

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

Nehemiah 7:1–5a

### Organization for Conservation

1 When the wall had been rebuilt and I had positioned the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed,  
 2 I then put in charge over Jerusalem my brother Hanani and Hananiah the chief of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many do.  
 3 I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem must not be opened in the early morning, until those who are standing guard close the doors and lock them [*or* and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors]. Position residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their guard stations and some near their homes.”

### The Registration of the People

4 Now the city was spread out and large, and there were not a lot of people in it. At that time houses had not been rebuilt.  
 5a My God placed it on my heart to gather the leaders, the officials, and the ordinary people so they could be enrolled on the basis of genealogy.

## 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 arrived and the Israelites were settled in their cities,  
 8:1 all the people gathered together in the plaza which was in front of the Water Gate. They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had commanded Israel.  
 2 So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly which included men and women and all those able to understand what they heard. (This happened on the first day of the seventh month.)  
 3 So he read it before the plaza in front of the Water Gate from dawn till noon before the men and women and those children who could understand. All the people were eager to hear the book of the law.  
 4 Ezra the scribe stood on a towering wooden platform constructed for this purpose. Standing near him on his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Masseiah. On his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.  
 5 Ezra opened the book in plain view of all the people, for he was elevated above all the people. When he opened the book, all the people stood up.  
 6 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people replied “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.  
 7 Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah—all of whom were Levites—were teaching the people the law, as the people remained standing.  
 8 They read from the book of God’s law, explaining it and imparting insight. Thus the people gained understanding from what was read.  
 9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priestly scribe, and the Levites who were imparting understanding to the people said to all of them, “This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping when they heard the words of the law.  
 10 He said to them, “Go and eat delicacies and drink sweet drinks and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”  
 11 Then the Levites quieted all the people saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy. Do not grieve.”  
 12 So all the people departed to eat and drink and to share their food with others and to enjoy tremendous joy, for they had gained insight in the matters that had been made known to them.

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

Nehemiah 8:13–15

13 On the second day of the month the family leaders met with Ezra the scribe, together with all the people, the priests, and the Levites, to consider the words of the law.  
 14 They discovered written in the law that the LORD had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month,  
 15 and that they should make a proclamation and disseminate this message in all their cities and in Jerusalem: “Go to the hill country and bring back olive branches and branches of wild olive trees, myrtle trees, date palms, and other leafy trees to construct temporary shelters, 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 these things back and constructed temporary shelters for themselves, each on his roof and in his courtyard and in the courtyards of the temple of God and in the plaza of the Water Gate and the plaza of the Ephraim Gate.  
 17 So all the assembly which had returned from the exile constructed temporary shelters and lived in them. The Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day. Everyone experienced very great joy.  
 18 Ezra read in the book of the law of God day by day, from the first day to the last. They observed the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day they held an assembly as was required.

## 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 same month the Israelites assembled; they were fasting and wearing sackcloth, their heads covered with dust.  
 2 Those truly of Israelite descent separated from all the foreigners, standing and confessing their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors.  
 3 For one-fourth of the day they stood in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God, and for another fourth they were confessing their sins and worshiping the LORD their God.  
 4 Then the Levites—Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani—stood on the steps and called out loudly to the LORD their God.  
 5a The Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah—said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God!”

### Prayer of Confession

5b “May you be blessed, O LORD our God, from age to age. May your glorious name be blessed; may it be lifted up above all blessing and praise.  
 6 You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, along with all their multitude of stars, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You impart life to them all, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.  
 7 “You are the LORD God who chose Abram and brought him forth from Ur of the Chaldeans. You changed his name to Abraham.  
 8 When you perceived that his heart was faithful toward you, you established a covenant with him to give his descendants the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites. You have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.  
 9 “You saw the affliction of our ancestors in Egypt, and you heard their cry at the Red Sea.  
 10 You performed awesome signs against Pharaoh, against his servants, and against all the people of his land, for you knew that the Egyptians had acted presumptuously against them. You made for yourself a name that is celebrated to this day.  
 11 You split the sea before them, and they crossed through the sea on dry ground! But you threw their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into surging waters.  
 12 You guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and with a pillar of fire by night to illumine for them the path they were to travel.  
 13 “You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven. You provided them with just judgments, true laws, and good statutes and commandments.  
 14 You made known to them your holy Sabbath; you issued commandments, statutes, and law to them through Moses your servant.  
 15 You provided bread from heaven for them in their time of hunger, and you brought forth water from the rock for them in their time of thirst. You told them to enter in order to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.  
 16 “But they—our ancestors—behaved presumptuously; they rebelled and did not obey your commandments.  
 17 They refused to obey and did not recall your miracles that you had performed among them. Instead, they rebelled and appointed a leader to return to their bondage in Egypt. But you are a God of forgiveness, merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and unfailing in your loyal love. You did not abandon them,  
 18 even when they made a cast image of a calf for themselves and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up from Egypt,’ or when they committed atrocious blasphemies.  
 19 “Due to your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. The pillar of cloud did not stop guiding them in the path by day, nor did the pillar of fire stop illuminating for them by night the path on which they should travel.  
 20 You imparted your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths; you provided water for their thirst.  
 21 For forty years you sustained them. Even in the desert they never lacked anything. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.  
 22 “You gave them kingdoms and peoples, and you allocated them to every corner of the land. They inherited the land of King Sihon of Heshbon and the land of King Og of Bashan.

