

International Bible Lesson Commentary
Nehemiah 9:1-3, 6-10, 29-36
International Bible Lessons
Sunday, August 11, 2013
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 11, 2013**, is from **Nehemiah 9:1-3, 6-10, 29-36**.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* (formerly, *Bible Lesson Forum*) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** discuss the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lesson Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Nehemiah 9:1-3

(Nehemiah 9:1) 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.

The people of God continued to study the law of God as Ezra read and taught them from the Book of Moses. Ezra's reading led them to obedience and rejoicing when they learned about their sins of omission from ignorance; such as, the failure to build booths during the festival of booths. Their sins of commission, based on their open rebellion against the law of God by some or ignorance of the law by others led them to repent with deep demonstrated sorrow.

(Nehemiah 9:2) Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors.

The Book of Ruth provides a good example of how a Moabite woman came to faith in the true God when she made the true God her God and God's people her people. The Israelites were forbidden by the law of God from marrying "foreigners;" that is, those who remained foreign by not making God their God and God's people their people when they married an Israelite. When an Israelite married an unrepentant foreigner, they married someone who had committed themselves to worshiping idols and practicing paganism, and this had a dramatic and harmful effect on their families.

(Nehemiah 9:3) They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth part of the day, and for

another fourth they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.

The Israelites (those who had returned from exile with their families and those who had remained in the land because they had not been carried off into exile in 587 BC with their families) continued to read from the law of the Lord even though the law condemned their practice of sin. They did not turn away from God or refuse to obey God when they learned the law of God. They confessed their sins and continued to worship the true God as they learned more of the truth of God and God's law.

Nehemiah 9:6-10

(Nehemiah 9:6) And Ezra said: "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. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you.

When Ezra prayed to God and worshiped God before the people, he prayed aloud, which helped the people learn how to pray. He prayed according to what they had learned about God from God's words and works in the law of God, the Book of Moses. The beginning of his prayer recounted truths they had studied from the early chapters of Genesis in the Book of Moses.

(Nehemiah 9:7) You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham;

Ezra declared in prayer the truth about God being the Creator of all, and the truth about God being the Creator of the Israelites, the people of God, beginning with Abraham. Notice that Ezra accurately described the name change of Abram to Abraham and that God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans, according to the Book of Genesis that they had been reading.

(Nehemiah 9:8) and you found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.

Ezra had set his heart to study, to obey, and to teach the law of God. He acknowledged in his prayer that Abraham had been faithful and obedient also. Abraham had been faithful. God had been and continued to be righteous; therefore, God kept His covenant and promise to Abraham regarding His commitment to give the Promised Land to Abraham and his descendants.

(Nehemiah 9:9) "And you saw the distress of our ancestors in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea.

Ezra's prayer in the Bible teaches us to sometimes pray in ways that describe our beliefs in God as the God over history and the God who has spoken in history and the God who keeps His promises in the Bible. At this point in his prayer, Ezra proclaimed what he had read and taught from the Book of Exodus in the law of Moses, the Book of the Law of God.

(Nehemiah 9:10) You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted insolently against our ancestors. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day.

Ezra prayed and worshiped God for His acts in the history of his ancestors according to the writings of Moses. Because God acts in righteousness, He heard the cries of His people and He also heard the insolent words of Pharaoh against the true God, Moses, and His people. In judgment, God showed He was above all gods and all nature and all people, and Ezra and God's people praised God for His great acts in their history.

Nehemiah 9:29-36

(Nehemiah 9:29) 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 ordinances, by the observance of which a person shall live. They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey.

In spite of all God had done for them, and in spite of who God is, and in spite of His law, the Israelites had remained a stubborn and rebellious people.

“Presumptuous sins” are those God’s people commit because they unrighteously think that because they are God’s people God will not hold them accountable, or responsible, or punish them, because they are special to God and are better than other people. They thought God would ignore their sinful behavior because they were His children. This verse includes the period covered by the Book of Judges, the Books of the Kings, and the Books of the Prophets prior to 587 BC.

(Nehemiah 9:30) Many years you were patient with them, and warned them by your spirit through your prophets; yet they would not listen. Therefore you handed them over to the peoples of the lands.

In his worship of God, Ezra reasonably remembered the wonderful, holy, pure, and loving moral attributes of God that moved the God to be patient with His children while continuing to warn them of the consequences of their continued disobedience and rebellion, but they would not listen; therefore, their neighbors defeated them in battle as their judges and kings ruled over them. God's Spirit told the prophets what to say when they gave God's warnings.

(Nehemiah 9:31) Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

Ezra continued to emphasize the moral character of God. God's love moved God to be gracious and merciful. God's love moved God to not destroy His people completely, but continue to work with them to lead them to repentance. God did not abandon or walk away from His people, because God is gracious and merciful, but He did need to justly punish them to correct their behavior.

(Nehemiah 9:32) "Now therefore, our God--the great and mighty and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love--do not treat lightly all the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings, our officials, our priests, our prophets, our ancestors, and all

your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until today.

In addition to praising God for His holy moral character, Ezra praised God by telling God in his prayer before the people that God is great, mighty, and awesome. God did not permit their neighbors to afflict them because He was powerless to prevent it! God is so powerful that He sent mighty pagan kings and mighty armies to punish His people and lead to them to repent. God's moral attributes are displayed when His steadfast love motivates Him to keep His covenants and promises. Only after much praise did Ezra begin to intercede and pray for God to help His sinful children, who did not deserve His help as Ezra rightly confessed in his prayer.

(Nehemiah 9:33) You have been just in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly;

As part of his prayer of intercession, when Ezra described the suffering of God's people, he was very quick to say that God acted justly and they deserved His punishment (or discipline). Ezra described again the moral character of God: God acts faithfully. God's people had acted the opposite of faithfully. Unfaithfulness is wickedness.

(Nehemiah 9:34) our kings, our officials, our priests, and our ancestors have not kept your

law or heeded the commandments and the warnings that you gave them.

From top to bottom, the community of God's people had acted wickedly. In some cases the political and religious leaders had led all the people to join in their wickedness in spite of the prophets warning. For example, King Solomon led the way in immorality when he took pagan foreign wives. No one that Ezra knew of had obeyed God or heeded God's repeated warnings.

(Nehemiah 9:35) Even in their own kingdom, and in the great goodness you bestowed on them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you and did not turn from their wicked works.

God has great goodness as our holy God. He expressed His goodness by giving His people a kingdom with kings such as King David. God gave them a land flowing with milk and honey. In spite of all God's moral goodness and His good example of how good and reasonable and intelligent people should behave, Ezra confessed that God's people had not served God (a sin of omission) and God's people had not turned from their wicked works (sins of commission).

(Nehemiah 9:36) Here we are, slaves to this day--slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts.

Ezra confessed that the Israelites (or Jews) were still slaves to the kings of Persia and could only return to their land, rebuild their temple, and rebuild their city's walls, with the permission of the pagan kings who ruled over them as God moved these kings to do His will. They did not cease being slaves to foreign rulers in some way until 1948. Until 1948, they were always subject to other rulers (unless we count the brief time they were somewhat free under the rule of the Maccabees).

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What kind of foreigner were the Israelites forbidden to marry?
2. Why did God forbid them from marrying unbelievers?
3. What did the Israelites do for a fourth part of the day followed by another fourth part of a day? What example might that give believers today?
4. What did Ezra pray about the heart of Abraham? What did he mean?

5. What reason did Ezra give for God fulfilling His promises to Abraham and his descendants?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly [*International Bible Lesson*](#). — © Copyright 2013 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.