

February 25

Scriptures: Read Nehemiah 9

Key Verse: “But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.” (Nehemiah 9:17b)

Overview

The daily public reading of the Scripture and its exposition brought about a strong conviction of sin. Their humble repentance was expressed publicly a couple of days after the joyous Feast of Tabernacles by fasting and the wearing of sackcloth, which expressed their sorrow for breaking the covenant with the Lord their God. Their consecration to God was marked by separating themselves from the heathen, confessing their sin, and worshipping the Lord.

A brief history, which is like both a sermon and a prayer, recounts Israel’s main events and the intervention of God on their behalf. Much of the material quotes other scripture passages. It is evident that the Levites giving this message were well learned in the Word of God, likely due to Ezra’s teaching. The sermon emphasizes the goodness and faithfulness of God, beginning with the declaration that He alone is God, the creator and sustainer of the universe (v. 6). The words are a form of worship to God, for they bring glory to His wonderful Name.

Every event of history that is recounted bears witness to the faithfulness, mercy, and love of God. He called Abraham and made an everlasting covenant with him, promising that his descendants would be His people, and He would give them the Promised Land. This covenant was the basis for God’s mercy that was shown to them throughout their history, and because of it, He did not reject them, even though they continually sinned against Him and were stiff-necked. He fulfilled His promises to Abraham and was faithful to the covenant, but His people constantly broke the covenant. Over and over again, He was patient with them and graciously gave them deliverance from the oppression of their enemies.

An interesting point is mentioned about God’s interest in the people of Israel: He gave His “good Spirit to instruct them” (v. 20). This is referring to the time God provided help for Moses by also putting his Spirit upon the seventy elders, that they might judge and lead Israel in the ways of the Lord (Numbers 11:16-17). Throughout all their history, God had put His Spirit upon those He raised up to instruct Israel, such as the judges, the prophets, and some faithful kings. The Person of the Holy Spirit was, and still is, active in redemption. God’s good Spirit opens ears and unveils eyes that people might see the truth. He convicts and changes hearts, guides, comforts, and draws people to love and obey God; all of this is such a wonderful blessing (cf. Psalm 51:11).

History continued to show that, because of God’s love and desire to bring His people back to Himself, He had to punish and discipline them. The most severe punishments were the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Yet, once again, God was faithful to His covenant, for He brought them back from exile. Even after the Exile, at the time Nehemiah was writing this account, the people were still experiencing adversity and in need of the Lord’s deliverance. Our dependence upon God is never-ending.

This sermon wonderfully expresses the character, nature, and attributes of God. He is One, unchanging, all-powerful, faithful, merciful, compassionate, and just. The sermon served as a reminder to show the people how unworthy they were, and yet how blessed they were. Taking a thorough evaluation of one's spiritual history is always beneficial. It helps us to realize the goodness and love of God toward us, and that even though we have fallen, He is always there to pick us up. Such reflection can lead one to return to his first love (cf. Revelation 2:4-5; 3:3).

Prayer

We praise You, O Lord, that You are ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness and that You have not forsaken us. Help us to live in a repentant attitude. We need Your grace daily.