

## Chapter Nine

### PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. What do you suppose brought the people to the humility and confession described in this chapter?
2. Who is the more prominent in this chapter, Ezra or Nehemiah? How do you explain this?
3. What were the major points in the Levites' prayer?
4. Why do you suppose so much time was taken up tracing the history of Israel?

### OUTLINE

- B. The Levites lead in a psalm of confession.
1. Introduction: The occasion on which the prayer was offered is described (vss. 1-5a).
  2. God is praised for his power in creation (vss. 5b-6).
  3. His goodness to Abraham (vss. 7-8).
  4. His hand in the Exodus (vss. 9-15).
  5. Israel's rebellion in the Wilderness (vss. 16-21).
  6. God's compassion takes them into Canaan (vss. 22-25).
  7. Disobedience, punishment, and repentance characterize the period of judges and kings (vss. 26-31).
  8. Prayer for present mercy (vss. 32-38).

### TEXT AND VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENT

- B. The Levites lead in a psalm of confession.
1. Introduction: The occasion on which the prayer was offered is described.

#### TEXT, 9:1-5a

- 1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dirt upon them.
- 2 And the descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities

of their fathers.

- 3 While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.
- 4 Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.
- 5a Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever!

### COMMENT

A quick look through this chapter will reveal the startling fact that neither Ezra nor Nehemiah is mentioned in it. This is another evidence that the real stars of this performance, the heroes on this occasion, were the people. They had initiated it in 8:1 by their request to hear the reading of God's Law. Throughout the events of the seventh month they have been the center of attention. Now, without mention of a great name who ordered their response they came together once more.

*Verse 1* reinforces this impression in another way. Their assembly was on a day which fits no requirement of the Law at all; that is, they met because they wanted to, not because of any command or obligation. They had already had nine or ten days of Scripture reading and worship, and they still would not go home. The twenty-fourth day does allow for one day's rest since the close of the previous chapter. Fasting, being clothed in sackcloth, and with dirt upon them would be progressively more intense signs of grief and repentance.

In *verse 2* the separation from foreigners was a ritual symbol of their purification. It portrayed in action what their shunning marriage to foreigners was designed to accomplish. Their standing and confessing may be a summary of the rest of the chapter.

In *verse 3* the day is divided into fourths and the reading continues for one fourth of the day, with confession filling another;

that also is probably a summary of the next verses. We have here a slight problem is arithmetic: how long is a quarter of a day? If we think of the day as opposed to the night, it would be three hours; but if we think of a calendar day, it is six. Since only two quarters are accounted for, we assume that they were sleeping the other half. Also, in 8:3 the action had begun at daybreak and continued to noon, with a new set of activities apparently taking up the rest of the day. We would assume, then, that reading filled six hours, and confession and worship occupied substantially the rest of the daylight hours.

*Verse 4* returns to the scene in 8:2, with the platform above the people occupied by Levites; we assume that all the names in this list are Levites, as they are in the next verse. A prayer follows, but is not preserved for us; evidently it was a spontaneous one.

*Verse 5a* gives a second list, with some duplications. Perhaps those in *verse 4* presided in the morning, and those in *verse 5* in the afternoon or second session. The people were then called on to stand in preparation for the prayer that follows. The Levites who were presiding may have read it in unison, or one may have voiced it as the representative of the group.

## 2. God is praised for His power in creation.

### TEXT, 9:5b-6

5b O may Thy glorious name be blessed  
 And exalted above all blessing and praise!

6 "Thou alone art the LORD.  
 Thou has made the heavens,  
 The heaven of heavens with all their host,  
 The earth and all that is on it,  
 The seas and all that is in them.  
 Thou dost give life to all of them  
 And the heavenly host bows down before Thee.

