

BIBLE SURVEY

NEHEMIAH

"You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." Nehemiah 2:17

Nehemiah was a contemporary of Queen Esther, the prophet Haggai, and Ezra. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. It is possible that Queen Esther persuaded her stepson, Artaxerxes, to give this place of honour and trust to Nehemiah.

Information

News of the trouble and disgrace of the returned exiles in Jerusalem reached Nehemiah. The walls were still broken down and the gates had been burned with fire. Nehemiah sat down, wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. From his regret and repentance, he was led to make a request of the king, to be released to travel to Jerusalem to aid his people in rebuilding the walls of the city. Nehemiah provides us with a proven strategy for success in any venture. This book inspired the launch of Africa Christian Action and it has guided many in how to achieve their goals.

"My people perish for lack of knowledge." Hosea 4:6.

We must be informed. It is when people are informed that they can be inspired to prayer and action. Nehemiah researched amongst the rubble and developed a plan of action.

Vision

"Without a vision a people perish." Nehemiah had a vision of a great work and he inspired those around him with that vision.

Involvement

"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called repairer of broken walls, restorer of streets with dwellings." Isaiah 58:12

Nehemiah motivated and mobilised the community to rebuild their portion of the wall. Yet, while each group of families had their own part of the wall to work on, they were united in a common goal. ***"The God of Heaven Himself will prosper us, therefore we His servants will arise and build..."*** Nehemiah 2:20

Opposition

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem met resistance. Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab, mocked and ridiculed the people of God as they sought to rebuild the wall. They sought to undermine and interfere with the work and spread false charges against Nehemiah and his followers. When God gives you a work to do, satan sends people to waste your time. Some have the gift of criticism and a ministry of discouragement. They seek to undermine those who seek first God's Kingdom.

Intercession

In response to their threats, Nehemiah turned to God in prayer: ***"Hear O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads and give them as plunder to the land of captivity! Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for***

they have provoked You to anger before the builders." Nehemiah 4:4-5. This is an example of praying the imprecatory Psalms.

Resistance

Nehemiah encouraged his people: ***"Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses."*** Nehemiah 4:14. The Bible is not a pacifist book. Christians are called to stand up, to step out and to fight the good fight of Faith. *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the Faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* 1 Timothy 5:8

With Sword and Tool

Nehemiah ensured that his people were armed and prepared. The people worked with all their heart, with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other.

"The work is great and extensive and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us!"

Nehemiah 4:19-20

The Trumpet

The trumpet bearer remained close to Nehemiah so that when any portion of the wall came under attack, the trumpet would be blown and the other people would rally to that point under attack. Historically the Church bell has alerted people to fires and summoned the faithful to services. Today the newsletter and mailing lists, Christian community radio programmes, the internet and social media serve as trumpets of communication to concentrate our forces where and when needed.

Distraction

The people were united in the common goal and alert to the threats. When Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem sought to distract Nehemiah by calling him for a conference, he responded: *"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"* Nehemiah 6:3. Do not allow yourself to be side tracked. Seek first the Kingdom of God.

Implementation

Within a mere 52 days, the wall was completed. ***"And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God."***

Nehemiah 6:16

Perseverance

We should never allow ourselves to be distracted, deviated, discouraged or drawn away from our duty.

Reading of the Law

Once the wall was rebuilt, all the people assembled in the square as Ezra the Scribe brought out the Book of the Law of Moses and read it to all the people. Ezra made it clear; giving the meaning, so that the people could understand what was being read. As the people refocused on God's Word, the response was Repentance and Revival. *"The Law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul."*

Repentance

The people wept as they listened to the Words of the Law and recognised their sinfulness before a Holy God. Nehemiah responded to the people: *"Do not sorrow, for **The joy of the***

Lord is your strength!" Nehemiah 8:10. Nehemiah 9 records a great prayer of Repentance and Renewal of the Covenant. Repentance leads to rejoicing.

The Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sack cloth and having put dust on their heads, they stood and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers: *"But they and our Fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks and did not heed Your Commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, worthy to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness and did not forsake them... and in the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from Heaven; and according to Your abundant mercies, You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rested, they again did evil before You. Therefore you left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from Heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies... now therefore Our God, the Great, Mighty and Awesome God, who keeps Covenant and mercy... You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have dealt wickedly. Neither our kings, nor our princes, our priests, nor our Fathers, have kept Your Law, or heeded Your Commandments and Your testimonies, with which You testified against them. For they have not served you and the kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them... here we are, servants today! The land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we are, servants in it. Because of all this, we make a sure Covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites and our priests seal it."* Nehemiah 9

Reform

As goes the family so goes the nation. The place to begin Reformation is in the home. When Nehemiah discovered that some of the believers had *"married women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab"*, and that many of their children could not even speak the language of Judah *"but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them, and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying: 'You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, he was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?'"* Nehemiah 13:24-27

Defiled and Disqualified

Nehemiah drove from the priesthood a man who was married to a pagan. Nehemiah banished him *"because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan."* Nehemiah 13:28-30. Who we marry matters. Marriage involves two families, a community, a nation and the Kingdom of God.

Resolution

Nehemiah stands out as a man of prayer and action. A man of character, courageous and resilient. A man of vision and a gifted organiser, who was able to mobilise the people to complete a great task. Nehemiah is a book of Restoration. *"Without a vision a people perish."* From Ezra and Haggai the people received a vision, and Nehemiah organised the people to fulfil this vision, resolutely persevering until all obstacles were overcome. Nehemiah stands out as a man who was both prayerful and practical, one who could sorrow and yet rejoice, one who could be both tough and tender, sensitive to God and to his neighbours. He is concerned with justice and efficiency. Most of all he was concerned for the Glory of God and the good of His people.

Principles for Success

Whether your studies, a writing project, physical training, or skills development, the principles for success are laid out in Nehemiah. You can apply these principles to school, sports, or your spiritual development, your marriage, your community, or your country. Study Nehemiah this week and apply its time-tested strategy for success in your life.

Information, Intercession, Involvement, Implementation and Investment,
Motivate and Mobilise.
Educate, Encourage and Enlist

Perseverance leads to achievement.
Communications, Commitment and Concentration of forces leads to victory.
Resolution, Repentance and Reformation lead to Revival.

Do you have a vision?

Do you have a vision of God?
Do you have a vision of what God wants done?
Is the joy of the Lord your strength?

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