

Nehemiah Organizes the Community (September 22–25, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 7:1–5a

Organization for Conservation

1 Now when the wall had been built and I had erected the doors and appointed the gatekeepers, singers, and the Levites,

2 I gave command over Jerusalem to my brother Hanani and Hananiah the commander of the citadel. For he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

3 I said to them, “Do not open the gates of Jerusalem until the sun is hot. While they are standing guard let them shut and fasten the doors. And appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his post and another opposite his house.”

The Registration of the People

4 The city *was* widespread and large, but the people in it were few and no houses were rebuilt.

5a Then my God put into my heart to assemble the nobles, the prefects, and the people to be enrolled.

Ezra Reads the Law and Explains It to the People (September 26, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 7:73b–8:12

7:73b When the seventh month came, the Israelites *were* in their cities.

8:1 All of the people gathered as one to the public square before the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that Yahweh had commanded Israel.

2 So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly for *each* man and woman to hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.

3 He read from it facing the public square before the Water Gate from dawn until noon that day, opposite the men, women, and those with understanding. The ears of all the people *were attentive* to the book of the law.

4 Then Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden podium that had been made for the occasion. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right. On his left *was* Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, because he was above all of the people. When he opened it all the people stood up.

6 Then Ezra blessed Yahweh the great God, and all of the people answered, “Amen! Amen!” while lifting their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped Yahweh *with their* noses to the ground.

7 And Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites were teaching the people from the law while the people were in their places.

8 So they read the book from the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that they could understand the reading.

9 Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all of the people, “This day is holy to Yahweh your God. Do not mourn nor weep.” For all of the people wept when they heard the words of the law.

10 Then he said to them, “Go, eat festive food and drink sweet drinks, and send a share to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our lord. Do not be grieved because the joy of Yahweh is your refuge.”

11 So the Levites silenced all of the people, saying, “Silence, for this day is holy. Do not be grieved.”

12 All of the people went to eat, to drink, to send a share, and to have great joy because they understood the words that they had made known to them.

Discovery of the Forgotten Feast (September 27, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 8:13–15

13 On the second day the heads of the families of all the people, the priests, and the Levites gathered together to Ezra the scribe to study the words of the law.

14 They found written in the law, which Yahweh had commanded by the hand of Moses, that the Israelites should live in booths during the festival of the seventh month,

15 and that they should proclaim and give voice in all of their cities in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the hill and bring olive tree branches, olive oil wood branches, myrtle shrub branches, palm tree branches, and other leafy tree branches to make booths, as it is written.”

Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (October 11–17, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 8:16–18

16 So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the house of God, in the public square of the Water Gate, and in the public square of the Gate of Ephraim.

17 And all of the assembly of those who returned from captivity made booths and lived in the booths because the Israelites had not done it from the days of Jeshua son of Nun until that day. And there was very great joy.

18 And he read from the scroll of the law of God day by day from the first day up to the last day. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day there was an assembly according to the rule.

The Israelites' Prayer of Confession (October 20, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 9:1–37

Assembly for Confession and Worship

1 On the twenty-fourth day of this month the Israelites gathered in fasting, in sackcloths, and with soil on them.

2 Those of the seed of Israel separated themselves from all of the foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors.

3 They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of Yahweh their God for a fourth part of the day, and for a fourth they were confessing and worshiping Yahweh their God.

4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani stood on the platform of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to Yahweh their God.

5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah said, "Stand up, bless Yahweh your God from everlasting until everlasting.

Prayer of Confession

5b Blessed be your glorious name that is being exalted above all blessing and praise!

6 "You alone are Yahweh. You alone have made the heavens, the heavens of the heavens, and all of their army, the earth and all that is in it, the waters and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the army of the heavens worship you.

7 You are Yahweh, the God who chose Abram and brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham.

8 You found his heart faithful before you and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite—to give *it* to his seed. And you have kept your word because you are righteous.

9 "You saw the misery of our ancestors in Egypt, and you heard their shout at the Red Sea.

10 You gave signs and wonders against Pharaoh, all of his servants, and all of the people of his land because you knew that they acted arrogantly against them. You made a name for yourself, as it is this day.

11 And you divided the sea before them, and they passed through the sea on dry ground, but their pursuers you threw into the depths like a stone into mighty waters.

12 You led them by day with a column of cloud and with a column of fire by night, to give them light on the way that they were to go.

13 Then you came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right judgments and true teachings, good regulations and commandments.

14 You made known your holy Sabbath to them and gave them commandments, regulations, and law by the hand of your servant Moses.

15 You gave them bread from heaven for their starvation, and you caused water to go out from a rock for their thirst. You told them to go in order to take into possession the land that you have sworn by your hand to give to them.

16 "But they and our ancestors acted arrogantly and stiffened their neck and did not listen to your commandments.

17 They refused to listen and did not remember your wonders that you did among them. They stiffened their neck and in their rebellion determined to return to their slavery. But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in loyal love, so you did not abandon them.

18 Even when they made for themselves a molten idol of a calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you out from Egypt,' and committed great blasphemies.

