

**A SIX-SESSION
WORKSHOP
by DAVE CAVE**

A large number of cities that were once great centres of our land are now in decay.

The Archbishops' report "Faith in The City" bears witness to our cities today, so that modern day Nehemiahs will hear and respond.

This course sets out to study how Nehemiah tackled the huge task of rehabilitating his ruined city.

What lessons can we learn for today's Urban Priority Areas?

Drawings

**by Dave Cave (with thanks for original ideas to C.P.O)
The course has been
edited by Jim Hart**

**(Dave Cave is a URC Minister who has been involved in full-time urban ministry for over 15 year – he is a founder member of Anfield Road Christian Fellowship in Liverpool.
Jim Hart is a training officer for Unlock and has spent many years working in Urban priority Areas)**



Unlock is a Christian organisation which aims to help churches of any denomination to relate the gospel to the people around them.

We are especially concerned with communication in a non-book culture – people who can read but often choose not to. Tailor made workshops and training events are led by our network of trainers, and a variety of bible studies and audit packs are published by us.

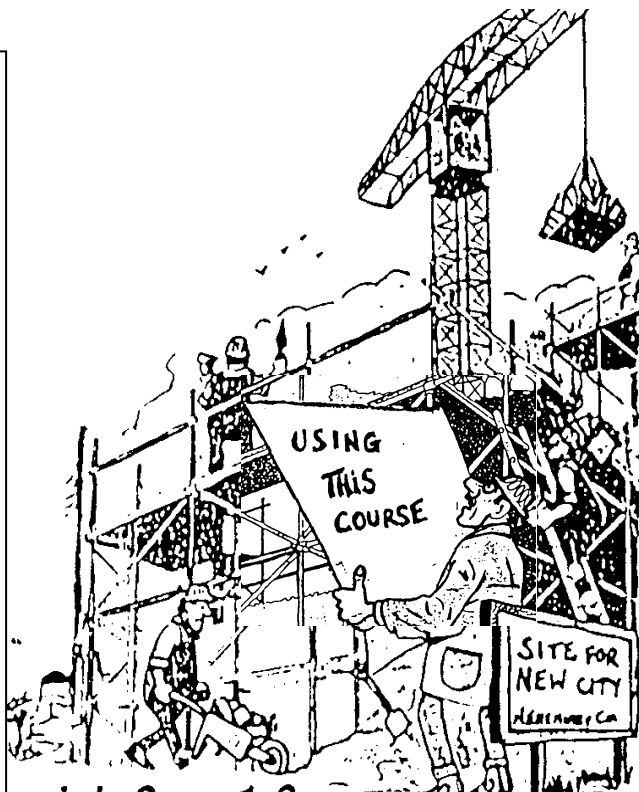
This resource was produced by Unlock (then EUTP) in 1985 in response to the 'Faith In the City' report. We are reissuing it now exactly as it was in 1985; alongside the new 2009 Nehemiah Resource, 'Restoring The City; Bricks, Building and Big Hearts' (www.unlock-urban.org.uk/resources.php). Clearly it is now somewhat dated but there are some surprising parallels between now and then. As the writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us, 'There is nothing new under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 1:9). If there is sufficient demand we could potentially update this resource for 2009/10; so if that is something you think would be useful, do please let us know.

On January 21st 2009 the BBC reported that the pound was at its lowest level against the dollar since 1985.

USING THIS UNLOCK COURSE ON NEHEMIAH

Use of the Bible

- a) the course does not involve reading the complete book of Nehemiah, but you can encourage your group to read it at home if they can, and would like to.
- b) The course is not an exhaustive treatment of all issues raised in the book of Nehemiah. It identifies some of the themes and sees how far they can help us think 'Christianly' today.
- c) The Bible version used is the 'Good News Bible'. the passages used are often included in this pack as 'extracts' to be photocopied for the use of the group. Extracts will be found in a pack and numbered for photocopying. (The Bible Society have given Permission for quotes from the Good News Bible to be used in this way). This is useful especially where verses are extracted from different locations. But you don't have to issue these sheets if your group prefers to use the Bible! Where whole chapters are studied the extracts are not provided and a Bible will be needed.



Timing

The times given are approximate.

Be Flexible

- (a) Adapt the course to suit yourself and your group. You can run it in any order; omit sections, and add your own material.
- (b) If discussion runs on, omit sections, to carry on next time!

Group Size

The course will work well from about 8 to 15 people.

Who is it for?

All Christians. But you may be living in a

- rural area
- suburban area
- well-off urban area
- Urban Priority Area.

Your group will have in your mind one Urban Priority Area which will be your equivalent of the ruined city which Nehemiah and his fellow-Jews rebuilt. Your group may live in it, near it, or have some link with it, or some concern for it.

Questions

Questions are given to guide and open-up discussion. You needn't use all, nor in the order given, and you can add your own.

Materials

A 'flip-board' i.e an A3 pad or similar sheets of paper. (You can use rolls of lining paper or the back of wallpaper).

