

## THE PEOPLE FAST AND PRAY

### TEXT: NEHEMIAH 9

#### Introduction:

1. In Nehemiah 8, “all the people gathered themselves together” before the water gate and Ezra the scribe read the Scriptures to them.
2. Things begin to happen when people read the Word of God, and we see that in Nehemiah chapter 8.
3. Seven days of Bible reading had a wonderful effect on the people of God (8:18). Nehemiah 9:1 says that “in the twenty and fourth day of this month” (the same month as chapter 8), “the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes (rough material made of goat’s hair), and earth upon them” (signifying repentance) (9:1).
4. Before we begin my exposition, I would like to point out the order. First it was the reading of God’s Word. Everything must start with God’s Word. We are reminded of this in chapter 8.
5. But that’s just the beginning. The Bible says, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).
6. There’s something here that also should be noted – the Israelites “separated themselves” from their heathen neighbors (9:2). The reasons most churches are so weak and ineffective is the members are not separated. They are worldly. There is no separation from the world.
7. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (I John 2:15).
8. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).
9. The doctrine of separation has been neglected and consequently churches are getting weaker and worldlier.
10. After the Word of God was read, the people prayed. I realize we should pray before we start to read the Bible but I’m speaking here of serious prayer, fervent prayers.
11. George Muller would read the Bible before he prayed, and this is one of the secrets to his successful prayer life.
12. This prayer in Nehemiah 9:4-38 is the longest recorded in the Bible.

13. I realize some people are long-winded and they pray around in circles and so on, but that's not what we have here. Personally I like to listen to a godly Christian pray with fervor and unction.
14. Spurgeon was a great preacher, but it is interesting to consider that many people used to attend his church because they loved to hear him pray.
15. You will notice that Nehemiah doesn't even mention the word prayer here. It says they fasted with sackcloth and ashes (9:1). It says they "confessed their sins" for three hours (9:2, 3). It has been truly said that confession is the road to revival.
16. They "read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God" (9:3).
17. In other words, they had a three-hour preaching service and then a three-hour invitation. Most Christians today would not be happy about that.
18. They want to get in and out of church real quick. One preacher said, "We piously sing, 'Take Time to Be Holy,' but we aren't willing to pay the price to do it" (Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*).
19. The old-time evangelists used to come and preach for at least two weeks straight, often day and night. The first week they would preach primarily to Christians. After the Christians would get right with God, they would preach to the unsaved.
20. One time a committee complained that they brought Evangelist Sam Jones to town to preach to sinners but that he ended up preaching at them! Sam Jones said, "Never mind, I will get to the sinners. I never scald hogs until the water is hot."
21. Sam Jones was an old-fashioned Methodist preacher. Once, when asked why he didn't attack the Catholics, he replied, "When I get through with the Methodists, it's bedtime."
22. In one revival, the pastors, feeling Jones shouldn't be so negative in his preaching, gathered for a prayer meeting one afternoon to pray for him. Jones, driving by the tabernacle, was overjoyed to see a group of preachers conducting a prayer meeting, so he slipped in to join them. He heard their prayers about him..."Help him to have more tact, change his mannerisms," etc. Then it was his turn to pray: "Lord, I hope you won't listen to a one of these preachers. They don't preach against sin. They don't visit from door to door. They don't weep over sinners, and they don't win souls. And they want You to change me until I'm just like them. O Lord, help these preachers to have enough sense to realize that if You were to answer their prayers, I would be just as worthless and no-account as they are. I'd be too lazy to work too. I'd be afraid to fight sin

and too cold to cry over sinners and too indifferent to win souls. Please God, don't make me like any of these fellers.

23. Sam Jones' prayer continued and a great sweeping revival was seen. We need more preachers like that today.
24. Verse 4 says the priests and Levites, "cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God" (9:4).
25. After Bible-reading, prayer and fasting, confession of sin, and separation from the ungodly, came worship (9:3b).
26. The rest of the chapter is devoted to the prayer of the priests and Levites (9:4ff). They "stood upon the stairs" as though they were going up to the heavenly sanctuary.
27. Let us look at this prayer. They literally prayed through the Bible, from the days of Abraham up to the Babylonian captivity.

## **I. THEY PRAISED GOD BECAUSE HE IS WORTHY TO BE PRAISED (9:5).**

1. The Levites said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever: and blessed be Thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Neh. 9:5).
2. They praised God because He is our Creator (9:6). We see this all throughout the Bible. It serves to remind us that evolution is dishonoring to God.
3. Revelation 4:10 and 11 says, "The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."
4. If you have a good English dictionary it will give you the etymology of the word "worship." It is literally "worth-ship."
5. Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines worship as "the state of worth or worthiness."
6. So why do we worship God? According to Revelation 4:11 it is because He hast created all things, and for His pleasure they are and were created" (cf. Neh. 9:6).
7. By praising God, who alone created the heavens and the earth and all that are therein, the people of God were testifying against the idolaters all around them that worshipped and served the creature, rather than the Creator (9:6).

8. Today we testify not only against the idolatry of our foolish generation but against evolution and all the other wicked philosophies that deny God our Creator.
9. In Darwin's famous book, *Origin of the Species*, he says, "I suppose..." over 800 times. But there is no "supposing" in the Bible. The Bible clearly tells us that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
10. Evolution has been called a "fairy tale for adults."
11. Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree  
Discussing things as they are said to be.  
One said to the other, "Listen here, you two.  
I just heard a rumor that can't be true."  
  
"That man descended from our noble race!  
The very idea is a big disgrace.  
No monkey ever cheated his wife,  
Starved her baby, and ruined her life."  
  
"You'll never see a mother monk  
Leave her child with others to bunk.  
Passing him off from one to the other,  
Till the poor child scarcely knows his mother."  
  
