

Nehemiah Chapter 9

Verses 1-3: Three weeks had passed since the gathering began at the Water Gate (8:1). After a time of celebration for all that God had done, it was time for the people to repent, both personally and as a nation. Such confession, which combines exalting the name (or character), of God and acknowledging guilt for sins, is found elsewhere in Scripture (Joshua 7:6).

Nehemiah 9:1 "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."

“This month”: Tishri (Sept. / Oct.; 445 B.C.; compare 7:73b; 8:2).

“With sackclothes, and earth upon them”: The outward demonstration of deep mourning and heaviness of heart for their iniquity seems to have been done in the spirit of the Day of Atonement which was normally observed on the tenth day of the seventh month (compare Lev. 16:1-34; 23:26-32).

On our calendar, this would be the 24th day of October. The children of Israel here were determined to repent of their sins voluntarily, and begin again with their LORD. This was not a set time they were fasting and mourning in sackcloth, and throwing dirt upon their heads. This was a time of their own choosing. Ezra had stopped them from weeping in sorrow when they heard the law read, because it was to be a festive time.

Nehemiah 9:2 "And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers."

“Separated themselves from all strangers”: This call for divorcing all lawful wives taken from among the heathen was needed, since the last time, prompted 13 years before by Ezra (see notes on Ezra chapter 10), had only been partially successful. Many had escaped the required action of divorce and kept their pagan wives. Perhaps new defaulters had appeared also, and were confronted for the first time with this necessary action of divorce. Nehemiah’s efforts were successful in removing this evil mixture.

The reading of the law by Ezra had opened their eyes to the reality of their sins. They wanted to repent, so they could begin again. They separated themselves from the world around them and confessed their sins, and the sins of their fathers.

Nehemiah 9:3 "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."

“One fourth part of the day”: was three daylight hours of the daytime when God’s word was read publicly, following which the people joined in a great confession of sin led by the Levites (verses 5-37), for another fourth part of the day.

“They stood ... read ... confessed and worshipped”. The succession of events helped to reestablish the essential commitment of Israel to God and His law. They read for 3 hours about the sins of their fathers and for 3 more hours confessed that they had been partakers of similar evil deeds. In response to all of this, they worshiped.

This means they read the law for 3 hours, and confessed for three hours. The Levites actually read the law to them. They were sincere in their desire to seek God.

Verses 4-37: This long confession of sin in the context of the recitation of God’s mighty redemptive acts on Israel’s behalf is an expression of worship (verse 3), that recalls some of the psalms in their theme and worshipful purpose. This season of national humiliation centered on adoring God for His great mercy in the forgiveness of their multiplied iniquities, in delivering them from judgment, protecting them, and blessing them graciously. Apparently, this great prayer of worship offered to God was recited by a group of Levites (verses 4-5), indicating it had been prepared and adopted beforehand, probably by Ezra. This prayer initiated the 3 hours of confession and worship (verse 3), which led to a national promise of obedience to God in the future (verse 38).

Nehemiah 9:4 "Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, [and] Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God."

On an ascent. An elevated place where the Levites used to stand when they sang at the time of sacrifice, and where they might be seen and heard by the people.

"Jeshua and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani": Who seem to be all Levites (see Neh. 8:7).

"And cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God": Praying with great fervency, and making bitter lamentation for the sins of the people and their own.

Jeshua, Bani, and Kadmiel represented the three families of the Levites at that time. The leaders must lead in repentance as well. The Levitical family was not free of sin either. They must cry out to God for themselves, and then for the people.

Verses 5-38: This prayer gives a survey of the history of Israel, with emphasis on certain events in the life of the chosen people. The approach resembles that of Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, and 136. The composition of this hymn is:

- (1) The praising of God as Creator (verse 6);
- (2) The covenant with Abraham (verses 7-8);
- (3) The great and wonderful acts of God in Egypt (verses 9-11);
- (4) The care of God in the desert (verse 12);
- (5) Mount Sinai and the desert wandering (verses 13-21);
- (6) The conquering of the Holy Land (verses 22-25);
- (7) The unfaithfulness of Israel and God's patience in the Promised Land (verses 26-31);
- (8) The confession of sin (verses 32-37); and then;
- (9) A commitment to keep God's laws (verse 38).

Verses 5-38 is the longest sustained worship hymn in Scripture. It is unknown whether this was read or recited from memory by the "Levites". Still, it is a wonderful example of confession as part of worship and a memorable review of the blessings of God.

Nehemiah 9:5 "Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, [and] Pethahiah, said, Stand up [and] bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise."

Or, then the Levites, even Jeshua.

"And Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah": The same as before, with a little variation of their names. And perhaps some of them might have two names.

"And said": To the men that stood and confessed their sins (Neh. 9:2).

"Stand up": For though they are before said to stand, yet, through shame and confusion of face, and awe of the Divine Majesty, might be fallen on their faces to the ground.