A few felt markers.

Try to use material in quotes in your own words rather than just reading it out. e.g the intro to the book Nehemiah (learn to 'gossip the gospel')

INTO THE CITY WITH NEHEMIAH

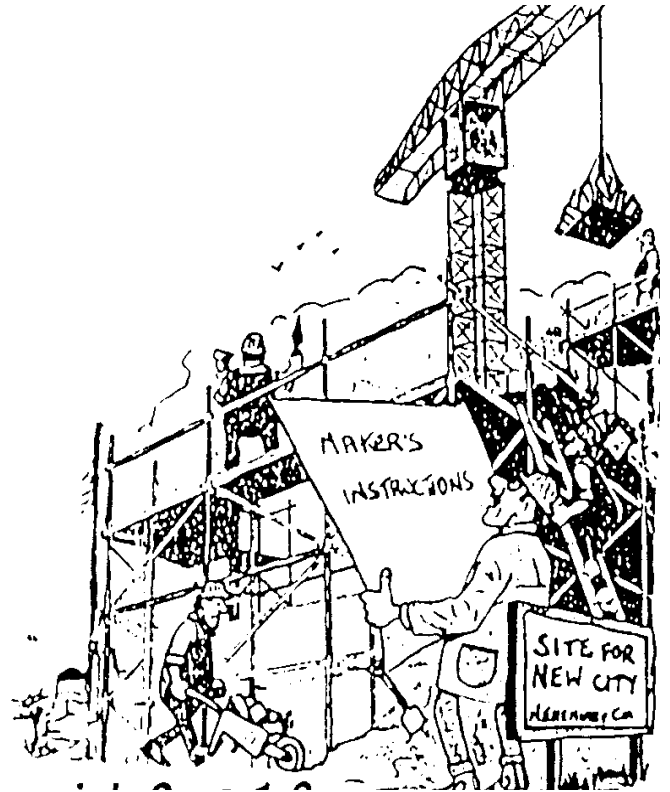
SESSION ONE

Loving the City, hearing the call.

Preparation

- (a) Photocopy diagram 1 ready to distribute around your group.
- (b) Photocopy Bible extract 1.
- (c) Mark a sheet on your flipboard thus:
(How it is to be completed is shown in the text headed 'Bible Work')

A
B
C
D
E



Introduction (10 minutes)

“Nehemiah wrote his short book probably around 430 years before Jesus Christ – that is about 2,400 years ago”.

He was a servant at the court of the Persian king, Artaxerxes. The Persians had overthrown the Babylonian empire on hundred years earlier and had become the rulers of the middle east as we know it today.

During the Assyrian and then the Babylonian empires many Jewish people had been forcibly removed from their homelands and Jerusalem had been destroyed.

The Persians reversed all this. They allowed the captives to return to their various countries; to rebuild their cities and temples; and to practice their religions.

50,000 Jews returned to Israel during the reign of the first Persian king, Cyrus, but one hundred years later – in the time of Nehemiah – the city of Jerusalem had still not been rebuilt and many were still living in hovels made from the rubble.

At this time Nehemiah was still living in Persia like many other Jews.

A number of cities that were once great centres of our land are now in decay. Liverpool was once a great port, second only to London – people flocked to the city to make their fortunes and ship owners built many fine houses, particularly in the Toxteth area. Then came the death of the cotton trade, increasing air travel, a move from trade with the commonwealth to trade with Europe, and so the great houses of Toxteth have become a ghetto and a focus for riots.

The Archbishops report 'Faith in The City' bears witness to our cities today – so that modern day Nehemiahs will hear and respond.

In this course we will study how Nehemiah tackled the huge task of rehabilitating his ruined city. What lessons can we learn from his story to tackle today's 'Urban priority Areas'?

(15 minutes)

(Issue blank paper and felt pens to the group. Pass around diagram on page 13 – Jim's story – to give the people an idea of what to do).

“Write or draw a diagram to show in any way you like where your family from grandparents onwards, have lived. Think about why they moved, and what sort of communities they live in. You might like to work in twos on this exercise.”

(You could do the exercise on your board with a volunteer.)

Discussion (20 minutes)

(On your board write as many moves as possible from your groups stories, using these letters:

- R Rural
- S Suburban
- PU 'Prosperous Urban'
- UPA Urban Priority Area (run down urban areas including housing estates.)

Your board lists:

- (1) R R (2)
- (3) S PU (4)
- (5) UPA S (6)

The exercise will help people to reflect on their family stories and see how urban communities are constantly reforming and spreading out into suburban and rural communities.

In the discussion, these questions may help to open up thinking. You will need to vary the questions according to whether your group lives in the country, the suburbs, or in an urban priority area.

Bible Work (30 minutes)

(Hand around extract 1 and read it)

“This part of our discussion is about 'hearing the call' Let us look at the stages by which Nehemiah was called.”

