

Nehemiah

Chapter 9

The People of Israel Confess Their Sin

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. 4 On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. 5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 “You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. 7 You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. 8 You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. 9 “And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, 10 and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. 11 And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. 12 By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. 13 You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, 14 and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. 15 You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them. 16 “But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. 17 They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. 18 Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies, 19 you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. 20 You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. 21 Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. 22 “And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land

of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. 23 You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. 24 So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. 25 And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. 26 “Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. 27 Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. 28 But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. 29 And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. 30 Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. 31 Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. 32 “Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. 33 Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. 34 Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. 35 Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. 36 Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. 37 And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. 38 “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

9:1–37 The ninth chapters of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel are devoted to confessions of national sin and to prayers for God’s grace. (CSB)

The prayer led by the Levites is the longest prayer in Nehemiah. It is divided into three parts. It begins with a general statement of praise (9:5b). Then comes a long historical review of Israel’s past relationship with God (9:6-31) that begins and ends with the second person singular masculine pronoun “you.” Finally, a request for God’s mercy culminates in a pledge attested by a written solemn agreement (9:32-38). The transition from the historical review to the request for mercy is marked by a change from third person (“they,” etc.) to first person (“we,” etc.). Throughout God is primarily referenced in the second person masculine singular, translated as “you” and “your.” (CC)

The prayer makes extensive use of Scripture. Newman outlines three primary ways in which this is done: (CC)

One use of scripture is an exact or nearly exact citation. The appropriation of Exodus 13:21 concerning the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire in Nehemiah 9:12a is an illustration of such a use...Another example is the combined use of Exodus 3:7 and Nehemiah 9:9. (CC)

A second kind of scripturalization, near kind to the first, is represented by the reuse of a phrase whose source(s) is/are identifiable and that later comes to be used as a stock phrase in interpretation of a particular tradition complex. An example is found in Nehemiah 9:10d, that God “made a name for Himself, (as it is to this day).” This is also found in a number of other contemporaneous (sic) passages, in Jeremiah 32, Psalm 106, Daniel 9 and Isaiah 63, all of which are prayers. The phrase can thus be regarded as having entered the liturgical idiom. The phrase becomes a theological affirmation of sorts... Another example of this sort of idiom is the promise to the ancestors, discussed in reference to the Abraham traditions above. An important feature of both of these reuses is that in their first appearance in the in the Pentateuch, both were originally divine speech, direct divine statements... (CC)

A third use of scripture is more diffuse. Some verses contain distinctive language that recurs in various sources, but that is not clearly dependent on any narrative. In other words, it is derived from no specific narrative context but nonetheless has meaning in its new setting that derives from its use elsewhere in the Bible...An example is the term “dry land” set in contrast to “might waters” (Neh. 9:11). (CC)

Thus the prayer led by the Levites is based on God’s revelation in the Scripture and thoroughly saturated with biblical language. It approaches the throne of God with the very words of God, thereby relying on God and His promises, not on human effort. It views prayer as being prompted by God and pleasing to Him because He Himself not only invites prayer (Ps. 50:15; Lk. 18:1), but also provides the very words that He promises to hear (Mt. 6:5-13; cf. Rom. 8:26-27). (CC)

9:1 *twenty-fourth day.* Oct. 30, 445 B.C.; a day of penance in the spirit of the Day of Atonement, which was held on the tenth day (Lev 16:29–30). (CSB)

In the seventh month (8:2) two days after the Feast of Booths had concluded, the people were again assembled, this time for a day of repentance. Already at the first convocation, “the people wept as they heard the words of the Law” (8:9). Continued reading (8:18) made them even more aware of “their sins and iniquities of their fathers” (9:2). (TLSB)

fasting ... sackcloth ... earth. Symbolizing humility and repentance (1:4; Jb 2:12; Jnh 3:5). (TLSB)

These symbolized humility and repentance. A survival of these symbols of repentance is the practice, observed by some Christians, of wearing ashes on Ash Wednesday and fasting during Lent. (PBC)

9:2 *separated themselves* – Foreigners could not be expected to join with the Judean in confessing their own and their ancestors’ sins. (TLSB)

We are told on this day those of Israelite descent separated themselves for foreigners. The Teaching of Moses permitted resident aliens to celebrate the Festival of Booths (Deut. 16:14), although only native-born Israelites were required to live in booths (Lev. 23:42). On this day, however, only Judeans participated, since the repentance for the historic sins of the ancestors confessed on this day was appropriate for them alone. (CC)

iniquities of their fathers. Confession recounts history of sinning (vv 6–37), including also wickedness of the present generation (vv 33, 37). Such confession acknowledges enduring effects of original sin and actual sins. (TLSB)

9:3 *in their place.* Wooden platform (8:4). (TLSB)

Book of the Law. Cf 8:1, 3. (TLSB)

quarter of the day. About three hours. (CSB)

Reading continued for about three hours, followed by confession of sins and worship. (TLSB)

We are told that the first quarter of the day, which would be about three hours, was spent reading God’s Word, followed by three hours of confession and worship. This time prepared for Levites’ prayer that follows. The prayer itself may have been composed during this time of study and worship. (CC)

9:4-5 Two sets of eight Levites are mentioned as leading the people in confession. Since five names are common to both groups, it is probable that five of the most prominent Levites participated in both groups. Only the first two names at the start of each group – “Jeshua and Bani” (9:4), and “Jeshua and Kadmiel” (9:5) – are connected by a conjunction, indicating that these men were leaders. The second group led the prayer of confession, calling on the Judeans to bless and praise God. (CC)

9:4-5 *stairs.* Ascent to the platform (8:4). *cried with a loud voice.* Levites needed to speak loudly so all could hear their praise and psalm of repentance. *Levites.* Two groups of eight Levites are listed, though five of the names are duplicates (Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, and Sherebiah; a Bani is named twice in the first list). Levites led the assembly in prayer and confession (8:7). *Stand up and bless.* Levites invited people to rise and give worshipful attention to the psalm of repentance they would speak. *Blessed be Your glorious name.* Introduction to a psalm similar to Ps 106. (TLSB)

