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## Nehemiah 9

(2021)

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## Nehemiah 9.

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### THIS CHAPTER TELLS OF THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

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The chapter gives an overview of:

- The call of Abraham to the Promised Land, the Exodus and the Red Sea.
- The pillars of cloud, Mount Sinai, the Law of Moses and the golden calf.
- The Manna and the forty years wilderness, the rebellion, possession of the land and the kingdom.
- Israel's disobedience and great blasphemies, their repeated captivity and their repeated deliverance.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

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In 445 B.C. the Persian King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah, an Israelite who was a trusted official written permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah went with the third wave of returning Jewish exiles. There was intense opposition from other people in the land, and disunity within Jerusalem. Despite the strong opposition, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and overcame many threats. He served twice as governor and did what God had put in his heart (Neh. 2:12) (Neh. 7:5), and found that the joy of the LORD was his strength (Neh. 8:10). For an overview of the entire book see the title: "Overview of the Book of Nehemiah" (at the beginning of the index to Nehemiah).

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### THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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Ezra the priest read the Book of the Law of Moses before men and women and all who could understand what they heard. It was found written in the book that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, so all who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths according to what was written in the Book of the Law.

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### NEHEMIAH 9:1-3

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- **Nehemiah 9:1-3:** 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. <sup>2</sup> And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. <sup>3</sup> And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God; for another quarter (for a quarter of the day in KJV) of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.

In the previous chapter Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites said to all the people:

- "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. (Neh. 8:9).

Nehemiah exhorted the people to dry their tears, and joyfully go to the feast. When the reading was over, because it was a special holy and sacred feast day of thanksgiving to God and rejoicing in His salvation mercy, forgiveness and blessings. There is no doubt that as the law was

read a deep sense of their national sins would have been brought to their remembrance which would have inwardly deeply affected the hearts of the people with sorrow and repentance, so the Levites do not reprove the people for their inward mourning, but assure them of God's mercies if they are repentant. Weeping was a good sign that their hearts were tender and had a deep inner sense of guilt as they heard the words of the law and that they had godly sorrow for the nation's sins and offences before the LORD. It was right and proper that they should feel inwardly sorry for their sins, they were not reprimanded or forbidden from this, but rather told not to carry their mourning over to the time of feasting and rejoicing. The idea is that all sinners should grieve and sorrow over their sin before God, but once forgiven, sorrow should change to joy and rejoicing.

Added to this, when the people of Israel did outwardly express their mourning it was very dramatic, since they sprinkled dust and earth on their heads (v1) such a display of mourning would have been totally contrary to the spirit of the sacred holy feast. The act of sprinkling dust and earth on their heads signified that the external body and the internal spirit were one in repentance, grief and sorrow.

**The twenty fourth day:** (v1) the festival began on the 14th day (the feast of trumpets) of the seventh month (Heb. Tisri) immediately after this day, the feast of Booths/Tabernacles began and lasted from the 15th day to the 22nd., with the 23rd day (the eighth day) being a day of solemn observance (Neh. 8:18) during which time outward manifestations of mourning had been forbidden.

- Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the LORD. <sup>35</sup> On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. <sup>36</sup> For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work. (Leviticus 23:34-36).

During the time of this feast outward displays of mourning had been forbidden since it was contrary to the nature of the feast, because it was to be kept with joy. But now, after one day of rest (the 23rd and eighth day), on the twenty-fourth day, their consciences after hearing the word read every day, was fully awakened, and their hearts filled with overwhelming grief for their sins, which they were not allowed to express during the previous days of public joy. (Neh. 8:9).

But now after hearing the law of the LORD read to them every day their minds are flooded with memories of the nation's past sins and with thoughts, of their own sins on this twenty-fourth day set apart as a day for solemn fasting and repentance. Now they were permitted to outwardly express their overwhelming sorrow. It seems that one day was allowed for the people to rest, after which they were permitted to outwardly manifest their grief, sorrow and repentance. (Neh. 8:9) and a general fast was proclaimed, on this day the people assembled with all the outward signs of sorrow, even to dust and earth on their heads, which signified that the external body and the internal spirit were one in repentance, grief and sorrow.

