



HG240: Nehemiah - Be Determined  
***Let Us Worship And Bow Down***

Nehemiah 9:1-37

Home Group Study Notes

22 May 2022 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and other  
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

Share something that you had to spend a great deal of  
time preparing for and what did you do in order to pre-  
pare?



**Looking Upwards** (10 mins)  
*Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs  
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using  
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



## HG240: Nehemiah - Be Determined *Let Us Worship And Bow Down*

Nehemiah 9:1-37

Home Group Sermon Notes

22 May 2022 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction** In ch8, we saw how Nehemiah began to restore the worshipping life of Jerusalem. Nehemiah, as we've come to expect, led the way, but it was the people who requested that the Word of God be read to them. And it was this Word that became a revealing mirror, exposing their disobedience and disloyalty. However, whilst God's word is a word that often wounds, it is also a word that also heals. I have three points this morning!

**The Greatness of God, vs1–5a** The people listened to the Word of God and responded to its message by confessing their sins, vs2, they: *confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers*. And they did one other thing, vs3: *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*.

This prayer teaches us what true confession is, as we notice how specific they are: *We did wrong. You have acted faithfully but we did wrong. We did not pay attention to your laws. We did not hear your words, etc*. Some Christians think they are confessing when they say: *Lord, if I've injured any soul today, If I've caused some foot to go astray, If I've wandered from your path, dear Lord, forgive me!* But that's not confession, its negotiation, if not denial! There is no *if* in true confession. We do not say: *If I did this we say, Lord, I did it. I failed. I turned aside. I forgot your Word. I walked in my own wilful way*. Then God hears, forgives and restores. That is his gracious nature.

When the Israelites prayed, they fasted, and they wept. They asked for mercy for what they had done. They didn't blame any foreigners or their enemies (despite been taken to Babylon as slaves) and they didn't seek to apportion blame for their situation. And that's a great lesson we can learn, isn't it? They kept it all strictly within the family of Israel - sometimes some things are better dealt with 'in house' aren't they, rather than involving those outside. We don't wash our 'dirty lined' in public!

This is clearly a time of sober self-judgement in Jerusalem. It's a time when the people expressed their feelings of shame and grief. Feasting turned into fasting; they began to wear sackcloth and placed ashes on their heads to symbolise their inner sense of desolation. The people in Jerusalem, just as they did in ch8, presented their case to God corporately. The whole community gathered together to pray. They had a desire to spend time in the presence of God and in prayer.

I'm sure you've heard the saying that: *You can tell the popularity of the church by the attendance at the morning services. You can tell the popularity of the vicar by the attendance at the evening services. And you can tell the popularity of God by the attendance at the church prayer meeting.* I'll let you draw your own conclusions.

Now, I'm not suggesting that people are not praying, because that's simply not true. People are praying together in House Groups on Zoom and in many other ways. But what I am saying is that we don't seem to have a desire to meet together as a church family, to pray. We've talked about this since I arrived at DCC and Leadership Team. We've tried different formats and times but we're still in the same position when I arrived in 2008.

In her book: *The Prayer Saturated Church* Cheryl Sachs has several suggestions which 'set apart' a praying church, which are well worth considering:

- 1) *Its members have a strong devotional life and invest time praying for others.*
- 2) *They understand who God is and how they can relate to Him through prayer.*
- 3) *Leaders model the importance of prayer before the congregation.*
- 4) *Prayer permeates church life and is not viewed as another activity.*
- 5) *A high priority is placed on corporate prayer meetings.*
- 6) *Investing time in God's presence results in humility, unity, and Christ likeness.*
- 7) *The most distinguishing mark is that the presence of God fills His house.*

**The Goodness of God, vs5b-30** Vs5b-30 records the longest prayer in the Bible. We don't have time to go through it all in any great depth - you can do this at home (if you haven't read it already). However, we can get a broad picture of how the Israelites prayed and we see how, as they pray, they grasp a greater vision of God's nature and character as they reflect on the God of their history.

It's not clear whether Nehemiah or Ezra prayed this prayer but it's a prayer that expresses much of their experience of, and thankfulness to, God's goodness and faithfulness. It's a brilliant mosaic of Biblical images, quotations, recollections and phrases and shows a deep knowledge, and understanding, of scripture.

The Bible is given to us not only so that we can learn about God, but also to inspire our conversation as we talk with him. There are times in all our lives when we can't fully articulate how we are feeling and what we want to say. We struggle to find the right words to pray. We can't do any worse than use scripture to focus our thoughts on what to pray. Because the Bible is God's inspired word, we can't hope to find better words to express exactly what we want to say in prayer - try it sometime, it works! The Psalms are a great place to start.

In vs5b-6 God is praised as the creator and maker of everything. In vs7-8, they praise God as the one who gives undeserved blessings to whoever he chooses - just as he made his covenant with Abraham. Then in vs9-12, they praised God as the great deliverer from sin and slavery, as they remembered their deliverance from Egypt through the Red Sea and God's guidance by cloud and fire in the desert. Vs13-15, they praise him as the provider of wisdom and the necessities of life, through the Ten Commandments, manna from heaven and water from the rock. Here we see something of God's providential care of his own. God meets their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs. He taught his people how to live in the midst of great wickedness.

God has given us this wonderful book, His word that teaches us the rules of life, of health, of salvation, of deliverance and all that we need to resist the temptations around us.

Vs16-17a takes up the theme of confession because of the arrogance and rebellion of their ancestors. When we rebel against God, we invariably go back to the things we were once involved in - that's what Israel did. They actually wanted to go back to Egypt and conveniently forgot about the bondage and slavery behind them because they longed for the sensual pleasures that Egypt had to offer.

