

About Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 1-2)

Most Christians don't find their workplaces very supportive of their faith. Generally, there is limited scope for explicitly Christian witness and action. Moreover, workers may feel pressure to violate the ethical requirements of biblical standards, either explicitly or implicitly.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah depict what it is like for God's people to work in unwelcoming workplaces. They show God's people working in jobs ranging from construction to politics, always in the midst of environments openly hostile to God's values and plans. Yet along the way they receive surprising help from nonbelievers in the highest positions of civic power. God's power seems to crop up for his people's good in surprising places.

Ezra had to ponder whether to trust an unbelieving ruler to protect the Jewish people as they returned to Jerusalem and began rebuilding the temple. He had to find financial support within the corrupt economic system of the Persian Empire, yet to be true to God's laws about economic integrity.

Nehemiah had to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, which required him to both trust God and be pragmatic. He had to lead people whose motivation ranged from altruism to greed, and get them to overcome their divergent self-interests to work towards a common purpose.

Our titles and institutions have changed since their days, but in many ways our workplaces today have much in common, for better or worse. The real life situations, challenges and choices found in these biblical books help us develop an understanding of work that matters in how we live each day.