

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

Read Nehemiah 9.

1. In the previous chapter we read that “all the people came together as one” to hear Ezra read from “the Book of the Law of Moses” (8:1). Now, after the Feast of Tabernacles has ended, the Israelites gather together again.
 - a. How is this gathering different from the previous one? (Contrast 8:10, 12, 17c with 9:1-3)
 - b. What are some ways the New Testament defines sin? (Jas. 4:17; 1 Jn. 3:4)
 - c. Why are grief over sin and confession of it so important? (Prov. 28:13; Acts 3:19; 1 Jn. 1:8-10)
2. Why have the Israelites “separated themselves from all foreigners” (v. 2)? (Lev. 20:26; Ezra 6:21)
3. What characteristic of “the LORD their God” (v. 4) do the Levites acknowledge as they direct the people to stand in praise? (v. 5a)

Why do you think this aspect of God's nature would be particularly worthy of praise for these people in the midst of “the hardship that has come upon [them]” (v. 32)?

“The barely habitable city, the encircling heathen, and the poverty and seeming insignificance of the Jews are all transcended by the glorious reality of God.”

Reread the prayer offered by the Levites on behalf of the people in verses 5b-38.

4. The Levites’ prayer is a walk through the Old Testament, reminding those gathered of the history of God’s relationship with his people. What stories do you recognize?

Sometimes it is helpful to see yourself as living in the midst of a larger story. What is a practical way of reminding yourself that you are a part of God’s narrative?

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

“The prayer [in Nehemiah 9] is, like some of the Psalms (e.g. 78; 105; 106), an example of confession in both senses of the word: *i.e.*, a confessing of God’s glory and grace as well as man’s ingratitude. So it is worship, not mere wallowing in self-reproach. It shows, too, the influence of the scripture reading of the recent weeks.”²

5. Skim back through the prayer in verses 5b-37. List below as many works of God (things he did), and characteristics of God (words that describe what he is like) as you can find.

Works of God	Characteristics of God

What do you see about God in these lists that you find most encouraging?

6. Beginning in verse 16, the prayer recounts the repeated pattern of relationship between the Israelites' ancestors and God – their rebellion and his response to their rebellion. Fill in the chart below.

The Israelites' Sin	God's Response
vv. 16-18	vv. 17-25
v. 26	v. 27
v. 28a	v. 28b,c
v. 29	vv. 30a,b
v. 30c	vv. 30c-31

What purpose is there for recounting the repeated cycles of the people's arrogance, disobedience, and rebellion, and God's gracious responses, warnings, and discipline?

As believers in Christ, our relationship with God is different from that of the Israelites, in that it is founded on grace we receive through faith in Jesus' atoning work. Nevertheless, what parallels can you discern between their relationship with God and ours?

7. What is the final word regarding God's response to the sins of his covenant people? (vv. 31, 33)
8. In verse 32, the focus of the prayer shifts. How are the Israelites' current circumstances summarized in verses 36-37?

Does this description surprise you? Why or why not?

Why do you think they see their circumstances this way? (Consider v. 37 and Ezra 9:8-9.)

9. This lengthy confession of both individual and national sin leads the Israelites to act. The specifics of the "binding agreement" (v. 38) they draw up are spelled out in chapter 10. For now, though, we see here a picture of repentance. What does it mean to be truly repentant? (Isa. 55:7)
10. As with generations of God's chosen people, God remains faithful to his people today. Take some time to remember God's faithfulness to you. Turn to him in prayer, confessing his grace and mercy in your life as well as your own rebellion and ingratitude, and praising him "who is from everlasting to everlasting" (v. 5).

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

¹ Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 111.

² Ibid.