift. Bring your encouragement. Bring your generosity. Bring your testimony. Bring your praise. Bring your faith.

Don't only ask what you can receive from the Body. Ask what God has entrusted to you for the good of the Body.

For LifeGroups

ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER

Share —

- Which area of their covenant commitment—relationships, Sabbath, finances, worship, firstfruits—challenged you most?
- Where is it hardest for you to allow God's Word to have the final say?
- Where are you currently being asked to trust God with an outcome you cannot control?
- What does giving God your first and best look like in your present season?
- What “firewood” has God put in you that could strengthen the faith of others?

Pray Together —

Pray that God would:

- Move you beyond conviction into genuine obedience.
- Give His Word authority over every part of your life.
- Reveal places where your priorities have become disordered.
- Give you courage to obey when obedience costs something.
- Free you from fear-driven striving and self-reliance.
- Teach you to trust Him with tomorrow.
- Grow generosity and open-handed worship in you.
- Help you offer Him your first and best rather than your leftovers.
- Reveal gifts, stories, faith, and resources He has given you for others.
- Make your church a community where everyone contributes to a life of wholehearted worship.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Don't only say: *"God comes first."* Ask whether your life actually shows it.

WHO GETS THE FINAL SAY?

WHAT AM I TRUSTING IN?

WHAT AM I BRINGING TO THE FIRE?

***"Jesus, You are worthy. You get the first. You get the best.
Everything I am and everything I have is Yours."***