**Study notes – Nehemiah 1**

**Ice breaker: Do you have any new years resolutions?**

**More serious: Where do you long to see changes in the world or your own life?**

**Read Nehemiah 1**

**1. Nehemiah discovers that the people living in Jerusalem were in 'great trouble and disgrace'. Looking at vv1-3, how is this the case?**

In the modern Western world, we have no need of walled cities, however, in this context the walls being broken and the gates burned made the city and its inhabitants very vulnerable to attack, particularly during the night when the gates would normally have been shut. The physical appearance of this great city in ruin also sends the signal to others that Israel's God has abandoned them or is not powerful enough to help them. Furthermore, 'disgrace' is a label often given in the Old Testament to those who have sinned, and turned away from God and his law. Nehemiah knows that the spiritual state of his people is at a low point, even after having been allowed to return to Jerusalem after the exile. It seems very unlikely that his people will turn back to God and be lifted out of poverty and disgrace without first God's forgiveness and intervention.

**2. What was Nehemiah’s first response when faced with a seemingly hopeless predicament? How is this a good example for us?**

Mourning, fasting and prayer (v4). Nehemiah mourned and prayed for five months before he did anything–longer than the time it took him to rebuild the walls later on. It is striking the heaviness with which Nehemiah receives this news, and the time he takes to mourn and pray before responding.

**3. What does Nehemiah’s prayer reveal about his view of himself and of God?**

That the Jews (including him) had strayed from God's ways and disobeyed him (v6-7); That they are, nevertheless, a people belonging to God and loved by him. See ‘your servants’, ‘your people’ (v6,10.); That God is faithful to his covenant of love (v5); That he has promised to bring back together his people if they turn back to him (v9); That God will hear his prayer and act.

**4. Based on this passage, what are some of the ingredients of effective prayer?**

Simon’s sermon: Confess; Remember; Ask; Be (living in the right way); others?

**5. In what ways can a life rooted in prayer change our attitude towards life’s difficulties?** It can put our problems into perspective; it can grow faith and dependency upon God; bring comfort and assurance in place of fear, worry and anxiety.

**6. In what ways does God bless those who continually turn to him in prayer?**

Seeing God answer prayers in expected and unexpected ways.

The joy of a relationship with Him.

**7. How might Nehemiah’s example challenge us to root our lives in prayer? What are the challenges, practical ideas, and ways we can support each other?**

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