

**GOD'S BIG PICTURE –
7. Learning from the Exile
(Nehemiah 1:1 – 2: 5)**

Q1: Try to put yourself in Nehemiah's shoes – roughly 2000 kms away from home. How would you feel when you heard the news? (v 3) What is the religious significance of this news?

Q2: When was the last time you reacted like Nehemiah did? (v 4) What do you think about mourning and fasting? (cf. Matthew 6: 16-18)

Q3: Where did Nehemiah get his description of God from at the start of his prayer in v 5? (cf. Deuteronomy 7: 9, 21) How did his view of God shape his prayer?

Q4: Summarise his prayer in verses 5-11. In what ways has his prayer been shaped by the exile? How can we model our prayers on Nehemiah's prayer?

Q5: What do you think about 'arrow prayers'? (2 v 4) How does this specific unspoken prayer relate to chapter 1? What does this teach us about prayer? (e.g. Philippians 4: 6)

Q6: How is your prayer life? What aspects do you struggle with? What practical steps can we take to encourage each other in prayer? What have we learnt about prayer from Nehemiah?



**God's Big Picture
Bible Overview**



**No. 7 (Exile)
Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah , Esther**

1. Hereditary Failure

Q: READ : 1 Kings 12: 1-19 What destroyed Rehoboam?

This is the end of the line for David's sons as king over all Israel. Rehoboam's arrogance teaches us not to trust our own sinful hearts.

2. Charismatic Failure

Q: READ : 2 Kings 9: 1-28 Was Jehu the son of a king? How was he chosen to be king? What kind of man was he?

Following the disastrous Rehoboam, David's kingdom had been split into two: the ten tribes of 'Israel' or 'Ephraim' to the north, and the two tribes of 'Judah' to the south. The northern kings raised themselves to the throne by their natural gifts: ambitious, able men aiming for the top. Jehu is typical: a brilliant commander but ruthlessly cruel. No hope for God's people with these leaders!

So the single dynasty of David lasted in Jerusalem for 400 years, but in the north one dynasty followed another. God warned both nations, through his prophets, that if they did not turn back to them he would hand them over to other nations.

In the north king succeeded king by conquest or assassination until Israel was taken captive to Assyria in 722 BC. The kings of the south were better than those in the north but they still did not stop the continual slide away from God. Judah fell to Assyria's successor, Babylon, in 586 BC, and then the exile was complete.

3. King Ironic Name

Q: **READ : 2 Kings 24: 18-20 (skim chpt. 25)** Zedekiah means 'the Lord is my righteousness'. Did he live up to it? How was this the last straw for the Lord? How must God's people have felt as they read over chapter 25? Where is David's great throne and great city now? What lessons should we learn?

4. How should God's people live in Exile?

Q: **READ : Jeremiah 25: 1-14; 29: 4-14** Why did the exile happen? How long would it last for? How should the Jews live in captivity?

5. Ezra

Those seventy years have now passed since Jerusalem was destroyed. The Jews have heard that a great conqueror, Cyrus, is on his way. This surely will only mean a change of guard and further captivity for them. But such thinking is to reckon without God ...

Q: **READ : Ezra 1: 1-11** To make things happen, what does God have to move? (vs.1,5) How must the Israelites have felt?

The book of Ezra reveals a lot about right priorities. In chapter 3 their first commitment is to obey the word of the Lord. And their first act was to set up the altar – even before the rubble had been cleared from the temple there was a need for atoning sacrifices to be made.

6. Nehemiah

Nehemiah is to be read alongside Ezra. Nehemiah is the governor sent back to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Ezra was the scribe who taught God's word to the people.

7. Esther

The book of Esther explains the origin of the festival *Purim*. While in exile in Persia there is a threat to wipe out the Jews (not for the last time). Esther is a Jew who has become Queen and finds herself in a position to help her people... a real OT heroine!

Q: **READ : Esther 4: 12-16** Whose name is missing here? (Indeed does not occur at all in the whole book – probably because it was written in Persia.) What can we learn from the example of Esther? What does this book teach us about God's sovereignty? What lessons can we learn about how to witness in a non-Christian culture?

In all this the exile is a painful time for God's people. It is a cry for something better. God is painfully teaching his people to give up their self-reliance and to realise that their only hope is in his salvation.