

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH 9

In this chapter we have an account of a fast kept by the Jews, which was observed, as by outward acts of humiliation, so by confession of sin, reading the law, and worshipping the Lord, (^{<4600>}Nehemiah 9:1-3) and of a long prayer that the Levites made, in which they celebrate the divine perfections, take notice of various instances of the goodness of God to the people of Israel, acknowledge their manifold transgressions, observe the Lord's correction of them for them, in which they own he was righteous, (^{<4600>}Nehemiah 9:4-38).

Ver. 1. *Now in the twenty fourth day of this month,* etc.] The seventh month, the month Tisri or September, two days after the feast of tabernacles was ended:

the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them; which were all outward tokens of mourning and humiliation, (see ^{<2008>}Joel 1:8,14 ^{<0042>}1 Samuel 4:12) which they could not show during the festival; but that being over, they return to it, (see ^{<4600>}Nehemiah 8:9).

Ver. 2. *And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers,* etc.] Such as were genuine Israelites, of the seed of Abraham, who had married wives of the Gentiles, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, either before the reformation by Ezra, not being then discovered, or had fallen into this evil since; but now, on the reading of the law, were convinced of it, and so separated themselves from such wives, which was a proof of the truth of their repentance:

and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers: particularly their taking of strange wives, which their fathers had also done, and set them a bad example, which they had followed; of standing and confessing, (see ^{<2183>}Luke 18:13).

Ver. 3. *And they stood up in their place,* etc.] In the outward court of the temple, where men used to stand when they prayed and confessed their

sins: and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God; that they might the better know the mind and will of God, and do their duty: this they did

one fourth part of the day; the space of three hours, from sun rising, or six o'clock in the morning, to the time of the morning sacrifice, which was about nine o'clock:

and another fourth part they confessed; the goodness of God to them, and the sins they had been guilty of:

and worshipped the Lord their God; bowed down before him in prayer and supplication, and so spent three hours more, which reached to noon or twelve o'clock; and from thence to three o'clock, about the time of the evening sacrifice, and from thence to sun setting, or six o'clock, and so spent the whole day in the above exercises alternately.

Ver. 4. *Then stood up upon the stairs of the Levites*, etc.] On an ascent; an elevated place where the Levites used to stand when they sang at the time of sacrifice, and where they might be seen and heard by the people:

Jeshua and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; who seem to be all Levites, (see ^{<K&O>}Nehemiah 8:7),

and cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God; praying with great fervency, and making bitter lamentation for the sins of the people and their own.

Ver. 5. *Then the Levites, Jeshua*, etc.] Or, then the Levites, even Jeshua:

and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah; the same as before, with a little variation of their names, and perhaps some of them might have two names:

and said; to the men that stood and confessed their sins, (^{<K&O>}Nehemiah 9:2)

stand up; for though they are before said to stand, yet, through shame and confusion of face, and awe of the Divine Majesty, might be fallen on their faces to the ground:

and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever; for all the great and good things he had done for them, notwithstanding their sins; and particularly for his pardoning grace and mercy they had reason to hope for:

and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise: the glory of which name, nature, and perfections of his, cannot be set forth by the highest praises of men, and the largest ascriptions of blessing and honour to him.

Ver. 6. *Thou, even thou art Lord alone,* etc.] Whose name alone is Jehovah, the one only true and living God:

thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host; the airy and starry heavens, and the sun, moon, and stars in them, and the third heaven, the seat of God, angels, and saints:

the earth, and all things that are therein; men, beasts, trees, metals, minerals, etc.

the seas, and all that is therein; fishes, sea plants, etc. (see ^{<404>}Acts 4:24),

and thou preservest them all; they consist in thee, and are upheld in their being by thee, (^{<300>}Hebrews 1:3 ^{<5017>}Colossians 1:17 ^{<4916>}Psalm 36:6)

and the host of heaven worshipped thee; not the sun, moon, and stars, only in their way, (^{<482>}Psalm 148:2,3) but the angels chiefly, (^{<5006>}Hebrews 1:6).

Ver. 7. *Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram,* etc.] From among the Chaldeans, and out of his father's family:

and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees; by calling him from thence, of which (see ^{<0112>}Genesis 11:28,31 12:1), to which may be added what Amama^{f60} on that place observes; that some think that the sacred fire, which the Chaldeans worshipped, was kept in this city, from whence it was called Ur, that being worshipped by them and by the Assyrians under the name of Ur^{f61}:

and gavest him the name of Abraham; which was changed when the covenant of circumcision was given him, (^{<0175>}Genesis 17:5).

