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**C1338 – November 13, 2013 – Nehemiah 10:28-12:26**

**The Spiritual Restoration**

We are studying the book of Nehemiah and so if you will turn with me to chapter 9 we'll pick up with our exposition. To remind you of the historical background, the southern kingdom had been militarily defeated by Babylon and taken into exile 140 years before, 586BC. The Persian's defeated the Babylonians fifty years later in 539BC. King Cyrus permitted the first return of the Jews to the land with Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple. The Jews completed the project in 515BC under King Darius. King Artaxerxes permitted the second return of the Jews in 458BC with Ezra to reform the people and adorn and correct the Temple worship. King Artaxerxes also permitted the third return of the Jews in 444BC with Nehemiah who led the people to restore the walls of Jerusalem. When the people came up to the newly restored city for the Feast of Trumpets they had a desire to learn the Mosaic Law. As such Ezra read to them extensively. As they came to understand the original sense they were convicted of their sins and began to confess their sins and the sins of their fathers. They had consistently failed to meet the obligations of the Mosaic Law that God had given them at Mt Sinai. The leaders saw it fitting at this time to renew the original covenant and dedicate themselves to follow it. A fresh rededication would set the nation on a good course.

In order to renew a covenant in the ancient world they would follow the basic structure of ANE treaties between a greater King and lesser servant. Essentially the Mosaic Law is a treaty between God as the great King and Israel His servant. God had first done for them by delivering them from Egypt and in return He revealed His law at Mt Sinai asking them to obey Him. If they did obey Him they would be blessed; if they disobeyed Him they would be cursed. The people accepted the covenant. The Book of Deuteronomy follows this basic ANE treaty structure. As such the renewal of

the covenant here follows the same structure. First, the preamble or introductory words which give praise to the great King for his work on their behalf (9:5). Second, the historical prologue which cites the great King's works on behalf of the people giving the adequate reason to obey (9:6-38). Third, the acceptance of the covenant by the people when the leadership drew up and signed the covenant (9:38-10:27). Fourth, the actual stipulations the people were agreeing to follow and that's where we come to tonight (10:28-39). So those are the divisions and it helps to draw lines sectioning these divisions off in your Bible so when you read back through this ten years from now you remember that this is the treaty structure and it's the exact same structure in the Book of Deuteronomy. It's the principle that God rules His people Israel by covenant.

Now we saw in 9:5 last week the Preamble or introductory words praising God for his work on their behalf. "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! O may Your glorious name be blessed And exalted above all blessing and praise! Then in 9:6ff you see the Historical Prologue starting with the creation in verse 6, the Call of Abraham in vv 7-8, the Exodus in vv 9-12, Mt Sinai in vv 13-15, the Wilderness Wanderings in vv 16-22, the Conquest and Settlement of the land in vv 23-25, the Judges, Kings and Kingdoms in Decline in vv 26-30a, the Exile in v 30b, the Partial Restoration in v 31 and finally the request based on past deliverances for a future deliverance in vv 32-37. In 9:38-10:27 we see the Acceptance of the Covenant and we won't read through all the names in 10:1-27, only to point out that in verse 1 Nehemiah is the first person to sign the covenant. As the governor of the province he shows leadership by leading the way and signing his name first. "The names in verses 2–8 are those of the heads of 21 priestly families (cf. 12:12–21). Verses 9–13 record the names of 17 Levites. Then the writer gave the names of 44 heads of other leading families (vv. 14–27)."<sup>i</sup> All these were leaders in the land and they lead the way by accepting the covenant first. We won't go through all their names, just know this document is the Acceptance of the Covenant. They are rededicating themselves to the covenant.