9:4 *cried with a loud voice* – The first group, standing on the stairs of the Levites, “cried out in a loud voice,” an expression that indicates an urgent cry with deep sorrow (e.g., 2 Sam. 19:4; Ezek. 11:13). (CC)

9:6-37 One of the most beautiful prayers outside the Psalms, it reviews God’s grace and power (1) in creation (v. 6), (2) in the Abrahamic covenant (vv. 7–8), (3) in Egypt and at the Red Sea (vv. 9–11), (4) in the desert and at Sinai (vv. 12–21), (5) during the conquest of Canaan (vv. 22–25), (6) through the judges (vv. 26–28), (7) through the prophets (vv. 29–31) and (8) in the present situation (vv. 32–37). Cf. Ps 78; 105–106. (CSB)

9:6-31 The lengthy historical review that occupies most of this prayer divides into two unequal parts: a description of God’s creation (9:6) and a history of God’s dealings with His chosen

people (9:7-31). Both parts are prefaced by the statement “you are Yahweh.” This statement at the beginning of both parts serves as a creedal confession that Yahweh is not simply the God of Israel, but also the God of all creation. This same confession of God the Creator is quoted by the apostles in a prayer of thanksgiving for the sending of the Messiah in fulfillment of Scripture (Acts 4:24). It is even included in an angel’s oath that announces Christ’s return to bring this world to its end, fulfilling the words of the prophets (Rev. 10:6-7). (CC)

The historical review included here mirrors other historical reviews in the OT. However, this is the most complete, since it alone includes creation, the patriarchal narrative, the exodus, the wilderness wanderings, the conquest of the land, and Israel’s long occupation of Palestine. (CC)

9:6 LXX attributes these words to Ezra. Hebrew text attributes the psalm to the Levites, who may have chanted it. (TLSB)

You are the LORD. Though not in the words of Dt 6:4, which expresses the central monotheistic conviction of Israel’s faith, the prayer begins with a similar affirmation (cf. 2Ki 19:15; Ps 86:10). (CSB)

The preface of “you are Yahweh – you alone” to the description emphasizes that Yahweh alone created the heavens and the earth. Therefore, the prayer rejects all pagan creation myths and their polytheism. It asserts that there is only one God, who created everything from nothing (creation ex nihilo), and all creation is dependent on Him (2 Ki. 19:15, 19; Is 37:16; Ps. 86:10; Heb. 1:3). (CC)

God’s creation is mentioned in three realms: heaven, earth, and the seas, each with its own inhabitants. (CC)

heaven of heavens. See Dt 10:14; 1Ki 8:27; 2Ch 2:6; Ps 148:4. (CSB)

The expression “the heavens of heavens,” drawn from Deut. 10:14, is a superlative indicating “the greatest of heavens.” This heaven is occupied by an “army.” This word is often used to describe human armies, especially Israel (E.g., Ex. 6:26; 12:17; Num. 2:8; 31:21, 32, 48, 53; 2 Sam. 3:23; 1 Ki. 1:25; 2:5; Ps. 44:9; 60:10; 108:11; 1 Chr. 19:8), but it can also refer to the “heavenly hosts.” At times this refers to the angels (e.g., Josh 5:14; 1 Ki. 22:19; Ps. 103:21; 148:2; 2 Chr. 18:18), but at other times it refers to the stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies. (E.g., Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 2 Ki. 23:5; Jer. 8:2; Zeph. 1:5; Ps. 33:6; 2 Chr. 33:3, 5.) The reference in this prayer is to Gen. 2:1, where it may refer to either the angels or the heavenly bodies, or more probably \, both collectively with everything else that fills creation. (CC)

the earth and all that is on it – This is a close paraphrase of Deut. 10:14. (CC)

seas and all that is in them – Unique to this prayer, however, is this line. It celebrates the seas as God’s creation. This wording with the plural “seas” has no parallel anywhere in the OT (cf. Ex.20:11; Ps. 69:34; 146:6). (CC)

The prayer recognizes, however, that creation is ongoing in the sense that God continues to give and “sustain” all life. The verb in Piel (D) often signifies preserving life in contrast to taking it. (E.g., Gen. 7:3; 12:12; Ex. 1:17; Num. 31:15; Deut. 6:24; Josh. 9:15; Ps. 22:29; 30:3; 33:19; 41:2; 138:7) The prayer thus acknowledges that no creature has life on its own but has life only as long as God preserves it (CC)

Furthermore, some passages use the verb here translated as “sustain in the Piel (D) in the sense of God giving new spiritual life – by His grace and through His Word – to a person who is physically alive, but who acknowledges his need for the forgiveness of sins and righteousness from God (e.g., Ps. 119:25, 37, 40, 50, 107; see also Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13). In addition, some passages affirm that God is able to give new life that is spiritual and overcomes physical death, even life that delivers a person from Sheol and the everlasting grave (hell). He is the only God who can declare: (CC)

I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal. (Deut.32:39)

Here “make alive” comes after “kill,” just as “heal” comes after “wound.” The parallelism implies that God has the power to “make alive” those who were dead. Other passages go even further: (CC)

Yahweh kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and rises up. (1 Sam 2:6)

This and similar passages with the same verb (Hos. 6:2; Ps. 30:3; 71:20) suggest that God’s power to resurrect the dead is in view (cf. Heb. 11:19). Of course, in the NT Jesus Himself exercises divine power by raising the dead (e.g., John 12:17). God raised Jesus bodily from the dead (e.g., Acts 13:30, 34; Gal. 1:1), and all baptized believers in Him (e.g., Rom 6:1-4; Col. 2:11-13; Titus 3:5-6) have the promise of bodily resurrection on the Last Day (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:1; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). (CC)

host of heaven worships you. See Ps 89:5–7. (CSB)

Angelic creatures (1Ki 22:19; Ps 103:21). “He is the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible” (AC I 2). (TLSB)

Creation’s response to God’s work is worship in a liturgy that involves “the army of heaven,” the angels and the rest of creation, including believers on earth and those already in heaven (e.g., Rev. 4:4-11). Newman observes: (CC)

