

NEHEMIAH 9:32-38; 10:28-29
LESSON: GOD'S COVENANT WITH THE
RETURNED EXILES — October 29, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he found more than just broken walls, he found broken lives. He gathers the people together to hear Ezra the priest to read God's Law. The people repent and promise to change their lives by obeying God's Words. In the beginning of chapter 9 Ezra leads the people in confession of their sins unto God. This time they fasted, clothed themselves with sackcloth, sprinkled dirt in their hair, and separated themselves from all foreigners. The Laws of God was read to them for about two or three hours, and then for several more hours. They took turns confessing their own sins, and those of their ancestors, and then worship would spring forth. They would stand up and praise the Lord God, and then Ezra prayed. This is a beautiful prayer unto God; a play by play of God's deeds and miracles; Israel's disobedience, and then God's mercy; how God led them and how He subdued nations to get them into the Promised Land. But despite all of this they were disobedient—throwing away God's Law, and rebelled against God—killing the prophets who told them to return to God! So, God had to give them over to their enemies. He went another route by sending or delivering them into the hands of the heathen enemies of the land. For the northern kingdom, this meant Assyria (2Kgs.17), while for Judah it meant Babylon (2Kgs.24-25). Ezra brings out that God had to punish them to turn them toward His Laws. And in God's mercy He did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God He is. He gives us chance after chance, again and again (9:1-31).

LESSON: I. CONFESSION Nehemiah 9:32-35

9:32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy,— Ezra recognizes God's greatness, His might, and that He is a terrible God meaning awesome. It is made known that God keeps His covenant (His promises) toward His people and shows mercy.

9:32 b...let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. In Ezra's petition to God he asks to let not all their troubles; their hardships that they've gone through to not be light or insignificant. For all the misery that came upon them, their kings, their princes, their priests, their prophets, and their fathers from the time the kings of Assyria, their enemy triumphed over them, even to now, was not a small thing. It's like saying, "*Lord, You were right to do this.*"

9:33 Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:— Ezra proclaims that all recognize that all of the problems that came upon them, even from their captivity were well-deserved. They had done wickedly and it was the wickedness of the

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people that had brought on the terrible times and they recognize their sin. God is a just God!

9:34 Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. The list of people who have done wickedly even extend to the kings, princes, priests— those in high positions, and the Israelites fathers. They did not keep the law, nor pay attention to God's commandments and His warnings that were given. Their actions in turn became a testimony against them.

II. CONSEQUENCES Nehemiah 9:36-37

9:35 For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. Ezra is still confessing that even living in their kingdom, they didn't serve God. They lived in the extensive and rich country God bestowed to them and in God's great goodness and blessings they still did not turn from their wicked works. It looks like their blessings made them independent of God instead of being thankful to God

9:36 Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it:— The Israelites were in the strange position of being slaves in their own land, having to turn over a part of their resources each year to a foreign king. How ironic, since God had given the land to them but they are servants in the land.

9:37 And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. The enemy kings enjoyed the bounty of the increase the land yielded, that would have been Israel's because of the consequence of sin—disobedience. At the pleasure of the enemy, they had dominion over the Israelites' bodies and over their cattle which placed them in dire distress.

III. COVENANT Nehemiah 9:38

9:38 And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it. And yet, in view of the Israelites becoming servants in the land God gave their fathers; and in view of their enemy kings eating the fruit of their land, and having dominion over their bodies and cattle, and because all of this have caused them great distress, they will draw up a binding pledge—a sure covenant. And the princes, Levites, and priests were to sign and seal the covenant.

IV. CURSE Nehemiah 10:28-29

10:28 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;— Chapter 10 began with a list of these leaders signing the covenant. Nehemiah, the governor signed and there were others named who signed. This verse deals with the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters (*gatekeepers or security guards*), the singers, the Nethinims (*Temple staff or servants*); along with their wives, sons, and daughters. Anyone who was old enough to understand made agreement unto the law of God

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and all that had separated themselves from the people of the lands, and had knowledge and understanding of what they were doing signed the covenant.

10:29 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;— They all joined with their noble kinsmen and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law They made the oath in the name of the whole multitude, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to keep and carry out all the commandments of the LORD their Lord, and his judgments and his statutes. If they broke the law or failed to keep their promises, this made them accountable for their obedience to God's Word.

SUMMARY:

Ezra who is praying this beautiful prayer recognizes God's greatness, His might, and that He is a terrible God meaning awesome. God still did not consume them, but in His mercy He didn't give them what they deserved. He kept covenant and Ezra's petitions God to let not all their troubles; their hardships that they've gone through to not be light or insignificant. They truly deserved all that had come on them since the time of the Assyrian king until now. They were assured that God did everything right and they had done wickedly. Even those in high offices didn't listen to God's commandments. All of them that ranked in high office and lived in the fat of the land that God generously gave them, did not turn from their wicked works (9:32-34).

Ezra is still confessing that even living in their kingdom, they didn't serve God and they are servants in the land God had given their fathers and servants under these kings because of their sins. Therefore, they are in great distress; deep trouble (9:35-37)

And because of the above they will draw up a binding pledge— a sure covenant. And the princes, Levites, and priests were to sign and seal the covenant (9:38).

Remember, the people made an agreement with God. Their names were on it. Anyone who was old enough to understand made agreement unto the law of God and all that had separated themselves from the people of the lands, and had knowledge and understanding of what they were doing signed the covenant. They all joined with their noble kinsmen and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law. If they broke the law or failed to keep their promises, this made them accountable for their obedience to God's Word (10:28-29).