If you come down to 10:28 we'll pick up with the stipulations. Here we're going to find that the people took an oath to obey the Law. **Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from**

**the peoples of the lands to the law of God**, the separation refers back to 9:2 where the people separated from gathering in formal assemblies with foreigners. Also **their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding**, I find it very interesting that those here are those who had knowledge and understanding. A month before they did not have knowledge and understanding but now that they have knowledge and understanding they are in a position to act. You have to have knowledge and understanding in order to be able to act responsibly. Otherwise you are getting into something you don't know about and before you know it you're in over your head. So they are acting on knowledge and understanding **and** in verse 29, **joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes**; So we have the law. It was given at Mt Sinai. And the law is **God's law**, that is, God is ultimately the author or source of the law and that's what we mean by the doctrine of revelation that we always connect with Mt Sinai. God spoke from outside of the creation into the creation at a specific location in the Sinai Peninsula in the hearing of several million Jews. At least initially all the people heard His voice but they were afraid so they requested that Moses go get the law and come back and tell them what God said. So that's what happened and that's why it says it **was given through Moses**, that is, Moses is the human author or channel through which the law came and that's what we mean by the doctrine of inspiration that we also connect with Mt Sinai. God spoke through human beings in order to create His word in history. And now that they have knowledge and understanding of God's law given through Moses they are now taking **a curse and oath to walk** in it. A **curse and oath** is probably a hendiadys, a figure of speech where two words signify one complex idea, that is, an oath involving a curse. They were taking an oath to keep God's law even though involved in that law was a series of curses listed in Lev 26 and Deut 28 for disobedience. You've seen them before, the five degrees of divine discipline. When they disobeyed God would discipline in order that they would repent but if they didn't repent then He would ratchet up the discipline and if that didn't stimulate repentance then He would ratchet it up again. There were five degrees of discipline. What they're joining together to do here is so serious because they are admitting that they are fully aware of what they are getting into and they understand the consequences for not keeping

and observing **all the commandments of YHWH Adonai!** That would include their entire constitution as laid out in the Book of Deuteronomy.

In verse 30 they get more specific about certain commandments they will follow and evidently these really pricked their conscience as they heard and understood constitutional law. **And that we will not give our daughters to the people of the land or take their daughters for our sons.** That's the prohibition of intermarriage with foreigners and we already know that was a problem because we saw that 14 years before when Ezra returned and it came to his attention that all the Jewish boys had married all the beautiful Gentile girls. Satan is slick, he's been observing the human race for thousands of years and he knows all our weak points so he just zeroes in on these areas of weakness and boom, we fall. That's what he's doing here, he got little Jewish girls interested in Gentile boys and vice versa and the whole goal of this plan is to destroy the nation's identity so that when the Messiah came his genealogical credentials couldn't be verified. So right here they are taking an oath with a curse to not give their children in marriage to foreigners.

Verse 31, **As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.** Three things here that were apparently going on at the time. First, they will forego **buying and selling on the Sabbath.** God's law forbade them from this activity on the Sabbath because God rested from His work of creation on the Sabbath. The foreigners didn't have any Sabbath law; it was just another business day for them so they'd bring their **wares and grain on the Sabbath to sell** to the Jews. The Jews thought they could get ahead by having another business day but Jews who kept this law historically had more successful business than those who didn't. So here they're taking an oath with a curse to stop buying and selling on the Sabbath. Second, they will forego **planting every seventh year.** God's law forbade them from planting every seventh year. They were supposed to allow their fields a year of rest. This was to allow the nutrient depleted soil to replenish every seventh year. They would have to trust God that He would provide in an abundance every other year so they would have plenty of grain the seventh year. They had not been keeping this law so from here on they agree that they will. Third, they will forego **exacting every debt.** God's law

forbade them from collecting any debt that remained in the seventh year. All debts were to be released. They had not been keeping this law so now they are going to keep it. These are particular laws that were cited because they were regularly being violated.

Now in verse 32 you'll notice more stipulations mentioned but I want you to observe that they are all related to the Temple which was the center of Jewish life. So we had the people's re-dedication to God's law in general in verse 29, their re-dedication to God's law in a few particulars not directly related to the Temple in vv 30-31 and the people's re-dedication to God's law in several particulars directly related to the heart and soul of Jewish life in vv 32-39, the Temple. Every law here is related directly to the Temple and the end of verse 39 is pointing up the centrality of worship of God in the Temple.

