

## **The Path to Restoration**

### **Salvation Exalts God's Glory**

#### **Nehemiah 9**

#### **Introduction**

*"To do even the most humbling tasks to the glory of God takes the Almighty God Incarnate working in us." - Oswald Chambers*

In Nehemiah chapter 8, the people listened to God's Word read and wept in repentance as they realized how seriously they had sinned. But it was a time for a feast, so Nehemiah urged the people not to weep but to rejoice because "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10).

Two days after the end of the Feast of Booths, the people gather again. But this time, they gathered with fasting, sackcloth to express grief over their sins. Once again, the priests read the law of the Lord for several hours, and then the Levites prayed and repented.

Along with Ezra 9 and Daniel 9, Nehemiah 9 is one of the great prayers of confession in the Bible.

#### **I. Sin Is a Problem For Us**

In Nehemiah 9, the nation gathers in an assembly of humble repentance.

Verse 1 begins, "On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads." (Neh 9:1 NIV)

They completed the wall. The people were listening and obeying God's Word, and the Holy Spirit was doing a significant work in their hearts.

So they called an assembly and agreed together to fast and seek God.

They were contrite in heart because they have sinned and disobeyed God.

They were so troubled by their sin that they couldn't even eat.

They put on sackcloth, a rough fabric (like a burlap bag), and wore it to show their humility before God.

They discarded the usual comforts of life and took handfuls of dirt and sprinkled it on their heads to express how sorrowful they felt before God.

The people address not only their sins but the sins of the preceding generations as well.

It is one thing to sin because you don't know God, but what about repeatedly sinning even when you have tasted of God's grace and love?

When you read this chapter, it's like looking in the mirror.

You see the sinfulness of your own heart!

The Word of God revealed the condition of their hearts.

In response, they began to confess their sins to God!

How many of you know, sin blinds us.

But the Bible lays bare the real condition of our hearts.

It's only then that we see how sin has corrupted us and how desperately we need God's help!

In verse 2, the people separate themselves from their worldly friends and begin to take a good hard look at themselves.

"Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors." ([Neh 9:2 NIV](#))

When you dedicate your heart to God invariably, you have to separate yourself from some of your more worldly friendships.

The people also confessed the sin of their nation.

They realized and admitted they all missed the mark.

By the way, repentance isn't something that we do only once.

It is something that we continue to do as we grow closer to Jesus.

Repentance grows as faith grows. Spurgeon said, "Repentance is the inseparable companion of faith."

But when the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin and your heart is watered with the tears of repentance, the joy for forgiveness and eternal life flourishes.

This gathering of God's people took place only two days after the end of the joyful celebration of the feast of tabernacles.

They had drawn close to God, and now He is drawing them even closer! Their hunger for God's Word, only deepens.

In verse 3, we read, "They stood where they were and read from the Book of the

Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God." (Neh 9:3 NIV)

God doesn't show us our sin just so we will humbly confess it, but so that we can walk in what is right before Him.

Their brokenness of heart led them to come before God and hear His Word humbly.

A sure first step toward restoration is a brokenness and humble heart.

In verses 4 and 5, Nehemiah lists those who led the congregation in prayer.

The prayer is the longest prayer in the Bible - and yet takes only six and one-half minutes to pray it.

A prayer doesn't need to be lengthy to be effective.

In verse 5, the people are called upon to praise God and give him glory!

## **II. God's Shows Us Mercy**

"And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah—said: "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting." "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you." (Neh 9:5-6 NIV)

After the encouragement to praise the Lord, Ezra gave the people a reason to praise - because our God is the great God who made everything.

Looking at the glory of God's creation gives us a reason to praise God and humble ourselves to trust Him.

The prayer of repentance causes us to cry out for God's mercy and grace!

Their prayer begins by exalting God and His glorious name.

In verse 6, all the angels bow before Him, and verse 7 reminds the people, "God chose Abram, brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham" (the only Old Testament reference outside of Genesis to God's changing Abram's name).

In verses 9-15, they acknowledge God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness.

"You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red

Sea. You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. You divided the sea before them so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take. "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees, and laws through your servant Moses. In their hunger, you gave them bread from heaven, and in their thirst, you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them." (Neh 9:9-15 NIV)

Restoration can occur when we begin to reflect on the goodness of God. So in verse 16, they confess their repeated sinfulness.

"But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and, in their rebellion, appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them" (Neh 9:16-17 NIV)

God had been so good to Israel, and still, their pride led them back into sin.

Realizing you are a sinner is terrible enough, but when you realize your sin is against a God who has only treated you well is far worse.

You definitely step forward in restoration when you begin to recognize your own sinfulness.

After recounting the arrogance and stubbornness of their ancestors, they pray, "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. "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, 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. 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. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; They lacked nothing; Their clothes did not wear out, And their feet did not swell." (Neh 9:17-21 NKJV)

God's attitude towards Israel was gracious even though they became rebellious.

