

For the Family

Read together Nehemiah 1:1-4

Explain that the people of Israel had been defeated by an enemy nation and had been taken away from their land. Later, they had been allowed to return, and had started to rebuild their home town of Jerusalem. But they had run into some trouble.

Some people traveled from Jerusalem to where Nehemiah was. He asked them how things were going there. They told him that there was trouble in Jerusalem.

Review together Nehemiah's reaction:

He wept and mourned for days.

He fasted and prayed before God.

Talk together about Nehemiah's reaction.

Can you think of a time when you wept and mourned for days?

What would be so upsetting that you would do that?

Why do you think Nehemiah did that?

Have you ever fasted?

Explain that fasting is going without food so you can focus on praying to God about whatever is going on.

Explain that Nehemiah had an important position where he lived. Things were pretty good for him. Yet, when he heard that God's people were in trouble, he wept and fasted and prayed to God for days.

Talk together about how important it is to think about other people and not just ourselves. Things may be going well for us, but it might not be so good for others. Even though Nehemiah was fine where he was, he became sad when he heard that the people of God were in trouble.

Pray together that you will be aware of other people, and will be concerned for them, just as you are for yourself. If you know of someone in trouble, pray for them as you would for yourself.

Next Week: Nehemiah's Prayer



Rebuilding *Nehemiah 1:3-4*

³And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

⁴As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Opening

1. Describe a leader that you admire. What qualities stand out in your mind?
2. How would you define *leadership*?
3. What kind of leadership experiences have you had?
Share with your group.

Background to the book of Nehemiah

Exile

Following the death of King Solomon, Israel divided into a Northern Kingdom (called Israel) and a Southern Kingdom (called Judah). Both groups abandoned God and lives were characterized by disobedience and idol worship.

In 722 BC, the northern kingdom, Israel, was conquered by Assyria and taken into captivity.

Read 2 Kings 17:6-23

A little over 100 years later, the southern kingdom, Judah, was defeated by the Babylonians and taken into exile.

Read 2 Kings 24:10-17

Read 2 Kings 25:1-21

What do you learn about the exile from these passages?

Return

Later, the Jews were allowed to return. This happened in three different phases, over a period of about 100 years.

1. Under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6) they rebuilt the temple, but came under opposition and work ceased for the most part.
2. Under Ezra (Ezra 7-10) they worked on the temple and restored worship. They then came under attack, and were unprotected without a wall around the city.
3. Under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1-13) they rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem and restored the covenant community.

Our Story: Nehemiah Responds to a Bad Report

Read Nehemiah 1:1-4

What is Hanani's report to Nehemiah?

What is Nehemiah's response to this report?

Why did Nehemiah weep and mourn for days?

Why did he fast and pray?

Nehemiah was in a comfortable position far away from the problem. Why did he have such a concern for this?

Reflect

When was the last time you wept because of a report concerning difficult conditions somewhere else in the kingdom of God?

Read and respond to the following, from James Hamilton in the *Christ-Centered Expository Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*:

"If we would feel the kind of zeal for the church that results in weeping, mourning, fasting, and praying in response to reports about how the enemies of the gospel have attacked God's kingdom, we should seek to understand the Scriptures and pray that God would cause us to long for their fulfillment."

What do you think of Hamilton's call for a response of understanding Scripture and praying for its fulfillment?

Should weeping, mourning, fasting and praying have a stronger presence in American churches? Support your answer.

Steve shared a quote from Walter Henry:

"One day I sat down and meditated on what would be the most horrible thing that could happen to me as a Christian. The conclusion to which I came was that when I die, God would take me aside and say to me, "Let me show you what your life could have been like "if only" you had done what I asked, "if only" you had been faithful to me, "if only" you had disciplined your life and made it really count, as I wanted you to."

What is your response to this idea? Share with the group.

What can you do to more conform to what God has in mind for you?

Next Steps:

- I will commit to reading the Book of Nehemiah.
- I will be available to be used by God for his purposes.
- I will pray for the spiritual rebuilding of our country, our churches, and our families.

Memory Verse – Nehemiah 1:3-4

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