

God Desires Accountability

HOW CAN WE RECONCILE WITH GOD?

Focal Verses • NEHEMIAH 9:32–38, 10:28–29

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will SURVEY the prayer recorded in Nehemiah 9 for repentance and covenant affirmation, REPENT of personal and corporate sinful attitudes and actions, and COMMIT to following God's ways in daily life.

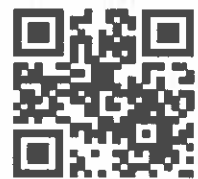
In Focus

For years, Darlique sensed God was pursuing her. And for years she had run, determined to live her own way, on her own terms. She never expected this. She never considered her decisions' impact on her twins. They were only six, so they didn't really comprehend the gravity of how Darlique had been living. This made it easier for Darlique to continue in her sinful ways. Each time Darlique found herself in trouble, she would pray and ask God to forgive that "mistake" and ask Him to give her just one more chance. Each time, He did. And, each time, she would thank Him for being so gracious, kind, and loving. But she had forgotten that God is also just. Until now.

The man she had decided that she "loved," despite repeated warnings and pleas from family and friends—both hers and his—was facing time in prison. And he decided to take her down with him. No, she wasn't really involved. But it was his word against hers. As Darlique faced a court date to determine her fate, she understood that she had been "sorry," but being sorry was not the same as repentance. With true reverence for God, she bowed down to the ground, saying, "Father, forgive me. I turn away from sin and turn toward You."

How do you know if you have truly repented? In this lesson, we will see a picture of what it means to truly repent.

SCAN FOR VIDEO



Keep in Mind

"Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly." (Nehemiah 9:33, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Nehemiah 9:32** Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest 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:

37 And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.

38 And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

Nehemiah 10:28 And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes.

The People, Places, and Times

Nehemiah. The book of Nehemiah is written primarily by Nehemiah (whose name means "Jehovah consoles"), the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I Longimanus. Some portions are attributed to Ezra, based on Nehemiah's memoirs. For example, Nehemiah 9 is traditionally considered Ezra's prayer. While serving the king, Nehemiah received word about the deplorable condition of Jerusalem, its walls, and its people years after the Babylonian invasion and exile. He took a great risk to present his dilemma to the king and created a plan to help rebuild the walls and the people's morale. King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's

request to return to Jerusalem, providing him with supplies and armed security.

Nehemiah successfully motivated the Jews who returned with him to rebuild the wall in 52 days despite threats, intimidation, and abuse. Nehemiah served as governor of Jerusalem for 12 years. He and Ezra encourage the people to rebuild, confess, and repent of their sins.

Nethinims. Written as Nethinims in the King James Version (10:28), other translations refer to them as "temple servants." These servants were tasked with jobs such as carrying wood or gathering water "for the service of the Levites" (Ezra 8:20).

How did the king's support help Nehemiah rebuild the walls of the city?

Background

For generations, and under multiple kings after David, the Jews continually failed to obey God's commands or heed the warnings of many prophets. They worshiped idols, married idolaters, ignored the Law, killed prophets, and more. As God warned through the prophets, He allowed other nations to besiege them, destroy their land, scatter them throughout the earth, and enslave them—Israel first, in 722 BC, by Assyria, then Judah, when Jerusalem was conquered over several years ending in 586 BC under Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

As promised, the Jews remained in exile for 70 years. Then, in 539 BC, Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon and established the Persian Empire. He would eventually decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild. However, the walls would remain in ruins, leaving Jerusalem unfortified and exposed to enemies. Upon inquiring about the state of Jerusalem and the Jews who had escaped death and survived captivity, Nehemiah writes, "They said to me, 'Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire' (Nehemiah 1:3). This motivated him to pray, mourn, and fast, resulting in a national confession of sins, repentance, and rebuilding.

How might we apply the practice of national confession to our own country?

At-A-Glance

1. The Confession (Nehemiah 9:32–38)
2. The Repentance (10:28–29)

In Depth

1. The Confession (Nehemiah 9:32–38)

Two days after the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites came together in fasting and mourning, wearing sackcloth and ashes (9:1). They separated themselves from all foreigners (failure to do this in previous generations was part of their downfall), "confessed their own sins and the sins of their ancestors" (v. 2), read from the Law, and worshiped God. All of these things have been neglected over the years.

