

God's people return to Jerusalem and the surrounding area in three distinct waves during the 5th and 4th centuries BC. First, God's people, led by Zerubbabel, return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and restore the sacrificial cult. A 2nd group of God's people, led by the scribe Ezra, return to Jerusalem to initiate a spiritual and social renewal among God's people. Ezra sought to rebuild the community by teaching Torah. A 3rd group under the leadership of Nehemiah was sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city, and along with the scribe Ezra, to rebuild the spiritual life of God's people.

The Book of Nehemiah can be divided into two major parts: 1. Nehemiah 1:1- 7:3, which focuses on rebuilding the walls of the sacred city (Jerusalem) 2. Nehemiah 7:4-13:31, which focuses on rebuilding a community of sacred people (the Israelites). Today's study will focus on Nehemiah's call to pray (1:1-11). As stated above, Nehemiah serves as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (see 1:11). This is a prominent position of influence. Nehemiah has daily access to the king. During this time of service, Nehemiah learns that the walls of Jerusalem are in shambles (1:1-3). But instead of taking his concern to the King of Persia, Nehemiah takes his prayer of praise, confession, promise, and petition to the King of Kings (1:5-11). We quickly learn that Nehemiah's call is a call to a life of prayer.

Who taught you to pray? Share a prayer with the group that you still remember from when you were young.

What makes a great leader?

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4a

Where is Nehemiah living?

Does Nehemiah receive good news or bad news?

When did you last receive a word of "bad news"?

How do you normally react to receiving bad news?

According to Philippians 4:6, what may be an alternative to agitation, anxiety, or anger?

What does Philippians 4:7 promise to those who choose to pray instead of fret?

How did Nehemiah react to the bad news he received? See 1:4a.

Read Nehemiah 1:4b-11

After Nehemiah sat down and wept, he did three things. (see 1:4a) How might mourning, fasting, and praying help us through difficult days?

Slowly re-read Nehemiah's opening prayer in 1:5-11. What words or phrases strike you? Write them down. What strikes you about them?