**Sin lying within:** perceiving the depth of sin lying within our body of flesh is a natural result of reading and studying the word. For those who do not know the enormity of God's grace in Christ, such knowledge brings guilt and torment to the mind, but for those in Christ, it drives them even further to live in God's grace, and to offer up prayers of thankfulness for the grace He daily showers upon them, for without it they know they would have no hope of salvation. After that feast the men separated from their unlawful foreign wives which had begun by Ezra (Ezra 10:1-17) as a necessary part of reforming the nation, but it seems it was only partially accomplished during Ezra's time as it is now continued here under Nehemiah. this was a necessary step in reforming the nation, because such marriages threatened the purity of the nation's

religion and the inheritance of the land, which had the potential to lead to disastrous consequences to the prosperity and character of the chosen people. This solemn fast allowed for the expression of the people's repentant emotions and sorrowful feelings which the reading of the law had produced, which was outwardly evidenced by the determined steps taken for the correction of existing unlawful marriages.

**They stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers:** (v2) in the outward court of the temple, where the people used to stand when they prayed and confessed their sins: and read in the book of the law of the LORD.

**They read from the Book of the Law of the LORD:** (v3) the Levites stood up in the place built for them (Neh. 8:4-5), and read the law as they had done before and giving understanding to what they read.

**For another quarter (for a quarter of the day in KJV):** (v3) being four three-hour parts, for the Jewish day was considered to be twelve hours . (John 11:9).

1. **The first three hours:** being from sun rise, (i.e., six o'clock) in the morning, to nine o'clock, which was the time of the morning sacrifice.
2. **The second three hours:** being from nine o'clock to midday when they most likely focused upon reading the books of the law after the morning sacrifice.
3. **The third three hours:** being from midday to 3pm, during which time they worshipped.
4. **The fourth three hours:** being from 3pm to 6pm (sunset) during which they confessed their sins, prayed and praised God for His goodness which also led to the time of the evening sacrifice.

All of this means they spent the entire day in worshipping God in some form or other.

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## FROM HERE ON IS A PRAYER OF THE LEVITES

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### NEHEMIAH 9:4-6

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- **Nehemiah 9:4-6:** On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. <sup>5</sup> Then the Levites, Jeshua, 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. <sup>6</sup> "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; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.

**The stairs:** (v4) are understood by most to be an elevated platform or scaffold, upon which the Levites stood so they could better address the people and the people would be able to better hear them and easily see them. Consider the following verse:

- Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform (a pulpit of wood in KJV), that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. (Neh. 8:4).

These pulpit platforms were probably placed at convenient distances, to prevent confusion and the voice of one drowning out the voice of another. If all the men mentioned here stood in one place, and spoke the following words together, the sound of each individual voice would have merged together, making it enormously difficult to distinctly hear their speech

and understood what they were saying. These may also be platforms that the Levites and musicians used to stand on so they would be seen and heard by the people when they sang at the time of sacrifice.

**Cried with a loud voice:** (v4) testifying to the deep sense of their sins, guilt and miseries, and their fervent and zealous desire for God's mercy. It was totally natural that such a national cry would follow this exceptional prayer, especially since they were all united as one, and outward gestures was the common way in which the Jews, and other people in the East, expressed their deep and earnest inward feelings.

**The men:** (v5) Jeshua and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; who were most likely all Levites.

**Hashabniah:** (v5) is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture.

**Stand up:** (v5) it is mentioned, prior to this that they were standing, (v2-3) however through shame and awe of God's Divine Majesty, they may have fallen to the ground on their faces, or they may have simply sat once the reading of God's law had begun, much like we do in church, for there are always moments of standing and sitting. The Levites prayed this prayer (v5-6) could imply to one of the following three:

1. Ezra or Ezra and Nehemiah together composed the prayer and gave a written copy to the Levites.
2. They all agreed to pray in the same manner, with the same purpose and the same theme and this is just one of the prayers prayed.
3. It is also very likely especially since it was very clear to Ezra and Nehemiah and the Levites that they would be praying this prayer before such a vast crowd that with the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah they composed this prayer together and all prayed the same words from their individual pulpit platforms to the company of people allotted to them.

