

## **Week #9: November 7-13**

### **Nehemiah 9 (Ongoing Repentance and Spiritual Renewal)**

#### **Main Points:**

- **To note the major themes in this beautiful corporate prayer of confession led by the Levites.**
- **To pay careful attention to God's character as unfolded through Israel's history.**

1. "There is a time for everything," the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote. Two days after the celebration of the Festival of Booths ended, the Israelites once again gathered together as God had commanded – this time not in joy but in mourning. Why?

In chapter 8, we learned that as a result of the reading (and understanding) of God's law, the people experienced a spiritual awakening. They wanted to be faithful to God. As an expression of their desire to please Him, they observed the Feast of Booths, and received great blessing and joy in their obedience (8:13-18). The Feast of Booths took place from the 15<sup>th</sup> day to the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the seventh month. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> day (the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the festival) there was a solemn assembly (see 8:18b). Chapter 9 continues the story of the spiritual awakening and its results.

2. a) What was the occasion for this time of corporate confession that we read about in Nehemiah 9?

b) How did the people express their deep grief and sorrow over their sins and guilt before God?

c) How else did they prepare themselves for this occasion (see 9:2a)? Why do you think they did this?

Once again, the events of the day were centered on the Book of the Law of the LORD. The people stood and read God's Word for 3 hours (a quarter of the day). Then they confessed and worshipped Him for another 3 hours.

3. What is the relationship between these two parts of their solemn assembly: a) instruction from the Word; b) confession and worship? Why not spend their entire day reading the Word of God? Why not spend the entire day in confession and worship?

According to some Bible scholars, this corporate prayer led by the Levites (Nehemiah 9: 4-38) is one of the most beautiful prayers recorded in the Bible. It is a review of God's grace and power throughout the history of His people.

Here's an outline the main themes in this prayer.

*The prayer reviewed God's grace and power:*

*1) in creation (v.6)*

*2) in choosing Abraham and establishing a covenant with him (v. 7-8)*

*3) in the exodus from Egypt and the deliverance at the Red Sea (v. 9-11)*

*4) in the giving of the Law at Sinai and the desert wanderings (v. 12-21)*

*5) during the conquest of Canaan (v. 22-25)*

*6) through the period of the judges (26-28)*

*7) through the period of the kings and prophets to the period of exile (v. 29-31)*

*8) in their present predicament (v. 32-37)*

4. What are some of the descriptions and attributes of God in this prayer that caught your attention? Please feel free to paraphrase these descriptions and attributes of God.

5. In contrast to the descriptions and attributes of God, what characteristics of the Israelite people are revealed in the prayer?

6. Look up God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 13: 14-17; 17: 1-8; 22: 17-18. Then read Nehemiah 9:22-25. Bearing in mind what we have discovered about the people of Israel in the previous question (#5), what does this tell you about God's character?

"Rest/Prosperity ☞ Disobedience ☞ Oppression ☞ Israelites cry out ☞ God hears and rescues ☞ Rest/Prosperity ☞ Disobedience..." Time and time again, this seems to be the cycle of the relationship between the people of Israel and God (v. 26-30).

7. a) As you recall your own life journey with God, what has been the recurrent pattern in your relationship with Him?

b) Have you in the past found yourself in a similar cycle or pattern that the Israelites found themselves in? If yes, how has God shown His faithfulness to you?

The prayer of Nehemiah 9 is very honest and real. Through this prayer, the exiles who returned to their homeland came face to face with who they really were, and who God really is. Verse 33 summarizes their relationship with God: "In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong." Repenting of their past sins and looking at their present situation as slaves in their own land, the Israelites ended their prayer with a commitment and a promise for the future. The commitments listed in Nehemiah 10: 29-39 reflect both the sins that had been committed, and their intentions to rectify them in the future.

8. What binding agreement did they make with God during the solemn assembly on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month (v. 38)? In what manner was this promise made?

9. Review your answers to Questions 4 and 5.

a) Which characteristic of the Israelites do you most relate with, and why?

b) Which attribute of God do you most appreciate personally, and why?

c) Reflect on your past and present relationship with God. Is there a part of that relationship which God is asking you to change and make right with Him?

d) What “binding agreement” or promise will you make with God from this day forward? If you are ready to make one, you may write it down on paper and commit it to the LORD in prayer. You may also share this prayer with someone in your small group.