

NEHEMIAH 7:5-73

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 God's people.

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. By the end of Nehemiah 6, with the help of God, the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was complete.

The job was done. The structure was in place. But the work was not yet over.

So the question we now need to ask is "What now?"

"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)

God put it on his heart to repopulate the city.

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

But first leaders needed to be put in place – men who were trustworthy and who put God first.

"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)

The leaders needed included:

Gatekeepers to prevent harmful elements from entering the city – to protect the people.

Singers to ensure the people worshipped God regularly and acceptably.

Levites to teach the people God's Word.

3. Note what needed to happen before the gathering of the people began.

There needed to be worship (temple plus singers and Levites).

There needed to be defence (walls plus gatekeepers)

3. Application.

As we approach our 10 year anniversary, we are in a similar position to the situation in Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day.

The structures are in place – we are a fully functioning local church.

We have 3 main meetings where we gather to worship God, to be taught His Word and to pray.

We have a united leadership to lead, to teach, to care for, to defend the flock and to watch out for danger.

The structure is in place, and this will need to be maintained.

We need to pray that God will continue to raise up leaders, and we will need to actively train them for ministry either within this church (an elder training programme) or in other local churches (the trainee pastor programme).

But with the structure in place, it doesn't mean the work is over.

What now?

Like Nehemiah, we need to gather the people.

"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)

Jesus has given a vision of making disciples of all nations and a strategy of beginning where we are before moving out.

We need a vision for how we are going to do this practically with God's help in our situation, including how we deal with the various challenges we face as a church such as the size of venue (we are at the 70-80% plateau stage that will inhibit growth), and the concern that there are communities nearby where there is no local gospel witness.

What can we learn from Nehemiah?

B. We need to know what people we are starting with

1. Nehemiah needed to know who were the people he was starting with.

God had put it on Nehemiah's heart to repopulate the city.

But how was he going to do this?

The first thing he does is to take an up to date register of the people who had returned from Babylon.

"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)

Ezra had previously taken a register at the time of the return (see Ezra 2),

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

Since then people had been born, or joined the group, while others may not have left or had returned.

Nehemiah needed an up to date list of the people of Israel from which this new community could be formed.

"These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, in company with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah)." (Nehemiah 7:6-7)

2. Nehemiah needed to know how many people he was starting with.

From verses 7 to 69 we have a list of returnees by families and the number of descendants in each.

"The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 menservants and maidservants; and they also had 245 men and women singers. There were 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys." (Nehemiah 7:66-69)

Numbers matter.

3. Nehemiah needed to know the gifting of the people he was starting with.

"The priests:" (Nehemiah 7:39)

"The Levites:" (Nehemiah 7:43)

"The singers:" (Nehemiah 7:44)

"The gatekeepers:" (Nehemiah 7:45)

"The temple servants:" (Nehemiah 7:46)

"The descendants of the servants of Solomon:" (Nehemiah 7:57)

Nehemiah records the variety of jobs that the people of Israel did, including the members of the community who served in lots of different ways.

4. Nehemiah needed to know the spiritual condition of the people he was starting with.

He needed to know whether they were members of the people of Israel – so they didn't lose their uniqueness.

"The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descended from Israel." (Nehemiah 7:61)

He needed to know whether they were qualified to serve in a particular way – a corrupted priesthood would lead to a lowering of standards among God's people.

"And from among the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai (a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name). These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. The governor, therefore, ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim." (Nehemiah 7:63-65)

5. Application.

As we plan for the future, we need to know who we are starting with (triage the people):

Who are the people? (The Core; The Committed; The Congregation; The Crowd; The Community)

How many people we are starting with?

What is their gifting? Need everybody to play their part and to encourage them to do so.

Are they Christians? (Members; New Christians; Sunday Christians)

Are they qualified? (To be members; To be elders and deacons; To serve in a particular way – to preach from the pulpit)

This needs to be regularly kept up to date.

C. We need to know what resources we are starting with

1. Nehemiah as well as taking a register of the people, also took a register of the resources they had, which had generously been given by the people.

"Some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 drachmas of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 drachmas of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 drachmas of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests." (Nehemiah 7:70-72)

Resources were needed for the rebuilding of houses in Jerusalem and the resettlement of the people.

Nehemiah needed to know what resources they already had.

2. Application.

As we seek to go forward into the next 10 years and seek to make disciples in this community and the surrounding communities this will need to be resourced.

We need to know what resources we have currently to do this.