

Ezra - Nehemiah

Come Follow Me

Ezra and Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally counted as one book. In modern times, they have often been regarded as part of the Chronicler's History. The concluding verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22-23) are virtually identical with the opening verses of Ezra (Ezra 1:1-3a).

Ezra and Nehemiah

The decree of Cyrus, with which Ezra begins, accords well with what we know of Persian policy toward conquered peoples. The Cyrus Cylinder is located in the British Museum in London.



Ezra – An Outline

One of the most notable events described in the book of Ezra is the completion of the temple in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed many years earlier by the Babylonians. Ezra 1–6 contains an account of the return of the first group of Jews to Jerusalem in approximately 537 B.C. and their efforts to rebuild the temple. Ezra 7–10 contains an account of Ezra's return to Jerusalem at a later date and his efforts to help the Jews living there keep the Lord's commandment to not marry outside of the covenant.

The enemies of the Jews work to halt temple construction

Their strategies

1. They “weakened the hands of the people of Judah” (Ezra 4.4).
2. They “troubled them in building” (Ezra 4.4).
3. They wrote out an accusation to the King of Persia (Ezra 4.6).
4. They stated that the Jews would not pay their tribute (Ezra 4.13).
5. They stated that Jerusalem was “rebellious” and a “bad city” (Ezra 4.12).

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Their strategies

6. The enemies mocked them (Nehemiah 2.19).
7. They were angry (Neh. 4.1).
8. They conspired against the Jews (Neh. 4.8).
9. They requested that the workers come down (Neh. 6.2).

The Judean response

1. “I cannot come down!” (Nehemiah 6.3).
2. “Let us rise up and build!” (Neh. 2.18).
3. “The God of heaven will prosper us” (Neh. 2.20).
4. “The people had a mind to work” (Neh. 4.6).
5. They set a watch both day and night (Neh. 4.9).
6. “Be not afraid... remember the Lord!” (Neh. 4.14).
7. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah get involved in the rebuilding effort (Ezra 5.1-2).

Many... wept with a loud voice – Ezra 3.12

This is a mixed response in Ezra. On one hand, they weep because the temple is rebuilt, and on the other, they weep because it does not match the brilliance or the stature of the First Israelite Temple.



Many Wept...

Although continuity with preexilic practices is emphasized, the loss of the First Temple and its glory is still mourned. Compare the returnees' response to the dedication of the walls in Neh. 12.43. Josephus emphasizes the irrevocable loss of the First Temple by interpreting this verse to mean that the sound of the elders and priests wailing was louder than the sound of joy and trumpets (*Antiquities* 11.4.2). Similarly, the Rabbis interpret these verses to suggest that the majority of the returnees could recall the First Temple and its glory. (*The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1675.)

James E. Talmage explains

In many respects the Temple of Zerubbabel appeared poor in comparison with its splendid predecessor and in certain particulars, indeed, it ranked lower than the ancient Tabernacle of the Congregation—the sanctuary of the nomadic tribes. Critical scholars specify the following features characteristic of the Temple of Solomon and lacking in the Temple of Zerubbabel: (1) the Ark of the Covenant; (2) the sacred fire; (3) the Shekinah, or glory of the Lord, manifested of old as the Divine Presence; (4) the Urim and Thummim, by which Jehovah made plain His will to the priests of the Aaronic order; (5) the genius or spirit of prophecy, indicative of the closest communion between mortals and their God. Notwithstanding these differences the Temple of Zerubbabel was recognized of God and was undoubtedly the site or seat of Divine revelation to duly constituted prophets. (Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, Deseret Book, 1968, 42-3.)

The prohibition of intermarriage is based on two passages in Deuteronomy, 7:1-3 and 23:3-8. In each case, specific peoples are listed. It is apparent that Ezra's prohibition of intermarriage is broader than either of these, because it includes the Egyptians. Ezra 9 and 10 present many problems when compared with the rest of the Biblical record.

