

## A Prayer about God<sup>1</sup>

Nehemiah 9

### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Nehemiah 8 focused on God's word as it was read, interpreted, and applied. In chapter 9, the people respond in prayer with genuine sadness for their sins (v. 1).
2. In chapter 8, Ezra and Nehemiah comfort the afflicted. In chapter 9, the comfortable are afflicted.
3. Nehemiah 9 has the record of an extended prayer of the people of God. It is the longest prayer in the Bible outside of the book of Psalms.
  - a. It is a compilation of choice quotations, recollections, images, and phrases.
  - b. Evidently, the Levites, who led the people in the prayer of confession, knew the Scriptures by heart and relied on the language of the patriarchs, prophets, and psalmists.
  - c. The confession expresses the people's disappointment with themselves and their confidence in God.
  - d. This declaration of guilt confessed...
    - 1) Who God is, and
    - 2) Who they were.

### **DISCUSSION: The Levites' prayer of confession mentioned...**

- I. **The Greatness of God (vv. 1-6).**
  - A. Showing signs of mourning, the people were ready to repent and recommit their lives to God.
  - B. After hearing the Law, perhaps they remembered Leviticus 20:26 and separated themselves from the bad influences around them.
    1. Separation without devotion is isolation.
    2. Devotion without separation is hypocrisy.
  - C. The people stood and confessed the sins of their fathers and their own sins. There was solidarity in their guilt.
  - D. Before the confession, there was praise of the eternal God given with respect.
    1. The believers reflected on God's nature and character as well as His mighty works in history.
    2. This is important, because, if our view of God is too small or too narrow, our faith will be too little.
    3. Theologian David Wells said about our limited understanding of God, "God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, His grace too ordinary, His judgment too benign, His gospel too easy, and His Christ too common."

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<sup>1</sup> The main points of this lesson are from Warren Wiersbe quoted by Brian Bill in "Putting First Things First," a sermon found at [www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com). Accessed, 11/05/2012. Adapted by Andy Kizer.

- E. The magnificence of God is incomparable! “You are the Lord, you alone” (v. 6; cf. Gen. 1:1; Psa. 19:1).
- F. It is always good to begin with the greatness of God.

## **II. The Goodness of God (vv. 7-30).**

- A. The bulk of the prayer focuses on the goodness of God.
- B. The personal pronoun “you” is used in reference to God, at least fifty times.
  - 1. In vv. 7-15, God is the subject of every sentence.
  - 2. The word “gave” is used in one form or another more than fifteen times.
- C. This part of the prayer rehearses the history of Israel, revealing God’s goodness to His people and their repeated failures to appreciate His gifts and obey His will.
- D. God’s goodness is seen in at least four different ways in Nehemiah 9.
  - 1. God formed (vv. 7-18)
    - a. Three things are required for a nation to be formed: people, law, and land.
    - b. God chose Abram and made a covenant with him (vv. 7, 8).
    - c. He delivered the people out of Egyptian bondage (vv. 9-12).
    - d. He gave them a law at Mount Sinai (vv. 13, 14).
    - e. He caused them to possess the land He promised to them (v. 15).
  - 2. God lead (vv. 19-21)
  - 3. God provided (vv. 22-25)
    - a. He caused them to overcome their enemies and gave them kingdoms and nations (v. 22).
    - b. He multiplied their numbers and blessed them with children (v. 23).
    - c. He gave to the people more than they deserved (v. 25).
  - 4. God corrected (vv. 26-30)
    - a. The people remembered how their forefathers acted defiantly (cf. Judges).
    - b. Though their needs were met by God, the people exhibited a rebellious spirit.
    - c. Instead of praising God and thanking Him for His goodness, they blasphemed Him.
    - d. As a result, God corrected them by handing them over to their enemies (vv. 27-30).
    - e. This had to be done repeatedly, because God is good.

## **III. The Grace of God (vv. 31-37).**

- A. God does not treat His people as they deserve to be treated (v. 31).
- B. Grace is not what you deserve, but what you need.
- C. To receive the grace of God, the people owned their specific transgressions (v. 33).
- D. The entire chapter speaks of God’s grace.
  - 1. The people turned away from Him. They sinned repeatedly.
  - 2. At any point, God could have given up on them.
  - 3. Though He corrected, He still loved.
  - 4. Grace returned again and again (cf. Rom. 5:20-6:2).

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. The people made a “firm covenant” and put it in writing, which made it personal, practical, and public.
  - a. Personally know God as great and gracious.
  - b. Practically apply His word to your life.
  - c. Publicly live before others in a way that glorifies God.
2. God is so great and so good, how could we not be committed to Him?