

Marks of a True Leader

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
2295 Towne Lake Parkway • Suite 116 #249 • Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

Last week we learned about Nehemiah finding out about the miserable conditions in Jerusalem. The walls and gates Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed and burned more than 70 years earlier were still broken down and in disrepair. Nehemiah's response to the news showed us why the Lord could use him to lead the children of Israel in rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. Before going to any earthly person for help, he turned to the Lord. His prayer involved mourning over and confessing Israel's sins, praising the Lord, and reminding the Lord of His promises to Israel. As Nehemiah's story picks up, we are going

to continue to see what made Nehemiah a great leader for the Lord. Using the outline below, let's study the truths of leadership from today's lesson. These principles can help us be better leaders for the Lord in whatever leadership position the Lord has placed us, whether in our church or in the secular world.

I. Nehemiah's Regard (vv. 1-4)

II. Nehemiah's Requests (vv. 5-10)

III. Nehemiah's Research (vv. 11-16)

IV. Nehemiah's Resources (vv. 16-20)

I. Nehemiah's Regard (vv. 1-4)

Verse 1 tells us the events in chapter 2 take place in the month Nisan. That was sometime in March or April of the year. Chapter 1's events took place in the month Chisleu. That would have been sometime in November or December. When we put the two together, we discover Nehemiah has been considering and, no doubt, praying about the terrible conditions of Jerusalem for four months. Sometimes when God lays something on our hearts, it doesn't mean we can or should just run out and do something. It is better to take time to pray

and ask God for His wisdom and direction. That is what Nehemiah seems to be doing. And it is during this time, the Lord gives Nehemiah direction on what He wants him to do (cp. v. 12). The Lord wants him to lead in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and gates. Nehemiah knows he has two problems standing in his way. They are problems only the Lord can remove. First, Nehemiah held a very responsible job. He was the cupbearer for Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. Would he allow his personal cupbearer to take a leave of absence to take care of a

situation almost a thousand miles away? The second problem was that this same king had issued a decree years earlier to stop the rebuilding work in Jerusalem (cp. Ezra 4:21-24). The laws of the Persians and the Medes were not to be changed. But Nehemiah knows prayer changes things.

As chapter 2 begins, Nehemiah is going about his normal responsibilities and serving the king his wine (v. 1). Artaxerxes notices there is something different about Nehemiah's face (v. 2). The burden in Nehemiah's heart is now being reflected on his



face. Many times what is going on in the inside will be reflected by how we look on the outside. The king asks Nehemiah why he is so sad and states, "... this is nothing else but sorrow of heart." That doesn't mean a lot to us. But if we were in Nehemiah's day, we would understand why Nehemiah says, "... Then I was very sore afraid." In those days the king could command a person to be killed just for being sad in his presence. Nehemiah realizes he is in a situation where the king might think there is a plot to assassinate him. The sadness of his face might indicate there is murder in his heart, especially since he was the king's cupbearer. So, in verse 3 he says, "... Let the king live for ever ..." He is telling the king there is no plot to kill him. The one thing Nehemiah didn't need was for the king to be dead. He needed him alive because God was going to use him to answer Nehemiah's prayer. He then shares with him the reason for his sadness. Jerusalem, the city of his forefathers, was in terrible shape.

The king asks Nehemiah what he would like the king to do (v. 4). Before Nehemiah answers, we read, "... So, I prayed to the God of heaven." Keep in mind Nehemiah's already prayed about this and most likely has been praying privately for four months. He is now standing before his earthly king, the most

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powerful person of his day, but he appeals to his heavenly King. Notice the interesting differences between the two. It was dangerous to appear sad before his earthly king. But we can go to the throne of grace and bring all our sorrows and cares before the Lord (cp. 1 Pet. 5:7). Nehemiah had to be very careful with his words before his earthly king.

But the Bible says we can come to our heavenly Father's throne with boldness (cp. Heb. 4:16). It means we can come with freedom of speech. We can tell Him exactly how we feel about a matter. The earthly king could only see the face of Nehemiah. Our heavenly King can see our hearts, and He knows what is in our hearts (1 Sam. 16:7). Isn't it wonderful to have a God like that to whom we can come? The English poet Alfred Tennyson from the nineteenth century said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Nehemiah regards the Lord first in his life. Because of that, he prays a silent and quick prayer to the Lord.

Reflection Connection

Read Proverbs 3:6 and discuss in what areas of our lives we should acknowledge the Lord. Why don't most Christians do this?