There are a number of biblical texts that contain references to the angelic praise of God in connection with the creation. Psalm 148 calls on all the created order to praise God, in the first verse calling on those in the heavens. The second verse continues: “Praise him, all his angels; praise him all his host.” Psalm 103 contains a similar theme. Although it does not state explicitly that the heavenly hosts have praise God from creation, the psalmist does call upon the angels, his hosts, his ministers, and all his works to join in the heavenly liturgy and bless the Lord (vv. 20-22). God’s so-called “answer” to Job in chapter 38 also contains a reference to this heavenly liturgy. In Job 38:7, God responds to Job’s complaints with a question, asking Job where he was at the time of creation, when “the stars of the morning sang together and all the sons of God raised a joyous sound.” Psalm 29 also contains an image of the “sons of God,” worshipping the Creator (Ps. 29:1). (CC)

Thus the Judeans joined their praise of God to that of the creation. This practice is contained by Christians in the Proper Prefaces of the Eucharistic liturgy: (CC)

It is truly good right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father everlasting God through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who, having created all things, took on human flesh and was born of the virgin Mary. For our

sake He died on the cross and rose from the dead to put an end to death, thus fulfilling Your will and gaining for You a holy people. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising You and say"... (CC)

9:7-8 Yahweh's Mercy to Abram

The second part of the historical review also begins with "you are Yahweh," but this time it is followed by "the God who chose Abram." This emphasizes Israel's gracious election by God, who called this nation to be His people. In fact, God is the subject of every verb in this section, emphasizing that the basis of Israel's relationship to God is God's own action and righteousness, not those of Abram or his descendants. (CC)

The events from Abram's life are not recounted in the exact chronological order recorded in Genesis, since his renaming in Neh. 7 (recalling Gen. 17:4-5) precedes the promise of the land and the imputation of God's righteousness in Neh. 9:8 (recalling Gen. 15). This different order allows the prayer to emphasize the final point of this section: the gift of the land (9:8) and God's righteousness in keeping His promise to give it to Abraham's descendants. God's trustworthiness in always fulfilling His promises is a recurring theme in this prayer (9:15, 22-24, 35), and it emphasizes God's attributes of righteousness, faithfulness, patience, and mercy. Yet the righteousness of God also resulted in hardships for the Judeans in the land because of their wickedness despite God's own "faithfulness (9:33). Thus, Israel's life in the land is an experience of God's righteousness from the beginning until the present moment. (CC)

9:7 *Ur of the Chaldeans.* Possibly in northern Mesopotamia, but more likely the site on the Euphrates in southern Iraq excavated by Leonard Woolley between 1922 and 1934. Ruins and artifacts from Ur reveal a civilization and culture that reached high levels before Abram's time. King Ur-Nammu, who may have been Abram's contemporary, is famous for his law code. (CSB)

Ur. In the valley of the Euphrates River in ancient Babylon. *Chaldeans.* Babylonians. (TLSB)

gave him the of Abraham. The first name means "Exalted Father," probably in reference to God (i.e., "[God is] Exalted Father"); the second means "father of many," in reference to Abraham. *your name will be.* By giving Abram a new name (see Ne 9:7) God marked him in a special way as his servant. (CSB)

9:8 *kept your promise.* Compare Ro 4:16–22 with Jas 2:21–23. (CSB)

The first event from Abram's life that is mentioned is God bringing him from Ur of the Chaldeans, referring to Gen. 11:28, 31 (cf. Gen. 15:7). God's act of renaming him Abraham is recounted from Gen. 17:4-5. The statement that God "found his heart (to be) faithful/believing is a reference to Gen. 15:6, where Abram "believed in Yahweh, and he reckoned it t to him as righteousness." The verb in this verse translated as "faithful" is a passive form of the same verb whose active form in Gen. 15:6 is translated as "believed." (CC)

made with him a covenant. Cut a covenant," referring to the slaughtering of the animals (the same Hebrew verb is translated "made" and "cut" [i.e., "violated"] in Jer 34:18). (CSB)

The next part of the prayer connects God deeming Abram to be justified through faith alone (see Romans 4; Galatians 3) to the promise that Abram's descendants would inherit the land then occupied by pagan nations, a promise that follows upon Abram being reckoned righteous (Gen.

15:17-21). The six pagan nations listed in this verse appear to be an abbreviation of the ten nations in Gen. 15:19-21), omitting several of the more minor peoples (Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites) as well as the Raphaim, who were later deposed by the Israelite campaigns east of the Jordan (Deut. 2:11, 20; 3:11, 13). (CC)

Canaanite ... Girgashite. The name means “land of purple” (as does Phoenicia, the Greek name for the same general region)—so called because Canaan was a major producer and exporter of purple dye, highly prized by royalty. The territory was much later called Palestine after the Philistines. (CSB)

righteous. Abraham “believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness” (Gn 15:6; cf Rm 4:9). (TLSB)

9:9-12 The Exodus

9:9 *Red Sea.* See notes on Ex 13:18; 14:2. (Various locations of the crossing have been proposed along the line of the modern Suez Canal and including the northern end of the Gulf of Suez¹) (CSB)

The prayer in Nehemiah 9 shifts the immediate reason for Israel’s cry from the harness of the Egyptian taskmasters (Ex. 3:7) to the threat of Pharaoh’s armies bearing down on them (Ex. 14:9). This shift enables the prayer to summarize the entire exodus account from its beginning in Egypt to climatic deliverance at the Red Sea right before the prayer recalls specific events in the exodus in Nehemiah 9:10-12. (CC)

