

Nehemiah and Ezra

Scripture: Nehemiah 1-13

Time Period: During the exile

The story of Nehemiah and Ezra

When the Babylonians took God's people to Babylon, they destroyed Jerusalem. God's people, lived in Babylon for many years until King Cyrus let them go home. Some of God's people stayed in Babylon while some of God's people returned to rebuild the temple, but when they faced opposition in rebuilding the rest of Jerusalem, they stopped working. Some 70 years passed, the walls and gates of Jerusalem lay in ruins and the king of Persia took over Babylon.



Nehemiah was a Jew, one of God's people, and he was the cupbearer of the king of Persia. One day, some men came from Judah. Nehemiah asked, "How are God's people doing in Jerusalem?"

The men had bad news. "The people are in trouble. They are ashamed. The walls around Jerusalem are broken down, and the gates have been burned down."

When Nehemiah heard this, he sat down and cried. Nehemiah prayed and fasted for several days. "Yahweh, God," he prayed, "let Your eyes be open and Your ears hear my prayer. We have sinned against you. Please remember Your words to Moses: 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples. But if you return to Me and obey Me, I will gather you from the ends of the earth and bring you to the place I have chosen.' Please, Lord, hear my prayer."

Nehemiah went back to serving the king, but he was still sad. The king noticed Nehemiah's mood and asked Nehemiah, "What's wrong? Why are you sad?"

Nehemiah was afraid; no one was supposed to be sad around the king. Nehemiah told the king, "The city where my ancestors are from is in trouble. It is in ruins, and the gates of the city have been burned down."

"What do you want to do?" the king asked.

Before Nehemiah answered the king, he prayed. Then Nehemiah said, "Please send me to Jerusalem so I can rebuild the city."

The king agreed to send Nehemiah to Jerusalem. He gave Nehemiah letters to keep him safe as he traveled. If anyone tried to stop him, Nehemiah could show that he had the king's permission to go to Jerusalem. Also, the king made sure Nehemiah had wood to help rebuild the city gates and wall. He even sent some men from his army to protect Nehemiah.

Nehemiah arrived safely in Jerusalem. He didn't tell anyone why he was there. After three days, Nehemiah got up in the middle of the night and went to look at the city's walls. Then he told the people there, "We are in trouble. The city is ruined, and the gates have been burned down. Come, let's rebuild Jerusalem's wall."

Nehemiah told the people how God had helped him, and he told them everything the king had said and done. The people said, "Let's start building," and so they did.

But it wasn't long before they met opposition, but even with the threat of attack God's People kept working—with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. The people had worked hard, and with God's help they finished rebuilding the walls and the city gates in just 52 days. One morning, very early, after the walls to the city had been completed, all the people in Jerusalem gathered together at one of the city gates. Men, women, and children—anyone who could understand—came to listen to the reading of God's Word.

As the sun was just coming up, Ezra the priest brought out the book of the law of Moses that God had given to His people. Ezra stood on a high wooden platform and some men stood next to Ezra on his right and on his left. As he opened the book in the sight of all the people and began to read, all the people stood. He read to them God's Word for several hours, and all the people listened carefully. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," Lifting up their hands and bowing their heads, they worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Some of the leaders there—the Levites—explained the law to the people and helped them understand the words Ezra read. As the people heard the words of the law, they began to weep. The law was God's rules for living, and the people had disobeyed God. They realized they had sinned.

Ezra, the Levites, and Nehemiah, the governor said, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." Even though the people's sin made them sad, this was a happy day.

Then Ezra said to them, "Go home and prepare a feast! Eat rich food and drink sweet drinks. Share what you have prepared with those who have nothing prepared." And again Ezra said, "Today is holy to the Lord our God. This is not a day to be sad because the joy of the Lord is your strength."

The people obeyed Ezra. They prepared a feast. They ate rich food and drank sweet drinks. They shared what they had with people who did not have food and drinks, and all the people had a big celebration. They were glad because they understood the words of the law that were read to them and they knew once again how to be in relationship with God.

God did not speak to his people again for 400 years. However, God had promised to send a Messiah that would come and establish God's rule and reign on earth as it was in heaven.