

Broken and Restored

An Exposition of Nehemiah

9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them^a. ² The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers^b. ³ While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for *another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. ⁴ Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani *and* Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God^c.

^a 9:1 **Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.** The outward signs of repentance were part of the commandment for the Day of Atonement:

And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves... Leviticus 16:29

Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. Leviticus 23:27

On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation and afflict yourselves. Numbers 29:7

What is puzzling here is that the people practiced the outward signs repentance two weeks after the prescribed day for such activities. This time of mourning also stands in great contrast to the commands of the leaders to feast and celebrate in the last chapter.

One reasonable explanation for these unusual events is that the ceremonial repentance called for on the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur) modeled the heartfelt repentance practiced here. Christians ought to examine themselves every day, not just when communion is on the calendar. Mourning for sin and the joy of forgiveness naturally fit together.

^b 9:2 **The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.** The separation from foreigners was not a matter of race. Israel stood confessing national sins and it was not fitting for those who had no part in the covenant to participate.

This is similar to the way we ought to look at the local church. The table of the Lord is for believers who have entered into covenant with the living God. It is a sacred time where we "clean house" and commune with those who have been made part of what Peter calls a "holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9). Both the apostles Paul and Peter urged local congregations to handle family business inside the family.

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? But those who are outside, God judges. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 1 Peter 4:17

^c 9:3-4 **While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for *another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani *and* Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.** We can measure a fourth of a Jewish day as the span of three hours. So the Levites, apparently minus Ezra, read the Scriptures for three hours and then led in prayer and confession for three hours.

⁵ Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah *and* Pethahiah, said, “Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever!

O may Your glorious name be blessed
And exalted above all blessing and praise^a!

⁶ “You alone are the LORD.
You have made the heavens,
The heaven of heavens with all their host,
The earth and all that is on it,
The seas and all that is in them.
You give life to all of them
And the heavenly host bows down before You^b.

⁷ “You are the LORD God,
Who chose Abram
And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees,
And gave him the name Abraham^c.

⁸ “You found his heart faithful before You,
And made a covenant with him
To give *him* the land of the Canaanite,
Of the Hittite and the Amorite,
Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite—
To give *it* to his descendants^d.

^a 9:5 **Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah, said, “Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! O may Your glorious name be blessed And exalted above all blessing and praise!”** There are eight men listed in verses four and eight men in verse five. Five men’s names appear in both lists, possibly indicating a shift change to relieve tired voices.

Look at the order of worship: God spoke. The people repented. The people worshipped.

^b 9:6 **You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before You.** The uniqueness and the holiness of God are a sweet meditation for His worshippers. He stands alone and that holy aloneness shows up in His awesome works like creation and providence. The people of Israel witnessed His holy devastation of the army of Egypt and they stood next to the Red Sea, singing these words:

Who is like You among the gods, O Lord?
Who is like You, majestic in holiness,
Awesome in praises, working wonders? Exodus 15:11

^c 9:7 **You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham.** The people moved from God’s transcendence (He is over all) to His immanence (He is with us). Out of the massive universe He created, the Creator set His affection on a family. The name change here is important because Abraham means “father of many.”

^d 9:8 **You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give *him* the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite—To give *it* to his descendants.** Note that God chose Abraham before He found the man faithful. The point of this prayer assured the people that they were standing on ground that God gave their family.

And You have fulfilled Your promise,
For You are righteous^a.

⁹ “You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,
And heard their cry by the Red Sea.

¹⁰ “Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,
Against all his servants and all the people of his land;
For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them,
And made a name for Yourself as *it is* this day^b.

¹¹ “You divided the sea before them,
So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground;
And their pursuers You hurled into the depths,
Like a stone into raging waters.

¹² “And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day,
And with a pillar of fire by night
To light for them the way
In which they were to go^c.

¹³ “Then You came down on Mount Sinai,
And spoke with them from heaven;
You gave them just ordinances and true laws,

^a 9:8 **And You have fulfilled Your promise, For You are righteous.** Only someone who is unrighteous makes promises he cannot keep. This righteous and faithful God had shown up once again on behalf of His covenant people and put them in a rebuilt city after 140 years of captivity.

