

NEHEMIAH'S STEADFAST HOPE (Neh. 7:1 - 8:6)

Nehemiah and his people have been devoted to their work! Despite Sanballat and Geshem's attempts from outside the city to hamper the progress, and those on the inside like Shemaiah and Noadiah, - spurred on by Tobiah, - the wall was successfully completed, with its gates securely in place. Jerusalem was protected as in former days and the achievement was accompanied with triumphant celebrations led by the doorkeepers, the musicians, and the priests (Neh. 7:1). Then, before leaving to report to the king in Babylon, Nehemiah handed interim charge of the city to his brother Hanani (v.2). He also made Hananiah the commander of the guard. The seventh chapter contains names and families of *some* of the 42,360 citizens of Jerusalem (v.66) and records how many of them had not yet built their own homes (v.4).

There are four brief observations from this chapter seven. *Firstly*, we see in the genealogy how essential is the role of individual people in God's plan. *Secondly*, God keeps accounts of how His servants serve. *Thirdly*, we are assured of God's keeping and sustaining work. *Fourthly*, the genealogy identified those who had the authority to serve as priests from those who had not, **Neh. 7:61** And these were they which went up also from Telmelah [*they came back with Zerubbabel*], Telharesha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer [*Babylonian towns*]; but they could not shew their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel ... **64** These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. ... And now the closing verse of chapter seven introduces us to the opening verse of chapter eight, **7:73** So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims [*temple servants*], and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities. **8:1** And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

Warren Wiersbe gives a helpful structure for the book so far, "What began with *concern* (ch. 1) led to *construction* (chs. 2-3) and *conflict* (chs. 4-7), and now it is time for *consecration* (chs. 8-13)".

And so, Ezra and Nehemiah gathered all the people to stand in front of a raised platform upon which was placed a wooden pulpit, and from there the Law of Moses would be read. This was the ancient document compiled about one thousand years earlier, and the people were about to be reminded of the importance of God's Word and how it never changes or loses its authority. ... It was good for the wilderness before their ancestors entered the Promised Land. It was good for when the land was distributed among them. It was good to be read in the magnificence of Solomon's temple ... and it was still good for Nehemiah and Ezra's generation. ... These men of God were putting the Word first in the life of their city for history had illustrated the danger when God's people drift away from loving, reading, and living by it.

Before we go any further, how important is it to focus in all our meetings on God's Word? Is it appropriate, or ought we by now in this twenty-first century to have moved on to something more contemporary? Why do we continue to read out of an ancient Book? ... At my ordination ('sending-out', 'commissioning'), my college principal emphasized Paul's words to Timothy, **II Tim. 4:1** I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; **2** Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ... He was telling me not to be a church administrator, or a comedian, or try to tell people what they want to hear, or anything else ... Simply, I was to preach the Word for *that* was my priority. ... And *that* is what Ezra was doing when he read the Scriptures to his people.

Notice how all the people gathered themselves together as one man (v.1). ... Here were different types of folk, from every strata of Jewish society and they were standing united together listening to the Word of God being read and explained. ... Nehemiah was there, and Ezra, and the rulers, alongside the craftsmen and the 'ordinary' workers ... In chapter, five dissension had been dealt with and now they were all standing together as one.

It reminds us of the words of the psalmist, Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Ps. 133:1) ... God has brought us here together in this fellowship to meet with Him as one people, as Paul explains, There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for *[we]* are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). ... What He did for *one* of us at Calvary, He did for us *all*. ... We are

united in Him and Paul entreats us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). ... This was the people of Jerusalem coming together *as one* to hear the Word of God!

Notice also where they met. Zerubbabel began building the temple in 536 BC, but it was not finished until 516 BC because of constant opposition. This meeting did not take place in the temple though, for the temple could not have contained them all (cf. 42,360, Neh. 7:66). Instead, they ‘gathered themselves together’ in the ‘street’, as in a wide and open area, like a plaza.

Look again at the purpose of their meeting, to listen to the Word of God. Ezra brought out the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel (v.1). ... The way that sentence is constructed could imply Ezra was explaining to the people the origin and importance of the Law of Moses. That is sad, *if* they had forgotten! ... But then, many Christians today are not as familiar with the Word of God as they ought to be.

Also, this could have been an occasion for a new government in Jerusalem to introduce its own legislation and decrees, to be ‘out with the old and in with the new’. But no, instead, out came ‘the book of the Law of Moses’, God’s Word, and *it* was read and confirmed as the foundation and ultimate authority for the nation once again. ... *God’s Word* which was reinstated. ... And here is something more ... Women were not usually mentioned in Jewish society (e.g. **Mt. 14:21** And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children), and yet how beautiful to see them included here, ² And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women ... How important both men and women together were listening to and learning from God’s Word!

But read on for it includes another important category of listener, ... and all that could hear with understanding ... These were the children, the young people, the future generations, listening with their fathers and mothers to the Word of God being read! ... They were not shuffled off to another area, but with their parents they were being taught as a family to hear His Word! ... How the modern Church has suffered by not following this example! ... “It’s too deep for the children. You can’t expect them to listen and behave. They need their own ‘church’” ... That is not how Ezra and Nehemiah taught! No wonder we are bereft of children in our congregations for we have lost the standards of teaching our children the way the Bible instructs, to worship together!

Gone are the days when mothers and fathers arose early to bring their children to the Sunday School before the service began, or in the afternoon, - it was an addition to their day but such was the commitment then to keep *all* of Sunday for the Lord! ... Nowadays commitment has been replaced by convenience ... We complain about how things are, but I wonder how much we have contributed to the dire spiritual state of our land. ... Ezra determined to follow the instruction in the Law of Moses, **Dt. 6:5** And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. **6** And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: **7** And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And all this was taking place in the street, reminding us how the Church is not a building made of bricks and mortar to be hidden away from view but, as Peter explained, it is constructed from the living members of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, a spiritual house, an holy priesthood (I Peter 2:5). ... And as Paul also wrote, **Eph. 2:0** ... Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; **21** In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto *an holy temple in the Lord: 22* *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

... It did not matter they were not meeting in Zerubbabel's temple ... but it *did* matter with *Whom* they met, and how. What a sound would have gone out from Jerusalem when Ezra begin to bellow God's Word ... Surely even the enemy outside the walls must have heard it! How horrified they must have been!

And finally, something else about where this congregation met, ... on the eastern side of the city, looking over towards the Mount of Olives, at the water gate, which was the next gate up from the fountain gate ... from which the water would have flowed. Zechariah prophesied the coming of the Messiah, **Zech. 13:1** In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. ... Jesus used similar symbolism when He addressed the woman of Samaria, **Jn. 4:14** whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. ... And it is accompanied with the promise, **Zech. 14:8** And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem ... **9** And the LORD shall be king over all the earth.

The word of God was again flowing into the hearts and minds of His beloved people in Jerusalem, - men, women, boys, and girls, - as they met together as one in the street. The enemy continued to lurk menacingly on the other side of the wall but on the inside, God's people were being prepared by God's Word.

Does it not illustrate the need for our present day? Previously, under Zerubbabel and Ezra, the rebuilding work was constantly hindered and stopped. The same obstructive mindset was relayed to Nehemiah also, **4:10** The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. **11** And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. ... Under Nehemiah, though, God restored the hope of His people, and His Word became their standard once more. Can God do it again? ... **II Chron. 7:14** If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.