(Encourage discussion and complete your wall chart as the points are made. You chart will be something like the following at the end, but you can fill it in in the order the points are made.)

A	Given Information The People who returned were in difficulty Foreigners looked down on them Walls of Jerusalem broken down Gates broken down	1:2-3
B	Emotions were aroused <i>He wept</i> <i>He mourned</i> <i>He fasted</i>	1:4
C	He prayed A Long prayer (1:4ff) A short prayer! (2:4)	
D	God answered his prayer The emperor asks him why he is looking sad The emperor agrees to his request	2:1-6
E	He acted He obtains a passport He gets supplies of materials organised He travels to Jerusalem	2:7-9

Comparison (5 minutes)

1) ask the group to compare their attitudes to their city with the way Nehemiah thought about his. How might suburban Christians relate to their urban priority areas?

2) how might Nehemiah's story help Christians living in poor and difficult urban communities?

Homework

Think of as many songs as you can about cities, e.g. 'In my Liverpool home'.

INTO THE CITY WITH NEHEMIAH

SESSION TWO

What makes a good and effective leader?

Discussion (10 minutes)

The group lists the songs about cities and towns that they can remember and discuss them.

What do these songs mean?

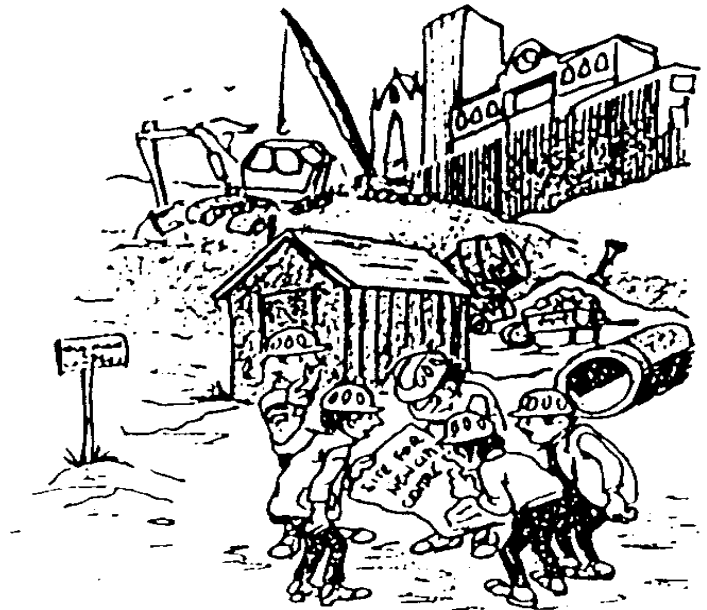
How do you feel about your city?

(Examples:

The Man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo;
O Mr Porter, what shall I do, I wanted to go to Birmingham
and they've taken me onto Crewe;
The day we went to Bangor;
Tulips from Amsterdam;
Copenhagen;
Men of Harlech;
Streets of London;
maybe it's because I'm a Londoner;
I belong to Glasgow;
In my Liverpool home;
New York, New York, It's a wonderful town;
Chicago;
Winchester Cathedral;
Bladon races;
Fog on the Tyne;
Durham town;
It's a long way to Tipperary;
Are you going to San Fransisco?;
I love Paris in the springtime;
Coventry Carol

Or hymn tunes with the names of places:

Cwm Rhonnda
Londonderry air;
Jerusalem;
Aberystwyth;
Rhuddlan.



Discussion (15 Minutes)

(1) *How do you exercise 'leadership'?*

(2) *Who are leaders in your churches?*

(Leadership is much more widespread than most people realise. A mother 'leads' her children and husbands and wives share or divide leadership in their families. In churches, often a third of our modern – usually small – congregations are involved in some way or another in leadership).

“We will now see what we can learn about the way Nehemiah led people. How far are there principles here for us? Nehemiah was an unusually able leader and we will only be looking at some of the incidents in his story.”

Role Play (30 minutes)

(Hand around extract 2 and ask members to read it.)

“I want half of the group to represent Nehemiah and the other half to represent his 'fellow Jews'. Spend five minutes in your two groups, discussing the questions given.”

“Now debate with Nehemiah whether or not you should rebuild the walls.”

(Write on your board the principles of leadership, which emerge afterwards.)

Examples

He surveys the situation carefully.

He works with a few trusted companions to get the facts right.

He then 'goes to his committee' and puts his case to them.

He tells them his conviction that this is the work of God.

They think about the likely snags.



Bible Work (25 minutes)

(Hand around extract 3.) Have on your board two columns:

How he could have behaved How he actually behaved

Invite discussion and complete your columns.

Questions

How far did Nehemiah behave in the way that Jesus taught his followers in Matthew 20?

How far does our church show this style of leadership?

How far do our political leaders, and managers in industry and commerce, lead like Nehemiah?

INTO THE CITY WITH NEHEMIAH

Session Three

Nehemiah and his workers

We will look at some aspects of the way Nehemiah led his people in their task of rebuilding Jerusalem. He was an exceptional person but a leader is only as good as the people he leads and they got stuck into the job.