"And here's one more thing a monkey won't do –  
Go out at night and get on a stew.  
Or use a gun, or club, or knife  
To take another monkey's life.  
Yes, man descended, the ornery cuss,  
But brother, he did not descend from us."
12. God is the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (9:7, 8, 22-25).
13. It was to Abraham that the promised land of Canaan was given. This is important to consider in light of all of the terrorism and turmoil in the Middle East (and all over the world).
14. The terrorists do not accept the authority of God's Word. Neither does the UN. And unfortunately, most Americans do not either.
15. God made His covenant with Abraham and "his seed" (descendants) and this covenant has never been abrogated (9:8, 23).
16. God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt (9:9-11).
17. This deliverance from Egypt is mentioned over and over again in both the Old Testament as well as the NT.

18. Liberal Bible critics do not believe that God parted the Red Sea (9:9-11). They say it was actually “the Sea of Reeds,” and only a few inches deep. Well that would be even more of a miracle – imagine the entire Egyptian army drowning in just a few inches of water!

## **II. THEY PRAISED GOD BECAUSE HE LED THEM THROUGH THE WILDERNESS (9:12).**

1. God not only led them, He provided for them, He fed them, and He sustained them (9:12, 15, 19-21).
2. The same God who led the Israelites wants to lead you and me. Isaiah 58:11 says, “And the LORD shall guide thee continually.”
3. God gave Israel the Law (9:13). This made Israel unique among the nations – God gave them His law. And that law is the basis for western civilization.
4. Behind this attack on western civilization is a hatred of God, Israel, the Bible, and the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. It is part of the ancient conflict between God and Satan, Christ and Antichrist, heaven and hell.
6. God gave Israel the Sabbath day (9:14).
7. Please note that the sabbath day was given to the Israelites “by the hand of Moses thy servant” (9:14). The SDA and others teach that the sabbath was not just for the Jews, and that it was given by God to Adam and Eve.
8. God did not give Adam any instructions regarding Sabbath-keeping. In fact, God only gave Adam and Eve two commandments.
  - “God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of

the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

- “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17).

9. The sabbath day was a sign between God and Israel (Ex. 31:12-17).

10. We do not keep the Sabbath today, but we should keep the Lord’s Day holy.

### **III. THEY PRAISED GOD BECAUSE HE IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL (9:15—21).**

1. A big contrast is found in Nehemiah 9. Over and over again we see that God is “gracious and merciful” (9:17, 19, 31), and over and over again we see that the Israelites were proud, stubborn, and rebellious (9:16, 17, 26, 29, 33-35).
2. The word “great” appears eight times in Nehemiah 9 – there is the “great kindness” of God (9:17), His “great goodness” (9:25, 35), and His great mercy (9:31).
3. Indeed God is “the great, the mighty, and the terrible God” (9:32).
4. But the Israelites responded to God’s great kindness and goodness and mercy with “great provocations” (9:18, 26).
5. This resulted in Israel’s “great distress” (9:37).
6. Another word found often in Nehemiah 9 is the word “gavest” (9:13, 15, 20, 22, 24, 27, 35, etc.). God is always giving. When Christians give they are acting godly. “For God so loved the world He gave...”
7. After praising God for all His mighty acts, the Levites go on to confess the stubborn disobedience of the people of Israel – they “dealt proudly,

and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to Thy commandments, and refused to obey..." (9:15-17).

8. In their rebellion they foolishly desired to go back to Egypt, the land of bondage from which God had delivered them (9:17). There are some Christians like that. They get saved and after a while they want to go back to the world.
9. But God is gracious and merciful and longsuffering (9:17-21).
10. Spurgeon said, "Brethren, the Israelites seem to have been set forward as a picture of all God's people."
11. Spurgeon then gave several examples of this:
  - They were, in the first place, a people very specially favored, but they were a people as specially ungrateful.
  - Again, the Israelites were absolutely dependent upon God for everything, and yet they were proud.
  - They deliberately rebelled against God.
  - The Israelites were unmindful of what the Lord had done for them (9:17).
  - "Further on we read that these people committed in spirit an act of utter apostasy. They made unto themselves a captain to return to their bondage."
  - "The Israelites did actually fall into shameful idolatry. They set up the figure of a calf to represent God; they compared their glory unto the image of an ox that eateth grass," when they said, 'This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt'" (cf. 9:18).
12. God, in His grace and mercy, corrected them (9:26, 27). "For whom the LORD loveth He correcteth" (Pro. 3:12).
13. Disobedience and rebellion characterized them from their earliest days, and after Joshua died the children of Israel went deep into apostasy (9:26). "Wrought great provocations" (9:18b, 26b).

14. Thus we read over and over in the book of Judges, and I & II Samuel, and I & II Kings, and I & II Chronicles the sad accounts of Israel's declension.
15. Until finally God allowed the kingdom to be divided, and then the kings of Assyria and Babylon were allowed to conquer them and carry them off into captivity (9:26-30).
16. This is God's perspective of the history of Israel. We need to see things the way God sees things. Indeed, history is "His story" (9:31-36).
17. Sin always brings "great distress" (9:37), but sinners are slow to grasp this important lesson.
18. They concluded their prayer with a "sure covenant" (9:38).
19. Bearing in mind all the evil consequences of their disobedience in the past, the Israelites made a "sure covenant" (which they would soon break) with God.
20. They put it in writing, signed (by their princes, Levites, and priests) it, and sealed it.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. No doubt the Israelites in Nehemiah's day were sincere, just like many Christians are sincere when they come forward at an invitation to pray.
2. In fact, Nehemiah's name is first on the list and we know he was a sincere, godly man (10:1).
3. Maybe God has spoken to your heart and you need to come forward today and make a "sure covenant" with the Lord.