

Starting Over

by Wayne Goff

We are studying in the training class the books of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah**. These books discuss the return of some of the Jewish people from Babylonian exile. Going back to Jerusalem and Judah which had laid waste for 70 years, inhabited only by the lowest people of the land, and basically left empty, would be a difficult task. Rebuilding the massive Temple of Solomon would be another tremendous undertaking. And rebuilding the city walls of Jerusalem would take decades more! So where do you begin?!

Ezra began with his **heart**. In Ezra 7:10 we read, *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”* Having thus learned himself, Ezra was not content to let God’s city, temple and nation go away. Forgetting about these things was not an option! It’s amazing what you can do when you are determined to go forward and not look back!

Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer in Persia. He came across certain brethren who had recently come from Judah, and he asked about the condition of the city of Jerusalem. They said: *“The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.”* (Neh. 1:3).

Nehemiah’s reaction? *“So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven”* (Neh. 1:4). Yes, his heart was greatly affected by the bad news of God’s nation in disrepair. No wonder he determined to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of that great city. There was no other choice for him. Nobody else was standing up to do it! He determined in his **heart** to do what was right.

What About Us?

When is the last time you saw a preacher, or an elder or a Bible class teacher weep for the spiritual condition of the church, or of a lost soul or family? Perhaps we do not see the *spiritual disrepair* of the Lord’s church in our place. Nehemiah wasn’t just crying to clear out his ducts! Perhaps the church where we worship is strong, vibrant, and in good working order. But it is not that way everywhere, and a lack of concern is the reason why it is in sad shape in some places.

Hard Work

When I was a child, I saw a new congregation begin in a city in northeast Arkansas. It began in an old dusty storefront, with a few members, no preacher, no elders, no deacons. Just a few who cared enough to start a small congregation. They used donated communion ware which was faded with a few dents here and there, but serviceable. Folded wooden seats had to be set up for each service, and taken down afterwards. It didn’t look promising to my young eyes. My father was asked to help preach there on occasion, so after our regular worship we would drive twenty miles down the road, worship **again** with this small group, and encourage their efforts by providing a preacher for them. It was a difficult beginning, but in time that small group became a strong, vibrant congregation of God’s people -- complete with elders, deacons, members, a church building, and a full-time preacher. Today, forty years later, that congregation still stands. It took the diligent effort of a committed few to accomplish what many would not attempt.

Support Your Work!

Likewise, this congregation also had an inauspicious beginning. Ask the families who were here at the **beginning** -- the Youngs, the McDaniels, and a few others. Building up a local congregation from nothing is a difficult work, and those who have done it appreciate the work so much more than those who *came later*! So brethren, appreciate the local church, work hard for it, and make it better. Don’t complain or criticize when you didn’t help at the beginning! It’s so much easier to tear down a work, than it is to build it up!