

God's Covenant with the Returned Exiles

Key Verse:
“Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.”
—Nehemiah 9:33

Selected Scripture:
Nehemiah 9:32-38;
10:28,29

THERE WERE MANY aspects concerning the restoration of Jerusalem following Israel's release from Babylonian captivity. One important consideration was the revitalization of their commitment to worship God and to obey his statutes.

“Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.”—Neh. 9:1-3

Then a number of the Levites led the people in a great prayer of confession, which emphasized God's faithfulness despite Israel's disobedience. Some of the remembrances brought to the people's attention included the call of Abraham and the covenant God made with him, the divine intervention that facilitated their ancestors' release from Egyptian bondage, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, and the miraculous provision to sustain the nation

throughout their wilderness experience. They were also reminded of their conquest of Canaan, their experiences during the period of the judges, as well as their frequent acts of rebellion, many unheeded warnings and their subsequent captivity. Yet in mercy, God did not abandon the Jews.—vss. 4-31

Our Key Verse is an affirmation that God is just in all his ways. The people confessed their wrong doing and recognized that their chastisement was merited. God had acted justly, but they had done wickedly. This recognition would provide a basis for their reinstatement into his favor.

Having demonstrated an attitude of repentance, the returned exiles desired a covenant with God, even to the point of writing it down. (vs. 38) After listing the names of those who signed the covenant on behalf of the people, there was a statement that the entire congregation vowed to “do all the commandments of the LORD” as well as his ordinances and statutes. (Neh. 10:1-29) More specifically, they vowed not to intermarry, to observe the Sabbaths, make contributions for the temple services, supply wood for the altar and restore the payment of tithes.—vss. 30-39

Although this reaffirmation of various ceremonial features of the Mosaic Law helped to strengthen the religious life of the people, God was interested in their imbibing the spirit of his Law. When Christ was questioned as to which was the great commandment of the law, he replied that it was love for God and, secondly, love for one’s neighbor.—Matt. 22:36-40

Not only is the foregoing true, but for true Christians today, we should willingly lay down our lives in service for our brethren, so as to be participants with Christ in blessing all the human family during God’s kingdom of righteousness. This new commandment implies a sacrificial love towards fellow believers that goes beyond the demands of the Mosaic Law.—John 13:34,35 ■