

Studies in the Book of Nehemiah
Broken Walls—Broken hearts
Neh. 1:1-4

Intro: When faced with tough times, churches must look to the Scripture for answers to their problems. There are a number of texts that might show us the key factors in meeting challenges and solving problems; but none better I think than the first six chapters of Nehemiah.

Recently I've been thinking about what we might learn from this important moment in the history of God's people as we go through a period of rebuilding. It is one of the great success stories in the revelation of God. This was a time when God's people did it right and was rewarded with great blessing from God! Let's see what we can learn.

Broken Walls...

Nehemiah's circumstances, v. 1-2

It was 444 BC. The power of Babylonians had been transferred by conquest to the Persians. In Susa was a citadel which served as the winter home of Persia's kings; Artaxerxes was king of the Persians. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king (v. 11).

The "captivity" refers to Jerusalem's destruction by the forces of Babylon under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

Now on the tenth day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, who was in the service of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the Lord, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every large house he burned with fire. So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile some of the poorest of the people, the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the artisans. But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen. (Jeremiah 52:12-16)

So there was left a struggling band of Israelites in Jerusalem; Nehemiah inquires about their welfare and the message is not a good one.

The report fits very well with Jeremiah's historical record of the circumstances after the fall of Jerusalem.

But Kidner suggests that the reference in 1:2 refers to a more recent attempt to rebuild the walls initiated by Ezra. The enemies of Israel in Palestine had pressured King Artaxerxes to order a halt to the work by force just as their efforts were getting underway (Ezra 4:6-23). And perhaps some of what had been restored was destroyed again! And

so the people were badly demoralized by these developments.

God's people faced a significant challenge (v. 3) Two words jump at us from the page.

Distress—It was painful for the people to see their circumstances.

Reproach—The Israelites were the subject of embarrassment or ridicule. Their boast had been in God and now it appeared that their God had let them down. The enemies had occasion to mock them and oppress them. They felt disgrace and shame.

Up to this point God's people had not responded to the problem. The walls of Jerusalem had remained in rubble for over 140 years! Yet all of that was to change because of the reaction of one man! Nehemiah is not only about broken walls; it's about:

Broken Hearts

Nehemiah's reaction, v. 4. He wept and mourned for days.

Nehemiah wept and mourned:

Even though he had nothing to cause the state of affairs in Jerusalem. He suffered because of what had been caused by others, at another time.

Even though he was not personally affected by the distress and reproach of the survivors of Jerusalem. He apparent enjoyed the comforts of a cushy job in Susa.

Yet, it was this sorrow that drove Him to God and began a chain of events that would rebuild Jerusalem's broken walls and restore the dignity and faith of the people.

Great works begin with tears

Like Nehemiah, we must see things as they really are and really care about them, and wanting to see them changed. We must carry a burden for the lost people in our families, in our workplaces, and in our society. We must carry a burden for the congregations we are apart of. When we look at God's greatest soul winners we see them carrying a burden of tears.

Jesus wept for lost.

And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. "For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44)

Paul wept for lost.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed,

separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, (Romans 9:1-3)

“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Acts 20:31)

It is sometimes out of painful and distressful circumstances and God’s people arise to do their greatest work.

Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:5-6)

The idea of the psalm became the basis for our old spiritual song “Bringing in the sheaves”, a song about doing God’s work.

When we, like Nehemiah, truly care about God’s work, then great things begin to happen. Do you have the concern of Nehemiah? Show us that you care!

Conclusion: If you are not a Christian, we care about you! We want you to be saved.