

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 8

Nehemiah 8 - 10

- In Nehemiah Chapters 8 – 10, we see the key themes of renewal and recommitment displayed.
 - Nehemiah renewed the people’s commitment to God, to his Law, and to his commandments.
 - The people recommitted themselves to God’s covenant, to support the Temple, to keep the Sabbath, and to divorce their foreign wives.
- Nehemiah Chapter 8 is entitled “Ezra Reads the Law” in the NIV.
 - Chapter 8 takes place over an entire month.
 - The chapter opens on the 1st day of the 7th month.
 - The 7th month was significant for several reasons. The 7th month marks the Jewish New Year, called Rosh Hashanah. It marks the beginning of the Jewish High Holy Days.
 - On the 1st day, the Jews celebrated the Feast of Trumpets. We read about the Feast of Trumpets in Leviticus 23:23-25:
 - The LORD said to Moses,²⁴ “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of sabbath rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts.²⁵ Do no regular work, but present a food offering to the LORD.’”
 - Rosh Hashanah customs include sounding a hollowed-out ram’s horn called the shofar.
 - Verse 1 references “the Book of the Law of Moses.” While we cannot be sure what exactly is meant here, this was probably the entire scroll of the Torah, the first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible.
 - On the first day of the 7th month, Ezra read from the scroll from daybreak until noon. Obviously, he could not have read all 5 books of the Torah in that short time. It is likely that he read from the book of Deuteronomy.

- Notice that the assembly includes men, women, and children old enough to understand. They were seated in the square before the Water Gate. The exact location of the Water Gate is unknown, but it was likely near the Gihon Spring.
- Ezra stood on a raised platform, so that everyone could clearly see and hear him.
- When Ezra began to read, the people stood to hear God’s Word. Many churches continue to this practice of standing to hear God’s Word today.
- Ezra praised God and the people responded by lifting their hands and saying, “Amen! Amen!” (So be it. So be it.) Then they bowed down and worshiped God with their faces on the ground.
- Notice that next the Levites interpreted God’s Word for the people around them. In his Nehemiah Commentary, Warren Wiersbe notes that Hebrew had changed much since the days of Moses. The Levites would explain the text in terminology that people could understand.
- On the 10th day of the 7th month, the Jews celebrated the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, which was ordained for them in Leviticus 16 and 23:26-28.
 - The LORD said to Moses,²⁷ “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the LORD.²⁸ Do not do any work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God. Leviticus 23:26-28
 - Yom Kippur is the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. On this day, the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and make atonement for the sins of the people.
 - 2 goats were used. One was sacrificed to the Lord as a sin offering. The other goat was presented alive before the Lord and sent out into the wilderness as the scapegoat. The scapegoat carried the sins of the people out into the wilderness; their sins were forgiven for another year.
- On the 2nd day of the 7th month, the heads of all the families, the priests, and the Levites gathered around Ezra, who again read from the Torah. On this day, he read from Leviticus 23:22-43, Numbers 29:12-39, or Deuteronomy 16:13-17. All these passages describe the Festival of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths.

- The LORD said to Moses,³⁴ “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Festival of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days.³⁵ The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work.³⁶ For seven days present food offerings to the LORD, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the LORD. It is the closing special assembly; do no regular work. Leviticus 23:33-36
- The Feast of Booths, known as Sukkot, opened with a Sabbath Day and closed with a Sabbath Day. The Jews were to live in temporary shelters which commemorated the shelters their ancestors lived in when God brought them out of Egypt.
- Nehemiah 8 records that this particular celebration of the Feast of Booths had never been this joyous since the time of Joshua, son of Nun.
- Nehemiah 9 records a special assembly of the people. The people gathered, fasted, wore sackcloth, and put dust on their heads to symbolize mourning. What were the people mourning? They mourned their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
 - Nehemiah 9 verses 6-37 comprise a long penitential prayer led by the Levites.
 - At a high level, the prayer has the following parts:
 - Praising God as creator (verse 6)
 - The covenant with Abraham (verses 7-8)
 - The wonderful acts of God in Egypt (verses 9-11)
 - God’s care in the wilderness (verses 12-21)
 - Conquering the Promised Land (verses 22-25)
 - Israel’s unfaithfulness and God’s patience in the Promised Land (verses 26-31)
 - The confession of sin (verses 32-37)

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Nehemiah 8 - 10

Hear the word of the LORD 2 Kings 7:1

1. Read Nehemiah 8:1-8.

- a. What was the significance of the month of the year in the Jewish calendar?