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**Then the Levites, Jeshua etc.** (v5) and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah; the same men mentioned previously, with a little variation of their names, but it is very possible some of them may have had two names.

**You are the LORD, you alone:** (v6) Jehovah, the self-existent and independent being, the supreme Sovereign over all things created and universal King who has sovereign dominion over all that is in heaven and all that is on earth and in the sea.

**The host of heaven worships you:** this refers to the following two things:

1. To the stars, the moon, the sun and all other things created which Psalm one hundred and forty shows are called to worship and praise God along with all other things created.
2. To the archangels, the cherubim and seraphim and all other angels, and by extension to all His faithful ministers as the following verses shows.
  - Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; (1 Kings 22:19).
  - Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! (Psalm 103:21).
  - Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying., (Luke 2:13).
  - Again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." (Heb. 1:6).

## NEHEMIAH 9:7-8

- **Nehemiah 9:7-8:** You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. <sup>8</sup> You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, (hast performed thy words in KJV) for you are righteous.

An overview of the history of the Hebrew nation follows from here on, which was most likely composed by Ezra or Nehemiah or both together in the form of a prayer, and given to the Levites, so that all would be distinctly proclaiming the same prayer before the whole assembly from their different pulpit scaffold platforms, which were placed, in allotted areas. From amongst all the people on earth God chose Abram. It should never be thought that this was random for the following reason, the Scriptures state:

- For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars.” (2 Chron. 16:9).

Even though Abram lived in Ur (Gen. 11:27), a country of idols and worshippers of them, including his own father, God saw something in the heart of Abram and Abram responded to the call. The LORD singled Abram out to serve and glorify Him, to be father of all the faithful, the ancestor of the Messiah, and the Saviour in who all the faithful (Jews and Gentiles) will be blessed at his return, and be with him throughout all eternity. When the covenant of circumcision was made God changed Abram’s name to Abraham and called him the father of many nations.

- No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. (Gen. 17:5).

**You found his heart faithful before you:** (v8) Abraham did not fail God, especially in his great trial and test of his faith and obedience, when he was required to offer up his only son as a sacrifice, proving himself a true believer.

- He believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen. 15:6)

Here we see the message of the Gospel, in that Abraham was not counted righteous for his works, but because he believed God, and the following verses show that he reasoned God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead.

- By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, <sup>18</sup> of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” <sup>19</sup> He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (Hebrews. 11:19).

May we all have the faith of Abraham when a loved one is taken, and find peace in the knowledge that God will raise them up.

**You have kept your promise:** (v8) (hast performed thy words in KJV) to give the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and the Girgashites, not to him personally, but to his offspring for God will never lie or break His promise for He is righteous.

- On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. (Gen. 15:18).

In all His ways and works God is a covenant keeping God whose angel went before Joshua to conquer the land of Canaan, and give Israel possession of it.

NEHEMIAH 9:9-11

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- **Nehemiah 9:9-10:** “And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, <sup>10</sup> and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. <sup>11</sup> And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters.

God’s working with Isaac and Jacob are passed over, to bring us to Abrahams offspring becoming a great nation under God, which was the first stage of God’s promise to Abraham, that He would multiply his seed as the stars of heaven, and their miraculous deliverance, when they cried to God from grievous affliction though the Red sea. The words, “You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt” (v9) carries the idea that God was not looking upon them as an unemotional spectator, but looked upon them from heaven with pity and compassion.

With this in mind, it is good to reflect upon the fact that at the time of this prayer they are praising and thanking God for all their past deliverances, and especially for their deliverance from Babylon and for the restoration of Moses Law and the perfecting of the nation’s faith.

