

A Prayer of Confession and Hope
Nehemiah 9
July 6th, 2025

1. Confessing personal and corporate _____ (9:1-5)
2. Praying the _____ of the Old Testament (9:6-31)
 - a. _____: God is the Creator and covenant maker. (9:6-8)
 - b. _____: God is the deliverer and law giver. (9:9-15)
 - c. _____ and _____: God is gracious and compassionate. (9:16-21)
 - d. _____: God is the good provider. (9:22-25)
 - e. _____: God is the faithful rescuer. (9:26-29)
 - f. _____: God keeps His word. (9:30-31)
3. Acknowledging God's _____ and their _____ (9:32-38)
4. Applying the Word
 - a. Be quick to _____ when you sin.
 - b. God is _____ to His promises.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Nehemiah 9

1. List all the carefully noted elements of this prayer gathering (Neh. 9:1–5). What strikes you in Nehemiah's description of God's people coming together in prayer—and what can we learn from this scene today?
2. Why is acknowledging God as creator essential to understanding the nature, character, and authority of God?
3. Why do you think this prayer is so full of history—and why is this important?
4. What specifically did God do regarding Abraham? (vv. 7-8) How do we see that covenant promise described in Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5ff?
5. Verse 16 brings a significant occurrence of "But," leading to what important revelations about the Israelites (and all of us)? Verse 17b brings another "But," leading to what important revelations about the character of God and His ways with His people (vv. 17b–25)?
6. What role should confession play in the life of the believer today? Why is it important? What should we confess? To whom should we confess? See Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16
7. Note each of the six references to God's compassion in Neh. 9. Why is God's compassion on the forefront of their minds as they pray?
8. What is the one specific request that the people make in this prayer? What does that request mean?

Note: Some questions partially adapted from *Knowing the Bible: Nehemiah* from Crossway.

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Big idea: God was just to inflict consequences on Israel but He was faithfully committed to His promises.

Intro:

While best known for his *Narnia* novels and his non-fiction *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis said his best book was a retelling of the ancient Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche called *Till We Have Faces*. The idea first occurred to him to retell the story when he was in college but he didn't finalize and publish the novel for 35 more years. The main character is the queen Orual and is told from her perspective in two parts.

In part one she attacks the gods for mistreating her throughout her life. She is ugly while her dear sister, Psyche, is beautiful. Psyche is taken away to live with a god and Orual believes she is deceived and the god is a monster. When she tries to intervene, her sister is cast out to wander the earth. Orual goes on to be a powerful queen, warrior, politician, and judge, but she remains lonely and bitter against the gods.

Part two has a dramatic reversal. She begins by stating that her previous accusations against the gods are unjust and wrong. She was actually mistaken and they were right all along.

But that wasn't what Lewis originally had planned when he began writing the story. He planned to end with part one – with Orual in the right and the gods in the wrong. What changed? Lewis changed. More specifically, Lewis became a Christian. This novel became a vehicle to explain what he now understood about the true God. It was Lewis himself who had been in the wrong and God was good and right and holy.

The people of Israel had suffered much. They had been cast out of the land and were scattered. A remnant had returned but they still existed under the rule of the Persians and lived as servants under a foreign power. Would they blame God? Would they accuse Him of breaking His promises? Would they be bitter?

This chapter is a prayer of confession that runs through the OT storyline and shows that God is just and good and they have been stubborn and rebellious.

1. Confessing personal and corporate sins (9:1-5)

- a. The setting is the 24th day of the month, still in the 7th month of the year – September/October in our calendar.
 - i. It is two days after the feast of booths in chapter 8 ends.
- b. They assemble again with visible demonstrations of mourning – fasting, sackcloth, dirt.
 - i. Visible ways to demonstrate what they were feeling and genuine sorrow for their sin
- c. They confessed their sins.
 - i. To confess is to acknowledge what God already knows to be true about our sin. It is to admit it. It is contrasted with concealing it.
 1. **Proverbs 28:13** He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.
- d. Not only their sins, but sins of previous generations.
 - i. Kidner – The sense of solidarity in guilt, expressed here, is often found in the OT (Neh 1:6; Ps 106:6), and is only spoken against when it is used to question God's justice, or to cut the nerve of personal responsibility (Ezek 18)
 - ii. **Psalms 106:6** We have sinned like our fathers, We have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly.

- iii. They saw themselves as living with the just consequences of the sins of the nation before them and as participants in the sin themselves.
- e. Once again this service goes on for hours – they read for 3 hours and then confessed and worshiped for 3 hours.
 - i. The Levites led them.
 - ii. They kick off the prayer by drawing attention to God’s glorious name.

2. Praying the **storyline** of the Old Testament (9:6-31)

- a. **Genesis**: God is the Creator and Covenant maker. (9:6-8)
 - i. We had an adult Sunday school class last year on a portion of the book of Genesis and that took them half the year. Nehemiah covers it in 3 verses.
 - ii. Williamson - Like the Bible itself, the prayer starts with an uncompromising acknowledgement of the uniqueness of God: “You alone are the Lord.”
 - iii. He made heaven and earth and everything in them.
 - 1. Who are you? You are a creation of the true and living God.
 - 2. When we see Him as Creator, we recognize His right to rule over His creation.
 - iv. He chose Abram
 - 1. Notice the verbs of what God does – He chose, brought, gave him a new name, found His heart faithful, made a covenant with him.
 - 2. Davis – the massive, creating, preserving God of v 6 is also the calling God of v 7.
 - v. The land makes the first entrance.
 - 1. God’s promise to Abraham was for a land, a nation, and a blessing.
 - a. He did make of Abraham a great people – the nation of Israel.
 - b. The blessing was the coming Messiah that would bless all nations.
 - c. But the land is still the land. The enjoyed it for a period. Were removed from it for disobedience. Returned in part. In the millennial kingdom under Christ it will be fulfilled completely.
 - vi. He fulfilled it because He is righteous.
- b. **Exodus**: God is the deliverer and law giver. (9:9-15)
 - i. From Abraham the story fast-forwards past Isaac, Jacob, Joseph to 400 years in Egypt that becomes increasingly difficult as the Israelites are oppressed.
 - ii. God saw their affliction and rescued them, making a great name for Himself.
 - 1. One of the themes we saw in Exodus when we studied it as a church is that God is showing who He is through the process of delivering Israel.
 - iii. God came down – didn’t remain distant.
 - iv. He gave – notice the adjectives –
 - 1. Just ordinances
 - 2. True laws

