

NEHEMIAH 9: 1 Now in the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth, and earth on them.

On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, the people hold a solemn fast unto the Lord, and confess their sins, Neh 9:1-3. The Levites give a general account of God's kindness and forbearance to them and to their fathers; and acknowledge God's mercies and judgments, vv. 4-37. They make a covenant with the Lord, Neh 9:38.

Verse 1

Now in the twenty and fourth day - The feast of trumpets was on the first day of this month; on the fourteenth began the feast of tabernacles, which, lasting seven days, finished on the twenty-second; on the twenty-third they separated themselves from their illegitimate wives and children; and, on the twenty-fourth, they held a solemn day of fasting and confession of sin, and reading the law, which they closed by renewing their covenants.

NEHEMIAH 9: 2 The seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

Verse 2

The seed of Israel separated themselves - A reformation of this kind was begun by Ezra, Ezr 10:3; but it appears that either more were found out who had taken strange wives, or else those who had separated from them had taken them again.

And stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. - They acknowledged that they had been sinners against God throughout all their generations; that their fathers had sinned and were punished; and that they, with this example before their eyes, had copied their fathers' offenses.

NEHEMIAH 9: 3 They stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God a fourth part of the day; and a fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

Verse 3

One fourth part of the day - As they did no manner of work on this day of fasting and humiliation, so they spent the whole of it in religious duties. They began, says Calmet, on the first hour, and continued these exercises to the third hour; from the third they recommenced, and continued till the sixth hour; from the sixth to the ninth; and from the ninth, to the twelfth or last hour.

1. They heard the law read, standing;
2. They prostrated themselves, and confessed their sins;

3. They arose to praise God for having spared and dealt thus mercifully with them.

NEHEMIAH 9: 4 Then Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani of the Levites stood up on the stairs, and cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

NEHEMIAH 9: 5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, and 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!

Verse 5

Stand up and bless the Lord your God - It is the shameless custom of many congregations of people to sit still while they profess to bless and praise God, by singing the Psalms of David or hymns made on the plan of the Gospel! I ask such persons, Did they ever feel the spirit of devotion while thus employed? If they do, it must be owned that, by the prevalence of habit, they have counteracted the influence of an attitude most friendly to such acts of devotion.

NEHEMIAH 9: 6 You are the LORD, even you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their army, the earth and all things that are on it, the seas and all that is in them, and you preserve them all. The army of heaven worships you.

Verse 6

Thou preservest them all - ואתה מחיה את כלם vettah mechaiyeh eth cullam, and thou givest life to them all: and the host of the heavens, מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְךָ lecha mishtachavim, prostrate themselves unto thee. How near is this to the opinion of Kepler, that all the heavenly host are instinct with life, and navigate the great expanse on pinions adjusted to their situation in their respective orbits! But to preserve in life, or in being, is a very good meaning in the original, which does not necessarily imply vitality. We say a tree is alive when flourishing, a plant is dead when it withers, etc.

NEHEMIAH 9: 7 You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram, and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name of Abraham,

Verse 7

Who didst choose Abram - See the notes on Exo 13:21 (note).

The name of Abraham - For the explanation of this name, See the notes on Gen 17:5.

NEHEMIAH 9: 8 and found his heart faithful before you, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, to give it to his seed, and have performed your words; for you are righteous.

NEHEMIAH 9: 9 "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea,

NEHEMIAH 9: 10 and showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, and against all his servants, and against all the people of his land; for you knew that they dealt proudly against them, and made a name for yourself, as it is this day.

NEHEMIAH 9: 11 You divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into the mighty waters.

NEHEMIAH 9: 12 Moreover, in a pillar of cloud you led them by day; and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light in the way in which they should go.

Verse 12

By a cloudy pillar - See the notes on the parallel passages, both here and in the other verses.

NEHEMIAH 9: 13 "You came down also on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments,

NEHEMIAH 9: 14 and made known to them your holy Sabbath, and commanded them commandments, and statutes, and a law, by Moses your servant,

Verse 14

Madest known unto them thy holy Sabbath - They appear to have forgotten this first of all the commandments of God, during their sojourning in Egypt.

NEHEMIAH 9: 15 and gave them bread from the sky for their hunger, and brought water out of the rock for them for their thirst, and commanded them that they should go in to possess the land which you had sworn to give them.

NEHEMIAH 9: 16 "But they and our fathers dealt proudly and hardened their neck, didn't listen to your commandments,

NEHEMIAH 9: 17 and refused to obey, neither were they mindful of your wonders that you did among them, but hardened their neck, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage. But you are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and didn't forsake them.

