

**Let Us Arise and Build (Lessons from Nehemiah)  
Rebuilding God's People #4—Committing to personal holiness**

**Intro:** In our studies of Nehemiah we've seen how God's people joined together to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem; but the book of Nehemiah also describes another great building project—rebuilding a people who would know and serve the Lord. As we look at Ezra and Nehemiah's efforts, we see four important aspects of that spiritual rebuilding.

*It all begin with... reading the Law.*

*As the people listened to the word of God, they understood the need to...reinstate divinely-commanded worship.*

*But as they continued to read, they also saw their failure to keep the covenant of the Lord; and that led to confession of their sins.*

*Finally, the confession of sin led them to commit to personal holiness.*

**Let's think about the last of these four great principles of spiritual revival—committing to personal holiness.**

**In our lesson last week we saw that Nehemiah records that the people gathered for the third time to listen as the Law of God was read.**

*In their first hearing of the word, they became aware of their sins; and they wept at how disobedient they had been. But the priests encouraged them to rejoice at the prospects of their new awakening.*

*In response to the second reading, they rejoiced in worship as they observed the Feast of Booths and celebrated the Lord's blessing upon their harvest. But now that the celebration of the Feast of Booths had ended, the godly sorrow of having sinned against the Lord manifested itself in the confession of sin. Led by the priests, the people joined together for six hours in the confession of sin and worship of the Lord. At the end of their prayer of confession we read these amazing words:*

*"Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests."  
(Nehemiah 9:38, ESV)*

*Here we see the final aspect of Israel's spiritual renewal—committing to personal holiness. God's people gave expression to that commitment by putting it in writing!*

**Israel's Commitment—Putting it in writing**

Let's take moment to think about what was taking place among God's people.

*They acknowledged in their confessional prayer that their desperate situation of being under the power of a foreign government was of their own doing.*

They were slaves because they had disobeyed the Lord. But now that they had acquired "knowledge and understanding" (10:28) based on the reading of the word of God, they purposed to do something about it.

***They made a firm covenant.***

Though the typical Hebrew word for covenant, “berith,” is not found here, the word that is used suggests an assurance for pledge.

The Hebrew word is “amanah.” Listen carefully; and you will hear that it is a form of the Hebrew word we often use at the end of our prayers—“amen.”

But what does it mean when we say that word? It means that we affirm the truthfulness of what is spoken; it means that we agree with the sentiments of the prayer. Jesus often used this word when making assurances of truth to his contemporaries. In those verses where in translation Jesus sayings, “Truly, truly...” he uses a form of the same Hebrew/Aramaic term.

Simply put, God’s people were making a solemn affirmation or assurance that they would make real changes in their lives.

***They put it in writing.***

Today if we want to know if someone is serious about something we ask, “Will you put that in writing?”

If we’re trying to sell a house, we might ask, “Are you willing to sign a contract?”

That is exactly what the people of God purposed to do. They were serious about their intentions to start obeying the Lord.

***They signed their names to it.***

We can see from our text that it was signed by the leadership—  
“*princes, Levites, and priests.*”

Chapter 10:1-27 lists the names of those who put their seal on the document.

In the ancient world, each person carried a signet ring or a seal by which they could authenticate documents and belongings.

Wax or clay would be applied to the document; and they would press their seal into the wax or clay to leave an impression that identified them.

***They accompanied their covenant with both oaths and curses.***

Note how that they were said to:

*“join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, (Nehemiah 10:29, ESV)*

First they called upon God as witness through solemn oaths that they would be obedient to the Lord.

Second they called curses upon themselves should they not keep their promises.

Keep in mind that these were not empty words; but were solemn punishments that they expected to endure if they did not keep their promises.

In other words, they made themselves accountable to the Lord and to a degree to one another by publically declaring their intentions and signing their name to that pledge.

***They promised to do all that the Lord had commanded.***

Notice the second part of the verse we just referred to:  
*and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord and his rules and his statutes.” (Nehemiah 10:29, ESV)*

The commitment of God’s people was 100%. There was nothing held back. No exceptions. No holding on to pet sins.

***But they also made specific promises.***

It is not hard to get people to make generic promises to do better; but in this case God’s people specified exactly how they would be changing their behavior in keeping with the Lord’s commands.

They promised not to intermarry with foreigners

They promised to not engage in commerce on the Sabbath with the heathen who had no respect for the Sabbath.

They promised to give the land rest every seventh year.

They promised to release debts in the same seventh year.

They promised to support the priests and the work of the temple.

They promised to contribute 1/3 of a shekel to pay for the temple service.

They promised to provide wood for the burnt offerings at the temple.

They promised to bring to redeem their firstborn and to tithe their herds and crops in order to support the Levites, who would in turn give a tenth to the priests for their support.

**Our Commitment**

***What a great example the people of Israel can be for us! If we are to experience true spiritual renewal we must also have these principles working our lives.***

***Just as we last week stressed the importance of being honest with God, sensitive to His word, and confessing our sins, so also we must move beyond personal sorrow to personal holiness. In a word we must repent! It was central tenet in the kingdom message.***

*“From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 4:17, NASB)*

*“NOW on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:1–3, NASB)*

***People are often confused by the meaning of that word. Repenting is what you do after you are sorry that you have disappointed God. Repentance is the change of mind that leads to a change of life.***

*“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.” (2 Corinthians 7:10–11, NASB)*

Note that repentance is the result of godly sorrow, i.e. the pious regret of defying and disappointing the Lord, not merely that we want to avoid the consequences of our bad decisions.

And we often neglect to read the verse following; but it makes an important statement. When we truly repent, the results will be evident. People will see in us a changed attitude toward God and toward sin. They will see a passion to do what is right.

**When you find yourself in disobedience to God, think of how you can apply these principles to your own situation. The actions of the Israelites would still be a good paradigm to imitate when**

Make a solemn covenant with God: I pledge that I will no longer defy the will of God.

Resolve to make your obedience total: I will do all that the Lord has commanded.

Be specific: I will make these changes in behavior that show that my sorrow is godly.

Put it in writing: I will keep my promises before me so that I can be reminded day by day of what I need to be doing.

Make yourself accountable: I will expect God to discipline me for disobedience and I will tell someone else who will hold me accountable for the changes I promise to make.

**Conclusion: When we became Christians, we made a covenant with God to love and serve Him. Have we kept that covenant? If so, keep doing so. If you have broken that covenant, it is time to be restored to the life you agreed to live.**