

# Confession and Commitment

Renewal in Christian Service

Text: Nehemiah 9:1- 11:2

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 Sunday sermon  
 Holy Light Church (English), Johor Bahru  
 9 September 2007

## Sermon statement (Big idea)

Repentance and confession, commitment and recommitment are part of the Christian process of becoming, especially in Christian service

## Introduction

An overview of the book of Nehemiah shows that Nehemiah wanted to restore not only the walls but also the people. The book is equally divided in two: chapters' 1-7 concerns the walls and chapters' 8-13 concerns the people.

# Nehemiah

Restoring the Walls and People									
Walls					People				
Chapters 1–7					Chapters 8–13				
Construction					Instruction				
Political					Spiritual				
Return 1–2		Rebuilding 3–7			Renewal 8–10			Reforms 11–13	
Persia Prayer 1	Jerusalem Inspection 2	Dele- gation 3	Opposed/ Finished 4–6	Organ- ized 7	Convic- tion 8	Confes- sion 9	Cove- nant 10	Resettle- ment & Dedication 11–12	Sabbath & Intermarriage Reforms 13
-----52 days (6:15)-----									425 BC? 420 BC?
445-433 BC									13:6a 13:6b

Dr Rick Griffins of Singapore Bible College summarise the book thus:

*The restoration of the walls and people in the land under Nehemiah record God's faithfulness to His promise of restoration to encourage the remnant in covenant obedience rooted in temple worship in Jerusalem.* (italics his)

## **Exposition of Text:**

### **A. A Renewal (9:1-5a)**

<sup>NE 9:1</sup> On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup> Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. <sup>3</sup> They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. <sup>4</sup> Standing on the stairs were the Levites--Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani--who called with loud voices to the LORD their God. <sup>5a</sup> And the Levites--Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah--said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. "

1. Chapter 8 deals with **conviction**. Ezra's reading of the Law of Moses and the Levites' exposition urges the nation to celebrate the feast of the tabernacles and begin a revival based on the word of God. They celebrated the feast of the tabernacle is to be celebrated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Nissan. Apparently the people have forgotten that. Actually according to Leviticus 23:35-44, the feast of the tabernacle is to be celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month (Nissan) for 8 days from one Sabbath to another. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day there is to be assembly. The reason is given in Lev 23:42-44

<sup>42</sup>Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: <sup>43</sup>That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God.

<sup>44</sup>And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD.

## **2. Repentance**

The Law must be working on their conscience because on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day the gathered together repentant.

- a. Fasting

- b. Sackcloth and ashes
- c. Put away foreigners

### 3. Confession

- a. Their sins
  - b. Sins of their fathers
4. They spent a quarter of the day standing listening to the Book of the Law of the Lord being read and another quarter of the day confessing and worshipping the Lord. 6 hours of Bible study and 6 hours of confession and worship.
  5. They prayed a prayer of repentance (9:5b-37)

## B. A Mighty God and a Sinful People (9:5b-37)

5b "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. <sup>6</sup> You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

<sup>NE 9:7</sup> "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. <sup>8</sup> You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.

<sup>NE 9:9</sup> "You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. <sup>10</sup> You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. <sup>11</sup> You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. <sup>12</sup> By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.

<sup>NE 9:13</sup> "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. <sup>14</sup> You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. <sup>15</sup> In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.

<sup>NE 9:16</sup> "But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands. <sup>17</sup> They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them, <sup>18</sup> even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, 'This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,' or when they committed awful blasphemies.

<sup>NE 9:19</sup> "Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. <sup>20</sup> You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. <sup>21</sup> For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.

NE 9:22 "You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. <sup>23</sup> You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their fathers to enter and possess. <sup>24</sup> Their sons went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you handed the Canaanites over to them, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. <sup>25</sup> They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness.

NE 9:26 "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. <sup>27</sup> So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

NE 9:28 "But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.

NE 9:29 "You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. <sup>30</sup> For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples. <sup>31</sup> But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

NE 9:32 "Now therefore, O our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes--the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, upon our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. <sup>33</sup> In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong. <sup>34</sup> Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them. <sup>35</sup> Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.

NE 9:36 "But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. <sup>37</sup> Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.

- This prayer is comparable to Ezra 9 and Daniel 9
- It is one of the two longest prayers in the Old Testament. The other is Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8. Its length signifies its significance.
- This prayer or hymn is the heart of the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is not just concerned about the walls. The walls of Jerusalem did have a role in protecting Jerusalem but this prayer shows that Nehemiah's main agenda is to restore temple worship in Jerusalem and to restore his people as God's chosen people.

The composition of the hymn is as follows<sup>1</sup>

- v.6 the praising of God as creator
- v.7-8 the covenant with Abraham
- v.9-11 the wonderful acts of God in Egypt
- v.12 the care of God in the desert
- v.13-21 Mount Sinai and the desert wandering
- v.22-25 the conquering of the Holy Land
- v.26-31 the unfaithfulness of Israel and God's patience in the Holy Land
- v.32-37 the confession of sin

You will notice that in the Old Testament, God always reminds the people of the Israelite narrative. In fact you will be able to notice that there are more than 7 times this is repeated. The idea is that this narrative reminds the Israelite of their identity: who they are and what is their special destiny.