**You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh:** (v10) many mighty and extraordinary and unparalleled miracles, that not only magnified the name of God and struck fear upon Pharaoh and upon all the inhabitants of Egypt, but would have also brought a sense of awe upon the people of the surrounding nations. The intention of the prideful Pharaoh was to keep the Hebrew people as his slaves forever, and his officials and taskmasters treated them with the utmost contempt and cruelty, so it was fitting that the deliverance of God’s people through the Red Sea brought the destruction of their enemies.

**You made a name for yourself, as it is to this day:** (v10) through the following events:

- Their miraculous passage through the Red Sea
- The giving of the Ten Commandments and God’s promises for them.
- God’s forbearance and long-suffering shown to them despite their frequent disobedience and rebellions.
- The victories and triumphs given to them over their enemies.
- The many faithful prophets and their happy settlement in the Promised Land.
- All the extraordinary blessings, both in the form of temporal prosperity and religious advantage with God, with which His goodness and mercy had favoured them above all other nations.

The underlying theme of this prayer is thankfulness for all God’s goodness shown to them as a nation and their repentance and sorrow for the nations numerous and determined acts of disobedience. They acknowledge that, in all God’s judgments and severe punishment for their sins upon their nation, God had done right, because they had acted wickedly. Here at this Feast of Booths, they are throwing themselves upon His mercy and pledging themselves to national faithfulness and obedience in future.

**As a stone into mighty waters:** (v11) carries the idea that Israel’s enemies sunk and perished in the Red Sea as a stone is thrown into deep water and there is no hope of ever seeing it again.

- Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. (Exod. 15:4).

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## PILLAR OF CLOUD AND FIRE

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### NEHEMIAH 9:12

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- **Nehemiah 9:12:** By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go.

During the day a cloudy pillar not only led them, but would have also, sheltered them from the sun and heat as they journeyed through the dry and barren wilderness. During the night a pillar of fire led them and gave them light to see the way they were to go through the barren trackless desert.

- The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. (Exodus 13:21).

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## MOUNT SINAI

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### NEHEMIAH 9:13-14

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- **Nehemiah 9:13-14:** You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments,<sup>14</sup> and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.

By some visible sign of God's presence came down upon Mount Sinai, as a cloud, fire and smoke etc., spoken of in the following verses:

- Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.<sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.<sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.<sup>20</sup> The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. (Exodus 19:17-20).

**You gave them right rules and true laws:** (v13) in contrast to the laws and rules of some of nations that do not believe in the God of Israel, whose laws taught falsehood, superstition, idolatry, and other errors; but rules and laws that:

- Teach the true God and His mind and will.
- Teach the ten commandments, of which the underlying theme is love, since each commandment protects others from harm (i.e., thou shall not murder, steal, commit adultery etc.).
- Teach the true and only way to live a fulfilling and happy life.
- Teach good statutes that comfort and save to eternal life.

Even the ceremonial laws were tokens of God's goodness, being types of Christ's sacrifice and pointed forward to the Gospel of grace. Had Israel obeyed God's voice, He would have blessed them with the following two most beautiful promises a nation could ever hear from the God of all creation:

- They would be His treasured possession among all peoples on earth.
- They will be to Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5-6).

This does not mean that God's wonderful promise has failed, rather it is being majestically fulfilled in Christ, for all who belong to him (Jew and Gentiles) are one in Christ and a part of the Common Wealth of Israel).

- Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision (the Jews), which is made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you (Gentiles) who once were far off (from Israel and God) have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:11-13).
- Which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph. 3:5-6).

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## BREAD FROM HEAVEN

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### NEHEMIAH 9:15-17

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- **Nehemiah 9:15-17:** You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.<sup>16</sup> "But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments.<sup>17</sup> They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

**You gave bread from heaven:** (v15) naturally refers to the manna which God gave them to satisfy their hunger and keep them nourished and healthy.

- The LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"<sup>13</sup> In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp.<sup>14</sup> And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ." (Exod. 16:11-14).

Following the Exodus God supplied an edible substance (manna) for the Israelites during their forty-years in the wilderness, and prior to the conquest of Canaan. When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it. (Num 11:7-9)

- Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium.<sup>8</sup> The people went about and gathered it and ground it in handmills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with fresh oil.<sup>9</sup> When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it. (Num. 11:7-9).

