

Nehemiah: The Work is Done...Or is It?

REVIEW: We have been working our way through the book of Nehemiah. We have watched God break Nehemiah's heart for his homeland so that he dared to do what others may have thought was impossible: ask the king to rebuild. God was with Nehemiah, and the king granted his requested, and went over and above it. He gave Nehemiah troops, and horses to accompany him to Jerusalem.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he evaluated the situation, roused the troops, organized them, and started rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah faced opposition from outside Jerusalem by the surrounding provinces issuing threats and trying to discourage the workers. Nehemiah ignored the remarks, prepared for threats of violence and kept building. Then Nehemiah had to put a stop to a threat from inside the walls by his own people! The rich were taking advantage of the situation and exploiting the poor. Nehemiah pulled everyone together and reminded them of what they were really doing, and told them to give it all back - everything they took from the poor. And they did it!

Finally, last week we saw another threat from outside the walls, aimed, really at Nehemiah himself. They tried to buddy up to Nehemiah, but Nehemiah said, "No thanks, God has given me a greater task!" They tried to smear Nehemiah's name, and Nehemiah just said, "Ha, good one. You made that up. Back to work everyone!" They even tried to make him do something to bring shame to himself, and Nehemiah saw through their schemes and prayed for God to remember their wickedness.

INTRO: Today, we finally get there. The work is finally all done! The wall is built! Everything is taken care of for Jerusalem. Well, not quite. Just because you are safe from outside interference, does not mean that you have a thriving society.

Nehemiah 6:15-7:73

- I. Let's start by reading 6:15 - "So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days."
 - A. Think about what that says
 1. Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem just completed 1.5-2.5 miles of wall in 52 days
 - a) That is less than two months!
 - b) That is impressive by anyone's standard, even with modern equipment today
 2. And think of this as well
 - a) From the time Nehemiah first heard of the problem in Susa, until the completion of the wall

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- b) It was 9 months! That is amazing!!!
 - B. Now, look what it says in verse 16 - "When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work has been done with the help of our God."
 - 1. Do you remember what I told you a couple of weeks ago about what people thought in that day about Jerusalem lying in ruin?
 - a) Because Jerusalem was in ruins, and the Jews could not seem to get anything going to rebuild, it must be a reflection of their God - He must be pretty weak
 - b) Yet here it says that they lost their self confidence because they now realized that God was on their side!
 - (1) Yahweh is great again!
 - (2) Again, Yahweh never stopped being great - the people around them just stopped thinking of Him that way. But all that changes now!
 - 2. The other thing to notice here is Nehemiah is not taking credit for the walls being rebuilt
 - a) He is not even giving credit to the workers - they obviously did the work
 - b) He gives credit to God
 - (1) It would be easy for Nehemiah to hog the credit
 - (2) However, that is not who Nehemiah is - it is a core value to Nehemiah that God gets the credit because God is greater than Nehemiah
 - (a) That is the way Nehemiah lived his life
 - (3) Nehemiah was the complete opposite of Nebuchadnezzar
 - (a) Remember how Nebuchadnezzar walked around his gardens and said "Look what I have build by my power and for the glory of my majesty!"
 - (b) The Bible says, "While the words were still on his lips..." God judged him
- II. The confusion of 6:17-19
 - A. We have to admit that we do not completely know what is taking place in these verses (17-19)
 - 1. Obviously an exchange of information is taking place
 - 2. Some of these people may have felt loyal to Tobiah because they were related to him by marriage
 - a) It says that they were under oath
 - b) It seems as if this was some other kind of oath beyond marriage

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- (1) But family ties are obviously there too
- B. The nobles were talking Tobiah up, while telling Tobiah everything Nehemiah was saying
- C. Tobiah was attempting to in some way intimidate Nehemiah
- D. So regardless of the details, here are some things we can infer from what we are reading
 - 1. Tobiah, seemed to be influencing their thinking
 - a) The nobles may have been believing lies from an outsider
 - b) They are really betraying their country in working with an outsider, regardless of the reason or this bond
 - 2. This teaches us that, in this case, the bonds of human connection were stronger than the bonds of spiritual affection
 - a) So we can stand over these Jews and point the finger, but slow down and examine yourself first
 - b) Have you ever allowed human relationships to influence you more than God
 - (1) The Jews forgot that their first responsibility was to God
 - (2) They were in a sense, married to God before they were married to anyone else
 - c) Remember one of Jesus' extreme statements, "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."
 - (1) We know that it is not true that God wants you to not love or express that love to family - quite the opposite
 - (2) What Jesus is saying is "more than Me"
 - (a) With that in mind, have human relationships influenced you more than your relationship with God
 - (b) I read a quote on the day I prepared this message attributed to Voddie Baucham that read, "If I teach my son to keep his eye on the ball but fail to teach him to keep his eyes on Christ, I have failed as a father."
 - i) Kind of harsh - but in light of what Jesus said, true
 - ii) If your child's desire to engage in any pursuit
 - (1) And the pursuit may be honorable before God
 - iii) And you don't teach them to keep their eyes on Christ, you have been influenced by your child
 - (1) That family relationship was more important than training your child in the way they should go
 - (2) Here is the idea summed up: teach them both

