



Studies in Ezra & Nehemiah

Text

Nehemiah 9:1-38

Topic

The Jews hear their history  
and it leads them to repent and  
rededicate themselves to the LORD

Title

*“Come and Listen to the Story  
Of a Clan Called Jews”*

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I opened my gift, and it was a box of cereal. Kellogg’s Cracklin’ Oat Bran. Growing up, Geno remembered it as being my favorite, but since it was more expensive than others, it was rarely on the shelf.

It was an extremely thoughtful gift. The sentimental value was obviously priceless.

It ought to have been like that moment when the food critic tasted the ratatouille in the Pixar film by that name.

There was just one small problem. **I had no memory of ever eating Cracklin' Oat Bran - let alone it being my favorite.**

I was concerned Geno had lost his mind... Until I realized that all the other members of my immediate family had a shared memory of my passion for Cracklin' Oat Bran.

Maybe if I tasted it, every wonderful memory would come flooding back. Let me tell you something about Cracklin' Oat Bran. It tastes like cardboard; worse, *wet* cardboard. You'd be better off using the cereal as cat litter and eating the box.

In the movie, *The Forgotten*, a woman believes that she lost her son in a plane crash 14 months earlier, only to wake up one morning and be told that she never had a son.

There's no physical evidence she ever had a son. Her husband and her psychiatrist think she's going crazy.

Spoiler alert: Aliens are conducting a memory experiment on her. That can't be true... *I hope.*

I got to thinking about how we remember the past because our text in Nehemiah rehearses Israel's past. There is something constant in Israel's past.

No, it's not baseball. (You get that reference if you remember James Earl Jones' assessment of American history in *Field of Dreams*).

The constant in Israel's history was, and remains, **the faithfulness of God**. Every act of His toward His chosen people had been, and would always be, faithful.

Believers in Christ - including myself - don't always see God's faithfulness in the past. Trouble, tragedy; suffering, sorrow; these can alter how we look back on our spiritual

pilgrimage. Even if we continue to believe God is faithful, it's bothersome that we can't always see how He is faithful, given our afflictions.

If you look back, questioning God's faithfulness, you might draw encouragement from this text.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 If You Don't See God's Faithfulness In Your Past, Look Ahead, and #2 If You Don't Serve God Faithfully In The Present, Start Again.

## #1 If You Don't See God's Faithfulness In Your Past, Look Ahead (v1-31)

What happened in Budapest?

In *The Avengers*, during the Battle of New York, Black Widow says to Hawkeye, "It's like Budapest all over again." Hawkeye responds, "You and I remember Budapest very differently."

Fans want to know, but maybe what happened in Budapest should stay in Budapest.

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Nehemiah 9:1-38

*"Come and Listen to the Story  
of a Clan Called Jews"*

Israel's history was accurately recorded in the Scriptures. They'd have no trouble remembering it.

With amazing brevity, chapter nine reviews about 35 centuries of history - from creation to the Second Temple.

Neh 9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.

The Feast Of Tabernacles had concluded two days earlier. We are reading about a special assembly, not a regular calendar activity. They had prepared by fasting with prayer over those two days, and they dressed with their pull-away clothes and bags of dust as was customary to indicate repentance and what we might call rededication.

Neh 9:2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and

they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

This wasn't racial; it was religious. Foreigners could believe, and be saved. But on this day, God was dealing with Jews.

Neh 9:3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God *for one-fourth* of the day; and *for another fourth* they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

We're talking six hours. During that time they listened to the Word being read, and they "worshiped." The word "confessed" here isn't a confession of their sin, but a confession - an acknowledgement - of the greatness of God.

Neh 9:4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, *and* Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and

cried out with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

Neh 9:5 And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said: "Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! "Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!

There were two groups on the platform, with some overlap of names. [Laymen and Levites led the liturgy, lifting lively lyrics to the LORD.](#)

Neh 9:6 You alone *are* the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You.

This is one of those verses that has so much packed into it, I wish we had more time. In it we have an apologetic for the following doctrines:

Sovereignty, special creation, the supernatural realm, divine providence, and monotheism.

The text jumps about 2000 years to Abraham.

Neh 9:7 "You *are* the LORD God, Who chose Abram, And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, And gave him the name Abraham;

Neh 9:8 You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give the land of the Canaanites, The Hittites, the Amorites, The Perizzites, the Jebusites, [the Troglodytes] - And the Girgashites - To give *it* to his descendants. You have performed Your words, For You *are* righteous.