9:10 *signs and wonders* – This verse characterizes the plagues on Egypt in common terms for summarizing them (e.g., Ex. 7:3; Her. 32:20-21; Ps. 135:9, especially in Deuteronomy (4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8 29:3; 34:11). The trio of parties who experienced the plagues – Pharaoh, his servants, and his people – aptly summarizes the extent of the plagues. (CC)

made a name for yourself – The import of the plagues is stated as God making a lasting name for Himself, establishing his reputation by judging the impenitent while sparing His own people. The revelation of Yahweh’s “name” through His punishment of unrepentant Pharaoh and His exodus redemption of Israel is first mentioned in Exodus 9:16, and these acts of judgment and salvation are continually recognized as the foundational OT revelation of God’s name in subsequent prayers (e.g., 2 Sam 7:23; Is. 63:12, 14; Jer. 32:20; Ps. 106:8; Dan. 9:15; cf. Lk. 1:51-54; Acts 7:7, 36). God uses His dominion over all things to defeat evil, including the oppressors of His people, and to save all who trust in Him. This divine “name,” that God is a God of Law and Gospel, was revealed by His signs and wonders in Egypt as well as the last great wonder of the exodus: the crossing of the Red Sea in the next verse. This event becomes paradigmatic for God’s deliverance of His people from sin and death, not just in the OT (Josh. 3-4; Is 27:1; 43:2; 51:9), but also in the NT, where Jesus Christ accomplished the ultimate exodus deliverance through His suffering and death on the cross and His resurrection (“exodus,” in Luke 9:31). (see also Mt. 2:15; Acts 7:36; 13:16-19; 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Heb. 11:26-27; Jude 5) (CC)

Nations recognized what great things the Lord had accomplished (6:16; Ex 15:14–18). (TLSB)

9:11 *divided the sea.* See Ex 14:21–22; 1Co 10:1. (CSB)

In stating “you split the sea,” the prayer makes explicit what is implicit in Exodus 14:16, 21. Yahweh first commanded Moses to extend his staff in his hand over the sea and ordered Moses to

“split” (Ex. 14:16). Then as Moses complied, Yahweh caused a fierce wind to blow all night so that the waters “were split” (Ex. 14:21). Moses of course, was merely the agent through whom God worked. However, in this prayer, as also in Ps. 74:12-14 (cf. Ps. 89:8-10), Moses is not mentioned, and the miracle of splitting the sea is attributed directly to God Himself, since it was He not Moses, who made a name for Himself with this saving miracle. (CC)

went through...on dry land – These words also occur fourteen times in the OT. Half of these are in various descriptions: of God’s act of separating the seas from the land in the original creation (Gen. 1:9-10; Jonah 1:9), a miraculous sign by Moses (Ex. 4:9), the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Is. 44:3), and the peril and deliverance of Jonah (Jonah 1:13; 2:10). However, the other seven, including Neh. 9:11, are in references to Israel passing through the Red Sea (Ex. 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19; Ps. 66:6) or the miraculous splitting of the Jordan so Israel could cross (Josh. 4:22), which was a recapitulation of the Red Sea crossing but on a smaller scale. (CC)

“Dry ground,” therefore, was an important term in the original description of the Red Sea crossing, since it occurs three times in the exodus account (Ex. 14:16, 22, 29) and once again in Moses’ Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:19), sung after the crossing as Israel’s worshipful response. The prayer in Nehemiah 9 uses this word to emphasize God’s power in delivering His people. The same God who had created and then separated the seas and the “dry ground” (Gen. 1:9-10; Jonah 1:9) is able to redeem His people by splitting the sea and leading His people to victory on “dry ground” (Ex. 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19; Ps. 66:6). This salvation event is the background when the next generation of Israel crossed the Jordan on “dry ground” to conquer the Promised Land (Josh. 4:22) and also when Jonah was rescued from the sea after three days and again stood on “dry ground” (Jonah 2:10). In turn, this “sign of Jonah” anticipated the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day. Therefore God the Creator established a pattern (Gen. 1:9-10; Jonah 1:9) that He subsequently used in the OT as God the Redeemer, culminating in the redemption of all humanity by God the Son, Jesus Christ. The salvation is poured out in Christian Baptism (Acts 2:38-41; 22:16; 1 Cor. 10:2; 1 Peter 3:18-22). (CC)

cast their pursuers – The final line of 9:11, “you threw their pursuers into the depths like a stone in mighty waters,” combines the exact wording of Ex. 15:5, “they went down into the depths like a stone,” with that of Is. 43:16, “thus said Yahweh, who makes a path in the sea, a road in mighty waters.” Isaiah and this prayer are the only OT passages that use this Hebrew wording for “mighty waters,” and this phrase is a synonym for the “lordly waters” into which the Egyptians sank in Ex. 15:10. Clearly the Levites who composed this prayer were steeped not only in the study of the Pentateuch, but also in later prophets, notably Isaiah, who preached about the saving God revealed in the Pentateuch, Israel’s violation of the covenant, and the new exodus redemption that would be accomplished by the Messiah. (CC)

9:12 *pillar of cloud...pillar of fire* – The column of smoke and fire provides a transition from the exodus account to the events at Mount Sinai, since Yahweh’s theophany at Sinai also was by smoke and fire (e.g., Ex. 19:9, 16, 18; 24:15-18; Deut. 4:11-15; 5:22-26). The motif of the column of smoke and fire, when it is mentioned in OT reviews of Israel’s history, always signals the transition from the exodus to Sinai and the wilderness (Ps. 78:14; 105:39; cf. Ps. 99:7; Song 3:6). The Levites’ prayer uses the motif again (with partly identical wording) in Neh. 9:19 as an example of God’s mercy in not abandoning Israel despite its sin. The pillar guided the Israelites beginning with the exodus and continued to guide them throughout their time in the wilderness (e.g., Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19-20, 24; 33:9-10; Num. 12:5; 14:14; Deut. 31:15). (CC)

We should also note that Neh. 9:12-21 presents events not in a strictly chronological order, but thematically: God's guidance, the Sinai revelation, and the provision of manna and water (Neh. 9:19-21). (CC)

9:13-14 At Mount Sinai

The emphasis of the treatment of the events at Mount Sinai is the giving of the commandments, including that for the "holy Sabbath." It features the only time Moses is named in the entire prayer. Here Moses is depicted as the agent of Yahweh who delivered the "commandments and statutes and Teaching." (CC)

The movement in this section is from God speaking directly to the people to giving his commands through Moses as the covenant mediator, thereby making a tacit reference to Ex. 20:18-20. At Sinai the Israelites asked Moses to be God's intermediary since they were afraid to see or hear God themselves, signaling a portentous note in their relationship with Yahweh, who had come down on the mountain to give them instruction so that they might not sin (Ex. 20:20). However, Israel, who could not abide God's presence, also could not refrain from sin and rebellion. The prayer's subtle, but real allusion to Ex. 20:18-20 prepares for Israel's coming rebellion in the wilderness. (CC)

