

Residing in Jerusalem

Nehemiah 7

Rebuilt City: *Nehemiah 7:1-4*

Delegation

Finally, the walls of the city were complete and the people could enjoy the benefits of their hard work. With the gates in place the Jews were able to safely reside within the city. However there was still much work to be done. Within the city, buildings remained unfinished amongst the ruins and debris from years of neglect. Jerusalem was still vulnerable to an attack. The walls provided a defense but the city remained a shell of its former self. Recognizing the importance of the situation, Nehemiah immediately installed men to protect and lead the city. Since he was governor this was his responsibility. (Nehemiah 8:9). Porters were assigned to watch over the city, Levites who were keepers of the temple gates (1 Chronicles 9:17-24). Nehemiah wisely used their experience to protect the city. What better men to guard the gates than those that did it for a living. It's best to use the talents God has given us for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). Whatever abilities God has blessed you with look to honor Him with them. Singers, descendants of Korah, were also appointed to service. There is a possibility singing was involved when the gates were opened and closed. A look at the Psalms attributed to these men enables us to know their music (Psalm 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87, 88). Their songs of praise exalted their mighty God (Psalm 46:6). These humble lyrics filled with meaning still provide encouragement for those that to read them. The Levites were also appointed to service, this probably included the priests, which performed the sacrifices. These ministers of God were directed to return to their work for the Lord. Notice, Nehemiah provided for the protection of the city, both physically and spiritually. In a world of sin we must guard against temptation, knowing the results will be destructive (Ephesians 5:14-16).

Next Nehemiah appointed two rulers over Jerusalem. The first was Hanani, either Nehemiah's blood brother or his close friend and countryman. Hanani was the man that informed Nehemiah of the situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:2-4). It was his message that God used to burden Nehemiah's heart. Hanani proved to be faithful, even returning to Jerusalem to work on the walls with Nehemiah. The second was Hananiah, the ruler of the palace. He is credited with being faithful and fearful, faithful to God because he feared Him. In regards to his fear of God he had no equal, and evidently none were

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above him. Both men were assigned positions of leadership based upon their character; they were faithful to God. Likewise, the faithful are the most qualified to lead in God's churches, not those that have been there longest, speak the loudest, or possess the most. Faithfulness to God is an essential qualification for leadership (1 Timothy 3:11; 2 Timothy 2:1-2). What is great about faithfulness is that anyone can have it.

Chapter Outline

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Direction

After establishing sound leadership Nehemiah addressed the safety of Jerusalem. Because the enemy resided nearby the city remained in danger. If the Jews disregarded the opposition or ignored the threat, the city could easily be overcome. Knowing this, Nehemiah established rules to protect the people. The gates of the city were to remain closed until the sun was hot. Evidently, the gates were shut at sunset and remained locked until the following day. Nehemiah ordered the gates to stay shut until they verified there was no threat on the outside. This was wise because darkness provided an opportunity for an attack, the enemy could hide outside the walls without being noticed. Waiting until the sun was out enabled the people to safeguard the city. Guard your life as well, because the devil still works in darkness (Ephesians 6:12). The inhabitants of Jerusalem were directed to guard their city. Watches were assigned so no confusion would arise, each would know when to be on guard. The watches also demanded all get involved, not just a few. The problem in many churches is not the number on the membership roll but the willingness of members to get involved. Because it was their city, the people were expected to faithfully protect it.

With the walls in place, Jerusalem was a large city. The circumference was about six miles.¹ It is likely many of the workers returned home once the walls were complete, so the population inside the city was small. On top of this, the buildings within the walls remained unfinished. Those that had homes along the wall provided a watch while those within worked on their buildings. It would take a while for the city to be completely rebuilt, but with the walls and gates finished the city was safe from opposition.

