

Nehemiah 9 – Thursday, October 19th, 2017

- Because it's been three weeks since we were in our study through Nehemiah, I'll take just a moment to set the stage as it were.
- The wall and gates has now been completed, miraculously so, after only 52-days, and worship in the temple has been restored.
- So much so, that the children of Israel are in the midst of a revival and as they draw near to God He in turn draws near to them.

Nehemiah 9 -- 1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. 2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they 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 one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

- The chapter begins with an extraordinary display of humility and fasting before the Lord on the part of the children of Israel.
- It's interesting to note in posturing themselves before the Lord in such humility they stood and read from the Book of the Law.
- To me this speaks to how humbling ourselves will always lead to a deeper desire to get into the Word and the Word get into us.

4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God. 5 And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said: "Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! "Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

- Here in verse four to the end of the chapter, we have what some believe to be the longest prayer recorded in the entire Bible.
- As we go through this prayer one thing that stands out is the goodness of God in spite of the disobedience of God's people.
- This prayer should be of great encouragement to us in the sense that it's a much-needed reminder of God's grace and mercy.

6 You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You. 7 "You are the LORD 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 a covenant with him To give the land of the Canaanites, The Hittites, the Amorites, The Perizzites, the Jebusites, And the Girgashites— To give it to his descendants. You have performed Your words, For You are righteous. 9 "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea. 10 You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants, And against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as it is this day. 11 And You divided the sea before them, So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; And their persecutors You threw into the deep, As a stone into the mighty waters. 12 Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar, And by night with a pillar of fire, To give them light on the road Which they should travel. 13 "You came down also on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. 14 You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your servant. 15 You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst, And told them to go in to possess the land Which You had sworn to give them.

- I have to say that this is a remarkable accounting of all that God had done for the Israelites starting with His calling of Abraham.
- The reason I point this out is because often times, one of the best things we can do is recall and recount all that God has done.
- It think of David convincing Saul to allow him to defeat Goliath by recounting how that God delivered him from a lion and a bear.

16 "But they and our fathers acted proudly, Hardened their necks, And did not heed Your commandments. 17 They refused to obey, And they were not mindful of Your wonders That You did among them. But they hardened their necks, And in their rebellion They appointed a leader To return to their bondage. But You are God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them.

- Notice the reason the Israelites acted proudly, hardened their necks, didn't heed God's commandments, and refused to obey.
- We're told the reason for this in verse sixteen was that the Israelites were not mindful of the wonders that God did among them.
- In other words, had they recalled and recounted all that God had done, they would have been less likely to rebel in this way.

18 "Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, And said, 'This is your god That brought you up out of Egypt,' And worked great provocations, 19 Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, To lead them on the road; Nor the pillar of fire by night, To show them light, And the way they should go. 20 You also 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; They lacked nothing; Their clothes did not wear out And their feet did not swell. 22 "Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations, And divided them into districts. So they took possession of the land of Sihon, The land of the king of Heshbon, And the land of Og king of Bashan.

- This is a most interesting account of what the Israelites had done after God had delivered them out of Egypt and into the land.
- Specifically, the worshipping the golden calf as the god who had brought them out of Egypt instead of the true and living God.
- The reason we have accounts like this is not to show us how wicked we were, but how good God is in spite of how bad we are.

23 You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, And brought them into the land Which You had told their fathers To go in and possess. 24 So the people went in And possessed the land; You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, The Canaanites, And gave them into their hands, With their kings And the people of the land, That they might do with them as they wished. 25 And they took strong cities and a rich land, And possessed houses full of all goods, Cisterns already dug, vineyards, olive groves, And fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, And delighted themselves in Your great goodness.

- Here we're told of God's faithfulness to do everything He had promised to do, again, in spite of their rebellion and wickedness.
- However, as we'll see next, it was this very fulfillment of God's promise to bless them abundantly that leads to disobedience.
- Sadly, this is what happens when we are blessed with abundance and plenty, such that we forget the God Who provided it.

26 "Nevertheless they were disobedient And rebelled against You, Cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets, who testified against them To turn them to Yourself; And they worked great provocations. 27 Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, Who oppressed them; And in the time of their trouble, When they cried to You, You heard from heaven; And according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them From the hand of their enemies.

- Here, and in the verses that follow, we see this cyclical dynamic on the part of the Israelites, of rebellion and then repentance.
- First, they disobey God and rebel against God, then God delivers them over to their enemies, then they cry out in repentance.
- Thankfully, God hears and hearkens unto the voice of their cry and delivers them again and again, because of how good He is.

28 "But after they had rest, They again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, So that they had dominion over them; Yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; And many times You delivered them according to Your mercies, 29 And testified against them, That You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, And did not heed Your commandments, But sinned against Your judgments, 'Which if a man does, he shall live by them.' And they shrugged their shoulders, Stiffened their necks, And would not hear. 30 Yet for many years You had patience with them, And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

- These verses paint for us a beautiful picture of the nature of God, as being merciful, longsuffering, patient, and compassionate.
- I mention this because often times we resent God's discipline of us, not realizing that He disciplines us because He loves us.
- I would suggest that not only does God discipline us because He loves us, He does so as evidence that we are His children.

Hebrews 12:4-14 -- 4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. 14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

31 Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You are God, gracious and merciful. 32 "Now therefore, our God, The great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You That has come upon us, Our kings and our princes, Our priests and our prophets, Our fathers and on all Your people, From the days of the kings of Assyria until this day. 33 However You are just in all that has befallen us; For You have dealt faithfully, But we have done wickedly. 34 Neither our kings nor our princes, Our priests nor our fathers, Have kept Your law, Nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, With which You testified against them. 35 For they have not served You in their kingdom, Or in the many good things that You gave them, Or in the large and rich land which You set before them; Nor did they turn from their wicked works. 36 "Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, To eat its fruit and its bounty, Here we are, servants in it! 37 And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, Because of our sins; Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle At their pleasure; And we are in great distress. 38 "And because of all this, We make a sure covenant and write it; Our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it."

- The prayer ends and the chapter with it but not before providing us a magnificent progression of sorts, when it comes to revival.
- Humility leads to remembering God's goodness, which brings about a realization of our sinfulness, which brings recommitment.
- The good news is no matter how often we do this cyclically in our own Christian lives, God will never turn us away in the end.