Verse 17

And in their rebellion appointed a captain - This clause, read according to its order in the Hebrew text, is thus: And appointed a captain to return to their bondage in their rebellion. But it is probable that במרים bemiryam, in their rebellion, is a mistake for במצרים bemitsrayim, in Egypt. This is the reading of seven of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., the Neapolitan edition of the Hagiographa, and

the Septuagint. It is also the reading in Num 14:4. The clause should undoubtedly be read, They appointed a captain to return to their bondage in Egypt.

NEHEMIAH 9: 18 Yes, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed awful blasphemies;

NEHEMIAH 9: 19 yet you in your manifold mercies didn't forsake them in the wilderness: the pillar of cloud didn't depart from over them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way in which they should go.

Verse 19

The pillar of the cloud departed not from them - מעליהם mealeyhem, "from over them." I have already had occasion to observe that this miraculous cloud, the symbol of the Divine presence, assumed three different positions while accompanying the Israelitish camp:

1. As a cloud in the form of a pillar, it went before them when they journey, to point out their way in the wilderness.
 2. As a pillar of fire, it continued with them during the night, to give them light, and be a rallying point for the whole camp in the night season.
 3. As an extended cloud, it hovered over them in their encampments, to refresh them with its dews, and to keep them from the arduous of the sun.
-

NEHEMIAH 9: 20 You gave also your good Spirit to instruct them, and didn't withhold your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst.

NEHEMIAH 9: 21 "Yes, forty years you sustained them in the wilderness. They lacked nothing. Their clothes didn't grow old, and their feet didn't swell.

Verse 21

Their clothes waxed not old - See the note on Deu 8:4.

NEHEMIAH 9: 22 Moreover you gave them kingdoms and peoples, which you allotted according to their portions. So they possessed the land of Sihon, even the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.

Verse 22

The land of Og king of Bashan - It is most evident that Sihon was king of Heshbon. How then can it be said that they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon? The words the land of the king of Heshbon are wanting in two of De Rossi's MSS. In another MS. the words and the land of are wanting; so that the clause is read, They possessed the land of Sihon, king of Heshbon.

The Septuagint has the same reading; the Arabic nearly the same, viz., the land of Sihon, the land of the king of Heshbon. The Syriac has, They possessed the land of Sihon, the land of the Kings of Heshbon. The reading of the text is undoubtedly wrong; that supported by the MSS. and by the Septuagint is most likely to be the true one. Those of the Arabic and Syriac contain at least no contradictory sense. The and in the Hebrew and our version, distinguishes two lands and two kings; the land of Sihon and the land of the king of Heshbon: when it is most certain that only one land and one king can be meant: but the I vau may be translated here as it often is, even: Even the land of the king of Heshbon.

NEHEMIAH 9: 23 You also multiplied their children as the stars of the sky, and brought them into the land concerning which you said to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it.

NEHEMIAH 9: 24 "So the children went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings, and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they pleased.

NEHEMIAH 9: 25 They took fortified cities, and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all good things, cisterns dug out, vineyards, and olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled, became fat, and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

Verse 25

Became fat, and delighted themselves - They became effeminate, fell under the power of luxury, got totally corrupted in their manners, sinned against all the mercies of God, and then were destroyed by his judgments. We have an old nervous saying, "War begets poverty, poverty begets peace, peace begets affluence, affluence begets luxury and corruption of manners; and hence civil broils, foreign wars, and desolations." A sensible Roman historian has said the same: "Imperium facile iis artibus retinetur, quibus initio partum est: verum ubi pro Labore, Desidia; pro continentia et aequitate, Libido atque Superbia invasere: fortuna simul cum moribus Immutatur."

NEHEMIAH 9: 26 "Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against you, and cast your law behind their back, and killed your prophets that testified against them to turn them again to you, and they committed awful blasphemies.

NEHEMIAH 9: 27 Therefore you delivered them into the hand of their adversaries, who distressed them. In the time of their trouble, when they cried to you, you heard from heaven; and according to your manifold mercies you gave them saviours who saved them out of the hand of their adversaries.

Verse 27

Thou gavest them saviors - The whole book of Judges is a history of God's mercies, and their rebellions.