The word mana symbolises the following things:

- Supernatural power.
- God's divinely supplied spiritual nourishment.
- God is the sustainer of life.
- Christ sustaining the spiritual hunger of his people as they journey through the wilderness of this fallen world.
- Jesus then said to them (his disciples) "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.<sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."<sup>34</sup> They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:32-35).

**OVERVIEW OF THE MANNA:** when the people of Israel were in the wilderness of Sin (Exod. 16:1) all of Israel accused Moses and Aaron of killing them with hunger (Exod. 16:3) so the LORD said He would rain bread from heaven (Exod. 16:4). During their forty years in the wilderness every morning they had manna to eat (Exod. 16:13) and in the evening, they had quail to eat (Exod. 16:13). They ate manna for forty years, but the day after they ate of the produce of the land of Canaan the manna stopped (Joshua 5:12). Manna was like white coriander seed (Exod. 16:31) and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey (Exod. 16:31).

**You brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst:** (v15) to quench their thirst and sustain their lives, this was done soon after they came out of the land of Egypt, and prior to their entrance into the land of Canaan.

- Behold, I will stand before you (Moses) there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. (Exod. 17:6).

**You told them to go in to possess the land:** (v15) that He had promised to give to their fathers, but because the spies they sent into Canaan to explore the land, brought back a negative and fearful report they refused to enter even though God had promised to give them possession of it, because of this unbelief the Exodus generation remained in the wilderness forty years.

- Not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. (Num. 14:30).

**They were not mindful:** (v17) this is difficult to comprehend, after all the extraordinary miraculous wonders that God did for them before and after delivering them from Egypt and after parting the Red sea, and giving them an abundance of meat and manna to eat in the wilderness and bringing fresh water forth out of a rock, rather than be mindful of these things, they not only hardened their hearts against God, but also appointed a leader to guide them back to Egypt, where they would once again be made slaves.

- They said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” (Num. 14:4).

This enormous lack of gratitude, can be likened to a sinner accepting Christ, passing through the waters of baptism and tasting of his love and grace, and afterward, returning to their past sinful life and the things of the world, rather than be thankful for the price Christ paid to redeem them. Israel’s hardened hearts toward God and their strong desire to return to Egypt, manifests the long-suffering of God and His mercy, toward Israel as a nation and His faithfulness to keep the promise He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

**You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful:** (v17) at various times in Israel’s history, they turned their backs on God, worshipped idols, sacrificed their children to foreign gods, took foreign women for wives and committed many gross sins, yet for all this, God never gave up on them, but remained gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in forgiveness.

- The LORD passed before him (Moses on Mount Sinai) and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. (Exod. 34:6).
- To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him (Dan. 9:9).

It was a common principal when Israel acknowledged their great sin and repented, they prayed for God’s mercy, and no matter how great the sin where there is true heartfelt repentance before God, His mercy is greater.

NEHEMIAH 9:18

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- **Nehemiah 9:18:** Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies,

This shows how strong the religion of Egypt had influenced the mind of the Hebrews, for this is an extreme provocation against God, especially considering how little a time passed since God had clearly commanded them not to make any graven image, and how many warnings He had not long after given them against making idols of any kind. Many theologians suspect that this molten calf made from the rings of gold of women’s earrings, that they brought out of Egypt was most likely made in the image of the Apis, the most important and highly regarded bull deity of ancient Egypt or the ox of the Egyptians. Making this great sin even worse, they give this idol credit for being the God or the image of the God that brought them out of Egypt

- And he (Aaron) received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exod. 32:4)

**You did not forsake them:** (v17) had God utterly forsaken them, the nation Israel would not exist today, for they would have either been consumed in the wilderness, or swallowed up by Egypt or so spread out across the land that they would have been lost amongst the surrounding foreign nations. But, God in His manifold mercies did not forsake them or cast them off, but remained faithful to His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

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PILLAR OF CLOUD

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NEHEMIAH 9:19

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- **Nehemiah 9:19:** you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go.