One verse on creation, then Abraham. It lends support to something we always allude to: Creation is merely the backdrop, the stage, for God to deal with humans. In the Psalms this is made apparent when David exclaims, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have



ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? (8:3-4). It's not arrogant to think we are alone in the universe in terms of life on other planets.

We jump ahead to their enslavement in Egypt and the Exodus.

Neh 9:9 "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea.

Neh 9:10 You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants, And against all the people of his land. For You knew that they acted proudly against them. So You made a name for Yourself, as *it is* this day.

Neh 9:11 And You divided the sea before them, So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; And their persecutors You threw into the deep, As a stone into the mighty waters.

Neh 9:12 Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar, And by night with a pillar of fire, To give them light on the road Which they should travel.

Neh 9:13 "You came down also on Mount Sinai,  
And spoke with them from heaven, And gave  
them just ordinances and true laws, Good  
statutes and commandments.

Neh 9:14 You made known to them Your holy  
Sabbath, And commanded them precepts,  
statutes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your  
servant.

Neh 9:15 You gave them bread from heaven for  
their hunger, And brought them water out of the  
rock for their thirst, And told them to go in to  
possess the land Which You had sworn to give  
them.

God was faithful to deliver them. What about  
the 400 years preceding the Exodus - when  
Israel was enslaved? Pretty slow delivery.

These returned Jews were declaring that God  
was faithful despite the much suffering of their  
ancestors. They saw His faithfulness, by faith.

Neh 9:16 "But they and our fathers acted proudly, Hardened their necks, And did not heed Your commandments.

Neh 9:17 They refused to obey, And they were not mindful of Your wonders That You did among them. But they hardened their necks, And in their rebellion They appointed a leader To return to their bondage. But You *are* God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them.

Neh 9:18 "Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, And said, 'This *is* your god That brought you up out of Egypt,' And worked great provocations,

Neh 9:19 Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, To lead them on the road; Nor the pillar of fire by night, To show them light, And the way they should go.

God was faithful to not forsake them even in their grotesque idolatry and sin.

He continued to dwell among them, in their midst, in the form of the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night.

Neh 9:20 You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, And gave them water for their thirst.

Neh 9:21 Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; They lacked nothing; Their clothes did not wear out And their feet did not swell.

They had food, clothing, and shelter; plus central AC and heating from the pillar.

My feet swell after a few minutes shopping at WalMart. John Candy, describing his tired feet to Steve Martin in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, famously quipped, “*My dogs are barking.*”

On a more spiritual note, God sent His Spirit to instruct them. Although our understanding is that the Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell them as He does believers today, He was active among them as a teacher.

Neh 9:22 "Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations, And divided them into districts. So they took possession of the land of Sihon, The land of the king of Heshbon, And the land of Og king of Bashan.

Neh 9:23 You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, And brought them into the land Which You had told their fathers To go in and possess.

Neh 9:24 So the people went in And possessed the land; You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, The Canaanites, And gave them into their hands, With their kings And the people of the land, That they might do with them as they wished.

Neh 9:25 And they took strong cities and a rich land, And possessed houses full of all goods, Cisterns *already* dug, vineyards, olive groves,

And fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and grew fat, And delighted themselves in Your great goodness.

In the days of Joshua, God went before them, annihilating their enemies, and giving them the spoils.

In the New Testament we are called “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37). We are called “more than conquerors” in the midst of a list of incredible trials and troubles that come upon us, which we must endure either for a time, or for a lifetime. God is faithful regardless the length or severity of the assault upon us.

Neh 9:26 "Nevertheless they were disobedient And rebelled against You, Cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets, who testified against them To turn them to Yourself; And they worked great provocations.

Neh 9:27 Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, Who oppressed them;

And in the time of their trouble, When they cried to You, You heard from heaven; And according to Your abundant mercies You gave them deliverers who saved them From the hand of their enemies.

Neh 9:28 "But after they had rest, They again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, So that they had dominion over them; Yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; And many times You delivered them according to Your mercies,

Neh 9:29 And testified against them, That You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, And did not heed Your commandments, But sinned against Your judgments, 'Which if a man does, he shall live by them.' And they shrugged their shoulders, Stiffened their necks, And would not hear.

Neh 9:30 Yet for many years You had patience with them, And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

It was the time of the Judges. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. We might describe them as faithless. God remained faithful. He didn't *disown* them; He *disciplined* them using the Gentiles they ought to have defeated.