Ver. 8. *And foundest his heart faithful before thee,* etc.] A true believer in his word and promises, (^{<0156>}Genesis 15:6) and closely attached to the fear of him, and observance of his commands, as abundantly appeared in the trial of him, in offering up his son, (^{<0211>}Genesis 22:1,2,12),

and madest a covenant with him, to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Gergashites, to give it, [I say], to his seed; not to him personally, but to his

posterity, at least including and chiefly designing them; of which covenant (see ^{<0158>}Genesis 15:18-21),

and hast performed thy words, for thou art righteous; in all his ways and works, faithful to his promise, a covenant keeping God, and who kept and fulfilled this covenant, assisting Joshua to conquer the land of Canaan, and put Israel into the possession of it.

Ver. 9. *And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt*, etc.] The hard bondage in which their lives were made bitter; and was not a mere spectator of it, but looked upon them in it with pity and compassion, and sent them a deliverer, (^{<0123>}Exodus 2:23 3:7)

and heardest their cry by the Red sea; which was before them, and the rocks on both sides of them, and the host of Pharaoh behind, pressing upon them, when he heard them, and wrought salvation for them, (^{<0240>}Exodus 14:10,13).

Ver. 10. *And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land*, etc.] By inflicting the ten plagues upon them:

for thou knowest that they dealt proudly against them; behaved haughtily to them, and despised them, (see ^{<0281>}Exodus 18:11)

so didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day; displayed his power on Pharaoh, and his goodness to Israel, the fame of which reached all over the world, and continued to that day, (see ^{<0196>}Exodus 9:16).

Ver. 11. *And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land*, etc.] That is, the Israelites, (see ^{<0241>}Exodus 14:21),

and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps; with great ease, and with indignation, meaning the Egyptians, that pursued hotly after them, and were thrown into the sea:

as a stone into the mighty waters; where they sunk and perished, (see ^{<0254>}Exodus 15:4,10).

Ver. 12. *Moreover, thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar*, etc.] The Israelites, to shelter them from the heat of the sun in a dry and barren wilderness:

and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go; through a trackless desert, see (^{<0132>}Exodus 13:21,22).

Ver. 13. *Thou camest down also upon Mount Sinai*, etc.] By some visible tokens of his presence, as a cloud, fire, smoke, etc. which must be understood consistent with his omniscience, (see ^{<0138>}Exodus 19:18),

and spakest with them from heaven; the decalogue or ten commandments, (^{<0211>}Exodus 20:1-17),

and gavest them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments; both judicial and ceremonial, which were of excellent use to them in their civil and ecclesiastical polity; these were not spoken to Israel, but given to Moses on the mount, to be delivered to them.

Ver. 14. *And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath*, etc.] Which was not made known to others, and was peculiar to the Jewish nation, and a privilege granted to them, to have rest corporeal and spiritual, typical of the rest in Christ:

and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant; moral, ceremonial, and judicial, such as other nations had not, (^{<0308>}Deuteronomy 4:8).

Ver. 15. *And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger*, etc.] To satisfy that, meaning the manna, (^{<0418>}Exodus 16:3,4)

and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock, for their thirst; to quench it; this was done both quickly after they came out of the land of Egypt, and a little before their entrance into the land of Canaan, (see ^{<0276>}Exodus 17:6 ^{<0418>}Numbers 20:8,11)

and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them; which oath was made to them and to their fathers also, (see ^{<0443>}Numbers 14:30 ^{<0308>}Deuteronomy 1:8).

Ver. 16. *But they and our fathers dealt proudly*, etc.] Behaved in a haughty manner towards God, their kind benefactor:

and hardened their necks; refused to take the yoke of his law, as refractory oxen, that withdraw their necks from the yoke:

and hearkened not to thy commandments; to do them, though they promised they would, (^{<0247>}Exodus 24:7).

Ver. 17. *And refused to obey*, etc.] Though exhorted, admonished, and threatened, such was their obstinacy:

neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; in delivering them at the Red sea, in raining manna about them, and giving them water out of the rock:

but hardened their necks; see the preceding verse:

and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage; they not only proposed it, but determined upon it, which is reckoned the same as if they had done it, (see ^{<0140>}Numbers 14:4),

but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; as he had proclaimed his name before Moses, and as the whole of his conduct towards the people of Israel abundantly shewed, (see ^{<0346>}Exodus 34:6,7)

and forsookest them not; when in the wilderness, where otherwise they must have perished, but still fed and protected them, notwithstanding their provocations.

Ver. 18. *Yea, when they had made them a molten calf*, etc.] In imitation of the Apis, or ox of the Egyptians:

and said, this is thy god that brought thee out of Egypt; or the image of thy god, as the Arabic version, (see ^{<0234>}Exodus 32:4),

and had wrought great provocations; of all which nothing was greater than idolatry.

