

Study Notes: Nehemiah 9:1-5a
October 22, 2023: “Confession and Commitment”
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On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors.

- A few days after celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, the people gathered again, but this time they came not in joy, but in fasting and mourning. They separated themselves from the foreigners in the assembly, and confessed their sins.
 - The New American Commentary explains, “Wearing sackcloth’ symbolized mourning and humility. Reading the Book of the Law (v. 3) made the people realize that they and their ancestors had constantly failed to keep the covenant with God.”

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. Standing on the stairs of the Levites were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani. They cried out with loud voices to the Lord their God. And the Levites — Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah — said: “Stand up and praise the Lord your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.”

- The time of confession was described in two parts. First, the people spent time reading and hearing from the Law. This took about three hours. After reading from the Law, the people spent the next three hours confessing their sins and worshipping the Lord.
 - The New American Commentary provides a modern application from this activity, “Their example presents two challenges: (1) Allow God to speak through his Word. That is the only sure basis for revival and for correction of the life and mission of the church. (2) Read widely in God’s Word, not just brief portions. At times we need to read long sections at one sitting to get a broad perspective. We can learn from the balance here between hearing God’s Word, worship, and confession. Each one is important, and all are imperative.”
- This process was led by the Levites, who stood on the stairs and led worship. The Levites began by calling them to stand up and praise the Lord. Following this call, a lengthy prayer of confession was recorded.

Nehemiah 9:5b-37 contains the prayer of confession that was made, likely by Ezra, leading the people. In this prayer, Ezra praised God and then remembered God’s dealings with Israel. The prayer ended with the people recognizing their sin and their need for God’s mercy.

Nehemiah 9:38 introduces the people’s commitment to the Lord, given their confession. They would make a binding agreement with the Lord, to turn from their sins and walk according to His ways.

Nehemiah 10:1-27 is a list of those who signed the covenant.

Nehemiah 10:28-29 is a general statement that all the people bound themselves to follow the Lord their God.

Nehemiah 10:30-39 lists some specific parts of the law that the people stated they would keep. These included separating themselves from the people around them, keeping the Sabbath, and taking care of the house of the Lord by presenting offerings and people to serve. The chapter ends with the statement, "We will not neglect the house of our God." This statement foreshadows some of the events that happened in Nehemiah 13.