

October 23 Su Reading 296 — Ezra 9:1-15 — We Have Forsaken Your Commandments

<sup>1</sup> After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. <sup>2</sup> For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race<sup>[fn]</sup> has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.” <sup>3</sup> As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. <sup>4</sup> Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. <sup>5</sup> And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God, <sup>6</sup> saying:

“O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. <sup>7</sup> From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today. <sup>8</sup> But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold<sup>[fn]</sup> within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. <sup>9</sup> For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection<sup>[fn]</sup> in Judea and Jerusalem.

<sup>10</sup> “And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, <sup>11</sup> which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering, to take possession of it, is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.’” <sup>13</sup> And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this, <sup>14</sup> shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? <sup>15</sup> O LORD, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.”

#### ESV Footnotes

(9:2) Hebrew *offspring*

(9:8) Hebrew *nail*, or *tent-pin*

(9:9) Hebrew *a wall*

**Your Goodness ... Our Guilt** — Being a tailor in OT times must have been profitable—people were always intentionally tearing their garments. ☺ The priest, Ezra, did it here, along with tearing out hunks of his hair, which was not just a symbolic gesture—he was genuinely appalled (v. 3). How disturbed do we get about the sins of our nation? How about our own sins? Ezra had a high view of God’s holiness and the truth and authority of His Word. By intermarrying with foreign women who served false gods, his fellow Jews were disobeying a direct command that God had given to Moses:

*"You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods"* (Deut. 7:3-4). Disobedience to this law was part of the reason Judah had spent 70 years exiled in Babylon. Nevertheless, God showed His goodness by bringing them back: *"But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God"* (Ezra 9:8). How do we react to God's goodness? When He removes punishing discipline for our past sins, do we relax and slide back toward the same sins? That is what Ezra saw, and he was appalled. His prayer of confession included himself with the sinful people: *"...we have forsaken your commandments"* (v. 10), and *"...our evil deeds and for our great guilt"* (v. 13). Collectively, they had great guilt in spite of God's great goodness.

### Goodness of God - YouTube

And all my life You have been faithful,  
And all my life You have been so, so good;  
With every breath that I am able,  
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

— Jason Ingram (1974)

\*\*\*\*\*

October 24 M Reading 297 — Nehemiah 1:1-11 — I Will Gather Them

<sup>1</sup> *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.*

*Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."*

<sup>4</sup> *As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."*

*Now I was cupbearer to the king.*

**Knowing the Heart Mover** — Nehemiah was one of the Jews who did not return to Judah with Ezra 13 years earlier. Perhaps he was not allowed to return because of his high position as *"cupbearer to the king"* (v. 11). This passage shows several things that Nehemiah realized about God. First, he knew that God had not only made a covenant with His people through Moses, but that He also *"keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments"* (v. 5). God

keeps His promises. Secondly, he knew that God punishes disobedience: “*If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples*” (v. 8). It was for those sins that Nehemiah spent days weeping, fasting, and praying (v. 4) in confession of his own sins and those of his fellow Jews (vv. 6-7). Nehemiah also knew that God was powerful enough to change the hearts of kings in order to benefit His people. Nehemiah asked God for only two things: “*give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man*” (v. 11). We will see later that God did answer that prayer and moved the heart of King Artaxerxes. The Promise Keeper is also the Heart Mover.

### [Way Maker - YouTube](#)

See it also performed by the Nigerian writer,  
whose full name is Osinachi Kalu Okoro Egbu:

### [Sinach - Way Maker - YouTube](#)

Way maker, miracle worker  
Promise keeper, light in the darkness,  
My God, that is who You are.

— Sinach (2016)

\*\*\*\*\*

October 25 Tu Reading 298 — Nehemiah 2:1-8 — God Who Answers Prayer

<sup>1</sup> *In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.* <sup>2</sup> *And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid.* <sup>3</sup> *I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”* <sup>4</sup> *Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.* <sup>5</sup> *And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.”* <sup>6</sup> *And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.* <sup>7</sup> *And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah,* <sup>8</sup> *and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.*

**Quick Prayers** — We saw in yesterday’s reading that Nehemiah mourned and prayed for days about the condition of Jerusalem’s walls and the sins of God’s people that triggered its destruction. Yet he had one more very short prayer when he faced King Artaxerxes. I love this thin, sandwiched prayer: “*What are you requesting?*” So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king...” (vv. 4-5). Between the king’s question and Nehemiah’s answer was a quick, silent prayer to God. What was it? Perhaps it was just, “Help me, God!” Sometimes in a crisis, a quick prayer is all that we need to get God’s attention and His action, but it must be preceded by a life of prayer and it must come from a cleansed heart. In the prayer we read yesterday, Nehemiah confessed his own sins as well as those of his fellow Jews. His quick prayer in the presence of the king came from a heart that was already humble and clean before God.