II. Nehemiah's Requests (vv. 5-10)

The first thing Nehemiah asks is for the king's permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls (vv. 5-6). We might wonder why he asks for the king's permission if he already knows this is something God wants him to do. He asks because the Bible says believers are to be good citizens in this

world. When we do a work for God on this earth we need to secure permission and do what the governmental authorities require. Nehemiah knows it is God's will, but now he asks for the king's permission. Number two, Nehemiah requests passage (v. 7). He asks the king for letters

so the governors beyond the river (the Euphrates) will allow him to pass through their territories on his way to Jerusalem. He knows it is important for the government officials he will see along the way to know his trip has the king's approval.



Number three, Nehemiah asks for provision (v. 8a). He understands the job is going to require provisions. Materials had to be gathered. Timber had to be cut out of the king's forest. The same thing is true spiritually. We have to have the provision of God if we are going to do a work for Him. The good news is Philippians 4:19 tells us, "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This gives us another contrast between earthly kings and our heavenly King. Out of the king's forest or "out of" his riches, Nehemiah would be supplied with timber. But believers are supplied "according" to the Lord's riches. We never have to wonder if the Lord will run out of resources to provide for our needs as we do His work. The last part of verse 8 tells us, "... And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me." In chapter 1:10 Nehemiah called God's hand, "the strong hand." Now, in chapter 2 he says God's strong hand is God's good hand. Our God who is strong is also good.

That's something we always have to keep in mind. When situations come into our lives and we do not understand what is going on, we can always remember that God's strong hand is also God's good hand.

Not only does the king give Nehemiah everything he asks for, he also sends him off with soldiers to provide him with protection (v. 9). This reminds us that where God leads, He feeds;

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where God guides, He provides; and where God directs, He protects.

When the news got out about Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem to do a work for God, it sent

shockwaves throughout the neighboring territories. Verse 10 introduces us to two men, Sanballat and Tobiah, who will become infamous players in this miraculous story of Nehemiah's building the walls of Jerusalem. Sanballat the Horonite was from a little town of Beth-horan, which was about 15 miles up above Jerusalem. This indicates he was most likely a Moabite. Tobiah was an Ammonite. The Moabites and Ammonites were the sworn enemies of Israel. They represent the spiritual forces of opposition that are against everything that is for good and for God in this world. Why were Sanballat and Tobiah so upset? They were grieved exceedingly because there was a man who had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

Reflection Connection

After reading 1 Peter 2:17d and Romans 13:1-2, discuss why it is important for Christians, especially leaders in the church, to be good citizens today.

III. Nehemiah's Research (vv. 11-16)

When Nehemiah arrives in the city of Jerusalem we are told he is there for three days (v. 11). In other words, it seems that Nehemiah arrives but doesn't do anything. Normally we want to immediately get to work. But Nehemiah doesn't do this. Nehemiah is giving us an

important principle of leadership. He has been on a long journey. For one thing he needs to have a little rest. He had been traveling for almost three months. It was a long, arduous trip. So, he needed time to rest and to repair his physical body.

Nehemiah was probably doing more than just resting. During those three days Nehemiah was most likely thinking and praying. He knew he had a great work to do. And he knew he had to be right with God. That's a very important principle of leadership too. We must never get the idea



that activity is ministry. Just because we are busy does not mean we are being a blessing. Leaders need have time alone with the Lord to be sure they are following His leading.

After the three days Nehemiah goes with a few men in the night-time to survey the situation of the city's walls and gates (v. 12). Nehemiah needs to see firsthand himself. He knows in the nighttime he will not have any distractions. He also has a few men with him. It is always important for leaders to have trusted people around them. The Bible tells us, "... in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 24:6b). As Nehemiah begins his research, he starts at the gate of the valley and travels around the entire wall (vv. 13-15). He makes a very

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careful close-up survey of the situation. Every leader would be wise to do that. Anytime a leader is given a new assignment, he or she needs to research the project firsthand to know clearly what's going on.

Verse 16 tells us the rulers do not know what Nehemiah is doing. He hasn't told them anything yet. As a good leader, Nehemiah researches everything before sharing his plan.

Reflection Connection

Read 1 Corinthians 14:40 and discuss if this command applies only to the work of the Lord or if it should apply to our personal lives as well.

IV. Nehemiah's Remedy (vv. 17-20)

In verse 17 Nehemiah is ready to share with the leaders of Jerusalem his plan. He begins with reminding them of the condition of the walls and gates. They knew the condition because many of them had been living in Jerusalem for 50 or 60 years. The problem was they had grown accustomed to the broken down walls and gates.