Nehemiah 9 continues with Ezra's prayer, which provides a brief history of the Jews and their relationship with God. He contrasts their unfaithfulness and wickedness with God's power, loyalty, mercy, and commitment. They broke their side of the covenant, yet God maintained His. Verses 32–38 continue this contrast, pointing out that they are unworthy of God's attention in comparison to His awesomeness (v. 32).

Ezra confesses that they are sinners, worthy of the calamities that have fallen upon them over the years; their sin was widespread. They are now slaves in their own land. They asked God for deliverance so they could enjoy the land He had promised and granted generations prior. In our lives today, there are often many things we can enjoy that God promises, but our sin and unfaithfulness keep us from obtaining them. Confession can get us on the right path to pursue God's blessings.

How can repentance and confession of sins change your circumstances?

2. The Repentance (10:28–29)

Nehemiah 10 opens with a list of leaders, priests, and Levites, beginning with Nehemiah, who made a binding agreement with the Lord by placing their seals on the document (similar to today's signatures), indicating their commitment to repent. Other lower dignitaries, such as gatekeepers, singers, and temple servants, separated from the outside influences

that contributed to their forefathers' disloyalty and wickedness. Not only did they flee from evil influences, but they also turned to God and "solemnly promised to carefully follow all the commands, regulations, and decrees of the LORD our Lord" (v. 29). They invoked a curse upon themselves if they failed to keep their oath, which was similar to the original covenant found in Deuteronomy 27–28. Chapter 10 continues with the stipulations of their agreement, including keeping the Sabbath and sabbatical year and avoiding intermarriages. Not only did they confess their sin, but they also changed their behavior, which is true repentance.

Why must we rededicate and recommit ourselves to God after separation?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why does Ezra's prayer make only one request? (Nehemiah 9:32)
2. What indicates this repentance is genuine? (v. 38, 10:28–29)

Discuss the Meaning

Often, we look at the events of the Old Testament as though its principles are antiquated. The God of love, mercy, and forgiveness is a just God who still hates sin and desires repentance.

What does Nehemiah 9 teach about the character of God? What can we learn about prayer and repentance?

Liberating Lesson

Repentance seems to be a foreign concept in our society. We often use the term "justice" as it relates to societal woes, but rarely do we consider the role of repentance. We say we want justice when what we often really desire is vengeance.

God is just, not vengeful. For years, He extended mercy to a disloyal people. He still does. Repentance brings about the restoration of relationships, and restoration is what our

broken families, communities, society, and nation need. This occurs by repenting—turning away from sin and going in the opposite direction toward God.

Many issues in our community require justice. As African Americans, we support movements calling for fair treatment by police officers and demand a halt to the mass incarceration of our youth. These movements also need to be coupled with genuine repentance. We have sinned against God and one another in many ways. How have we neglected our communities or dehumanized our community members? Some of our problems stem from destructive forces outside our community, but we must confess sinful habits in our hearts and homes.

What type of honest discussions are necessary within our congregations that will create opportunities for repentance, forgiveness, and healing?

Application for Activation

This lesson examines sin, both personal and societal. *In what areas of your life do you need to confess sin?*

- Ask God to reveal any personal sin, then confess and repent.
- Ask God to reveal how we as a church, society, and nation have strayed away from Him, then confess and repent.
- Gather some friends and church members and begin to confess and repent together as you pray for God's blessing for your family, church, community, and nation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Kidner, Derek. *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*.
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.
Myers, Allen C., ed. *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids,
MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume Three. Nashville, TN: Abingdon
Press, 1999.

Say It Correctly

Nethinims. neth-i-NIMS.
Assyria. ah-SEAR-ee-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 78

Judges 16–18
Psalm 35:7–10

DAY 79

Judges 19–21
Psalm 35:11–16

DAY 80

Ruth
Psalm 35:17–21

DAY 81

1 Samuel 1–3
Psalm 35:22–28

DAY 82

1 Samuel 4–8
Psalm 36:1–4

DAY 83

1 Samuel 9–12
Psalm 36:7–12

DAY 84

1 Samuel 13–14
Psalm 37:1–4

Notes
