

NEHEMIAH 9:5-38 – Nehemiah, Ezra and the People Pray at the Time of the Dedication of the Wall – 24th of the month following the wall's completion!

5/30/15 Sat Morn Prayer

Biblical Background:

- The Book of Nehemiah begins 15 years after the Book of Ezra ends; almost 100 years after the first captives came back to the Promised Land; and some 150 years after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. After this long time, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were still in rubble.
- Nehemiah took charge of the situation, with much prayer and the work of the people, the Lord enabled them to finish the wall in 52 days.
- He then appointed men to stand at the various gates. They celebrated Feast of Tabernacles throughout Jerusalem and all surrounding cities. Ezra was called upon to read the Word of God to the people every day for seven days-the days of the Feast.
- On the 24th day of the month, the people were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and ashes. Confession and reading of the Word of God followed. It was an assembly of fasting, praying and worshipping in humble repentance that lasted one whole day--three hours of reading the Word; three hours of prayer and worship; three hours of reading the Word; and another three hours of prayer and worship!
- They confessed and worshipped the LORD their God: This **brokenness of heart** had led them to humbly come before God and hear His Word. A **sure first step of revival** is this brokenness of heart.
- **After hearing the Word of God, they made their confession; then they praised and exalted God.** This is what we need to do. **How we need to exalt God in our services and praise Him!**
- We now have the third prayer in this Book, this time Nehemiah is no longer a cup bearer to the king, or the man in charge of rebuilding the wall, but now has the role of governor.

The prayer in *Neh_9:1-38* is a spiritual summary of the OT history of the Jews: the Creation (*Neh_9:6*); the call of Abraham (*Neh_9:7-8*); the Exodus (*Neh_9:9-14*); the nation's wilderness experiences (*Neh_9:15-23*); the conquering of the land (*Neh_9:24-25*); the period of Judges (*Neh_9:26-29*); the period of prophets up to the captivity (*Neh_9:30-31*).

1. (4-5a) Those leading the congregation. - Neh 9:5 And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said:

- **Then Jeshua, Bani . . .** This mentions those Levites and leaders gathered to lead the people in their humble confession. It shouldn't surprise us, or make us feel like failures, if we must be led into confession and repentance.
- **Stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice:** Obviously, all eight of these men did not pray the following prayer at the same time. Perhaps it was written out and they took turns, perhaps it was spontaneously prayed in succession, or perhaps (and according to tradition), Ezra prayed this prayer.
- The following prayer is one of the longer prayers in the Bible - and yet takes only six and one half minutes to say. Prayer does not need to be long to be glorious and effective.

2. (5b-6) Praise to the God of all creation. - "Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! "Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise! [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.

- **You have made heaven:** After the encouragement to praise, Ezra gave a reason to praise - **because this is the great God who made it all.** Looking at the glory of God's creation gives us a reason to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him.
- **The host of heaven worships You:** God wants us to praise Him, to humble ourselves before Him, and to trust Him - but He gives us good reason to. We sometimes want our own reasons, but God gives us plenty of His own reasons.

3. (7-8) Praise to the God who chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants. - Neh 9:7-8 "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.

- **You have performed Your words:** This says to God, Lord, You promised this land to Abraham and his descendants, and now here we are! **Your promise is indeed true. How faithful You are!**

4. (9-15) Praise to the God who delivered Israel from Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness. - Neh 9:9-15

"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.

- **You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt:** A second sure sign of revival (following brokenness of heart) is reflection on the goodness of God. When our pride is cast down, and our hearts humbled before God, we can begin to see Him for who He is - and when we see that, we see how good God is.

5. (16-17a) The sinful response of man to Gods goodness. - Neh 9:16-17a *"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 they and our fathers:** This was a terrible response to the great and good works of God on behalf of Israel. God had been so good to Israel, **but they and our fathers acted proudly**. Our sin is bad enough; but to consider we sin against a God who has only treated us well is far, far, worse.
- **Hardened their necks . . . refused to obey . . . we're not mindful:** This is a **third sure sign of revival - recognition of our own sinfulness**. When we humbly seek God, and see His goodness, we can't help but next to notice our own sinfulness - the blackness of our sin stands out against the brightness of Gods purity and goodness.

6. (17b-21) Gods gracious reply to rebellious Israel. - Neh. 9:17b-21 *But You are God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them. [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.*

- **But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them:** Gods gracious answer to the rebellion of Israel was glorious. **Ready to pardon** is especially wonderful, indicating that there is nothing keeping God from pardoning us except our refusal to come to Him through Jesus. *He* is **ready to pardon**, if we are ready to receive it.
- **Even when they made a molded calf for themselves:** This was Gods gracious response to Israel - even after they made the golden calf and worshipped it, He still did not forsake them. He still provided the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, He still guided them by His spirit, He still fed them and gave them water. Together it all shows not how special Israel was, **but how special God is**.
- **You sustained them in the wilderness:** We are often impressed at how patient God is with the sinner; how He somehow holds back His terrible judgment against those people who deserve it so badly. **Yet it seems that His patience toward us is even greater**, those who have received so much more from Him, but still act like Israel did.