It's very easy for people who are around a situation all the time to get so familiar with it that they really don't notice the conditions anymore. That's why we need to be very careful when

new people want to give us suggestions or recommendations in doing the Lord's work. They may see something that needs to be fixed or improved, but we've just grown accustomed to it. One of the jobs of a leader is to challenge the people to move away from the way things are and get them in the direction of the way things ought to be.

Nehemiah not only presents the problem before the leaders, but he gives them a remedy. He says, "... come, and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach"

(v. 17b). Did you notice the use of the pronouns "us" and "we"? It's very important in leadership to identify with the people. Nehemiah doesn't come to Jerusalem and say, "Hey, I want you to know I'm your new governor. I'm living up here in this tower, and I'll be faxing down directions about what you folks are to do on this project." No, he is right there and ready to work with them.

Notice how direct and to the point Nehemiah is. He doesn't have a complex plan. He identifies the project and then



challenges the people to do the project. He also tells them why. He doesn't want them to be a reproach any longer. The broken-down walls and gates made Jerusalem and the children of Israel a laughing stock to the people around them. The world will regain its respect for Christianity when we as believers build our moral walls again. The world needs to see believers who show that Jesus does make a difference in people's lives. The world needs to see Jesus does change lives.

A leader has to show God's people that what he is doing is of God. Nehemiah is able to do just that. In verse 18 he gives his personal testimony. He tells the Jews how the strong hand of God has been good upon him. He relates how God had worked in the king's heart and all He had done in bringing Nehemiah to Jerusalem. Nehemiah had challenged the people, "... come let us build ..." (v. 17c). They now respond, "... Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work" (v. 18b). They were ready to get started and follow Nehemiah's leading.

A leader who wants to do a great work for God has to have steadfast determination. That is because a testing time always comes on the heels of great times of commitment. The devil has many devices, but the Bible says we are not ignorant of his devices (cp. 2 Cor. 2:11). Sanballat and Tobiah, along with another

enemy—Geshem the Arabian, come on the scene to oppose Nehemiah's work (v. 19)." Their names are interesting. Sanballat means "thorn." Tobiah means "Jehovah is good." And Geshem means "rain." When we decide to do something for God, it is easy to run into one of these characters. The "Sanballats" come along and become a thorn in our side. Instead of seeing the good, they see the bad. They are always causing problems.

Tobiah has a religious name, "Jehovah is good." These people name the name of God. They even claim to belong to the Lord. But the first time they don't like a decision that is made, they become critics. Geshem represents people who always "rain on the parade." They are the negative voices who give reasons why something can't be done.

The first attack from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem is derision and intimidation (v. 19b) One of the devil's most effective means of hindering the work of God and intimidating God's people is laughter and ridicule. They even accuse Nehemiah of rebelling against the king. That's another way of the devil. He will attack our motives and have us misjudged. Leaders have to learn to deal with criticism. Leaders have to get to the point where if they know God is in a matter, no criticism will keep them from doing what they know God wants them to do.

A good leader, though he listens to criticism because God might be trying to tell him something, doesn't allow criticism to stop him from doing what God has laid on his heart to do. How does Nehemiah handle the criticism of these three men? He tells the truth. Note the following words in verse 20, "He," "we," and "ye." First of all, he tells the truth about God. The God of heaven will prosper them. He is simply saying God has led the children of Israel to do what they were doing. The truth is if God has led us to do something and others start opposing it, they are not opposing us. They are opposing God.

Then Nehemiah says "we." He tells the truth about himself and the people. He and the people are going to keep on doing what they've been doing. Number three; he tells the truth about the enemy, "ye." There is nothing in Jerusalem that presently belonged to those three men and their people. And there was nothing in Jerusalem in the future that was going to belong to them.

Reflection Connection

Read Ephesians 4:15 and discuss how believers should share the truth with others. How can that be applied to confronting opposition today?



Wrap Up

The principles of leadership Nehemiah demonstrates are timeless. Christians who serve as leaders should strive to follow these truths. But these principles can also benefit us even if we are not in a leadership position. This is because Nehemiah actually sets before us an example of living a successful life for the Lord. His regard for the Lord guided him in his relationship with his king, with his countrymen, and with his enemies. If you have any "broken down walls" in your life today, take encouragement from Nehemiah. Go to the Lord in prayer, ask His forgiveness, and prepare to build up those walls once again. Then, let Nehemiah's life continue to be an example for you as you live for the Lord.