^b 9:9-10 **You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea. Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants and all the people of his land; For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them, And made a name for Yourself as *it is* this day.** Observe all the actions of God here: “You saw... heard... performed... knew... made.” God has made it known to His people that they will never be left unattended. Even though trouble in Egypt lasted a long time, Israel’s covenant-keeping God took His own revenge. Verse ten shows (“as *it is* this day”) that nothing had changed about God from the time of the Egyptian Passover to the return from Persia.

^c 9:11-12 **You divided the sea before them, So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; And their pursuers You hurled into the depths, Like a stone into raging waters. And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day, And with a pillar of fire by night To light for them the way In which they were to go.** More actions of God: “You divided... You hurled.” There refers to the violent closing of the Red Sea on the army of Egypt. Texts that describe the way the Lord led Israel out of Egypt often picture both sides of the glory. So it is here. It was dry ground and safety on one side and raging waters for the other. It was confidence and light on one side and confusion and darkness on the other. Note the way Moses described it:

The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them.²⁰ So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night...

The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.²³ Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea.²⁴ At the morning watch, the Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion.²⁵ He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for the Lord is fighting for them against the Egyptians.” Exodus 14:19-20, 22-25

Good statutes and commandments.

¹⁴ “So You made known to them Your holy sabbath,
And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law,
Through Your servant Moses^a.

¹⁵ “You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger,
You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst,
And You told them to enter in order to possess
The land which You swore to give them^b.

¹⁶ “But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly;
They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments.

¹⁷ “They refused to listen,
And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them;
So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt^c.
But You are a God of forgiveness,
Gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness;
And You did not forsake them^d.

^a 9:13-14 **Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. So You made known to them Your holy sabbath, And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, Through Your servant Moses.** The Levite worship leaders moved the story from the miraculous works of God to the words God spoke to His people. The new actions of God: “You came down... spoke... gave them just ordinances... made known to them your holy Sabbath.”

The God who is Spirit often revealed Himself with physical traits to communicate His character and actions. Here He is shown going from one place to another in order to come near His people and speak to them. In the giving of the law to Moses and Israel, God began with His character: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Exodus 20:2).

^b 9:15 **You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, And You told them to enter in order to possess The land which You swore to give them.** And, finally, more actions of God are revealed. He did miraculous works as well as spoke: “You provided bread... brought forth food... told them to enter.” The record shows that God’s miraculous provision (His *providence*) sustained the nation until He sustained them through the means of hard work (still more providence).

The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year. Joshua 5:12

^c 9:16-17 **But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.** Here begins the section of the narrative that shows how Israel had squandered the riches of God’s grace He had poured out on them. The word “stubborn” describing the attitude of the fathers often simply refers to *hardness*. Hard hearts and stiff necks are the invisible version of putting your hands over your ears.

For national Israel this hardness resulted in an attempt to drive out Moses, the man who acted as God’s messenger. Moses was often asked to carry less-than-complimentary messages and most of us would prefer not to hear descriptions of how bad we have been.

^d 9:17 **But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And You did not forsake them.** God *forgives*, so He refuses to

¹⁸ “Even when they made for themselves
 A calf of molten metal
 And said, ‘This is your God
 Who brought you up from Egypt,’
 And committed great blasphemies,
¹⁹ You, in Your great compassion,
 Did not forsake them in the wilderness;
 The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day,
 To guide them on their way,
 Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go^a.
²⁰ “You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,
 Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth,
 And You gave them water for their thirst.
²¹ “Indeed, forty years You provided for them in the wilderness *and* they were not in want;
 Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell^b.
²² “You also gave them kingdoms and peoples,
 And allotted *them* to them as a boundary.
 They took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon

hold past wrongs against the forgiven. God is *gracious*, so He gives His children more than they need. God is *slow to anger*, so He does not give His people what their sins deserve. God overflows with *lovingkindness (covenant loyalty)*, so He keeps His promises. He does not turn away from His own.