Verse 32 we have the people re-dedicating themselves to part of the tax structure of the nation Israel. **We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel<sup>ii</sup> for the service of the house of our God:** the shekel was 0.403 ounces of silver. Interestingly the law required them to pay a half shekel, not a third of a shekel (Exod 30:13). So they obligated themselves to pay slightly less than what was required. Why the difference we don't know. One explanation is that Nehemiah lessened the demand due to the famine. A second explanation is that due to the value of a third of a shekel at this time it was the equivalent of a half shekel of earlier times. Another less probable explanation in my opinion is that the third shekel was in addition to the half shekel. In any case there was an annual contribution they were obligated to pay **for the service of the house of our God** and they hadn't been paying it. This meant that the Levitical priests couldn't carry out their particular God-ordained functions that relate to the Temple. Instead they had to go out and make a living in other ways and tend to fields in order to put food on the table for their families. So the people decided to start fulfilling their obligation of supporting them with this annual contribution so that the Levitical priests could return to their God-ordained responsibilities relating to the Temple.

Verse 33 tells us the sum of the third of a shekel contributions purchased for the Temple service. **the showbread**, those were the twelve loaves of bread that were placed on the table of showbread in the Holy Place, one for each of

the twelve tribes of Israel. Also **for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.** All of these things were not being purchased so the Temple worship system was clearly in disrepute. And if the Temple were in disrepute God's name was in disrepute since the Temple was His house. There had been times under Zerubabel and Ezra when the Persian Empire allotted funds from the royal treasury to support the Temple worship so God's name was not in disrepute but for some reason or other funds were not coming in. Perhaps the people got used to the government paying for it and when the government stopped paying for it they didn't want to pay for it. But when the law was read to them and it was discovered that it was their responsibility to pay, they were convicted and at least in part, obligated themselves to make the contribution in order to support Temple worship.

Verse 34, **Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law.** The law required that the altar fire be continually burning in readiness for sacrifice (Lev 6:12-13). It was not to be allowed to extinguish. Therefore a continual supply of wood was necessary to keep it burning. In order to supply this **wood** they **cast lots** to decide which **times** of the year each **household** would bring it up to the Temple. The casting of lots in the OT was a divinely given method of deciphering the will of God. Prov 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." The casting of lots remained a valid way of deciphering God's will until the Church began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. That's why the choosing of the twelfth apostle in Acts 1 by the casting of lots was still a valid method of determining the will of God and that is why Matthias is the twelfth apostle and not Paul. To say otherwise is to say that Matthias is not the decision of the LORD when the Bible says he is the decision of the LORD. So while Paul is an apostle of the Lord and of equal authority with the twelve apostles, he is not one of the twelve apostles.

Verse 35, **and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD**

**annually.** The law required them to **bring the first fruits of** their produce (Exod 23:19; Deut 26:1-3) and to present them before the priest with a proclamation reciting God's work of bringing them out of Egypt and giving them the Promised Land and providing the fruitfulness of the land. The first of all things was therefore given to Him at the Temple and by doing this the people would be recognizing that God brought them out of Egypt and had given them the land and all the productivity of the land.

Verse 36, **and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God.** The law also required them to bring their firstborn sons and domestic animals like oxen, sheep and goats (Num 18:15-17). These came forth from the womb and that which came forth from the womb was the gift of God. It belonged to Him. Therefore there were to take it to the Temple and offer it to Him. However, as the law stated, they had to redeem the firstborn of man and of unclean animals (which could not be offered as sacrifice). They paid a redemption price for these while the clean animal's blood was sprinkled on the altar and the fat was offered up in smoke as an offering to the Lord. The meat was given to the priests who were ministering in the Temple for their portion.

Now in verse 37 the attention shifts to those who served in the temple, we call all this group, categorically, the Levitical priests because they are all of the house of Levi but they were broken into three groups. First, the high priest was the spiritual leader of all Israel and he had the very important function of entering the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement each year. Second, the priests, they looked after the Temple vessels and performed sacrifices while wearing the special, symbolic vestments. They were also responsible to teach the nation the word of God. Third, the Levites, they were involved in various tasks such as singers, gatekeepers, temple servants and Solomon's servants. They also taught the nation the word of God. So you had all three classes of Levitical priests serving in some capacity with respect to the Temple but these distinctions are important for understanding some of the taxes in the following passage.

