

NOON BIBLE STUDY: NEHEMIAH 9 & 10

SUMMARY:

THE NATION HAS JUST GATHERED TO HEAR THE WORDS OF GOD READ AND EXPLAINED BY EZRA (NEHEMIAH 8). THIS WAS A TIME OF JOY AND CELEBRATION. THE NATION WILL NOW MEET AGAIN TO CONTINUE IN THE WORDS AND WAYS OF THE LORD. THIS MEETING WILL BE A MORE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY, ACCOMPANIED BY CONFESSION OF SIN AND A RECOUNTING OF THE NATION'S ROCKY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD. THE NATION'S LEADERS WILL TAKE A BOLD STEP TO HELP THEIR GENERATION BE ONE WHO FOLLOWS THE LORD.

NEHEMIAH 9:1-4 - SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

THIS GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE IS NOT THE DAY OF JOY WE READ IN NEHEMIAH 8. INSTEAD THIS IS A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY WHERE THE NATION IS RESPONDING TO THE READING OF THE LAW OF THE LORD WITH SORROW AND REPENTANCE. WE SEE ANOTHER POWERFUL EXAMPLE OF THE HEART THE PEOPLE HAD FOR GOD REVERENCE FOR HIS WORD:

NEHEMIAH 9:3 (NLT) - THEY REMAINED STANDING IN PLACE FOR THREE HOURS WHILE THE BOOK OF THE LAW OF THE LORD THEIR GOD WAS READ ALOUD TO THEM. THEN FOR THREE MORE HOURS THEY CONFESSED THEIR SINS AND WORSHIPED THE LORD THEIR GOD.

EZRA NOW MOVES TO THE BACKGROUND AND LEADING GROUP OF LEVITES LEAD THE PEOPLE IN PRAYER AND PRAISE.

NEHEMIAH 9:5-15 - GOD'S GOODNESS TO ABRAHAM'S CHILDREN & SALVATION FROM EGYPTIAN SLAVERY

NEHEMIAH 9:16-21 - GOD'S MERCY TO ISRAEL IN SPITE OF THEIR REBELLION

NEHEMIAH 9:22-25 - GOD'S PROVISION OF AND IN THE PROMISED LAND

NEHEMIAH 9:26-31 - GOD'S COMPASSION AND MERCY IN SPITE OF THE NATION'S FAITHLESSNESS

THIS IS A GREAT MOMENT TO PAUSE AND REFLECT ON WHAT "PRAISE" IS ALL ABOUT. TO "PRAISE" SOMEONE OR SOMETHING, ONE SPEAKS WELL OF THEM. PRAISE FOR GOD IS ROOTED IN SPEAKING WELL OF GOD - FOR WHO HE IS (CHARACTER) AND WHAT HE'S DONE (ACTS & DEEDS). PRAISING GOD IS NOT JUST SAYING "PRAISE GOD" OR "HALLELUJAH" (THE HEBREW WORD WHICH MEANS "PRAISE YAH(WEH)"). THOSE TWO PHRASES ARE A CALL FOR OTHERS TO "PRAISE GOD" - BUT TO *ACTUALLY* PRAISE GOD, WE SPEAK (OR SING OR WRITE) WELL OF HIM FOR WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE'S DONE.

NOTICE THE WORDS USED BY THE JEWISH LEADERS HERE:

NEHEMIAH 9:5 - ARISE, BLESS THE LORD YOUR GOD FOREVER AND EVER! O MAY YOUR GLORIOUS NAME BE BLESSED AND EXALTED ABOVE ALL BLESSING AND PRAISE! *(THIS IS A CALL FOR THE PEOPLE TO WORSHIP)*

NEHEMIAH 9:6 - "YOU ALONE ARE THE LORD. YOU HAVE MADE THE HEAVENS, THE HEAVEN OF HEAVENS WITH ALL THEIR HOST, THE EARTH AND ALL THAT IS ON IT, THE SEAS AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. YOU GIVE LIFE TO ALL OF THEM AND THE HEAVENLY HOST BOWS DOWN BEFORE YOU. *(THIS IS PRAISE)*