^a 9:18-19 **Even when they made for themselves A calf of molten metal And said, ‘This is your God Who brought you up from Egypt,’ And committed great blasphemies, You, in Your great compassion, Did not forsake them in the wilderness; The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, To guide them on their way, Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go.** This would certainly seem to be the ultimate in rebellious behavior. Not only the direct defiance to at least the first two of the ten commandments, but also the timing of their acts shows Israel’s animosity toward the living God. In response to emancipation from slavery in Egypt, the children of Israel had a democratic vote to replace their Redeemer. But even in that wickedness He kept His covenant.

^b 9:20-21 **You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth, And You gave them water for their thirst. Indeed, forty years You provided for them in the wilderness *and* they were not in want; Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell.** God spoke to His creatures. He fed them. He satisfied their thirst. He gave them clothes that did not wear out and feet that would stay healthy in a lifetime of extreme conditions. And they gave His strength to His rivals.

They were like the prophet Hosea’s wife Gomer. Gomer’s self deception not only caused her to think her illicit lovers were her benefactors, it made her (and Israel) rationalize taking gifts from her husband and spending them on her lovers:

...she said, “I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.” Hosea 1:5

For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. Hosea 2:8

Think of all the examples of people who greatly benefit from God’s gifts who spend His gifts on His rivals. The eyes he made to take in His world so we can worship instead are used for coveting. The gift of language designed for praise and thanksgiving degrades to tongues that slander and lie. Minds created to ponder the greatness of God plot mischief. Hands made to serve others instead steal from them.

And the land of Og the king of Bashan.

²³ “You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven,

And You brought them into the land

Which You had told their fathers to enter and possess^a.

²⁴ “So their sons entered and possessed the land.

And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites,

And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land,

To do with them as they desired.

²⁵ “They captured fortified cities and a fertile land.

They took possession of houses full of every good thing,

Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves,

Fruit trees in abundance.

So they ate, were filled and grew fat,

And reveled in Your great goodness^b.

²⁶ “But they became disobedient and rebelled against You,

And cast Your law behind their backs

And killed Your prophets who had admonished them

So that they might return to You,

And they committed great blasphemies^c.

²⁷ “Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them,

But when they cried to You in the time of their distress,

You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion

You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors^d.

^a 9:22-23 **You also gave them kingdoms and peoples, And allotted *them* to them as a boundary. They took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon And the land of Og the king of Bashan. You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven, And You brought them into the land Which You had told their fathers to enter and possess.** In addition to supplying material needs and subduing enemies, God increased Israel’s wealth by increasing the population.

^b 9:24-25 **So their sons entered and possessed the land. And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, To do with them as they desired. They captured fortified cities and a fertile land. They took possession of houses full of every good thing, Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, Fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled and grew fat, And reveled in Your great goodness.** Material prosperity is good when God is being praised for it. Pastor John Piper has often said that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. This truth has rarely been seen more clearly than when Israel occupied a land with bounty available that the people had no part in creating. This was a big congregation, swimming in material wealth, gathered together for the purpose of thanking God for His redemption. This was the Old Testament church.

^c 9:26 **But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, And cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets who had admonished them So that they might return to You, And they committed great blasphemies.** This disdain for the voice of God is the same attitude shown by King Jehoiakim who persecuted Jeremiah and even burned the manuscript of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jeremiah 36:23). It is the attitude of Ahab, who hated the prophet Micaiah because the prophet’s words were never encouraging (1 Kings 22:8).

^d 9:27 **Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, But when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors.** The period of the judges in the history of Israel was dark.

²⁸ “But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion,
²⁹ And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, By which if a man observes them he shall live^a. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen.
³⁰ “However,
³² “Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness, Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You, Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day^b.
³³ “However, You are just in all that has come upon us; For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.
³⁴ “For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them^c.”

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. God’s standard existed but the people were willingly ignorant of it. They reaped the horrible consequences of their own sins, but God continued to raise up deliverers. It is mercy immeasurable to restrain judgment from rebels and instead take their side against those who oppress them.

