

“Renewed”
Nehemiah 9:38 – 10:39
Mercy Hill Church | October 22, 2023

Big Idea: The Christian life is a continual renewed commitment to Jesus, which flows from a conviction and confession of who He is.

1. The Signees (People) of the Covenant (vv.1-18)

- 9:28 – standard Hebrew word for covenant (berit) is not used here. However the usual word (karat) for making (literally, “cutting”) a covenant is. Sealed document – included a waxed seal and/or signatures.
- Document bearing 84 names in 4 groups:
 - vv.1 Nehemiah & Zedekiah - political leaders
 - vv.2-8 Priests – religious leaders; from the lineage of Aaron (a Levite)
 - vv.9-13 Levites – religious servants to the priests, often served as gatekeepers, musicians, etc.; from the tribe/lineage of Levi.
 - All priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests.
 - vv.14-26 The “Chiefs” (or Heads) of families – non-political/religious leaders
- vv.28-29a The non-signers who participated in the renewing of the covenant
 - Included believing gentiles (non-Jewish): “...all who separated themselves from the peoples of the lands...”
 - Included women and children – all who could understand (cf. Nehemiah 9:3, 8, 12)
- What is significant about signing your name to something? It means you’re “all-in,” 100% committed. You can’t sign just half your name on a document and say you’re 50% in agreement.

2. Renewed Commitment to the Covenant (v.29)

- What did these people sign or agree to? They’re making a renewed commitment (covenant) to the Mosaic covenant, God’s Law (and commands) – “to walk in God’s law”
 - The Bible is a covenant document
 - “Testament” is Latin for Covenant – Old Testament and New Testament
 - Overarching theme of God’s relationship and grace to people is through covenants:
 - Adamic Covenant, Noahic Covenant (Flood), Abrahamic Covenant (Descendants), Mosaic Covenant (People of God), Davidic Covenant (King)
 - New Covenant in Jesus
- “enter into a curse...” – the seriousness and consequences of breaking the covenant
 - “oath” – a promise
- “...to observe (or keep)” the commandments of God and “to do” – to obey, to follow, to put into practice the commands of God.
 - This phrase in the Hebrew is used and repeated throughout the OT, esp. in Leviticus: Leviticus 18:5, 19:37, 20:8, 22:21; Deut 4:6, 7:12, Ezekiel 36:27, Psalm 103:18, Nehemiah 1:9, 2 Chronicles 34:31
- Previous examples of covenant renewal: Joshua – Joshua 24:25-27, Hezekiah – 2 Chronicles 29:10, Josiah – 2 Chronicles 34:29-32
- Overall focus of God’s commands in the OT for His people was in particular for them to be a people set apart from the world and set apart for Him (re: “a holy” people): “...separated themselves *from* the peoples of the land *to* the Law of God.”

- However, not just for holiness' sake but for a missional (witness) purposes as well! There would be something distinct and different about the people of God which would point to the holiness of God! (cf. Leviticus 11:44, 1 Peter 1:16, Matthew 5:14)

3. Points of Emphases in the Covenant (vv.30-39)

- While the people of God renew their commitment to His commands and law in general, in vv.30-39 they specifically highlight or emphasize three areas where they desire to commit to
 - These were three areas that the people of God were historically struggled and often failed in
 - We all have areas where we are more easily tempted, susceptible to compromise or sin...what are yours?
- **#1 Intermarriage (Personal Relationship/ Home) v.30**
- (cf. Exodus 34:14-16, 2 Corinthians 6:14)
 - Parents were the ones who decided who their children's spouse would be (arraigned marriage) – not the children. And over the years, they often chose non-Jewish people as spouses for their children – whether out of convenience, financial reasons, and/or compromise.
 - This passage is not against inter-racial/ethnic marriages – in the OT we see examples of it with Moses' wife (a Cushite), Ruth the Moabite -- not a single word from God judging or condemning them or their marriages
 - Remember that ethnicity was tied to religion/spirituality
 - To be Jewish meant to worship God (Yahweh) and to not be Jewish meant one worshiped some other gods or goddesses.
 - Unlike today where ethnicity and religion are mixed: an Indian Christian, a Chinese Muslim, a Mexican Hindu and a Caucasian who practices Shinto.
 - Rather, back then, intermarriage meant compromising one's faith, allegiance and commitment to God (cf. King Solomon, King Ahab) – and often times a desertion or abandonment of their faith in God altogether.
- **#2 Sabbath-Keeping (Work) v.31**
- (cf. Exodus 34:21, 23:11, Deut 15:1-2)
 - Sabbath commandment was a significant part of Israel's identity as God's people
 - v.31A: Commitment to not engage in commerce (i.e. shopping) on the Sabbath day
 - Nowhere does Torah speak about Sabbath and marketplace (cf. though Amos 8:5 & Jeremiah 17:19-27 speaks against this)
 - v.31B: Forgo the crops of the seventh year (cf. Exodus 23:11) and release debts every seventh year (cf. Deut 15:1,2)
- Sabbath keeping – reminder God worked in the 6 days of creation and God rested on the 7th day.
 - Sabbath a reminder of God's sovereignty – God is in control – and the Lordship of God: to worship Him, remember Him, and honor Him!
- **#3 The Temple (Finances/Church) vv.32-39**
- (cf. Exodus 30:11-16, Leviticus 6:12-13, Deut 14:22-29, 2 Cor 8:1-5, 9:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2)
 - The people of God had neglected the house of God and desired to do differently. In fact, in their renewed commitment, they raise the level of commitment and giving (above what the Mosaic law required)
 - A) vv. 32-33 Shrine Contribution (Exodus 30:11-16): *one-time*, $\frac{1}{2}$ shekel to build the tabernacle
 - => *Annual* $\frac{1}{2}$ shekel temple contribution