The pillar of the cloud remained with them during the day, not only to lead them in the way, but also to protect them from the scorching heat of the desert sun. Since much of their travelling was in the cool of the night God gave them a pillar of fire to give light and to guide them.

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GOD’S GOOD SPIRIT

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NEHEMIAH 9:20

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- **Nehemiah 9:20:** You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst.

The words, “You gave your good spirit,” this the LORD did first to Moses, and then to the seventy elders mentioned above, so that they would be able to wisely direct, govern and instruct the people wisely and in the knowledge of God’s law.

- I will come down and talk with you (Moses) there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them (the seventy elders), and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone. (Num. 11:17).
- Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him (Moses), and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. (Num. 11:25).

- The words, “you gave your good Spirit to instruct them,” in a much wider sense can be applied to the Ten Commandments, since these are from His Spirit, and given to the entire nation of Israel, to instruct them how to live a good life before Him.

For information concerning the mana and the water for thirst, see the title:

- Bread from Heaven, following (Neh. 9:15-17) (above).

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## FORTY YEARS THE LORD SUSTAINED ISRAEL

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### NEHEMIAH 9:21-22

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- **Nehemiah 9:21-22:** Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. <sup>22</sup> “And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan.
- Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. (Deuteronomy 8:4).

For forty years God miraculously supplied all they needed to live in peace and harmony with each other in the wilderness, they did not have to stress about finding food, water or clothing, they were protected from the heat of the sun, they had light during the night and they never travelled so far in one journey that they got sore feet, or God also miraculously protected their feet.

Added to this God gave them Kingdoms and nations. The sense of this prayer is of highlighting so many things that they should have been grateful for, and satisfied with, yet they continued to crave the sinful things the people of this world had, and forsook God to chase after them. Much like a Christian today, who after experiencing the goodness of Christ, leaves his Kingdom to return to the secular world.

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## THE LORD MULTIPIED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

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### NEHEMIAH 9:23-24

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- **Nehemiah 9:23-24:** You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. <sup>24</sup> So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would.

The words, “you multiplied their children as the stars of heaven,” (v23) fulfils the following promise God made to Abram:

- And he (the LORD) brought him (Abram) outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” (Gen. 15:5).

When they came out of Egypt, and just before they entered into the land of Canaan, they numbered 600,000 men, plus women and children.

- The people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. (Exod. 12:37).

With this vast number in mind, its easy to imagine how the population of Israel would have greatly multiplied, especially with God’s favour toward them. However, this is not the full completion of this promise God made to Abram, rather it is just the beginning, for all in Christ (Jews and Gentiles) are through Christ counted as the offspring of Abraham

the father of the faithful. Today God is continuing to multiply Abraham's offspring as the stars, of heaven, and will continue to do so until that glorious day when Christ the offspring of Abraham returns in majestic glory.

**You gave them into their hand:** (v24) meaning God gave into the possession of Israel rich and wealthy kingdoms and nations, widespread territories, and good aquicultural land in Canaan, that was previously occupied by powerful kings, rulers and princes that God had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that their offspring would go in and possess and which by Joshua's faithful leadership they did.

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## ISRAEL CAPTURED FORTIFIED CITIES

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### NEHEMIAH 9:25

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- **Nehemiah 9:25:** And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

They delighted themselves in God's great goodness, ponder for a moment, with today's modern weapons, wars destroy cities and all that is on the land, in contrast, during these ancient times wars were fought with swords, spears and primitive weapons, which means once the enemy was defeated, all that they had built, their palaces, houses, farmlands, vineyards, orchids, livestock etc., became the possession of the victor. Today with the advancement of technology, powerful nations worldwide have weapons that are able to totally destroy an entire army or the heads and rulers of a nation without destroying buildings, agricultural crops and livestock etc.