Discussion (35 minutes)

Go through Nehemiah 3 and identify the types of people who rebuilt the walls.

Because of the length of the chapter, a bible will be needed.

List what is offered on your board. The list includes:-

- Priests (1,22ff) Goldsmith (8,31)
- High Priest (1) Makers of perfumes (9)
- Men (2,7, etc.) Local government ruler (9,14 etc)
- Sons (2, etc.) Daughters (12)
- Levites (17ff) Merchants (32)
- Local residents (23) People from other towns (13,27)



Conclusion

Discussion will establish that the work of God is for:

- Women and men
- Young and old
- Powerful and weak
- 'Ordinary' people i.e not 'qualified'
- They were unpaid volunteers

BUT

Note v5: The leaders of Tekoa – why do you think they didn't want to get involved?

Work in twos (15 minutes)

Write these things on your board:-

- (1) My role in God's family
- (2) My qualifications for this role
- (3) What I need to do the role better

Spend five minutes telling another group member about your 'role' as a Christian using the statements on the board to guide you. "By 'my role' I mean..."

- (1) **My role**
Whatever you do in the church, or elsewhere, because you're a Christian.
- (2) **My qualifications**
Why I do it; what I have to offer; my sense of 'calling'.
- (3) **What I need**
Training, support, equipment, money etc.

Bible work (25 minutes)

(Pass around extract 4 'Prayer and action')

Head your two columns on your board with the words. Invite your group to identify the prayers and actions and complete your chart. It might include:-

Prayers	Actions
Against Mockery	Men put on guard
When attacked	Remained clothed
For God to remember	Armed
For strength	Anger
For punishment of opponents	Denouncing of corporation
	Calling public meeting
	Locating and studying the records
	Physical punishment

Discussion

How do we pray?

How do our prayers help us in difficulties?

Nehemiah was sometimes angry and violent. Is anger and violence ever justified in the Christian church? (The group may recall stories of anger and its effects.)

INTO THE CITY WITH NEHEMIAH

Session Four

Opposition

In the Bible God's workers usually experience opposition. Some Christians say that if you aren't getting opposition you can't be doing enough. We will look at 'opposition' from outsiders from chapter 5 (which we'll be dealing with next time). Both will have lessons from God for our own work.

Bible Work (45 minutes)

(Hand around extract 5)

Chapter 4 has been re-ordered to emphasise some of the features of the opposition to the wall building programme and how Nehemiah and his fellow Jews dealt with it. Let us now take each section in turn.

Questions

Opposition

- 1) What was the nature of it? (It was practical. It was opposition to a large semi-military project by Samaritians who had developed as opponents of Jews during the Babylonian period. The true worship of God was at stake).
- 2) What opposition do we/does our church experience? (we have to face typical church concerns seem trivial compared to this. Why should this be so?)

Prayer

- 1) what were the prayers about?
- 2) Should Christians pray like this?
- 3) What people should you never forgive?
- 4) How do you show your love for your enemies practically?

Information and Preparation

Who are our enemies in our Christian work?

Building up people's morale (20 mins)

- 1) what keeps you together as a church?
- 2) What excites you in the life of your church?



“A ship is safe and secure in harbour but that is not what ships are built for.”

How far does our morale result from the fact that we feel and do not encounter real opposition? Is it because our church is friendly and cosy and safe?



INTO THE CITY WITH NEHEMIAH

Session Five Oppression

Preparation (40 minutes)

Photocopy diagram 2 and cut it into four sections

Nehemiah 5 vs 1-18 Read the chapter – don't forget you will need a Bible. (if there are no Bibles available, hand out Extract 6)

Role Play

Ask the group to form four sub-groups. Give each of these one of the four cards below.

NEHEMIAH'S
FAMILY

THE RICH AND
POWERFUL

THE POOR

NEHEMIAH



Tell the others what you feel like and argue your case with them.

Discussion and Homework

At the beginning we identified one 'Urban Priority Area' which for us is our equivalent of the ruined city of Jerusalem, which Nehemiah went to rebuild. Let us think about it now and who are the equivalents of the people in the role play? (Guidance questions can be selected according to your situation.)

Nehemiah and his family

Who are the community's leaders?

Could any of us here 'the call of Nehemiah' and move to an Urban Priority Area?

Could I hear 'the call of Nehemiah' and move to an Urban Priority Area

Are the leaders effective, with good support?

The rich and powerful

Who are oppressing the community?

How do they do it?

Are we part of the problem?

The poor

Who are they in the community?

Is there poverty their own fault?

What can we as Christians do practically to help relieve their situation?

Money on its own is probably not the answer. (It may be in a UPA church that they are the poor.)



Discussion (20 minutes)

- (1) How should our family income be affected because of our Christian faith.
- (2) Either – who are rich and powerful people who oppress us?
- (3) OR – Would we be seen by poorer people as those who are rich and powerful? How do we oppress them?
- (4) How can we challenge our rich and powerful oppressors?

