

NEHEMIAH – FACT SHEET 8



Chapters 11 & 12:

As we move on into the business end of Nehemiah; the much more complex and personal project of re-populating the city needs to begin in earnest. It is one thing committing to being involved in a building project, quite another to move into the new city. This would involve the trauma of leaving families, rural businesses, and familiar surroundings – all for the hustle and bustle of city life.

Under FOUR headings, chapters 11 & 12 reveal that the people:

Firstly – Were to be a COMMITTED people: 11:1-2:

Chapter 11 begins with a common theme, with the personal sacrifice being exemplified by the leaders (11:1). The process of casting lots was not some mystical practice; but for God's people at the time, was a tried and tested way of discerning God's will and purpose for their lives (see Levit 16:8, Prov 16:33, Joshua 18:6-10). However primitive this process may initially appear for us as God's people today who possess the Scriptures and Holy Spirit for guidance, the people's faithful response is to be commended; along with those 'others', '...who volunteered to live in Jerusalem' (11:2). This move would take special commitment and dedication as they were called to 'start again', out of their very own and personal comfort zones.

In addition to being committed; God's people are also called **Secondly, to be a HOLY people: 11:1**

Although the move from the rural areas and enclaves would be traumatic, it would also be one of great honour. Jerusalem was no ordinary city but God's 'Holy' city (11:1,18). Nehemiah understood the importance of those things God had 'set apart' - the Priesthood and it's holy office (6:11), the importance and holiness of the Sabbath (9:14,10:31), the temple sacrifices (10:33). Nehemiah's contemporary, Ezra, had emphasised the need for God's people themselves to be 'Holy', set apart (Ezra 9:2) – a common command within the Scriptures (Levit 11:43, Levit Ch11-27, Eph 1:4, Zech 14:20, 1 Cor 1:2).

Additionally, chapters 11 and 12 reveal, **Thirdly, God's people to be a GIFTED people: 11:3-36, 12:1-26:**

In total, there are 5 lists of people within the book of Nehemiah. Each of them is a reminder that God's people is made up of committed individuals who are all called to play their part; and whose work does not go unnoticed. The first list in chapter 3 (3:1-32) details those who carried out the repair work on the walls of the city. Chapter 7 is a list of the original exiles, under Zerubbabel, who formed the first 'return party'. For Nehemiah and the people, they needed reminding that they were the continuum of God's covenant people. The third list in chapter 10 (10:1-28) lists those, who following the half day worship service, pledged to put God's things first, in all areas of relationships, business and possessions – all based upon God's central Word. These final two lists in chapters 11 and 12, detail out first, those who re-populated Jerusalem (11:3-36), with the list in chapter 12, again a reminder of the Priestly and Levitical lineage since Zerubbabel – sacrifice always at the centre of the worship of God's people. The people needed reminding that they were, 'a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy nation' (Exodus 19:6).

On closer observation, the lists detail varying roles and tasks performed by the people; all key in God's functioning body. There were administrators (11:9), city engineers (11:9), maintenance folk (11:16), worship leaders (11:11), even 'unnamed' associates (12:7) – perhaps not all listed or known household names – but more importantly, their names would be recorded where it mattered.

Fourthly, such a committed, holy, gifted people – were also a WORSHIPPING people: 12:27-47:

As we consider this act of 5th century, BC worship at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem; it reveals several things about the worship of Nehemiah and the people:

- Firstly it's **CONTENT** – was one of celebration, thanksgiving and dedication (12:27). Recalling and celebrating what God had done and worshipping Him for who He is, thanking Him for His activity and guidance and purposing to dedicate themselves and their work to Him;
- Second – it's **NATURE** – was one of **JOY** (27, 43) – this was no dull muttering; but a visible and joyful expression of praise;
- Thirdly – it's **VARIETY & LEGACY** – many and various instruments were utilised; all were involved (27,28,35,43) – and done in recognition that they followed a legacy of previous worshippers of the One true God (36, 46);
- Fourthly – this act of worship was not entered into lightly or flippantly – but with **PURITY & SINCERITY**(30) – the priestly purification service was designed to teach God's Holiness and moral purity (Levit 16:30) – as God's people worship Him – they must do so under self inspection and out of Holy reverence;

- Fifth – the worship in Nehemiah 12 is one of both **UNITY & WITNESS**(27-28, 31,38) – people from the varying areas, in varying circumstances, were brought together to worship, with the two choirs being a visible witness to the watching world;
- Sixth – The worship service ends with **GENEROUS EXPRESSION** (44-47) – in the light of God’s grace and mercy; in the light of all He had and would continue to do – the people’s worship extended to their possessions. With giving that was organised (44), specific (44), joyful (44) regular and universal (47) – the people gave to God’s ongoing work amongst them.

For further study:

Several names appear in the Nehemiah lists – it’s a good exercise to trace them through back to the Genesis narrative – just think how important this would have been for a previously disparate, reformed people – with the aid of a Bible dictionary perhaps – trace the following people back:

Perez (Neh 11:4), Judah (11:4), Benjamin (11:7)

What was the significance of the tribes of Judah & Benjamin?
(read 1 Kings 12)

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*