Had Israel remained faithful to God, they could have enjoyed and rested in the comforts and blessings that by God's goodness, they had obtained. But they neglected and despised God's laws and did not regard or observe them, when they should have had them continually before their eyes to direct them in all their ways. Added to this, the good things that God had given them, that they did enjoy, instead of making them grateful, made them wanting more and forgetful of His commandments and even worse they slew God's faithful prophets.

**They became fat and delighted themselves:** (v25) they greatly prospered from the fruitful soil, the ready built houses with good provisions and furniture, but rather than thank God for such prosperity, they became self-indulgent and grew proud, immoral, wicked, in mind and body, pampering themselves in excessive greed and sinful pleasures.

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## ISRAEL WAS DISOBEDIANT

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### NEHEMIAH 9:26-29

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- **Nehemiah 9:26-29:** "Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies.<sup>27</sup> Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies.<sup>28</sup> But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies.<sup>29</sup> 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 rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey.

**The words, “they cast your law behind their backs,”** (v26) rather than keeping God’s laws continually before their eyes, to direct and govern them, they neglected and despised God’s laws nor did they observe them. The LORD told Ezekiel to declare to Judah and Israel all the sins that they had committed against Him, he then rebukes them of the following abominations:

- They committed adultery, married foreign wives and killed for their own gain.
- With idols they committed adultery and slaughtered their own children in sacrificed who they had borne to the LORD.
- They defiled God’s sanctuary and profaned His Sabbaths.

Because Judah and Israel had forgotten God and cast Him behind their back, despite all His favours and mercies, which was great manifestation of their ingratitude, the LORD justly declares, “they must bear the consequences of their lewdness and whoring.” (Ezek. 23:35-39).

**They killed the prophets:** (v26) who warned them to turn from their wicked ways and return to God and called heaven and earth to record against them if they did not repent and turn from their wicked ways.

- He (Elijah) said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:10).

In the New Testament it is written:

- Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matt. 23:37).

Jewish tradition further affirms that more than one of the great prophets (i.e., Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) were martyred by their countrymen.

**You gave them in the hand of their enemies:** (v27) at one-point God so abandoned them that He permitted the Philistines to rule over them forty years.

- The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, so the LORD gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. (Judges 13:1).

It was also the will of God that they would be in captivity to Babylon for seventy years. Many other times throughout their history God permitted them to be delivered into the hands of their enemies, nothing other than their great sins would have moved God to allow the enemies of His people gain the victory over the nation He had chosen, but in His mercies, they had to be disciplined, to bring them back to the Lord their God and to living a life according to His laws. Added to this, had God not disciplined them in such a manner the continuation of their gross sins would have given the pagan nations justified reason to mock the God of Israel and proclaim Him to be a God who approves of all kinds of wickedness and evil.

**You gave them saviours:** (v27), saviours here carry the idea of delivers, some of these delivers were people like Gideon, Samson, Ehud, Joshua, and Moses. God gave Israel leaders that He inspired to deliver Israel from the terrible circumstance they were in.

**NOTE:** The Judges were not necessarily actual judges or elders or rulers in accordance with the traditionally accepted title in ancient Israel. They were actually more like local deliverers who were raised up by God to bring relief to the oppression that was brought about by their enemies.

- **Nehemiah 9:30-31:** Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. <sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

**They returned and cried to you:** (v00) the constant pattern of Israel's history was a frequent cycle of gross sin, then falling into the hands of their enemies, then repentance and crying to God for help, then God having compassion on them and delivering them, then after some time of prosperity and peace, they enter into gross sin and the cycle repeats itself, such is the pattern and cycle of their history.

Even today God has not forsaken Israel, for Zechariah prophesied:

- On that day (the day the LORD gives salvation to Israel and the inhabitants of Jerusalem) I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. <sup>11</sup> On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. (Zech. 12:9-14).

It is true that this prophecy initially applies to Israel's deliverance from Babylon, but the words, "when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced," clearly show that it has a far greater fulfillment yet to come. It is a principal of many biblical prophecies that they contain a partial fulfillment, but contained within the language is a far greater and perfect fulfillment.

