

1. Fasting and wearing sackcloth and dust on their heads.

NE 9:1 On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. ² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers.

A bit bizarre. The month of Tishri, which is when this all happened, was particularly a month of "fasting" ([Zec 7:5](#)). "Sackcloth" was a goat-hair garment that covered the bare loins during times of mourning and penance. The placing of "ashes," often rendered "dust," on one's head as a sign of sorrow is mentioned in [Jos 7:6](#), [La 2:10](#), and [Eze 27:30](#) (cf. also [2Sa 13:19](#); [Job 2:12](#)).

The idea was that they were sad for the grief they caused God by sinning. This is a visible sign of sorrow for sin. We don't do this anymore. There is a lot of things that have gone out of our culture for whatever reason. We just are not very good at demonstrating our faith physically. Last week we talked about raising our hands. Someone said that I didn't give a full theology of hand raising, your right I didn't, a full theology of hand raising wasn't in last weeks passage. What was in that passage and is followed up here is that these people demonstrated their worship physically.

**They did worship
Physically**

Today we sing worship. These people allowed worship of their God to affect their whole body. Same here with their repentance. It affected their whole body. They demonstrated to others the seriousness of their sin in ways that their culture understood. Fasting in the bible is fair dinkum fasting. Not like some fasting of other religions which is popular today. They only fast during daylight hours then pig pout at night. Fasting in the OT for the Jews was without food for the length of the fast. This coupled with wearing an uncomfortable piece of clothing and dusting yourself off would have hit the psych of the people. They did this for a reason. To physically say sorry. It is more than words.

2. Confess sins, theirs and their fathers badness.

² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers.

Most of chapter 9 is a re – reading of Israel's history. This is done time and time again in the bible. Psalms do it, it is repeated over and over again. Paul did it as part of his testimony at times.

Why? They need to remember that sin happens and even though God forgives sin happens and we are accountable. Each generation is accountable for its own sin. One of

the things about this repeated sin mentioned in these history lessons is that the people did things wrong. One of which was had wrong dealings with foreigners. In this case they married them, and they were told not to. So the part of the verse

2 Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners had specific validity to these people there and then. Also, when the Israelites were in exile foreigners came and filled the land. It happened more so in the north, remember that in 722BC the northern kingdom was taken off into exile and they never returned. The then king of the Assyrians, I think it was Shalmaneser had a policy of taking captives from one conquered nation and putting them in another country. So out went the Jews and in went someone else. In 587 BC when Jerusalem was taken, some people went into exile and others stayed, but foreigners took advantage of things like empty farms and moved in. When the exiles got back, they just mixed in. This is not what God wanted. They intermarried, again not what God wanted, his laws stated so, they knew yet the still did.

So when we get to this verse it is appropriate that this issue is mentioned.

But notice what they did. ***They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers.***

Confessing sins is recognising that they hurt God's feelings. Confessing sin is articulating before God that sin is my fault. But why does the wickedness of the fathers come into it. The Jewish concept is that we learn our behaviour from our parents. So we need to recognise that dad didn't teach us everything right and that dad's sin too. That is noticed in the re-reading of the history. People before us sin. It wasn't the good old days – sin was the same.

Confession of sin is something that we aren't into. We don't tell people our failings anymore. There is a theological reason why. I don't have to tell a priest like in the old catholic system. I confess to God directly through the Holy Spirit and Jesus mediates for us.

HEB 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess”

Jesus is our priest, He does it. What this has done in our protestant Anglo-saxon church traditions is that we have a whole lot of hidden things from people. Now, there are verse that say to confess to each other our sins.

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

That does not mean that you can expect everyone to tell you all their secrets. Confessing to others a sin is assisting you to deal with that before God. It is not to embarrass, it is not so the whole congregation knows all about everyone, it is about the relationship between God and the sinner. It is not even about relationships between each other unless the sin

impacts both parties. Confession in this situation was a corporate thing, why – because God was dealing with reinstating the national worship system. Because it is God we mostly offend – most of our confession is directly to Him.

Notice how long it took to deal with this.

³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God.

It appears here that the laws were read and then the personally and corporately dealt with the issues – there and then. Let me encourage you – deal with the issues. Right now. Today. You can stand and confess or you can go straight to God, but here is the sermon's principle – deal with the sin issue.

Look at the end of the chapter.

NE 9:38 "In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."

They made it a contract. They made it so they were accountable to God. They put it in writing. We could do that. What we need to do is make ourselves accountable, take responsibility for what we do and the sins we cause. Jesus made a contract with us. On that first easter, died, rose again and all we have to do is sign our part of the contract. Thing is, then the contract stands. We have got to be serious about it.