



Time to Reflect

- What are some of the main challenges that church leaders face today?
- What aspect of Nehemiah's leadership do you find to be most profound? What can we learn from Nehemiah's leadership approach during his early days in Jerusalem?

Last week our passage challenged us to think about the issues of waiting and asking. We reflected on questions such as 'what does it mean to wait upon God?' We also considered different approaches to prayer. This week our attention is drawn to the early stages of Nehemiah's rebuilding project. As we look at these verses we will encounter the emergence of opposition and we will see how Nehemiah dealt with that opposition. We will also reflect on specific leadership traits and the importance of times of rest.

"We too, like Nehemiah and the citizens of Jerusalem, are called to build. But we are not erecting a physical city, but the church, 'the city of God' (Psalm 46:4; Hebrews 12:22-24). We do not build with bricks and cement, but with the tools of fervent prayer, powerful preaching and zealous personal witnessing to those who do not know the Saviour. We shall encounter opposition, but the 'God of heaven' who gave success to Nehemiah is our God!"

(Stan Evers, *Doing A Great Work: Ezra And Nehemiah Simply Explained*, p127)

Specifics

- As our passage begins we discover that Nehemiah had travelled to Jerusalem, with a military escort and his letters from the king. Please note that this journey from Susa would have taken two months.
- Nehemiah was a king's officer and he would have travelled with quite an entourage (v9). This attracted the attention of Sanballat and Tobiah. Note how these two men were "...very disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites" (v10).
- In coming weeks we will discover the type and extent of opposition that Sanballat and Tobiah, as well as Geshem (v19), would use against Nehemiah. It is safe to say that they were not pleased by Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem!
- It is incredible that the negativity and complaining started as soon as Nehemiah entered Jerusalem. Once again we are reminded that God doesn't call leaders to easy tasks.
- Warren Wiersbe reflects, "**Nehemiah would soon discover that his biggest problem was not the enemy on the outside but the compromisers on the inside, a problem the church still faces today.**"¹
- It is interesting that Nehemiah rested for a period of three days when he arrived in Jerusalem (v11). He would have been tempted to get straight to work but he decided against such a strategy.
- After such a long journey from Susa, Nehemiah demonstrated great wisdom in resting before embracing a new season of busyness.
- We shouldn't, however, simply conclude that Nehemiah spent this time asleep or in recreation. Stan Evers helpfully observes, "**We assume that his first three days in Jerusalem were not spent in idleness,**

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah* (David. C. Cook, 1992), p37.

but were used for devising his strategy and supplicating God for strength and wisdom to fulfil his new role (2:11). Nehemiah, like Ezra, discovered that time devoted to prayer and planning is not wasted time (Ezra 8:15, 21).²

- Note how Nehemiah also took time to assess the lay of the land (v12). He set out at night with only a few others. This enabled him to move around Jerusalem without any hindrance and without his sceptics scrutinising his every move.
- It is also worth highlighting that, at this stage, Nehemiah was yet to share his God-given vision with anyone else in Jerusalem (v12). This point is reinforced in (v16).
- (v13-15) record how Nehemiah examined the walls. He conducted an extensive survey and this helped him assess the enormity of the task that he was called to fulfil.
- Wiersbe suggests, “A good leader doesn’t rush into his work but patiently gathers the facts firsthand and then plans his strategy (Prov. 18:13). We must be ‘wise as serpents’ because the Enemy is always watching and waiting to attack.”³
- Even at this early stage of his time in Jerusalem, Nehemiah modelled three important leadership principles.
 1. He took time to pray and to plan, choosing to keep his thoughts and strategies to himself until the time was right for them to be shared.
 2. By travelling through Jerusalem at night, Nehemiah got the opportunity to assess with honesty and accuracy. He knew he needed to embrace reality. Wiersbe develops this as he writes, “Leaders must not live in a dream world. They must face facts honestly...Nehemiah saw more at night than the residents saw in daylight, for he saw the potential as well as the problems.”⁴
 3. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem with a new perspective on the problems that the city was experiencing. He had a new vision for the task ahead and then he proceeded to step out in mission (v17).
- Nehemiah had the faith to challenge the people of Jerusalem to partner with him in the rebuilding work (v17). Note how his appeal was positive and inclusive.
- He included himself with the people of Jerusalem. “You see the trouble we are in...Come let us rebuild...we will no longer be in disgrace.”
- Nehemiah challenged the people of Jerusalem but he did so in a caring way – as opposed to the selfishness of previous governors (5:14-18). He also focused on the glory and greatness of God (v18).
- To the credit of the people of Jerusalem, they accepted the challenge (v18b). They didn’t embrace negativity, nor did they ignore the reality of the situation that they were in. They knew that change and action were required.
- Wiersbe offers an important point of application. “Christian leaders today face these same two obstacles as they seek to lead God’s people into new conquests for the Lord. How often we hear, ‘We’re content the way things are; don’t rock the boat by trying to change things.’ Or, ‘We tried that before and it didn’t work!’⁵”
- Finally, Nehemiah also challenged those who sought to oppose him (v19-20). Sanballat, Tobiah and Gesham mocked and ridiculed Nehemiah.
- Nehemiah’s response to these men emphasised that he was called to undertake God’s work. Note how Nehemiah drew a line against his opponents. He stood firmly with those who had taken up his call (v20) and he challenged the negativity that was levied against him.

² Stan Evers, *Doing A Great Work: Ezra And Nehemiah Simply Explained* (EP Books, 2015), p124.

³ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, p37.

⁴ Ibid, p37.

⁵ Ibid, p38.