

Nehemiah 8-9

- From the beginning, we've said that Nehemiah's task was not to build a wall or secure the city
 - He was drawn to Jerusalem to accomplish those tasks, certainly
 - He has focused his efforts there since he arrived
 - And at the end of Chapter 7, Nehemiah had achieved what he had come to Jerusalem to do
 - But these tasks were just the backdrop for the real purpose in Nehemiah's call
 - The Lord called this man to minister to His people
 - When Nehemiah came to Israel, the city was still in ruins, the people were living a meager existence, under attack and lacking purpose
 - The Lord freed Israel and returned them to their land for a purpose
 - But they were failing in that purpose, and so He sent them a leader
 - As we've said, Nehemiah's mission wasn't to build a wall
 - He was there to build up a people
 - So with the temple constructed, the wall finished and the city inhabited again, it's time for Nehemiah to return, right?
- As we'll see today, the answer is "no", because the mission hasn't been accomplished yet
 - All the pieces are in place, yes, but a temple and a wall and even a bustling city are the not the measures of success in God's economy
 - Those things are at best means to an end, and the end is restoration in worshipping God through a life of obedience to His Word
 - Loving God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength
 - While loving one another

- So with the pieces in place, Nehemiah begins leading the people into a proper relationship with the Lord, Who has brought them back to the land
 - At the conclusion of Chapter 7, we're told the people were settled in the city and it was the seventh month of the year
 - The mention of the seventh month is significant
 - The final feasts of the Jewish calendar are conducted in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar
 - The Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles all occur in the seventh month
- The events of Chapters 8-10 will take place during this important month of the year
 - In Chapter 8, Nehemiah assembles the people for a reading of the Torah to the people and explaining its meaning
 - Then, in Chapter 9, we'll witness the people joyously celebrating what they learn in a moment of corporate prayer and worship
 - And in Chapter 10, the people declare a corporate commitment to obeying God
 - Across these chapters, we'll see the true mission for godly leaders: edifying God's people for service

[Neh. 8:1](#) And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel.

[Neh. 8:2](#) Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.

[Neh. 8:3](#) He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

[Neh. 8:4](#) Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand.

[Neh. 8:5](#) Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

[Neh. 8:6](#) Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

[Neh. 8:7](#) Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place.

[Neh. 8:8](#) They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

- The Law of Moses required that the people of Israel hear the reading of the Law once every seven years
 - Moses stipulated the requirement in Deut. 31, near the conclusion of the Law

[Deut. 31:10](#) Then Moses commanded them, saying, “At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths,

[Deut. 31:11](#) when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing.

[Deut. 31:12](#) “Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law.

- These gatherings were Covenant renewal moments in the Nation of Israel
 - Renewal was not optional, but these moments were to be repeated so the people knew the Law
- The renewal was not prescribed for a specific day in the seventh month
 - It simply must take place at the time of year of the remission of debts and the Feast of Booths
 - The remission of debts refers to the Feast of Atonement, which came early in the month, while the Feast of Booths came later
 - So the requirement was to read the Law sometime early in the seventh month
 - Ezra chooses to waste no time, reading the Law on the first day of the month
- This is Ezra’s first appearance in the story of Nehemiah

- I said at the outset of the book that Nehemiah and Ezra were contemporaries
 - In fact, it's my belief that Ezra was the scribe who penned the Book of Nehemiah, though he wrote it in Nehemiah's voice
 - And here we see Ezra is still acting as the teaching leader over the people, even after Nehemiah's arrival
- Take note that Nehemiah's arrival didn't mean the end of Ezra's leadership role
 - It seems clear that the Lord raises up men with different skills to perform different roles in the Body of Christ
 - Ezra was a gifted teacher, and he led the people from a position of intellectual strength
 - But when Nehemiah arrived on the scene, Ezra yielded authority over the people, yet he retained his teaching responsibility
 - Men like Nehemiah and Ezra need to understand how to work together as the Lord appoints
 - The leader of a congregation need not be the teacher of the flock
 - And the teacher of a flock need not be the chief administrator of a church
 - In fact, it's rare to find a man who is the best at both roles
 - More often, the roles will be split – unless ego gets in the way
- Looking at the scene, Ezra gathers the people in front of the Water Gate on the first day of the seventh month
 - In v.1, it's interesting to see that the people themselves asked Ezra to bring the book of the Law out to read to them
 - The people were eager to hear the Word of God
 - They were looking forward to the instruction
 - To the chance to grow closer to God through His Word
 - What follows has become the basis for Jewish synagogue service