^a 9:28-29 **But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion, And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, By which if a man observes them he shall live.** Note the contrast between God’s actions: He abandoned them. He heard them. He rescued them (many times). He admonished them.

These two verses illustrate the cycle that is the story of the history of Israel as well as the story of the history of you. At the pinnacle of the cycle is joy and the ability to see God in all His glory. At the bottom of the cycle is sorrow and the ability to see the consequences turning away from God. Ironically, joy is often followed by complacency and sin and sorrow are often followed by repentance and holy living.

^b 9:32 **Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness, Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You, Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people, From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day.** The leaders made no excuses for their sins. They did, however, point out to God the hardness of their situation. They appealed to Him to act on their behalf as He had in the past.

There is nothing wrong with complaining to God. That is far different than complaining about God.

^c 9:33-34 **However, You are just in all that has come upon us; For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly. For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them.** The contrast is obvious. Part of the fruit of repentance is

³⁵ “But they, in their own kingdom,
 With Your great goodness which You gave them,
 With the broad and rich land which You set before them,
 Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds^a.
³⁶ “Behold, we are slaves today,
 And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty,
 Behold, we are slaves in it.
³⁷ “Its abundant produce is for the kings
 Whom You have set over us because of our sins;
 They also rule over our bodies
 And over our cattle as they please,
 So we are in great distress^b.
³⁸ “Now because of all this
 We are making an agreement in writing;
 And on the sealed document *are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests*^c.”^d

telling the truth about yourself. It is confessing that you are worthy of the consequences you have received for your sin. Just as the thief on the cross scolded his colleague on the other side of Jesus, so the spokesman here make no excuses for the hard times that had come upon the nation.

And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. Luke 23:41

^a 9:35 **But they, in their own kingdom, With Your great goodness which You gave them, With the broad and rich land which You set before them, Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds.** God gave Israel land that had the ability to produce wealth. As Paul told the church at Rome, idolatry is more than bowing down before a statue. It is enjoying the good gifts of the living God and refusing to give Him thanks.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Romans 1:21

^b 9:36-37 **Behold, we are slaves today, And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty, Behold, we are slaves in it. Its abundant produce is for the kings Whom You have set over us because of our sins; They also rule over our bodies And over our cattle as they please, So we are in great distress.** Release from captivity in Persia was not the same as complete freedom from slavery. Never again would national Israel have her own king. The answer to this prayer did not come with the restoration of the sacrificial system in the temple. It certainly did not come when an Idumean falsely dubbed “Herod the Great” manipulated his way into the equally fabricated title “King of the Jews.”

^c 9:38 **Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests.** Covenants are needed because of sinfulness. If people did not break covenants, covenants would be unnecessary. While this covenant testified to God’s work of repentance in His people, the answer to this cry for deliverance did not come as a result of this covenant. What was needed had been prophesied by Jeremiah before the Babylonian captivity:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his

brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Jeremiah 31:31-34

^d 9:1-38 There are a number of questions answered in this gathering. What is God like? How has He revealed Himself? What gifts has God given men? What have men done with those gifts? What has God done for repentant rebels?

Rehearsing the attributes of God is always fitting, particularly when circumstances—good or bad—threaten to eclipse His glory. The first flyover of this chapter answers the question *What is God like?* Below are reasons to worship even though you walk about with reminders of your own past:

- He speaks (v. 3)
- He stands alone (v. 6)
- He creates (v. 6)
- He condescends (v. 7)
- He is righteous (v. 8)
- He rescues (vv. 9-11)
- He sustains (vv. 15, 21)
- He shows compassion (vv. 17-19, 28-31)
- He gives gifts (vv. 22-23)
- He disciplines (v. 27)
- He keeps covenant (v. 32)

Because God has revealed Himself to the world, we can rest confidently in the fact that we know things about Him that we could otherwise not know. We must listen because He has spoken. The Levites taught the tiny nation that God speaks. Here are four reasons why you also need to pay attention:

