

NEHEMIAH 9

A GOD READY TO PARDON!

Here we have a general account of a public fast which the Jews kept two days after the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles, which they celebrated at the end of chapter 8. They assembled together, probably in the courts of the Temple, clothed in sackcloth and in the posture of mourners. By these outward expressions of sorrow and humiliation, they gave glory to God, took shame to themselves, and stirred up one another to repentance. Not only did they observe a fast to Jehovah, but they also spoke to Him in prayer – offering their pious and devout affections to Him, in the confession of sin and the adoration of Him as the Lord and their God. The people also heard the Lord speaking to them by His Word, for they read from the Book of the law.

The names of the Levites who prayed on this solemn fast-day are recorded. Their solemn address to God began with an adoration of Him as a perfect and glorious Being, and the Maker of all things. Next there was a thankful acknowledgment of His favors to His people. Many particular instances of God's goodness to Israel were recounted here. He showed His free grace to Abraham, brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and assured him that he would be the father of many nations. The Lord delivered His people out of Egypt; and even to this day, His name is glorified for that wonderful and miraculous work. He then conducted them through the wilderness, by the pillar of cloud and fire – the visible token of His presence with them, guiding and guarding them. He made plentiful provisions for them in the wilderness, so that they might not perish for hunger or thirst. And the giving of the Law upon Mount Sinai was the greatest favor of all that the Lord showed them! No other nation under the sun had such righteous judgments, true laws, and good statutes. The moral and judicial precepts were true and right; and even the ceremonial institutions were tokens of God's goodness to them, as well as pictures of Gospel-grace. The putting of the Israelites in possession of the Promised Land of Canaan was another instance of the Lord's goodness to them. They became victorious masters of it; and all of the natives' cities, farms, and vineyards were ready for their use! And so they delighted themselves in the gifts of God's great goodness.

Despite all the sins that His people were guilty of, Jehovah was continually ready to pardon their sins and work deliverance for them – even after their provocations had brought His judgments upon themselves. They always found Him to be a God “ready to pardon” (verse 17). Although they forsook Him, He did not forsake them (as He justly might have done); but He continued His care for them and His favor to them. He worked many great deliverances for them when they were on the brink of ruin – not for any merit of theirs, for they de-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A solemn fast is observed – verses 1-3
- ❖ A record of the prayer that was offered to God upon this occasion – verses 4-38

served nothing but ill. He gave them admonitions and fair warnings by His servants the prophets, and He mercifully delivered them from their troubles. For many, many years, the Lord was thus patient with them. And when He finally did punish them, He did not utterly consume them or forsake them. He did not stir up all His wrath; for He desired their reformation, and not their destruction.

This solemn prayer included a penitent confession of sin. The mention of these sins was interwoven with the memorials of God's favors, so that His goodness (despite their provocations) might appear more illustrious, and so that their sins (despite His favors) might appear more heinous. They charged two things upon themselves and their fathers, as the general cause of their troubles – first, a contempt of the good law which the Lord had given them; and second, a contempt of the good land which He had given them. The people made a humble acknowledgment of the justice of the judgments of God – which they had been under, and were still under. And under these calamities, they made a humble petition to Him. They requested that their trouble might not seem little in His eyes, and this is the only petition in all this prayer. They did not dictate to God what He should do for them, but they left that to Him – only desiring that He would be pleased to take notice of their troubles. They remembered that when He saw the great affliction of His people in Egypt, He came down to deliver them (Ex. 3:7-8). In this request, they looked to the Lord as the One Who is to be feared, for He is the great and mighty God; and also as the One Who is to be trusted, for He is a God Who keeps His Covenant with His people.

After this long description of their sad case, the people came at last to this resolution: they would return to the Lord and their duty; and they would oblige themselves to never forsake Him, and to always continue in their duty. "Because of all this," they said, "we make a sure covenant with God!" In consideration of their frequent departures from Jehovah, they now resolved more firmly than ever to bind themselves to Him. This covenant was made with serious consideration, and with great solemnity. It was written down, in order that it might remain a memorial for all ages; and it was sealed and left upon record, so that it might be a witness against them if they broke it and failed to keep their promises. A certain number of the princes, priests, and Levites were chosen as the representatives of the congregation, to subscribe and seal it in the name of the rest. Now was fulfilled those promises concerning the Jews, declaring that when they returned out of captivity, they would join themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant (Jer. 50:5), and that they would subscribe with their hand unto the Lord (Isa. 44:5). And can we not do the same? Our sins have been washed away by the blood which makes us whiter than snow. Shall we not dedicate ourselves and all that we have to the One Who has redeemed us?

Lord, we pray for grace to daily renew our covenant with You, for You have crowned us with an abundance of merciful blessings – not the least of which is the gift of redemption! Amen.

