

Nehemiah 9

The people were not content to go about their business as usual after hearing the Word of God read in Chapter 8. They realized that they needed to hear more and to get right with God more completely. The ninth chapter of Nehemiah is one of the most eloquent accounts of God's marvelous acts in Israel's history.¹

As we open this chapter, having celebrated the Feast of Trumpets (8:1-3), and the Feast of Tabernacles.... and two days after the solemn assembly which ended the Feast of Tabernacles (8:18), how would you describe the condition of the peoples' hearts/attitude? Humble and repentant hearts. The people were still mourning over their sins. This was a genuine spiritual revival that was going on (started in 8:1). It's not back to business as usual after hearing the Word of God read. They realized they had a serious sin problem and they needed to get right with God more completely. They were under extreme conviction.

After The Feast of Tabernacles concluded on the 22nd day of the month what did the people do next (vv. 1-2)? Two days after the feast, the people, still mourning over their sins, assembled for a great day of national confession.

How did the Jews prepare for worship (vv. 1-3)?

- They gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth (like burlap) and putting dust on their heads – a sign of humility and repentance -- all traditional signs of mourning and grief in that culture.
- In obedience to God's Law the people had broken off forbidden alliances with non-Jews ([Ezra 9-10](#)).
- They confessed their ancestors' sins as well as their own. This is a recurring theme in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. They felt their solidarity with past generations.²
- They listened to the reading of the Law.
- They worshipped God (v. 3).

Application: Is there a preparation-for-worship model in here for us? Worship is an activity/function of the heart. Their hearts were prepared... they were eager to worship. They gathered as one ([Hebrews 10:25](#)). Confession of sin reestablishes fellowship with God. Focused on scripture is key.

Why did they feel a need to separate themselves? For the purpose of ensuring spiritual purity in worship. Spiritual (and cultural, religious) purity is a big deal to God. He is a jealous God and does not want His people being corrupted by those who worship foreign gods.

What else did they do (v. 3)? For three hours the people again stood (8:7) while the Law was read. Then for three more hours, they confessed and worshiped. Confession is the road to revival.³

What do vv. 5b-31 consist of? A prayer voiced by the Levites on the people's behalf. It recounts major events in Israel's history, The overriding theme of the prayer is God's faithfulness despite Israel's waywardness.⁴ It is the longest prayer in the Bible.

How does the prayer start out (vv. 5-6)? By praising God for His character and His conduct. The prayer begins, as the Bible does, by describing God's greatness seen in His creation of the universe.⁵

What were the Levites praising God for in vv. 7-8? His grace and faithfulness in calling Abraham, promising him the land of Canaan, and then fulfilling that promise through a covenant.

What were the Levites praising God for in vv. 9-12? God's miraculous deliverance of their forefathers when they were slaves in Egypt and their subsequent exodus from Egypt under God's leadership.

What were the Levites praising God for in vv. 13-14? The giving of the law at Mount Sinai and introducing the concept of Sabbath.

What were the Levites praising God for in v. 15? God's miraculous provision of manna and water during the wilderness journey.

What were the Levites praising God for in vv. 16–21? In spite of their forefathers' disobedience and rebellious hearts against God even to the point of worshiping a calf-idol, God was still gracious and compassionate. He forgave them and did not abandon them in the desert. God continued to guide them ... instruct them, and provide for their physical needs.

What were the Levites praising God for in vv. 22–25? The conquest of Canaanhelping them to conquer their enemies , He brought them into the Promised Land under Joshua, and multiplied and established them there. They reveled in God's goodness.

What were the Levites praising God for in vv. 26–28? Again, during the period of the Judges, the Israelites disobeyed and rebelled many times and God turned them over to oppressors each time. But because of His great compassion, when they repented, He raised up deliverers, the Judges, who freed them.

What were the Levites praising God for in vv. 29–31? Through the centuries of Israel's sin (v. 29) God continued to be patient and to admonish them through the prophets (vv. 26, 30). But as a result of their ongoing sinning they were ultimately taken into captivity/exile (v. 30).⁶ Yet, in spite of...their refusal to listen. God did not abandon them for He is gracious and merciful (v. 31).

What appeal were the Levites making in vv. 32–37? The returned Jews then called on God to remember their sufferings in exile (v. 32). They acknowledged that the exile was a consequence of their disobedience to God's Word (vv. 33–34). Even while the Israelites were enjoying God's blessings from His great goodness (35) in the land, they were still sinful.

Now they were slaves in their own land (v. 36)! Being slaves meant that they had to pay taxes to Persia, and Judah's leaders had to give the Persian kings tribute from the produce of the land. Nehemiah's prayer ended with a sad admission of their great distress.⁷

What was happening in v. 38? The leaders of the people, the Levites and the priests agreed to put their seals to a written agreement that they would obey the stipulations of the Mosaic Law.⁸ Now they, the faithful remnant of returnees, were ready to make a formal commitment to obey Yahweh again.

In many ways the last verse (38) is the most significant part of the prayer. The Jews realized that the problem was with them, not with the Lord, and they determined to do something about it. Prayer and confession, important as they are, are no substitutes for obedience.⁹

What value is remembering/rehashing the past history of Israel? Left to themselves, the Israelites were a forgetful people. That's one major reason the Jews celebrated seven major festiveals....so they would remember.....where they had come from and how God repeatedly delivered them. We have the same testimony as the Israelites....we tend to forget. For us, our major festival of remembrance takes the form of Communion – *Do this in remembrance of me*. Remembering is a faith builder. And it glorifies God.

vv. 6 – 35 What character traits of God are in view here?

- Patience. He stands ready to receive if we will come.
- Compassion, long suffering.
- Grace and mercy– not just a New Testament phenomenon.
- Determination to redeem his people. Never forsakes them. Chases after them.
- Faithfulness – keeps His covenant of love
- His goodness and generosity

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 51.

² Ibid.

³ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 489.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Nehemiah, 2023 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 52.

⁶ Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 690.

⁷ Ibid., 691.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 489.