Intermarriage issues in Ezra

The Division in the Land

The locals wanted to help in the building project (Ezra 4.2), but the Jews refused them (Ezra 4.3). This continues the deep rift between the northerners and the Jews that lasted even through to the time of Jesus (John 4.9).

The Division in the Land

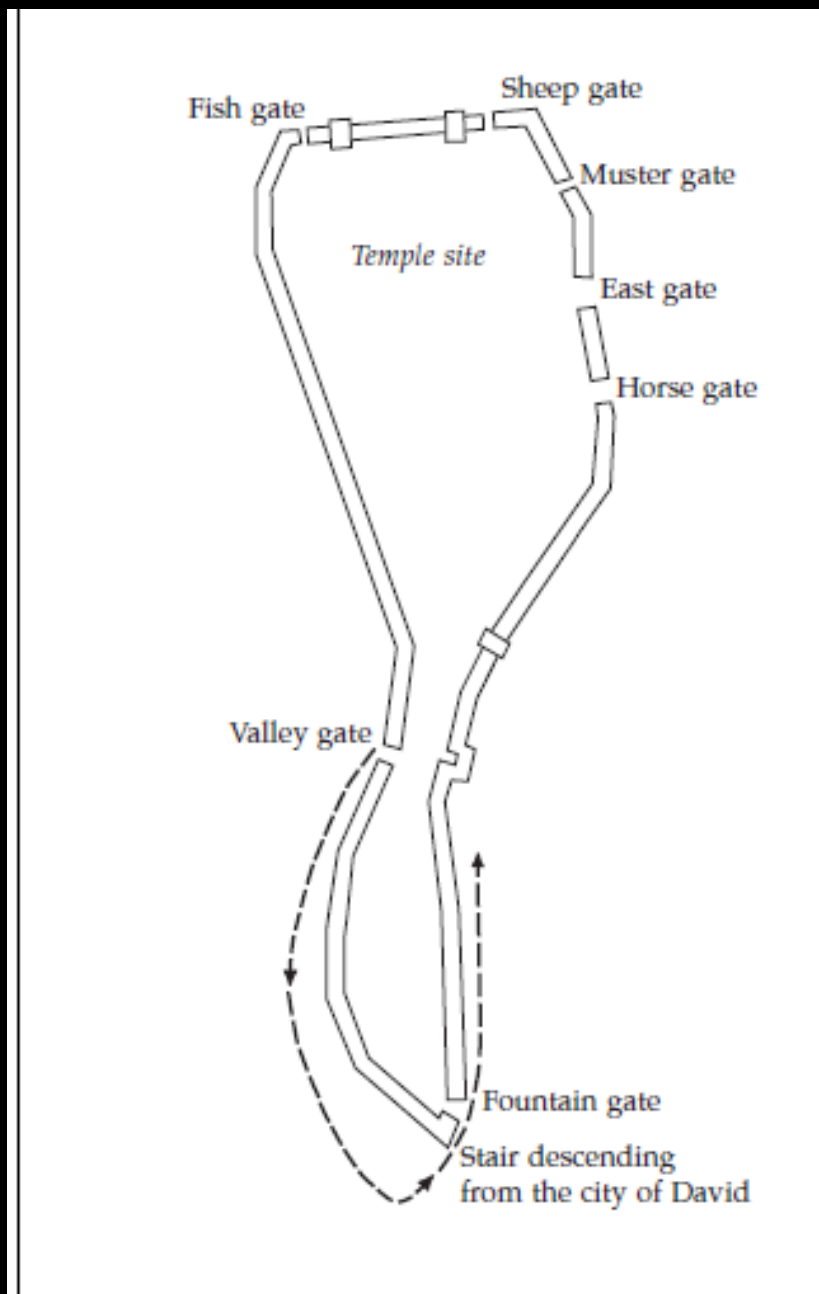
Both groups, the Jews and the Samaritans, had a temple in the time period of 500 BCE to 110 BC. In 112-111 BCE, the Jews destroyed the Samaritan temple at Mount Gerizim. Some argue that this was in an effort to assimilate the Samaritans into the beliefs of the Jews. It did not work. What can we learn from this?

