

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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STUDY NOTES ON NEHEMIAH

Chapter 7: New Beginnings

We will see in Nehemiah 7 that the wall is finished, the gates are in place, and the doors are hung! So having finished the wall, Nehemiah gives Hanani and Hananiah charge of Jerusalem. He instructs them to keep the gates closed at certain times to prevent the enemy from entering. “Eternal vigilance” is the price of Christian liberty.

Opening (7:1-2).

After the wall had been rebuilt the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed. The singers and the Levites were there to lead the people in worship; the walls were not rebuilt so the people of Jerusalem could look at nice walls. They were rebuilt so they could worship God with greater glory and freedom than ever before.

Every victory in our life should take us deeper into praise. If we are not praising God more, and more deeply, with each passing year, are we really having much victory? Maybe we are making it through tough times - but coming out more bitter and sour than ever. That is not God’s victory. His victory leads to a sweeter spirit and to deeper praise.

Although Nehemiah doesn’t mention his brother’s qualifications, he does say that Hananiah was a man of integrity and he feared God more than most men do (v.2). For leadership to be godly, these two things must go hand in hand. Anyone who would be in a position of authority as a decision-maker must be both God fearing and a person of integrity.

Rules for the Gates and Guards (7:3).

Nehemiah instructed Hanani and Hananiah how to carefully use their new defences. The gates were not to be opened too early in the day, and the doors should be shut and bolted while guards were present. Attacks from the enemy would undoubtedly be sneaky, with an early-morning assault before all the people were awake and alert, or they would sneak in at night, just as the doors were closing. Either way, Nehemiah wanted them to give their enemy no opportunity. A tremendous victory had been won in the rebuilding of the walls. Yet, the walls would not protect themselves. Diligent watchmen must be appointed, and the walls had to be guarded.

In the Christian life, often a victory is won and later lost because there was no guard. An enemy may come in because we are not watching. Walls can be climbed if there is no one there to stop the enemy, but an enemy is easily turned back from a wall by a guard. That is

why the Scriptural injunction in Ephesians 6:10-18 is very helpful. We must put on the whole armour of God in order to withstand the devil's schemes.

Big City, Few People (7:4).

Although in Jerusalem's history, it had been a major population centre, since the return from the Babylonian captivity, there just weren't enough people living there. After all, who would have wanted to live in the city whose walls were demolished? For now, it was a big place with just a few people, but this problem will be addressed in chapter eleven. Nehemiah wanted Jerusalem to grow and prosper. But before that could happen he must first know who he had already. Just as when he toured the broken down walls in 2:11-16, he needed to know the problem well. So, he took a census and looked at the registry first written by Ezra in Ezra 2:1-70.

Enrolling By Genealogies (7:5-65).

God put it into Nehemiah's heart to enrol the people by their genealogies. Many of us find it hard to imagine the importance that the Hebrew culture placed on genealogy. But the family tree was to them just as important as the immediate family. Their identities were linked to the tribes they had come from, and going even further back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those from the tribe of Judah knew that their next son might be the Messiah. Those that were linked by genealogy to their father Abraham knew that the promises given to him and his seed applied to them as well.

Nehemiah found the book documenting the returning Jews that had been started about a hundred years before, as we read in Ezra two. If you take the time to cross-reference them, you will see that the book had been kept somewhat current, as changes were made when families grew or shrank.

Those Who Came First (7:6-60). The next 54 verses detail the Jews that returned to the land of Judah from the Babylonian Captivity. Although we won't be reading them, the information provided is valuable reference for Bible studies. This list flows beautifully after the completion of the work, because it reminds us that the work was really all about these people. The building work wasn't all that important; what was important was the benefit the building work had in the lives of God's people (teaching them to work hard, work together, work through adversity and attack, and work till the job is done and to enable them to live in peace and security).

Missing Genealogies (7:61-65). Some of those assembled could not show their genealogy. They couldn't prove that they were really Jews. Even some of those serving as priests couldn't prove their ancestry, and had to be removed from the priesthood. The Lord had very strict regulations regarding who served as priests in His temple. Those who were disqualified due to defects, however, were still allowed to eat the food set aside for the priests (Lev. 21:17-23). But being unable to prove their genealogical right to the priesthood, Nehemiah 7:65 "The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim."

Urim And Thummim: means "lights" and "perfections" or "reflections." They were kept in the breastpiece of the High Priest, and used for determining God's judgment or to inquire about God's will. Although we don't know the logistics of how this worked, or what they actually were, we do know that God ordained and even commanded their usage. Cf Exod.us 28:29-30. Until God made His will known about this issue, they could not take a chance on the sanctuary being defiled by someone who was not truly a priest of God.



Breastpiece of the High Priest

So the problem with Jerusalem was its under population that even those who were serving in the temple lived elsewhere.