

# Nehemiah - The Path to Revival

REVIEW: Today I want to review Nehemiah by themes. The first week we saw two great themes come out that have been the basis for the book of Nehemiah - a God-given burden, and prayer. Nehemiah was burdened for his homeland and its people; so much so that he refused to be inactive, he had to do something. The first something he did was pray. And as we have seen since then, that was his normal reaction to most things. The second week we saw Nehemiah's godly planning. Week three we continued the theme of planning, and watched as Nehemiah's leadership begins to shine through. Over the next several weeks we saw different variations on these themes (prayer, planning, leadership) under difficult circumstances (some from without, some from within). Finally we saw spiritual leadership as Nehemiah and the leaders began to set worship back in its rightful place.

TRAN: I review today by theme because we are going to look at our next passage, Nehemiah 9 thematically today, rather than verse by verse. And perhaps a little more peculiar, we are going to start part way into the chapter, and come back for the opening verses at the end.

INTRO: Many of you know who Jonathan Edwards was from history, a preacher in New England. He is most famous for preaching the sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." You might even know the stories about the sermon. Edwards held the sermon transcript up close to his face as he read it. People in the church were moved beyond control. One man jumped up from his seat and shouted, "Mr. Edwards, have mercy!" Others held the backs of the pew in front of them lest they slip into the pit. Most thought the day of judgment had come.

However, most do not know the power behind the sermon. Obviously, the Holy Spirit was at work, and that is the power behind the sermon. Did you know, some believers in town had heard that God had been blessing other places in New England. After all, the "Great Awakening" was taking place in New England. These believers were concerned that God might pass them by, so they met on the evening before the sermon and spent the whole night in agonizing prayer. It was the prayer that supported the revival.

This morning we are going to start with the prayer in Nehemiah 9 that was a result of the revival.

Nehemiah 9:5b-37

- I. The blessing of God - 9:5b-6
  - A. Normally when you hear the words "the blessing of God" you think about God blessing you

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1. Wrong idea here
2. This is the Jews giving blessing to God
- B. God's name is great for several reasons here
  1. His name is glorious
    - a) What we will see through this sermon is why they are saying his name is glorious
    - b) It is by the incredible acts of God that are being recounted to them by the reading of God's Word (the OT)
    - c) It is the history they have with God
      - (1) Do you have history with God?
      - (2) Can you review how God has been faithful to you?
      - (3) If not, have you worked on your relationship with God? Have you surrendered your life to Him?
  2. Second they say that He alone is God
    - a) He made the heavens
    - b) He made the stars
    - c) He made the seas
    - d) In other words, there are not all these other gods that did this, there is one God, and He made it all
- II. The relationship of God - 9:7
  - A. The surface reading of this verse points out one thing: God is a God of relationship
    1. God chose Abraham and the Jews for a special relationship
    2. This is identity folks
      - a) There is one God - not many
      - b) And that One God chose Israel for a special relationship
    3. Think about how arrogant this must sound
      - a) There is only one God and He chose us!
      - b) That is why the Jews were hated back then
      - c) And that is why Christians are hated today
        - (1) We insist that there is one God - and only one God
        - (2) Even though we declare that He wants to have a relationship with anyone that will come, the world thinks we are narrow-minded and arrogant because of our understanding of God
  - B. But there is something I want you to notice about these verses and it will be true through this whole prayer
    1. Read verse seven again and answer this question: who is doing the action? (HINT: It is a Sunday School answer and Jesus has not showed up yet in the Bible - that only leaves God or the Bible)