23 You multiplied their descendants like the stars of the sky. You brought them to the land you had told their ancestors to enter in order to possess.

24 Their descendants entered and possessed the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites who were the inhabitants of the land. You delivered them into their hand, together with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with as they pleased.

25 They captured fortified cities and fertile land. They took possession of houses full of all sorts of good things—wells previously dug, vineyards, olive trees, and fruit trees in abundance. They ate until they were full and grew fat. They enjoyed to the full your great goodness.

26 “Nonetheless they grew disobedient and rebelled against you; they disregarded your law. They killed your prophets who had solemnly admonished them in order to cause them to return to you. They committed atrocious blasphemies.

27 Therefore you delivered them into the hand of their adversaries, who oppressed them. But in the time of their distress they called to you, and you heard from heaven. In your abundant compassion you provided them with deliverers to rescue them from their adversaries.

28 “Then, when they were at rest again, they went back to doing evil before you. Then you abandoned them to their enemies, and they gained dominion over them. When they again cried out to you, in your compassion you heard from heaven and rescued them time and again.

29 And you solemnly admonished them in order to return them to your law, but they behaved presumptuously and did not obey your commandments. They sinned against your ordinances—those by which an individual, if he obeys them, will live. They boldly turned from you; they rebelled and did not obey.

30 You prolonged your kindness with them for many years, and you solemnly admonished them by your Spirit through your prophets. Still they paid no attention, so you delivered them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.

31 However, due to your abundant mercy you did not do away with them altogether; you did not abandon them. For you are a merciful and compassionate God.

32 “So now, our God—the great, powerful, and awesome God, who keeps covenant fidelity—do not regard as inconsequential all the hardship that has befallen us—our kings, our leaders, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all your people—from the days of the kings of Assyria until this very day!

33 You are righteous with regard to all that has happened to us, for you have acted faithfully. It is we who have been in the wrong!

34 Our kings, our leaders, our priests, and our ancestors have not kept your law. They have not paid attention to your commandments or your testimonies by which you have solemnly admonished them.

35 Even when they were in their kingdom and benefiting from your incredible goodness that you had lavished on them in the spacious and fertile land you had set before them, they did not serve you, nor did they turn from their evil practices.

36 “So today we are slaves! In the very land you gave to our ancestors to eat its fruit and to enjoy its good things—we are slaves!

37 Its abundant produce goes to the kings you have placed over us due to our sins. They rule over our bodies and our livestock as they see fit, and we are in great distress!

## A Signed National Covenant (October 20, 444 BC)

Nehemiah 9:38–10:39

### Introduction

9:38 “Because of all of this we are entering into a binding covenant in written form; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests have affixed their names on the sealed document.”

### The Chief Leaders and Priests Who Signed

10:1 On the sealed documents were the following names: Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, along with 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, and Shemaiah. These were the priests.

### The Levites Who Signed

9 The Levites were as follows: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel.

10 Their colleagues were as follows: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

13 Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

**The Other Leaders Who Signed**

14 The leaders of the people were as follows: 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, Nebai,  
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 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,  
27 Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

**The Solemn Promise**

28 “Now the rest of the people—the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple attendants, and all those who have separated themselves from the neighboring peoples because of the law of God, along with their wives, their sons, and their daughters, all of whom are able to understand—  
29 hereby participate with their colleagues the town leaders and enter into a curse and an oath to adhere to the law of God which was given through Moses the servant of God, and to obey carefully all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, along with his ordinances and his statutes.

**Specific Examples of Separation**

30 “We will not give our daughters in marriage to the neighboring peoples, and we will not take their daughters in marriage for our sons.  
31 We will not buy on the Sabbath or on a holy day from the neighboring peoples who bring their wares and all kinds of grain to sell on the Sabbath day. We will let the fields lie fallow every seventh year, and we will cancel every loan.

**Temple Taxes**

32 We accept responsibility for fulfilling the commands to give one third of a shekel each year for the work of the temple of our God,  
33 for the loaves of presentation and for the regular grain offerings and regular burnt offerings, for the Sabbaths, for the new moons, for the appointed meetings, for the holy offerings, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the temple of our God.

**Offerings in Kind**

34 “We—the priests, the Levites, and the people—have cast lots concerning the wood offerings, to bring them to the temple of our God according to our families at the designated times year by year to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as is written in the law.  
35 We also accept responsibility for bringing the first fruits of our land and the first fruits of every fruit tree year by year to the temple of the LORD.  
36 We also accept responsibility, as is written in the law, for bringing the firstborn of our sons and our cattle and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks to the temple of our God, to the priests who are ministering in the temple of our God.  
37 We will also bring the first of our coarse meal, of our contributions, of the fruit of every tree, of new wine, and of olive oil to the priests at the storerooms of the temple of our God, along with a tenth of the produce of our land to the Levites, for the Levites are the ones who collect the tithes in all the cities where we work.  
38 A priest of Aaron’s line will be with the Levites when the Levites collect the tithes, and the Levites will bring up a tenth of the tithes to the temple of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury.  
39 The Israelites and the Levites will bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil to the storerooms where the utensils of the sanctuary are kept, and where the priests who minister stay, along with the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the temple of our God.”

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