

# Return and Rebuilding

## Nehemiah Goes Home

### Foundation

#### Bible passage : Nehemiah 1.1-2.9

Powerpoint: ExileAndReturn-13. Begins in Susa with more people returning to Jerusalem and animations on each screen. There is no city wall.

When: About 455BC, ten years after the previous unit. Nehemiah and many other Israelites were still living far from Israel.

Prayer: It was eighty years since the first people returned to Israel but Nehemiah heard news that things are not going well (1.3). The Temple had been rebuilt but Jerusalem and other cities were lacking protection given by a city wall which still lay in ruins. Nehemiah was so saddened by what he heard that he wept, mourned, fasted and prayed.

“let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant”

There are several times in the book where we find Nehemiah praying the first of which is in chapter 1 verses 5 to 11. It was a prayer to the Lord God and like many Biblical prayers he began by speaking about God. Then he asked God for help. We can see that it is not just words, but a prayer that comes from his heart.

Nehemiah also realised that the troubles that had come upon Israel were the result of sin and he confessed before God his own sin, and the sin of his people (v6ff). He also remembered some of the things God had said, which we can read elsewhere in the Bible.

*Leningrad codex showing the end of Ezra and start of Nehemiah. They were traditionally called 1 & 2 Ezra and copied on a single scroll. The name “Book of Nehemiah” only dates from the 16th century.*



Nehemiah didn't ask God for much in his prayer, simply that God would give Nehemiah “mercy in the sight of this man”. At this point in the account we have not been told who “this man” is but we soon learn that Nehemiah has in mind to somehow speak to King Artaxerxes about the situation and get his support. We are then told that Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the King.

A dangerous face: It was a dangerous thing to look sad in the King's presence. But Nehemiah's gloomy face was noticed and the King's question provides the opening Nehemiah had hoped for. He quickly prays again (v4) before responding. The Lord answered his prayer and the King allowed him to go to rebuild the walls and also promised him help in various practical ways for the rebuilding work. It was quite an answer to prayer.

Going home: Nehemiah did not at this stage expect to return to Jerusalem indefinitely. The King let him go but on condition that when the work was done Nehemiah would return. After 12 years Nehemiah did go back to Susa (Neh 13.6) though later he went to Jerusalem again (Neh 13.7) and as far as we know remained there the rest of his life.



**Nehemiah is an example to us of prayer from the heart. His prayer was answered abundantly.**