(See: Bourgel, The Destruction of the Samaritan Temple by John Hyrcanus: A Reconsideration, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 135, No. 3 (Fall 2016), p. 505-523.)

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 2:12-16

Nehemiah wrote in such detail about his night reconnaissance and the later reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem that we have a good idea of the actual sites of much that he reported. The accompanying map shows the estimated locations.



Nehemiah's night walk

The other hand held a weapon – Neh.

4:16-18

Consider what President George Q. Cannon, who was a member of the First Presidency, said of the persecution in Utah around 1884: "It is very encouraging to think that, in the midst of the assaults which are being made upon the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the threats that are in circulation concerning us and our future fate, there is faith enough found in the midst of the people to pursue, without discouragement and without cessation, the great work which we feel that our Father has laid upon us. We have not been situated as we were in Nauvoo, when we finished our temple there, for then the workmen who labored upon it, were like the Jews in the days of Nehemiah, when they undertook to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and had to labor a portion of the time at least, and a great portion of it too, with their instruments of labor in one hand, and weapons to defend themselves in the other. We were surrounded by mobs, and living in a constant state, it may be said of fear, because of the threats which were made and the combinations which were formed, and the attacks upon our outlying settlements in the burning of houses, in the destruction of grain, in the shooting down of cattle, and in the driving out of the people from their homes." (In *Journal of Discourses*, 25:167.)

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The Feast of Tabernacles – Neh. 8:13-18



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One of the three great feasts at which the attendance of all male Israelites was compulsory, the Feast of Tabernacles, was by all odds Israel's greatest feast. Coming five days after the Day of Atonement, it was thus celebrated when the sins of the chosen people had been removed and when their special covenant relation to Jehovah had been renewed and restored. Above all other occasions it was one for rejoicing, bearing testimony, and praising the Lord. In the full sense, it is the Feast of Jehovah, the one Mosaic celebration which, as part of the restitution of all things, shall be restored when Jehovah comes to reign personally upon the earth for a thousand years. Even now we perform one of its chief rituals in our solemn assemblies, the giving of the Hosanna Shout, and the worshipers of Jehovah shall yet be privileged to exult in other of its sacred rituals.

