

## Nehemiah 9 Student Supper notes

### Summary

The story of God's relentless faithfulness to unfaithful Israel prompts the people to cry for mercy

### Structure

- v1-5a: Gathering for corporate confession
- v5b-37: Representative prayer of corporate confession
  - 6: Creation
  - 7-8: Abraham
  - 9-12: The Exodus
  - 13-15: Covenant at Mount Sinai
  - 16-18: Wilderness rebellions, particularly the Golden Calf
  - 19-21: Journey to the Promised Land
  - 22-25: Entering the Promised Land
  - 26-28: Cycle of disobedience, oppression, cry, deliverance (particularly period of Judges but whole time in Promised Land encapsulated)
  - 29-31: Exile
  - 32-37: Confession and cry for mercy from their distress

### Comment on applying this passage to us

There are important situational differences between us and Israel here:

- Israel's cycle is of completely abandoning Yahweh and then returning to him – which is different to a Christian believer's "cycles" of fighting sin.
- The old covenant contained specific blessings (peace, prosperity in the land) linked to obedience, and specific curses (exile and distress) linked to disobedience. The new covenant in Jesus is different. We may sometimes experience some form of distress as a result of our sin (by direct consequence and/or by God's discipline), but we don't experience "curses" in the same way – we experience God's discipline in the context of full, total assurance of forgiveness.

So we can certainly use this prayer as a general model for confession of sin, including crying out in distress caused by sin. But we should be careful not to overdo our parallels with Israel's situation here.

### Extra text notes

(I would recommend watching the video first - many of the details of the text are referred to there, and this is really intended to give a bit more depth on a couple of points for you as leaders. Lots of this may well not come up in your study but just in case!)

- Timeline of seventh month:
  - Day 1 – assembly (8:1-12)
  - Day 2 – leaders' gathering, beginning to prepare for festival of shelters (8:13-16)
  - (Day 10 – probably celebrating the Day of Atonement)
  - Days 15-22 – Festival of Shelters (8:17-18)
  - Day 24 – assembly to confess (ch9)

- v2: See Ezra 6:21 for an example of foreigners joining Israel.
- Torah language throughout prayer:  
*(NB the specific quotations are illustrative of the more important point: the whole prayer is deeply shaped and rooted in God's revelation of himself and Israel in the Torah)*
  - v6 echoes Deuteronomy 6:4 ("The LORD our God, the LORD is one")
  - v11 echoes Exodus 15:1,4,10 ("You hurled their pursuers into the depths...")
  - v17 quotes Exodus 34:6 ("But you are a forgiving God...")
  - v18 quotes Exodus 32:4 ("This is your god...")
  - v23 echoes Genesis 22:17 ("You made their children as numerous...")
  - v25 echoes Deuteronomy 6:11
- V32-37: their petitions are less direct than we might expect (v32 contains the only direct request). This is partly because the prayer will lead in to covenant recommitment in chapter 10. But although it's somewhat implicit, this is still a cry for mercy, forgiveness and deliverance.  
(I didn't make it super clear in the video – despite being back in the land with the walls built, their situation is far from sorted – they are still in great distress as slaves under Persian rule – clearest in v36-37.)
- v38 leads into chapter 10.

### *Suggested questions*

- How do the details of the story of Israel show the ugliness of their sin?  
How do the details of the story show the greatness of God's mercy?  
*(Could ask these together or separately. Worth spending a good bit of time on this.)*
- How does the cross add to this picture of the ugliness of sin and the mercy of God?
- How do you feel about confessing your sin?
- How does seeing this picture of sin and God's mercy help us to confess?
- How can we grow in having a two-way dialogue with God, where his word shapes our prayers?  
*(More general application – I'd perhaps only use this if chatting about confession has dried up early!)*