Neh 9:31 Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You *are* God, gracious and merciful.

**Gracious...** Merciful... Patient... Righteous... Slow to anger... Abundant in kindness... Not forsaking... Great in goodness... These are just a few of the superlatives mentioned in these verses to highlight the faithfulness of God. Looking back upon their history:

1. There were times in their history when they brought judgment upon themselves, e.g., the time of the Judges. God was faithful to use



Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia as a rod of discipline upon them.

2. There were times in their history when they seemed to suffer for no apparent reason - like the four centuries spent in Egypt. They were enslaved because the Egyptians thought they were growing too numerous. It wasn't a discipline; it wasn't deserved.

In **all** their times, God was faithful, and looking back they could see, by faith, His faithfulness - even when suffering seemed uncaused.

When you are in a suffering of your own doing, that's one thing. But I'd venture that, for most of you, suffering and sorrow, trials and troubles, have come upon you more often when you are walking close to the Lord. It's in those times we can either doubt His faithfulness, or not see it.

Warren Wiersbe recently went home to be with the Lord. (On his tombstone they ought to carve, "Be Home").

Regarding suffering, from Wiersbe's review of the Bible, he said, "Pain purifies. Pain draws the Christian closer to Christ. Pain glorifies God. **And pain today means glory and honor tomorrow.**"

Paul's words to the Thessalonians were similar:

1Th 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Th 5:24 He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*.

Paul associated God's faithfulness with your glorious future. Your certain future guarantees God's faithfulness in the present. No matter how you think or feel, He cannot leave you, or forsake you. He is always there with you with sufficient grace to endure. And not just endure grudgingly, but joyfully.

If you can't see God's faithfulness as you look back, **look forward** to all He has promised to do for you. THEN look back, knowing that in your light affliction, which is but for a moment, God has been, and always is, faithful.

## #2 If You Don't Serve God Faithfully In The Present, Start Again

(v32-38)

I'll tell you who is really the worst about giving you a second chance: Darth Vader. He told his general, "You have failed me for the last time," then remotely choked him out - promoting a reluctant captain to be the next admiral.

God gives you unlimited second chances. His grace is no excuse to sin; but it is superabundant to the disobedient, to the rebellious, to the prodigal son or daughter of God, who repents.

Neh 9:32 "Now therefore, our God, The great, the mighty, and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You That has come upon us, Our kings and our princes, Our priests and our prophets, Our fathers and on all Your people, From the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.

Neh 9:33 However You *are* just in all that has befallen us; For You have dealt faithfully, But we have done wickedly.

“Do not let all the trouble seem small before You” means the disciplinary methods God used had been effective in leading Israel to repentance.

Neh 9:34 Neither our kings nor our princes, Our priests nor our fathers, Have kept Your law, Nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies, With which You testified against them.

Neh 9:35 For they have not served You in their kingdom, Or in the many good *things* that You gave them, Or in the large and rich land which You set before them; Nor did they turn from their wicked works.

Neh 9:36 "Here we *are*, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, To eat its fruit and its bounty, Here we *are*, servants in it!

Neh 9:37 And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, Because of our sins; Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle At their pleasure; And we *are* in great distress.

Neh 9:38 "And because of all this, We make a sure *covenant* and write *it*; Our leaders, our Levites, *and* our priests seal *it*."

Instead of “serving” the LORD, they had been, and still were, “servants” of Gentile nations. They were rededicating themselves to the LORD. They were rededicated men walking.

We hear “rededication,” and immediately associate it with backsliding.

We think of folks in sin, returning to the Lord, as those needing to rededicate themselves.

They do; but so may you and I. In these unredeemed bodies, amidst the unyielding spiritual warfare for our affections, we can get apathetic. We can go into a spiritual slumber from which we are called to awaken. We may settle in ways that need stirring-up. We may doubt or draw back.

In fact, we will do all these at one time or another.

I'm not saying you have to come forward to rededicate yourself. You may need to; if the Lord is prompting you.

I am saying God is faithful and you can always start fresh serving Him by His superabundant grace.

Speaking of God's faithfulness, a verse in the New Testament comes to mind:

1Tim 1:15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...

All of us here are sinners. Some of us are saved-sinners. If you are not in that group... Why not? Jesus said that by being lifted up on the Cross, He would draw all men to Himself. He is the Savior of the world and specifically of those who believe.

We mentioned Abraham. He was saved because he believed God.

Do you?