Our next session is the last one and we are going to make a practical Christian response to the things we have learnt from our short study of the story of Nehemiah. Can you in the meantime be thinking about what activities we Christians could undertake in our Urban Priority Area which would be in any way comparable to the work of Nehemiah and his fellow-Jews in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem?

INTO THE CITY WITH NEHEMIAH
Session Six
Doing Something About It



Discussion (30 minutes)

(Go through all of your written sheets and review the whole course – briefly!)

What new ideas or insights have you learnt from our study of Nehemiah?

(Encourage Discussion. Write up summaries on your board of everything offered.)

What activities could we Christians undertake in our Urban Priority Area which would be in any way comparable to the work of Nehemiah and his fellow-Jews in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem?

The group discuss this question and agrees on one of the activities offered. Help them analyse how far their suggestions rule out bigger issues in favour of 'safe' traditional church ones. Write whatever is offered on your board. Then discuss the activity using these questions:-

What opposition might we expect? (this will include opposition and apathy from within the church as well as outside).

Why should the activity arouse opposition?

How would we get information about our opponents?

How would we prepare ourselves for the task?

Does the activity deal with 'oppression' in our urban priority area?

Practical Issues (20 minutes)

Where do we go from here?

Do we need more facts?

How can we get them?

Who can help us?



Where to go for help

UNLOCK
HANDSWORTH PARISH CENTRE
HANDSWORTH ROAD
SHEFFIELD
S13 9BZ
0114 293 9060

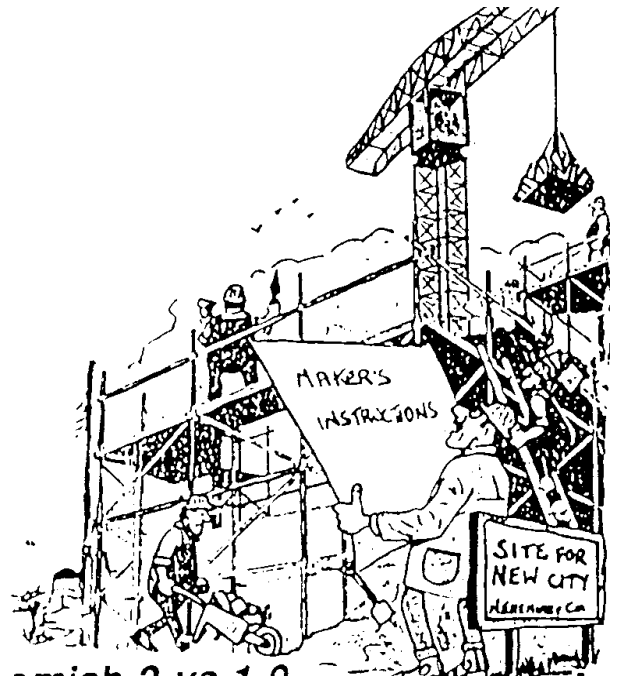
Nehemiah 1 v 1-4 (Extract 1)

"This is the account of what Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah accomplished.

In the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year that Artaxerxes was emperor of Persia, I Nehemiah, was in Susa, the capital city. Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived from Judah with a group of other men, and I asked them about Jerusalem and about our fellow-Jews who had returned from exile in Babylonia. They told me that those who had survived and were back in the homeland were in great difficulty and that the foreigners who lived near by looked down on them. They also told me that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down and that the gates had not been restored since the time they were burnt. When I heard all this, I sat down and wept. For several days I mourned and did not eat. I prayed to God."

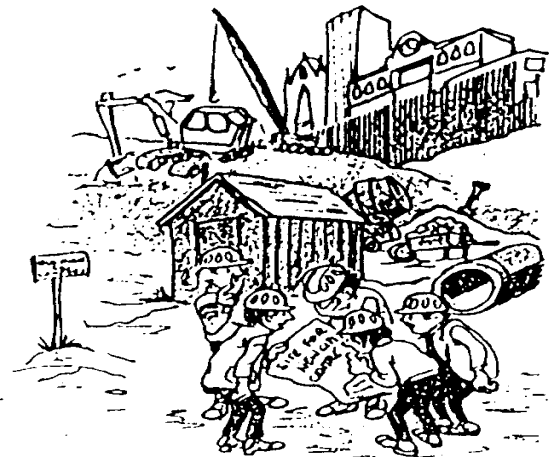
Nehemiah 2 vs 1-9

"In those days I was the emperor's wine steward. One day four months later, when Emperor Artaxerxes was dining, I took the wine to him. He had never seen me look sad before, so he asked, "Why are you looking so sad? You aren't ill, so it must be that you're unhappy." I was startled and answered, "May Your Majesty live for ever! How can I help looking sad when the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" The emperor asked, "What is it that you want?" I prayed to the God of Heaven, and then I said to the emperor, "If Your Majesty is pleased with me and is willing to grant my request, let me go to the land of Judah, to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I can rebuild the city." 6 The emperor, with the empress sitting at his side, approved my request. He asked me how long I would be gone and when I would return, and I told him. Then I asked him to grant me the favour of giving me letters to the governors of West Euphrates Province, instructing them to let me travel to Judah. I asked also for a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal forests, instructing him to supply me with timber for the gates of the fort that guards the Temple, for the city walls, and for the house I was to live in. The emperor gave me all I asked for, because God was with me. The emperor sent some army officers and a troop of horsemen with me, and I made the journey to West Euphrates.



