

Old Testament Genre: History

By Joshua Williams

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Nehemiah 9:5–37. Write down the major events (and their verse numbers) that are recorded there. Use the **Assignment One Feedback** section as your guide. Prepare to share your answers.

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Nehemiah 9:5–22 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What people and places are mentioned in these verses?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to Nehemiah 9:33 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: According to the verse, how has God acted, and how have the people acted?

Scripture to Memorize

Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for You have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. Nehemiah 9:33

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will know the Old Testament's basic history and interpret historical writings properly.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Maggie and Sara are best friends. They always seem to be together, and they are always talking. They talk about everything, but mostly about things that are going on or things that have happened in the past. In other words they tell stories. They share many stories about things that happened while they were together, things that happened while they were apart, and things that happened to others they care about. It's one reason they are so close. So, how close are you to God? How well do you know His story?

Learning God's Story with Israel

Read Nehemiah 9:5–22 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 6. host. They are either bodies in the sky (stars, planets, etc.) or heavenly beings.

Verse 7. Abram. Since this prayer is Israel's confession of sin, it skips events not related to Israel directly.

Verse 8. land of. This becomes the land of Israel.

Verse 9. Red Sea. This is also called Sea of Reeds in Hebrew.

Verse 10. signs and wonders. These are also called plagues (see Exodus 7–12).

Verse 15. bread from heaven. This is also called manna. Manna appeared in the morning on the ground for Israel to gather as they needed it. **water... out of the rock.** God did this twice, but here it is probably talking about the first time, recorded in Exodus 17.

Verse 16. acted presumptuously. Israel acted the same way Egypt had acted in verse 10.

Verse 21. Forty years. Israel stayed in the wilderness forty years because they rebelled against God. Verse 21 points out Israel's unfaithfulness but also God's compassionate provision.

Verse 22. Sihon . . . Og. These two kings attacked Israel on their way to the promised land, so God defeated the two kings and gave their land to Israel.

Discussion Question

Can you trust God based on His activity described in these verses? Why?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now guide the group to fill in scripture references for each of the following events below.

Creation

Call of Abraham

Leaving Egypt

Giving of the Law

Time in the Wilderness

Read Nehemiah 9:23–37 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 24. possessed the land. The land of Israel. **as they would.** Israel's enemies were now governed by Israel.

Verse 25. full of all good things. "All good things" here means everything needed to live well: safety, fresh water, and plenty of good food.

Verse 26. Turn them back to You. The prophets spoke so that Israel might return to the Lord.

Verse 30. peoples of the lands. Other nations such as Assyria and Babylonia.

Verse 32. Since the time of the kings of Assyria. Israel as a nation had split into two kingdoms (Northern = Israel and Southern = Judah) under King Rehoboam. The Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom was conquered by Babylonia in 586 BC. Therefore, all of Israel had not been an independent nation since the days of Assyria.

Verse 33. You have been righteous. Even though the people experienced disaster, that did not happen because God is cruel, weak, or unfair. Disaster happened because He is just but they are wicked.

Verse 36. slaves to this day. This phrase means they no longer ruled over themselves as a nation but were part of a larger, non-Israelite empire.

Verse 37. as they please. The same phrase is used in verse 24. There Israel did with the nations as it pleased, but now the nations do with Israel what they please.

On Your Own

In the space below, write which verses present the following events. When everyone is finished, the group can compare answers to the Scripture passage and make changes where needed.

Taking the Land (Conquest of the Land)

Life in the Land

Life outside the Land (Exile)

Life in the Land a Second Time (Return)

A Basic Old Testament History

The prayer of Nehemiah 9 summarizes the history of Israel from its beginning with Abraham to the last days of the Old Testament. It serves as a basic sketch for Old Testament history, although there is one period where more detail may be helpful. The prayer talks about life in the promised land, but it does not provide much detail. This period may be divided as follows:

Judges

United Monarchy—where all of Israel has a single king (Saul, David, and Solomon)

Divided Monarchy—where all of Israel is divided into a Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, and a Southern Kingdom, known as Judah.

Having this basic history helps disciples better know God's story and allows disciples to become closer to God.

Interpreting God's Story with Israel

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the people and places mentioned in Nehemiah 9:5–37.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share an answer to the question: According to Nehemiah 9:33, how has God acted, and how have the people acted?

Discussion Question

Is this history of Israel told to us just to add to our knowledge about the past, or is it supposed to teach us something about God and people? What is it trying to teach?

On Your Own

In the space below, write two things we learn from this passage that help us interpret Old Testament history properly. When everyone is finished, the group can compare answers to the Scripture passage and make changes where needed.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Old Testament history is important for knowing God's story. Nehemiah 9:5–37 provides a basic Old Testament history that shows God is righteous and compassionate even though most of Israel was wicked and disobeyed God. Old Testament history looks like the following:

1. Creation
2. Call of Abraham
3. Leaving Egypt
4. Giving of Law
5. Time in the Wilderness
6. Taking the Land
7. Life in the Land
 - a. Judges
 - b. United Monarchy
 - c. Divided Monarchy
8. Life outside the Land
9. Life in the Land a Second Time

Nehemiah 9:5–37 also reveals important truths about how we understand Old Testament history.

1. Old Testament history is real history. Nehemiah 9:5–37 shows that the historical events recorded in the Old Testament are real events, not just symbols of something else.

2. Old Testament history teaches about God and people. The events of Old Testament history are recorded in order to teach us something important for our own spiritual lives. Often the point is to show the faithfulness and justice of God while showing the unfaithfulness and wickedness of people. This point drives us away from trusting ourselves and drives us toward trusting God.

Follow up Question

What are the parts of a basic Old Testament history?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.