

Inevitably this passage causes us to remember our great covenant with God through Jesus Christ who is the mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6). In this new covenant God promises to forgive us and enter into intimate relationship with each one of us.

Read Matthew 26: 26-28

What does communion mean to you? Is there a covenant relationship involved?

Concluding Thoughts

There seems to be an association between obedience and God's blessing, particularly in the OT, (although this is not to say that bad things don't happen to good people!) However, here the message is that praying, expecting God's blessing and then being a law unto oneself will not work. The history of Israel bears witness to this.

Promising obedience in this context takes practical and detailed form in abstinence from inter-marriage, commitment to the Sabbath, and leaving the ground to lie fallow every seventh year while cancelling debts.

We are centuries on from the time when Nehemiah restored the infrastructure and the faith of the people of God. Some of the concepts we have discussed might strike us as odd, but we can also learn from Israel's covenant with God because it contains some important principles for the Church in the 21st century.

To end in prayer...

If you have a candle at home you could light it to signify your intention to pray.

Jesus, like Nehemiah, has led us into a new relationship with God through a binding covenant. Every time we take communion we remember that through His death our sins are forgiven and that God has committed Himself to us, just as we have committed ourselves to follow Him.

In a few moments of silence let's pray for the Holy Spirit to develop within us a love for God's Word, a deep desire to do His work and to minister to those who need to know the love of God, in the name of Christ.

We will end by saying *The Grace* together...

The people are, in effect, agreeing that the Lord's claim on their lives will touch everything they have and own – children, cattle, produce, new wine and oil.

Ezra took great care to ensure that the covenant took into account every area of their lives.

What similarities and differences are there between Temple worship and maintenance and Church worship and maintenance?

How do we neglect the House of God?

The people commit themselves to maintaining the house of God with great solemnity. The commitment to ensuring that the things of the Temple were not neglected, though last in order, is not to be regarded as least in importance.

There is always a strong link between our spiritual attitudes and our social conduct, and unless the worship of God (as represented by the house of God) is central in hearts and minds, all kinds of social problems can arise. Without a strong base for worship, the Church cannot survive and the wider community is adversely affected.

What is the purpose of the House of God (the building)?

What impact does Jesus' teaching have on OT Temple theology?

(Teaching about the destruction of the Temple and that he -Jesus - would be the future locus of worship).

How do we reconcile the Body of Christ (the people) as the NT focus of the Church with the need for a physical House of God?

What are we trying to say to the wider community through the House of God – the building?

The book of Nehemiah concludes by naming the priests, leaders and key workers involved in the restoration of Jerusalem followed by the joyful dedication of the new wall (Neh. 12:27). Eventually, Nehemiah went back to Babylon to serve King Artaxerxes but later returned to Jerusalem to ensure the people continued to follow the Lord. He found that God's people had once again begun to drift from the terms of the covenant commitment, **(Neh. 13:6-31)**. Nehemiah rebukes those in the wrong and exhorts the people to turn back to God.

The Israelites drift from their covenant commitments under the crooked Eliashib the priest. How can we avoid drifting away from our commitments to God? What keeps us 'in the fold'?

**What are the main lessons you have learned from our studies in Nehemiah?
Themes/ideas**

Nehemiah 7

Covenant Commitment

Opening Discussion

Identify key elements of a marriage ceremony

Bible readings:

Nehemiah 9: 38; 10:28-39

Jeremiah 31: 3 – 4, 33-34

Matthew 26: 26-28

Does anything from the Nehemiah passage particularly speak to you?

The passage mentions the word 'covenant'. How do you understand that word?

The importance of making a binding agreement that commits a person to a deeper relationship with God is something we need to understand.

Many words can be used to describe such a binding agreement: dedication, consecration, covenant - the decision to commit oneself following confession or when new challenges are being opened up by the Lord.

As a result of the exposition of Scripture and the powerful prayer of confession, the people under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah decided to enter into a covenant (or agreement) with their covenant-keeping God.

They solemnly commit themselves to following God and obeying His Word.

What exactly did the Israelites commit themselves to do and how may this relate to us?

How should Christians regard the Sabbath or day of rest in our modern culture?

The final terms of the covenant sealed by the people are concerned with Temple maintenance and ministry. This implies that the House of God is once again central to the Jews' thinking.

The commitment involves an assurance that there will be:

- an adequate supply of wood
- that the first fruits of the produce will be brought annually to the Lord
- that tithes will be given

What do you think about tithing? Should this be confined to the Old Testament?