NEHEMIAH 9:11 - "YOU DIVIDED THE SEA BEFORE THEM, SO THEY PASSED THROUGH THE MIDST OF THE SEA ON DRY GROUND; AND THEIR PURSUERS YOU HURLED INTO THE DEPTHS, LIKE A STONE INTO RAGING WATERS. *(PRAISE FOR WHAT HE'S DONE)*

NEHEMIAH 9:31 - "NEVERTHELESS, IN YOUR GREAT COMPASSION YOU DID NOT MAKE AN END OF THEM OR FORSAKE THEM, FOR YOU ARE A GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE GOD. *(PRAISE FOR WHO HE IS)*

AND JUST LIKE WHEN SOMEONE SPEAKS WELL OF US (FOR WHO WE ARE OR WHAT WE'VE DONE), IT BLESSES US - SO PRAISE OF GOD BLESSES HIM!! IT IS EASY TO JUST SAY "PRAISE THE LORD" OR "HALLELUJAH" - IT TAKES THOUGHT AND EFFORT IN MIND AND HEART TO DECLARE THE GREATNESS OF GOD. YET THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS FOR OUR VERY EXISTENCE!

NEHEMIAH 9:32-38 - THE LEVITES APPEAL TO GOD'S MERCY & PLAN TO RENEW COVENANT WITH HIM

V. 33-35 - HUMILITY, CONFESSION, TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

THE LEADERS RECOGNIZE WHY THE NATION IS IN THE SITUATION THEY ARE CURRENTLY IN (SLAVES/SUBJECTS TODAY RATHER THAN FREE). IT IS BECAUSE OF THEIR NATIONAL SIN AND TURNING FROM THE LORD. YET IN THIS MOMENT THEY ARE ASKING GOD TO BE MERCIFUL TO THEM AND TURN HIS ATTENTION TO THEIR SITUATIONS.

WITH THIS FINAL PRAYER, THEY PREPARE AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT WHICH THEY WILL RATIFY AS A RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT WITH GOD. GOD HAS ALWAYS WORKED IN SCRIPTURE THROUGH COVENANTS. A COVENANTS IS AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO OR MORE PARTIES TO DO OR NOT DO CERTAIN THINGS WITH (AT TIMES) A PROMISED SERVICE OR BLESSING IN THE END. GOD PROMISES TO BE THEIR GOD, PROTECT AND PROVIDE FOR THEM AND KEEP THEM IN (AT FIRST IT WAS BRING THEM TO) THE PROMISED LAND. THE PEOPLE PROMISE TO OBEY HIS COMMANDMENTS, WHICH SERVE AS THE TERMS OF THE COVENANT. CONVERSELY, IF EITHER PARTY BREAKS THEIR END OF THE COVENANT, THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES.

Q - WHY DO YOU THINK THE LEADERS FELT IT IMPORTANT TO WRITE THE AGREEMENT DOWN AND SIGN THEIR NAMES?

NEHEMIAH 10:1-27 - THE NAMES OF THE COVENANT MAKING LEADERS

THIS LIST WAS A COLLECTION OF THE LEADERS (V. 1, 14-27), PRIESTS (V. 2-8), LEVITES (V. 9-13)

NEHEMIAH 10:28-29 - MAIN OATH & COVENANT PROMISE

THE CORE OF THEIR COVENANT RENEWAL IS THE ORIGINAL MOSAIC COVENANT.

NEHEMIAH 10:29 (NLT) - (ALL OF THE PEOPLE) JOINED THEIR LEADERS AND BOUND THEMSELVES WITH AN OATH. THEY SWORE A CURSE ON THEMSELVES IF THEY FAILED TO OBEY THE LAW OF GOD AS ISSUED BY HIS SERVANT MOSES. THEY SOLEMNLY PROMISED TO CAREFULLY FOLLOW ALL THE COMMANDS, REGULATIONS, AND DECREES OF THE LORD OUR LORD.

