

XVII. Nehemiah in Biblical Perspective
What Does the Bible Say?
“Nehemiah’s Directives for a Nehemiah Day”
Nehemiah 9 and I Corinthians 11:17–34
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
July 12, 2015 – 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

We will start by looking at Nehemiah 9 and then I’ll make some brief comments as we move ahead. In the previous study we examined what happened in Nehemiah 8 and the following seven days after Nehemiah 8. Now we come to Nehemiah 9. This is the Word of God. It’s the Truth.

Nehemiah 9:1–38 says [1] *Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. [2] And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. [3] And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. [4] On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. [5] Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.*

[6] “You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. [7] You are the LORD, the 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 with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

[9] “And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, [10] and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. [11] And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. [12] By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. [13] You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, [14] and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. [15] You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.

[16] “But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. [17] They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a

leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. [18] Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, [19] you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. [20] You 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, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

[22] "And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. [23] You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. [24] So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. [25] And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

[26] "Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. [27] Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. [28] But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. [29] And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. [30] Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. [31] Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

[32] "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. [33] Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. [34] Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. [35] Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from

their wicked works. [36] Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. [37] And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.

[38] "Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

The grass withers, the flower fades, this is the Word of God, it abides forever, and by His grace and mercy may it dwell richly in you. Amen.

I only have a few comments to give as we sing praise to our God. This is an extraordinary passage but I think it needs to be remembered in context. Do not forget that this extraordinary statement of praise, adoration, confession, contrition and repentance comes after eight days of large group and small group assemblies in God's Word. God's Word has done its work. It has saturated the hearts of the people.

Nehemiah 9 is the result of all that has taken place in eight days that is recorded in Nehemiah 8. The Word of God has done its work in the hands of the Spirit of God and what it has wrought is first of all, confession. That confession is two-fold. Number one it is the confession of God's goodness, His righteousness, His holiness, His justice, His kindness, His mercy and His grace. It's not just a mere statement for they go back throughout their history and they recount consistently God's covenant faithfulness even in the context of their unfaithfulness.

Secondly, it confesses the sins of the people. The word confession is an interesting word. In the Greek it means to make an agreement with. Confession is to agree with God, who He is and who we are. You probably noticed the pattern as we read through Nehemiah 9. The pattern was constantly 'God's good intervention to save His people, God's goodness to His people and their soon forgetfulness of God and unfaithfulness to Him.' Then there was God's loving hand of discipline upon His people, many times, using the very nations that God was bringing judgment upon that eventually He would use to bring discipline upon His people. When they would repent and cry out God would time and again, would be gracious, faithful, merciful and He would send them prophets. He would send them saviors, not like referring to Jesus, but types of Jesus like the judges who would come to preach and God would use them to restore the people after their unfaithfulness for multiple years.

The key I want you to see, was there was no attempt to explain their unfaithfulness. There is full ownership of it and there is a clear, consistent theme – our hope is in You, not in us. Your Word has promised that if we repent You will receive us and history affirms time and again our unfaithfulness and Your faithfulness, Your faithfulness to discipline Your people in love, to bring them to repentance and then to restore them when they confess, repent and come before You.

You will notice something that is absent. What is absent is there is no fascination with or preoccupation with the enemies of God's people. They are not looking to the nations. They are looking at themselves. Judgment begins with the household of God. They know that God is sovereign over all the nations. What they need is the grace of God to affirm the sovereignty of God over their lives. So we confess and repent. They even established a covenant and the leaders signed and sealed it. O God, we have been unfaithful. You alone are faithful, glorious, majestic and gracious. That's what the Word had done in them.

These moments we are spending together, to eat with the Lord at His Table is not a time for any one personality or any one amazing sermon or any one constellation of special music. It's just a time for God's Word, to saturate us, penetrate us, permeate us that from our hearts we would confess our sins before God personally and corporately and that we would confess the majesty and grace of our God. This is not about any one preacher, any singer, any presenter or any program. This is just going to the pattern of God's Word where God's Word is prayed, read, meditated upon, sung, and explained with brevity but clarity and for God's Word to break our hearts where they need to be broken. We want God's Word to comfort our hearts where they need to be comforted. We want God's Word to shape our lives that Christ would be in all, through all and we would be for Christ in all. That is our desire. Let's pray.

Prayer:

O God, our God, this is Your Word. As we take the time to read it, read it responsively, meditate on it, think our way through it, sing it and pray it, bring Your Word to our hearts. Create within us a heart that receives Your Word that we might hide Your Word in our heart that we may no longer sin against You that we may rejoice in Your forgiveness in and through Christ who has paid for all of our sins on the cross that we might know Your Word in and through the Holy Spirit who becomes our Teacher and that we might love the God of the Word, having heard the Word of God, even as this text affirms our Triune God. Father, we praise You. Holy Spirit do Your work. Jesus, You are our Rock and from that Rock may we drink deeply. Jesus, You are our manna, come and feed us with Your Word for man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Now Father, feed us, fill us, and cause us to fix our eyes on Jesus for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

At this point, our Nehemiah Day service continues. Here is the Pastor's homily delivered as we began the Lord's Supper segment of the service:

Brothers and sisters, we come to this glorious moment where we partake in the supper that our Lord earnestly desires to eat with us and that we now earnestly desire to bring to a focus on this day. In Nehemiah's day they discovered the Feast of Booths and they enjoyed it. In our day we have been given a feast with the Lord, the Lord's Supper. In preparation for this supper I want to take a few moments in God's Word. We will do that by looking at this wonderful text in I Corinthians 11. Hear the Word of God to guide us to the Lord's Supper.

