

## **A City in Need**

### **Nehemiah 1:1-11**

The book of Nehemiah is like Nehemiah's political memoirs. It begins in 445BC, when the Persian empire was at its greatest extent, and Israel was just a minor province.

Nehemiah was an extraordinary man – but the book is really about an extraordinary God, who uses a man like us to bless people like us, who don't deserve it.

#### **A Heart for the City**

Nehemiah was living in the city of Susa, in Persia. His life changes forever when he asks his brother a question about Jerusalem and her people. Nehemiah cares about the city, because he cares about the people. Nehemiah responds to the news with high emotion. Why? For two reasons:

- A city without walls was defenceless, at the mercy of her enemies. Nehemiah mourns because of the tragedy, need and powerlessness of God's people.
- Jerusalem was the place of God's name: he had staked his reputation there. Nehemiah mourns because he cares about the glory of God.

So this book is about having a heart that cares for the needy and the vulnerable, for the health of God's people, his church, and God's glory and fame in the eyes of the world. But Nehemiah didn't need to be moved. He lived in safety, he had a good job, he wasn't a religious leader or Bible teacher. But his safety and his job were not reasons for him not to care, or pray or serve.

The secret to Nehemiah's willing response was that he saw himself as the Lord's servant. When you understand that, doors of service open to you.

#### **Praying for the City**

Nehemiah knew God would have to intervene, so he prayed. He knew the king was just a man, the real power belonged to God.

Nehemiah knew God was powerful, loving and holy. He knew the people had experienced exile because of their sin, but rather than point the finger he identifies with them in their sin. He knows he is no better than they are. So he throws himself on the mercy of God, knowing that God is the God who rescues.

How did Nehemiah know all this about God? Because he was a man who knew his Bible, the word of God.

#### **A Saviour for the City**

Nehemiah wasn't the only one who wept and prayed over, served and went to Jerusalem. Christ did to. He was crucified outside the city walls. He experienced exile from God's presence at the cross. He was the ultimate cupbearer – the King who drank the poisoned cup – the cup of God's wrath, for us his servants. He fully identified with us in our sin when we were needy and powerless.

When we allow his love and sacrifice for us to penetrate our hearts we will love the needy and the sinful in the city. We will love God's people as he loves them, and pray and act for the glory of God and the good of his people.