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2. God CHOSE Abraham, God BROUGHT him, GAVE him the name, God FOUND his heart faithful, God MADE a covenant, God KEPT his promise
    - a) You will find that God is the real subject of this entire prayer
    - b) They prayed this after being read the books of the Law
    - c) They realized that God is the one that acted throughout their long history
  - C. Why is that so important?
    1. I will not sugar coat this at all - there are still far too many people that think that they saved themselves
      - a) Put another way, too many people think that God is obligated to save them
      - b) That they are just fine, God would be happy to have them on the team because they are such swell folk, and so God must have to pick them for heaven
      - c) What is the one thing God owes you? (There is a right answer to this)
        - (1) God does not owe you love - that is a major fallacy of society that has crept into the church
        - (2) God owes you justice! God owes you punishment for your sin!
        - (3) The fact that God loves you should stagger you to the place you have to sit down
    2. You are not so amazing that you deserve God's blessing
    3. God acted on your behalf when he didn't need to, He was under no obligation to
      - a) The Jews got this - finally!
      - b) God chose us for no reason other than His own choice
        - (1) It used to be a place of arrogance for them - "Hey, God chose us!"
        - (2) Now, after the punishment and being in exile for years, they finally get it that it is purely by the grace of God that He chose them
  - D. We are going to read the rest of the chapter all at once, and then I will point out a few things (Emphasize God's work)
  - E. Read 9:8-31
  - F. Did you see the huge emphasis on God's work, and did you see how his chosen people behaved
  - G. From this prayer we find four promises
- III. God does not abandon his people, and knows their circumstances
- A. Over and over you hear in this passage that God saw their affliction and heard their cries

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1. The people of Israel got themselves into situations again and again, always by abandoning God's principles
2. Yet, God did not abandon them
- B. The principle for us is true - God sees, and God does not abandon
  1. No matter how broken you feel right now
    - a) Over marriage concerns
    - b) Over medical issues for yourself or a loved one (which seems to be bigger in our church than other issues)
    - c) Over finance, or children
  2. No matter what issues you are struggling with, God sees, and God is there
- C. God sees every tear shed, every heart breaking, and He knows your pain
  1. What's more, He has not abandoned you
  2. You are not alone
- IV. The second thing we see through this long passage is that God leads and instructs His people 9:9-15
  - A. Think about some of the stories of God leading His people
    1. A cloud by day and a fire by night
      - a) Would that not be awesome!
      - b) Anyone ever stand at the edge of a choice and think, "Which way, which one?"
      - c) The Israelites had their own Fidelity Green Line - "Oh, look the cloud is going that way, time to turn left"
    2. He spoke to them from heaven
    3. He gave them laws and decrees
      - a) Now that may not sound all that great, but trust me you do like laws
      - b) The minute someone steals your stuff from your house while you are at church, you are glad there are laws to help deal with it
      - c) The OT writers referred to God's law as "honey" something they meditated on, a light to their feet
  - B. God leads and guides
    1. How so?
    2. Well the first and biggest is by the Word of God
      - a) But the Bible is not a magical answer book that solves all problems
      - b) It will not tell you if you take this job or that job, date this Christian person or that Christian person
    3. So a second thing that God gives us in the 21st century is the Church
      - a) Too few of us take advantage of this gift of God
        - (1) Too few of us are involved in small group studies
        - (2) And if we are, we work hard to keep things surface level

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- (a) And I get it, church life can be messy
- (b) You can, and will get hurt by people
- (c) But let me equate this idea to loving another person
  - i) Was it scary in many ways to trust another person to the point of marriage? Was there always the specter of being hurt by this person you want to love? Of course!
  - ii) Is it worth the risk? I hope most if not all of you would say “yes”
- (d) Is it worth the risk to get beneath the surface and be vulnerable with your brothers and sisters in Christ? Absolutely!
- b) Just to be clear, We encourage small groups because we do not expect that you will be vulnerable to everyone
  - (1) I’ll be honest, there are about 4-5 people in this church that I will be open with
  - (2) I don’t expect that you would have any more than that, some of you less
- c) And just in case you are male in here and think, “I’m not an onion, I have no layers to peel, what you see is what you get.”
  - (1) That’s garbage guys - I am a what you see is what you get person too
  - (2) But that does not mean that I don’t have more layers that need to be shared with brothers or sisters in Christ for my betterment and God’s glory
- 4. Let me add one other thing to this and we will move on
  - a) The term covenant community has become popular in recent years to describe followers of Christ in a church
  - b) The idea is that, because of Christ, we are under the New Covenant of His blood
    - (1) We celebrate that every month with communion
    - (2) Is this covenant that Christ instituted made with individuals, or with a group?
      - (a) While you enter it on an individual basis
      - (b) It is made with and for the group
  - c) The problem is we think it is an individual covenant made with us as individuals
    - (1) That is not how the church is to work
    - (2) We only grow by being with others that are like minded and serious about serving Christ
      - (a) That is one of the things that I encourage the kids that graduate is to find a good church to plug into

