

May 25, 2025

Nehemiah 9:38-10:39 NIV 1984

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.” ¹ Those who sealed it were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah. The priests...the Levites...the leaders of the people.

²⁸“The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples or the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—
²⁹all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord. ³⁰“We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the people around us or take their daughters for our sons. ³¹“When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year, we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts. ³²“We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God. ³⁴“We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. ³⁵“We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree. ³⁶ “As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. ³⁷“Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees, and our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. ³⁸ A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. ³⁹ The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine, and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers stay.



The Hand of God to Produce Practical Obedience
Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

BIG IDEA: Real repentance leads to renewal of our commitment to the Lord in all areas of life, but we must identify specific areas of practical application, particularly Sabbath worship and rest.

OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Facets of obedience
 - A. Marriage (v.30)
 - B. Sabbath (v.31)
 - C. Temple Tax (v. 32-33)
 - D. Offerings in Kind (v. 34-39)
3. Application
 - A. Sabbath Worship
 - B. Sabbath Rest
 1. What
 2. Why
 3. How
4. Conclusion

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. What “piecrust” promises have you made? Piecrust promises are those that are easily made and easily broken.
2. The people’s “firm covenant” comes about “because of all this” (Neh. 9:38). To what does “all this” refer? For further clarification, reflect on Nehemiah 9:1-37 and read on in Nehemiah 10:1-29. What has impressed and motivated these people, and how can we tell?
3. In what specific areas of the law do the people focus their promises (10:30-39)? In the context of what you’ve seen so far in Ezra and Nehemiah, why are these areas so crucial for the people to focus on?
4. In light of Ezra’s ending and the history revealed in the prayer of Nehemiah 9, what questions might we have about the covenant of the people in chapter 10? Read again Nehemiah 9:17. Read also Exodus 34:1-9. What glorious truths about God stand out?
5. Read Genesis 9:8-17, Genesis 17:1-22, Exodus 34, and 2 Samuel 7:12-17. What pattern do you see? What is strikingly different between the covenants described in these passages and the covenant found in Nehemiah 9:38? Can you find a response from God to the covenant of the people in Nehemiah 9:38-10:39? What is different about the covenants God made with his people and the covenant the people made with him?
6. Underlying the covenant is the hope that fellowship with God will be restored. How does God restore fellowship with his people (refer to Matthew 1:1, 5:7-18, John 1:1-18, Revelation 21:1-4)?
7. How can this hope encourage us, especially when we fail to keep a promise?

Questions adapted from ESV Knowing the Bible: Nehemiah, and ESV Story of Redemption Bible

Praise to Jesus. Praise God that he honored his covenant with Abraham, and his covenant with David, but not in the form of another national covenant like this; rather, in his own time, those covenants will be honored and fulfilled in the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel—one that will encompass all of the nations of the world, not just the Jews, and will center on the divine, suffering, ever-living Priest-King Jesus Christ!

Repentance through Jesus. Spend time in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to confess the ways that you have thought that you initiated God's relationship with you. Ask the Lord for a complete change of heart and mind regarding your overall attitude toward Him.

Consecration to Jesus. In light of the compassion, mercy, and steadfast love that God has shown to His people throughout history and to you today, determine to rely moment to moment on his promises to you fulfilled in Christ so that you can be a blessing to the nations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nehemiah 9:38. In many ways, this is an extraordinary prayer that the Levites offer. As is common in the Bible, the prayer brings to memory the entire history of the nation of Israel, recounting the Lord's consistent grace, the people's repeated sin, and, finally, the Lord's judgment. It also acknowledges the unmistakable truth that even though the wall and temple are rebuilt, all is not right. The Israelites are still slaves in the land God has given them; the fruit of their labors is taken from them by the foreign kings who rule over them. But perhaps most importantly of all, at the conclusion of the prayer, the people extend their hand in an offer of a new covenant with God. Chapter 10 contains its terms and signatories.

-ESV Story of Redemption Bible

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. Remind your children that in chapter 9 we read of how the Israelites confessed their sins and prayed to remind themselves of God's faithfulness. In chapter 9 the Jews looked back to confess their sins and to remind themselves of God's saving mercy and love. This is an important context for the current passage. Then we move into chapter 10 when the people re-commit to following God's Law.

2. What is a U-turn? How is repentance and faith like a U-turn? (A U-turn is when you stop driving in one direction and turn around to drive in the opposite direction. Make sure to show them a U-turn sign or show them when you do a U-turn this week in your car. The Bible teaches us that when we repent of our sins that we not only confess our sins and turn away from our sinful ways. But we also turn towards God to renew our faith or trust in Him to pursue His ways and laws. Make sure to tell your children that we can only do this with the Holy Spirit's help.)

3. Many of the re-commitments that God's people made in this chapter were concerning various Sabbath laws. What is the Sabbath and the Sabbath laws? (The Sabbath was the day of rest for God's people. God called His people to work for six days and then rest on the seventh day. This Sabbath rest was a purposeful rest. It was a day to focus on the Lord and His faithfulness. The purpose of the Sabbath laws was to enable the Jews to stop focusing on their regular routines and to have special routines for this one day of rest.)

4. What is the "house of our God" mentioned in this passage? (It is the temple that was the place of God's presence and the primary place of worship for the Jews.)

Scriptures for further study:

Romans 3:20

2 Corinthians 5:21

Exodus 20:8-11

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Matthew 11:28-30

Matthew 22:34-40

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 32-42

FOR STUDENTS

1. After confessing their sins in chapter 9, the people make a covenant in chapter 10 to obey God. What's the difference between saying sorry and actually changing? How have you seen real repentance lead to change in your life or someone else's?
2. In verse 29, the people commit to follow all of God's laws. Do you think your relationship with God impacts every part of your life—like your friendships, school habits, rest, or how you spend money and time? Why or why not?
3. The people specifically recommit to honoring marriage, keeping the Sabbath, and giving offerings to God's house. Which of these stands out to you most, and why do you think it's important?
4. What is Sabbath rest, and why does God command it? What would it look like for you to practice real rest that helps you slow down, focus on God, and be refreshed?
5. Think about your typical week. How often do you make space for worship and rest? What distractions make it hard to prioritize those things? What small step could you take this week to make worship and rest a bigger part of your life?
- 6 The people in Nehemiah 10 gave offerings to support the temple and worship. What does it look like for you to be generous with what God has given you—whether it's time, energy, or resources?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. In the previous chapter 9, we saw how repentance involves acknowledging sin and turning from it, but here in chapter 10, we see that repentance also involves turning toward God.

QUESTION: In what ways might you personally need to turn from sin, and in what areas of your life would you now resolve, by the grace of God, to commit to honoring and obeying him?

2. The people all agreed to obey carefully “all the commands, regulations, and decrees of the Lord” (v.29). God desires that we commit and surrender every area of our lives to him.

QUESTION: Do you see your relationship with God as including and affecting every aspect of your life (relationships, money, work, worship, marriage, etc.)?

3. Can you identify specific areas of your life and daily conduct in which God would have you endeavor to grow? What practical steps can you take to that end?

4. Why is corporate worship such a necessary and vital part of your life in Christ? What steps can you take to make this a greater priority?

5. What is Sabbath rest, and why should we see it mainly as a gift from God to us? How might you best practice the Sabbath in order to experience more of the soul-filling goodness of God in your life?

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)