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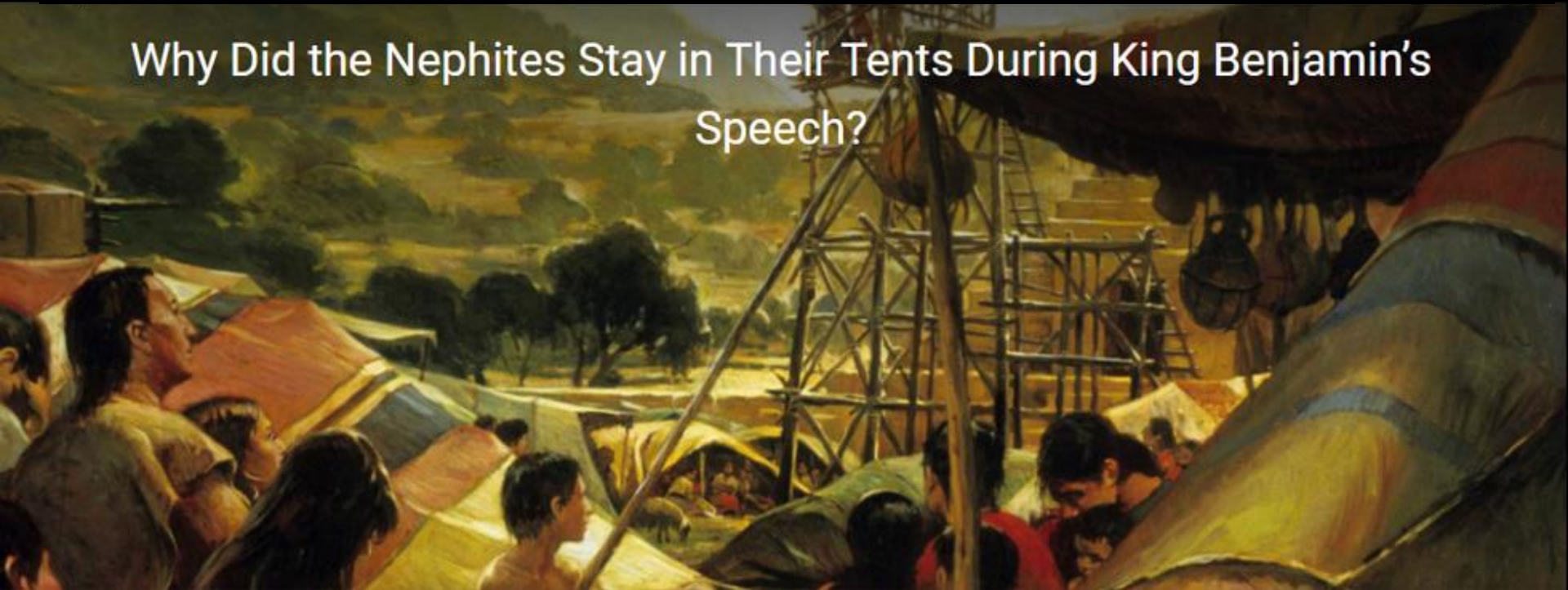
The Feast of Tabernacles – Neh. 8:13-18

“Also known as the Feast of Booths, because Israel dwelt in booths while in the wilderness, and as the Feast of Ingathering, because it came after the completion of the full harvest, it was a time of gladsome rejoicing and the extensive offering of sacrifices. More sacrifices were offered during the Feast of the Passover than at any other time because a lamb was slain for and eaten by each family or group, but at the Feast of Tabernacles more sacrifices of bullocks, rams, lambs, and goats were offered by the priests for the nation as a whole than at all the other Israelite feasts combined. The fact that it celebrated the completion of the full harvest symbolizes the gospel reality that it is the mission of the house of Israel to gather all nations to Jehovah, a process that is now going forward, but will not be completed until that millennial day when ‘the Lord shall be king over all the earth,’ and shall reign personally thereon. Then shall be fulfilled that which is written: [Zechariah 14:9-21]. That will be the day when the law shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Manifestly when the Feast of Tabernacles is kept in that day, its ritualistic performances will conform to the new gospel order and not include the Mosaic order of the past.” (*The Promised Messiah*, pp. 432-33.)

