

A Covenant Renewal

Lesson Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1–10:39

Focus Scripture: Nehemiah 10: 28–39

Key Verse: We will not neglect the house God. Nehemiah 10:39b

NEHEMIAH 10:28-39 (NRSV UE)

28 The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to adhere to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding,

29 join with their kin, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his ordinances and his statutes.

30 We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons,

31 and if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day, and we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

32 We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:

33 for the rows of bread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

34 We have also cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, by ancestral houses, at appointed times, year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law.

NEHEMIAH 10:28-39(KJV)

28 And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;

30 And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:

31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

32 Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;

33 For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

34 And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law:

35 We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord;

36 also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks;

37 and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our soil, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our rural towns.

38 And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes, and the Levites shall bring up a tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse.

39 For the Israelites and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the storerooms where the vessels of the sanctuary are and where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are. We will not neglect the house of our God.

35 And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the Lord:

36 Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God:

37 And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.

38 And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.

39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

KEY TERMS

- **Covenant** – A pact, treaty, alliance, or agreement between two parties of equal or of unequal authority; covenants define parameters for relationships. A major theme in the Bible is that of God's grace in relating to his people by initiating covenants with them.
- **Ezra** – A Jewish priest, scribe, and great leader, whose name in Hebrew means "help." He is noted for having devoted his whole life to serving God and God's people.
- **Nehemiah (Hebrew: Yahweh Comforts or Encourages)** – Cupbearer for Persian King Artaxerxes; leader of Jewish

volunteers who rebuilt Jerusalem's walls, and later became the governor of Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION

This lesson comes from the book of Nehemiah, which continues Ezra's accountings of God returning the Hebrew people to Jerusalem. The book of Nehemiah begins about the same time as Ezra was commissioned by King Cyrus of Persia to return to Jerusalem to help restore the city. Ezra is remembered for having led the people to reaffirm their relationship with God. For more information, refer to last week's lesson. Nehemiah, on the other hand, is noted for having led the people in rebuilding

the walls and the city of Jerusalem. Notably, in both cases, God used pagan kings to aid his chosen leaders and the Hebrew people in returning and restoring both their lives in Jerusalem and their relationships with him.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

To understand the depth of Nehemiah's commitment to God and the restoration of Jerusalem, it is helpful to take an in-depth

look at what Nehemiah found upon his arrival in Jerusalem. The temple had been rebuilt, but the people were disorganized because of lack of leadership. These people were not warriors! They were defenseless, having been in bondage to other nations for 70 years, and they were currently living in a city without walls. Prior to the fall of Jerusalem, the people had their own language, their own king, and army,

along with a national identity as "a force to be reckoned with." All of this had been taken away from them because they disobeyed God and broke their covenant with him.

Nehemiah Began With Basics, Nehemiah 10:28-29

Once again, the whole nation of Israel is accountable for sinning against God and

breaking their covenant with him. Therefore, a new covenantal relationship with God must be established. Although this portion of scripture begins with the signing of a new covenant, some review is essential for understanding the setting and context of this lesson. So, let's begin with the signing of the covenant and some of the pivotal events that preceded this moment. Only the

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specified leaders signed the new covenant (10:1-27). Prior to this point, the people engaged in sincere spiritual renewal. Ezra read the law of Moses to them, from early morning to noon (8:1-12). With new understandings, the people observed the Feast of Booths as prescribed by the scriptures (8:13-18). After a period of fasting and wearing sackcloth, they confessed their sins, prayed, and praised God as they recalled his faithfulness (9:1-37).

Obviously moved at this point, the people were ready to seek reconciliation with God and to confirm their sincerity.

The People Commit Themselves to God and New Lifestyles, Nehemiah 10:28-31

Although the rest of the people didn't sign the covenant, they vowed to separate

themselves from ungodly people and pledged to wholeheartedly obey God's law. This group included "the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, the temple servants, and all who agreed to separate themselves from the peoples of the land" (10:28). Their sons and daughters, who were capable of knowing and understanding the commitments, were also included. The specific commitments are detailed in Nehemiah 10: 29-31.

The People Commit to Resource-Sharing and Sacrifices, Nehemiah 10:32-39

Foremost in the new mindsets of the people is acknowledgement that God was the provider of every resource they would need to fulfill his will for them. Loving care and maintenance of God's house was critically important (10:32-34).

Giving a portion of their resources for this purpose was considered to be a reasonable expectation that also honored God. Since the concept of "first fruits" was so common among the Jewish people, they did not think of themselves first and God second. Instead, bringing offerings to the Lord's house was a revered practice (10:35). Commitments to ensuring that God's house was never neglected were equally as important

(10:39), and the treasury was reserved for the purpose of fulfilling God's agenda.

SANKOFA

Do you consider yourself to be in a covenantal relationship with God? If you have been baptized, your answer should be "yes." Unfortunately, many of us have not considered baptism from this perspective. Again, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the*

AME Church (2021) is our best source of information as it speaks to our worship traditions and personal relationships with God. It also provides pertinent frames of reference for comprehending the Hebrews' relationships with God and for creating deeper understandings of God's consistency in relationships with his people. As referenced earlier, baptism and the

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Lord's Supper or Holy Communion are two sacraments observed by the AME Church. *The Doctrine and Discipline* defines baptism as "a sign of new life through Jesus Christ and unites the one baptized with Christ and his people as members of the church. The act is administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (p. 886). Another common explanation is the following: "Baptism is an outward sign or

symbol of inward change.” Strong parallels exist between the actions that led to Israel’s new covenant with God and those which typically lead to baptism and new life in Christ Jesus.