The only thing keeping God from pardoning us is our refusal to come to Him through Jesus Christ.

God is always ready to forgive you if you are ready to receive it.

Even after Israel made the golden calf and worshipped it, God still did not forsake them.

He still provided the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

He guided them by His spirit, fed them, and gave them water.

God loved Israel; they were special to Him just as God loves you! You are special to Him.

But that does not excuse you of your sins. That still requires repentance and humility towards God.

It's incredible how patient God is with us as sinners and how He holds back His terrible judgment against us even though we deserve it.

In verses 22-31, their prayer continues to list the many blessings God conferred on His disobedient and ungrateful people (9:20-25).

"You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. You made their children as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their parents to enter and possess. Their children went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you gave the Canaanites into their hands, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness. "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. So you delivered them into the hands of their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies. "But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time. "You warned them in order to turn them back to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, of which you said, 'The person who obeys them will live by them.' Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to

listen. For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighboring peoples. But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God." (Neh 9:22-31 NIV)

Israel's relationship with God began with His goodness and blessing.

Then, in the time of comfort and abundance, they turned away.

So God brings a time of correction as a "wake-up call."

As a result, the people would turn back to Him.

Then, blessed and satisfied, they would again turn from Him.

As the cycle continued, the depths of sinfulness went deeper and deeper.

But God never gives up on us, and He never turns away the repentant heart.

Despite their repeated rebellion, God's compassion was greater.

This is the great news of the gospel. No matter how awful or terrible and numerous your sins are, God's grace is greater!

God's forgiveness and mercy glorify Him as God!

God's mercy may benefit us, but its primary purpose is to exalt God.

In Exodus 9:16, God tells Pharaoh, "For this reason, I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and to proclaim My name through all the earth."

He's the only one who truly knows the heart of a person.

As the potter, God has the right to make one vessel for honorable use and another for common use.

Salvation focuses upon God's redemptive plan, not merely man's need to be saved.

Salvation reveals God's goodness and exalts God's glory.

The great preacher Jonathan Edwards said, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy His glory forever."

Many people are God-centered as long as they feel God is man-centered. That way, we can still manipulate things our own way.

But God saves us for His own sake and glory. He saves us because of His divine nature, not because he pities us.

He loves us and saves us because it is His Divine Nature to do so.

Some people think God's mercy and grace are contingent on their faith or (even worse) on their works.

But the Bible teaches that our faith and works are contingent on God's mercy and grace.

Saving faith is God's gift to us. Salvation is entirely by His grace, which again, only exalts His glory.

We are prone to sin, but God is rich in mercy. Therefore, we need his gift of salvation.

Repentance opens the door for us to praise God, humble ourselves before Him, and trust Him.

Repentance restores God's work in us.

### **III. Repentance Restores God's Work In Us**

In verses 32-37, the people plead for God to intervene and glorify himself through his people and his covenant.

"Now, therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our priests and prophets, on our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully while we acted wickedly. Our kings, our leaders, our priests, and our ancestors did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep. Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways. "But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress." (Neh 9:32-37 NIV)

Ongoing repentance marks God's continuing work in your lives.

At this time, Israel was not an independent nation - they were a province of the Empire of Persia and faced heavy taxes and obligations. So they ask God to deliver them once again from this oppression!

Real confession recognizes that God is right, and we are wrong.

"It is a tremendous moment when you can honestly say, 'Lord, You are right, and I am wrong.'

True repentance takes sin seriously and takes the necessary steps to break away from it.

A repentant person accepts responsibility for sin and does not blame God.

The people prayed in verse 33, "You are just in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly."

They believed God was rich in mercy, and they appealed to His great compassion and grace.

In verse 38, they made their decision and signed on the dotted line!

"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites, and our priests are affixing their seals to it." (Neh 9:38 NIV)

A sure sign you are on the path to restoration is when you follow-through with your commitment.

They even put it in writing that they were committing themselves to His ways.

God's work in us gives us the courage and faith to exalt God above all other gods and above every situation and circumstance of life.

## **Conclusion**

I pray whenever you're overwhelmed by guilt because of your sins, you realize God is abundant in mercy, and His great love will draw you to the cross of Christ for forgiveness and refuge.

Salvation is God's great gift to us. It came by special delivery through Jesus Christ.

But you must receive it and sign for it!

Alan Redpath gives us these self-examination questions:

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better person than I really am?

Is there any suspicion of hypocrisy in my life? Are my words and actions honest? Am I reliable?

Does the Bible live to me? Do I give it time to speak to me?

Do I enjoy my prayer time? When I am involved in a problem in life, do I talk about it or pray about it?



Do you speak to others about God's love and plan for them?