## COMMENT

Here begins the longest prayer recorded in the Bible: longer than either Jesus' prayer in John 17 or Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple in I Ki. 8. Its author is not named, but Ezra is most commonly thought to have composed it. The *Anchor Bible*<sup>1</sup> has an extensive chart of verbal and thought parallels in the O.T. to this prayer verse by verse. The author was obviously immersed in the Biblical tradition; the things he mentions are exactly the historical events recorded in the O.T. We may conclude that the Book which he had was essentially the same as the one which we have, up to that point.

The prayer begins (*verse 5b*) with praise to God. There is a difference between thanksgiving to God for what he has done and praise to Him for who He is: for His majesty and power and glory, and His mighty acts. This along with *verse 6*, is praise. The reference to God's name is to His character and person: "name" in the O.T. means "personality," or "person": see the Word Studies that follow.

In *verse 6*, the first reference to the heavenly host is to the stars, all in their orderly ranks; the second reference is to His angels, all the heavenly beings.

## 3. God is exalted for His goodness to Abraham.

## TEXT, 9:7-8

- 7 "Thou art the LORD God,  
 Who chose Abram  
 And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees,  
 And gave him the name Abraham.
- 8 "And Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee,  
 And didst make a covenant with him  
 To give him the land of the Canaanite,

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1. *Anchor Bible*, *op. cit.*, p. 167ff.

Of the Hittite and the Amorite,  
 Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite—  
 To give it to his descendants.  
 And Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise,  
 For Thou art righteous.

### COMMENT

History was of great significance to Israel's religion. The people believed, on good authority, that they could see evidence of God's taking action in their affairs in actual observed events. Faith, in Scripture terms, is always rooted in history. Judaism and Christianity alone are regarded as historical religions, whose truth can be measured by verification of the events which gave them their character. Therefore this psalm moves into a recital of that history.

Without a Divinely inspired interpretation and record of our nation's history, we may still be profited by recalling and recounting His favors to us.

*Verse 7:* The history of the people of Israel starts with Abraham. There might also be an implied parallel between God's bringing Abraham out of the land of the Chaldeans and His recent delivery of Israel, Abraham's descendants, from the same land.

*Verse 8* records God's generosity and faithfulness to Abraham and to his descendants. Of course He would keep His promise, because He is righteous: this is the keynote of the prayer.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. God's hand is seen in the Exodus.

#### TEXT, 9:9-15

9 "Thou didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,  
 And didst hear their cry by the Red Sea.

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2. Adenay, *Expositor's Bible*, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

- 10 "Then Thou didst perform signs and wonders against Pharaoh,  
Against all his servants and all the people of his land;  
For Thou didst know that they acted arrogantly toward them,  
And didst make a name for Thyself as it is this day.
- 11 "And Thou didst divide the sea before them,  
So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground;  
And their pursuers Thou didst hurl into the depths,  
Like a stone into raging waters.
- 12 "And with a pillar of cloud Thou didst lead them by day,  
And with a pillar of fire by night  
To light for them the way  
In which they were to go.
- 13 "Then Thou didst come down on Mount Sinai,  
And didst speak with them from heaven;  
Thou didst give to them just ordinances and true laws,  
Good statutes and commandments.
- 14 "So Thou didst make known to them Thy holy sabbath,  
And didst lay down for them commandments, statutes, and  
law,  
Through Thy servant Moses.
- 15 "Thou didst provide bread from heaven for them for their  
hunger,  
Thou didst bring forth water from a rock for them for their  
thirst,  
And Thou didst tell them to enter in order to possess  
The land which Thou didst swear to give them.

### COMMENT

As the Cross and Resurrection are the focal points of the N.T., so the Exodus, the giving of the Law, and the entrance into Canaan constitute the central event of the O.T. Whenever Israel praised God for His acts in history, in the Psalms or elsewhere, this would have to be mentioned. So it is the largest topic of this prayer.

The deliverance from Egypt occupies *verses 9-12*.

*Verse 9* recalls the words of Ex. 3:7, with other acts following.

In *verse 10*, Pharaoh's arrogance is paralleled by Ex. 15:7. God's making a name for Himself illustrates an idea in the Word Studies under NAME, at the end of this chapter.