Nehemiah 2 vs 11-18 (Extract 2)

"I went on to Jerusalem, and for three days I did not tell anyone what God had inspired me to do for Jerusalem. Then in the middle of the night I got up and went out, taking a few of my companions with me. The only animal we took was the donkey that I rode on. It was still night as I left the city through the Valley Gate on the west and went south past Dragon's Fountain to the Rubbish Gate. As I went, I inspected the broken walls of the city and the gates that had been destroyed by fire. Then on the east side of the city I went north to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool. The donkey I was riding could not find any path through the rubble, so I went down into the valley of the Kidron and rode along, looking at the wall. Then I returned the way I had come and went back into the city through the Valley Gate. None of the local officials knew where I had been or what I had been doing. So far I had not said anything to any of my fellow-Jews—the priests, the leaders, the officials, or anyone else who would be taking part in the work. But now I said to them, "See what trouble we are in because Jerusalem is in ruins and its gates are destroyed! Let's rebuild the city walls and put an end to our disgrace." And I told them how God had been with me and helped me, and what the emperor had said to me. They responded, "Let's start rebuilding!" And they got ready to start the work."



Questions for the Nehemiah group

What would you feel like as you rode around Jerusalem in the darkness?

How would you persuade your 'fellow-Jews' to undertake this seemingly hopeless task?

Questions for his fellow-Jews

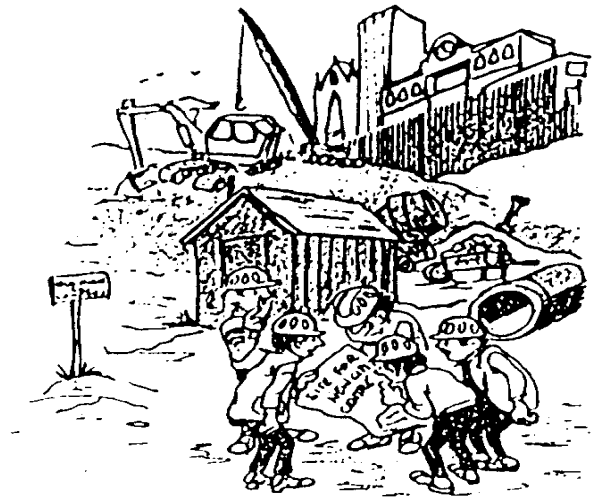
What objections might you have for Nehemiah's plans?

How does he persuade you to support him?

Nehemiah 5 vs 14-18

(Extract 3)

During all the twelve years that I was governor of the land of Judah, from the twentieth year that Artaxerxes was emperor until his 32nd year, neither my relatives nor I ate the food I was entitled to have as governor. Every governor who had been in office before me had been a burden to the people and had demanded 40 silver coins a day for food and wine. Even their servants had oppressed the people. But I acted differently, because I honoured God. I put all my energy into rebuilding the wall and did not acquire any property. Everyone who worked for me joined in the rebuilding. I regularly fed at my table 150 of the Jewish people and their leaders, besides all the people who came to me from the surrounding nations. Every day I served one ox, six of the best sheep, and many chickens, and every ten days I provided a fresh supply of wine. But I knew what heavy burdens the people had to bear, so I did not claim the allowance that the governor is entitled to.



Matthew 20 vs 25-28

So Jesus called them all together and said, “You know that the rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority.

This, however, is not the way it shall be among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must be your slave — like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.”



Nehemiah

Prayer

(Extract 4)

4 v 4 I prayed, “Listen to them mocking us, O God.”

4 v 9 We prayed to our God and kept men on guard against them day and night.

5 v 19 I pray you, O God, remember to my credit everything that I have done for this people.

6 v 9 They were trying to frighten us into stopping work. I prayed, “But now, God, make me strong!”

6 v 14 I prayed, “God, remember what Tobiah and Sanballat have done and punish them.”

Action

4 vs 22-23

During this time I told the men in charge that they and all their helpers had to stay in Jerusalem at night, so that we could guard the city at night as well as work in the daytime. I didn't take off my clothes even at night, neither did any of my companions nor my servants nor my bodyguard. And we all kept our weapons to hand.

