

Nehemiah: Rebuild and Renew

Lesson 7: Confession and Commitment

Key Verse: *"They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors" (Nehemiah 9:2).*

Confession of Sins and the Renewal of the Covenant (9:1-10:39)

- The Feast of Tabernacles concluded on the 22nd day of the month. The people reassembled on the 24th to confess their sins (vv1-4)
 - o Confession involved outward expressions of sorrow (fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads).
 - o Action associated with correcting their offending behavior (they separated themselves from foreigners).
 - o Reading from God's word for three hours.
 - o Public confession of sin and worship of the Lord for another three hours.
- Their public worship included a recommitment to the covenant with God. This service followed a normal form used in the ancient Near East for covenant making.
 - o Preamble of praise (9:5b-6): God is the only God, the maker of heaven and earth.
 - o Historical prologue (9:7-37)
 - Recounts God's call and promise to Abraham (vv 7-8)
 - Recounts God's deliverance of his people from Egypt (vv 9-21).
 - Highlights God's rescue, his provision, and his guidance both through the wilderness (cloud by day/pillar of fire by night) and life (The Law).
 - Notes the rebellion of the Hebrew children in the wilderness and God's patience (v 17 echoing Exodus 34:6).
 - Expounds upon God's continued provision and faithfulness despite the Hebrew children's lack of faithfulness.
 - Recounts God giving the Promised Land to his people (vv 22-25).
 - The emphasis is upon God's action, not the people's.
 - Notes that in the Promised Land, God's people were well-fed and reveled in God's goodness (v 25).
 - Recounts that even in the Promised Land, the people rebelled, and God allowed them to be handed over to their enemies (vv 26-31).
 - The priests recount the cycle of the people's sin, God turning them over to their enemies, the people crying out for help, God's compassion and rescue.
 - Despite the people's repeated failures, God "did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God" (v 31).

- The Levites then join the cycle by once again calling out to God for help in an hour of need trusting that God will show mercy once again (vv 32-37).
- Acceptance of the covenant (9:38-10:29)
 - The civil leaders, religious leaders, and many of the people put their seals to a written agreement that they would obey the Mosaic Law (vv 9:38-10:17).
 - The rest of the people bound themselves with an oath to the same agreement (v 10:29).
- Public reading of the stipulations of the covenant (10:30-39).
 - Avoidance of intermarriages (v 30; See Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4).
 - Keeping the Sabbath and Sabbatical year (v 31; See Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 25:2-7; Deuteronomy 15:1-3).
 - Supporting the Temple by giving an annual third of a shekel and other prescribed offerings (vv 32-33).
 - The priests promised to contribute wood for the altar fires (v 34; see Leviticus 6:12-13).
 - The giving of the firstfruits and tithes of their crops, children, and property (v 35-37-39; see Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 26:1-3; Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 28:26).
 - Note that the Levites were to tithe on the tithe to help provide for the priest's needs (v 39).
 - The final statement is a summary of the agreement, "We will not neglect the house of our God." The Temple serves as a rallying point for the people to place a higher priority on spiritual things.

The New Residents of Jerusalem (11:1-36).

- With the walls complete, the challenge of populating the city arose.
 - The leaders of Judah committed to living in the city.
 - The rest of the people essentially gave a tithe of themselves to the city, with 1/10 of the population called upon to take up residence in Jerusalem.
 - People were chosen by lot, or they volunteered.
- Nehemiah then provides a census of those who took up residence in the city.
- Nehemiah also notes those who remained outside of the city in the surrounding villages and towns (vv 25-36).

Sources

- Derek Kinder, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1979).
- Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022).
- Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1992).