- The pattern was probably established during the exile, when the people lacked access to a temple
- It's still the common order of worship among orthodox Jews today
- And the pattern is instantly recognizable for Christians today
 - The people gather for a service
 - Readings of God's Word takes place
 - The people stand, a leader offers praise, people respond
 - Finally, the people receive instruction through an oral explanation of the Word and an exhortation to live by what they have learned
 - After the gathering, the people go away to share a fellowship meal
- This is a common pattern – or should be – in the Christian gathering
 - New ideas come from time to time, but the basic formula hasn't changed
 - Where it has changed, it's largely been diminished by a de-emphasis on the Word of God
 - In many churches, it isn't even read
 - And even when it is read, it's not explained properly
 - Explaining God's Word is no longer the highlight of many services
 - Let's revisit the formula in this chapter to see why it was so valued in Israel
- First, in v.2, Ezra brought the Law before everyone in the nation who could listen with understanding
 - Only children at an early age were excluded from the gathering and from the teaching of God's Word
 - If families were separated, it's only because the youngest are too little to value the instruction
 - Because they are likely to be an interruption to others

- Apart from these youngest ones, everyone else should be gathered to hear the Word
- Secondly, he read the Law as required from early morning to midday
 - Roughly, Ezra read for 5 hours or more
 - Ezra stood and read and the people stood to listen for this entire time
 - Their standing was a sign of respect and attentiveness
 - Can you imagine something like this happening today?
 - Christians fidget in the pews when they're made to sit for a sermon longer than 20 minutes
 - And Heaven forbid children are required to sit still that long
 - Have children changed that much – or just our expectations?
- People say it's unreasonable to expect Christians to listen to a 60-minute sermon or attend a 2-hour church service
 - Yet those same people gladly sit through a 3-hour Hollywood blockbuster without a second thought
 - How important is the Word of God to us?
- Next, we find Ezra standing behind a wooden podium
 - Around him, stood elders or leaders of the people of Israel
 - Here's another instantly recognizable scene
 - Don't let anyone tell you that the tradition of a preacher teaching from a pulpit from the Word of God is a modern invention or a dispensable anachronism
 - From the beginning, God has chosen to communicate His truth from the mouths of preachers to the ears of His people

1 Cor. 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message **preached** to save those who believe.

- Next, the people are drawn to a heart of worship through the reading of the Word
 - The people bow to the ground, cry “Amen” and worship
 - The people give an objective lesson in worshipping in spirit and truth
 - The truth of God’s Word is a powerful tool to bring the heart closer to God
 - In fact, there is no greater tool
- Finally, the elders of Israel follow the reading of the Word with an explanation
 - The five-hour reading of the text gives way to sermons concerning the meaning of what was written
 - I wish I could hear what these leaders said
 - What insight did God give them about the stories of Genesis, the experience in Egypt and the time of wandering?
 - I wonder if any of the stories in the Law gave the exiles a sense of déjà vu, having just left their own period of captivity, wandering and now security in the land?
- This is the moment we want for every child of God, whether the one being restored or the one who never strayed
 - We want to be drawn by our leaders into a moment of sincere fellowship and worship
 - We want men who lead by, and through, the Word of God
 - We need men to call us to sacrifice and to exercise discipline, so we can have the patience to hear God’s Word
 - We need to be moved by the Word to humble ourselves before God
 - And we need men to give us instruction and explanation from the Word so we can understand and follow what we’ve been given
 - God is faithful to give us these things, and He always will

- The problem has never been God's willingness to supply
 - It's our willingness to seek for them
 - Because Nehemiah and Ezra have come and done their part, the people have been blessed
 - And when we do our part in obedience, we make it easier for other believers to do theirs
- The entire day was so moving for the people, they were weeping in response to their sermons and readings
 - The tears were probably tears of thankfulness and regret
 - Thanks for God's faithfulness
 - Regret for the way they and their ancestors had tested the lord's patience so often
 - Most of all, they are moved by the presence of the Lord's Spirit
 - But Nehemiah responds with a call to joy

[Neh. 8:9](#) Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.

[Neh. 8:10](#) Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

[Neh. 8:11](#) So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved."

[Neh. 8:12](#) All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

- Nehemiah tells the people that this day is a holy day for the Lord, to honor His faithfulness
 - So therefore, he tells the people to feast, celebrate and know the joy of the Lord
 - In fact, Nehemiah says their joy in the Lord has been their strength in the days of their trials
 - So the people respond with a fellowship meal to celebrate the end of the day in joy

- The words Nehemiah speaks in v.10 are especially important to understanding the prophetic significance of this passage
 - He says, “the joy of the Lord is Israel’s strength”
 - The phrase, “joy of the Lord” is a reference to Christ, Who is the joy of the Father
 - This phrase is a description of Christ
- It’s also our clue to see this entire scene as a picture of another moment in a future restoration of Israel
 - Another time when Israel will encounter the joy of the Lord bringing strength to Israel
 - A time when Israel persevered through trial
 - A time when mourning turns to joy, culminating in a period of restoration and feasting
- On that future day, Israel will experience great distress because of attacks brought by the nations of the world that surround Jerusalem
 - The attack comes at the hands of the antichrist, at the end of Tribulation

Zech. 12:3 “It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.