The description of God's judgments, laws, statutes, and commands as "upright," "true," and "good" all in one verse is without exact parallel anywhere in the OT, but is close to Mal. 2:6; Ps. 119:137, 142 (cf. 2 Chr. 31:20). In contrast to verse 13, verse 14 does not have any adjectival modifiers to describe God's Law. The difference may reflect that in Neh. 9:13 God spoke directly to the people, but in Neh. 9:14 He spoke through Moses. Yet later Scripture passages affirm that the words God spoke through Moses are just as holy and authoritative as words He spoke directly: "your judgments are upright" (Ps. 119:137) and "your Teaching is truth/true" (Ps. 119:142; cf. "Teaching of truth" or "true Teaching" in Mal. 2:6. Note also the association of "goodness" with "your commandments" (Ps. 119:66). (CC)

9:13 *laws*. The singular form of the Hebrew for this word is *Torah*, which means "instruction," "law," and later the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. (CSB)

Terms here appear with adjectives, uncommon for such a list. (TLSB)

9:14 *holy Sabbath*. According to the rabbis, "the Sabbath outweighs all the commandments of the Torah." (CSB)

Only the Third Commandment was mentioned specifically because keeping the Sabbath was a distinguishing mark of a Judean, and breaking it was a capital offense (Ex. 31:13; 35:1-3). (TLSB)

The only specific command mentioned in the Sabbath ordinance, traditionally numbered as the Third Commandment. It enjoined Israel to sanctify the Sabbath, both because God rested on the seventh day of the original creation (Ex. 20:8-11) and because God redeemed His people from bondage in Egypt (Deut. 5:12-15). Thus the Sabbath recalls both the goodness of God the Creator and the grace of God the Savior, who accomplished the exodus. At the same time, looking forward, the Sabbath had messianic and eschatological significance since it is fulfilled in Jesus, who provides the eternal Sabbath rest for all believers. (CC)

The observance of the Sabbath was important to the Judean community (Neh. 10:31; 13:15-22). The inclusion of the Sabbath observance in the Levite's prayer signaled their renewed

commitment to God and His Word. From the time that God gave the command to observe the Sabbath, this perpetual day of worship and mediation on God's Word should have drawn Israel back to God at the end of every week. Yet Israel defiled the Sabbath, thereby severing its relationship with God and leading to rebellion against God (Ezek. 20:13). (CC)

9:15-21 In the Wilderness

9:15 *bread from heaven.* Jesus called himself “the true bread from heaven” (Jn. 6:32), “the bread of God” (Jn. 6:33), “the bread of life” (Jn. 6:35, 48), “the living bread that came down from heaven” (Jn. 6:51)—all in the spiritual sense (Jn. 6:63). For a similar application see Dt 8:3 and Jesus' quotation of it in Mt 4:4. (CSB)

This phrase to describe manna is taken from Ex.16:3-4 (cf. 105:40). Both Exodus and the Levites' prayer state that God is the one who gave Israel bread from heaven – not Moses, as wrongly implied by the crowd of people who questioned Jesus (Jn. 6:30-31). Jesus corrected this misconception (Jn.6:32). Then the Lord went on to explain how the bread from heaven in the desert was only a foretaste of the true bread from heaven – Jesus Himself, who alone is able to satisfy hunger and thirst permanently (Jn. 6:35). He became incarnate in order to give His flesh and blood for the life of the world, and He promises that He will raise all who feast on Him to eternal life on the Last Day (Jn. 6:38-58). (CC)

water...out of the rock. The Pentateuch includes two accounts of Yahweh instructing Moses to enable water to flow out of a rock (Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:2-13). In the first incident Moses faithfully carried out God's instructions by striking the rock once. In the second incident Yahweh instructed Moses and Aaron merely to speak to the rock. Moses, frustrated by Israel's rebelliousness, struck the rock twice. This resulted in abundant water, (Num. 20:11) but also the exclusion of Moses and Aaron from the Promised Land because of their sin (Num. 20:12). Both Pentateuchal accounts are summarized together as a single kind of miracle in Neh. 9:15b, just as they are in Deut. 8:15; Is. 48:21; Ps. 78:15-16; 105:41; 114:8. The words, literally, “and water from a rock you brought out” in Neh. 9:15 are taken from Num. 20:8, in which, however, Yahweh was the one who spoke these words to Moses: “and you shall bring out for them water from the rock.” (CC)

God's free gift of relieving thirst is coupled with relieving hunger not only here, but also in Is. 55:1 and Prov. 9:1-5 and by Jesus' gift of His own body and blood in Jn. 6:32-56. See also the free living water in Jn. 4:10-14; 7:37-39; Rev. 22:17. The apostle Paul declares that the rock that attended Israel, from which the water flowed, was Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). This helps explain why in Num. 20:2-13 Moses' angry act of striking the rock twice, when he was simply to speak to it, was a sin so grievous that he would die without entering the land. It can be seen as doing violence to the Lord. Compare the issue of blood and water from the pierced side of Jesus as He hung on the cross – an incident so important to the evangelist and his audience that he attests it with his eyewitness testimony so that readers may believe (Jn. 19:34-35; see also 1 John 5:6-9). (CC)

sworn to give them. A standard oath-taking practice in ancient times. (CSB)

9:15c-17 These verses recount the first, failed attempt to take the Israelites into the Promised Land (Num. 13-14). Interestingly, the same verb used in verse 15 from for “inherit, take possession” of the land occurs three times in these chapters (Num. 13:30; 14:12, 24). In Num. 13:30 Caleb urged the people to go up and obediently take possession of the land that God had promised to give them, and in Num. 14:24 God promised to bring faithful Caleb into the land that

his descendants would take possession of it. But the people refused to go into the land. And God threatened to destroy Israel for its disobedience (Num. 14:12), in whose context has the nuance “and I will dispossess/destroy” Israel). The use of the same verb here in Neh. 9:15 may be intentionally ironic and may prepare for the recollection of Israel’s rebellion, which immediately follows in the Levites’s prayer. (CC)