"And bless the LORD your God for ever and ever": For all the great and good things he had done for them, notwithstanding their sins. And particularly for his pardoning grace and mercy they had reason to hope for.

"And blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise": The glory of which name, nature, and perfections of his, cannot be set forth by the highest praises of men. And the largest praise of blessing and honor to him.

Nehemiah 9:6 "Thou, [even] thou, [art] LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all [things] that [are] therein, the seas, and all that [is] therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshipeth thee."

“Hast made heaven”: The recitation was ordered historically, although themes of promise and judgment are traced through Israel’s history with God. The first feature is the celebration of God’s greatness as Creator (compare Gen. chapters 1 and 2).

“And the host of heaven worshipeth thee”: The praise which Israel offered on earth was also echoed in the heavens by angelic hosts.

This was a recognition of the LORD for who He really was. He is the Creator of everything. The angels in heaven even worship Him as well. He is not only Creator, but Deliverer and Preserver.

Nehemiah 9:7 "Thou [art] the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham;"

From among the Chaldeans, and out of his father's family.

"And broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees": By calling him from thence (of which see Genesis 11:28). That being worshipped by them and by the Assyrians under the name of Ur.

"And gavest him the name of Abraham": Which was changed when the covenant of circumcision was given him (Genesis 17:5).

Verse 7 above, spoke of Abram who was selected of God to be the father of all believers. His faith in God won him favor with God. His faith was counted unto him for righteousness.

Nehemiah 9:8 "And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give [it, I say], to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou [art] righteous:"

“And foundest his heart faithful before thee”: The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:4-7; 17:1-9), was based on God’s faithfulness to His Word and given to a man who was faithful to Him. (See notes on Gen. 15:6 and Rom. Chapter 4), where the faithful heart of Abraham is discussed.

“A covenant with him to give the land”: This covenant was a covenant of salvation, but also involved the Promise Land. The people, having just returned from captivity, understandably emphasized that feature of the covenant, since God had returned them to the Land.

The covenant that God made with Abraham was an everlasting covenant. The following Scriptures are the covenant God made with Abram who became Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee:" "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:" "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

The land God promised Abraham was inhabited by seven heathen families, when God gave it to the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 7:1 "When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;"

God removed these 7 heathen families, and gave the land to His family Israel.

Verses 9-12: This section of the prayer of praise and confession recounts the Exodus (see Exodus chapters 2-15).

Nehemiah 9:9 "And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea;"

The hard bondage in which their lives were made bitter. And was not a mere spectator of it, but looked upon them in it with pity and compassion, and sent them a deliverer (Exodus 2:23).

"And heardest their cry by the Red sea": Which was before them, and the rocks on both sides of them. And the host of Pharaoh behind, pressing upon them, when he heard them, and wrought salvation for them (Exodus 14:10).

These Israelites had been freed from hard labor in Egypt, when God sent ten plagues on Egypt. Pharaoh released them after the death of all the firstborn in Egypt. God even opened the Red Sea that these same Israelites could walk over on dry ground. At the same time, He drowned all of the Egyptian soldiers who tried to follow them.

Nehemiah 9:10 "And showedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as [it is] this day."

By inflicting the ten plagues upon them.

"For thou knowest that they dealt proudly against them": Behaved haughtily to them, and despised them (see Exodus 18:11).

"So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day": God established His righteous reputation over the powers of Egypt by the miracles of immense power performed in Egypt. Displayed his power on Pharaoh, and his goodness to Israel, the fame of which reached all over the world, and continued to that day (see Exodus 9:16).

God had defamed all the false gods of Egypt, and caused all the nations, who knew of His act, to realize that He was the True God.

They did not know that He could be their God. They called Him the God of Israel.

Nehemiah 9:11 "And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters."

That is, the Israelites (see Exodus 14:21).

"And their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps": With great ease, and with indignation. Meaning the Egyptians, that pursued hotly after them, and were thrown into the sea.

"As a stone into the mighty waters": Where they sunk and perished (see Exodus 15:4).

This is again speaking of the opening of the Red Sea to give Israel passage through the midst of the sea, and causing the Egyptian soldiers to drown.

Nehemiah 9:12 "Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go." The Israelites, to shelter them from the heat of the sun in a dry and barren wilderness.

"And in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go": Through a trackless desert (see Exodus 13:21).

The presence of the LORD crossed the wilderness with them. His presence was seen of them in the fire by night and the smoke by day. They moved when the fire or smoke moved, and stopped when it stopped. He led them as a Father would a helpless child. He is the Light of the world. They would not dwell in darkness. The Light of the world was with them.

Verses 13-19: The months at Sinai are remembered (see Exodus chapters 19-40).

Nehemiah 9:13 "Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:"

By some visible tokens of his presence, as a cloud, fire, smoke, etc. Which must be understood consistent with his omniscience (see Exodus 19:18).