Zech. 12:4 “In that day,” declares the LORD, “I will strike every horse with bewilderment and his rider with madness. But I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.

Zech. 12:5 “Then the clans of Judah will say in their hearts, ‘A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the LORD of hosts, their God.’

Zech. 12:8 “In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them.

Zech. 12:9 “And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

- The people of Israel were under attack, fearful and driven to desperation
 - With the Lord’s strength, the people will defend the city
 - They succeed in defending the city against terrible odds

- Just as Nehemiah's Israel defended the walls from attacks with the strength of the Lord
- Once again, their ability to defend the city comes from the Lord
- Then in that day, the people will be moved by the Word of God, delivered by the Spirit

Zech. 12:10 "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

- The people of Israel living in Jerusalem will come to understand that Jesus was the Messiah
- The people look into the Word of God by the Spirit and come to a recognition that they disobeyed the Word, that is Christ
 - Their ancestors crucified their Lord
 - And they all mourn the revelation
- And this recognition will lead them into a mourning for the sins of their fathers and their own sins in rejecting Jesus
- Just as the Israel in Nehemiah's day was moved to tears at the recognition of their own sin under the Covenant
- This future Israel will be humbled by what they learn in the Word, to the point of weeping and tears
- But just as Nehemiah called the people to cease weeping and find joy in the Lord, so will the future Israel trade tears for joy

Zech. 14:2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.

Zech. 14:3 Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.

[Zech. 14:4](#) In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

[Zech. 14:8](#) And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter.

[Zech. 14:9](#) And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

- The Lord's return for Israel will bring great joy to the nation
 - They are rescued from the antichrist and brought to faith in Him
 - The Lord establishes His kingdom on earth and the people of Israel are at the center of it
 - This story is explained in greater detail as part of the [VBVMI Revelation study](#)
- And just as we see in Nehemiah 8, the concluding act in this moment of restoration is a celebration feast, the Feast of Booths

[Zech. 14:16](#) Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

- The Feast of Booths memorialized Israel's wanderings in the desert upon reaching the promised the land
 - It was to be celebrated by those who had received their permanent home to remind them that they had to wandering in a temporary place first
 - That feast symbolized the wandering of the desert prior to crossing the Jordan
 - And it represents the Jews' life on earth prior to entering the Kingdom
 - The final celebration of the feast will happen when the nation enters the Messianic Kingdom
- But here, in Nehemiah's day, is a moment when Israel experiences a lesser version of that celebration

- The nation has returned from a new exile and is enjoying a new life in their land
 - And so they are ready to celebrate the feast anew

Neh. 8:13 Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.

Neh. 8:14 They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month.

Neh. 8:15 So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written."

Neh. 8:16 So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

Neh. 8:17 The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing.

- Following the long day of hearing the Word taught at the Water Gate, the heads of the households are intrigued to learn more about the Word
 - Specifically, they remembered hearing something the day earlier about a feast in the seventh month of the year
 - They returned to Ezra to ask questions and to know more about the words of the Law
 - With his help, they found in the Law the Word of the Lord commanding that the sons of Israel should celebrate the Feast of Booths
 - Having confirmed what they heard, they know what to do
 - They go out into the people and circulate a proclamation to everyone that the day for the feast is coming quickly and they must get ready
 - They are commanded to collect the branches and leaves that are used to make the booths they occupy
 - A booth was essentially a tent made of natural materials

- For this feast, the Jews essentially abandoned their homes for a week to camp out in these temporary structures
- The booths reminded them of living in the desert, wandering without a home
 - While it appears Israel did celebrate the Feast of Booths (Ezek. 3:4), they were not previously making and living in booths as was commanded by the Law
- Everywhere they could fit these structures, the people made the booths and occupied them
 - And notice, it's a time of great joy for the people
 - The feast is joyful, because it is celebrated by people who have finally received their permanent homes
 - They remember the Lord's faithfulness to deliver them through a period of wandering and trial
 - This was true in the time of Exodus, as the people knew the joy of Canaan
 - It's true again for Israel that returned from exile and occupied the city in joy under Nehemiah
 - And it will be true for the future Israel that enters the Messianic Kingdom in joy under the leadership of Christ

Neh. 8:18 He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.