9:16 *and our fathers.* Response of Israel’s ancestors to God’s material and spiritual blessings grew more disappointing as His favors mounted. Were it not for His “great mercies” (v 19), they would have been left to perish in the wilderness. (TLSB)

stiffened their neck. Arrogant and stubborn attitudes. (TLSB)

The description of Israel’s rebellion is characterized by the accusation that they “acted arrogantly” in this verse and also in Neh. 9:29, which earlier described the Egyptians’ hubris toward God (Neh. 9:10). The rebellion made Israel no better than the pagan Egyptians – and Israel did not remember the miracles that punished the Egyptians (“they did not remember your wonders,” Neh. 9:17). The lack of memory is coupled with refusing to listen to God (Neh. 9:16-17). Even miracles will convert unreceptive hearts that refuse to listen to Moses’ Teaching (Lk. 16:31). Conversion comes by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word (Lk. 16:29; see also Lk. 8:15; 10:212; 11:13, 28). (CC)

9:17 *appointed a leader.* Their intention to do so is recorded in Nu 14:4. (CSB)

The rebels’ appointing of a leader is drawn from Num. 14:4: “Let us appoint a head/leader and return to Egypt.” (CC)

returned to their slavery – The main difference is that the prayer adds the phrase “to their slavery,” emphasizing not simply the slavery in Egypt, but the Israelites slavery to sin and death. All sinners are held in this slavery unless the Son frees them and enables them to become servants of God (Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:16-22; Heb. 2:15). (CC)

gracious and merciful. Although in their rebellion the Israelites wished to return to the slavery from which God wants to deliver all people through the Messiah, God is a “forgiving, merciful, and compassionate, slow to anger, abundant-in-steadfast-love God.” The placing of God’s disclosure of His merciful nature between two account of rebellion, all in the middle of the account of Israel’s wilderness wanderings, highlights His grace. (CC)

did not forsake them – The confession of God as “forgiving...” draws on God’s own revelations about His nature in Exodus 34:6-7 and Numbers 14:18. In addition, it sets the tone for speaking about God’s compassion on sinners throughout the rest of the prayer (9:19, 27-28, 31). The conclusion from these attributes of God is short and to-the-point: “so you did not abandon them,” a statement resumed in Neh. 9:19 (cf. Deut. 31:6, 8; Ps. 16:10; 94:14; Heb. 13:5). (CC)

9:18 *blasphemies.* See v. 26; Eze 35:12. (CSB)

The retelling of the golden calf incident contains the only quotation of human speech in the entire prayer. It is quoted from Exodus 32:4, 8 (cf. 1 Ki. 12:28). The only significant change in wording that the plural “these are your gods” in Exodus 32:4, 8 is changed to the singular “this is your god” in the prayer. These actions of apostasy and idolatry are unequivocally termed “great blasphemies,” a charge that will be leveled again in Neh. 9:26. (CC)

9:19-21 These verses return to God’s mercy, recounting specific ways in which He “did not abandon” Israel (Neh. 9:19, repeated from Neh. 9:17; cf. Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:23): (CC)

- He continued to guide them with the column of smoke and fire (9:12).
- He gave them His good Spirit (a reference to Num. 11:16-25).
- He continued to give them manna and water (as in Neh. 9:15).
- He sustained them for forty years (a reference to Deut. 8:4; 29:5)

These four specific acts summarize the patience and graciousness of God toward His people during their wilderness wanderings. (CC)

9:19 *great mercies*. See vv. 27–28; a tender, maternal kind of love (see note on Zec 1:16). (CSB)

9:20 *Spirit to instruct*. See Ex 31:3. (CSB)

The Lord bestowed His Spirit on the 70 elders whom Moses chose to be his assistants (Num. 11:16-29). In this survey of the past, all action is attributed directly to God; there is no mention of Israel’s great men, not even Moses or David. (TLSB)

9:21 *clothes did not wear out*. Evidence of the special providence of God (see Dt 8:4; 29:5; contrast Jos 9:13). (CSB)

did not swell. Or “blistered”; the Hebrew for this word occurs only here and in Dt 8:4. (CSB)

9:22-25 The Conquest of the Promised Land

The account of the conquest begins with the events of Numbers 21:21-35 and Deut. 2:24-3:22, which narrate the capture of the land east of the Jordan River. This land was to become home to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh (Num. 32:33; 34:14; Josh. 18:7). (CC)

9:22 *every corner* – Expressed God’s abundant blessing of land. (TLSB)

Sihon ... Og. See Nu 21:21–35. (CSB)

9:23 *as the stars of heaven*. The promise to Abraham and Isaac that God would multiply their descendants like the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4) was already partially fulfilled before Israel enter the land. (CC)

See Deut. 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; cf. Ex. 32:13; 1 Chr. 27:23. The NT, of course redefines sonship as consisting of faith in the Son. All baptized believers in Christ are spiritual children of Abraham and heirs of the OT promises (Gal. 3:26-29; cf. Rom. 9-11; Gal. 6:16). Already now, Christians shine as stars in this dark world (Phil. 2:15). On the Last Day, all believers shall be raised from the dead to “shine...like stars, forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3. Compare Rev. 21:23-25; 22:5, 16. (CC)

Therefore it was appropriate for the Levites to mention that promise as they recounted how Israel was brought to the land in fulfillment of the land promise to the ancestors (Neh. 9:23; cf. Neh.

