

Nehemiah 1

Day 1

Background: The Downfall and Captivity of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of the Nation of Israel.

Northern Kingdom

1. What happened to the **Northern Kingdom** of Israel during the reign of the last king, Hoshea? 2 Kings 17:1-6, 23

2. Why did God allow Israel to go into captivity? 2 Kings 17:7-8

- How far did they stray from following God? 2 Kings 17:9-17
- What five phrases describe their attitude toward the Lord in 17:14,15a,16a
“*did not listen*”

FYI: Because of internal strife, Israel became a **divided kingdom** around 930 BC. The **northern kingdom** was called both “Israel” and “Ephraim” and was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The **southern kingdom**, called “Judah”, was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The account in Nehemiah takes place after these captivities.

3. What measures had the Lord taken with His people? 2 Chronicles 36:15,16 What two word phrase describes their state in 36:16? (See also Jeremiah 25:3.)

4. Under God’s covenant relationship with Israel, what reasons are given for why they could lose the special blessings they enjoyed in the land? 2 Chronicles 7:19-22

Southern Kingdom

5. Read the following passages concerning the Babylonian conquest of the **Southern Kingdom** (Judah) during the reigns of the last three kings.

First invasion: 2 Chronicles 36:5-7: King Jehoiakim

- His Relationship with the Lord:
- Result:

Second siege: 2 Chronicles 36:9,10: King Jehoiachin

- His Relationship with the Lord:
- Result:

Third siege - destruction of Jerusalem: 2 Chronicles 36:11-20: King Zedekiah

- His Relationship with the Lord:
- The Leaders' relationship with the Lord:
- Result:

Digging Deeper

See the message all the kings ignored.
Jeremiah 22:1-6

Note the message
Zedekiah ignored.
Jer. 38:17-20)

6. *(Jeremiah prophesied during the decline and fall of the southern kingdom spanning the reigns of the last five kings.)* According to Jeremiah 29:4-14:

- How did the Lord want the people to live while in exile? 29:5-7
- What did He say He would do after the 70 years were completed? 29:10-14

7. Amazingly, what happened at the end of 70 years of captivity? 2 Chronicles 36:22,23

FYI: "PERSIA - an ancient world empire that flourished from 539-331 B.C. The Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians, setting the stage for the return of the Hebrew people to Jerusalem...following their long period of captivity by the Babylonians."
- Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary

8. What understanding do the following verses give of God's heart in afflicting Israel?

- Micah 7:18-20 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. 19 You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. 20 You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago. NIV
- Lamentations 3:32-33 Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. 33 For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men. NIV
- Ezekiel 33:11 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' NIV
- Matthew 23:37-38 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. NIV
- Luke 19:41 As [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it

Applying the Word: How would you explain the bigger picture of how God's affliction of Israel was a means of His salvation?

Day 2

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4

Return of Exiles

9. From Ezra 1:1-4, why were the exiles able to return to the land?
- Who returned? Ezra 1:5 How many? Ezra 2:64-65
 - What did they build? Ezra 3:2; 6:14,15
 - What opposition did they face? Ezra 4:1-5,23,24
10. When did the second group of exiles return to the land and why? Ezra 7:1,6
- What motivated Ezra and enabled his mission? 7:9,10
11. How benevolent was King Artaxerxes with Ezra and the exiles? 7:12-16ff
- Whom did Ezra credit with these kindnesses? 7:27,28

Nehemiah Inquires about Jerusalem

12. From Nehemiah 1:1,2 list the *who*, *what*, *when* and *where* details that are given.
- *Who* - Nehemiah, Hanani, Jewish remnant
 - *What*
 - *When*
 - *Where*

FYI: 'Shushan/Susa was about 159 miles north of the Persian Gulf, in the present-day Iran. The citadel, or the fortified royal palace, was built on an acropolis. The city served as a winter residence of the monarchs of Persia. Shushan is also notable in biblical history as the place where Daniel received his vision (Dan. 8:2)...and as the home of Mordecai and Esther (Esther 1:2)."

