

# Community of Confession

**Bible Background • NEHEMIAH 9:1–37**

**Printed Text • NEHEMIAH 9:2, 6–7, 9–10, 30–36 | Devotional Reading • LUKE 15:1–10**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: UNDERSTAND that confession and repentance are acts of worship; FEEL the need to confess and repent; and CONFESS and repent our shortcomings.

## In Focus

As a retail store employee, all the training Brenda received was from watching videos—none of it was hands-on; there was no one to show her where the items belonged. Later, the opportunity arrived where she had to train someone who was from another country and did not fully understand English. Then there was the culture issue. The trainee was not accustomed to nor did he appreciate a woman telling him how to do anything. One particularly busy night, as they were placing the stock on the shelves, he continuously asked her how to do it. His questions confirmed to her that he really did not understand English, or so she thought.

The next week, another new person arrived. To Brenda's astonishment, the person she was training volunteered to train the new arrival. She lost it and yelled at him in front of their colleagues and the store's customers. The venom that came out of her mouth even scared her. Brenda knew she had to apologize, and to ask God for forgiveness. After she confessed and sought repentance from God, she was able to go to her coworker and apologize.

*Before seeking another chance from God, we must confess and seek repentance. As we experience God's grace and mercy, our acts of confession and repentance become another way for us to worship God.*

## Keep in Mind

“And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers” (Nehemiah 9:2, KJV).

## Focal Verses

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**KJV** Nehemiah 9:2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

9:6 Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.

7 Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham;

9:9 And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea;

10 And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day.

9:30 Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands.

31 Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepeth covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.

33 Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:

34 Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them.

35 For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works.

36 Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it:

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### The People, Places, and Times

**Post-exilic.** The period of time when the southern tribes returned from their exile in Babylon, returned to Jerusalem, and rebuilt the Temple.

**Prayer.** Dialogue or conversation between God and humankind. Prayer consists of petition, complaint, praise, thanksgiving, and confession.

### Background

Led by Ezra, the people of the southern tribes returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:32). After offering “burnt offerings” to God for their safe travel, Ezra was told, “The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations... For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have

mingled themselves with the people of those lands” (9:1–2).

As Ezra prayed and confessed to God on behalf of the people their transgression, Shechaniah the son of Jehiel replied to Ezra, “We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing” (10:2). The “thing” Shechaniah spoke of was to divorce the foreign women the men had married.

After the men divorced their foreign wives, the Bible records the return of Nehemiah, who is immediately seen praying to God (Nehemiah 1). In his prayer to God, Nehemiah requests that God hear his confession of his sins and his confession of the sins of the people. Nehemiah asks God to remember the promise God made to the people of Israel and identifies by name the people of Israel who are to be the recipients of God’s promise. Nehemiah petitions God to answer, and then asks God for the success of the rebuilding of the Temple.

After the completion of the Temple, the Bible records Ezra reading the Law of Moses to the people. This reading was in response to their sins and the sins of their ancestors. In response to the reading of the Law, Nehemiah prepared the people to repent with a prayer of confession. This prayer included God’s continued care for the people, God’s covenant with Abraham, the people’s exodus from Egypt, and God’s continued grace and mercy.

## At-A-Glance

1. The People Confess Their Sins (Nehemiah 9:2)
2. The People Numerate Their Sins in Their Confession (vv. 6–7, 9–10, 30–36)

## In Depth

### 1. The People Confess Their Sins (Nehemiah 9:2)

The link between confession of one’s sin and the reading and hearing of Scripture is the beginning of one’s journey of faith. With the hearing and reading of Scripture, the act of forgiveness emerges as the vehicle to accept that only God can and does change. Throughout the Old Testament, the Bible records the disobedience of the people of Israel. The hearing of Scripture often preceded their admission of their sin. “And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses ... before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding” (Nehemiah 8:1–2).

Unlike the people of Israel, we are under God’s grace and mercy. With confession of our sins, our confession becomes the vehicle toward our freedom. In Romans 10, Paul explained that the people of Israel were under the law. Our confession of our sins includes our repentance and our belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul explained that our confession represents what should be in our hearts and mouths: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead ... it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved” (Romans 10:9–10, NLT). The songwriter captured the importance of confession of one’s sin with the hearing and reading of the Word when he wrote, “healed by the power of His Word,” for the Word of God delivers, heals, empowers, and transforms.

## 2. The People Numerate Their Sins in Their Confession (vv. 6–7, 9–10, 30–36)

Both Ezra and the Israelites knew that they had suffered much from the consequences of their own sin. It was not God’s fault that they went into captivity for 70 years into Babylon. They were a stiff-necked, hard-headed, ungrateful people who would not follow God’s edicts, even though they promised to do so time and time again. Therefore, Ezra acknowledged before the people and God that God had been just in His punishment of them for their transgressions. “For our sins are piled higher than our heads, and our guilt has reached to the heavens” (Ezra 9:6, NLT). In other words, they did not try to excuse their transgressions or blame them on someone else. Therefore, they reviewed their past mistakes. We, too, need to do so, so we will not repeat our sins—and improve our behavior. The Israelites had been devastated by past rebellion (they had gone into bondage); but a merciful God heard their cries and delivered them.

### Search the Scriptures

1. How did the people of Israel praise God (Nehemiah 9:6–7)?
2. What did the people of Israel recount to God (vv. 9–10)?

### Discuss the Meaning

Again, the link between confession of one’s sin and the reading and hearing of Scripture is the beginning of one’s journey of faith. With the hearing and reading of Scripture, the act of forgiveness emerges as the vehicle to accept that only God can and does change or transform us.

### Liberating Lesson

Confession of one’s sins is empowering because it is the introduction of faith. With faith, one accepts the plans God has for each of us. With faith, one will engage into an intimate

relationship with God. With faith, one desires to please God. With faith, one will allow the Holy Spirit that dwells within each of us to lead us. With faith, nothing is impossible. With faith, one is empowered by the reading and hearing of Scripture. With faith, one will love. With faith, one will forgive.

### Application for Activation

If the confession of one’s sin and the reading and hearing of Scripture is the beginning of one’s journey of faith, then one should begin with forgiving oneself. Many of us have something in our past or even present that needs to be forgiven. Once we learn to live in the generosity of God’s forgiveness and also forgive ourselves, then the work of forgiving others may begin so the deliverance of past hurts may occur. With forgiveness of others, then learning to love—especially the way God loves—will be achieved. Then, as the songwriter wrote, they will know them by their love—the love of God.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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**Sources:**

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## Say It Correctly

Chaldees. KAL-dees, KAHL-.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Repent and Turn to God  
(Acts 3:17-26)

### TUESDAY

A Changed Mind  
(Matthew 21:28-32)

### WEDNESDAY

I Repent in Dust and Ashes  
(Job 42:1-6)

### THURSDAY

First Be Reconciled  
(Matthew 5:21-26)

### FRIDAY

God, Be Merciful to Me  
(Luke 18:9-14)

### SATURDAY

Joy in Heaven  
(Luke 15:1-10)

### SUNDAY

The Community Confesses Together  
(Nehemiah 9:2, 6-7, 9-10, 30-36)

## Notes

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