There follows a wonderful word of praise in vs17b-18, *But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.* God is always described in the OT as a God of loving care and compassion. He waits patiently while people go through their trials, hoping they will learn lessons along the way. Even though the Israelites blasphemed God by worshipping a golden calf, he spared them. Then there follows another period of confession, vs22-25, centred around their life in the promised land of Canaan, their conquests and their achievements - by God's hand. But vs26-27: *they were disobedient and rebelled ... and in your compassion, you delivered them time after time.* What a marvellous picture of the continuing patience of God!

**The Grace of God, vs31-37** God was good to His people even though they were not good to Him. He sent His prophets, but they were ignored vs29-30, but God still didn't abandon them vs31. The closing paragraph, beginning with vs32, brings their history down to their own time. They have been talking about *they* and *them*. Now we read about *we* and *our* as they begin to look at their own generation.

Vs36-37 tells us what it was that caused them to mourn and fast and to confess their sins. Not only did they confess their own sins, they confessed the sins of their father's as well. One thing I've noticed about the OT prophets, Jeremiah, Daniel etc. is how often they align themselves with the sins of their contemporaries, and especially their ancestors, recognising that they are as much to blame for the state of things as those who had gone before. Here are a people who clearly recognise the connection between the evil in their own hearts and lives and the terrible conditions of slavery and bondage in which they exist.

They were acutely aware that the evil of one generation is often passed along to the next - that's what Deuteronomy teaches - and it is, I believe, a principle that still applies today. I believe we share, with our ancestors, the responsibility for what this church has, or hasn't done, in the past. I touched on this in an earlier sermon when I spoke about healing wounded history. However, this is the second time Nehemiah touches on the fact that the people are suffering the consequences of the decisions and attitudes of their ancestors and so it must mean it was a serious issue they needed to break free from. Do you wonder what our legacy might be for future generations to come? Yes, we have a wonderful building, but what about spiritually?

R.T. Kendall has written a tremendous book *Total Forgiveness*. In the foreword the African Professor, Washington A. J. Okumu, who was strategically involved in the 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission', writes about Apartheid, (but it could so easily apply to the church today): *Looking back at past history is important because without a knowledge of history and one's links to the past, humankind is a social amnesiac, intellectually and therefore to some extent emotionally rootless.*

In other words, if we don't remember the past, and learn from the past, we'll make the same mistakes as our ancestors. The American philosopher, George Santayana said: *Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.* And that's so true. Who amongst hasn't done that? If we forget the lessons God has taught us, we go back to making the same mistakes time and again. Which is why Nehemiah was keen to ensure the people didn't and why prayer became such a central issue for him.

I wonder, have you ever looked back on your life, historically, in this way and recognised the providential care of God in your life? The Israelites were more than avid collectors of historical data and scribblers of interesting facts. Their experiences were confirmed in history and, as a consequence, they had a real sense of solidarity with their ancestors. God had met with them throughout the centuries and, despite their rebellion he had not abandoned them.

The past is not dismissed as irrelevant, it's because of the past that they recognise God has not dealt with them the way their actions deserved. They knew that the remembrance of God in their history would enhance their experience of him in the present. What God had revealed in scripture, and demonstrated in history, were channelled in prayer to enlarge their vision of God. They acknowledge they are slaves because of their own sins. Human nature is no different today than it was then - the same two themes are at work: the rebellion and indifference of men and the gracious, loving patience of God. ***In His mercy, God didn't give them what they deserved, and, in His grace, he gave them what they didn't deserve.*** He gave them a fresh start, a new beginning, that's what God does when we confess our sin and need of Him.

Our experience of God will never be extended if it is purely an academic faith. Yes, the intellectual grasp of Christian truth is vital, and we are to worship the Lord with our minds, but we come to know him not only by reading about him but by spending time with him. ***It doesn't do us any good if we know a lot of things in the Bible if we don't hear the One who has spoken the words.***

I believe we mature and develop as Christians through the experience of prayer, confession and praise. Philip Yancey in his book 'Prayer: Does it make any difference' writes: *"The main purpose of prayer is not to make life easier, nor to gain magical powers, but to know God. I need God more than anything I might get from God."*

**Conclusion** This sermon needs little application. I'm sure as we've looked at this passage, the Holy Spirit has prompted you about areas of complacency in your relationship with God and those things you need to do to put things right. I suggested earlier that confession is not *if* I have sinned, but a recognition that *we* have sinned. Repentance and confession can be painful, but a necessary part of putting right our relationship with God.

© Paul A. Carr. May 2022

## Emmanuel Church Text for 2022

*"But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever,  
the purposes of His heart through all generations."*

Psalm 33:11



## **Looking Upwards** (40 mins)

### *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

**1.** Do you think any of the areas mentioned in this passage are particularly applicable to the church (local and national) today? In what way? What can we do about them?

**2.** Oftentimes, our prayers are focused on how we want God to act in the present and future, but the first part of this prayer is mainly focused upon how God has acted in the past. Why do you think this is?

**3.** The prayer in 9:5a-30 is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible. It shows us many different aspects of prayer. What jumps out for you about the sorts of prayer we should pray?

**4.** After God blessed Israel (9:8-15), how did Israel respond? What happens when we forget what God has done for us?

**5.** How do you respond to knowing that God will love you and remain faithful to you, no matter how often you fail him?

**6.** Notice what the first part of verse 28 says regarding what happened when the Israelites were at peace? Why does this seem odd and what should this teach us today?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?