- The celebration of the feast included Ezra reading from the Book of the Law daily to the people
 - They couldn't get enough of God's Word
 - The love of God's people is an eternal truth
 - When Heaven and Earth have passed away, the Word of the Lord will remain
 - The feast lasted the required seven days, and on the eighth day, the nation holds another solemn assembly

- It seems that the celebration of this feast brought people to a realization that the Word of God was to direct their lives in an even deeper way
 - They had heard a single reading of the Word of God, and they had discovered the Feast of Booths
 - That discovery completely changed their lives for seven days
 - And it led them to ask more fundamental questions about the power of God's Law to change their lives
- If one reading could produce so much enlightenment, could later the course of their week so dramatically, then what more must they do?
 - Clearly, they needed to redirect their entire lives according to what was written in the Word
 - They had been living their entire lives without the guidance of the Word of God
 - And it had been generations since the people had the freedom and opportunity to live by the Word
 - And even longer since they had even tried
 - So now, on the first day after the feast, they are ready to recommit in prayer and repentance to living according to God's Word

Neh. 9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.

Neh. 9:2 The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

Neh. 9:3 While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Neh. 9:4 Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

- Following the feast, a great spiritual revival takes hold in Israel
 - The word "revival" gets thrown around too often in the Church
 - A revival can't be manufactured and it can't be timed to suit our desires

- It's a work of the Spirit that comes only when the Lord desires
 - And it's evidently happening in Israel here
- In this case, we can understand why it's happening now
 - The Lord has been leading Israel to this moment over the past 100 years, and even earlier
 - This is the work of restoration reaching its climactic end
 - The people seeking the Lord with all their hearts in humility
- In this moment, they are also picturing that moment of Jewish repentance that precipitates the Lord's return for Israel at the end of Tribulation
 - The Jews in this day heard Ezra read Leviticus 26, and in particular, this promise

Lev. 26:40 'If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me –

Lev. 26:41 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies – or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,

Lev. 26:42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

- The Lord promised to Israel that in a future day, when the whole nation turns to Him with their hearts humbled
 - When they confess their sins and the sins of their forefathers, then the Lord will remember His covenant with Abraham
 - The covenant that promised to send a seed to bless Israel
 - The seed of Christ
- At this moment, the people are responding in faith to the promises they heard in Leviticus 26
 - And in response, the Lord will send Israel Her Seed
 - The first coming of Christ comes a few hundred years following this confession

- Not as a result of the confession, but as a result of God's promise to honor His Word to Israel
 - Only when the final generation confesses Christ, will the Kingdom be made available
- Then, the prayer of repentance and worship ensues, beginning with a beautiful retelling of what they have learned in God's Word

Neh. 9:5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever!

O may Your glorious name be blessed
And exalted above all blessing and praise!

Neh. 9:6 " You alone are the LORD.

You have made the heavens,
The heaven of heavens with all their host,
The earth and all that is on it,
The seas and all that is in them.
You give life to all of them
And the heavenly host bows down before You.

Neh. 9:7 "You are the LORD God,

Who chose Abram
And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees,
And gave him the name Abraham.

Neh. 9:8 "You found his heart faithful before You,

And made a covenant with him
To give him the land of the Canaanite,
Of the Hittite and the Amorite,
Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite –
To give it to his descendants.
And You have fulfilled Your promise,
For You are righteous.

Neh. 9:9 " You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,

And heard their cry by the Red Sea.

Neh. 9:10 "Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,

Against all his servants and all the people of his land;
For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them,
And made a name for Yourself as it is this day.

Neh. 9:11 " You divided the sea before them,

So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground;
And their pursuers You hurled into the depths,
Like a stone into raging waters.

[Neh. 9:12](#) "And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day,
And with a pillar of fire by night
To light for them the way
In which they were to go.

[Neh. 9:13](#) "Then You came down on Mount Sinai,
And spoke with them from heaven;
You gave them just ordinances and true laws,
Good statutes and commandments.

[Neh. 9:14](#) "So You made known to them Your holy sabbath,
And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law,
Through Your servant Moses.

[Neh. 9:15](#) "You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger,
You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst,
And You told them to enter in order to possess
The land which You swore to give them.

[Neh. 9:16](#) "But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly;
They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments.

[Neh. 9:17](#) "They refused to listen,
And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among
them;
So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in
Egypt.

But You are a God of forgiveness,
Gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness;
And You did not forsake them.

