

Money Matters

Nehemiah: the sort of person that we need for our times?

The book of Nehemiah has much to teach us but some of it can be heavy going. These are the key sections to read: Chapter 1:1 to Chapter 2:20, Chapter 4:1 to Chapter 7:3, Chapter 8:1 to Chapter 9:38, Chapter 10:28 to 39, Chapter 12:27 to 30.

So from this what do we learn about the character of Nehemiah?

A person who was deeply involved in the society that he was a part of – even though it was not his own

Nehemiah originally served as cupbearer to king Artaxerxes whilst in exile. A **cup-bearer** was an officer of high rank in royal courts, whose duty it was to serve the drinks at the royal table. On account of the constant fear of plots and intrigues, a person must be regarded as thoroughly trustworthy to hold this position. He must guard against poison in the king's cup, and was sometimes required to swallow some of the wine before serving it. His confidential relations with the king often gave him a position of great influence. The position of cup bearer is greatly valued and given to only a select few throughout history.

Someone who identified with the failings of others

When Nehemiah heard about the state of Jerusalem he did not find someone else to blame. 'I, my family and the rest of your people have sinned by choosing to disobey you and the laws and teachings you gave to your servant Moses (1:6 and 7). Are we like that?

Someone who set an example in integrity

Integrity is about the way that we conduct ourselves in the entirety of our lives. It is about consistency. And this is seen in the whole book of Nehemiah. But there are supreme examples of Nehemiah showing integrity. For example, when Nehemiah refused the allowances that were made available to him. It is a bit like an MP refusing to claim his legitimate expenses! (5:14 and 15)

*A man who prayed **and** planned*

Although it would be good if all we needed to see change in the world was to pray for it, that does not seem to be how God wants to operate. Nehemiah prayed that the King would do what he asked but he also developed a strategy of what he would need to ask the King for (1:4 – 8). If we want to see change we are likely to need to meet God half way. We need to be the change that we want to see? Nehemiah also prayed when Jerusalem was under attack but the same time didn't forget to station guards (4:9).

A passionate man who got angry

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How often do we get angry about injustice like Nehemiah did when the powerful Jews were exploiting their fellow countrymen? ‘When I heard their complaints and their charges I became very angry’ (5:6). It is worth reading the whole account in chapter 5: 1 – 8.

How often do we get angry when God’s rules for us are flouted? “I discovered that some Jewish men had married ...(non Jews). So in my anger I called down curses on those men”. (13:23-25)

A person without airs and graces

Nehemiah helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He writes about sleeping in his work clothes (4:23). Is your boss like that?

Someone who was prepared to face formidable odds for something that he believed in

Nehemiah was seeking to fortify a city in a period where empires existed and rebellion was not tolerated but ruthlessly suppressed. But that did not deter him from speaking to the King himself about what he wished to do (1:2-5) or giving up when the odds against him were high. Opposition to Nehemiah was strong as is seen by 2:10 and 29,20, 4:1-3, 6-9 , 11 -15 but he remained determined to see his God ordained task through.

A man who knew about prayer

The book of Nehemiah begins with Nehemiah praying (1:4), continues with Nehemiah praying (e.g. 4:4,) and finishes with Nehemiah praying (13:30). And we still wonder why he was the sort of man he was?

Someone who cared about God’s ways and would not compromise them

Nehemiah helped sign a new agreement made by the Jewish secular and spiritual leaders, to keep to God’s laws (10:28,29). Ironically, this happened after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt which God seems so clearly to have been behind. So do we have to be totally spiritually ‘together’ before we can do things for God? Or could it be that trusting Him when we are sometimes compromised and weak can lead to that commitment as a result of our actions?

Chapter 13 is all about matters where Nehemiah discovered that some of the Jews were not respecting God’s laws. One man Tobiah was living in the temple rooms when he should not have been. We are told of Nehemiah ‘that it upset me so much that I threw out every bit of Tobiah’s furniture.’ (13:8)

A man of generosity who thought about the needs of others

Whilst at Jerusalem Nehemiah fed over 150 other people whilst refusing to claim his own entertaining allowance (4:18,19)