3. Good statutes and commandments

- v. Davis – Sinai is the assurance that Yahweh does not redeem a people from bondage only to abandon them to ambiguity. The Law is the clarity of a gracious God who refuses to leave his people in limbo about what pleases him.

c. **Numbers** and **Deuteronomy**: God is gracious and compassionate. (9:16-21)

- i. Now for the first time in this summary, the failings of the Israelites emerge in contrast to the faithfulness of God.

- ii. Their failings

- 1. They acted arrogantly

- a. Same as the Egyptians

- b. Israel behaved as Egyptians. There is an Egyptian nature within Israel.

- 2. They became stubborn – lit. “stiffened their necks” – like an animal refusing to turn where directed.

- 3. They tried to return to Egypt.

- 4. They made an idol

- iii. But God

- 1. Is a God of forgiveness, grace, compassion...

- a. **Exodus 34:6** Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

- 2. 6 times in ch 9 the prayer recalls God's compassion.

d. **Joshua**: God is the good provider. (9:22-25)

- i. They received a land and multiplied as people and “reveled in Your great goodness” (v. 25)

- ii. Fulfilled the promise of Deuteronomy 6:10-12 but failed to heed the warning.

- iii. **Deuteronomy 6:10-12** "Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, ¹¹ and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, ¹² then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

e. **Judges**: God is the faithful rescuer. (9:26-29)

- i. Sin, servitude, supplication, salvation, silence

- ii. 2 ½ times this section recalls this cycle, but it happened many more.

- iii. “they did evil” but “many times you rescued them”

- 1. You can tell the tale through the “many” clauses

- a. *Many times* you rescued them (28)

- b. You bore with them for *many years* (30)

- c. In your *many compassions* you did not make an end of them (31)

- i. NASB has “great compassions” but it’s the same word as “many”

iv. Davis tells the story of Bill Miller from Brian Kelly’s book, *best little stories from WW2*

1. Miller – in Feb 1940 purchased his first car – late at night in Pennsylvania with 3 feet of snow on the ground, Miller decided to see how fast his car could go, not thinking about the wet road now frozen – he hit a curve at 110 mph and was ejected through the windshield and into a snowbank. A passing motorist found Miller, took him to a hospital. Miller later learned his name was Warren Felty.
2. 5 years later Miller was shot down over Germany and was captured as POW. Marching through the snow for 75 miles he was exhausted and at last gave up and fell into a snow bank. Someone dragged him out of the snowbank and pushed him to continue, saving his life. Remarkably, it was once again Warren Felty.
3. After the war Miller is back in Pennsylvania at a roadside restaurant and about to lose his job because he couldn’t get a distributor for his company’s product. A passing motorist stopped by the restaurant, met Miller and made arrangements to serve as Miller’s distributor, saving his job. It was Warren Felty.

f. ***Kings***: God keeps His word. (9:30-31)

- i. From Judges the pattern continued through the books of 1 and 2 Kings – some bright spots of obedience and faithfulness, but mostly kings who did wrong and led the people to do wrong away from God.
- ii. Even when God sent them prophets to warn them they refused to turn and so God gave them into hands of the people of the lands – taken away into exile by Assyria and Babylon.
- iii. But God still did not forsake them.

3. Acknowledging God’s ***justice*** and their ***wickedness*** (9:32-38)

- a. “Now” – reflects a change to the present.
- b. Only one petition: Let this be considered enough
 - i. Boldness! – yet they acknowledge that God was just in what He did, they were wicked but He was faithful, they were honest yet you couldn’t possibly call this prayer irreverent
- c. V. 30 is a good summary of the whole prayer.
 - i. You are just – you have dealt faithfully – we have acted wickedly
- d. V. 36 there is some irony that they are now slaves in the land God gave them.
 - i. The verb “to give” (Hb. natan) is a key word throughout the confession, where God is the primary subject. (Ex Commentary)
 1. 6 – give life
 2. 7 – gave him the name Abraham
 3. 8 – covenant to give the land (2x)
 4. 13 – gave them just ordinances, etc.
 5. 15 – the land he swore to give them
 6. 20 – gave your Spirit to instruct
 7. Gave them water for their thirst

- 8. 22 – gave them kingdoms and peoples
- 9. 24 – gave them (Canaanites) into their (Israelites) hands
- 10. 27 – gave them deliverers
- 11. 35 – in their kingdom, with Your great goodness which You gave them
- 12. 36 – land which you gave to our fathers

e. They make a commitment before God (9:38)

i. This is what we'll read in chapter 10. They promise to do better. Will it last? No.

4. Applying the Word

a. Be quick to **confess** when you sin.

i. Pro 28:13

b. God is **faithful** to His promises.



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(9:1-5)

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