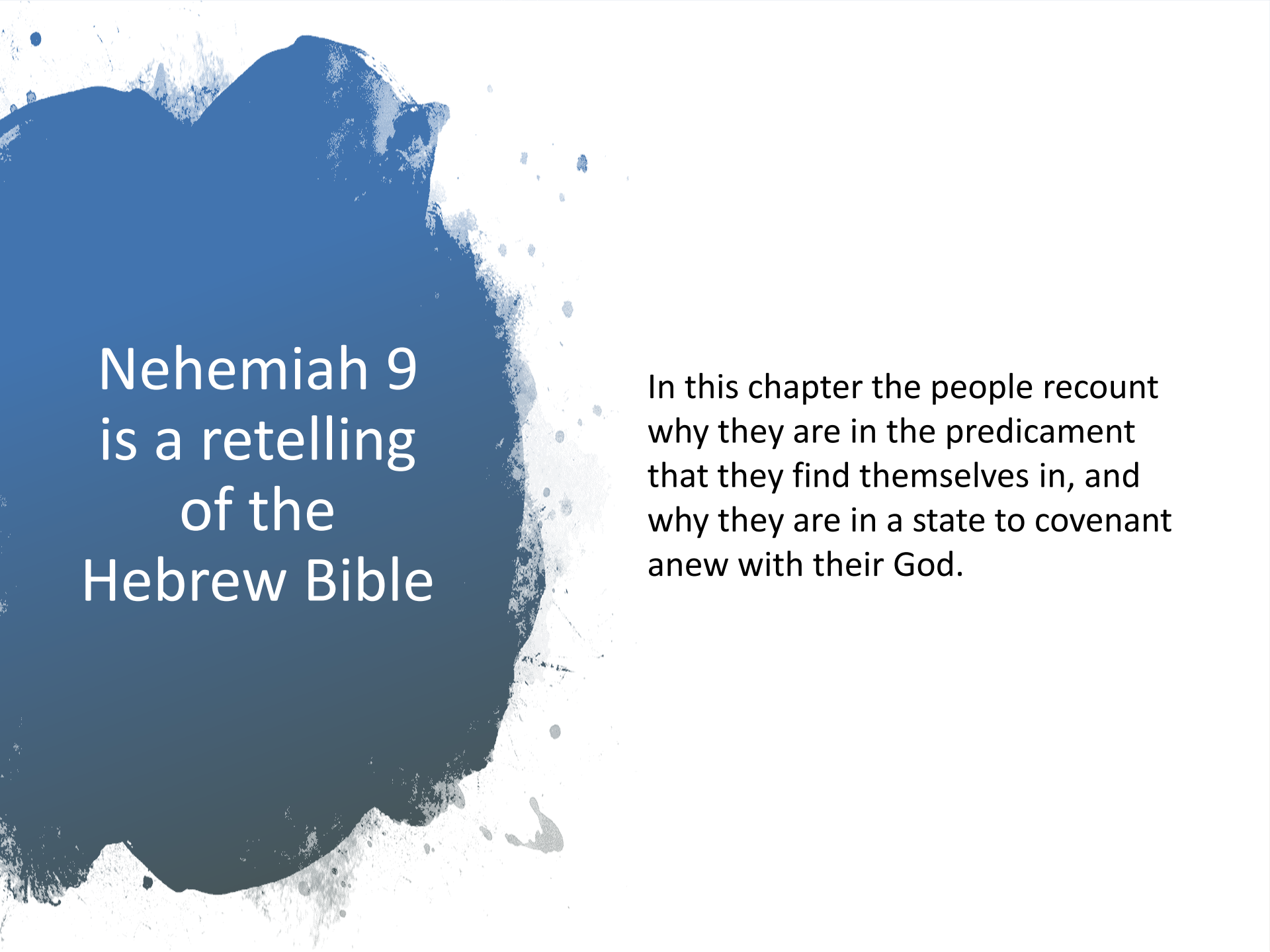
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Why Did the Nephites Stay in Their Tents During King Benjamin's Speech?



Feature	Old Testament	King Benjamin's Speech
Travel to the temple (with family)	Deuteronomy 16:14; 31:10–12	Mosiah 2:1, 5
Remain in booths/tents	Leviticus 23:41–44; Exodus 33:8; 1 Kings 8:55–56; Hosea 12:9	Mosiah 2:5, 6
Speaker on platform	Nehemiah 8:4	Mosiah 2:7
Sacrifices	Numbers 29:12–34; Exodus 24:5	Mosiah 2:3
Reading law and renewal of covenant; commandments	Deuteronomy 4:1-9, 11–25; 31:11; Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5	Mosiah 2:13, 22, 31, 41; 4:6, 30; 4:1–3; 5:1–8
Blood of the covenant applied to people ³	Exodus 24:8; Leviticus 16:14, 19	Mosiah 3:11; 4:2
Blessings/curses	Deuteronomy 27:14-26	Mosiah 2:22, 33
Ritual response, prostration on ground	Nehemiah 8:6	Mosiah 4:1; 5:2



Nehemiah 9 is a retelling of the Hebrew Bible

In this chapter the people recount why they are in the predicament that they find themselves in, and why they are in a state to covenant anew with their God.