### **C. A Separated People (9:38-10:1-29)**

NE 9:38 "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."

NE 10:1 Those who sealed it were:

Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah.

Zedekiah, <sup>2</sup> Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

NE 10:3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah,

NE 10:4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,

NE 10:5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

NE 10:6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

NE 10:7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

NE 10:8 Maaziah, Bilgai and Shemaiah.  
These were the priests.

NE 10:9 The Levites:

Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel,

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<sup>1</sup> Fensham, Charles *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, NICOT ( Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982) p.228

NE 10:10 and their associates: Shebaniah,  
Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

NE 10:11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

NE 10:12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

NE 10:13 Hodiah, Bani and Beninu.

NE 10:14 The leaders of the people:

Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

NE 10:15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

NE 10:16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

NE 10:17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

NE 10:18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,

NE 10:19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

NE 10:20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,

NE 10:21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,

NE 10:22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,

NE 10:23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,

NE 10:24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,

NE 10:25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,

NE 10:26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,

NE 10:27 Malluch, Harim and Baanah.

NE 10:28 "The rest of the people--priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand--<sup>29</sup> 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.

The people response is to confess their sins and to sign a new covenant with God. Notice that this is a one sided covenant. This is from the people to God. Previously it is from God to the people.

The signatory of the covenant

1. Officials (10:1)
2. Priests (10:2-8)
3. Levites (10:9-13)
4. Leaders (10:14-27)
5. Rest of the People (10:28-29)

#### **D. A Committed People (10:30-11:2)**

NE 10:30 "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.

NE 10:31 "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

NE 10:32 "We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: <sup>33</sup> for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God.

NE 10:34 "We--the priests, the Levites and the people--have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law.

NE 10:35 "We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.

NE 10:36 "As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there.

NE 10:37 "Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. <sup>38</sup> A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. <sup>39</sup> The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay.

"We will not neglect the house of our God."

NE 11:1 Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. <sup>2</sup> The people commended all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

#### **Conditions of the covenant**

1. No intermarrying (10:30)
2. Keeping the Sabbath holy (10:31)

3. give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God (10:32)
4. cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar (10:34)
5. the first fruits (10:35)
6. the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God (10:36)
7. storerooms of the house of our God (10:37)
8. leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem (11:1,2)

### **Observations of the section**

1. Joy and Mourning occurs because of a mighty God and a sinful people
2. Mourning leads to repentance and confession
3. Repentance and confession must lead to recommitment
4. Recommitment leads to a new covenant with God
5. Recommitment is led by the leaders and supported by all the people
6. New covenant supports the Temple worship

### **Lessons for us**

#### **1. Does a Christian need to mourn, repent and confess of his/her sins?**

Since we have all being forgiven of all our sins, so why is there a need to confess our sins? Why talk about sin anymore? God said He has forgiven and forgotten our sins.

Hb.10:15

HEB 10:15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

HEB 10:16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

HEB 10:17 Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts

I will remember no more."

HEB 10:18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Does this mean as Christians cannot (not capable of) sin?

And if we sinned, we do not have to confess. After all we already have a blank cheque for forgiveness.

I believe James 5:16 has something to say about this:

<sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

James is writing to Christians and he instructs them to confess their sins. This means that (1) Christians can sin, and (2) Christians need to confess their sins.

I have this mental picture of a large haversack full of stones which I have to carry on my back.. On the haversack is written "Alex's sins" and across the letters is a label "Forgiven and forgotten, signed GOD." These stones represent the sins of the past, present and the future. There great big ones and little ones. That means there are stones of future sins I have not committed yet. Everything I repent and confess a sin, I get to remove the stone of that sin from the haversack. And the load gets lighter. By the time I reach heaven, the haversack will be empty.

## **2. What is your commitment to God as a Christian?**

### **1) To become in character like Jesus Christ (Gal.4:19; Rom.8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18)**

Gal.4:19

19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

Rom. 8:29.

<sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

## **2) To be followers of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18,19)**

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

To become a missional people.

## **3. What is your commitment as a church?**

- 1) A commitment to Bible exposition (Acts 2:42)
- 2) A commitment to prayer (Matt 7:7-11, Phil 4:6, Isa 56:7)
- 3) A commitment to awe-inspiring worship (Acts 2:42-43)
- 4) A commitment to seeking and saving the lost (Mark 10:45)
- 5) A commitment to building everyone to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ (Col 1:28)
- 6) A commitment to caring and authentic relationship (Acts 2:42; 45-47)
- 7) A commitment to a well mobilized laity (Eph 4:11-12)
- 8) A commitment to unity of body and teamwork (Rom 12:5, 1 Cor 12:27)
- 9) A commitment to building strong Christian families (Jos 24:15, Ps 128)
- 10) A commitment to excellence (Phil 4:4, 8-9)

The mission of Holy Light Church (English) is to develop people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Repentance and confession, commitment and recommitment are part of the Christian process of becoming.