CASE STUDY

The scriptures clearly portray Nehemiah’s strong desires for restoring Jerusalem and honoring God. Reuniting the Jews and removing the shame associated with Jerusalem’s broken walls demonstrated

the fervency of his commitments. As a leader, Nehemiah is remembered for persevering and not allowing oppositions of any kind to deter him from his mission. Although from a different, more contemporary era and with a different mission, the Honorable Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005) demonstrated similar leadership traits.

Mrs. Chisholm articulated desires to be remembered as “a woman who dared to be a catalyst of change.” In 1968, she was the first African American woman to be elected to the United States Congress, and in 1972, she was the first to seek nomination for the presidency of the United States. Mrs. Chisholm excelled as a congresswoman from New York City, who passionately and effectively advocated for minorities, women,

and children. Despite her obviously excellent qualifications and performance records, deeply entrenched pockets of discrimination prevented her from becoming an official nominee for the presidency. Although she did not succeed in this endeavor, and in many cases was ridiculed for trying, Mrs. Chisholm is highly regarded as a pioneering role-model for many other women and minorities with political aspirations.

One of Mrs. Chisholm’s most renowned

Nehemiah was intentional about his work. He began with basics: Preparing the people to live according to God’s will.

admirers is Vice President Kamala Harris, who was also the official 2024 Democratic nominee for president of the United States. Vice President Harris proudly identifies herself as a black woman of Asian and African American descent! On numerous occasions, Vice President Harris has spoken of Mrs. Chisholm’s positive impacts on her life. She speaks of herself as one who is “standing on the

shoulders of Shirley Chisholm.” Likewise, Mrs. Chisholm’s legacy lives on in the lives of many others.

LIFE APPLICATION

Nehemiah was intentional about his work. He began with basics: Preparing the people to live according to God’s will. The Jews had been in bondage to the Babylonians

and later the Persians for 70 years. It is easy to see how much of the “basics” of godly living may have been forgotten or never transmitted from one generation to the next. Fortunately, Nehemiah, Ezra, and others filled the knowledge gaps and helped prepare the people for reconciliation and a new covenant with God.

Bondage comes in many, many different forms and impacts people in different ways. We are fortunate recipients of grace and mercy! As we accepted Jesus Christ, he did not require us to deny or destroy the bondages in our lives as prerequisites for his acceptance of us. Instead, he said: “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my

yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-29). His promises do not change. Baptism, as noted in **Sankofa**, is symbolic of our decision to accept Jesus’ invitation. Like the Jews, we might break our covenants with God, but we can also be reconciled with him by repenting, confessing our sins, and humbly asking God for his forgiveness. He does not

require a written covenant with us – just a broken and contrite heart, and he promises we can begin anew with him. With this kind of love and mercy, is there any doubt in your mind that God deserves our highest praise?

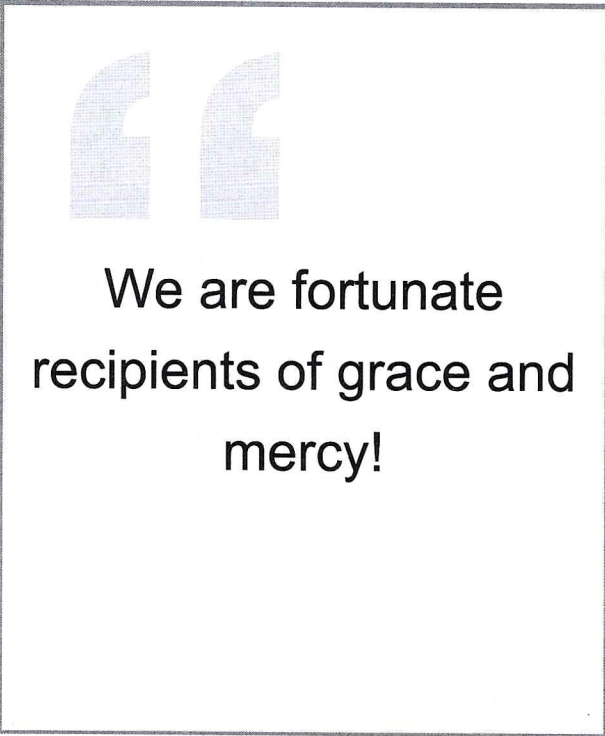
Questions

1. How can we use Nehemiah’s example to encourage those who may be discouraged, or uncertain about what they should be doing with their lives?
2. What lessons can we draw from recounting and analyzing how the Jews repeatedly broke their covenants with God?
3. What new insights do you have about your personal baptismal experience and its effects on you as God’s child?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: “I Am Thine, O Lord” (*AME Hymnal* #283)

Closing Prayer: Father God, we submit ourselves to you as we come with praise and thanksgiving in our hearts. Thank you for not only telling us what to do, but for also teaching us how to please you. Please forgive all of our sins and transgressions. Cleanse us, Father God, of all unrighteousness and bless us to walk and live in ways that please you and glorify your name. Please bless



**We are fortunate
recipients of grace and
mercy!**

us to remember today's teachings and let them be reflected in our lives so that others will seek to know you, also. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 26–June 1

Monday	Proverbs 3:1-10 (Honor God With Your First Fruits)
Tuesday	Hebrews 10:26-34 (Struggles of Faith)
Wednesday	Hebrews 10:35–11:4 (The Righteous Will Live by Faith)
Thursday	Acts 5:1-11 (Half-hearted Giving)
Friday	Luke 20:45–21:4 (Give Your All)
Saturday	Revelation 6:9-17 (The Martyrs' Cry for Justice)
Sunday	Genesis 4:1-15 (Acceptable and Unacceptable Worship)