

Leadership

Nehemiah 1-3

INTRODUCTION: Today we are going to look at one of the great studies on Leadership in the bible, but also in all of human history. We are calling this series, “**rise and build**” - in the days ahead much will need to be rebuilt.

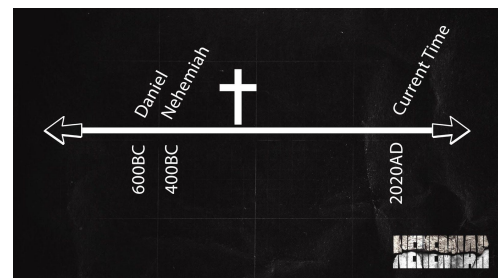
- **Ministries** - I’ve read stats where over 15% of churches will close forever. Here at FBC everything will have to experience a major - relaunch. Pastor Shad will lead Sunday school through a relaunch. Josh and Kristina will lead family ministries.
- **Businesses** - Over 100,000 small businesses will close their doors forever due to the impact of COVID19.

The challenges we will face in the months ahead are unlike any in our lifetime. But while challenges change - the principles of great leadership do not.

CONTEXT:

You will find that it falls just a couple of books before **Psalms**. But that is a bit misleading, because you see - Chronologically Nehemiah is the last **historical** book of the OT. **Malachi** is written about 45 years after Nehemiah, making it the last Prophetic book of the OT.

In reading **Nehemiah** we step back in time over **2400** years, however in following our study of **Daniel** we are stepping forward about **200** years after Daniel was concluded.



The historical placement of Nehemiah gives you some insight to its **interpretation**. Because what comes next? After Nehemiah accomplishes the building of the wall, historically the next recorded event in scripture is **MESSIAH** - the King of Kings.

At the time of Nehemiah, Persia is still the Dominant world power. **Artaxerxes** was the reigning Monarch. Nehemiah like Daniel was a Jew with a place of Prominence in the Kingdom.

Hi **occupation** was that of the **royal cup-bearer** to the Persian King Artaxerxes. In our vernacular the cupbearer was something of a wine taster/butler. He was in charge of the King’s wine, but he was also in charge of the Kings safety. He had to make certain that no one had tried to poison the King. He would have been considered an officer of the King’s court, and would have been among the most trustworthy men in the King’s inner circle of advisors.

By the way -

- God not only calls CLERGY, he calls CUP-BEAERERS.
- He calls EVANGELISTS and EXECUTIVES.
- He calls people to the MISSION FIELD and the MILITARY.

Nehemiah gives us an example of a man who worked no miracles, foretold no future events, raised no one from the dead, parted no sea - yet was mightily used by God in the ordinary circumstances of life.

But like every one of you - he held dual citizenship. He was a citizen of an **earthly kingdom** named Persia - and he was a citizen of a **heavenly Kingdom** named Israel.

So he faithfully rendered unto **Artaxerxes** what belonged to Artaxerxes and faithfully rendered unto **God** what was God's.

So his heart was for the welfare of his earthly Kingdom - **Persia**, but also for his Heavenly home represented by **Jerusalem**.

REMEMBER - The nation of Israel, and it's capital city Jerusalem was massively important in the storyline of scripture.

- God had made a promise to **EVE**, to defeat Satan through her **SEED**, a male descendant.
- God made a similar promise to **ABRAHAM**, to take this one old man and make him into a great nation, and through his **SEED** all of the nations of the world would be blessed.
- God determined that the King would come through the lineage of Abraham's son **Judah**.
- God promised to **David** that his descendant would sit upon an eternal throne.
- One day every Jew knew that the Messiah would make a triumphal entry into the city of **Jerusalem** and lay claim to the throne of David.

But Jerusalem had been destroyed by Babylon. The temple was gone, the city was unprotected.

But something had happened to give the Israelites hope.

The **Persians took a different approach** to being a superpower than did the Babylonians. The Persians knew that if a nation they now ruled was to be profitable it had to have **good leaders**, so the Persian began to return the ruling class back to Jerusalem.

This happened in three waves -

1. Zerrubbabel a descendant of King David, led over 40,000 Jews back to their home land. The temple began to be rebuilt.
2. 70 years later, Ezra leads another group of exiles back to Jerusalem.

That happens right after Daniel last prophecy.

So you can imagine what Nehemiah and his fellow Jews are thinking. REVIVAL and RESTORATION HAS BEGUN!

TEXT: Nehemiah 1:1–4 (ESV)

¹ The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel (modern day Iran), ² that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And 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.” ⁴ As 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.

So this is where the story begins. It begins with **GREAT PAIN**.

1. Pain

As a matter of fact, practically every great work of God in all of history begins with **Pain**. As American’s we believe in our right to pursue happiness, and we all want happiness - but the truth is the first qualification for a mighty work of God is pain.

Do any of you have a painful area of your life? Do you have any problems?
WONDERFUL - you qualify for a work of God!!!

ILLUSTRATION: Perhaps we should give an invitation at this point and invite all of those who have a perfect life to come forward so we can pray of them that God would give them a few problems, because problems are the first ingredient in the recipe of a miracle.

I think in our culture we are too quick to eradicate pain. We take a pill, we get a therapist, God forbid we weep over the situation too long. But folks - that is the way God designed humanity.

Lest a grain of seed falls to the ground and DIES it will not bring forth life.

- Sometimes your dream has to die before God can resurrect it.
- Sometimes your marriage has to be on life support before you will really do was is needed to make it better.

Nehemiah had gotten word about the city of Jerusalem and he wept for days.

