

## Prayer Letter 2

Excerpts from the book "Pray for the Nation" (chapter 8)

### 2. God's dealings with cities

In recent years, evangelical Christians have placed great emphasis on the salvation of individuals. Generally there has not been a great emphasis on seeing whole families come to the Lord, as long as individuals are being saved. We have tended to think of God's dealings as only being concerned with the individual, not families, and certainly not cities or nations.

But God is concerned with cities (or towns), and nations too. After all, a city is a large collection of people for whom Christ died. And while God is concerned over one person's sin and salvation, He is also concerned about sinful cities, and the sins of nations. After all, the sinfulness of cities and nations are powerfully bad examples, and bad influences on the individuals who live in them!

As far back as Genesis 18, God was grieved over the sins of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He was so grieved that He shared with Abraham the judgement He was about to bring on those cities because of their sins. Abraham pleaded with God to spare the cities, and God said that He would if He could find even ten righteous people in the city – but He could not. So God removed Lot, his wife and two daughters, and destroyed the rest of the cities.

God spoke to both Moses and Joshua about setting aside certain cities as cities of refuge (Joshua 20) – these were cities to which people could come and find protection if they had accidentally killed someone. Larger cities, in Biblical times, were protected by high walls and gates. The elders and judges of the city exercised their authority and judgement at the gates of the city. The city was thus to be a place of protection and justice for the people.

When Nehemiah saw the state of the city of Jerusalem, with its walls broken down, and lying in waste, the haunt of jackals and wild beasts, open to the enemy, undefended and unprotected, he wept, he fasted and he prayed (Nehemiah 1).

The Temple, the House of God, had been restored by Zerubbabel about 100 years earlier, but the city and the Temple still lay unprotected.

Why had the city of Jerusalem been destroyed? Because the people of Israel had rebelled against the Lord; they had refused to listen to His prophets, refused to obey His Word and His laws, and had gone into idolatry. Therefore God said, "I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good" (Jeremiah 21:10).

Even when the people of Israel were in captivity in Babylon, God said, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7).

A city will know the goodness of God, or His judgement, depending on how the people in that city live. "When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness. By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked" (Proverbs 11:10-11)

There is hope! Even if things look bad, there is hope. Nineveh was an exceedingly great, but wicked, city. Nevertheless, God had pity on the city (Jonah 4:11) and sent Jonah with a message of impending judgement. When the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, mourned over their sin, and cried to God, God spared that heathen city. "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it" (Jonah 3:10)

## **New Testament examples**

God's concern for cities did not stop at the end of the Old Testament. Lest anyone should feel that today God is only concerned for individuals, not cities, let us look at some New Testament examples.

When Jesus sent His disciples out into the towns and villages, He said that if a town did not receive their message they were to shake the dust off their feet as a sign against it, and pronounce judgement, not over individuals, but over the town as a whole (Luke 10:8-12)

Jesus Himself did this when He pronounced judgement over Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because of their refusal to repent, in spite of the mighty works done in them (Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-15). Thus Jesus dealt not only with individuals and their judgement or salvation, but also with cities as a whole.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not!" (Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44)

What does Jesus think of our city? Does He weep over it? Does He rejoice over it? Does He pronounce judgement, warning, or blessing? And, what do **we** think about our city or town?

## **Characteristics of a city**

In the Bible we see cities described by many different characteristics, some good and some bad. For example: rebellious, wicked, chaotic, oppressive, divided, idolatrous cities or towns. As well as good, decent, peaceful, generous, united, fruitful, beautiful, etc. One of the reasons for praying for where we live, is so that we have good leadership, and the blessings that brings.

### **1 Timothy 2:1-4**

First of all, I urge that petitions [intercession], prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people – for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct. This is good and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth.

How would you describe your town or city? How would God see your city? We need to pray for it accordingly!

## **Cities can change!**

There is hope: ruined cities can be repaired (Isaiah 61:4; Ezekiel 36:35). Conversely, once fortified cities have their defences broken down, they can be destroyed (Isaiah 1:21; 25:2; 37:26; 64:10). *We must continually maintain our defences!*