- The Nelson Study Bible (786)

13. What do you learn about Nehemiah in:

- 1:1
- 1:11b
- 8:9

14. Besides the people who were deported, what people survived the captivity and remained in the land? 2 Kings 24:14; 25:12

FYI: The traditional view of the order of the events in Ezra and Nehemiah is that the exiles in Ezra returned and built the temple before Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to build the walls. Others think that the events in Nehemiah coincide with the second part of Ezra (chapters 7-10). Some even maintain that the events in Nehemiah preceded Ezra.

These differences are due partly to the difficulty of differentiating between names versus titles of Persian kings, and also due to the difficulty of piecing together and translating ancient historians and inscriptions. This makes the identity of ancient Persian kings in scripture controversial.

"In this book and in the book of Ezra, the Persian king is called 'Artaxerxes.' In the book of Esther, the Persian king is called 'Ahasuerus.' Neither Artaxerxes nor Ahasuerus are names; they are titles. The title Artaxerxes means great king. The title Ahasuerus means 'venerable father.'"

- Ray Stedman (12)

AHASUERUS means "the Mighty", and "is the name, or rather the title, of four Median and Persian monarchs"...In every case the identification of the person named is a matter of controversy." - Companion Bible App. 57

15. List the conditions of the people that Nehemiah was given. 1:3a (Cross-reference 9:36,37)

Trouble/distress/affliction OT:7451 *ra'* Strong's OT:7489; bad or (as noun) evil (natural or moral):

ra' OT:7451, "bad; evil; wicked; sore; may mean "bad" or unpleasant in the sense of giving pain or causing unhappiness" - Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

disgrace/reproach Strong's OT:2781 *cherpah*; contumely (i.e. harsh language or treatment arising from haughtiness and contempt), disgrace

16. List the conditions given about Jerusalem. 1:3b To how much danger would this have exposed the city? (Compare Joshua 6:5,20,21)

- How challenging would restoring this have sounded?

FYI: 1:3 broken down. The wall of Jerusalem had apparently been at least partially built by Zerubbabel (Ezra 4:12; 5:3,8). Many years had passed, however, and the returning exiles had encountered continuing serious opposition from the people of the land."

- Henry Morris

"The walls of Jerusalem were walls of protection. Jerusalem was the city of God, containing God's dwelling place, the temple. But after the Babylonian invasion, the walls were torn down and the city lay defenseless. Jerusalem was weak and unable to protect herself as long as the walls lay in ruins."

- Ray Stedman

17. In the following, underline what the Babylonians destroyed or carried away.

- 2 Kings 25:8-10,13-16 ...an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. 10 The whole Babylonian army, under the commander of the imperial guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem...13 The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the movable stands and the bronze Sea that were at the temple of the LORD and they carried the bronze to Babylon. 14 They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes and all the bronze articles used in the temple service. 15 The commander of the imperial guard took away the censers and sprinkling bowls—all that were made of pure gold or silver. 16 The bronze from the two pillars, the Sea and the movable stands, which Solomon had made for the temple of the LORD, was more than could be weighed. NIV
- 2 Chronicles 36:18-19 All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. NAS
- Jeremiah 52:13,14 He burned the house of the LORD, the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every large house he burned with fire. 14 So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. NASU

18. Underline the words that Isaiah used to describe the devastation to the land of Israel.

- Isaiah 64:10-11 Your sacred cities have become a desert; even Zion is a desert, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy and glorious temple, where our fathers praised you, has been burned with fire, and all that we treasured lies in ruins. NIV

FYI: "The Babylonian captivity had one very significant impact on the nation of Israel when it returned to the land—it would never again be corrupted by the idolatry and false gods of the surrounding nations. A revival among Jews took place after the return of the Jews to Israel and the rebuilding of the temple. ..Just as God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah, God judged the Babylonians for their sins, and the Babylonian Empire fell to the armies of Persia in 539 B.C., once again proving God's promises to be true."

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/Babylonian-captivity-exile.html>

Applying the Word: *What breaks your heart and produces a desire in you to help someone or something? How has or how do you think God could use you?*

Day 3

Nehemiah's Prayer. Read Nehemiah 1:4-7

19. How did Nehemiah react to the report? 1:4 What does Nehemiah's reaction tell you about his heart for his people and his heart for God?

