

**The Power of Prayer**  
**Series: The Story, chapter 21**  
March 9, 2014      Pastor Bill Bump

Today, as we conclude the Old Testament portion of God's Story, we focus on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the role of prayer.

Some eighty years after the first group of Jews left Babylon to rebuild the temple, a second group of exiles returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra

Ezra 7:6 (NIV) ...this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.

When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, he found that the people had again started marrying people of different faiths and believing in other gods.

Ezra 9:3-4 (NIV) When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.

Ezra realized the only thing he could do was pray.

Ezra 9:5-6a (NIV) Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God and prayed...

As Ezra prayed he talked about how gracious God was to end their exile and allow them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

Ezra 9:10-12 (NIV) <sup>10</sup>But now, our God, what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commands <sup>11</sup>you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: "The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons..."

Ezra 9:15 (NIV) LORD, the God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence."

If we have learned anything from our journey the *The Story*, it is this: Obey God's commands.

After Ezra's prayer and the people's repentance, God blessed his people.

Meanwhile back in Persia, thirteen years after Ezra left, we are introduced to another man God chose to use in His story. That man was Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was told that Jerusalem was in ruins, the walls had been broken down, and the gates had been burned with fire.

Nehemiah 1:4-7 (NIV) <sup>4</sup>When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Then I said:

“LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ‘let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you. <sup>7</sup>We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.”

Note the pattern with Ezra and Nehemiah: They were both deeply committed leaders and they both became prayer warriors.

Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and immediately faced opposition.

Nehemiah 4:1-3 (NIV) When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, <sup>2</sup>and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?”

<sup>3</sup>Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!”

Opposition can lead to discouragement.

Nehemiah 4:10-12 (NIV) <sup>10</sup>Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.”

<sup>11</sup>Also our enemies said, “Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.”

<sup>12</sup>Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.”

However, Nehemiah kept the Jews motivated by reminding them they were rebuilding the walls for God.

Nehemiah 6:15 (NIV) So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

At the heart of both Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s stories is the power of prayer.

## Conclusion

A few lessons about prayer that we learn from Ezra and Nehemiah:

1. Prayer gives us vision. It allows us to see the will of God.

Nehemiah reminded God of some promises God made to Moses.

Nehemiah 1:8-9 (NIV) Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.”

As we read Nehemiah’s prayer, we find it full of repentance. Repentance means you do an about-face, that you go in the opposite direction.

The height of our spiritual revival will be determined by the depth of our personal repentance.

2. Prayer gives us wisdom to understand the will of God.

Nehemiah prayed and God gave him direction.

James 1:5 (NIV) If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

3. Prayer gives us courage, courage to believe the Word of God.