

NEHEMIAH – FACT SHEET 5



Chapter 6:15 to 7:73:

“So the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul (Sept/Oct), in 52 days” (Neh 6:15). What a great verse! Following the chapters of devastating report (1:3), fearful discussions with the Persian King (2:5-8), initial survey (2:11-16), sheer hard work (3:1-32), enemy opposition (4:1-23, 6:1-14) and social outcry (5:1-19) – the project is complete, the wall is finished. However, whilst the construction project may be over – the ‘building’ work had just begun.

From 6:15 onwards, we now begin to see the God of Heaven start His main building project through His servant, Nehemiah; that of building the people.

We can consider this under four headers, firstly seeing that God’s community was to be:

A Community of Security, Worship, Praise & Godly Instruction:

Nehemiah tells us in chapter 7, verse 1, that following completion of the wall, three ministry groups were appointed:

- Gatekeepers
- Singers
- Levites

There are 33 direct references to Gatekeepers in the Old Testament, with 11 of them in Nehemiah. Gatekeepers were there for physical protection; and in earlier days, were primarily used to secure the temple (2 Chron 23:4), the Kings house (2 Chron 23:5) and the Foundation gate (2 Chron 23:5). Later, Nehemiah uses them on the city walls (Neh 12:25). The Gatekeeper’s in Nehemiah’s Jerusalem, would also take on a more spiritual and moral responsibility as they would later be tasked to ensure illegal Sabbath trading did not take place (Neh 13:22).

Out of some 32 direct references to singers in the OT, half of them are within the book of Nehemiah – he truly wanted a city of praise! Indeed, in the ‘list’ of those returning from the exile (7:6-69 – almost a carbon copy of Ezra 2) – there are ‘generations’ of singers mentioned (7:44). Singing and praise was not an ecclesiastical (church based) ‘bolt-on’ to more important things – but was a key element in a balanced community of God’s people. Whole villages had even been built by and for the singers! (Neh 12:29).

However, praise and worship needs to be 'informed' – a response to what we know and love about the Lord. For this, Levites were appointed. Descended from Levi (3rd son of Jacob/Leah – Gen 29), the Levites original purpose in the OT was for service around the tabernacle (Numbers 3 & 4) assisting the Priest in his duties. The Priests, who were descendants of Aaron (Exod 28:1) were also descendants of Levi (see further study!). The exile and the destruction of the later temple would have been no more keenly felt then by those who served in its courts. The later responsibilities of the Levites are also seen to extend to teaching (Neh 8:7-8).

What a community! A community where physical security and need would be met; a community of worship and praise and a community of Godly instruction. This is the balance that we at Bethel have been considering and will be the foundation for our development; recently summarised in the WED documents and discussions (Worship & praise, Evangelism & mercy, Discipleship & teaching).

Secondly, this new community would be one of **Godly leadership**:

7:1-3 introduce to us, two men, appointed and commended by Nehemiah, Hanani and Hananiah. Hanani had been the one who had brought the initial devastating report (1:3); he clearly had a passion for the people, just like his Governor, Nehemiah. Hananiah is described as, '*..a man of integrity who fears God more than most*' (7:2). What a great testimony for a leader. Together they discussed and agreed the best way forward for the practical security of the new, vulnerable community (7:3). Shutting the doors '*until the sun (was) hot*' (some translations make it '*whilst the sun is hot*') would ensure that the city would not be prone to attack in the restful 'siesta'. A Godly leadership is a wise leadership.

Godly leadership is also interested in the individual, and not just the corporate vision. So the third thing we see in the new community is:

A Community where individuals were Remembered & Valued:

Verses 7:6-69 give us an almost carbon copy of the list from Ezra 2 of the original folk who returned from the exile. This section is a key continuum for the new community; they must know that they are involved in a much bigger picture; they now hold the 'baton' of faith as God's covenant people. The repatriation of Jerusalem would be a much bigger, ongoing project. Persuading folk to move from their comfortable rural enclaves to a busy, bustling, new, vulnerable city, would not be easy. Yet God is into 'city mission'; and so again puts this city mission project into Nehemiah's heart (7:5).

Verses 61-65 of chapter 7 appear to be separatist and 'excluding'. To a degree, this is technically true; though with the 'purity' and 'holiness' (set-apartness!) of God's people at its heart. The episodes of intermarrying had created huge issues of polytheistic (multi god) households (Neh 13:23-24), that compromised God's standards and led to many of the issues leading up to the exile. This was not 'ethnic' cleansing or anything of the sorts – the gracious Lord had made ample provision for those of other nations to come to Him (Exod 12:48, Numbers 15:14). This was God's blueprint to purify a people for Himself.

Fourthly, Nehemiah's new community was to be a **Generous one**:

Verses 70-73 of chapter 7, again are a record of the generosity of many of the saints of old (Ezra 2); however, through Godly example, leading from the front, Nehemiah inserts himself in there (7:70).

With 150 years of an exiled people being resurrected and restored; the enemy was angry. When God is at work, as we saw previously in chapters 4 and 6; the enemy is never far behind. Chapter 6:16-19 reveal a more subtle approach by the enemy this time. Not so visible, not so obvious; but in the form of Tobiah (name meaning 'Yahweh is good'); we see the enemy endeavouring to infiltrate and influence many of God's people, through both commercial and familial (6:18) bonds. Tobiah was in amongst God's people but was against God's vision and plans. Despite the fact that he had 'previous' (4:3,8); with links to the nobility and priesthood (13:5); the people are blinded to his devices through their personal oaths and allegiances.

Yet the ultimate glory in this section, again goes to the God of Heaven. Verse 16 of chapter 6 tells us, following the completion of the wall, that, '*when all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self confidence, because they realised that this work had been done with the help of our God*'. The enemies that had been gathered to surround and intimidate Nehemiah and the people (Neh 4:7-8) now ironically provided the audience to witness the awesomeness of Almighty God.

For further study:

Nehemiah has a number of 'lists' of people – important for the continuity of many 'lines' of service within God's work. Can you trace the Levitical and Aaronic priestly line through the following:

Genesis 29 > Genesis 46 > Numbers 26 > Exodus 28 > Nehemiah 7

Further Reading/Bibliography – My thanks go to!

- *The Holy Bible – (first of course!)*
- *The Message of Nehemiah, R Brown – IVP*
- *Overcoming challenges, B Hybels – Zondervan*
- *A Passion for Faithfulness, J Packer – Crossway*
- *Ezra & Nehemiah, D Kidner – IVP*

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word"

Psalm 119:18