### [Hear My Prayer - YouTube](#)

Hear my prayer, O Lord,  
From the ends of the earth I cry;  
Your peace will lead me to  
The Rock that is higher than I.

For You have been my strength in times of trouble,  
A tower above my enemies;  
And Lord, I will abide with You forever  
In the shelter of Your wings.

— Debbie Owens (2014)

\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>6</sup> So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

<sup>7</sup><sup>[fn]</sup> But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. <sup>8</sup> And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. <sup>9</sup> And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

<sup>10</sup> In Judah it was said,<sup>[fn]</sup> “The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.” <sup>11</sup> And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work.” <sup>12</sup> At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, “You must return to us.”<sup>[fn]</sup> <sup>13</sup> So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. <sup>14</sup> And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.”

<sup>15</sup> When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. <sup>16</sup> From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, <sup>17</sup> who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. <sup>18</sup> And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. <sup>19</sup> And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. <sup>20</sup> In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”

<sup>21</sup> So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. <sup>22</sup> I also said to the people at that time, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.” <sup>23</sup> So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.<sup>[fn]</sup>

#### ESV Footnotes

(4:7) Ch 4:1 in Hebrew

(4:10) Hebrew *Judah* said

(4:12) The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain

(4:23) Or *his weapon when drinking*

**Who Works?** — This story shows three good examples of the relationship between trust and toil. The people trusted God to defend them, but they still worked with all their strength. When the leaders of the surrounding peoples threatened them, Nehemiah recorded that “...we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection” (v. 9). They asked God for safety, but still prepared to protect themselves. Was that a lack of trust? Secondly, Nehemiah challenged them not to be afraid, saying, “Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers...” (v. 14). Trust God, but be ready to fight. If they fought, would they be trusting God? The third example came when they

were spread out so far apart around the wall that Nehemiah planned to have a trumpet blown at the site of any attack, saying, “*rally to us there. Our God will fight for us*” (v. 20). Why rally together if God was going to do the fighting? What Nehemiah understood in these situations was that sometimes God uses us to accomplish His purposes, and sometimes He does it Himself, perhaps by manipulating circumstances or changing the minds of the opposition. God is sovereign, and we don’t know what means He will use. We must do what we should do, knowing that God can use that for success or He can produce His own separate work for us. So, we work while we trust that God will also work to accomplish His will.

### [God Will Work It Out - YouTube](#)

When my heart is full of doubt,  
Feels like faith is running out,  
I've come too far to turn around;  
I know  
God will work it out.

— Aaron Moses, Christopher Cleveland,  
Naomi Raine, Nate Moore

\*\*\*\*\*

October 27 Th Reading 300 — Nehemiah 6:15-19 — The Help of Our God

<sup>15</sup> *So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.* <sup>16</sup> *And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.* <sup>17</sup> *Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah’s letters came to them.* <sup>18</sup> *For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.* <sup>19</sup> *Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.*

**The 52-Day Wonder** — Notice, again, the cooperation between the Hebrews and their God. They did the work, but God provided the strength: “...*this work had been accomplished with the help of our God*” (v. 16). It was a phenomenal feat. The people expended the effort, but God gave them strength and made them efficient. It is like the lumberjack who takes time to sharpen his axe before attacking the tree; he is able to chop down his tree much faster than others working with the same effort, but with dull tools. Do you pray before you begin an ambitious project? It will sharpen your axe. Finishing the wall in 52 days was not only unexpected, it was unheard of. The opposing neighbors of the Jews recognized that and knew they were in trouble. If Yahweh could accomplish that with people who worked with a weapon in one hand, what might He do next? They knew they were facing a miraculous power, and they “*were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem*” (v. 16). They were fearful and deflated. What could God do through us if we sharpened our axe with prayer and asked God to do the impossible through us?



## I Believe in Miracles - YouTube

I cannot doubt the work of God,  
There's glory all around,  
And those who see must stand in awe,  
For miracles abound.

I believe in miracles; I've seen a soul set free,  
Miraculous the change in one redeemed through Calvary;  
I've seen the lily push its way up through the stubborn sod;  
I believe in miracles, for I believe in God!

— Carlton C. Buck (1956)

\*\*\*\*\*

October 28 F Reading 301 — Nehemiah 8:1-18 — Honoring the Law of God

<sup>1</sup> And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

<sup>4</sup> And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishaël, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. <sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites,<sup>[fn]</sup> helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly,<sup>[fn]</sup> and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

<sup>9</sup> And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." <sup>11</sup> So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." <sup>12</sup> And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

<sup>13</sup> On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law. <sup>14</sup> And they found it written in the Law that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths<sup>[fn]</sup> during the feast of the seventh month, <sup>15</sup> and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, "Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written." <sup>16</sup> So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. <sup>17</sup> And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was

very great rejoicing. <sup>18</sup> And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.

