

Nehemiah Seeks God's Forgiveness for Israel

Nehemiah 1:1–2:9

 BIBLE BACKGROUND
FOR LEADERS

Bad News Broke Nehemiah's Heart

The events described in this passage occurred 90 years after the first large group of Hebrews had returned to the land of Judah. And 70 years had passed since the Temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt. In addition, about 12 years had passed since Ezra had begun to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and had returned to Jerusalem with a large contingent of men, women, and children, as well as excellent funding from the king. It appeared that God was working to restore his people, just as he had promised through Jeremiah and other prophets. Thus Nehemiah was surprised to hear from his brother, Hanani, that Jerusalem still lay in ruins. And that news grieved Nehemiah greatly.

Nehemiah Responded and Acted Wisely

Nehemiah's initial response wasn't to run to the king for help; rather, he turned to God in prayer. Nehemiah's mourning and fasting demonstrated to God and to those around him how sincerely he cared about the situation in Jerusalem. Nehemiah confessed the sins that he and his ancestors had committed against God.

Then he turned to the king. Nehemiah must have done a good job as cupbearer: Artaxerxes was king for 40 years before dying of natural causes. But even for someone in Nehemiah's trusted position, coming before the king was a scary proposition. And Nehemiah was boldly asking for two enormous favors: permission to make the trip and the king's assistance in making it. Even after having prayed for days, Nehemiah silently said a quick prayer to God before making his request.

Nehemiah's Faith and Risk Paid Off

Nehemiah's prayer was answered abundantly. Artaxerxes gave him the time off he needed, letters assuring safe passage through lands along the way, and a guarantee of building materials. In addition, the king gave him and his entourage an escort of officers and soldiers on horses! When Nehemiah prayed and humbled himself before God, God answered.

The Jesus Connection

Sin damages our lives and pulls us from God. But Jesus gives us a path to seek God's forgiveness.

Do you need God to restore an area of your life that has been broken down by sin? Talk to God about it. You can write about it by filling in this prayer:

God, I confess this sin to you:

Here's how I want your help to begin the work of rebuilding:

Thank you for hearing my prayer and helping to restore what is broken.