Compare the beginnings of Daniel's prayer in Dan: 9:4-6 and David's in Psalm 51:1-3

20. From Nehemiah's prayer, list the titles and attributes given to God. 1:5

FYI: "Prayer is always the first step toward rebuilding a broken life. Prayer is the place to begin. In prayer, we ask God to take what is wrong and set it right, to take what is broken and mend it. In prayer, we ask God to forgive us, restore us, and guide us.. The moment we turn to God in prayer, the process of recovery begins."

great and awesome God "It's important that we begin our prayer with a recognition of God's greatness...He is a God of infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite majesty..."

who keeps his covenant of love "Our God is not some remote and capricious deity on a mountain who might strike us dead on a whim. He is a God who makes and keeps covenants, a God who loves us, a God who can be trusted and who always keeps His words. He is a responsive God, and He is attentive to the prayers of His people."
- Ray Stedman (25,26,29)

21. What did Nehemiah ask God to do first? 1:6a. (See Psalm 34:15)

- How did Nehemiah refer to himself? What does that say about his attitude?

22. What did Nehemiah acknowledge? 1:6b What does this say about any merit on his part for an answer to prayer? See Daniel 9:18b

- How did he confess about the people's merits? 1:7 (How many excuses did he give?)

23. What does an honest acknowledgement of our sin do for our relationship and communication with the Lord? Psalm 51:17

- What experience did David have about confessing sin? Psalm 32:3-5

Digging Deeper

What illustration did Jesus give about forgiveness in Luke 7:39-50?

FYI: [Nehemiah's] "confession was national, communal and personal. His own sin was part of the whole."
- The Nelson Study Bible (786)

Applying the Word: Is there anything that keeps you from letting your guard down with the Lord? Why?

Day 4

Nehemiah's Prayer. Read Nehemiah 1:8-11

24. Although he had no merits of his own, on what basis did Nehemiah ask for an answer to his prayer?

- 1:8,9
- 1:10
- 1:11a

FYI: "When he invited God to remember the details of the covenant (1:8), he was not implying that God had forgotten the terms he set out in Deuteronomy 30:1-4. God cannot forget His people...Rather, he was speaking in human terms as he called on God to intervene to change the situation." - The Africa Bible Commentary (545)

"He was reminding the Lord of these things not out of a spirit of accusation but in a spirit of expectation. ...There is another layer to this prayer...In order for Nehemiah to remind God of His promises, he had to know those promises in the first place. [God] delights when His children remind Him of His Word, because it shows that we have faith in His character and His faithfulness. It also strengthens us and deepens our faith when we remind ourselves of His promises."
- John MacArthur (96)

25. What eternal promises had God given the nation of Israel?

Abraham	Genesis 17:7	
Moses	Deuteronomy 30:2-5	
David	2 Samuel 7:12,13,16	
Jeremiah	Jeremiah 31:37-40	

26. What examples did Jesus give about a humble and honest approach to God? (Note what each person acknowledged and God's response.)

- Luke 15:18-24
- Luke 18:10-14

27. What was Nehemiah's immediate personal request? 1:11b (What did he know? Proverbs 21:1) What kind of power/authority was he giving to God?

FYI: Give your servant success "Now this is a tall order. That is a bold prayer. Nehemiah was dealing with issues and powers far above his pay grade...Solving international disputes does not come under a butler's job description. But Nehemiah wanted to approach the king for help in restore his broken nation - and that meant taking a big risk. If the king was displeased with Nehemiah's requests, Nehemiah could easily face execution. The only way his plan would work was if God himself took charge of the situation and arranged the circumstances in Nehemiah's favor"
- Ray Stedman (28)

28. How do you think Nehemiah's position 1:11c with the king had the potential to benefit him or possibly make things more difficult?

FYI: "The cupbearer was a personal *bodyguard* to the king, being the one who tasted wine and food before the king did – making certain no one could poison the king...The king, therefore, had to have a tremendous amount of trust in his cupbearer, who had to be a man of faithful and impressive character. If the cupbearer could be turned against the king, assassination would be easy."
- David Guzik

29. How do you think God felt about Nehemiah's heart? See Ezekiel 22:30

Applying the Word: When you pray, how does remembering first the goodness and faithfulness of God prepare you for everything else you may say?