"THIS PICKS UP AND FILLS OUT THE DECLARATION MADE IN 9:38 BY THE WHOLE COMPANY AND SEALED ON THEIR BEHALF BY THEIR LEADERS. IT IS MADE COMPLETELY CLEAR THAT EVERYONE, DOWN TO THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN WHO COULD UNDERSTAND SHARED IN THIS OATH. THIS OATH IS REINFORCED BY A CURSE (EX: CALLING DOWN DISASTER IF THEY SHOULD GO BACK ON THEIR WORD)." THE LIST NOT ONLY EMPHASIZES THIS UNANIMITY BUT PORTRAYS THE PEOPLE CONSCIOUS OF ITS CALLING TO BE SEPARATED FROM THE NATIONS. IT WAS THEIR READING OF THE LAW THAT INSPIRED AND LEFT NO ROOM FOR DOUBT OF THIS." (DEREK KINDER, "TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES: EZRA & NEHEMIAH". PG 115)

NEHEMIAH 10:30-39 - SPECIFIC COMMANDS CITED

THE SUMMARY STATEMENTS MENTIONED IN THIS COVENANT RENEWAL DOCUMENT WERE A COMMITMENT TO REFRAIN FROM INTERMARRYING AND INTERMINGLING WITH THE NATIONS (V. 30-31) AND TO TITHE AND SUPPORT THE TEMPLE AND THE TEMPLE SERVANTS (PRIESTS, LEVITES, ETC).

AND SO THE STAGE IS SET FOR THE NATION TO BE COVENANT-KEEPERS. THEY ARE MINDFUL OF WHAT HAS GONE WRONG IN THE PAST AND WHAT NEEDS TO BE ADHERED TO IN THE FUTURE. THESE TWO PIECES ARE IMPORTANT TO BE COVENANT KEEPERS OURSELVES. WE CAN'T FORGET WHERE WE'VE COME FROM - WHAT HAS TRIPPED US UP IN THE PAST - AND WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING NOW *INSTEAD*. IN OUR CASE, WE HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE TO ADD TO OUR OWN STORY OF HOW TO STAY FAITHFUL TO THE LORD.

WE'VE LOOKED AT COVENANTS IN THE PAST IN LIGHT OF OUR CULTURAL MARRIAGE VOWS. LET'S REMEMBER THEM AGAIN NOW. HERE'S WHAT THE BRIDE IS ASKED OF HER GROOM:

WILL YOU LOVE HIM, COMFORT HIM, HONOR AND KEEP HIM -- FOR BETTER OR WORSE, FOR RICHER OR POORER, IN SICKNESS AND HEALTH AND FORSAKING ALL OTHERS, BE FAITHFUL ONLY TO HIM SO LONG AS YOU BOTH SHALL LIVE?

THOSE ARE GOOD WORDS TO PLEDGE TO OUR LORD AND SAVIOR. COVENANT IS SOMETHING THAT TRANSCENDS OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, SITUATIONS, AND EVEN OUR FEELINGS. HUSBANDS AND WIVES SHOULD SHOW LOVE EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T "FEEL LOVE". THIS SEEMS ALMOST CONTROVERSIAL TO SAY BUT WE SEE THIS MODELED DAILY BY PARENT'S LOVE TOWARDS CHILDREN AND WE SEE IT MOST CLEARLY IN JESUS.

WE KNOW JESUS DID THIS TOWARDS US - IT CERTAINLY DIDN'T "FEEL GOOD" TO GO TO THE CROSS - BUT HE DID BECAUSE HIS LOVE FOR US (AND HIS FATHER) TRANSCENDED HIS CIRCUMSTANCES, SITUATION, AND FEELINGS.

AND SO WE ARE CALLED TO A COVENANT KIND OF LOVE TOWARDS GOD. ONE THAT PLEDGES TO LOVE AND BE DEVOTED TO HIM, FOR BETTER OR WORSE, WHETHER OUR LIVES FOR HIM LEAD US TO BE RICHER OR POORER, WHETHER OUR TEMPORAL LIVES ARE FILLED WITH SICKNESS OR HEALTH. WE FORSAKE ALL OTHERS AND VOW TO BE FAITHFUL TO ONLY HIM AS LONG AS WE LIVE.

AND WE REJOICE IN AND ARE FUELED BY THE TRUTH THAT THE ONE WHO WE PLEDGE TO WILL NEVER LEAVE OR FORSAKE US, FOR HIS COVENANT LOVE ENDURES FOREVER. FOR HE IS "THE GREAT AND MIGHTY AND AWESOME GOD, WHO KEEPS HIS COVENANT OF UNFAILING LOVE... (NEHEMIAH 9:32A, NLT). THAT'S SOMETHING TO PRAISE GOD FOR INDEED!