9:8). Here Israel is depicted as being on the verge of entering the land, and it is the last verse in the prayer that recounts Israel's history from the Pentateuch. (CC)

9:24 *they might do with them as they would.* Israel was able to work its will on the nations living in Canaan because God had given this power (Dt 7:1–5). (TLSB)

This verse summarizes the conquest of the land, especially as it is recorded in Joshua. However, it adds a concept not found there: God enabled the Israelites “to do with them (the Canaanites) as they pleased. This emphasizes God’s total fulfillment of His promise to Abraham that the patriarch’s descendants would subjugate the Canaanites (Neh. 9:8). It also prepares for a contrast with the Judeans’ current situation, described with the identical prepositional phrase: the Persian king’s rule “our bodies and our animals as they please (Neh.9:37) (CC)

9:25 Three specific aspects of the conquest are related in this verse: capture, possession, and settlement. The first two are a paraphrase of Deut. 6:10-11, where the order is that God gave them land, cities, houses full of goods, hewn cisterns, vineyards, and olive trees. The prayer changes the order of the first two items to cities followed by fertile land. Then at the end of the list of God’s good gifts, the prayer adds fruit trees. This addition to the list may have been supplied from Lev. 19:23. (CC)

cisterns already hewn. Because of the lack of rainfall during much of the year, almost every house had its own well or cistern in which to store water from the rainy seasons (2Ki 18:31; Pr 5:15). By 1200 B.C. the technique of waterproofing cisterns was developed, permitting greater occupation of the central hills of Judah. (CSB)

Pits for storing water. (TLSB)

vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees. Cf. Dt 8:8. The Egyptian story of Sinuhe (c. 2000 B.C.) describes Canaan as follows: “Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives. Every (kind of) fruit was on its trees.” (CSB)

were filled...great goodness. Elsewhere the Hebrew for this word always implies physical fullness and spiritual insensitivity. (CSB)

The description of the Israelites’ contentment after their settlement in the land appears to combine the end of Deut. 6:11 with “grew fat” in Deut. 32:15. This once again sounds an ominous note, since rebellion immediately follows growing fat in Deut. 32:15, and rebellion is the topic of the next verse in the prayer (9:26). However, the prayer adds a clause found nowhere else in the OT: “and they delighted in your goodness.” Like the addition in Neh. 9:24, this addition serves to highlight the plight of the returned Judeans in Nehemiah’s day. They could not take the delight in the riches of the land as did the original Israelite settlers because they were slaves in the land where their ancestors ate and delighted (9:26). (CC)

9:26-31 Verses 9:26-28 recounts a cycle of unfaithfulness, repentance, and restoration similar to that in Judges (see Judg. 2:10-19. The killing of the prophets recalls Elijah’s claim made on Mount Horeb (1 Ki. 19:10, 14). Like the idolatry with the golden calf, the murders of the prophets too are called “great blasphemies,” Neh. 9:18, 26). Both were a rejection of God. (CC)

In the NT Jesus cites the murder of the prophets as a characteristic of OT Israel (Mt. 23:29-37; Lk. 11:47-51; 13:34). So too does Stephen the proto-martyr (Acts 7:51-53). Jesus declares that this history of murdering the prophets will culminate in the rejection and killing of the Christ

Himself, with the result that God will take away His kingdom and give it to others who will yield its fruit (Mt. 21:33-44). (CC)

9:26–28 See note on Jdg 2:6–3:6. (The second half of the introduction continues the narrative of Jos 24:28–31. It is a preliminary survey of the accounts narrated in Jdg 3:7–16:31, showing that Israel’s first centuries in the Promised Land are a recurring cycle of apostasy, oppression, cries of distress and gracious deliverance. The author reminds Israel that she will enjoy God’s promised rest in the Promised Land only when she is loyal to him and to his covenant.) (CSB)

9:27-28 Twice in these verses God “heard from heaven, (Neh. 9:27-28), a clause reminiscent of Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, where he repeatedly called on God to hear from heaven when His people pray to Him toward the temple. (1 Ki. 8:30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49; 2 Chr. 6:21, 23, 25, 27, 30, 33, 35, 39) God promised Solomon He would hear His people’s prayers, meaning that He would answer them according to His good will and gracious promises (2 Chr. 7:14; cf. 1 Ki. 9:3). Praying toward the temple is the OT era indicated trust in the expiation, propitiation, and grace of God based on the atoning sacrifices and liturgies performed there. Analogously in the NT, Jesus promises that God will respond favorably to all who pray in the name of Jesus (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-27), the one who atoned for the sin of the world by His sinless life, vicarious suffering and death, and resurrection victory. (CC)

9:27 saviors. The judges here are called “saviors,” to save, rescue. This term in the singular is applied to both Othniel and Ehud (Judg. 3:9, 15). These saviors “saved” Israel “from the hand of their foes.” (CC)

hand of their enemies – While “foe” is not used in Judg. 3:9, 15, two parallel passages use a synonym in historical affirmations that God used the judge to deliver Israel “from the hand of (all) their enemies,” Judg. 2:18; Judg. 8:34. Of course, these saviors and their actions to rescue Israel were but small previews of the Savior, who would rescue the entire human race for its sin. (CC)

9:29 *which if a person does them, he shall live.* With God’s full blessing. The law was the way of life for the redeemed (see Eze 20:11, 13, 21), not a way of salvation for the lost (see Ro 10:5; Gal 3:12. (CSB)

Israel did not earn the right to live because of observing God’s laws. Escape from eternal death was solely a gift of God’s grace offered and bestowed in the covenant. Obedience to the Commandments showed a grateful acceptance of this unearned mercy (cf Ezc 20:11). (TL SB)

God’s judgments are those “which when a man does (them), he will live by them.” The OT contains similar promises of life, such as Prov. 4:4; 7:2. However, the wording here most closely resembles Lev. 18:5, which is quoted verbatim in Ezek. 20:11. In both of these verses Yahweh refers to “my statutes” and “my judgments.” (CC)

The Teaching Yahweh gave through Moses contains both condemning Law and justifying, life-giving Gospel. For that reason Moses could tell Israel that the Teaching offers them either death or life (Deut. 30:15-20; for life, see also e.g., Deut. 4:1; 5:33, 30:6; 32:47). If the Israelites would believe God’s Word, they would be justified by grace alone, saved through faith, and enjoy everlasting life. However, the implication of the statement in the context of the prayer of Nehemiah 9 is that because the Israelites rejected God’s Teaching and sinned against His judgments, they did not live, but instead died, both physically and eternally (Deut. 28:15-68; Jn. 6:49; 1 Cor. 10:1-11). (CC)