I Corinthians 11:17–34 says [17] *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, [19] for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. [20] When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. [21] For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. [22] What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.* (After challenging them, he gives us not only what we should not be doing but now what

we should be doing that would rule out those things that were destructive in that church. Here is what they are.)

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[27] Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

[33] So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— [34] if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

I want to share with you a couple of thoughts and then our elders will come and administer the Lord's Supper to us. Our God has been very gracious to people like me. In the previous study in Nehemiah 8 we heard from God's Word that the people of Israel for over hundreds of years had left out a feast. Now how could they have possibly done that? Not to give them a big excuse but a little bit of an excuse, there are a lot of feasts in the Old Testament. There is the Feast of Unleavened Bread wrapped up in the Feast of the Passover and there is this feast and that feast and then the Feast of Booths. There were a lot of feasts and perhaps there were more feasts than fasting going on and so they lost one of them.

God, in the study of His Word, reclaimed it, maybe even like today where we've read and saturated ourselves with God's Word and God's uncovered some things for you, very precious to you and encouraging to you. I'm very grateful I'm in the New Testament for the Lord knew He had some brilliant priests who could remember everything because He has some pretty dumb pastors coming along in the New Covenant and they can't remember everything. So He says instead of all these circumcision, these feasts, fasts and offerings, I'm going to wrap all this up in Jesus so when you get to the New Testament I'm just going to give you two things to remember – baptism and the Lord's Supper. We can even mess that up, can't we?

That is what the church of Corinth did. It took a precious gift of God and it made it an occasion for God to have to discipline His church, when in reality He had created it as an instrument to bless His church. So Paul tells them of the judgment that has been brought upon them through sickness and death, because of what they had done in the church and the Lord's Supper is an indicator of the divisions, not in standing for the truth, but divisions in standing for one's self or standing in party spirit or factions or personal agendas or politics in the church. Therefore the Lord started checking some people out. They weren't under the judgment of condemnation along with the world but He was just pulling them out, as He did with Ananias and Sapphira at the church of Jerusalem.

Paul tells them to get back to what God has called them to do. So he lays out the simplicity of the Lord's Supper. Not only do we have two sacraments in the church, but they are also simple. He tells them about the two actions they do to prepare for the Lord's Supper. One, is you set aside this very common element to a holy and sacred use and spiritually you feast upon Him and what He has done for you. This is My body. So it's not physically transformed into the body of Christ but spiritually transformed in all the benefits of Christ. So by faith you partake of this body. Secondly, He said this cup is the blood of a New Covenant and as you drink of it you drink spiritually of the benefits of My sacrifice on the cross for you. There are two simple elements, two separate but simple actions whereby God's people come and feast with one another in the Lord on level ground, because we are all saved by the redeeming work of Christ.

Then He doesn't tell us how often to do it but He indicates that we ought to be doing it often. He says in the text 'for as often as you drink it.' Some would go with weekly and that is certainly not inappropriate. Some churches historically have gone with just once or twice a year but they have built everything around that. They would even have five days of preparation. What we have done today in four hours they would have done for eight hours a day for five days and then communion. Then you would sit down with an elder who would give you a token, not that you had earned your way to the communion table but that you had come in a manner worthy. You had examined yourself to prepare yourself.

I think this is reminding us of this very simple profound two elements, two actions where we focus upon one thing and that's Christ and His death for us. There is a reason He is doing this for us and this is what I want you to think about now. I want you to think about one word – often. You do this often and you do it rightly. You do it in a manner worthy of preparation and not that you're worthy, because we need to be, not redeemed again and again but the redeemed need to be recalibrated again and again.

I had one granddaddy who played baseball for the Washington Senator and his hope was that I would get there one day but I always told him I didn't make it because they sold the Washington Senators and became the Minnesota Twins and he wouldn't want me to do that so I never made it. I had another granddaddy who could fix anything. He is the one who taught me about recalibrating. He knew how to recalibrate an engine. He knew how to get that spark plug gap in place. He knew how to get that timing belt in place. He knew how to make sure the rings were right. He could recalibrate anything.

We need recalibration and here's why. It is because every believer that is serious about God's grace realizes that we're not saved by our works, but by Christ's work, but by His grace we're saved by His work in order to work for Him. We're serious about our works and about our sin. So whenever you are intentional about depending on Christ and serving Christ, it is very easy particularly for the sensitive and the committed to begin to think that our redemption rests upon our work and we have to be recalibrated. No! It's not that your works aren't important for your work is important but your redemption is not in your work. Your redemption was in the work of your Redeemer and He did it at the cross.