19 But you in your many mercies did not abandon them in the desert. The column of cloud *that was* over them in the day did not cease to leave them on the way, and the column of fire by night *that gave* light to them on the way that they went.

20 And you gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst.

21 Forty years you sustained them in the desert—they were not in need. Their clothing did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

22 And you gave them kingdoms and nations and allotted them a portion. They took into possession the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan.

23 You made their children numerous like the stars of the heavens and brought them to the land that you told their ancestors to enter in order to take possession.

24 So the children went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites; you gave them into their hand, and their kings and the nations of the land to do with them according to their pleasure.

25 And they captured fortified cities and a fertile land and took possession of houses filled with every good thing: hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, and many *fruit* trees. They ate and became full, and they became fat and took delight in your great

goodness.

26 “But they rebelled and were rebellious against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them to turn back to you, and they did great blasphemies.

27 Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemy, and they brought trouble to them. Then in the time of their trouble they cried out to you, and you heard from the heavens, and according to your great compassions, you gave them saviors, and you saved them from the hand of their enemies.

28 But when they had rest they returned to doing evil before you, and you abandoned them in the hand of their enemies, and they ruled over them. Then they returned and cried out to you, and from the heavens you heard and many times rescued them according to your compassions.

29 You warned them so that they would return to your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to your commandments but sinned against your judgments that a person must do so that they may live. They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not listen.

30 You were patient toward them for many years, and you have warned them by your spirit through the hand of your prophets, but they did not listen. So you gave them into the hand of the nations of the lands.

31 But in your great compassions you did not put an end to them, and you did not abandon them. For you are a gracious and compassionate God.

32 “And now our God, the great, mighty, and awesome God who keeps *his* covenant and loyal love, do not belittle in your presence all of the hardship that is found in us, our kings, our officials, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all of our people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.

33 You are righteous in everything that has come on us, for you dealt faithfully, and we have acted wickedly.

34 Our kings, our officials, our priests, and our ancestors did not keep your law and did not listen to your commandments and statutes that you declared to them.

35 And in their kingdom and in the greatness you gave to them, and in the wide and fertile land that you gave before them, they did not serve you and did not turn from their evil deeds.

36 Behold, we are slaves to this day, and the land that you have given to our ancestors to eat its fruits and *enjoy* its goodness— behold, we are slaves in it!

37 Its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have given over us because of our sins, and *they are* ruling over our dead bodies and our livestock at their pleasure. We are in great trouble.

A Signed National Covenant (October 20, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 9:38–10:39

Introduction

9:38 “Now because of all of this we make a binding written agreement and are writing on the sealed documents *the names of* our commanders, our Levites, and our priests.”

The Chief Leaders and Priests Who Signed

10:1 Upon the sealed documents: Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah and Zedekiah;

2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,

4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,

5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

8 Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah—these are the priests.

The Levites Who Signed

9 And the Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui from the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;

10 their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

12 Zaccur, Shereiah, Shebanaih,

13 Hodiah, Bani, Beninu.

The Other Leaders Who Signed

14 The heads of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,
 19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nobai,
 20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,
 21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,
 22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,
 23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,
 24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,
 25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,
 26 Ahijah, Hanan, Anan,
 27 Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

The Solemn Promise

28 “The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to *observe* the law of God—their wives, their sons, their daughters, and all who know and understand—

29 *are* helping their brothers, their nobles, and entering into a solemn oath to walk in the law of God which was given by the hand of Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all of the commandments of Yahweh our Lord and his judgments and regulations.

Specific Examples of Separation

30 We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land nor take their daughters for our sons.

31 And the peoples of the land who bring merchandise and any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not accept it from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. We will forego *the crops of* the seventh year and *cancel* every debt.

Temple Taxes

32 “We put on ourselves the commandment upon us to yearly give a third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God:

33 for the rows of bread, the offering of the daily sacrifice, the continual *burnt* sacrifice, the Sabbaths, the new moon festivals, the appointed *festival* times, the holy objects, the sin offerings that make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

Offerings in Kind

34 And we have cast lots for the contributions of the wood offering of the priests, the Levites, and the people to bring *it* to the house of our God, by our fathers’ houses, at designated times, year by year, to burn on the altar of Yahweh our God—as it is written in the law.

35 We *also* bring the first fruits of our soil and the first fruits of all the fruit trees, year by year, for the house of Yahweh.

36 And the firstborn of our sons and beasts—as it is written in the law—and the firstborn of our cattle and sheep, to bring to the house of our God *and* to the priests serving in the house of our God.

37 And we bring the best of our dough, our offerings, the fruit of every tree, new wine, and olive oil to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and *to bring* the tithe of our soil to the Levites, for the Levites *receive* the tithes in all of our rural towns.

38 And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, will be with the Levites during the tithe the Levites receive. The Levites will bring up a tithe of the tithes for the house of our God to the chambers of the storehouse.

39 For the Israelites and the Levites will bring to the storerooms the offering of grain, new wine, and olive oil. These are the objects of the sanctuary and the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and singers. We will not neglect the house of our God.”

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