- B) v.34 Wood Contribution (Leviticus 6:12-13): Priests keep the fire of tabernacle burning continually
 - => Set a rotation (via lots) among the priest, Levites *and the people*
 - C) vv. 35-39 First Fruits & Tithes (Deut 14:22-29, 26:12): Give tithes during pilgrimage festival *every third year*
 - => Give first fruits and tithes *annually* to local Levitical locations
 - Overall commitment was, “We will not neglect the house of our God” when it came to their finances, their money.
- 3 areas of renewed commitment in areas of weakness
 - At the heart of these issues is Jesus
 - Jesus is the point of marriage: marriage is meant to display God’s covenantal faithfulness to us
 - Jesus is the point of the Sabbath: that ultimately in Jesus we have true, spiritual, eternal rest (and peace) in Him.
 - Jesus is the point of the Temple: all the sacrifices, offerings, rituals was to clear the way for the people of God to know and be with Him. In Jesus we don’t need anything or anyone else to know God

4. The Heart Behind the Renewed Covenant (9:38)

- Why? Why did the people of God renew their commitment to Him – in some ways above and beyond what the Lord required?
 - Is this passage about us making or renewing our commitment to God and to follow Him more and to give it 150%? Yes!
- But is it only about that? No! Why? We go back to 9:38: “Because of all this...”
 - What is “all this”? It’s Nehemiah 8 – the people being re-formed by God’s Word, it’s Nehemiah 9 – the people returning to God in confession and repentance as they’re being reminded of God’s preserving faithfulness and love towards them despite their disobedience and sin. No one is forcing them or coercing them into this covenant!
- So we see that the purpose of this renewed covenant is not to earn God’s blessing, favor or forgiveness – rather the people renewing their commitment to God is in response to God’s blessing, favor and forgiveness.
 - I believe that’s also why they go above and beyond in some of the areas!
 - We see this in the NT: Luke 21:1-4 – The Widow’s offering, Luke 7:36-50 – The prostitute who anointed Jesus’ feet with her tears, hair and ointment, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:7 – Macedonian Christians giving out of a joyful, willing, grateful heart in Christ– even though they themselves were suffering in need.
 - They knew, understood, and experienced the radical grace, generosity, love of Jesus
- The Christian life is a continual renewed commitment to Jesus, which flows from a conviction and confession of who He is.

Reflection/Application

- What are some of the areas in your life where you are prone to sin (i.e. recurring sins) or have a more difficult time trusting God in (i.e. more susceptible) ? In what sphere(s) of your life (i.e. home, work/school, church, etc.) is it more difficult to entrust to God?
- In what ways or areas of your life have you been "talking the talk" as a Christian, but not necessarily "walking the walk" as a Christian?

- What are some ways or areas of your life where the Lord is perhaps convicting and leading you to make some changes or take some significant next steps in? Practically, what might that look like?
- Are you being reminded (and reminding yourself) of the gospel message daily? In what ways do you need to be reminded again of God's holiness, grace and faithfulness to you in Jesus? What are some practical ways you can regularly be reminded of the gospel?
- *Parent Corner:* What are some ways you can teach, encourage, remind -- and also be an example to - your child(ren) that following and obeying Jesus ultimately comes from a grateful and joyful heart?