The 7th month of the Jewish calendar, Tishrei, is associated with Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Sukkot (Feast of Booths/Tabernacles), and Simchat Torah. Simchat Torah follows Sukkot and marks the end of the annual public reading of the Torah and commencement of the public reading for the next year.

- b. What did Ezra read?

He read the Book of the Law of Moses.

- c. How did the people respond?

- And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. Nehemiah 8:3

- Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. ⁶ Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Nehemiah 8:5-6

- d. What did the Levites do and why was this important?

- The Levites —Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. Nehemiah 8:7-8
- The Levites were interpreting what Ezra had just read aloud and interpreted for the people at the assembly.

2. Read Nehemiah 8:9-12.

- a. What did Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites tell the people?

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah 8:9

- b. Why do you think the people had been weeping?

Hearing the Law read to them and then understanding the interpretation of the Law made them aware of their sins.

- c. Why did their weeping turn to joy?

Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.”¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, **because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.** Nehemiah 8:10-12

3. Read Nehemiah 8: 13-18.

- a. What important festival did the people learn about?

Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths

- b. What were they instructed to do to celebrate this festival?

and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters”—as it is written. Nehemiah 8:15

- c. How long did they celebrate this festival?

They celebrated for 7 days.

- d. What followed next?

On the 8th day there was an assembly.

4. Read Nehemiah 9:1-3.

- a. What did the people of Judah do next?

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. ² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. ³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God. Nehemiah 9:1-3

- b. What did wearing sackcloth and ashes represent?

Mourning; Acknowledgement of their sins

- c. What is the importance of verse 2?

The Jews and proselytes were separated.

5. Do you think this was the first time the general populace had heard the Book of the Law? Why or why not?

- Certainly it was the 2nd hearing, as they had been gathered for Ezra's reading of the Law in Nehemiah 8. However, it was possible that there were descendants of those left behind when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and took all but the poorest into exile who had never heard the Law.
- In addition, given the depth of the intermarriage issues which Ezra had to confront, particularly among the priests and Levites, that the reading of the Law by the priests and Levites on a regular basis to the exiles is also suspect.

6. Read Nehemiah 9:4-37. This prayer follows the ACTS model for prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Study the prayer and note the key points for each section of the prayer.

- a. Adoration

- Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. Nehemiah 9:5
- You alone are the LORD. Nehemiah 9:6
- You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Nehemiah 9:6

- You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. Nehemiah 9:6
- You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. ⁸ You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. Nehemiah 9:7-8
- You have kept your promise because you are righteous. Nehemiah 9:8
- But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Nehemiah 9:17
- Because of your great compassion Nehemiah 9:19
- But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. Nehemiah 9:31
- our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love Nehemiah 9:32
- In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully Nehemiah 9:33
- your great goodness Nehemiah 9:35

b. Confession

- But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. Nehemiah 9:16
- They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. Nehemiah 9:17
- even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, ‘This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,’ or when they committed awful blasphemies. Nehemiah 9:18

- But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. Nehemiah 9:26
- They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. ²⁷ So you delivered them into the hands of their enemies, who oppressed them. Nehemiah 9:26-27
- But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. Nehemiah 9:28
- You warned them in order to turn them back to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. Nehemiah 9:29
- They sinned against your ordinances, of which you said, ‘The person who obeys them will live by them. Nehemiah 9:29
- Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. Nehemiah 9:29
- Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighboring peoples. Nehemiah 9:30
- we acted wickedly. Nehemiah 9:33
- Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our ancestors did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep. Nehemiah 9:34
- Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways. Nehemiah 9:35

c. Thanksgiving

- You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. ¹⁰ You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. ¹¹ You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. ¹² By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take. Nehemiah 9:9-12
- You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. Nehemiah 9:13
- You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. ¹⁴ You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. Nehemiah 9:13-14
- In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; Nehemiah 9:15
- you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them. Nehemiah 9:15
- Therefore you did not desert them Nehemiah 9:17
- you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. Nehemiah 9:19
- You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. Nehemiah 9:20
- You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. Nehemiah 9:20
- For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen. Nehemiah 9:21
- You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. Nehemiah 9:22

- You made their children as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their parents to enter and possess.²⁴ Their children went in and took possession of the land. Nehemiah 9:23-24
- You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you gave the Canaanites into their hands, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased.²⁵ They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness. Nehemiah 9:24-25
- But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies. Nehemiah 9:27
- And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time. Nehemiah 9:28
- For many years you were patient with them. Nehemiah 9:30
- By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Nehemiah 9:30
- But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them Nehemiah 9:31

d. Supplication

- do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our priests and prophets, on our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. Nehemiah 9:32
- Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. Nehemiah 9:37
- We are in great distress. Nehemiah 9:37

7. Read Nehemiah 9:38 – 10:29.

a. Which people groups are part of the binding agreement?