In *verse 11*, even the imagery of the stone is taken from Moses' victory song, Ex. 15:5, 10.

*Verses 13, 14* rehearse the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai.

The statement in *verse 14* that God revealed His Holy Sabbath at that time is informative. It reinforces Dt. 5:15, which says that the purpose of the Sabbath was to commemorate their release from slavery in Egypt; their enjoying rest was an appropriate symbol. There is no mention of Sabbath keeping in the O.T. before that event. It is true that God Himself rested on the seventh creative day, and He blessed and sanctified it; but there is no suggestion that He required its observance by man until Moses' time, as *verse 14* says.

The bearing that this has on Seventh Dayism is clear. The Sabbath was not an eternal, unchanging law, but a national celebration of Independence. The Lord's Day celebrates another event, in another manner.

*Verse 15* bespeaks the provision which God made for His people in that circumstance: the manna, the water from the rock, and the instruction for possession of the land. We think of our bread from heaven (Jn. 6:48-51), and of our rock, which is Christ (I Cor. 10:4).

### 5. God blesses Israel even during her rebellion in the Wilderness.

#### TEXT, 9:16-21

- 16 "But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly;  
They became stubborn and would not listen to Thy command-  
ments.
- 17 "And they refused to listen,  
And did not remember Thy wondrous deeds which

- Thou hadst performed among them;  
So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return  
to their slavery in Egypt.  
But Thou art a God of forgiveness,  
Gracious and compassionate,  
Slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness;  
And Thou didst not forsake them.
- 18 "Even when they made for themselves  
A calf of molten metal  
And said, 'This is your God  
Who brought you up from Egypt;'  
And committed great blasphemies,
- 19 Thou, in Thy great compassion,  
Didst not forsake them in the wilderness;  
The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day,  
To guide them on their way,  
Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in  
which they were to go.
- 20 "And Thou didst give Thy good Spirit to instruct them,  
Thy manna Thou didst not withhold from their mouth,  
And Thou didst give them water for their thirst.
- 21 "Indeed, forty years Thou didst provide for them in the  
wilderness and they were not in want,  
Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell.

### COMMENT

Twice in these verses the pattern of Israel's rebellion and God's graciousness are repeated.

In *verses 16, 17* their stubbornness and short memory caused them to appoint a leader to replace Moses, God's man, in order to lead them back to Egypt. Num. 14:4 records their threat to do this; the information given here, that they had actually appointed someone is a supplement to it. Their arrogance made them guilty of the same sin as the Egyptians. Yet God's graciousness and forgiveness prevented His forsaking them.



Then again in *verses 18-21* they rebelled but God was compassionate.

*Verse 18* portrays the epitome of the rebelliousness. Not only did they make a forbidden idol and worship it, but they credited it instead of God for their deliverance from Egypt! That is incomprehensible.

*Verses 19-21* list God's favors to them despite their sins; His presence vouched for by the pillar and the cloud, guiding and lighting their way; His Spirit of instruction; the manna and the water; protection from wear for their clothing and their feet.

## 6. God's compassion takes them to Canaan.

### TEXT, 9:22-25

- 22 "Thou didst also give them kingdoms and peoples,  
And Thou didst allot them to them as a boundary.  
And they took possession of the land of Sihon the king of  
Heshbon,  
And the land of Og the king of Bashan.
- 23 "And Thou didst make their sons numerous as the stars of  
heaven,  
And Thou didst bring them into the land  
Which Thou hadst told their fathers to enter and possess.
- 24 "So their sons entered and possessed the land.  
And Thou didst subdue before them the inhabitants of the  
land, the Canaanites,  
And Thou didst give them into their hand, with their kings,  
and the peoples of the land,  
To do with them as they desired.
- 25 "And they captured fortified cities and a fertile land.  
They took possession of houses full of every good thing,  
Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves,  
Fruit trees in abundance.  
So they ate, were filled, and grew fat,  
And reveled in Thy great goodness.

