THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH
"The Great Confession of Israel"
Nehemiah 9:1-3

Introduction
1. Nehemiah is known for the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem (1:3-8; 3:1-32). He accomplished his task within 52 days (6:15), albeit with extreme opposition (4:1 – 6:14).

2. Moreover the city of Jerusalem was partially reoccupied and provided with trusted guards (7:1-3). An enormous census was ordered to determine the purity of genealogies (7:4 –73).

3. As the people moved into Jerusalem for new construction, they gathered "as one man" in front of the Water Gate (8:1). There was a desire for the Word of God (8:1). Ezra declared it (8:2-6) and then defined it (8:7, 8). All of this was on the first day of the month (8:2).

4. The people digested the Word (8:9, 12) read to them and responded -- emotionally (8:9-12) and obediently (9:13-18). This brings the account to the twenty-fourth day of the month (9:1). Additionally responses to the gathering of the people are given. Study them:

1. Provoked 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; 9:3). However one may interpret this, standing must admit of spiritual respect. Note that the reading was "in the Book of the Law of the Lord their God." This phrase affirms the reading was:

a. An Acknowledged Book
Everyone knew this designated piece of literature. It is called "the Book of the Law of the Lord." The primary reference is to the "Law of Moses" i.e. the Pentateuch. Extensively the reference is to the prophetic writings and perhaps to some of the writings. It concerns effectively to the Bible of the O.T. (cf. Lk 24:44). Make no mistake, this is the "Lord's Book," hence fully inspired and inerrant. It must not be diluted.

b. An Authoritative Book
Note that the "Book" belongs to the "Lord their God." The people desired the message from "their God." After all, nothing else counts. This is a divine Word. If the Book is not from Him, it has no authority (cf. v. 6; Isa. 44, 45).

c. An Established Book
This must be inasmuch as it is the "Law of the Lord." Here is a standard indicated. God gave "the Law" to Moses (John 1:17) for the people of Israel (Ex. 19:7; 20:1ff) It was not just another voice, but the voice of God for the people. What the "Law" was to Israel, the entire Bible is for the N.T. believer. One must not treat it lightly.

2. Provoked HUMBLING v. 1
Eight solemn days had passed (8:18). The record denotes that the twenty-fourth day of the month was taken up with a fast. The verb "assembled" is the same as "gathered" (8:1), hence the nation was all there like harvested grain. What does the nation do? They humbled themselves before God. Three activities indicate this:

a. Israel Fasted
The verb "fast" has as its primary idea "keeping the mouth shut." That's what people do who fast – they do not eat. Amazingly the verb or noun do not occur in the Pentateuch. Actually, the first mention of voluntary fasting is with David about 1000 B.C. (2 Sam. 12:22). Christ's disciples apparently did not fast (Mk 9:29). It appears fasting is associated with trying times of calamity (cf. Jer. 36:9; Joel 1:14) and may be involuntary (cf. 2 Cor. 6. 5) or voluntary (Lk 2:37). It does not seem fair to use a barometer of spiritual maturity or growth.

b. Israel Wore Sackcloth
This was a fabric of coarse weave and was made of camel or goat hair. It signified a major calamity, mourning for the dead, prayer for deliverance and penitence for sin (cf. Mt. 2:4; Mk 1:6). Note it is plural.

c. Israel Put on Earth
The Hebrew word means the "ground" was put on themselves. Penitents often did this as an additional expression of self humiliation. There is no doubt the people admitted their humbleness before the Lord.

3. Provoked WORSHIP vv. 3, 4
This included:
a. Confession
The participial plural form is used for "confess" and "worship" to indicate the two ideas are linked. So, Israel sought to make it right with God. To "confess" comes from a root meaning "to point out. To show with the hand." The hand might be expressed as if with the hand "thrown out." The hifil or causative form of the verb is used ( ). It should be observed that Israel confessed "their" ( ) sins. First "sins" means a "slip of the foot" and is used of the sin offering (Lev. 6:18, 23). Following their personal sins, Scripture states confession of the "iniquities" (plural) or perverseness of their fathers.
What an unimaginable acknowledgement of sin (cf. Dan. 9).

b. Profession
The concomitant to confession here is "worship." The verb ( ) means to "bow down, be brought low." It refers to animals lurking for their pray, to crouch. Israel did this "before the Lord their God." The two most frequently used names of God are used here (Lord and Elohim). The first connotes the covenant keeping LORD and the second the Strong or Mighty One. The remainder of the chapter is filled with His acts for which worship is warranted.

4. Provoked SEPARATION v. 2
As one observes the emphases of these verses, it is evident that the progress of events is remarkable. Look: 1. Reading and explanation of the Law of the Lord. 2. Confession of sin before the Lord. 3. Worship of the Lord their God. 4. Now comes the practice of the people. How meaningful is the notice of separation. The noun "sons" is used with "stranger/foreigner" are found here. What is recorded in Ezra (10) is expressed here. God always draws a line between the "ins" and "outs" (cf. Ex. 8:22; 9:26). The doctrine of separation is abused and has virtually been silenced in the modern church. Yet, it is taught in Scripture (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1).

Conclusion The reading and explanation of the Word is God's divine pattern to have a pure and separated ministry. All other means offer facades and epidermal efforts without genuine changes. The work must be of the Holy Spirit. He has plainly indicated His sword is the Scriptures (Eph. 6:17). So, beloved, lets read and reread the Word. It's the only way to have personal and corporate holy separation to the Lord our God. Amen.