

Restoring a Nation, Nehemiah 9

Setting the Stage:

- The northern ten tribes of Israel were annihilated by Assyria in 722 B.C. for idolatry and faithlessness;
- In 605 and 597 B.C. the two southern tribes of Judah were conquered by and taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon in two deportations; then in 586 B.C. Jerusalem was razed and the Temple was destroyed; a third group was deported; and, as predicted by Jeremiah, they spent 70 years in captivity;
- Then, Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian (of the Medo-Persian Empire) overwhelmed Babylon and began allowing *the remnant* of God's people to return to their homeland in what turned out to be three groups (under Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar, and Jeshua in 515 B.C., under the primary leadership of Ezra in 458 B.C., and finally under Nehemiah in 44 B.C.);
- With the first wave of returned exiles, the Temple was partially rebuilt and then completed in 516 B.C.; with the second group under Ezra's leadership, *spiritual reforms* were enacted (foreign wives and children were put away); and finally with Nehemiah and the third group of returning exiles, the walls around Jerusalem were rebuilt and more *spiritual reforms* were enacted.

But rebuilding physical structures, and even reading the Law and worshipping God weren't enough of themselves. All of which leads us to our text of Neh.9. Let's read it together, and then we'll make a few brief observations that (to me at least) relate to us more specifically. But as we read the text, pay particular attention to the *nature* of God, the *confession* of sins both *past* and *present*, and the *justice* of God's judgment(s).

Necessary steps for the *spiritual restoration* of a nation:

- 1. A correct view of the nature and characteristics of God must be attained. To be *spiritually restored*, a nation must *know* and *praise* the true God, vv.5-15.**
On this side of eternity, while bound by temporal knowledge and experience, man cannot *fully know* God, cf. 1Cor.13:12. But for spiritual restoration to take place: His *eternal nature* and *glorious name* must be *exalted*, v.5; His *sovereignty* and *creatorship* must be recognized and acknowledged, v.6a; and His *supremacy* must be accepted, v.6b; His *faithfulness* and *righteousness* must be accredited, v.8b; His *awareness* of and *care* and *concern* for His people must be conceded, v.9; His *power* must be accepted, vv.10-11; His *leadership* must be recognized and followed, v.12; His *laws*, *statutes*, and *commandments* must be known and obeyed, vv.13-14; His *provisions* must be acknowledged and received with gratitude, v.15; His *forgiveness*, *graciousness*, *forbearance*, and *compassion lovingkindness* must be understood and attributed, vv.17,19,27,28,30,31,32a.

While no person or nation *fully* understands God while in the flesh, surely one must recognize and acknowledge His "*eternal power and divine nature*" (Rom.1:20) in a non-blasphemous concept of Him for any semblance of spiritual restoration to take place!

2. **Past/historical sins must be confessed, vv.16-32.** A nation that is unwilling to *look back* and confess *past sins* cannot move *forward* to *spiritual restoration*. It must, then, admit its: *arrogance, stubbornness, and refusal to listen* to God, v.16; *failure to remember* God's *past wondrous deeds*, vv.17a,19-25; and its own *stubborn rebellion*, v.17b; *idolatry* and *blasphemies*, v.18; *rebellious disobedience*, vv.26-29; *failure to serve* God or *turn from evil deeds*, v.35.

A nation that is unable or unwilling to *look back* and admit and confess its *spiritual arrogance, idolatry, and rebellion* against God cannot *look forward* to *spiritual restoration and fellowship* with Him.

3. **Present sins must be confessed, vv.33b-37.** While they did acknowledge and confess the sins of *their fathers*, they did not do so to the exclusion of *their own* iniquities and culpability, cp. Ezk.18:2,19ff. Nor did they blame their *current situation* on their fathers' *past sins*. Instead, they confessed their own: *wickedness*, v.33b; *disobedience to and ignoring of* God's *commandments and admonishments*, v.34; and *sins*, v.37.

It is always a dangerous thing to *blame others* for our own plight. There is usually plenty of *stubbornness and unrepentant hearts*; for "*the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things*," cf. Rom.2:1-6. No nation can *move forward* to *spiritual restoration* while only *looking back* and *blaming their forefathers*, Ezk.18:20.

4. **Recognize and acknowledge the justice of God- even in great distress, vv.33-37.** Note that: God's *faithfulness* was answered with *wickedness*, v.33b; God's *provision of law/commandments* to guide and *admonish* was met with *disobedience and ignoring*, v.34; God's *goodness* in the *provision of a broad and rich land* was recompensed with *disobedience and lack of repentance*, v.35; therefore, they became *slaves to kings* who *took their produce* and *ruled* (unjustly) *over them* so that they were *in great distress*, v.37. And why did all of this happen? The answer is embedded in v.37 also, "***because of our sins***." God is not, nor has ever been, or will ever be, unjust! They confessed the *sins of their fathers*, but did not blame them for their current predicament. They acknowledged the *greatness, goodness, and past provisions of God*, but did not blame or charge Him with injustice for their current predicament. They knew and confessed that their present national *great distress* was just, and deserved.

Conclusions:

- **Our concept and view of God as a nation has been eroded or eliminated. We must correct it to know (to the degree that we can) God and be restored to Him.**
- **Our forefathers have sinned, and we need to acknowledge and confess it.**
- **Our current national great distress is a result of ignoring and disobeying God. As a nation, we must give heed to, learn, and obey His laws or we will all perish off this good land that he has given us, Josh.23:11-13,15-16.**
- **God is just- always. Never believe for a moment that He is anything less.**