THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
"The Bible and Prayer"
Nehemiah 9:1-3

Introduction
1. The Lord had commissioned Nehemiah to rebuild the walls and doors of the city of Jerusalem (2:1-8). This was accomplished after the Babylonian Captivity (7:1).
2. The rebuilding done, the Bible was read (8:1-18). A great celebration of the feast of tabernacles was enjoyed (8:17). The nation was united and in full joy (7:73; 8:17). They demonstrated their fidelity to God by sacrifice (8:18).
3. These marvelous experiences in the life of the nation yielded some good results. Some of these are listed in the text:

1. Continued READING v. 3.
   The reading of the Word (law) was commenced in the previous chapter. Here is more! It was done while the people stood (8:5). It was a mark of spiritual respect. The reading was "in the book of the law of the Lord their God."
   This shows three items:
   a. An acknowledged book. Everyone knew this designated piece of literature. It was called "the book of the law of the Lord." Dating back to Moses and probably including the prophetic utterances and some of the writings, this was in effect the Bible of the O.T. This is the "Lord's book." Let's not dilute it today!
   b. An authoritative book. It was related to the "Lord their God." Nothing else really counted. Here is a divine word! That's the way it should be—then and now. Anything more or less is destructive (v. 6, Isa. 44, 45).
   c. An established book. It is called "the law" because it was a standard. Not just another voice, but THE voice for Israel!

NOTE: The last chapter shows how much reading was done. Now there is more here. In fact, up to a fourth of the day (3 hours cf. John 11:9). That was intensive!

2. Provoked FASTING v. 1.
   Eight solemn days had passed (8:18). This is the next day and it is spent in fasting. The verb "gathered" shows the nation was all there like grain harvested. Now they humbled themselves before God. "Fast" means to "shut the mouth." With this came "sackcloth and earth." It is an expression of total contrition (Jonah 3:5-10). Was used of mourning (Esther 4:2).
NOTE: There is no legislation in the O.T. or N.T. about fasting. The verb or noun does not occur in the Pentateuch. The first mention of voluntary fasting is with David in 1000 B.C. (2 Sam. 12:22). Christ's disciples did not fast (Mark 9:14). Conclusion: fasting may be involuntary (2 Cor. 6:5) or voluntary (Luke 2:37), but is no barometer of spiritual maturity or growth!

   a. Confession The participial form for both this act and that of worship (v. 3) shows they are linked. Here Israel sought to make it right with God. The verb "confess" means "to show with the hand oneself" as a sinner. The verb is related to the word "hand." It was "their" sin which was confessed and not another's! The noun "sin" means "a slip of the foot" and is also used of the sin offering (Lev. 6:18, 23). The sin (Hebrew: perverseness) of their fathers was also confessed.
   b. Profession "Worship" means to "bow down." They did this before "the Lord their God." This combines the two frequently used names of God: Jehovah and Elohim. The former means the covenant-keeping God and the latter the Strong One. What was included in worship is found in the rest of the chapter: what relates to His Person (v. 6) and to His acts (vv. 7-12, etc.). This is true worship and what is expected (John 4:24).

4. Specified SEPARATION v. 2.
   Following the reading of the Word, confession, and worship, the only thing left is practice! Here it is seen in overt separation from the "sons of a foreign land" (Hebrew). What started in Ezra (10) is continued to the full here. There is a line between the ins and outs with God (Ex. 8:22; 9:26).
   NOTE: The doctrine of separation is one of the most abused doctrines of the Bible! It has been silenced in most quarters by the influence of the neo-evangelical movement. Mass meetings and mixtures of all sorts have devastated the truth of the Word. But the Bible still calls for separation (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Conclusion
A facet of the local church ministry is revival. This is a work of the Spirit calling believers to purity, faithfulness, and earnestness before the Lord. It comes through reading of the Word, contrition and true worship. There is NO OTHER way to achieve separated people. It must be a work of God the Holy Spirit. Amen.