

Nehemiah: God's Wall Builder, Principles in Leadership

Nehemiah Chapter 9: Confession and Repentance



In Nehemiah Chapters 1-6, Nehemiah leads the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. In Chapters 7-14, he leads the rebuilding of the spiritual lives of the nation. After the celebrations of the *Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles* in chapter 8, the nation looks into itself in chapter 9. They ask, why are they in the position they are in? Why do the Persians rule over them?

Do you remember a time in your life when you were connected to God? When everything was perfect between you and the LORD, then things went bad. How can you

reconnect again? One place to start, look at your past. Find where you went off track in your relationship. Did you disregard God's commands? Did you stop fellowshiping? Maybe you stopped reading the Bible for lack of time? When we confess our sins, we take an inventory of our walk, we realize what happened and why it happened?

Nehemiah chapter nine is a model for national repentance, it's also a model of individual repentance. The Levites lead the nation as they recount the "Goodness" and "Mercy" of God on a disobedient nation, refusing to follow the commands of God.

Assembly of the Levites and People

Neh 9:1-38

- (1) Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.
- (2) And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.
- (3) And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.
- (4) On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.
- (5) Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodia, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. **Nehemiah 9:1-5**

- (1) **The Twenty-Fourth Day:** Continuing from chapter 8, when the nation celebrated the Feast of Trumpets on the 1st of the **Month**, The Feast of Atonement on the 10th, and Tabernacles on the 15 to the 22st of the month (Leviticus 23:23-37), this event is 2-days later. The nation was still assembled in Jerusalem and were in a state of mourning for sins.

Fasting...sackcloth and earth: The people humbled themselves before God, much like Daniel less than 100-years earlier, they fasted, wore cloths made from sacks, the basest material and they put dirt on their heads.

Dan 10:2-4

(2) In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks.

(3) I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks.

(4) On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris)

(2) Israelites separated: The Jews who returned from Babylon had compromised their ways, the foreigners who had begun to mingle with Israel, were pagans. They were the people of the land who came to Jerusalem to trade and associate with the activities taking place in the city. **Confessed their sins**, they were doing the same things **their fathers** had done, celebrating the feasts in the Seventh month (Chapter 8), and reading from the Law was beginning to convict the nation.

(3) They stood...and read from the book of the Law: The Levites, who were the spiritual leaders of the nation, stood on a raised wooden platform to recite God's Word to the people. The same platform in chapter 8, where Ezra led the reading. **Quarter of the day:** Three hours, since the day was 12 hours. So they read from scripture, then they applied the scripture the next three hours another quarter. They **confessed the sins** of the nation and worshipped, applying what they read.

(4-5) The Levites: Two teams Levites were leading the nation for this 6-hour scripture reading, confession and worship service. Certain Levites were in both groups such as Jeshua and Kadmie.

Creation and Call of Abraham

After assembling the people and separating the foreigners from the Hebrews (Nehemiah 9:1-5). Now the nation will recount its history and God's dealing with Israel's past sins.

(6) "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.

(7) You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham.



(8) You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. **Nehemiah 9:6-8**

(6) You are the LORD...alone: The first part of confession is to know who we are confessing to, the God of Israel is not "a god", like Zeus or Marduk, Thor or Atlas, Greek mythology. He is God alone, meaning there is no other. He is the exclusive God. His qualities identify Him as exclusive, He **made heaven** and the stars and

the earth. The LORD is the source of "Being" in the universe. In the New Testament era God became man and walked amongst his Creation. In *John 1:1-3*, Jesus, the Son of God, is the source of all Creation.

Joh 1:1-3

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

(2) He was in the beginning with God.

(3) All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

(7-8) The God who chose Abram: Why did Israel deserve the land? Because they were chosen by God, who chose Abram. The LORD God, owns the universe, He created the Earth, and He chose Abram, later to be Abraham (father of nations). Israel's privilege was from the owner of the earth, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were chosen by God.

Made with him the covenant: The source of the Israel's position is the *Covenant*, the agreement between the Creator of the Universe and Abraham (Genesis 15). Like the relationship between a husband and wife, mother and daughter, father and son, we understand our position based on our covenants. Israel's relationship is based



on a covenant. The Levites appeal to this unique relationship between the God and Israel. God **kept** the **promise** He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He restored them to the land. (Deut 28-30) after they rebelled against Him, because God is both merciful and **righteous**.