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**GOD KEEPS THE COVENANT**

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**NEHEMIAH 9:32-33**

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- **Nehemiah 9:32-33:** "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome (terrible in KJV) God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, (mercy in KJV) let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. <sup>33</sup> Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly.

**The awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love:** (v32) mercy is added here, because the covenant in itself was not a sure ground of hope, because Israel so many times broke it, God was by this set free from keeping it. Israel fully aware of this, at times of repentance plead for His abundant mercy, for without mercy God was not bound to accept or help them in any way. This is one of the reasons they proclaim, "you are just in all that is brought upon us," and why they cannot complain of any of God's dispensations toward them, for their history shows that God is just in all His ways toward His chosen people. Israel's whole national history prominently bears testimony to God's faithfulness to His covenant, but this gave them little ground of comfort or of hope while they were so painfully conscious of having violated it, for their only hope of God's favour was not the covenant, but the riches of His divine grace, which is why He is here given the following title, "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome (terrible in KJV) God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, (mercy in KJV)." This same title is given to the LORD in chapter one:

- I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome (terrible in KJV) God who keeps covenant and steadfast love (mercy in KJV) with those who love him and keep his commandments, (Neh. 1:5).

**Kings of Assyria:** (v32) the following kings of Assyria, Pul, Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser, Sargon, Sennacherib, Esar-haddon, are traced in the Scriptures as the rod of the LORD'S anger.

- Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! (Isaiah 10:5)

It appears from the following verses that the beginning of Judah and Israel's calamities began with the Assyrians.

- Pul the king of Assyria came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm his hold on the royal power. (2 Kings 15:19).
- In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. (2 Kings 18:13).
- Therefore, the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. (2 Chron. 33:11).

**Let not all the hardship seem little to you:** (v32) meaning, consider all the punishment we have suffered from time the Assyrian kings and Babylon invaded our land and carried us captive to the very time of this prayer, to be enough, so no more needs to be added, but rather show mercy.

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## KINGS AND PRIESTS HAVE NOT KEEP GOD'S LAW

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### NEHEMIAH 9:34-35

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- **Nehemiah 9:34-35:** Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. <sup>35</sup> Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works.

They have not served you in their kingdom, it is a general law of leadership, if the leaders are on the wrong path those under their rule will also end up on the wrong path. When Israel's, kings, princes and priests were all corrupt the entire nation became corrupt, when they had faithful kings, princes and priests were faithful the nation was faithful. Even when God had removed all obstacles and obstructions out of the way and made their way prosperous and easy and gave them good things to enjoy in the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey, their hearts were still not grateful, nor were they satisfied.

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## WE ARE SLAVES IN THE LAND

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### NEHEMIAH 9:36-38

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- **Nehemiah 9:36-38:** Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. <sup>37</sup> And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. <sup>38</sup> "Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. (we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it in the KJV).

Unlike their fathers who were free tenants in the Promised Land of milk and honey that God gave to them and that under God they were the rightful lords and owners, they now pay taxes to others. For though they had the kings written permission to return to their land, and rebuild their city and temple, they were still in subjection to the kings of Persia. God had promised that they would be the head and not the tail of all nations, if they kept the covenant. Constantly breaking the covenant is the reason they are now the tail of secular nations.

**Because of this we make a firm covenant in writing:** (v38), because of the following things:

- All their past sins, suffering, distress and sorrow.
- They are not lords of their own land and are forced to pay taxes to other nations.
- They are slaves; in the land that God gave to their fathers to enjoy.
- Others eat the fruit of their orchards and vineyards.
- The rich yield of the land goes to the kings who rule over their bodies and their livestock.

Because of all these things the people of Israel say that they will make a firm written covenant and their princes, Levites, and their priests will put their names on it (as witnesses) and seal it. (All the names of the princes, Levites, and priests etc., who sealed the covenant are given in the next chapter).

However, such a document was of little value when it is considered, if they had no regard for the ten commandments, written on tables of stone by the finger of God, why would they hold true to this covenant written by the fingers of men. Nevertheless, a public document written by their own hand, would be very useful witness against them should they return to their wicked ways, for by it they would become witnesses against themselves.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*