**Ezra – Nehemiah Bible Study**

**Nehemiah 7:73– Nehemiah 13:33**

Analysis from [www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org) **Author:** [Mark Throntveit, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament](http://www.enterthebible.org/contributors.aspx?rid=931)

**Read Nehemiah 7:73-8:12**

**ANALYSIS: Nehemiah 7:73b-10:39 – God’s Covenant Renewed**

The timing is important. These events take place shortly after the completion of the reconstruction of the walls. Mention of the "seventh month" (7:73b; "Tishri," September/October) is even more important, since this marks the beginning of the religious New Year with convocations, sacrifices, the Day of Atonement, and the Festival of Booths (Numbers 29).

Nehemiah 7:73b-10:39 reintroduces Ezra to the narrative by relating his crowning achievement, namely, the introduction of the law as the theological center of the community. These chapters stand apart from their context and treat a different matter. It is likely that they have been ordered as a covenant renewal similar to the reforms of Asa (2 Chronicles 15:1-8), Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29-31), and Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:29-35:19). Seen in this way the chapters fall into a congruent structure: proclamation of the law (chapter 8), confession (chapter 9), and renewal of commitment to the covenant (chapter 10).
**Read Nehemiah 9:1-3**

Outline of Ezra’s speech/prayer:

1. God of Creation
2. God of Abraham
3. God of the Exodus
	1. But still the people rebelled & ignored the law
4. God who patiently sends prophets
	1. But still the people didn’t listen
5. Therefore we are slaves in our own land
6. Thus we make a covenant with God

Outline of the covenant of the people: (10:28-39)

1. Observe the Torah
2. No intermarrying
3. Observe the Sabbath
4. Will pay a temple tax

**Read Nehemiah 11:1-2**

**ANALYSIS: Nehemiah 11:1-12:26 – The Repopulation of Jerusalem**

We have seen that the tedious lists of Ezra-Nehemiah serve the practical purpose of providing a running commentary on the status of the community in relation to the developing situation of reform. Here, the list in 11:3-36 ties the community, newly reconstituted in accordance with the law, to the land. In the same way, the list in 12:1-26, a list of the cultic personnel serving the restoration community, links the contemporary cultic situation under Ezra and Nehemiah (12:26) with the emerging situation obtained at the time of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (12:1).

By placing the lists here, after the covenant renewal, the newly formed people themselves (11:1-2) are voluntarily responsible for the repopulating of the city as the first fruits of their pledge not to "neglect the house of our God" (10:39), the verse linking the covenant renewal to our text. This strategic placement also makes the point that the work of the reformers has been successful. The temple has been rebuilt and staffed with the cultic personnel, and the walls have been rebuilt and filled with people purified and bound together in a covenant resulting from the proclamation of the law.

**ANALYSIS Nehemiah 12:27-43 – Joyful Dedication**

The most interesting piece of this text is the elaborate procession around the city on top of the rebuilt walls. It is depicted as a double procession to emphasize the shared contributions of Ezra and Nehemiah at this climactic moment in the narrative.

The climactic nature of the dedication is best seen in the parallels it draws with previous activities. The depiction of the ceremony as a "dedication" (*hanukkah*in Hebrew, v. 27) recalls the dedication of the temple in Ezra 6:17, as does the offering of great sacrifices, which further recalls the reestablishment of the altar in Ezra 3:3-5. At that time the people's rejoicing was heard far away (Ezra 3:13), as was the case now (12:43), and now their rejoicing is not mixed with weeping. In fact there is a pronounced emphasis upon joy throughout the passage (five times in verse 43!), and it is clearly indicated that this joy comes from God, which recalls God's similar activity at the reading of the law in Nehemiah 8:2-6. As a final indicator of closure, the procession itself begins at the Valley Gate where Nehemiah's midnight inspection of the walls had begun (Nehemiah 2:13).

# Read Nehemiah 13:1-9

# ANALYSIS Nehemiah 12:44-13:31 – Nehemiah’s Final Reforms

In many ways these final verses function as a coda or an appendix to the narrative that was so dramatically concluded with the procession and dedication of the walls in chapter 12. Their presence is a sober reminder that the process of reform and restoration was not completed with the reestablishment of worship or the rebuilding of the temple and the walls. The church must always be reformed, as both Calvinist and Lutheran strains of Protestantism tirelessly remind us.

Nehemiah's reforms in chapter 13, following an absence of unspecified length (vv. 6-7), seem to be grouped together because they all deal with purification. The six reforms may be briefly described as follows:

* Separation from foreigners, a persistent problem, here has to do with the banning of foreigners from the "assembly of God" (vv. 1-3). Decisive here are Deuteronomy 23:3-6; Numbers 22-24; and an anecdote from the time of David (Nehemiah 12:44-47).
* The eviction of his old nemesis, Tobiah--who had inappropriately been given rooms in the temple by Eliashib, one of the priests, while Nehemiah was in Babylon--served to purify the temple (13:4-9).
* The community's lack of support for the Levites and temple singers forced them to abandon the temple to work their fields in order to survive. After rebuking the people, Nehemiah set up a system by which the temple personnel would be supported (vv. 10-14).
* Violation of the Sabbath commandment by Jews and foreigners alike was quickly corrected, while additional measures were taken to prevent a recurrence (vv. 15-22).
* As in Ezra's day, the problem of intermarriage required Nehemiah's attention. Unlike Ezra, however, Nehemiah does not demand the divorce of these women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. He does rebuke the community, including physical abuse, and makes them promise not to intermarry in the future (vv. 23-27).
* Closely related to this, Nehemiah was chagrined to learn that even the high priests were not exempt from the threat to the community presented by intermarriage. This was especially painful for the governor since it involved a marriage to the daughter of his archenemy Sanballat (vv. 28-29).

A very terse summary of Nehemiah's attempts to keep the community pure from corrupting outside influence brings the work to a somewhat matter-of-fact conclusion (vv. 30-31).