Verse 37, **We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the**

**chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.** The Levites often lived out in the rural areas around Jerusalem, they were living among the people and they would commute into Jerusalem at their appointed time of the year for their service. But for most of the year they lived in the rural areas. Since they lived out among the people they could collect the people's tithes in the towns they lived in. The Hebrew tithe means "a tenth" so this is referring to a tenth of the produce of the land; the land itself was never taxed, only the produce; the **dough** or grain, **wine** and **oil**...all necessities of life. The law required that a tenth of the land's produce was to be brought up to **the priests at the chambers of the Temple** (Lev 27:30; Num 18:21-24). The priests worked much closer to the Temple and so a lot of them lived in Jerusalem. So **the Levites would receive the tithes in all the rural towns** and then they would bring them up to Jerusalem to the priests at the Temple **chambers**. These **chambers** were storehouses where the grain, wine and oil were organized and stored. It all belonged to the Lord but because the Levites did not have an inheritance of land in return for their service to the Lord the tithe was given to them.

However, verse 38, **The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.** In other words, **the priest** would be right alongside the **Levites when they received the tithes** in their rural towns because this is the handling of money and the handling of money is a sensitive issue so you need two people at least involved in handling the money. And notice **the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tenth.** The people give a tenth of their produce to the Levites and the priest is there with him and then the Levites would give a tenth of the tenth they had received to the priests. So this is where I said before the distinctions are important. The people's tenth didn't just go into one big pot. It was given to the Levites in one big pot and then a tenth was taken out of the big pot for the priests.

Verse 39 summarizes and gives the reason the people re-committed themselves to the stipulations regarding the Temple. **For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contributions of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the**



**singers. Thus, or in this way, we will not neglect the house of our God.** The house of God had been neglected because the sons of Israel had not been giving a tenth and the sons of Levi had not been taking a tenth of the tenth. All this was necessary to support the worship system of the Temple. The Temple is the center of OT worship. The entire spiritual life of the nation centered on the Temple since the Temple was the house of God. It was where He lived or dwelled among men and it is where men worshipped Him according to the daily Temple worship including daily chorale singing with specific instrumental accompaniment, the reading of Scripture, the daily offerings, the feasts, the celebrations, etc.... Everything centered on God who dwelled in the Temple. It was all about Him and thus to neglect the Temple was to neglect Him. So here, in reality, they are vowing that they will neglect Him no longer. They even put themselves under an oath containing a curse if they neglect Him again. So it was very serious.

Now we come to Neh 11 and here we find Nehemiah's plan to re-populate the city of Jerusalem go into effect. Remember, back in Neh 7 when the city walls had been rebuilt that he went out into the city and observed that it was relatively spacious and large compared to the number of people living there and so the Lord put it in his heart to repopulate the city. He started with a little research to discover the families with Jewish lineage living in the land and he found an older document listing the families and cities these families had settled in when they returned under Cyrus. So he used that as a starting point for his plan and then in Neh 8 the people came up for the Feast of Trumpets and Ezra read the law and the people learned of the Feast of Booths and so they kept the feast and Ezra read more of the law and the people learned that they should be separate from foreigners and so in Neh 9 the people promised to separate from the foreigners. And now we are getting down to a list of people of Jewish lineage and these are the prospects of those whom Nehemiah wants to move into the city of Jerusalem. Most of this is just filling in detail until we get to 12:27 so there are a lot of names and places here, we won't go through them all but we will highlight some important items.

So we see in Neh 11:1 the plan being implemented. **Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in the other cities.** So the plan was to take a tenth of the Jewish

families and move them to Jerusalem. And to select this tenth they **cast lots**, again following this divinely revealed method of deciphering the will of God. It wasn't chance, it wasn't luck, there is no such thing, the lot was cast but it's every decision was the LORD's. So these families were chosen by God to move to Jerusalem in the same way that Matthias was chosen by God to be the twelfth apostle. Now the city of **Jerusalem** is titled here, **the holy city**. It's the only city in the Bible referred to as **the holy city**. Why is it known as **the holy city**? Because it's the only city God chose to put His name. And that should be evident today as it is the most controversial city on the planet. It will only become increasingly controversial. In the last days Zechariah says it will be a cup of trembling to all the nations round about as they come up against it since they will be heavily injured. Interestingly Zechariah made his prophesy about 80 years before Nehemiah so his prophecy was already on the table and they knew that opposition would mount against the city. And here is the first group allotted to live in the city, one out of every ten Jewish families in the land, they may have to prepare for combat.