Remnant Remembered: *Nehemiah 7:5-73*

Purpose

Nehemiah successfully led in the rebuilding of the walls. It was the completion of a work that began years earlier (Ezra 2). When the Jews returned from captivity under the leadership of Zerubbabel they were determined to rebuild Jerusalem, however things did not go as planned. The work became a struggle as the people faced much opposition. As soon as the foundation of the Temple was laid, the work was stopped (Ezra 4:24). After several years of complacency, the people responded to the challenge and the Temple was finished (Haggai 1, Zechariah 1). The city itself remained in ruins for 150 years. With this in mind, Nehemiah was burdened to remember those that returned to Jerusalem. He understood God was directing him in this manner, so he followed (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The leaders were gathered to verify their ancestry. A record was found of the families that followed Zerubbabel out of captivity, it was a reminder of their strong heritage. Their ancestors proved to be faithful and courageous, returning to a city in ruins so they could rebuild it. Out of the millions of Jews that lived, only about 50,000 returned. Their number was small but their desire was great. This faithful group may not have achieved what they set out to do but God preserved them. The Jews in Nehemiah's time were reminded of God's mercy (Psalm 100:5). The work was neglected for years, yet God never forsook them, allowing them to finish what their ancestors had begun. The Lord is good and His blessings are abundant.

¹ John Gill, "Gill's Commentary on the Bible: Nehemiah," (Bible Truth Forum: E-book, 2005) p. 49

People

Here we have a record of those that returned to Jerusalem following the captivity. It is similar to the account found in Ezra 2. The differences are minor and can be attributed to a number of reasons. What is important is that Nehemiah remembered the people that sacrificed so the city could once again be populated.

The list offers several different categories. We find Zerubbabel and the other leaders, like Jeshua the High Priest, mentioned first (Zechariah 3:1). Next we find people listed by family, 'the children of.' After that comes those associated with cities. Eventually we run across those involved with Temple services, the priests, Levites, singers, and porters. Their service to the Lord was extremely important. The list continues with servants and finishes with those that were unable to verify their ancestry, some of which were priests. This introduced a serious problem, since they were directly involved with service to God. These men were relieved of duty until God gave direction concerning their situation. For priests discernment came through the Urim and Thummim, which were worn in the breastplate (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6). The last mention of these items is during David's reign. Today the Word of God and Spirit of God provide discernment for believers; both need to be in your heart (Psalm 119:11; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Important Dates Concerning the Return from Captivity

536 BC – Cyrus issues a decree that allows the Jews to return (Ezra 1:1-4).

534 BC – The Jews hindered in finishing the second Temple (Ezra 4).

516 BC – The second Temple completed (Ezra 6:15).

467 BC – Ezra arrives in Jerusalem (Ezra 8).

455 BC – Nehemiah learns of the situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1).

454 BC – Artaxerxes Longimanus' decree to rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2).

454 BC – Wall of Jerusalem finished and dedicated (Nehemiah 3-6).

Possessions

Lastly we find a record of the gifts given towards God's work. Only some gave to the cause, not all. There were some unable to give and those unwilling to give. Stinginess can be found in every generation. Some gave a large amount while others gave a little. The amount was not important because giving was based upon ability. What mattered most was the heart, which God knew (2 Corinthians 9:7). Keep in mind, God is aware of all that is given but also how much is held back (Mark 12:42-44). Generosity is not difficult when we remember that our possessions are from God.

Questions for Consideration

What danger did the city remain in?

What responsibility was given to the porters?

Why did Nehemiah appoint rulers?

What is said concerning Hananiah?

Why is it important to have a fear of God?

When were the gates of the city to be opened, and why that time?

Why did Nehemiah read the record of those that returned after the captivity?

How would the record encourage the Jews living in Jerusalem?

What was done with the priests that were unable to prove their ancestry, and why?

Why do you believe it is important to know what was given, and who gave?

Points to Ponder

Do you have a reason to sing?

There was little singing in Babylon (Psalm 137:1-2). There was no reason to sing, they were in captivity. If you are saved you have a reason to sing, you have been set free. Praise God for His goodness.

Is faithfulness a priority?

It should be, if you want to serve God. The rulers were selected because of their faithfulness. Nehemiah could trust those men to perform the task assigned to them. Can the Lord depend upon you? How about your family and church?

Is character important for leaders?

Yes it is, Hananiah's spiritual conduct was deemed more important than his physical abilities or leadership skills. Nehemiah knew his decisions would be made with a faithful and fearful heart. His leadership would reflect his character.

Are you doing your share?

When Nehemiah ensured the safety of Jerusalem, all were assigned to watch over the city, not just a few. If you are a member of a church, you are responsible for the livelihood and safety of it. Why not, it is your church. Take your service to God seriously.

What family do you belong to?

While reading the record the people were reminded of their ancestry. Since it was important to be counted amongst the Jews, they knew which family they belonged to. Do you know which family you belong to; is it the family of God?