

NEHEMIAH 6:15-7:5

A. Introduction

1. Nehemiah is a great book for us to be looking at together at our elder's meetings.

It is a book about building a community of people who will reach the community around them.

It is a book about God's provision for His people as they wait for King Jesus to come.

It is a book that will be helpful for us as we plan for the next 10 years of Banstead Community Church.

2. What have we seen so far?

In Nehemiah 1-2 we saw that God's provision for His people are elders of to build them up in their faith so they will reach the community around them as they wait for King Jesus to return.

In Nehemiah 3 we saw that this building up of God's people will not be effective without the involvement of church members as well.

In Nehemiah 4-6 we saw that when the church is being built up and reaching its community there will be opposition from outside the church and from within.

3. Nehemiah had a plan, he prayed hard, and he stuck to his mission, he didn't allow himself to get distracted or discouraged or dissuaded, and in Nehemiah 6:15 the rebuilding project was completed.

"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realised that this work had been done with the help of our God." (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

The rebuilding of the walls and the repairing of the gates, with the help of God, was done in less than two months.

As we come to the end of the first half of Nehemiah, the question is "What now?"

The job is done, the structure is in place, but the work is not yet over!

"Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families." (Nehemiah 7:4-5)

4. Application.

As we approach our 10 year anniversary, we are in a similar position.

A fully functioning local church has been established – the structures are in place – we have 3 main meetings to provide opportunities for worship, instruction and prayer; we have a united leadership of 6 elders; there are different ministries making contact with the community and seeking to reach out with the gospel; the church is stable.

What now?

The job is done, the structure is in place, but the work is not yet over! It is not a time for settling down and putting our feet up.

What else needs doing? What is God calling us to do next?

Whatever it is, there is a need for 2 things:

B. The Need for Leaders

1. To continue the work there needed to be leaders.

Nehemiah's first task was to appoint leaders.

"After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed." (Nehemiah 7:1)

Gatekeepers to prevent harmful elements from entering the city (see verse 3).

Singers to ensure the people worshipped God regularly and acceptably.

Levites to teach the people God's Word.

"I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do." (Nehemiah 7:2)

These leaders needed to be reliable and trustworthy, whose priorities matched Nehemiah's own, and who he would see eye to eye with.

These leaders needed to put God first and set an example for the people.

"I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, make them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses." (Nehemiah 7:3)

In addition there was the need for members of the community to step up and take responsibility for certain tasks.

2. The Lord Jesus knew His church needed leaders, which is why He appointed 12 men to be apostles to lead the church after He had ascended into heaven.

To teach the people, to ensure the people worshipped God regularly and acceptably, and to protect the church.

This responsibility was passed from the apostles to elders of local church who are also given the responsibility of training up elders to replace them in the future.

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." (2 Timothy 2:2)

In addition there still was the need for members of the church to step up and take responsibility for certain tasks, including in some situations deacons being appointed.

3. Application.

Whatever we do in the next 10 years, there will be the need for leaders, which means training will be essential.

We need to continue to train up people for gospel ministry.

We need to train up future elders for this local church – this means that there is probably the need for an elder's training programme (including both study / sitting in on elder's meetings). Care will need to be taken to make sure they are suitable for the role.

We need to invest in the younger generation to encourage them to take responsibility for certain tasks in the future.

C. The Need for a Vision

1. Nehemiah knew what God wanted him to do next.

God put it on his heart to repopulate the city.

"Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families." (Nehemiah 7:4-5)

It was a vision about growth. The structure was in place – now let's get the people.

He then put in place a plan for achieving this.

"I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return." (Nehemiah 7:5)

2. The Lord Jesus knew His church needed a vision for the future, which is why He gave His followers clear instructions about what they were to do after He had ascended into heaven.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

It was a vision about growth.

He also gave them a plan for how they were to do this.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Start where you are and move out.

3. Application #1.

Our vision as church must be to grow over the next 10 years (ambition to double in size) by getting the gospel out into our community and beyond.

We have a structure in place – we now need to get the people.

But we are at the plateau stage – it is accepted that when a church is 70-80% full it stops growing.

Q. How are we going to create space for growth?

In our half of Reigate and Banstead, there are communities without a gospel witness or a viable gospel witness. Kingswood (inc. Lower Kingswood) pop. is just under 7000; Tadworth (inc. Walton on the Hill) pop. is approximately 11000; Nork pop. is 7500.

Q. Where is the gospel witness in these communities going to come from?

4. Nehemiah pushed forward as opposition continued.

"Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shecaniah son of Arab, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me." (Nehemiah 6:17-19)

Opposition had found its way into the city through commercial and marital alliances.

Yet Nehemiah didn't lose his focus and pressed on.

5. Application #2.

There will always be opposition in the church.

When change is proposed there will always be some who will oppose it – who can't cope with it and will grumble.

Different reasons for this:

Comfort – people like to be settled, and want things to go on as before; people panic at the thought of change.

Loss of influence and position.

We must not let this stop us moving forward as a church.

We must not let this stop us from being willing to try new things to see if the Lord would choose to use them.

The job is done, but the work is not yet over!