

PARTNERSHIP

“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.” —NEHEMIAH 9:38

After 140 years of desecration, the city walls in Jerusalem have been rebuilt by the people. Then for seven straight days, they listened attentively as the Law of Moses was read and explained. They confessed their sin, praised God and worshipped Him. But what happened next? What kind of people were they going to be?

Before the gathering, Ezra speaks to God and there are three aspects to his prayer. Firstly, he acknowledges what God has done as the Creator, and recaps the history of the Israelites, giving a comprehensive list of God’s work for His people. Then comes the big little word ‘but’, which leads to the second aspect – what the people have done. Ezra cites several ways and instances where the people had rebelled and disobeyed God.

These failings did not shock God and they should not shock us. If we are honest, we know our failures and areas of sin. This is the pattern again and again of God’s people, where they enjoy the victory He gives them, then become self-sufficient and begin to fall away again. When God works good things in our lives, often the effect is that instead of remaining in humble dependence, we get a little pleased with ourselves and become self-reliant. Our godliness cannot be guaranteed beyond this point.

The third aspect of Ezra's prayer concerns renewing the covenant God had with their forefathers, but he is not making this agreement in the hopes of giving it one more try or of committing fully this time and making it final. That will never work and can never work. So what does Ezra mean when he says, "in view of this, we are making a binding agreement"? In rebuilding the temple of Jerusalem, Ezra had already experienced partnership with God, as Nehemiah had also done in rebuilding the city walls. Their part was obedience, dependence and faith in God, and God's part was to bring about the end result. It was not a passive 'letting God do the work', nor an active 'we do the work', but it is bringing these two together in partnership.

The moment we pull out of obedience and dependence upon God, the agreement is breached on our end. This is not a start-stop situation. That was the pattern Ezra had already pointed out to the people. They had now confessed their sin, praised and worshipped God and had seen the victory. Today's victories, however, are not tomorrow's victories. Every day we need to meet with God in dependence on Him for a fresh daily work in our lives and this applies to every generation as spiritual health cannot be passed on.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help me to live every day in dependence on You for a fresh, new work in my life. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Am I working together with God in what He has called me to do?