Isn't it interesting, the body and blood means we're at the death of Christ. We're not at the manger or the empty tomb. That is where the Table brings us. Now, it assumes the manger because if God hasn't come and Jesus isn't God having come in the flesh, the virgin birth, then His death on the cross is just another sinner dying there. It also affirms

the resurrection because the Bible tells us to do this until He comes again. How can He come again if He hasn't been raised and ascended? So, it assumes the resurrection and the virgin birth, but it brings our focus to the cross because it is at the cross that we are recalibrated. It is not your work but My work.

So we get recalibrated by remembering and that's the first thing. Remember the body and blood of the Lord. In His body He bore our sins and in His body He became our sin. This wasn't just a legal transaction where He says I'll give My life and You give their life back to them. No, He was a sin offering because He became sin on our behalf thus bore our guilt and shame. The Father turned away from His Son and poured all of hell upon Him, because at that moment He deserved it, not by His disobedience but by His obedience to take our disobedience upon Himself and I need to remember that. There is my Redeemer! In His body He bore my sin.

Then His blood was poured out for me. I used to love when I grew up in the Christian Missionary Alliance Church and we had this guy who was quite the song leader. His greatest challenge in life was to sing the great hymn, *There is Power in the Blood*. This guy could put sixteen powers in it. Not there is power in the blood but there is power, power, power, power, power, power, power...sixteen times and even at 12 years old I couldn't keep up with guy for he was absolutely amazing on that song. The whole point he was trying to do there was to tell us that this was unfathomable power in the blood of Christ. Christ has paid for all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity. There is power in the blood of Jesus. It is not the blood of bull, goats and lambs yet that was all there to teach us for we needed a sacrifice. This is the blood of the Lamb and I am set free. I need to remember that.

When I remember that, it gives me the freedom to repent. If you and I are religiously trying to work our way to heaven we're never free to be honest about our sin. We can't confess it. We have to kind of cover it up. We can't say 'I'm a sinner, I sinned in thought, word and deed and here it is' because if I think I'm getting to heaven on my work I can never be honest about my sin. I have to keep modifying and I can't say to God, 'God You're right to bring judgment upon me because I am a sinner' because that just consigns me to judgment but when you hear the Gospel, now you're free to confess your sins because it's not what you do that gets you to heaven but what Jesus did for you and those sins. So now you're free to confess them.

Do you see the Table? That is a visual reminder of what you hear, have heard this day and constantly from His word and that is that Jesus paid it all. Then it is not only a reminder that allows me to repent but it's a reminder that allows me to not only repent from something but to Him. Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe. So Lord, I'm now Yours. Mold me. Make me. Shape me. Fill me and then pour me out for You that I may serve You with my uneven, imperfect, fallible works in life. Let me be poured out as a drink offering for You who drank the cup of judgment for me. So now I can repent, turn, and remember. We recalibrate by remembering, repenting and then by renewal.

Here is a possible suggestion of renewal. I have been so blessed to go through God's Word with God's people. There have been no manipulations, no emotional tugging and moving which I'm very susceptible to now in my old age. It's just been rationally, emotionally and volitionally washed with the Word. I want to encourage you every Lord's Day to come and take a good drink of God's Word. Every morning get up and go to God's Word and take another drink from God's Word. It is a fountain of life.

You don't need to make it a big deal with your family but make it a deal. Get your family around God's Word for there is nothing more precious you can do as a father and mother for your children. If you can think of something more important than getting them God's Word to get them to the God of the Word in a family thing then please tell me it is for I am available to be convinced. So drink personally, as a family and with the family of families, God's people on the Lord's Day.

Perhaps personally and as a family we can do what we have done as a family of families, every once in a while just jump in and don't just drink but bathe in it. Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church and He washed her with the water of the Word. I just feel like I've taken a great bath today. I love to drink from the fountain every Lord's Day and every morning when I meet Him. I love to drink from the fountain with my family but I would encourage you to consider how you personally might put a day once or twice a year where you get that good devotional book and good text of Scripture and just go take a bath that day in God's Word. Maybe on your vacation take a half a day as a family and take a bath in God's Word and perhaps what we've done this week we can continue to do as a church.

Just take a bath in God's Word. Sing it. Pray it. Read it. Meditate on it. Memorize it. Wash me with the water of the Word, not to be saved for you're coming to the Table and there's your Savior. We do this just to know our Savior better, deeper and to see how lovely He is. When you get ravished with the beauty of Jesus, all of the empty beauty of the idols of this world begin to fade away. Come and see the beauty of your Savior, a Rock of salvation for all of the ages. Come, taste, drink and see He is good. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we can be together in this Your Word to come to this Your Table on this Lord's Day, a very special one in the life of our congregation and for all of us. So Father, we come in a manner worthy which means we confess we're not worthy but we've come to the Lamb who is worthy that You will recalibrate us that we might remember, repent and be renewed in our love for the Savior and our desire to follow that Savior and bring Him to a lost world, in Jesus' Name, Amen.