



Confession

Nehemiah 9

After a time of joyful celebration (*Nehemiah 8*), the people turned to sorrow.

Assembly for Confession

□ Read Nehemiah 9:1-5a.¹

1. As the Israelites stood in their places, what did they do? (*9:2b-3*) How are these activities related to each other?²

Prayer of Confession

□ Read Nehemiah 9:5b-37. The prayer begins with praise of the one true God – the Creator and Sustainer of the universe (*9:5b-6*), and then traces the history of God’s people.

2. Using the diagram “Nehemiah in the Big Picture,” give a title or name to each of the sections listed below.

<i>Verses</i>	<i>Title or Name (Subject)</i>
6	
7-8 ³	
9-12	
13-14	
15-21	
22-25	
26-31 ⁴	



¹ ‘twenty-fourth day of the [seventh] month’ (*8:2*), shortly after the Feast of Booths (*8:14-18*); ‘fasting’ – abstaining from food; ‘wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads’ – signs of humility and sorrow because of their sin.

² They ‘read from the Book of the Law’ (probably the ‘Pentateuch’ – first five books of the Bible). They ‘confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors’ and ‘worshiped’ God. The Book (God’s written revelation) reveals sin, leading to sorrow and confession; and it reveals God’s gracious and merciful acts, leading to praise and worship.

³ ‘covenant’ – an agreement, promise or bond (obligation) that establishes a particular relationship between parties. God’s covenant with Abraham included the promise of many descendants (through Isaac and Jacob/Israel), a land, and blessing. God promised that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham’s offspring (*Genesis 12:3*).

⁴ The repeated cycle of the Israelites rebelling against God, God handing them over to their enemies, the Israelites crying out to God, and God rescuing them (*9:26-27, 28*) especially reminds us of the book of Judges, but the pattern extends through Israel’s destruction and exile. The last cycle (*9:29-31*) does not include God’s rescue, but sets the stage for the plea in verses 32-36. The people are once again ‘in great distress’ (*9:36*).

- ❑ The prayer of confession was mostly about what God had done. God chose Abraham and promised him many descendants, a land, and blessing (9:8; *Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5*). He miraculously delivered His people from slavery in Egypt (9:9-11). He gave them instructions for living (9:13-14). He guided them (9:12) and provided for their material needs (9:15). He gave them the “promised land” and blessed them (9:22-25).
 3. The prayer of confession was also about what the people had done. What had they done? (9:16-18; 26, 28, 29)

- ❑ Because of the Israelites’ sin, God gave them into the hands of their enemies (9:27, 28, 30).
 4. What else did God do, and not do? Why? What does this teach about God? (9:17, 19-21, 27, 28, 31)⁵

- ❑ After tracing the history of God’s people, the prayer of confession turns to its present time. Though many of God’s people had returned to Judah (part of the “promised land”) and had rebuilt the temple and the wall around Jerusalem, they were still in “great distress” (9:37).⁶
- ❑ So the prayer asks for God’s mercy. The people know they deserve God’s righteous judgment (9:33-35, 37), but they also know that God is faithful to his “covenant of love” (9:32). God’s character, faithfulness, and past gracious actions provide basis for hope.
 5. The Jews’ hopes were not entirely realized. Their restoration to the land was far short of what the prophets had proclaimed. So what about God’s promise? How is it fulfilled?⁷

- ❑ Like the Israelites, *we* have sinned against God (*Romans 3:9-12, 23*) and we desperately need God’s grace. God has provided the way of forgiveness, salvation and blessing in Jesus Christ.
 6. How can we apply Nehemiah 9 to our lives today? What place should confession of sin (both individual and corporate) have in *our* lives? How should we pray?

Reflection/Application

- Forgiveness, salvation, and restoration to God are found in Jesus Christ. Do you need to confess your sin and your need of salvation, and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord?
- As a believer, do you regularly confess your sins? Do you have a balanced understanding of God’s grace and the need for confession of sin?⁸ Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and 1 John 1:5-10.

⁵ Despite the peoples’ sin (9:16-18), God continued to guide them, instruct them, and provide for their material needs (9:19-21). Though the people turned away from God, He did not abandon them (9:17, 19, 31). When the people were oppressed and cried out to God, He rescued them (9:27, 28). Why did God do this? Because He is forgiving, gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love (9:17). And He keeps his promises (9:8).

⁶ Their situation was much better than it had been at other times in their history, but it was much worse than the days of kings David and Solomon. They were no longer a ‘great nation’ but servants under a foreign power (9:36-37). Based on God’s promises and the words of the prophets, they expected restoration of the kingdom even beyond the kingdoms of David and Solomon. They longed for this kingdom under the reign of the promised Messiah (Christ).

⁷ The Jews’ restoration to the land was a significant beginning to a greater restoration. About 440 years after this prayer, the promised Messiah (Christ) entered the world. He died for our sins and was raised from the dead, thus providing the way of forgiveness and salvation. In the future, he is coming back to establish his perfect kingdom.

⁸ Since true believers have *already* been *totally* forgiven, some people think they do not need to confess their sins. However, sin harms our fellowship with God, so we should confess our sins and repent (turn away from sin to God). Confession is not complete without repentance and commitment to God’s will. Come back for Lesson 10!