1. He can be known. He wants to be known. Because He has spoken in audible and written form, you can know what He is like. Verse three shows the worship team reading from and explaining the law of Moses. Verse 13 reviews the historic event of giving the law to His people.
2. He can be seen. Because He has spoken through His creation, you can see His works constantly. Verse six has the leaders delighting in creation. The whole earth is full of His glory, which means you cannot get away from Him.
3. He is the judge. Because He has spoken in judgment, you know that evil cannot last. Sometimes this judgment comes with physical violence and sometimes it comes through internal condemnation. Verses 9-11 review the way God showed His power in the defeat of Egypt's army. Judgment is also something that happens inside us. Jesus said that the Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11).
4. He cares. When you know you are loved you pay attention to the one who loves you. Because He has spoken through His dealings with men, you know He cares for His people. While not everyone is in covenant with Him, everyone is witness to others in covenant with Him. Verses eight 32 laud our King because He keeps His promises to those He loves.

This rehearsal of God's history with Israel sets clearly before us the gifts God gave His people. It also shows how His people responded by sowing seeds of rebellion. As shown below, the harvest Israel reaped looked very much like the seeds that were sown. You, believer, must include yourself among the wandering souls.

The seeds sown:

- Refusing to listen (vv. 16-17)

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- Using God's gifts to aid in rebellion (v. 19)
 - Replacing Him (v. 18)
 - Forgetting Him (v. 26)
 - Hating His messengers (v. 26)

The harvest the rebels received:

- Hard hearts (v. 16)
- Short memories (v. 17)
- Misdirected worship (v. 18)
- Slavery (v. 21)

When you have a shameful past like you have, it is a healthy exercise to live in honest confession of both the depth of your sin and the depth of God's mercy toward you. This dark backdrop ought to make you overflow with joy at the magnitude of the goodness of God. Here are reasons why remembering your past can actually strengthen your worship:

1. He has shown His goodness in softening your hard heart. He did this, for example, in the life of Saul of Tarsus. God's grace turned a violent bully into a tender-hearted servant.
2. He has shown his goodness in restoring your memory of His character. Psalm 103 urges us to "forget none of His benefits." After the resurrection you have a number of instances where Jesus' disciples remembered after behaving for a time as unbelievers (e.g. John 2:22).
3. He has shown his goodness in turning you from vain idols. Paul urged the people of Lystra and Derbe to "turn from these vain things" (Acts 14:15). He told Agrippa that God had sent him to the Gentiles "to open their eyes"
4. He has shown His goodness in freeing you from slavery to sin. Romans 6 describes a new, living identity for those who are in Christ that frees them from bondage to the old life.

Pixar's animated 2004 classic *The Incredibles* starts with a quote from superhero Mr. Incredible expressing his frustration in an interview: "No matter how many times you save the world, it always manages to get back in jeopardy again. Sometimes I just want it to stay saved! You know?" This sentiment not only expresses the history of Israel in the wilderness. It expresses the cycle that is the Christian life. God does indeed save His people from their sins, but it also true that He *is saving* them from their sins.

God's salvation is considered by many an event in our past. Because Scripture does teach that we enter into covenant with God by believing the gospel, some people overlook the ongoing work of the gospel in believers. God's covenant people Israel were part of a cycle of blessing and joy, amnesia and sin, judgment and sorrow, and repentance and restoration. Just as the priests taught the people about God's deliverance of the nation of Israel, we can see His ongoing work in the Church.

Paul taught the church at Philippi about this:

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

Here are the ways you need to see the ongoing work of God's deliverance:

1. The trouble you are in is of His design, so no one is beyond His reach. You may think the trouble you are experiencing shows that you have been forsaken. Maybe it is rather the evidence that you belong to Him. Turn back.
2. He saves you even though He knows your weakness, so you know you have never strayed too far. Do you think the Master is unaware of your tendency to wander in that

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area? Do not deceive yourself into thinking you can get away with it but also do not deceive yourself into thinking that there is no way back.

3. He has entered into covenant with you, so your eternity is as secure as His promises. He is not like you. Praise Him for that.

BROKEN AND RESTORED

An Exposition of Nehemiah
Steven Svendsen, Sr.