## COMMENT

Israel's entrance into the Promised Land came in two stages.

*Verse 22* describes the conquest of the East Bank. Sihon and the Amorites inhabited the land by the Dead Sea; Heshbon was one of their cities. Og and the people of Bashan were closer to the Sea of Galilee. Psalm 135:11 is another example of how this event was impressed on their minds in relation to their entry into the land.

In *verse 24* they go on to the West Bank.

*Verses 23, 25* fit both situations. Their growing fat, in *verse 25*, speaks of their prosperity; in a culture where hunger was the rule, fat was beautiful (Prov. 13:4). The word "revel" in Hebrew has the name, Eden, in it; it speaks of delight and pleasantness. Under God, their Eden was being restored.

We realize that the two words, "fat" and "reveled," are taken by many as evidence of apostasy; but the phrase, "in Thy great goodness," suggests a more positive interpretation. Even good things can be used in excess; here we see them as goods; in other contexts the first term especially can be associated with excess. The transition to evil comes more naturally with the "But" of the next verse.

### 7. Disobedience, punishment, and repentance characterize the period of judges and kings.

#### TEXT, 9:26-31

- 26 "But they became disobedient and rebelled against Thee,  
 And cast Thy law behind their backs  
 And killed Thy prophets who had admonished them  
 So that they might return to Thee,  
 And they committed great blasphemies.
- 27 "Therefore Thou didst deliver them into the hand of their  
 oppressors who oppressed them,  
 But when they cried to Thee in the time of their distress,  
 Thou didst hear from heaven, and according to Thy great  
 compassion

- Thou didst give them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors.
- 28 “But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before Thee; Therefore Thou didst abandon them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to Thee, Thou didst hear from heaven, And many times Thou didst rescue them according to Thy compassion,
- 29 And admonished them in order to turn them back to Thy law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Thy commandments but sinned against Thy ordinances, By which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen.
- 30 “However, Thou didst bear with them for many years, And admonished them by Thy Spirit through Thy prophets, Yet they would not give ear. Therefore Thou didst give them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.
- 31 “Nevertheless, in Thy great compassion Thou didst not make an end of them or forsake them, For Thou art a gracious and compassionate God.

### COMMENT

*Verses 26-29* relate particularly to the rule by judges, though the pattern is the same when the kings ruled. The cycle of disobedience, suffering oppression, and God’s hearing and delivering occurs frequently in the book of Judges. The killing of the prophets (*vs. 26*) may raise eyebrows, but there were prophets in that period (Jgs. 6:8; in I Sam. 3:20, Samuel is called a prophet; I Sam. 9:9 indicates they had existed before under the title of “seers”). If they existed, it is a natural assumption that some of them would have been killed.

The “many times” of *verse 28* is an obvious reference to events during Judges. Even without the repetition indicated by that

phrase, there are three cycles of evil (vs. 26, "But they became disobedient"; vs. 28, "they did evil again"; vs. 29, "yet they acted arrogantly") each followed immediately by God's gracious deliverance, if we look ahead to *verse 30*.

The reference to the ordinances in *verse 29* is revealing; "By which if a man observes them he shall live." This does not refer directly to life hereafter, but to survival in this world. The keeping of the laws really did add to their longevity as compared to their contemporaries.

*Verses 30, 31* relate more fully to the Kingdom Period: God's long forbearance, His urgings through the prophets, their deafness, the inevitable Captivity, and God's compassionate preservation and deliverance of His people are all here.

## 8. Prayer for present mercy.

### TEXT, 9:32-38

- 32 "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who dost keep covenant and lovingkindness, Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before Thee, Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and on all Thy people, From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day.
- 33 "However, Thou art just in all that hast come upon us; For Thou hast dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.
- 34 "For our kings, our leaders, our priests, and our fathers have not kept Thy law  
Or paid attention to Thy commandments and Thy admonitions with which Thou has admonished them.
- 35 "But they, in their own kingdom,  
With Thy great goodness which Thou didst give them,  
With the broad and rich land which Thou didst set before them,  
Did not serve Thee or turn from their evil deeds.
- 36 "Behold, we are slaves today,

And as to the land which Thou didst give to our fathers to eat  
of its fruit and its bounty,

Behold, we are slaves on it.