[Neh. 9:18](#) "Even when they made for themselves
A calf of molten metal
And said, 'This is your God
Who brought you up from Egypt,'
And committed great blasphemies,

[Neh. 9:19](#) You, in Your great compassion,
Did not forsake them in the wilderness;
The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day,
To guide them on their way,
Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go.

[Neh. 9:20](#) " You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,
Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth,
And You gave them water for their thirst.

[Neh. 9:21](#) "Indeed, forty years You provided for them in the wilderness and they were not
in want;
Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell.

[Neh. 9:22](#) "You also gave them kingdoms and peoples,

And allotted them to them as a boundary.
They took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon
And the land of Og the king of Bashan.

[Neh. 9:23](#) "You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven,
And You brought them into the land
Which You had told their fathers to enter and possess.

[Neh. 9:24](#) "So their sons entered and possessed the land.
And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites,
And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land,
To do with them as they desired.

[Neh. 9:25](#) "They captured fortified cities and a fertile land.
They took possession of houses full of every good thing,
Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves,
Fruit trees in abundance.
So they ate, were filled and grew fat,
And reveled in Your great goodness.

[Neh. 9:26](#) " But they became disobedient and rebelled against You,
And cast Your law behind their backs
And killed Your prophets who had admonished them
So that they might return to You,
And they committed great blasphemies.

[Neh. 9:27](#) "Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them,

But when they cried to You in the time of their distress,
You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion
You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors.

[Neh. 9:28](#) "But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You;
Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them.

When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven,
And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion,

[Neh. 9:29](#) And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law.
Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances,

By which if a man observes them he shall live.
And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen.

[Neh. 9:30](#) "However, You bore with them for many years,
And admonished 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.

[Neh. 9:31](#) "Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them,

For You are a gracious and compassionate God.

- This retelling competes with Stephen's testimony in Acts for the most thorough, yet concise, retelling of Israel's history leading up to Christ
 - Many of the phrases included in this retelling can be found in the Psalms, or elsewhere
 - It's clear that the people have learned something in the days of listening to the Law
 - And what they've heard has influenced their thinking
 - Not only have they come to understand their own history in a new way
 - They have also come to appreciate God more
 - And that's the purpose of learning Scripture, in the end
 - We learn about God
 - We see His long-suffering character in the face of our sin
 - We also see His willingness to act eventually, to discipline His children
 - And we see His faithfulness to restore
- Having seen His faithfulness, the people make an appeal for mercy in light of their continued slavery under Persia

Neh. 9:32 "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness,

Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You,
Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people,
From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day.

Neh. 9:33 "However, You are just in all that has come upon us;
For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.

Neh. 9:34 "For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law
Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them.

Neh. 9:35 "But they, in their own kingdom,
With Your great goodness which You gave them,
With the broad and rich land which You set before them,

Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds.

[Neh. 9:36](#) "Behold, we are slaves today,

And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty,
Behold, we are slaves in it.

[Neh. 9:37](#) " Its abundant produce is for the kings

Whom You have set over us because of our sins;
They also rule over our bodies
And over our cattle as they please,
So we are in great distress.

[Neh. 9:38](#) "Now because of all this

We are making an agreement in writing;
And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our
priests."

- Their prayer ends in a confession of sin and a request for mercy
 - The people ask the Lord to recognize and remember that the people still suffer in significant ways
 - Life in Jerusalem still not an easy existence
 - They have the worry of attack by the surrounding people
 - They are not ruling over their own land
 - They are under the rule of Persians
 - And according to the prophecy of Daniel, it won't end there
 - In the near future, Persian oppression will give way to Greek oppression
 - And Greek oppression will give way to Roman rule
 - And Roman rule has evolved over the millennia and continues today, in a modern form
 - Still, Israel is in oppression, unable to live in peace and ruling over her promised land
 - The people in Ezra and Nehemiah's day appear to recognize the seriousness of their situation
 - They appeal for God's mercy

- But they also acknowledge that they are where they are because of sins that require God's response
 - Just as the Lord promised in Leviticus and Daniel, the people of Israel will see an extended period of curses
 - Until one day, when the Lord returns to fulfill His promises of blessing
- In the meantime, the people of Israel are moved by a sober appreciation of their past mistakes to vow never to repeat them
 - In the next chapter, the people recommit to living according to God's Word
 - To never repeating the mistakes of their forefathers
 - They mostly keep their word
 - Never again does a generation of Israel participate in pagan worship or idolatry of the sort practiced prior to the captivity
 - On the other hand, they commit an even more serious error
 - They reject the Messiah
 - So the judgment continues until the moment of Zechariah 12
 - Nevertheless, we see their intentions expressed in Nehemiah 10