7. (22-31) The cycle of Israel's relationship with God. - Neh 9:22-31 *"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. [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. [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. [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. [31] Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You are God, gracious and merciful.

- **So they ate and were filled and grew fat, and delighted themselves in Your great goodness:** The cycle began with God showing His goodness to His people (You gave them kingdoms and nations) and with Gods people being blessed.
- **Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You:** Then, in the time of comfort and abundance, Gods people turn from Him.
- **Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies:** Then, God brings correction - a wake-up call to His people.
- **And in the time of their trouble . . . they cried out to You; and God delivers them: You heard from heaven . . . You gave them deliverers:** As a result, Gods people then turn back to Him.
- **But after they had rest, they again did evil before You:** Then, blessed and satisfied, Gods people again turn from Him, and the cycle continues.
- **Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful:** As the cycle continues, the motions of each cycle get deeper and deeper - but God doesn't change.

8. (32-37) A plea to God for intervention. - Neh 9:32-37 "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.

- **The great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy:** Because of who God is, and because of who they are (rebellious and wicked), they needed God to do the work of saving them from their enemies.
- Israel, at this time, was not an independent nation - they were a province of the Empire of Persia, and were under heavy Persian taxes and obligations. They ask God to deliver them once again from this oppression!
- **You are just in all that has befallen us:** This gives a good description of what real confession is all about. It recognizes that God is right and we are wrong (**but we have done wickedly**). Confession is agreeing with God about both things.
- It is a tremendous moment in a Christian's life when he can honestly look up into the face of God and say, Yes, Lord, You are right and I am wrong, when he stops arguing with God, and drops his controversy. He says, Lord, yes. I've got what I deserved in this situation. You are right; I am wrong. That is the thing for which God has been working in your life and mine from the very moment of our conversion.

9. (38) Conclusion: a point of decision - Neh 9:38 "And because of all this, We make a sure covenant and write it; Our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it."

- **We make a sure covenant:** Israel needed to come to this place, where knowing who God is, and knowing who they are, they come and make a *covenant* with God - even writing it down - to commit themselves to His ways.
- **We make a sure covenant, and write it:** The **fourth sure sign of revival - after brokenness of heart, after reflection on Gods goodness, after recognition of our sinfulness, is a renewal of our obedience**. We come to a place of decision, so this work of God is not just a wonderful experience, but something that shapes our future.

SUMMARY:

- Gods work in us often must come to a place of decision - where He wants us to make a stand for Him, and against some other things. If *you* need a point of decision, Alan Redpath gave these self-examination questions, to give an idea how:
- **What about my relationship with men?**
- Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am? Is there the least suspicion of hypocrisy in my life? Am I honest in all my words and acts? Do I exaggerate?
- Am I reliable? Can I be trusted? Do I confidentially pass on what was told to me in confidence? Do I grumble and complain in the church?
- Am I jealous, impure, irritable, touchy, distrustful? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Am I proud? Do I thank God I am not as other people? Is there anyone I fear, or dislike, or criticize, or resent? If so, what am I doing about it?
- **What about my devotion to God?**
- Does the Bible live to me? Do I give it time to speak to me? Do I go to bed in time and do I get up in time?
- Am I enjoying my prayer life today? Did I enjoy it this morning? When I am involved in a problem in life, do I talk about it or pray about it?
- Am I disobeying God in anything, or insisting upon doing something about which my conscience is very uneasy?
- When did I last speak to someone else with the object of trying to win him for Christ?
- Am I a slave to devices, social media, books, dress, friends, work, or what others think? How do I spend my spare time?

Take My Life and Let It Be - (Frances Havergal, Henry Malan)

*Take my life and let it be Consecrated Lord to thee
Take my hands and let them move At the impulse of Thy love At the impulse of Thy love*

*Take my feet and let them be Swift and beautiful for Thee
Take my voice and let me sing Always only for my King Always only for my King*

*Take my lips and let them be Filled with messages for Thee
Take my silver and my gold Not a mite would I withhold Not a mite would I withhold*

*Take my love, my God I pour At Thy feet its treasure store
Take myself and I will be Ever only all for Thee Ever only all for Thee*

*Take my life and let it be Consecrated Lord to Thee
Take myself and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee Ever, only, all for Thee*