NEHEMIAH 9: 28 But after they had rest, they did evil again before you; therefore left you them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them; yet when they returned, and cried to you, you heard from heaven; and many times you delivered them according to your mercies,

NEHEMIAH 9: 29 and testified against them, that you might bring them again to your law. Yet they dealt proudly, and didn't listen to your commandments, but sinned against your ordinances, (which if a man does, he shall live in them), turned their backs, stiffened their neck, and would not hear.

NEHEMIAH 9: 30 Yet many years you put up with them, and testified against them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet would they not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

Verse 30

Many years didst thou forbear - It is supposed that Nehemiah refers here principally to the ten tribes. And many years did God bear with them; not less than two hundred and fifty-four years from their separation from the house of David, till their captivity and utter dispersion under Shalmaneser; during the whole of which time God invariably warned them by his prophets; or, as it is here said, by thy Spirit in thy prophets, which gives us the true notion of Divine inspiration. God's Spirit was given to the prophets; and they testified to the people, according as they were taught and influenced by this Spirit.

NEHEMIAH 9: 31 "Nevertheless in your manifold mercies you did not make a full end of them, nor forsake them; for you are a gracious and merciful God.

NEHEMIAH 9: 32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness, don't let all the travail seem little before you, that has come on us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria to this day.

Verse 32

On our kings, on our princes - I believe Nehemiah in this place mentions the whole of civil society in its officers as they stand related to each other in dignity: -

1. Kings, as supreme.
2. Princes.
3. Priests.
4. Prophets.
5. The Fathers, heads or chiefs of tribes and families.
6. The Common People.

Those who disturb this natural order (for it subsists even in Britain) are enemies to the peace of the whole, whatever they may pretend to the contrary.

NEHEMIAH 9: 33 However you are just in all that has come on us; for you have dealt truly, but we have done wickedly;

NEHEMIAH 9: 34 neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept your law, nor listened to your commandments and your testimonies with which you testified against them.

Verse 34

Neither have our kings - In this verse he acknowledges that the kings, princes, priests, and fathers, had broken the law: but the prophets are left out; for they continued faithful to God, testifying by his Spirit against the crimes of all; and this even at the risk of their lives.

NEHEMIAH 9: 35 For they have not served you in their kingdom, and in your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land which you gave before them, neither did they turn from their wicked works.

Verse 35

For they have not served thee in their kingdom - Instead of במלכותם bemaalcutham, "in Their kingdom," במלכותך bemaalcuthecha, in Thy kingdom," is the reading of two of Kennicott's MSS.; as also of the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic. This is most likely to be the true reading.

NEHEMIAH 9: 36 "Behold, we are servants this day, and as for the land that you gave to our fathers to eat its fruit and its good, behold, we are servants in it.

Verse 36

Behold, we are servants - They had no king of their own: and were under the government of the kings of Persia, to whom they paid a regular tribute.

NEHEMIAH 9: 37 It yields much increase to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins: also they have power over our bodies, and over our livestock, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.

Verse 37

It yieldeth much increase unto the kings - Good and fruitful as the land is, yet it profits us little; as the chief profits on all things go to the kings of Persia.

Over our bodies - Exacting personal and feudal services from us, and from our cattle; and this not by any fixed rate, or rule, of so much rent, so much labor, or boons; but at their pleasure; so that we

can neither call our persons, our time, our land, nor our cattle, our own: therefore we are in great distress. Miserable are the people that live under such a government.

Think of this, ye Britons! think of your liberties and rights. Compare them with any other nation under heaven, and see what a balance is in your favor. Almost all the nations of the earth acknowledge Britons the most happy of all men. May I not say,

O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint! "How exceedingly happy would you be, could you but consider your many advantages!"

NEHEMIAH 9: 38 Yet for all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, our Levites, and our priests, seal it."

Verse 38

Our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it - Persuaded that we have brought all the miseries upon ourselves by our transgressions, feeling much and fearing more, we make a covenant with thee to devote ourselves to thy service; to do with us as thou pleasest. From this sealing we learn that at this time the government of the Jews was a mixed aristocracy; composed of the nobles for the civil department, and the priests and Levites for the ecclesiastical.

This was not mixing the Church with the state, or the state with the Church: both were separate, yet both mutually supported each other. The state never attempted to model the Church according to its own mind; because the Church had been founded and regulated by God, and neither its creed nor its ordinances could be changed. The Church did not meddle with the state, to give it new laws, new ordinances, or new officers. Therefore the one could not be jealous of the other. Where this state of things prevails, every public blessing may be expected. In every state God says to the governors and the governed: "Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things which are God's."