5 vs 6-7

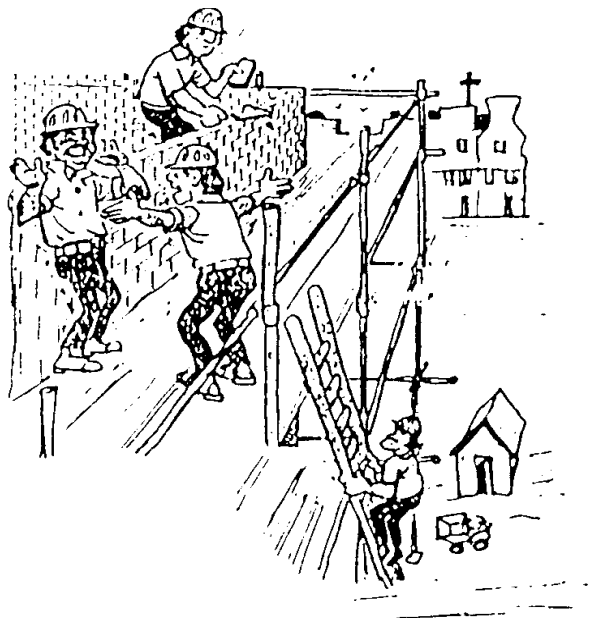
When I heard their complaints, I was angry and decided to act. I denounced the leaders and officials of the people and told them, “You are oppressing your fellow-Jews!” I called a public assembly to deal with the problem.

7 vs 4-5

Jerusalem was a large city, but not many people were living in it, and not many houses had been built yet. God inspired me to assemble the people and their leaders and officials and to check their family records. I located the records of those who had first returned from captivity.

13 v 25

I reprimanded the men, called down curses on them, beat them, and pulled out their hair.



OPPOSITION

4 vs 1-3 When Sanballat heard that we Jews had begun rebuilding the wall, he was furious and began to ridicule us. In front of his companions and the Samaritan troops he said, "What do these miserable Jews think they're doing? Do they intend to rebuild the city? Do they think that by offering sacrifices they can finish the work in one day? Can they make building stones out of heaps of burnt rubble?"

Tobiah was standing there beside him, and he added, "What kind of wall could they ever build? Even a fox could knock it down!"

4 vs 7-8 Sanballat, Tobiah, and the people of Arabia, Ammon, and Ashdod heard that we were making progress in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and that the gaps in the wall were being closed, and they were very angry. So they all plotted together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.

Prayer

4 vs 4-5 I prayed, "Listen to them mocking us, O God! Let their ridicule fall on their own heads. Let them be robbed of everything they have, and let them be taken as prisoners to a foreign land. 5 Don't forgive the evil they do and don't forget their sins, for they have insulted us who are building."

4 v 9 But we prayed to our God and kept men on guard against them day and night.



Information and Preparation

4 vs 11-13 Our enemies thought we would not see them or know what was happening until they were already upon us, killing us and putting an end to our work. But time after time Jews who were living among our enemies came to warn us of the plans our enemies were making against us. So I armed the people with swords, spears, and bows, and stationed them by clans behind the wall, wherever it was still unfinished.

Building up people's morale.

4 vs 14 I saw that the people were worried, so I said to them and to their leaders and officials, "Don't be afraid of our enemies. Remember how great and terrifying the Lord is, and fight for your fellow-countrymen, your children, your wives, and your homes."

High Spirits and Determination

4 v 6 So we went on rebuilding the wall, and soon it was half its full height, because the people were eager to work.

4 v 10 The people of Judah had a song they sang: "We grow weak carrying burdens; There's so much rubble to take away. How can we build the wall today?"



ONLY USE THIS EXTRACT IF BIBLES ARE NOT AVAILABLE

NEHEMIAH 5 VS 1-19

Some time later many of the people, both men and women, began to complain against their fellow-Jews. Some said, "We have large families, we need corn to keep us alive."

Others said, "We have had to mortgage our fields and vineyards and houses to get enough corn to keep us from starving."

Still others said, "We had to borrow money to pay the royal tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 We are of the same race as our fellow-Jews. Aren't our children just as good as theirs? But we have to make slaves of our children. Some of our daughters have already been sold as slaves. We are helpless because our fields and vineyards have been taken away from us."

When I heard their complaints, I was angry and decided to act. I denounced the leaders and officials of the people and told them, "You are oppressing your brothers!"

I called a public assembly to deal with the problem and said, "As far as we have been able, we have been buying back our Jewish relatives who had to sell themselves to foreigners. Now you are forcing your own relatives to sell themselves to you, their own people!" The leaders were silent and could find nothing to say.

Then I said, "What you are doing is wrong! You ought to obey God and do what's right. Then you would not give our enemies, the Gentiles, any reason to ridicule us. I have let the people borrow money and corn from me, and so have my companions and the people who work for me. Now let's give up all our claims to repayment. Cancel all the debts they owe you — money or corn or wine or olive oil. And give them back their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses at once!"