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(b) I'll help them if they need, but they need other believers in their life

- V. The third thing we see is that God provides for His people - 9:19-21
  - A. While God is guiding His people, God also provides for his people
    - 1. He gave them manna to feed them
    - 2. Water for their thirst
    - 3. He took care of them in the wilderness for 40 years and they lacked nothing
  - B. Notice that last statement - they lacked nothing
    - 1. Knowing what you know about the Israelites in the wilderness do you think that statement is from God's perspective or from theirs? God's!
      - a) Israel complained near constantly
    - 2. Let's bring this to today
      - a) Some of you feel like God is not giving you what you deserve
        - (1) God is ripping you off
        - (2) Yet God never promised what you think you should be getting
      - b) This is another application of the fact that God does not owe you anything
        - (1) Just because you are a good person does not mean God owes you anything
  - C. The reality is it is the difficult times of life that help us depend on God more
    - 1. It is the times when we don't have that drive us to dependance
    - 2. When we get everything we want, what do we need God for
    - 3. Sadly, the church falls into this trap just as easily as the rest of the world
- VI. Fourth thing we see in this chapter, God forgives - 9:16-18
  - A. What is the impetus for God to be forgiving?
    - 1. They failed to remember the miracles God did for them
    - 2. Even when they cast an image of a cow and said THAT brought us out of Egypt
      - a) You understand what that means?
      - b) Even when they worshipped something far less than God, when they worshipped an idol, God was forgiving
  - B. What we see is a group of people that go back and forth - trust God, don't trust, trust, don't trust
    - 1. And God's response time and again - grace, mercy, love
    - 2. If that don't excite you, nothing will
      - a) Maybe you are doing way better than me, but I struggle with the same thing
      - b) Trust God, don't trust God, trust God, don't trust God

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3. For us, over and over again, God meets us with grace, mercy and love
  - a) All of which is NOT owed to us!
  - b) All of which God freely gives because He chooses to

C. Now I want us to go back to the beginning to understand where this prayer comes from - why they pray this prayer - 9:1-5a

## VII. The Revival 9:1-5a

A. It is now the 24th day of the month in which they started all of the reading of God's Word

1. In chapter 8 it was the first day of the month, they began hearing the book of the Law
2. Their reaction was tears and mourning for their sin - even though it was to be a joyous occasion

B. It appears as if they have been hearing the book of the Law for 24 days

1. It has led them to putting on sackcloth and ashes (symbols of mourning)
2. They began to confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors
  - a) I don't have time to unpack that idea
  - b) But they realized how far off the mark their ancestors had come when they were confronted with the law

C. They stood listening for a 1/4 of the day and confessing and praising for a 1/4 of the day

1. If any preacher did that today in America, they probably wouldn't have a job on Monday
2. Yet the Jews were so desperate and so hungry for God's Word they just ate it up

D. We are ending with the beginning because this is what started the revival

1. The Jews came face to face with God's Word, and they were convicted
2. They were fasting and in mourning over their personal sin and the sins nationally

E. So the reality is, if we are ever going to see a revival, we need to come face to face with God's Word

1. Hence last week's message and challenges about reading God's Word
  - a) That is what they hear that came out in their long prayer
  - b) They hear that God was the great and only God - who made heaven and earth
  - c) They heard that God made a special relationship with them
    - (1) Out of all the nations on earth, God chose them, for no reason except because He wanted to
    - (2) In this special relationship, God loved them completely
  - d) They heard that God never abandoned them
    - (1) He always knew their circumstances