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- E. A second lesson is that we need to consider the source before believing anything - especially about Christian leaders
 - 1. These letters back and forth were in some way trying to intimidate Nehemiah
 - 2. This may have been libel
 - a) Things taken out of context
 - b) Or things taken with a specific world view in mind - rather than a search for the truth about Nehemiah
 - 3. Regardless if it is a Christian leader, or someone else, don't believe it until it can be confirmed independently
- III. The rest of our time I want to walk through chapter 7
 - A. If you did a quick verse count that is 73 verses - don't worry, we are not going verse by verse this time
 - 1. Partly for the sake of time
 - 2. And partly for your poor Pastor's tongue - trying to say all those names is really hard
 - B. What Nehemiah does now that the walls are built is establish order for the city, so that society can grow and flourish
 - 1. If you recall from past sermon series, that is one of the purposes of man given to him by God
 - 2. Man is designed to establish order so that humanity can thrive
 - a) On the societal level
 - b) On the familial level - with his wife and children
 - c) And on the ecclesial level - with the church
 - 3. What follows is Nehemiah working to establish order on the societal level
 - C. His first step is to appoint leaders
 - 1. After the doors of the gates are hung, Nehemiah appoints gatekeepers, musicians and Levites
 - 2. He also makes specific appointments
 - a) His brother (we assume his actual brother, not just a fellow Jew) Hanani - he was in charge of Jerusalem
 - (1) Basically he was the Mayor
 - b) Hananiah became the head of the military or the chief of police
 - 3. What is really happening here is what every good leader should know - delegation
 - a) Before they had one main focus - rebuild the wall
 - b) It was much easier for Nehemiah to remain in charge over the one thing everyone was working on 18 hours a day
 - c) Now, Nehemiah knows he has to split up the work

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4. Not only did Nehemiah begin to split up the work, but he gave the people specific instructions
 - a) If you are going to delegate, you have to trust that the person is capable of doing the job you assigned them
 - b) To do that, they have to have clear instructions on what they do - a job description, so to speak
 - c) So Nehemiah gives instructions on when the gates are open, when they are closed, and who guards where
 - (1) We can assume that he probably gave out more job descriptions
 - (2) Scripture is often a summary of the actual statements made
5. This brings up a good point for us all - we may not be called to be a Nehemiah
 - a) Nehemiah has lead this endeavor all the way through
 - (1) Some of us may never have a call like that from God
 - (2) God may call us to be Hananis or Hananiahs
 - b) I think the same criteria that Nehemiah seemed to select these two men should be our criteria as well
 - (1) 7:2 talks about being a man of integrity and fearing God
 - (2) Dr. Bob Jones Sr. (the one the university is named after) used to say, "The greatest ability is dependability."
 - (3) Great advice
 - (4) No matter what job God calls you to, our job is to be dependable - to be people of integrity and fear of the Lord
6. Another message brought out for us is that if God's people don't protect what was accomplished for the Lord, the enemy will come to take it back
 - a) Anyone every seen someone profess Christ, and then not be followed up on, not disciplined and wind up even further from God than where they started?
 - b) I can name several institutions that began with Jesus Christ, but because they became unguarded by the true followers of Jesus, they are nothing more than formerly Christian
 - (1) Think Harvard (its started as a seminary)
 - (2) Think Princeton, and many others
 - c) Parents, you need to guard your children in the Lord
 - (1) There are influences too many to number that will come and take hold of your child
 - (2) You have to be as vigilant as you can
 - (a) And after you have been as vigilant as you can, you do one more thing