Adoration of the of the LORD's goodness takes place from verses 6-15. In verses 16-18, Confession for the sins of the nation's past sins begins, then in verse 19 to 22 we see how God responded with compassion and mercy to Israel's sin. By recounting the past, and see how God operates they can look forward to God's mercy and intervention.



The Exodus and Wanderings

- (9) "And you saw **the affliction of our fathers** in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea,
 (10) and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day.
 (11) And you **divided the sea** before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters.
 (12) By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go.
 (13) **You came down** on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments,
 (14) and **you made known to them** your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.
 (15) You **gave them bread from heaven** for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.
 (16) "But they and **our fathers acted presumptuously** and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments.
 (17) They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. **But you are a God ready** to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.
 (18) Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies,
 (19) you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go.
 (20) You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst.
 (21) Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.
 (22) "And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. **Nehemiah 9:9-22**

(9-10) The Jews were in Babylon as a result of their sins, Jerusalem was destroyed, but God was faithful. He restored the people to the land and under Nehemiah's leadership the walls were rebuilt.

You saw the affliction...heard their cry: Here the Levites recount how God in the past has done what he is doing now, God is the same, as he rescued the nation in the past, he can do the same in their day. Daniel knew the captivity according to Jeremiah was 70-years, so when the time was almost complete Daniel began to pray. Daniel knew he could count on God's Word so he prayed according to God's WORD.

(11-12)**Divided the sea:** As in Nehemiah day, God in the past supernaturally intervened, he opened the Red Sea for the nation to cross in the past. In Nehemiah's day, they completed the wall in 52-days, with opposition of threats and death.



Pillar of cloud: God personally led the nation, He was in the cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. God was not distant and removed but personally accompanied the nation. Paul identifies the cloud as the pre-incarnate Jesus, who led the nation.

1Co 10:1-4

- (1) For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers **were all under the cloud**, and all passed through the sea,
- (2) and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,
- (3) and all ate the same spiritual food,
- (4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from **the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.**

As in the past, so in the future we can look forward to God's personal relationship and leadership in our life, if we are willing to be obedient. The problem with Israel was they refused to be obey God, this resulted in their chastisement and displacement from the land.

(13-15) You came down: Throughout the wilderness event, God personally revealed Himself to the nation. On Mount Sinai, Israel begged God to not talk to them directly lest they die, they were terrified of God's direct interaction. God applauded their fear, because their fear would keep them in obedience. It was the attitude of the nation toward the LORD, their rebellion was the cause of their problem.

Exo 20:18-20

- (18) Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off
- (19) and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."
- (20) Moses said to the people, "Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin."

You made known to them: God through Moses, revealed Himself to the nation, in New Testament era, God spoke directly with His people, since he was incarnated into human flesh, in the body of Jesus. Jesus compared himself to the manna that God **gave them bread from heaven**, that bread was temporary people hungered again, with Jesus we will never hunger. Nehemiah prepared Jerusalem for the coming of the Messiah, who would come over 400-years after the wall was complete.

Joh 6:48-51

- (48) **I am the bread of life.**
- (49) **Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.**
- (50) **This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.**
- (51) **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."**

told them to go in to possess: Israel was responsible to be obedient, yes God was with them, the nation needed to respond in accordance with faith. Their actions demonstrated faith in the promise, just like it does today.

(16-18) Israel's problem was not God's faithfulness, it was their attitude "But they and our fathers acted presumptuously"

They just assumed God would intervene and help them despite their sins. They relied on outside appearances, acting as if God could be fooled by acting. Over and over again we see in scripture God's call to sincere worship and obedience.

Despite God sending prophets, the people repenting, they went back to their ways **they refused to obey**. They forgot and discounted the miracles of God's deliverance.

But you are a God ready: Even with their disobedience God was willing to forgive them, he was waiting for them to acknowledge their sin so he could show them mercy. He waited to judge the nation, he gave them time to repent. This is same attitude God has toward us today as shown in Isaiah 1:18-19

Isa 1:18-19

- (18) "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
- (19) If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land;

(19-22) in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness: Despite all their failings God did not forsake Israel, this is demonstration of mercy and grace. Jesus came into the world, because God is merciful. Israel discounted God's mercy and rejected His grace. Here the Levites recount how God dealt with the nation in the wilderness.