Ver. 19. *Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness*, etc.] Where no supply could be had, if he had cast them off, (see ^{<0397>}Nehemiah 9:17),

the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; which, if it had, they would have been scorched by the heat of the sun:

neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go; or otherwise they would have lost their way, and not have known which way to have gone.

Ver. 20. *Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them*, etc.] In the knowledge of the laws delivered to them; the spirit of prophecy, according to Ben Melech, and which Aben Ezra interprets of the spirit put upon the seventy elders, (^{<0117>}Numbers 11:17,25),

and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth; all the while they were in the wilderness, until they came to Canaan's land; called the Lord's manna, because prepared by him, and given by him to them; a part or portion and gift from the Lord, as Ben Melech, from whence it had its name, (see ^{<0165>}Exodus 16:15)

and gavest them water for their thirst; which seems to have respect to the last rock stricken for them, after their many provocations in the wilderness, (^{<0211>}Numbers 20:11).

Ver. 21. *Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing*, etc.] As not for food, so neither for raiment, as follows:

their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not; of which (see ^{<0804>}Deuteronomy 8:4).

Ver. 22. *Moreover, thou gavest them kingdoms and nations*, etc.] The two kingdoms of Sihon and Og, and the seven nations of Canaan:

and didst divide them into corners; or "corner"; into every corner of the land of Canaan, so that they possessed the whole of it, a few cities excepted; Jarchi interprets it of one corner, that they might not be mixed with the people of the land, but be all together in one place; but Aben Ezra understands it of the Canaanites, of their being divided and scattered into corners, when they fled from the Israelites; but the former sense seems best:

so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon; or "eren", or "namely"^{f62}, "the land of the king of Heshbon"; for Sihon was king of Heshbon, and so the land the same:

and the land of Og king of Bashan; those lands both lay on the other side Jordan, and were possessed by the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

Ver. 23. *Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven*, etc.] Fulfilling the promise made to Abraham, (^{<0155>}Genesis 15:5 22:17

^{<6110>}Deuteronomy 1:10) their number when they came out of Egypt, and just before they entered into the land of Canaan, being upwards of 600,000 men, besides women and children, (^{<0237>}Exodus 12:37 ^{<0412>}Numbers 11:21 26:51)

and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it; the land of Canaan, promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their seed, into which the Lord brought them by Joshua; he was the instrument, but the thing was of God.

Ver. 24. *So the children went in and possessed the land,* etc.] Not the fathers of the Israelites that came out of Egypt, they died in the wilderness, all excepting two, but their children, which seems to be the reason of this manner of expression, (see ^{<0440>}Numbers 14:30-33)

and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites; by means of Joshua, the general of the armies of Israel; there is an elegant paronomasia in the word for “subdue”, and the Canaanites, which cannot be expressed in our language:

and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would; no less than thirty one kings, (see ^{<6110>}Joshua 12:9-24).

Ver. 25. *And they took strong cities,* etc.] Such as, in an hyperbolic way, are said to be walled up to heaven, (^{<0128>}Deuteronomy 1:28)

and a fat land; of a good and fruitful soil, abounding with all good things, (^{<0877>}Deuteronomy 8:7,8)

and possessed houses full of all goods; ready built and furnished for them, both with good provisions and good furniture:

wells digged; to supply them with water:

vineyards, and olive yards, and fruit trees in abundance; which they planted not:

and they did eat, and were filled, and became fat; in body, though in mind became wanton and wicked; they made their hearts fat, or stupid, as Aben Ezra interprets it, (see ^{<0315>}Deuteronomy 32:15 ^{<0360>}Isaiah 6:10)

and delighted themselves in thy great goodness; not in praising the Lord for it, and using it to his honour and glory, but indulged themselves to luxury and intemperance; though it may be understood of a lawful pleasure in the enjoyment of the great affluence they were brought into, which last agrees with what follows.

Ver. 26. *Nevertheless, they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee*, etc.] Notwithstanding all these favours and mercies bestowed upon them, which was great ingratitude:

and cast thy law behind their backs; as of no account, and unworthy of their regard; that which they should have had continually before their eyes, as the rule and guide of their actions, they cast behind them, not caring to look into it, and read it:

and slew thy prophets, which testified against them to turn them to thee; the prophets that bore a testimony against their sins, admonished them of them, called heaven and earth to record against them should they continue in them, and all to turn them from them by repentance to the Lord; those they were so wroth with on this account as to slay them, (see ~~4175~~ Matthew 23:37 ~~4175~~ Acts 7:52),

and they wrought great provocations; serving Baalim and Ashtaroth, and other gods of the nations, than which nothing was more provoking to the Lord.