

The Return of the Exiles



The Jerusalem Bible School

Making Clear the Meaning

Once that the walls and gates around the city were fully repaired, the city needed to be repopulated and the process was to start with spiritual priorities.

The Jerusalem Bible School

1. The Jews from all over Israel gathered in Jerusalem to hear the Book of the Law read and taught.
2. After understanding God's ways more clearly, the nation prayerfully confess their sins.
3. The people make a written agreement pledging their obedience and commitment to Yahweh.
4. The wall is joyfully dedicated with songs of thanksgiving and sacrificial offerings.
5. Sadly, the reforms did not last.

Making Clear the Meaning

Nehemiah 8:1-3

All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

2 So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly ... 3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon... And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

- Gathered as one in the city by the Water Gate.
- Told Ezra, the descendant of Aaron, to bring out the Book of the Law (v1).
- Prepared specially constructed platform so Ezra could be seen and heard by all the people (v. 4-5).
- Had the Levites teach and explain what was being read so the people could understand (v. 8).

Making Clear the Meaning

Nehemiah 8:4-9

4Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. 6Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” ... 7The Levites— instructed the people in the Law ... 8They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. 9Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

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Prayerful Confession

Nehemiah 9:1-3

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. 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. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God.



A Written Covenant

Nehemiah 9:38

In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.



A Written Covenant

Nehemiah 10:1-39

1. Will not marry idolatrous people (v30).
2. Will keep the Sabbath (v31).
3. Will make financial contributions for the service of the Temple (v32).
4. Levites promise to provide wood for the offerings (v34).
5. Will bring first fruits and pay tithes to the Levites (v35-37).
6. Will not forsake the House of God (v39).



A Joyful Dedication

Nehemiah 12:27

"At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem **to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving** and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres."

Psalm 147

1 Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

13 He strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.

19 He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the Lord.

Dedication of the Wall

Nehemiah 12:31-43

I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks.

One was to proceed on top off the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate...
36 Ezra the teacher of the Law led the procession.

38 **The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction.** I (Nehemiah) followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people—past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanahh Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped.

40 **The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God** ... 43 And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. **The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.**

Nehemiah Returns to Babylon

- When Nehemiah first asked Artaxerxes for permission to return to Jerusalem, he was granted a temporary leave of absence, not a permanent one (cp. Nehemiah 2:5-6).
- As agreed, Nehemiah returns to Babylon, but once he leaves Jerusalem, the people falter and fall into sin. Incredibly, Tobiah -- one of their arch enemies from chapter 4:3 -- is given a room in the Temple for his personal business.

Nehemiah 2:5-6

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it." Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

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Nehemiah 13:4-6

Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.

But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king.

Written Covenant

Nehemiah 10:1-39

1. Won't marry idolatrous people 10:30
2. Will keep the Sabbath 10:31
3. Will make financial contributions for the service of the Temple 10:32
4. Levites promise to provide wood for the offerings 10:34
5. Will bring first fruits and pay tithes to the Levites 10:35-37
6. Will not forsake the House of God 10:39



~~Written Covenant~~

BROKEN COVENANT

Nehemiah 10:1-39

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2. Will keep the Sabbath 10:31
3. Will make financial contributions for the service of the Temple 10:32
4. Levites promise to provide wood for the offerings 10:34
5. Will bring first fruits and pay tithes to the Levites 10:35-37
6. Will not forsake the House of God 10:39

- Married idolaters 13:23,28
- Broke the Sabbath 13:15-16
- Did not contribute to service of the Temple 13:11
- Levites did not provide wood for the offerings 13:31
- Did not pay tithes to the Levites 13:10
- Neglected the House of God 13:11



The Sad End to Nehemiah

Nehemiah 13

Despite their best intentions and joyful celebration, the book ends with the painful description of the people's failure to keep their promises to God.

1. Married idolaters v.23,28
2. Failed to keep the Sabbath v.15-16
3. Did not contribute to service v11
4. Levites did not provide wood v31
5. Did not pay tithes v10
6. Neglected the House of God v11



But not the End of the Story!

Struggle with Sin Continued

- During the 400 years between the Testaments, Jewish leaders attempted to solve the problem of sin by putting "fences" around the Law in an attempt to develop a system of rules and interpretations that would keep people as far from sin as possible.
- When the New Testament began, Legalism and Phariseeism hadn't reduced the instances of sin; they made matters worse.

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Romans 3:23

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

But not the End of the Story!

- Sadly, when we examine our lives, we find that sin is right there with us too.
- Undoubtedly, we like the Jews of Ezra and Nehemiah's time, will fall short of the mark.



Who Will Rescue Me?

Romans 7:18-25

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Problem of Sin, Solved!

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.