Verse 2, **And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem**. These were either the families chosen by the casting of lots or they were additional **men who volunteered** their families to move to the city. It was a well-fortified city now and so a desirable place to live and so this may very well be additional families.

Verse 3, **Now these are the heads of the provinces who lived in Jerusalem, but in the cities of Judah each lived on his own property in their cities—Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants**. Now he's about to give a list of each of these groups who lived in Jerusalem as well as noting that there were many leaders who continued to live outside Jerusalem in their own cities. This would mean that some of the priests and Levites and servants of the temple had to commute to Jerusalem during their appointed time of service but they would live among the people and this would promote unity of purpose as a nation.

Now the inhabitants of Jerusalem, beginning in verse 4, included **Some of the sons of Judah and some of the sons of Benjamin**. Those two tribes made up the southern kingdom before the Exile and they also were those involved in the Partial Restoration. The kingdom was known only as Judah

because that tribe was so much larger than Benjamin. But there were some from both tribes who moved back into Jerusalem. In verses 4-6 he lists those who were **from the sons of Judah** and that number was 468; in verses 7-8 he lists those who were from **the sons of Benjamin** and that number was 928. So nearly twice as many Benjamites moved to the city than Judahites. In vv 10-14 we have the priests who lived in the city, their total number of 1,192, they worked in the Temple. In vv 15-18 we have the Levites who lived in the city, their total number of 284, they worked outside the Temple. In v 19 we see the gatekeepers and their number was 172. Estimates of Jerusalem's population at the time range from 4,800-8,000.

In verses 20ff you have the list of those who lived outside of Jerusalem and remained in their cities. **The rest of Israel, of the priests and of the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, each on his own inheritance.** By referencing the **cities of Judah** is meant the Persian province of Judah at this time. It extended north to the province of Persia and south to the province of Idumaea and so included some of the ancient towns of Benjamin as well as Judah. But Nehemiah notes in verse 21 that **the temple servants were living in Ophel.** The **Ophel** was in Jerusalem. It was the area just south of the Temple Mount where many important archaeological remains have been discovered.

In vv 22-24 some of the worship in the house of God prescribed by the Persian king is described, **<sup>22</sup>Now the overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica, from the sons of Asaph, who were the singers for the service of the house of God. <sup>23</sup>For *there was* a commandment from the king concerning them and a firm regulation for the song leaders day by day.** The king evidently took interest in the Temple affairs at Jerusalem. Perhaps he wanted the God of Israel to be worshipped properly for his own well-being as well as prayers for his dynasty as he had requested in Ezra 6:10. Verse 24 reveals the king's representative. **<sup>24</sup>Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the sons of Zerah the son of Judah, was the king's representative in all matters concerning the people** so he evidently traveled extensively between the king's palace and Jerusalem to keep the king informed first hand as to the developments in the land.

Now as far as the Judahites who lived outside the city of Jerusalem vv 25-30 report seventeen towns. These, as you see from the end of verse 30, were cities extending from **Beersheba** which was in the far south, **as far as the valley of Hinnom** which was at the southern foot of the city of Jerusalem. As far as the Benjamites who lived outside the city of Jerusalem, vv 31-36 report fifteen cities. Verse 36 reports that some Levites who lived in Judah were transferred to Benjamin and so you had a proportionate number of Levites living in close association with the people and training them in the word of God.

Chapter 12, **Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua.** This is a record from an older document. **Zerubbabel** came up under Cyrus and **Jeshua** was the high priest. So what is happening here is their genealogy is being traced. The priests and Levites were the most important people who returned from the Exile because they were the people who operated the Temple! If you recall when Ezra set out years before to go to Jerusalem he took a census before they departed and he didn't find any Levites so he sent some men back to get some. These men were essential to the Temple worship system and without them nothing could happen. That's why you see in verse 8 **the Levites Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah and Mattaniah in charge of the songs of thanksgiving.** Without these men there wouldn't be any songs of thanksgiving.