"And spakest with them from heaven": The Decalogue or Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1).
"And gavest them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments": Both judicial and ceremonial, which were of excellent use to them in their civil and ecclesiastical polity. These were not spoken to Israel, but given to Moses on the mount, to be delivered to them.

God came down the mountain and spoke the ten commandments to them. It frightened them so badly, they asked Moses to speak to God for them. They were without excuse when they sinned with the golden calf, while Moses was on the mount getting the ten commandments on stone. He was gone 40 days and nights, but that was no excuse. They had heard in their ears, before he went up the mountain, these same commandments.

Nehemiah 9:14 "And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant:"

Among God's gifts to His people was the institution of the "Sabbath". Sabbath observance was a covenant sign established specifically between God and His people at Sinai (Exodus 31:12-17).

This was speaking of the Levitical law and commandments. There were over 625 of them in the book of Leviticus. God gave them laws of religion, civil laws, dietary laws, etc. Moses received them of God, and gave them to the people. These same laws were spoken of by the Jews as the law of Moses.

Nehemiah 9:15 "And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them."

To satisfy that, meaning the manna (Exodus 16:3).

"And broughtest forth water for them out of the rock, for their thirst": To quench it. This was done both quickly after they came out of the land of Egypt, and a little before their entrance into the land of Canaan (see Exodus 17:6).

"And promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them": Which oath was made to them and to their fathers also (see Num. 14:30).

The manna that fell from heaven fed them for their 40 year journey across the wilderness. When they had no water, Moses struck the Rock and water came forth to quench their thirst. Look with me at what Jesus said about this Bread.

John 6:50-51 "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die." "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

1 Corinthians 10:4 "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

Nehemiah 9:16 "But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments,"

Behaved in a haughty manner towards God, their kind benefactor.

"And hardened their necks": Refused to take the yoke of his law. As refractory oxen, that withdraw their necks from the yoke.

"And hearkened not to thy commandments": To do them, though they promised they would (Exodus 24:7).

This one verse is the story of these Israelites. The LORD would forgive them, but they would fall back into sin, over and over.

Nehemiah 9:17 "And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou [art] a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not."

"Appointed a captain": The Hebrew of this statement is almost a repeat of (Num. 14:4), which records the discontent of the people with God's plan and Moses leadership.

They had been slaves in Egypt. They were so rebellious, they turned against God and started to go back to Egypt. Moses prayed for them and God forgave them.

Nehemiah 9:18 "Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This [is] thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations;"

In imitation of the Apis, or ox of the Egyptians.

"And said, this is thy god that brought thee out of Egypt": Or the image of thy god, as the Arabic version (see Exodus 32:4).

"And had wrought great provocations": Of all which nothing was greater than idolatry.

Verses 19-21: "They lacked nothing": The same word is used (in Psalm 23:1). "I shall not want". Even during the long season of chastisement, God miraculously cared for their every need.

Nehemiah 9:19 "Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go."

Where no supply could be had, if he had cast them off (see Neh. 9:17).

"The pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way": Which, if it had, they would have been scorched by the heat of the sun.

"Neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go": Or otherwise they would have lost their way, and not have known which way to have gone.

The mercy of God always outweighed His judgement. They deserved to die for their sins, but God forgave them. This was the story of the Israelites the entire 40 years of their wandering in the wilderness.

Nehemiah Chapter 9 Questions

1. On the 24th day of the month, what did the children of Israel do?
2. When had they been convinced they needed to repent of their sins?
3. Verse 2 tells us they _____ themselves from all strangers.
4. They stood and _____ their sins, and their father's iniquities.
5. What did they do for 1/4 of the day?
6. Who represented the three families of Levites at the time in this chapter?
7. The Levitical family must cry out to God for _____, and then for the _____.
8. What are the people told to do in verse 5?
9. How should you praise the LORD?
10. What do they say about God in verse 6?

11. He is not only Creator, but _____, and _____.
12. Where was Abram living, when God selected him?
13. His _____ in God won him favor with God.
14. What kind of covenant did God make with Abram?
15. How many heathen people were living in the land God promised Abraham?
16. Where were the Israelites living in hard bondage, when God heard their cry?
17. What did God do for them at the Red Sea?
18. God had _____ the false gods of Egypt.
19. The nations around called God the God of _____
20. God led them with what?
21. At Mount Sinai, God spoke what to the people directly?
22. What did they ask of Moses, because they were frightened of God?
23. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments on stone, what did the people do?
24. What law is verse 14 speaking of?
25. What is another name for it?
26. Who was the Bread from heaven that fed them on their journey?
27. What did Jesus call Himself in John chapter 6 verse 51?
28. Where does He call Himself the spiritual Rock?
29. The _____ of God always outweighs His judgement?