

The Vindication of God

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Nehemiah 9:6-37

6 Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee. 7 Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; 8 And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous: 9 And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; 10 And showed signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. 11 And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. 12 Moreover thou led them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. 13 Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: 14 And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant: 15 And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. 16 But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, 17 And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. 18 Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; 19 Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsook them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. 20 Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them and witheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. 21 Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. 22 Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. 23 Their children also multiplied thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it. 24 So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. 25 And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and olive yards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. 26 Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations. 27 Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. 28 But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the land of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies; 29 And testified against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and

hardened their neck, and would not hear. 30 Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testified against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. 31 Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God. 32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. 33 Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: 34 Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. 35 For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. 36 Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it: 37 And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. 38 And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

The 24th day of the month Tishri was a day of solemn assembly for the Jews who had returned. The joy of the Feast of Trumpets had passed and so had the Festival of Booths. Still, these people had to be reminded where they had come from. They were summoned to assemble and had separated themselves from foreigners.

Dressed in sackcloth with dust on their heads, they came to confess their sins. Sackcloth is a rough, coarse cloth, or a baglike garment made of this cloth and worn as a symbol of mourning or repentance. In the Bible sackcloth was often used to symbolize certain actions. In the case of mourning, either over a death or another calamity 16:15 >, the Israelites showed their grief by wearing sackcloth and ashes. This was done also in instances of confession and grief over sin. <1 King 21:27>

Sackcloth was often worn by prophets, perhaps to show their won brokenness in the face of their terrible message of judgement and doom The word for sackcloth in the Bible can also mean sack. Joseph ordered that the sacks of his brothers be filled with grain . Rizpah spread sackcloth on a rock, using it as bedding material <2 Sam. 21:10 >. But sackcloth was most commonly used as an article of clothing.

This day featured a prolonged reading of the Law again and a time of confession Not only were their own sins confessed, but those of their ancestors. These people believed that the collective actions of their fathers had brought them to the present. They felt solidarity with their fathers who had turned away from God. Father's how important it is for you to lead our children right. What they become will be influenced by us or created by our lack of influence. Once the twig so to speak is bent it is difficult to bend it in a different direction without breaking it. Thank God for His power to change the course of lives by His power.

Nehemiah 9: 6-37 is a penitential and poetic prayer. Some scholars call it a hymn which reviews Israel 's history, the origins of the nation and her relationship with God. More than that, it vindicates His actions and praises Him for His longsuffering and grace towards these people.

The text follows a chronological pattern and becomes a contrast between God's actions and Israel 's response. Let's follow the pattern.

God's Action Israel's Response

<p>God called Creator & Sustainer -giver of life</p>	<p>Loving and Righteous</p>
<p>God called Abram -man of faith -became Abraham</p>	<p>Israel broke the covenant -rebellion -no faith</p>
<p>God delivered from Egyptian bondage -got them across the Red Sea "made a name for Himself" -Exodus still remembered after exile</p>	<p>Israel wanted to turn back - unthankful</p>
<p>God spoke from Sinai -gave just laws through Moses</p>	<p>Israel fashioned a golden calf -broke His laws</p>
<p>God patiently provided in the desert -bread from heaven - water from a rock</p>	<p>Israel was contemptuous and insolvent</p>
<p>God fought their enemies in Canaan -He led them in their conquest</p>	<p>Israel became prosperous and wicked -they sinned</p>
<p>God opened all the provisions of the covenant in the Promised Land</p>	<p>Israel blasphemed God and murdered the prophets</p>
<p>God allowed captivity following Oppression by foreign kings God delivered in grace and mercy</p>	<p>Israel was repentant and obedient Israel had short-lived obedience</p>

The hymn shows the character of God as being faithful to lovingly warn them and exercise discipline. Israel, on the other hand was consistent in their idolatry, rebellion and sinfulness. This is the situation that evoked such a long period of confession. The historic record produced

conviction in their hearts. Remember the hymn:

The old account was large and growing every day,

For I was always sinning and never tried to pay,

And then I looked ahead and saw such pain and woe;

I said that I would settle it, I settled it long ago.

Long ago (down on my knees)

Long ago, I settled it all,

Yes, the old account was settled long ago,

And the record's clear today for He washed my sins away,

Yes, the old account was settled long ago.

When these people looked around them and saw a city and a land rising out of the rubble, they realized they did not deserve the salvation God had brought them. The only constant in this entire hymn of Nehemiah 9 is the character of God. The hymn vindicates His righteousness. The hymn also points us to the fact that God's covenant was given to this nation so that one day a greater than Nehemiah would walk the streets of Jerusalem. One day Jesus would weep over Jerusalem and lament the sad fact that she had again turned from God. On another day, He would carry a cross outside her walls and be lifted up. On that day the wrath of God would be unleashed against the sins of humanity. Christ would graciously die as the supreme example of the Father's desire to create a new covenant and fulfill His promise to His friend Abraham. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed".

Prayer

Thank you Jesus for dying on the cross for each one of us so that we would have a way of salvation Help us each one to be willing to believe in you, to repent of our sins, be baptized in Jesus name for remission of sins and to be filled with the Holy Ghost. Lord touch all who read this study and help them to realize the great sacrifice You paid to set us free from the bondage of sin Help us to be obedient to You and to your word and not be like the Israelites who were constantly going back and forth, in their faith and walk with God Help us to be stable in our faith and not wavering to and fro Help us to endure to the end In the name of Jesus Amen!

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