

EZRA-NEHEMIAH, part 17 **Reformation Days, part 4 (Nehemiah 10)**

by Dr. Ralph Davis

III. The Structure for Reformation – Nehemiah 9 [Covenant]

In English we should begin with Nehemiah 9:38 (which is Neh. 10:1 in Hebrew). Here, one can say, is the response to the prayer of chapter 9, or, perhaps better, the consequence of the prayer. In light of the ongoing history of apostasy and infidelity, what can Judah do but repent? But *how* do you repent? Covenant is the vehicle of repentance. They are going to “cut an *‘amanah*,” lit., a firmness, i.e. a firm agreement or covenant.

A. The definiteness of the covenant: names (Neh. 10:1-27)

These names include both the leadership and the laity. Nehemiah and Zedekiah seem to be by themselves, then the priests, listed mostly according to family names (vv. 2-8), followed by the Levites listed as individuals rather than families (vv. 9-13), and then the leaders (vv. 14-27; vv. 14-19a follow Ezra 2; these are mostly lay families).

B. The heart of the covenant: separation, (Neh. 10:28)

Here is a *negative* separation: “from the peoples of the lands.”

Here is a *positive* separation: “to the torah of God.”

Here is a *social* separation: “their wives, their sons, their daughters.”

A proper *sanctification* stands at the heart of how the people of God are to live in this world.

C. The seriousness of the covenant: oath (Neh. 10:29)

Cf. Jeremiah 34. They are entering under a curse, calling down judgment on themselves if they do not keep their oath.

D. The specifics of the covenant: worship (primarily) (Neh. 10:30-39)

Covenant renewal cannot thrive on generalities and vague resolutions. Note how precise and particular these promises are:

1. Marriage (v. 30).
2. Sabbath (v. 31).
3. Funds for worship maintenance (vv. 32-33) (see Exod. 30:11-16). The one-third shekel (v. 32) may be due to a different monetary system in the Persian period.¹
4. Firewood (v. 34). Here’s a detail that could easily drop through the cracks.
5. Offerings (vv. 35-39).

¹ Fensham, NICOT.

These provisions deal with the maintenance of the temple worship itself, particularly the temple staff: firstfruits, first born, and crops. The major concern is mentioned in 39b: "We will not neglect [lit., forsake] the house of our God."

Because some of these items in this covenant do not grab our attention, we are prone to dismiss them. But the matters in this covenant are still live issues for Christians: marriage, Sabbath (largely ignored, though it is), and giving. But don't look on this covenant as legalism, as merely a document that has an eye for picky detail. Rather, what we have in Nehemiah 10 are "fruits that show repentance" (Luke 3:8 — note how these "fruits" are fleshed out in Luke 3:10-14 in generosity, honesty, and contentment). This indicates that here is a brokenness of heart that is not content simply to moan and groan, but uses paper and ink and to itemize how it will repent.

The question, however, arises: Are our covenants enough?