

# THE OT

## THE LESSON: NEHEMIAH 1

The Old Testament (OT) is filled with inspiring stories of saints and heroes that can serve as role models and examples for us. Embedded like gems throughout the OT are wonderful prayers from people in a wide range of circumstances. We can infuse fresh meaning into the prayers of the OT saints by making them our own.

Today we're going to look at one of the prayers of Nehemiah...

Nehemiah (whose name means "The Lord comforts") lived during a dark time for Israel. The kingdom had been divided into two, the Northern Kingdom and Judea (where the important city of Jerusalem was). Both kingdoms had been conquered by foreign nations. Many Israelites had been taken captive or exiled from their homeland.

Our story opens in Babylon, where Nehemiah is serving as the cupbearer to the Babylonian king. When he hears about the situation in Jerusalem, Nehemiah prays to God, and asks the king to send him to help his people. Nehemiah's prayers are answered. He is made governor of Judea, and God enables him to overcome many difficulties to repair the walls of Jerusalem, to set things in order in the temple, and to reestablish a sense of identity for his people.

## AT-HOME CHALLENGE

**EACH MORNING:** Take ten minutes to be quiet with God. Open by slowly praying along with these excerpts from the prayers of Asa and Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 14:11, 20:6, 12): "O Lord, there is none like you to help... we rely on you... You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you... We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

**EACH EVENING:** Take ten minutes to be quiet with God. Open by slowly praying along with these excerpts from the prayer of Daniel (Daniel 9:4-5, 18-19): "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules... O my God, incline your ear and hear... For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act."

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

*O Eternal God, mighty in power, of infinite majesty, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, much less the walls of temples made with hands; who yet hast promised to be present wherever two or three are gathered together in thy Name: Direct and bless, we pray thee, our efforts to build this house for thy worship and service, and grant us such success as may tend to thy glory and the salvation of thy people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (PRAYER FROM THE OFFICE FOR THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF A CHURCH OR CHAPEL, BCP PAGE 679)

# THE OT

## NEHEMIAH 1: **SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD**

<sup>2</sup>...And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

<sup>4</sup>As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>And I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father’s house have sinned. <sup>7</sup>We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup>Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup>but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ <sup>10</sup>They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. <sup>11</sup>O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”