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- (b) You trust God - your children are God's on loan to you - He cares more about how they turn out than you do
 - (c) Do everything you can personally - and trust God for the results
- D. The second thing Nehemiah did was establish citizenship - 7:4-69
1. This is the bulk of chapter 7, and oddly we will spend perhaps the least time here
 2. One thing to recognize about all these names is that these people were the bridge from a broken past to a bright and promising future
 - a) God promised that one day the Messiah would come and reign
 - b) God had promised a bright future for the people of Israel, and to be able to prove one's citizenship in Israel is to make those blessings that God promised open to you
 3. So Nehemiah finds the record of genealogies which breaks down into nine groupings
 - a) The original leaders - v. 6-7
 - b) Jewish laymen - v. 8-38
 - c) The priests - v. 39-42
 - (1) The priests were responsible for the service at the temple
 - (2) They were descended from Aaron, the first priest of Israel
 - (3) David had the families split into 24 groups within the priests
 - (4) Nehemiah mentions only 4 - the thought is that the other 20 did not return
 - d) The Levites - v. 43
 - (1) They descended from Levi
 - (2) They were workers of the temple
 - e) The Singers - v. 44
 - f) The Gatekeepers - v. 45
 - g) The Temple servants - v. 46-56
 - h) Descendants of the servants of Solomon - v. 57-60
 - (1) They were similar to the temple servants
 - (2) They did the tasks like cut wood for the sacrifices to lighten the load of the Levites
 - i) Finally you have people whose ancestry is questionable - v. 61-65
 - (1) These folks were excluded from working in the temple because God was very specific about who could work in the temple and in what capacity
 - (2) Because their ancestry was in question, the choice was made to keep them from work in the temple until their case could be decided by a priest by the means of Urim and Thummim

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- (a) Urim and Thummim was a means of making decisions that the high priest would keep in the breastplate of his apparel
 - (b) No one is quite certain what they were exactly
 - (c) The best guess is some form of casting lots that God would speak through for making decisions
4. This genealogy or census ends with a listing of the total number of Jews
5. To most modern people, reading through this section is tedious and boring
- a) However, let me point out an application that seems to glare at us under the surface
 - b) If you had to prove your genealogy to get into God's city, could you do it?
 - (1) Put terms that fit the church age, if you had to prove you were a Christian, would there be enough evidence?
 - (2) Don't take this as, "That's pretty judgmental of you Pastor telling me I should have evidence of my faith. Faith is a private matter between me and God."
 - (a) True, your relationship to God is between you and He
 - (b) However, I can take you to numerous verses that say the same thing, "By their fruit you will recognize them"
 - (3) Is your faith bearing good fruit - is there evidence to let you into God's city
 - c) There will be a day when each of us stands before THE Judge
 - (1) There is no fooling this Judge
 - (2) There is no smooth talking, spin doctoring going on with this Judge
 - (3) This is the Judge of all the earth and the Bible says He will do what is right
 - d) The reality is, it is not your works that earn you a spot in heaven - it is not the fruits we are talking about that earn you your spot
 - (1) The fruits reveal what is already there - good or bad
 - (2) The only good we can muster is the righteousness that was given to us by Christ on the day we believed in Him
 - (3) So yes, inspect the fruit to see if it is good or bad - that is an indication of what is taking place inside
 - (4) But understand that the bottom line is, do you have the righteousness of Christ which comes through faith in Jesus?
- E. The final thing that Nehemiah did was to provide for the Temple, and encourage worship - v. 70-72
- 1. Here the people are giving to the Temple treasury

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- a) Remember that some of the wealthy families were in cahoots with Tobiah - so they may not have been happy about this collection
- b) However, not all wealthy families were in Tobiah's pocket
2. Assuming the NIV notes are correct (and for things like weights and measures it really is scholars best judgement) the amount of gold and silver that was given to the Temple treasury would translate into around \$17-18 million dollars today, not counting the bowls and garments
3. What Nehemiah is doing here is setting the Temple up to be able to carry on its work of ministry, and for further restorations

IV. The direction of Nehemiah

A. What we have seen Nehemiah do here, after getting the wall rebuilt is:

1. Establish key leaders for the city
2. Define the population for the city
3. Aid in getting worship up and running at full capacity for the city

B. So we see Nehemiah concerned not only with the wall

1. He knew that leadership must be established beyond himself
2. He knew that for the Jews to repopulate, you have to know who is who
 - a) What families do you have
 - b) Where are they, etc.
3. And the most distinctive of all for the Jews, worship of the One True God must be re-established with only appropriate Temple personnel leading

C. Nehemiah's thinking is long term

1. Making sure this city will go on
2. This is the mark of a brilliant leader - learning how to lead so that the work will out live you

D. Next week we see what happens when the people come together and hear the Law of Moses read - the revival that ensues and the worship of God