The people who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples, the leaders, the Levites, the priests, the gatekeepers, the musicians, the Temple servants, their wives, their sons, their daughters, the nobles

- b. With what 2 things did they bind themselves to the agreement? Why?
- A curse and an oath
 - The oath was an agreement before all the constituents of the binding agreement, and it was made before God.
 - The curse outlined what would happen if they failed to uphold the binding agreement.
- c. What were the basic parts of this binding agreement?
to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.
Nehemiah 10:29

8. Read Nehemiah 10:30-39. In addition to the binding agreement, the people also made some specific promises. List each promise and determine if it is covered in the law of the Pentateuch (first 5 books of the Bible) by noting the applicable scripture(s). (Note: some of the promises are NOT covered by these laws.) If you think this promise is an expansion of an existing Pentateuch law, explain your thoughts.

Promise	Covered in the Law?	Expansion of the Law?
We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons. Nehemiah 10:30	Yes; Deuteronomy 7:3	
When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Nehemiah 10:31	Yes; Exodus 20:8	Yes, as not all holy days were Sabbath days

<p>Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts. Nehemiah 10:31</p>	<p>Yes; Leviticus 25: 3-5 (7th year); Deuteronomy 15:1 (debts)</p>	
<p>We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God. Nehemiah 10:32-33</p>	<p>Yes; Exodus 30:13 (which requires half a shekel; a third of a shekel may have been the appropriate amount for a Persian monetary system.)</p>	
<p>We—the priests, the Levites and the people— have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. Nehemiah 10:34</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree. Nehemiah 10:35</p>	<p>Yes; Exodus 23:19</p>	<p>Yes, because the Exodus passage only covers first fruits from the soil</p>

<p>we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. Nehemiah 10:36</p>	<p>Yes; Exodus 13:12-13</p>	
<p>we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. ³⁸ A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. ³⁹ The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept. Nehemiah 10:37-39</p>	<p>Yes; Exodus 23:19 (first fruits) Yes; Numbers 18:21(tithes)</p>	<p>Yes, because the Exodus passage only covers first fruits from the soil.</p> <p>Yes. The tithes belong to the Levites. Here, they are collecting the tithes as well and a priest must accompany the Levites.</p>

Nehemiah 8 - 10

Themes of Nehemiah

- In Nehemiah Chapters 8 – 10, We See the Key Themes of Renewal and Recommitment Displayed
 - Nehemiah Renewed the People's Commitment to God, to His Law, and to His Commandments
 - The People Recommitted Themselves to God's Covenant, to Support the Temple, to Keep the Sabbath, and to Divorce Their Foreign Wives

Nehemiah Chapter 8

- “Ezra Reads the Law” in the NIV
- Chapter 8 Takes Place Over an Entire Month
- The Chapter Opens on the 1st Day of the 7th Month
- The 7th Month Marks the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah; Marks the Beginning of the High Holy Days
- The 1st Day: The Feast of Trumpets
- Leviticus 23:23-25
- Sound the Shofar