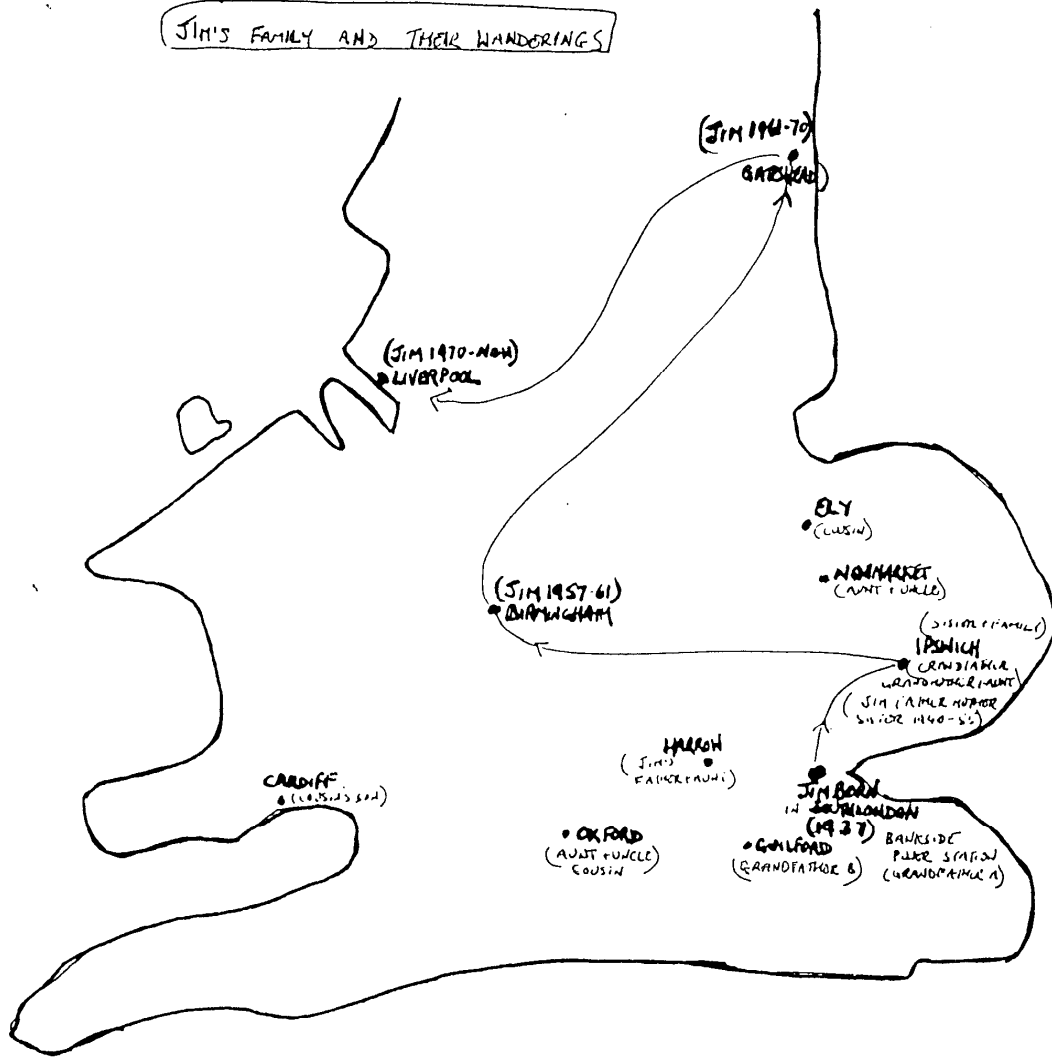
The leaders replied, "We'll do as you say. We'll give the property back and not try to collect the debts."

I called in the priests and made the leaders swear in front of them to keep the promise they had just made. Then I took off the sash I was wearing round my waist and shook it out. "This is how God will shake any of you who don't keep your promise," I said. "God will take away your houses and everything you own, and will leave you with nothing."

Everyone who was present said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord. And the leaders kept their promise.

During all the twelve years that I was governor of the land of Judah, from the twentieth year that Artaxerxes was emperor until his 32nd year, neither my relatives nor I ate the food I was entitled to have as governor. Every governor who had been in office before me had been a burden to the people and had demanded 40 silver coins a day for food and wine. Even their servants had oppressed the people. But I acted differently, because I honoured God. I put all my energy into rebuilding the wall and did not acquire any property. Everyone who worked for me joined in the rebuilding. I regularly fed at my table 150 of the Jewish people and their leaders, besides all the people who came to me from the surrounding nations. Every day I served one ox, six of the best sheep, and many chickens, and every ten days I provided a fresh supply of wine. But I knew what heavy burdens the people had to bear, so I did not claim the allowance that the governor is entitled to.

DIAGRAM 1



AN EXAMPLE OF A FAMILY EXTENDING OVER ENGLAND AND WALES IN THREE GENERATIONS (ONLY ONE TO AN URBAN PRIORITY AREA)





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