Then he had was I call HIS **Popeye moment**.

ILLUSTRATION: When I was a kid, I was very deprived - we didn’t even have cable. I didn’t get the Disney channel. I couldn’t even watch cartoons until Saturdays. Now keep in mind this was back in the Bible times. Heroes were different back then.

My favorite cartoon was Popeye the Sailor. He had a lot of bad days, Bluto would kick him around, Olive Oil would leave him. Wimpy would want to borrow money.

And there was nothing he could do about... **UNTILL he found some spinach**. He would always say it, **"I've had all I can stand and I can't stand no more!"** Then his forearms exploded and he took care of business.

Great Leaders are born in Popeye moments.

Here is how it typically happens:

- STAGE #1 - It ought not be that way.
- STAGE #2 - Someone ought to do something about that.
- STAGE #3 - I will do something about that if my life depends on it.

The same thing that burdens your soul, often reveals your destiny

ILLUSTRATION: I spent the first 9 years of my ministry preaching in revivals and conferences around the South East. I was pretty successful at it - I would go in an lead the church to reach lost people, they would bring them in God would save them.. it was a cool ministry. But I would see it and get so discouraged. Julie would be on cloud 9, but I was miserable. One day she asked me why? I said, "Julie there's nothing I can change about this church to make them fruitful that they will not undo next week". I was convinced the only way to bring about substantial change in a church is to invest your life there... preaching the word, making touch decisions, casting compelling vision. ***It became a burden, then it became a passion, to the point that it would have been a sin for me not to become a Pastor.***

Not only Pain, but notice secondly...

2. Prayer

Nehemiah 1:4 (ESV)

⁴ As 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.

From the time Nehemiah finds out about the state of Jerusalem to the time he appears before the King is at least **4 months**. FOUR MONTHS he had to wait and pray.

The bigger the endeavor the bigger the spiritual and practical infrastructure is required to handle it.

ILLUSTRATION: I am told by architects that when a sky scraper is about to be built, for months you won't see anything go up. But a LOT is going down. The foundation is being laid deep, long before the first Beam goes up.

You see the Vision was mature, but the Visionary needed to marinate. Prayer isn't so much about changing the mind of God, but about changing or preparing the heart of the person praying.

WELL WHAT DID HE PRAY? *Much of the prayer was confession of sin and repentance... but then look at verse 8.*

Nehemiah 1:6–9 (ESV)

⁸ **Remember the word** that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples,⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’

He is reminding God of his promise. Let me challenge you to ask God to give you a verse for whatever endeavor he calls you to.

ILLUSTRATION: Many times when I talk to people who feel called to **missions** I will ask two things - what place is he calling you to? What verse has He spoken through most loudly?

For me it is - **2 Timothy 4:2–5 (NASB95)**

² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

When I stepped out of the choir in 1995 and went forward - that was the passage God gave me.

Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is **God who works in you**, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Great leaders begin with Pain, respond with Prayer...

3. Plan

Nehemiah 1:11–2:8 (ESV)

¹¹ ...Now I was cupbearer to the king. ¹ In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ² And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid.

It was illegal to be sad in the King’s presence, Nehemiah could have been killed for this, because his countenance was the barometer for the Kings safety.

³ I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

Notice how Nehemiah shares his burden in a way that anyone could relate to. He could have couched it in the promises of the OT. He could have explained the theological framework of Judaism. But instead - he says, “this is the place where my dad is buried”.

Now most likely - King Artaxerxes knew Nehemiah’s father considering his place in the Kingdom.

**Your vision is not mature until you can explain
in a way that other people can feel what you feel.**

⁴ Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, “ If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.”

⁶ And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. ⁷ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king’s forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

Now we have a tendency to think that planning is unspiritual.

We think that God just blesses the man who steps out on faith and doesn’t have a clue what he’s doing. But Nehemiah shows us that God blesses careful planning.

The Bible calls people to careful planning -

- **1 Cor. 14** - we are told that all things are to be done decently and in order.
- **Psalm 20:4 (ESV)**
⁴ May he grant you your heart’s desire and fulfill all your **plans**!
- **Proverbs 15:22 (ESV)**
²² Without counsel **plans** fail, but with many advisers they succeed.

- **Luke 14** - Jesus said, you need to count the cost before you go into battle, count the cost and see if you are prepared to win. Before you build a tower, make sure you are prepared to complete it.

Nehemiah had a well thought out plan and knew exactly what it would require to finish his task.

Nehemiah's friends probably thought - wow, how lucky you are. Wish we could have luck like that.

Listen, the **Roman philosopher Seneca** said, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

Nehemiah was prepared when the opportunity came.

Every day of your life you are preparing for something that to you will be bigger than life - or you are not.

**One day the wind is going to blow and when it does
it will be too late to get your sail up.**

Set your sail NOW! And trust God for the wind.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: During the 80 years of Nehemiah's Life:

- Ara-stoph-enes wrote his comedies.
- Hero-dotus, the Father of History, wrote his history of the Western world.
- Thu-cy-di-des wrote the History of the Peloponnesian war.
- Socrates and Plato were teaching in Athens.

Yet by God's estimation - the most significant event in at that moment history was beginning in the heart of a leader.

It was birthed in the midst of Pain.

It was marinated in Prayer.

It was executed according to Plan.

I want to submit to you that when God weighs the history of OUR generation in the balance it may not be the most popular celebrity, the most successful politician, or the most intelligent scientist.... It will be a member of a church who like Nehemiah said - **I will arise and build something in my generation for the Glory of God.**