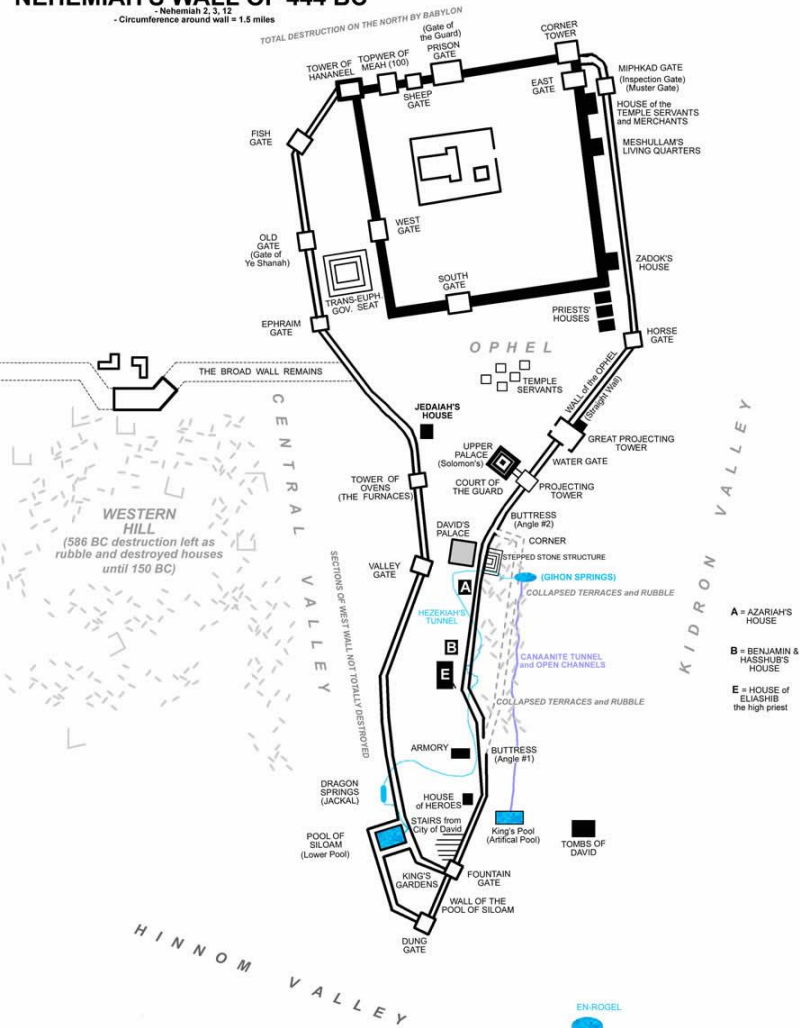


Nehemiah Chapter 8

- Verse 1 References “the Book of the Law of Moses”
- Probably the Entire Scroll of the Torah, the 1st 5 Books of the Hebrew Bible
- On the 1st Day of the 7th Month, Ezra Read the Scroll From Daybreak Until Noon
- It Is Likely He Read From Deuteronomy
- Notice the Assembly Includes Men, Women, and Children Old Enough to Understand, Seated in the Square Before the Water Gate

NEHEMIAH'S WALL OF 444 BC

- Nehemiah 2, 3, 12
- Circumference around wall = 1.5 miles



Nehemiah's Walls of 444 BC; copyright:
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Nehemiah Chapter 8

- Ezra Stood on a Raised Platform
- The People Stood to Hear God's Word; a Modern-Day Tradition in Many Churches
- Ezra Praised God and the People Responded With "Amen! Amen!"; Then They Bowed to the Ground in Worship
- The Levites Interpreted in Terminology the People Could Understand

The Day of Atonement

- Celebrated on the 10th Day of the 7th Month
- Yom Kippur
- Leviticus 16 and Leviticus 23:26-28
- The Holiest Day on the Jewish Calendar
- The High Priest Could Enter the Holy of Holies to Make Atonement for the Sins of the People
- One Goat Was Sacrificed to the Lord as a Sin Offering
- The Other Goat Was Sent Out Into the Wilderness
- The Scapegoat Carried the Sins of the People; Their Sins Were Forgiven for Another Year



Nehemiah 8

- On the 2nd Day of the 7th Month, the Heads of All the Families, the Priests, and the Levites Gathered Around Ezra, Who Again Read From the Torah
- He Read From Leviticus 23:22-43, Numbers 29:12-39, or Deuteronomy 16:13-17; All Passages Describe the Festival of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths
- This Feast Opened and Closed with A Sabbath Day
- The Jews Lived in Temporary Shelters to Commemorate the Shelters Their Ancestors Lived in When God Brought Them Out of Egypt
- The Celebration Had Never Been This Joyous, Since Joshua, Son of Nun



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Nehemiah 9

- Records a Special Assembly of the People
- They Gathered, Fasted, Wore Sackcloth and Ashes to Symbolize Mourning
- They Mourned Their Sins and the Sins of their Ancestors
- Verses 6-37 Comprise a Long Penitential Prayer Led by the Levites

Nehemiah 9

- Praising God as Creator (Verse 6)
- The Covenant with Abraham (Verses 7-8)
- The Wonderful Acts of God in Egypt (Verses 9-11)
- God's Care in the Wilderness (Verses 12-21)
- Conquering the Promised Land (Verses 22-25)
- Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Patience in the Promised Land (Verses 26-31)
- The Confession of Sin (Verses 32-37)

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