

Hurst Green
4th Aug 19
Neh 10:28-39
Solemn Covenant

Hey – here we are in Chapter 10 of our tour through Ezra’s life as we learn to love the word and aren’t we in a great place?

God has brought his people back out of slavery and back to his land – the promised land.

Those of his people who have chosen to come back have come in the three waves we have looked at, setting up the temple, re-establish the worship and rebuilt the defences.

The people are united and have come together and demanded to know what God wants of them – They had the law read to them and explained to them.

They let the law affect their hearts; they cried over it. When did you last cry over reading God’s word?

They then obeyed God’s law and did what it said – even giving up their tears for a time of celebration

After days of reading the law for six hours a day they then came together for that amazing time of confession. Three hours of reading the law and, what must have been a fabulous three hours of spontaneous worship and confession while they reminded themselves of all God had done for them.

And at the end of chapter 9

Nehemiah 9:38 (ANIV)

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."*

The people decided to make an agreement with God because of all he had done for them. *"In view of all this"*

What else could they do? They have been convinced by the demands of scripture – Just as we should be.

It was not enough to say sorry. They had to express their sincerity of their desire to serve God whole heartedly and passionately.

They had repented and repentance involves two turnings.

Firstly you turn away from sin – you decide to give it all up; permanently. That is why you must change; if you don’t you will just slip back into the mire.

Secondly you turn to God and his ways. If you don’t you will turn to something else and just find yourself in a different swamp. You turn to God **AND HIS WAYS.**

And the people decided to mark this with this covenant.

Do you realise that you made a covenant with God? When you accept God into your life you personally made a covenant with God.

You may not have realised it at the time but I hope by now that you do. You chose to make God and his ways the centre of your life. Well done!

The agreement that is symbolised by this covenant is important – **agreement is important.**

It is always a two way thing. God had agreed to be your God and promised to be with you and never leave you or forsake you. That is a pretty important commitment! And one he takes very seriously.

You have agreed to be his people and to follow in his ways.

These sort of agreements have figured prominently in the bible. We often call them God's promises but they include commitments from the people as well.

Noah – he agreed to make the Ark that God had demanded and God kept him safe through the flood.

Abraham – he agreed to go where God said and God agreed to make him the Father of many.

Moses – he agreed to go and fetch God's people and God agreed to lead them.

The Passover is a covenant that we keep to this day.

Moses (again) – God laid down the law and the people agreed to obey it.

God has been utterly faithful to those covenants although the people have not done too well.

And then we have the written covenants.

Joshua at the end of his life assembled all the tribes at a place called Shechem. The people committed themselves again to God (although they had not taken all of the Promised Land and had sinned against God)

Joshua 24:24-27 (ANIV)

²⁴ *And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."* ²⁵ *On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws.*

²⁶ *And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.* ²⁷ *"See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."*

This was in the Law of God – the very book that the people have been learning about. Sadly we do not have that part of the Old Testament anymore just what is recorded in Joshua 24.

They made a covenant with God to follow his ways and separate themselves from the world – that is from sin.

When Israel had good kings – and they did not have too many of them – the Kings cleaned up the nation, threw out the other Gods and made covenants with God.

All of these accounts were written in the book of the law and Ezra would have known about them and now the people knew about them too. They agreed with God.

And agreement is important.

It used to be common in non-conformists churches to have a covenant to show what they were committing to God and the people would sign it.

It is important to agree with God about things such as, your personal time with him, your lifestyle, your priorities, your relationships and being a witness.

If you have that agreement you can see quiet clearly what parts of your life you are withholding and can ask yourself why?

We have read the agreement that they signed up to.

Here are some key points from it:

Nehemiah 10:29 (ANIV)

²⁹ all 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.

That is good strong stuff and a covenant with God should be.

They promise to obey carefully – not just obey.

They agree to:

- Keep themselves Holy. To separate themselves from the other people around them. We promise to keep our self holy; to separate ourselves from sin and to be holy because the Lord our God is holy.
- They promise to keep the Sabbath. An important thing for our benefit. A day of rest and relaxation after the struggles of the week. I know we often cannot put a whole day aside but it is important to put time aside to be with your God – it is good for you. They even agree to the seventh year being a Sabbath and to let the land rest.
- Then they agree to keep all the laws about giving including the tithe. Just as we should agree to be a generous and open handed people contributing to the welfare of the area we are in (just as we do) and obeying the commands to love one another and to love our neighbour as ourselves.
- And then finally they agree that they will not neglect the house of our God.

Now how is that relevant?

You could just say that this is an interesting history lesson but we have been freed from the law and it does not apply to us.

I would agree.

But the topics covered in this covenant are not exclusive to the 5th Century BC.

The topics have been:

The authority of scripture and why it should be so important in our lives.

Witnessing in a pluralistic society – standing for Christ when we are among people with so many other Gods.

Family life and the importance of marriage.

Employment law – how do we who are special interact with other people in the workplace?

Human rights

Conservation – how they should have looked after the land and how we should do so today.

Money and resources management. For we are only stewards of what we have, it all comes from God and we need to be ten talent people.

The detailed wording of the agreement is not relevant to us but the principles behind it are.

When we follow Jesus we do not have to become itinerant carpenters but we do the things he did – and we were promised that we would do even greater things!

In our culture commitment is not a popular thing. We do not have a job for life and employers do not commit to us for life – but we have an employment contract that both sides keep.

All too often even family life is a transient thing with people not committing to each other.

So we are different because we do commit.

We commit to each other. To being the body of Christ and showing it through our love one for another

We commit to the Church. A key part of our witness is joining together here each week.

We commit to Gods word – to learn it and obey it.

And we commit to our community.

And we do so unreservedly.