

ACPC Bible Studies Oct 2016: Nehemiah 1: 1-11.

Introduction

The city of Jerusalem and the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. It had become a ghost town, because its inhabitants had been taken to Babylon as slaves. However, many Hebrews settled down in Babylon and even held high positions in the Government. After 70 years, the people were given the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, but only few did. When they arrived they began to rebuild the Temple. However, after 150 years, the walls were still in ruins, because their enemies prevented them from doing so. Nehemiah lived in Babylon, the capital of Persia and was the cupbearer (or butler, personal assistant) to the King. However, his heart was in Jerusalem, 800 miles away. He hears that the city is in great distress and the people are weak and vulnerable.

Nehemiah's prayer (verses 5-11)

Nehemiah begins his prayer very emotionally. He is deeply upset and weeps. Before he prays, he mourns and fasts. He does not rush into prayer. He makes sure that he is fully aware of the facts and is spiritually prepared. In the Bible, not eating for a certain period is a way of concentrating and focussing one's mind and heart. Hunger can either distract us or sharpen us. Then *in verse 4*, Nehemiah prays his great prayer which is a model prayer for us today. He does not complain about the situation. *In verse 5* he praises God. He knows the God to whom he is praying. All prayer begins with an acknowledgment that our God is the God of Heaven, that He is awesome and loving. *In verse 6*, he asks God to hear his prayer. Of course God hears our prayer. However, Nehemiah is making clear how important this prayer is. Nehemiah then *in verses 6 and 7*, takes on the role of leadership. He confesses the sins of *all the people*. He leads by acknowledging the failings and deliberate wrongdoings of his people.

In verses 8 and 9, Nehemiah states what he wants. Once we have acknowledged who God is, confessed that we are not all we should be, and that we seek to follow his commands, then our relationship with God is re-established. God's promise is that he will forgive us. Once we are reconciled with God, we are reunited with each other. Nehemiah "reminds" God that in *Leviticus 26* he has promised that he will gather his people together again. God requires the people to honour him in that place. *In verses 10 and 11*, Nehemiah is essentially asking for the gift of leadership. He feels that he is called to rebuild the walls, and to lead the people home to Jerusalem.

Questions

1. Do the leaders of the world ever acknowledge that they or their country and people have done something wrong?
2. What are the key elements of our prayers that we see in Nehemiah's prayer?
3. "Walls" can protect or separate people. What "walls" are "broken down" in Auckland today?
4. What "success" should we ask God for? How do we know we are asking for the right things?
5. When we build a new Church, what is its purpose from God's point of view?

Conclusion

Prayer is critical before we begin any new adventure. It helps us focus and then to listen to God. Recognition of how great God is, humility, confession, an understanding of what God has said and done through the Bible are all vital. So too is knowing that we must accept the challenge God gives us. It may take us out of our comfort zone. We may think it impossible. But Nehemiah asked for success. In humility, knowing that we can only succeed with God's help, we should do the same.

