

## Renewing Our Hearts: A Brief Overview of the Solemn Assembly<sup>1</sup>

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### What is a solemn assembly?

A solemn assembly is a special time of seeking God in prayer and corporate repentance. Historically, it was often a response to God's judgment or discipline and at other times it was a time to withdraw from worldly pursuits in order to pursue corporate consecration. The solemn assembly in a local church introduces the congregation to biblical corporate repentance, and initiates the journey of whole-heartedly returning to God. It is in the solemn assembly that the people of God experience the rhythm of revival in a renewed intimate walk with God.

### Solemn Assembly in the Old Testament

The solemn assembly was a prominent feature in the revivals of the Old Testament. For example: Exodus 33:7-11; Deut. 29:10-29; Judges 10:10-19; 1 Samuel 7:5-6; 1 Samuel 10:17-27; 1 Kings 8:1-66; 1 Kings 18:21-40; 2 Kings 11:17; 2 Kings 23:3; 1 Chronicles 13-18; 1 Chronicles 28:1-10; 2 Chronicles 5-7; 2 Chronicles 15:9-15; 2 Chronicles 20:3-13; 2 Chronicles 23:16; 2 Chronicles 29:3-36; 2 Chronicles 34:31-33; Ezra 6:6-12; Ezra 8:21-23; Ezra 9:5-15; Nehemiah 8; Esther 4:5-17; Joel 1:13; 2:12-17.

If one were to study the instances of collective confession in the Old Testament solemn assembly, these key elements would be found:

- The terms "we" and "us" were used as opposed to "them" and "they."
- Sin was identified primarily as a sin against God, although it also affected others.
- Sins of their "fathers" were confessed.
- At times, corporate confession was marked by fasting, weeping and/or lamenting.
- Past blessings of God were remembered, and the present calamity was recognized as coming from God.
- God's mercy in withholding judgment was recognized.
- Often corporate confession was prompted by disaster, defeat and/or devastation.
- Unfaithfulness to the covenant relationship by turning to other *gods* was confessed.
- Corporate confession was marked by a concern for God's reputation and glory.
- Participants pleaded for God's intervention, mercy and the withholding of *final* judgment.
- Leaders interceded with desperate pleadings on behalf of the people.
- Extended hours were spent seeking the face of God.
- It resulted in the decisive action of turning from false *gods* and back to God Himself.
- It was followed by an exclusive loyalty and service to God instead of false *gods*.

### Solemn Assembly in the New Testament

Is the solemn assembly an Old Testament observance that has no place in the New Testament Church? We must never forget that the Church was born in solemn assembly. The first two chapters of the Acts of the Apostles record a ten-day prayer meeting, which culminated in the observance of a solemn assembly known as the Day of Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26-31; Acts 2:1). This feast day, fifty days after Passover, is referred to as a *sacred assembly* (NIV, HCSB), *holy assembly*

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<sup>1</sup> Sources used other than the Bible: *The Solemn Assembly*, Richard Owen Roberts, International Awakening Press, 1989; *Blow the Trumpet in Zion*, Keeney Dickenson, Prayeridigm Publishing, 2011; *Prayer Meeting First Aid Kit*, Prayeridigm Publishing, 2006. The fact that Christians and ministers in our day do not know what a solemn assembly is attests to the great need of it. May the Lord be glorified in our pursuit of Him!



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(AMPLIFIED) or *holy convocation* (NKJV, NASB, ESV). The Feast of Pentecost was one of three *pilgrim* feasts during which all adult Jewish males, if possible, were required to be at the temple in Jerusalem. It is of great significance that this was the very place which Jesus declared and decreed to be *a house of prayer* (Luke 19:45-46).

There is a common myth that God's view of sin changed in the New Testament. But in the book of Acts it is recorded that God struck a couple dead who were deceptive and hypocritical in their giving within the congregation, sending a strong message of God's desire for congregational purity in motive and lifestyle. (Acts 5:1-11).

The individualistic view of the Christian life is a spiritual cancer to the person who thinks this way and to the body in which they are a member. We are members of one body! One reason for this harmful view of Christianity is the inability to distinguish between the singular and the plural use of the term *you* in our English texts of Scripture. Consider the following statements of the apostles and Jesus in which *you* is plural:

**The apostles continually called for the church body to collectively put off sin:** Ephesians 4:29-32; Ephesians 5:1-5; Hebrews 3:7-15; James 3:14-4:10; 1 Peter 4:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 11-13; (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Titus 3:9-11.

**The Lord Jesus Christ called for the church body to repent or put off sin:** Revelation 2:4-5; Rev. 2:14-16; Revelation 3:1-3; Revelation 3:15-20;

These statements are examples of the way in which God's apostles and the Lord Jesus addressed corporate sin. Especially in the letters to the churches in Asia Minor, the challenge was given to deal with collective sin through collective repentance. It mandated a congregational exercise of desperate repentance together. This would be nothing short of what is seen in the Old Testament as the solemn assembly.

### **Solemn Assembly in Church History**

Throughout the history of the church, gatherings of solemnity have been a vital part of local, regional, and national revivals and awakenings, although not necessarily termed a *solemn assembly*. Sometimes these gatherings were referred to as *fast days* or as *a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer*, rather than using the terms, *solemn assembly*.

### **Why are we having a solemn assembly?**

We want to glorify God by renewing our hearts through fasting, repentance, and intercession (prayer). We want to obey the Great Commandment (Mark 12:29-31) and the Great Commission our Lord Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20) to a better and greater degree.

### **A Warning About Spiritual Warfare – Ephesians 6:10-20**

Remember that your enemy is Satan and demons – not your spouse, friend, neighbor, co-worker, supervisor, fellow church members, or church leaders. Demons can influence our lives only through sin and lies. Therefore, when you get serious about repentance and sin, brace yourself for spiritual opposition, remain steadfast in faith despite your emotions, and watch God work! For an O.T. example of the ebb and flow of spiritual victory and spiritual conflict read the reign of Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 29-31.