Also their genealogy was very important because if they couldn't prove their genealogy they couldn't function as priests. So very careful records were kept for the Levites and priests and that's why we see in verse 10 the genealogy of the high priest, the most important spiritual position in all Israel. **Jeshua,** he was the high priest back in Zerubbabel's time, 90 years before, then he **became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joida, 11 and Joida became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua.** That was the high priestly line and it had to be maintained.

In verse 12 he mentions those who were priestly fathers' in the days of **Joiakim** and he mentions 21 priestly families of the original order of 24 established in the time of David. These are the courses of the priesthood and

they would alternate on a schedule the time of year they served in Jerusalem at the Temple.

Then in verse 22 we have the registration of the **Levites** accounted for even **in the reign of Darius the Persian**, by which he is probably referring to Darius II who reigned from 423-404BC. The Elephantine papyri discovered in the fortress city of Elephantine and dated to 407BC mentions the priest **Johanan** by way of confirmation. Verse 23, the **sons of Levi** were registered so they had an account of their genealogy. Verse 24, the **heads of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers opposite them, to praise and give thanks, as prescribed by David the man of God, division corresponding to division.** This was a wonderful chorale and they stood opposite to one another and sang antiphonally, with one side initiating and the other responding. It was a wonderful sound, these men would be remarkable singers and this was all **prescribed by David** centuries before as part of the proper worship. And notice David was not a man of God but **the man of God.** In all the OT you'll be pressed to find anyone who is more highly praised by God than David, and that with all the blemishes to his record. It's amazing but I'll tell you why, it was because he always got back with the program. David didn't lead a perfect life and God wasn't looking for David to live a perfect life. What God was looking for and is looking for today is men who get back with the program, who fail but get back up and return to the grace of God and respond to Him and never give up and always persevere to the end in God's grace. That's the kind of man God is looking for and that was who David was.

In verse 25 you've got men listed who served as **gatekeepers** and verse 26 these men served **in the days of Joakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.** The point being this was all authenticated and done officially. That brings us to verse 27 and we'll leave off here and pick up next week with the dedication of the wall. This probably all happened very quickly in the seventh month after the Feast of Trumpets and Booths very soon after the covenant renewal.

In summary, in a covenant renewal ceremony the people engaged in a Preamble that praised the name of their God for the great things He had

done. Then in a Historical Recitation they recalled the great works of their God on their behalf and how they had responded to Him. Then they Accepted the Covenant by signing a solemn oath. They then cited the Stipulations they now agreed to follow. In general, they agreed to follow the entire law of God, more specifically they agreed to not intermarry with foreigners and to keep the Sabbath day and Sabbath year holy, most specifically they agreed to provide for the Temple worship which had been neglected for so long. Since the Temple was the house of God they had neglected the worship of God. They set out to do everything necessary to worship Him correctly. They moved the appropriate leaders into the city of Jerusalem and left others living among the people. This would produce a unity of purpose among the people.

What can we learn? First, there may be a place for rededication of our life to God. These people had strayed so far from the word of God that when they heard it they were convicted, they confessed and they rededicated their life to God through a covenant renewal. They even took the oath with a curse. An oath with a curse is very serious; you are in effect calling down judgment on yourself if you take one. So if you do take one know what you are getting into. I wouldn't recommend it if you take things lightly. However, if you have strayed from the word of God there's nothing wrong with rededicating your life to God. I would simply say that the rededication would be along the lines of grace and not works. It would be along the lines of promising to live your life by grace, to depend upon God and consciously respond to God by not my will be done but Yours. That's the attitude now that we are living under grace. Second, the importance of the Temple as the dwelling place of God. These people had neglected the Temple and as such had neglected God. They sought to remedy this by making all the provisions necessary to restore the Temple and proper worship of God. We do not have a physical Temple but are a temple and God dwells in us. Do we neglect our own temple? Paul says that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that it is therefore a holy place. We should not defile it with sexual immorality. He also says that the Church is the temple of the living God and that it breaks fellowship with Him when we invite strange doctrine into our lives. And so we must cleanse ourselves from all defilement as these Israelites did and be sanctified living cognizant of the fact that we are in the very presence of God!

<sup>i</sup> Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ne 10:1). Galaxie Software.

<sup>ii</sup> A shekel was a Hebrew weight of 0.403 ounces so a half shekel was .2015 ounces.

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