- Pillar of cloud to lead by day
- Pillar of fire to lead by night
- Your Good spirit to instruct
- Manna for food
- Water for thirst
- 40-years you sustained them
- Clothes did not wear out

- Shoes did not wear out
- Gave them the kingdoms of Sihon and Og

When we are down and feel God has abandoned us, we need to look back on his mercy and grace in our life. Like the Levites here we need to remind ourselves of what God did in our lives. For example we can remember:

- He gave me mercy and hope
- He redeemed me from Hell
- He has prepared a home for me in Heaven
- He has filled me with His Holy Spirit to instruct me
- He has given me understanding of His WORD



Conquest under Joshua and nations failings

After Moses Joshua led the nation, again the Levites recite God faithfulness, vs. 23-25. They contrast this with the disobedience and restoration cycles that follow. Israel falls, is restored then they fall again, restored then they fall again. Over and over again the cycle repeats itself in Israel's history.

God gives us the example of Israel, we can learn from their mistakes we don't have fall if we choose obedience. Israel did not have to go through these cycles, it was a choice they made when they disobeyed God's WORD.

(23) **You multiplied their children** as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess.

(24) So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would.

(25) And **they captured fortified cities** and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

(26) **"Nevertheless, they were disobedient** and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies.

(27) **Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies**, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies.

(28) But **after they did rest they did evil again** before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies.

(29) And **you warned them in order to turn them** back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey.

(30) Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. **Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.**

(31) **Nevertheless**, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. **Nehemiah 9:23-31**

(23-25) You multiplied their children: The nation prospered, even if they did wander in the wilderness for 40-years, God blessed them despite their actions. He was the force behind their victory, it was His power not earthly effort that gave them the land. **You brought:** Joshua led, but it was the LORD who brought the victory, Israel's mission was to learn to submit to God's leadership. This is what takes place in Joshua 5, when Joshua meets the LORD, the LORD does not answer Joshua question on whose side He is on. Because, Joshua is on His side, He is not on Israel's side. God is the standard, not man.

Jos 5:13-15

(13) When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, **"Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"**

(14) And he said, **"No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come."** And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

(15) And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

They captured fortified cities: Israel was victorious as long as it was obedient. Jericho was the first city to fall, when Israel sinned, they lost the first battle for Ai, and after they repented they were victorious. God set the example of Jericho and Ai for future generation, when we obey and act in faith, we give God the ability to fulfill his promises. Israel's disobedience was the cause of their problems.

(26-31)

(26) Nevertheless, they were disobedient: Despite all the efforts of God to help the nation, they rejected His ways by being disobedient. Israel turned their back on God's Law, therefore he allowed them to feel chastisement so the nation would turn. We can relate as parents, if a child mocks or scorns obedience, is it beneficial to the child to ignore rebellion? In the end the child becomes an ugly spoiled child, a disciplined child knows how to say no to its inner voice of rebellion.



(27) You gave them into the hand of their enemies: The chastisement for Israel was to be given over to their enemies. This is highlighted in the book of Judges. When the nation rejected God's provision, He removed His blessing and protection. He allowed them to reap their rebellion. It is the same for us, God will allow us to suffer for our actions, like Israel we need to take an inventory of our walk, how do we respond to God's blessings? Do we take them for granted?

(28) after they had rest they did evil again: Israel as a nation was constantly cycling into obedience and disobedience, notice Israel's enemies had **dominion over them**, this was the result of disobedience. The enemies were in control because Israel would not follow God's plan. Does this apply to the Israel only? Could this not apply to the United States or other nations which choose to rebel against God's law. The United States was founded on Christian principles, now are falling away from these principles.

(29) You warned them in order to turn them: God was longsuffering with Israel,

(30) Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands

(31) Nevertheless: Despite all of Israel's unfaithfulness, God preserved the nation, he did not make an end of them, because he is gracious and merciful. This is the nature and character of God, which is often mistaken for weakness or non-existence. We think because we don't see immediate judgment there is no God, or God does not care. Really God is being merciful, giving us time to repent.

Heb 12:6-11

(6) For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

(7) It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

(8) If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

(9) Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

(10) For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

(11) For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Confession and Repentance

(32) "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day.

(33) Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly.

(34) Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them.

(35) Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works.

(36) Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves.

(37) And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.

(38) "Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. **Nehemiah 9:32-38**