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- (2) He always responded - even if it took time
- e) They heard that God leads and instructs
  - (1) They are excited that God would communicate the law
  - (2) They are excited that God gave them direction
- f) They hear that God provides for His people
- g) They see clearly that God forgives
- 2. All of this cuts the Jews straight to the heart and they mourn for their sin
- F. I'm going to tell you what folks, America needs revival, Amen?
- G. Gypsy Smith was an old revival preacher. He was asked how to start a revival. He answered, "Go home, lock yourself in your room, kneel down in the middle of your floor. Draw a chalk mark around yourself and ask God to start the revival inside that chalk mark. When He has answered your prayer, the revival will be on."
  - 1. You want revival in America, it starts inside the chalk line, Amen?
- H. So let's make this completely pointed and personal for us in America, in Michigan, in Almont, and in FCC
  - 1. The Jews ancestors were called "arrogant and stiff-necked"
    - a) Are we any different
    - b) While we would never say it out loud, some of those commands in the Bible - really?
      - (1) Give away all you have and follow me? Carrying the cross and following Him? Hating father and mother or I can't be His disciple?
      - (2) I have watched people try to worm out of those verses, and no matter how you try, you can't escape the same principle said over and over: Is Christ really first in your life?
  - 2. The Jews failed to remember the miracles God did for them
    - a) Do you have a short memory?
    - b) Do you fail to remember what kind of a moron you were before Christ saved you?
    - c) Did you forget how God ministered to you in your deepest pain?
    - d) Have you forgotten to be grateful for what God has done on your behalf?
  - 3. The Jewish ancestors made an idol and said it brought them out of Egypt
    - a) Do you have idols? I bet you do. Bet I do too
      - (1) I'll be honest, it has been until just recently that God has dealt with me on idols I was holding in my heart
      - (2) While they have been downgraded to struggles rather than idols, it is still a struggle
    - b) What are yours? Let me suggest a few - and this is gunna hurt

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- (1) Your possessions - do you have them or do they have you
  - (a) Some of us have more things than we need - more cars, more snowmobiles, 4 wheelers, clothes, or possessions of all kinds
  - (b) And some people hold loosely to them - they are happy to lend or sell them to help others - praise God for folks who use God's blessings for His glory
- (2) Your job - is it possible that God might want you to consider a different job so you can serve him better
  - (a) I include this because most people only think of a job as a necessary evil
  - (b) They don't think of their work as a ministry, or that because their work hinders them so much from doing ministry that maybe they should consider a switch
- (3) Your schedule - I'll just say it and you all can hate me later, the majority of people are guilty of this one
  - (a) You either fill your life with so much other stuff (stuff that may be fine) or your life gets filled by other stuff that God is the after thought - you cram God in where you can
  - (b) I have told you this before and it falls on deaf ears - put God in your schedule first (church on Sunday, a Bible study of some kind, and a ministry) then add the rest of life
    - i) If you are not modeling that for your kids, and doing that for yourself, you will exhaust yourself
    - ii) And if you are going to be exhausted, shouldn't it be for the kingdom of God which will last so much longer than these things we think are so important here
    - iii) Some of ya'll need to develop a kingdom mindset
- (4) One more - for some of you, your family is an idol
  - (a) Francis Chan has said it, and gotten people mad at him, and now I am saying - because I am to be your pastor, not your pal
  - (b) I hear the excuse "But it's a family day" or "It's a family thing, you understand?"
  - (c) I mentioned the verse earlier - hate your mother and father
    - i) No, God does not want you to hate your family
    - ii) He wants you to love Him so much it seems like hate
  - (d) Some of you have your family as an idol
    - i) And they are of extreme importance, don't get me wrong
    - ii) Let me ask you this, shouldn't your concern be for seeing Christ formed in your family

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- iii) When you use family to excuse yourself from seeking Christ, they are an idol, and you are actually harming your family in the long run
  - 4. Maybe you feel God has abandoned you
    - a) Maybe this is a time to take to reflect on how God has been with you all along
  - 5. Maybe you have forgotten that God guides -
    - a) You have been living your life your way
    - b) You have not made room for God to lead or guide you
  - 6. Or perhaps it is God's provision you are thinking you have done
    - a) You forget that all we have comes from God
    - b) You are guilty of pride
  - 7. Or maybe it is some other area of life that you know needs forgiveness by God
    - a) I haven't mentioned your area of sin - and part of you is saying "Whew"
    - b) Yet the Holy Spirit doesn't let you off that easily
    - c) The Holy Spirit is speaking loud and clear that you need to confess that area you have been trying to hide from God
- VIII. Chances are that if you are feeling angry with Pastor Keith, or uncomfortable as we talk about revival and getting right with God, that is called the Holy Spirit, and He is doing His job - to convict us of sin
- A. That conviction is for a reason - to get us back into a right relationship with Christ
  - B. Now is the time to respond to Him
  - C. Prayer time
    - 1. Confession
    - 2. Declaration - that we do not want these sins in our lives - these idols - we give them up for You
    - 3. Praise