

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN NEHEMIAH

THE STORY OF NEHEMIAH – A JOURNEY IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

PART ONE - THE START OF THE JOURNEY

The year was 445BC. The setting was Susa, the capital of Persia, now Iran. The ruler was King Artaxerxes I, whose father was Xerxes, (Ahasuerus in the book of Esther), a capable military leader, well known in Greek history. Most of the Jewish people had returned to Jerusalem from their 70 years of exile in 536, nearly 100 years earlier. Their temple had been rebuilt as described in the book of Haggai by 516BC. But their city walls, their security, were still broken down and their morale was equally low. As so often before and since God looked for His man for this moment. His choice of leader was on the same grounds it always is, a man who reminds us of Jesus. Nehemiah means ‘compassion of the Lord’ – ‘for God so loved the world’. Let us follow his story asking how much his story can become ours.

1. HE HEARS THE NEWS AND RESPONDS TO GOD FIRST

1:3 Nehemiah received news of a broken city -broken minds, hearts, bodies, families, communities, nations

1:4 He wept -as Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk.19:41), and Paul over Ephesus.(Acts 20:31)

1:5-11 He prayed a prayer of repentance which spoke of ‘we’ not ‘they’, recalling God’s promises of the way back.(I Jn.1:7-10)

1:11 He was cup-bearer to the king - as Jesus carried the cup of suffering for us.(Lk.22:42; Isa.51:17,22; Jer.49:12)

Question for discussion – How does God want us to respond when we hear of broken lives and needs in our world today? How do we so often miss the point and therefore achieve little?

2. HE PLANS THE WAY, PREPARES THE PEOPLE, AND MEETS OPPOSITION

2:4,5 He prayed to God and said to the king, the right way round.(I Thess. 5:17)

2:5 ‘I want to rebuild’ – as Jesus plans to build His church.(Matt.16:18)

2:6 He was sent but promised to return – as Jesus knew He would return to heaven.(Jn.14:1-4)

2:7 He was given authority – as Jesus was given all authority.(Matt.28:18)

2:8 He received all the needed resources to do the work – ‘my God will supply every need of yours.(Phil.4:19)

2:8 The good hand of God was with him – as He was with Christians in Antioch.(Acts 11:21)

2:10 His 3 enemies heard and were displeased –the Devil, the flesh and the world.(I Jn.2:14-16) Compare to Herod the Great.(Matt.2:3, 7,-13, 16)

2:11 He arrived to begin the work.(Matt.2:1)

2:11 He spent 3 days in Jerusalem – as Jesus spent 3 days in the grave.(Matt.12:39,40)

2:12 He went out to see for himself with just a few men – Jesus with only 12 disciples. (Matt.10:1-5)

2:17 He said ‘let us rebuild’ and they agreed.(Acts 1:6-8)

2:19 His 3 enemies mocked, despised and falsely accused – as Jesus was falsely accused.(Mk.14:56)

Sanballat was mentioned in Persian history as the governor of Samaria, who may well have been ambitious to rule Judah as well. A Jewish woman married him contrary to the Law.(Neh.13:28)

Question for discussion – What are the essential steps if we are to make a difference in our needy world? How did Jesus demonstrate the same steps in His ministry? What happens if we miss important steps? How in particular are we to handle opposition?

3. THE WORK BEGINS AND NEARLY EVERYONE HELPS

3:1 The task was shared with almost the whole population

- 3:5 - some nobles did not
- 3:8 - all kinds of tradesmen involved.(Acts 18:3)
- 3:9 - leaders and ordinary people.(Luke 22:24-27)
- 3:10, 23 - began opposite their houses,(Acts 1:8)
- 3:12 - daughters too.(Gal.3:28; Acts 2:17)
- 3:13,14 - walls to keep out and gates to welcome in.(Jn.10:7-10)
- 3:17,22,28 - priests too.(Acts 20:34)

As in so many places in the Bible, this chapter contains a long list of names to remind us how special each one of us is to God.

Question for discussion – How can we expect to see a whole community become committed to meeting need? How are we to respond if some are reluctant?