#### ESV Footnotes

(8:7) Vulgate; Hebrew *and the Levites*

(8:8) Or *with interpretation*, or *paragraph by paragraph*

(8:14) Or *temporary shelters*

**The Strength of Joy** — There are several expressions about emotions in this chapter, and they are centered around the Law of God. First, was their respectful attitude of honoring God's Word. Their eagerness to participate in this public reading and teaching of Scripture is shown in that "*both men and women*" (v. 2) gathered together at an event that was required only for men. The reading of the Law was honored by the elevated platform (v. 4), by the 13 leaders that stood there with Ezra, by the crowd standing as the book was opened (v. 5), and by their willingness to listen to its reading "*from early morning until midday*" (v. 2). They were intensely interested in, focused on, and in awe of learning from this long-neglected Law of God. Secondly, they had an emotional reaction to hearing the content of the Law. They reacted by worshiping God with lifted hands and bowed heads (v. 6). They reacted with tears ("*...all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law*"—v. 9), probably under conviction as their sinful history was revealed). Having tears of repentance is good, but Ezra stressed the important subsequent emotion of the joy of restoration ("*...the joy of the LORD is your strength*"—v. 10). They were also to "*make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them*" (v. 12). How about you? Has your daily reading and meditating on God's Word caused you to rejoice? I hope you have progressed past the idea of just completing a task every day, and have advanced to looking forward to what you are about to learn about God and His ways. That is when the Word of God becomes a source of real joy for us.

#### [Joy of the Lord - YouTube](#)

Though the tears may fall, my song will rise,  
My song will rise to You.

Though my heart may fail, my song will rise,  
My song will rise to You.

While there's breath in my lungs

I will praise You, Lord

In the dead of night, I'll lift my eyes

I'll lift my eyes to You.

The joy of the Lord is my strength.

In the darkness, I'll dance;

In the shadows, I'll sing,

The joy of the Lord is my strength.

— Edmond Cash, et. al. (2015)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY TIME!**

October 29 Sa Reading 302 — Nehemiah 9:1-38 — You Made a Name for Yourself

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And the Israelites<sup>[fn]</sup> separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> [fn] "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. <sup>7</sup> You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> "And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, <sup>14</sup> and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> "But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. <sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>[fn]</sup> But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. <sup>18</sup> Even when they had made for themselves a golden<sup>[fn]</sup> calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. <sup>21</sup> Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

<sup>22</sup> "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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> "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. <sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

<sup>32</sup> “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.<sup>33</sup> Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> 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.

<sup>38</sup> [fn] “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of<sup>ffn</sup> our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

#### ESV Footnotes

(9:2) Hebrew *the offspring of Israel*

(9:6) Septuagint adds *And Ezra said*

(9:17) Some Hebrew manuscripts; many Hebrew manuscripts *and in their rebellion appointed a leader to return to their slavery*

(9:18) Hebrew *metal*

(9:38) Ch 10:1 in Hebrew

(9:38) Hebrew lacks *the names of*

**Great Mercy** — This is a great historical summary of the people of Israel, extending from the calling of Abraham to their return from exile in Babylon. It reminds me of the historical sweep contained in Psalm 78 and in Stephen’s final speech in Acts 7. This chapter in Nehemiah contains a great review of the wonderful attributes and actions of God in contrast to the weakness, sinfulness, and rebellion of His people. Of the 23 attributes of God that I counted in this chapter, five of them mentioned God’s mercy, which emphasizes a core contrast between what is divine and what is human. Judgment is the legitimate and natural response to human sinfulness, but God chose to have mercy on His people much more often than applying justice. “*Mercy triumphs over judgment*” (James 2:13). It would be good to ask this of ourselves: Am I more apt to be merciful toward others, or more judgmental? Your honest answer would reveal much about your character and spiritual maturity. Most of us need to grow in our merciful attitude, even toward those we love. Ask God to make you more aware of how you think about and treat others in your biological family or church family. Are you more critical than forgiving? We all need to grow in becoming more merciful, like our great, merciful God.

[Let the Lower Lights Be Burning - YouTube](#)

Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
From His lighthouse evermore,  
But to us He gives the keeping  
Of the lights along the shore.

Let the lower lights be burning!  
Send a gleam across the wave!  
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman  
You may rescue, you may save.

— Philip Bliss (1871)

**ACCOUNTABILITY TIME!** If you are up to date in your reading for this month,  
please [click here](#) or let me know today at [accbibleread@gmail.com](mailto:accbibleread@gmail.com).