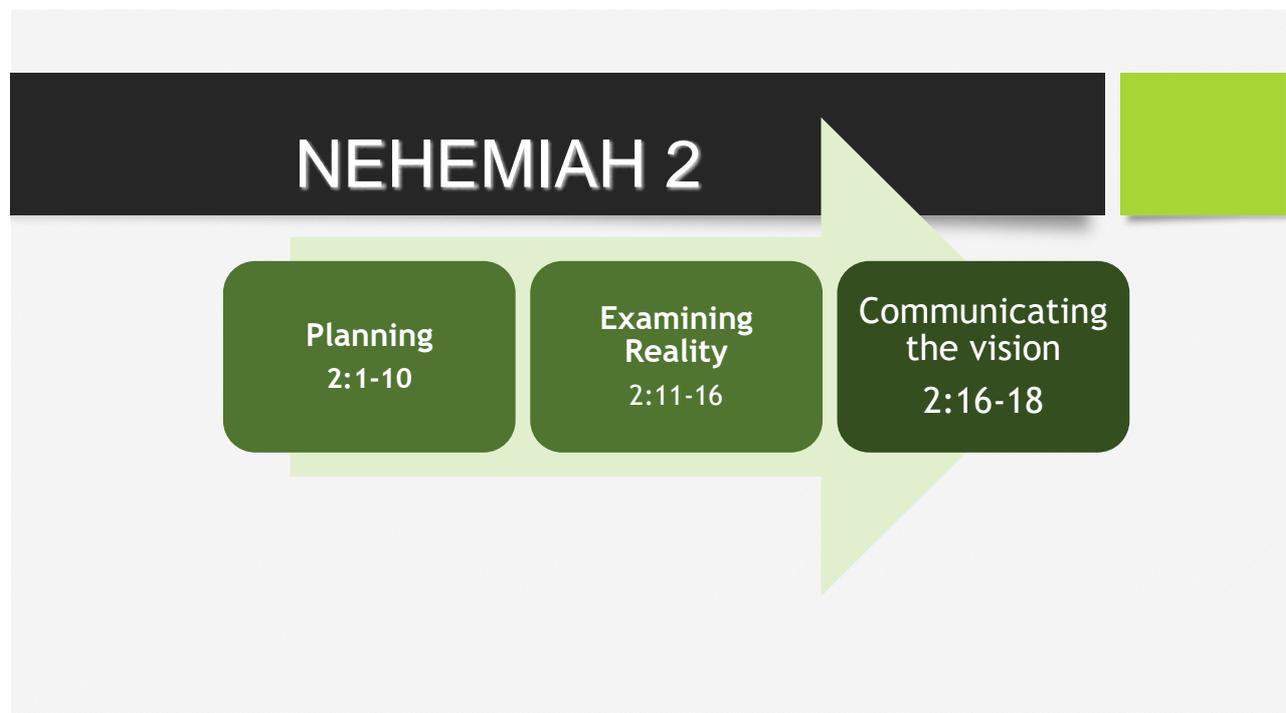


Session Two : the Biblical Basis for Revitalisation

The following slides summarise the “revitalisation” process set in motion by Nehemiah - rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem to keep the city safe from attacks, followed by a general confession of the people’s sins after hearing the reading of God’s law by Ezra (chapters 8 and 9).

Chapter 1 is the equivalent of seeing the need for revitalisation. Nehemiah hears of the “trouble and disgrace” of those who had returned from exile in Babylon, and that the walls of Jerusalem were broken down. His first reaction is to mourn and to pray about the situation.

Chapter 2 is the equivalent of starting the revitalisation process.



In this chapter, the first plans are made (verses 1-10), but it’s worth pointing out that this comes from Nehemiah seizing the opportunity which arises when the king sees his sadness. After an “arrow prayer” (verse 4), he not only gets permission from the king to go to Jerusalem but also makes a request for his practical help. I think that shows that we need discernment to see how we can make the most of any opportunity to start things moving. For example if another church member expresses his disquiet at the state of the church, or something objective happens, such as the church receives a legacy which could be used to make the building more attractive, and this can be a lead-in to further conversation on more important matters relating to revitalisation.

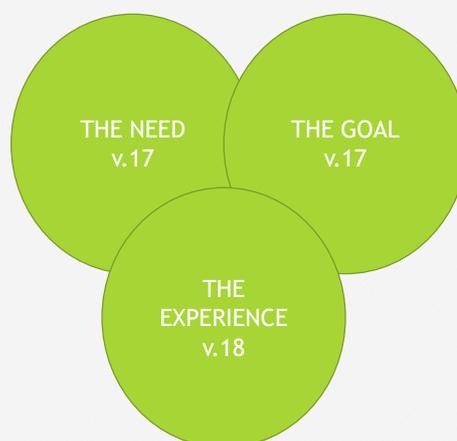
The next stage involves “examining reality”. What is the true state of the church? This will stop us from having illusions about what is the true starting point. We will look at ways of doing this later in the course, but in chapter 2.11-16 we read about Nehemiah’s approach to this question.

Examining Reality 2:11-16

- Personal - v. 12
- A team - v. 12
- Discreet - v. 12
- Attentive - v. 13-14

Before he raised too many expectations among the people and their leaders, Nehemiah examined the state of the walls of Jerusalem. He did this personally rather than rely on reports which others had made of the situation. And he did it by night so that very few people were aware of what he was doing (he was discreet). However he wasn't a loner : he took "a few men" with him. He examined the walls and the gates attentively (verses 13-15) but as verse 16 puts it : "The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests, or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work". It was only when he had studied the situation that Nehemiah started to communicate.

2. Effective communication is informative and motivational



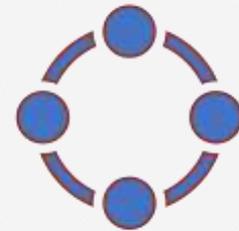
Nehemiah's communication had three elements.

- Firstly, the need (verse 17) : "Jerusalem lies in ruins"
- Secondly, the two goals (verse 17) : "Let us rebuild the wall" and "we will no longer be in disgrace", or as the ESV puts it "we will no longer suffer derision" (in other words, people won't mock us or laugh at us).
- Thirdly, his personal testimony, how the Lord had led him so far (v17) : "I told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me".

We can conclude that Nehemiah resisted the urge to communicate too soon, and waited until he had more facts at his disposal in order to convince people to start rebuilding.

3. The proof of effective communication is when the people respond

- The decision to get involved (v. 18)
- Resistance (v. 19)
- Courage (v.20)



The proof of good communication is that it leads to a positive reaction. The leaders and people themselves reply, "Let us start rebuilding" (v18). They are motivated and "begin this good work". This conviction is necessary because opposition soon rears its head. Several men mock their intentions but, more seriously, accuse them of plotting to revolt. By rebuilding the walls they were seen to be stating their independence and rebelling against the king in Babylon (this accusation returns in chapter 6, verses 5-7).

However Nehemiah's communication had given them courage and Nehemiah was their spokesman when he responded (v20) : "The God of heaven will give us success".

A practical exercise

Read through the letters to the 7 churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, and note down the following things

- What does the Lord approve in their church life?
- What does he condemn?
- What are they instructed to do?
- What are the outcomes if nothing changes?

Then write a short letter from Jesus to your church, using the style in which these letters are written.