Like Jesus, His apostle Paul invokes the theology in these OT verses (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11; Neh. 9:29) when he says, “Moses writes about the righteousness from the Law, ‘He who does them (the commandments) will live by them,” Rom. 10:5; see also Gal. 3:12. The apostle contrasts the futility of attempting to fulfill the demands of the Law by one’s own works with the righteousness that comes freely through faith. Abraham was justified through faith, and the true children of Abraham – the true Israelites – are those who share his faith in the God who justified the ungodly (Rom. 4:5; 5:6), not those who seek righteousness through their own works (see Romans 4; 9:6-8, 30-32). The patriarch’s heirs are those who trust in Christ’s incarnation, His unblemished life of obedience to the Law in our stead, His atoning death, and His resurrection, all in fulfillment of the OT (Rom. 10:1-9). Whoever simply believes the Word of Christ is saved and will live (Rom. 1:17; 8:4; 10:10, 17; see also Gal. 3:1-14). (CC)

Therefore Christ Himself is the fulfillment of the Teaching of Moses and all the OT promises of life (2 Cor. 1:19-20). Thus He can declare that whoever believes in Him “will live” (Jn. 5:25; 6:51, 57-58; 14:19; cf. Jn. 11:25; Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Thess 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:11). (CC)

turned a stubborn shoulder. See Zec 7:11; cf. the similar expressions in v. 16; 3:5; Hos 4:16. (CSB)

The Israelites acted arrogantly, as in Neh. 9:16 and refused to listen. Earlier this verb described the Egyptians’ arrogance toward God (Neh. 9:10), so its reputation in Neh. 9:16 characterizes Israel as no better than the pagan Egyptians who had enslaved them. (CC)

9:30-31 The Babylonian captivity is the subject of these verses and brings to a close the historical review. While God punished Israel by giving them into hand of “the peoples of the lands,” the review ends with God’s compassion in not abandoning the Judeans, implying that He brought them back to the land. (CC)

9:30 *many years* – More than 600 years elapsed between Israel’s entrance into the Promised Land and the fall of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

hand of the peoples of the lands – Nations such as Assyria and Babylon. Cf. 2 Ki. 17:7-23. (TLSB)

9:31 *great mercies* – “Where sin increased” throughout Israel’s history, “grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20). In the wilderness (v. 17), during the occupation of Canaan (v. 27), even in the Babylonian exile, God did not “make an end of them” as they fully deserved. A plea for continued mercy and pledge of covenant faithfulness (vv. 32-38) could be made without fear of rejection. (TLSB)

9:32-35 A Call for God’s Mercy despite Israel’s Unfaithfulness.

9:32 Judah’s current situation was described. (TLSB)

now, therefore our God the great, the mighty...awesome – The shift from the historical review to the present is signaled by “so now.” This phrase is commonly used to signal a shift of topic in prayers (e.g., Num. 14:17; Ezra 9:10; Dan. 9:15). God is described as “the great, mighty, and fearsome God” also in Deut. 10:17 (cf. Jer. 32:18). Five other times in the OT God is described as the one “who keeps the covenant and faithfulness/steadfast love” (Deut. 7:9 1 Ki. 8:23/2 Chr. 6:14; Dan. 9:4; Neh. 1:5). The combined description of God here is closely parallel

to Daniel's prayer for Jerusalem and the temple as well as Nehemiah's prayer for Jerusalem. (CC)

All of these prayers express a messianic hope, since the new covenant would be instituted by the Messiah at a time in history when Jerusalem and its temple were restored. This prayers the basis for a restored Jerusalem and a restored people who make a binding agreement to live according to God's Word as they await the Messiah. (CC)

kings of Assyria. Including Tiglath-Pileser III, also known as Pul (1Ch 5:26); Shalmaneser V (2Ki 18:9); Sargon II (Isa 20:1); Sennacherib (2Ki 18:13); Esarhaddon (Ezr 4:2); and Ashurbanipal (Ezr 4:10). (CSB)

Israel's hardship peaked with Assyria's capture of the Northern Kingdom and Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and deportation into exile of many inhabitants. In Nehemiah's day, the chosen people were "slaves" to the Persians and were not an independent community. (TLSB)

9:33 *You have been righteous* – Beginning (v. 8) and the end of this psalm affirm that God is righteous, that He is free of blame for what had happened, and that He has power to save. (TLSB)

9:36-37 A Call for God to See the Present Misery of His People

The result of Israel's infidelity and God's righteous judgment is presented in these verses with great irony: the people were slaves in the Promised Land. Though they had been restored to the land, they still experienced a form of captivity. Although they were brought back to the land to eat its fruit and its good things (cf. Jer. 2:7), the blessing of abundant produce now went to the Persian kings who still ruled over them. (CC)

9:36 *slaves* – Though the Judean were not literally slaves, they were subject to the heavy burden of taxation (5:4; Ezra 4:13; 7:24) and other oppressive measures (v. 37). (TLSB)

9:37 *rule over our bodies.* See 1Sa 8:11–13. The Persian rulers drafted their subjects into military service. Some Jews may have accompanied Xerxes on his invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. (CSB)

9:38 The People Make a Solemn Agreement

In spite of the faithlessness of their forefather, the Jews readily see evidence of God's continued faithfulness towards them. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 134)

Ezra and Levites were apparently as aware of this human failing as we are. They, therefore, took steps to bring the people to a place of renewed dedication to the Lord.. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 130)

because of all this – This is an admission of the sins of the present generation. The adoption of this agreement was a sign of the people's repentance and an implicit plea for a new deliverance like the exodus redemption God accomplished through Moses. (CC)

a firm covenant – People of Ezra's time felt the need to renew their pledge of loyalty to the same covenant after hearing the Book of the Law read repeatedly. (TLSB)

IN WRITING – The solemn, public commitment to God's Law was put into writing, and the document was sealed. (TLSB)

princes, Levites, and other priests – The clerical and lay leadership signed their names on the outside of the document (chapter 10). (TLSB)

Ch 9 The people confess the Lord's enduring mercy promised in the covenant. They were saved by God's grace, not by their obedience. You, too, are saved only by God's grace, which He offers faithfully through Christ Jesus. • We confess You alone, O Lord, our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen. (TLSB)