

**Let Us Arise and Build
Lessons from the Book of Nehemiah
The Great Confessional Prayer of Nehemiah 9**

Intro: In our lesson this morning we continued to look at the remarkable transformation and renewal that God's people experienced as they read the Lord's word, restored divinely-commanded worship, confessed their sins, and committed to personal holiness.

An important part of that process was the work of the Lord's priests who led the people of God in worship and in confession. For six hours that day the people of God listened to the word and worshipped the Lord. Nehemiah records for us the beautiful confessional prayer of those priests. This morning we made a quick summary of it; but tonight let's take a more in-depth look at this prayer and see what lessons we can learn from it. Let's begin by reading it together.

"Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting.

Creation: *Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 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.*

Patriarchal Age: *You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. 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.*

Egyptian bondage and Exodus: *And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, 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. 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. 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.*

Revelation at Mt. Sinai: *You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.*

Journey to Canaan: *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.*

Israel's sin: *But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. 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. 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, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness.

Wilderness wanderings: *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. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. 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.*

Conquest of Canaan: *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. 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. 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.*

Judges: *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. 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. But after they had 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. 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.*

Kingdoms and Exile: *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. Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. 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.*

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

Post-exile: *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. 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.”* (Nehemiah 9:5–37, ESV)

You probably could not find in Scripture a better thumbnail sketch of redemptive history than that found in Nehemiah 9. It is an accurate summary of the OT from creation to the post-exilic period.

There many lessons to learn especially about the confession of sin. But since we focused our attention on that idea this morning, let’s see what can this great prayer teach us about the Lord?

This confessional prayer of the priests gives us an accurate understanding of the true God.

First, they acknowledge that there is only one God who created the universe, the heavens and earth and the heavenly hosts that worship the Lord.

“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.

Though almost all peoples of the ancient world were polytheists; the priests of Israel affirmed the existence of only one true God (monotheism). They affirmed that this God was the origin of all things. They lived with a theistic world view.

Today we find ourselves as a culture gagging on forbidden fruit in large part because of this shift in world view that has rejected the Lord as the true God and substituted humanistic thinking (ourselves) as our god. We could learn a thing from those godly priests of Nehemiah’s day.

Second, they affirm that the one who created the heavens and the earth is the same God who delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage and provided for them in the centuries that followed.

The priests of God acknowledged a divine plan that began with the call of Abraham, a plan in which Abraham’s descendants would be given the land of Canaan and in whose seed blessing would come to all the world.

If listen carefully to the story of the priests of Nehemiah we can see that we are heirs of the purpose of God that began in Abraham. What God promised to Abraham has been fulfilled in Jesus. In Him we have been blessed beyond measure with the opportunity to be a part of His kingdom.

Third, they affirm the historicity of OT narrative and confirmed the miraculous nature of God's activity.

The priests of Nehemiah accepted as fact the narrative of the Law and the Prophets that told Israel's story. Ironically today many modern Jewish "scholars" flatly deny that most of the events described in the OT ever happened. Thus the call of Abram, the account of the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, conquest of Canaan, the Judges, etc. never occurred. They view them as myths invented of their imagination to give Israel a "history." This is intellectual arrogance. However, it is clear that as the priests read the scrolls they considered them an accurate report of actual events that had taken place. They were in the best position to know the truth and accepted as fact what is recorded in those books including the many miracles recorded there. Today the world largely remains ignorant of the facts about what the true God has accomplished in this world that would lead people to believe in Him. Ignorance of redemptive history means ignorance of the Lord's purpose in the world.

Fourth they affirmed the unique character of the true God.

He is the God who keeps His promises.

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.

And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

He is the God who gives out of His goodness.

The Hebrew word "natan" occurs 15 times in this section—a reminder that the Lord is a giving God.

They speak of how the Lord gave them the land of Canaan, gave them victory over those who attacked them (Sihon and Og), gave them the prosperity they enjoyed in the land.

He is the God who reveals His Law.

The priests acknowledge that God did not leave His people without direction and guidance.

you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant

(Note that Seventh Day Adventists contend that the weekly Sabbath command existed from the beginning and thus continues to be binding today. But note that priests says that the Sabbath was "made known" at Mt. Sinai)

God reveals His word "through His Spirit."

You gave your good Spirit to instruct them

Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets.

It is the foundation of the doctrine of "inspiration."

He is the God who warns the disobedient out of His love.

Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets.

He is the God who shows grace to the disobedient.

But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love,

He is the God who remains faithful in spite of His people's disobedience and hears the pleas of His people and delivers them from their suffering.

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.

Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies.

He is the God who holds accountable and justly punishes the impenitent

While the priests acknowledge that a remnant of God's people remained due to His grace, they also show that many were destroyed along the way because of their impenitence.

The priests did not believe in once saved, always saved.

So today we need to know the true God in all these ways. To know Him as He is revealed in Scripture is to fear Him, to love Him, and to obey Him.

Conclusion: The great truths of Nehemiah 9 have continuity in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is that same God who was the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles. And it is to Him that men today must at last give account.