37 "And its abundant produce is for the kings

Whom Thou hast set over us because of our sins;

They also rule over our bodies

And over our cattle as they please,

So we are in great distress.

38 "Now because of all this

We are making an agreement in writing;

And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders,  
our Levites and our priests."

### COMMENT

The "Now" of *verse 32* brought them up to the present. Three attributes of God are given: majesty (great, mighty, awesome); faithfulness (who dost keep covenant); mercy (and loving kindness).<sup>3</sup> The reference to the kings of Assyria (there were at least six) reverently omits accusing God for this, though He had said (Isa. 10:5) that He was using them as the rod of His anger against His people. *Verses 33-35* use this information in justifying God for His hand in these acts of punishment and correction.

*Verses 36, 37* describe their condition as of that day. Note the contrast between the "they" of *verse 35* and the "we" of *verse 36*.

*Verse 36* pungently reminds us that they were not entirely free. The Persians were still their overlords, though they had been permitted to return to their homeland.

*Verse 37* speaks of the nature of that burden. A certain part of their crops went to the Persian rulers; a certain number of their offspring were taken into Persian taskwork and military service; and everyone in fact was physically subject to the rule of these foreigners. They felt the burden of God's judgment.

*Verse 38* gives the outcome of their prayer: they have determined

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3. Adenay, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

to place their names on a document pledging their loyalty to God, as will be further described in the next chapter. A conclusion which spells out and calls for immediate action is always effective.

## WORD STUDIES

**NAME** (vs. 5, Shem): basically it means a sign, monument, or memorial of a person, thing, or event. This word is translated "memorial" in Isa. 55:13. But the emphasis is on the person or event of which it is only the sign. To do something in someone's name is to act by his authority (Ex. 5:23). To know someone by name suggests acquaintance with him personally (Ex. 33:12). To make oneself a name indicates fame and renown (II Sam. 7:9); conversely, to have no name is to be a nobody (Job 30:8); a good name signified a good reputation or character (Prov. 22:1); the destruction of one's name meant that his person and the memory of him would be no more (Dt. 9:14).

God's name, then, is His person, His authority, the knowledge of Him, His fame or glory, His character, the memory of all that He has done.

**WORSHIP** (vs. 3); **BOW DOWN** (vs. 6): these are the same word. It contains three ideas; (1) sink down, bow down, fall prostrate, do honor or reverence to someone whether to an equal or to a superior; (2) hence, to worship or adore; (3) therefore, to do homage or yield allegiance to someone.

Worship is incomplete without commitment.

## SUMMARY

After a day's break the people assembled once more with the marks of humility and purity. The Law was again read, and the Levites led them in a prayer of confession.

The prayer began with praise to the incomparable God of creation who had chosen Abraham and had covenanted to give him and his descendants the land on which the people were standing.

They reviewed God's hand in the Exodus events: miraculous deliverance from Egypt, giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, directions to enter Canaan. When the Israelites were stubborn and disobedient, God forgave. When they made a golden calf to be their god, He was compassionate and continued to guide and provide for them. Eventually God enabled them to defeat Sihon and Og and take their territory on the east of the Jordan: then to go into the land of the Canaanites. They took over cities already built and farmlands already under cultivation. Then followed alternating periods of rebellion, oppression, repentance, and God's gracious deliverance, through the time of judges, kings, and even captivity. Now they recognized the justness of what God had done; they saw the bonds which still tied them to Persia; and their leaders signed their names on behalf of all the people to a document to be described following.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who led the people in their prayer?
2. What is the character which Israel consistently demonstrated?
3. What character traits did God show?
4. What was the immediate result of the prayer?