

Nehemiah 7

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[0:00] Amen. Nehemiah chapter 7. I'm only going to read the first few verses of it is a repetition of what we find in the early pages of the book of Ezra which again just affirms the connectivity of these two books.

If you remember Ezra and Nehemiah are contemporaries of one another. Ezra arrives in Jerusalem some 13 to 14 years prior to the coming of Nehemiah.

Ezra was not the first to come back because there were people who came back some 70 to 80 years prior to Ezra at the issuing of the decree of King Cyrus. Ezra is the spiritual leader. He is the priest.

Nehemiah is a political leader but that does not mean that he is not concerned about spiritual matters and we will see that this evening hopefully. By the time we had finished Nehemiah chapter 6. Nehemiah has led the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the people around that area because Jerusalem is not very heavily inhabited. We'll see in just a moment to reconstruct the wall.

In 52 days they have rebuilt the wall and they have hung its gate. And it is prepared now. The city seems to be ready to go to be inhabited. We'll see that. But I want you to see this evening from the verses we will read and really what is recorded in the entire 7th chapter is a continued work.

[1:46] The word of God says, now when the wall was rebuilt and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed. Then I put Hananiah, my brother, and Hananiah, the commander of the fortress in charge of Jerusalem for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. Then I said to them, do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors. Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post and each in front of his own house. Now the city was large and spacious but the people in it were few and the houses were not built. Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials, and the people to be enrolled by genealogies.

Then I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first in which I found the following record and we will stop right there because starting in verse 6 is a repetition of the early chapters of Ezra chapter 2 really of those who came back after the issuing of King Cyrus all the way until the end of this seventh chapter. It is almost a word for word if not a word for word. Again there are some changes in numerical counting. If you were to be really picky in particular you would count it. If you were really into math you would add up all the numbers and say well it doesn't come to the total that he projects at the end because that does not mean that every individual is numbered out but the word of God founds consistency here. But I want you to see this evening a continued work. When we got into the book of Nehemiah we looked at this reality that if the work was just the rebuilding of the walls then we would stop. Nehemiah 6 would be the end of the book for the walls are done. The gates are hung. If all God was doing through the man Nehemiah was using him as a political leader he is governor of Jerusalem at that time. If his whole task and calling was to simply lead the nation and inspire the people who had been living among disrepair and rubble and all of the things around him and had gotten comfortable in their mess so to say. If all God was doing was using Nehemiah to stir them to rebuild the walls then his work is done. But there is a major portion remaining in the book of Nehemiah because the walls were just a part of the work. And the danger that we understand that we understand is in Nehemiah in our reading and interpretation of it because if I was to ask you tell me about Nehemiah you would say oh well he's the man that

God used to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem and I would say you're partially right. And you might know this because I've said this over and over to you again. He is also the man that is the first one to construct a platform on which someone stands and reads the word of God. The very first time we read in scripture that someone stands on a raised platform above a congregation of people and the word is read out loud to them. We call that preaching nowadays. It's found in the book of Nehemiah. It's Ezra reading it. It is also the book from which we get to practice that the people stand when the word of God is read. And it is also from that that we get to practice that they break up into quote-unquote small groups for the understanding and the comprehension. There is a lot that goes on in the book of Nehemiah besides simply reconstructing the wall. So I want you to see what does it look like to continue the work to understand in part just three things. We'll make our way through them very quickly because like I said I know we have a lot to cover tonight. The first thing I want you to notice is the purpose of Nehemiah. Work is determined by purpose and we've already said it. If his purpose was to rebuild a wall then his purpose has been fulfilled and Nehemiah can go back home, can go to the capital city of Susa, sip wine literally in the presence of the king and advise the king on political affairs and tell him what is right and what is wrong. Nehemiah does go back. He is there 12 years as governor. He goes back reports to the king and then he comes back to Jerusalem which should tell you something because his work was not just for a short period of time. We don't know how long the interval between him going back to the king and coming back is but we do know that his work is greater than the 52 days it takes to reconstruct the wall and we know that not because we have chapter 7 and everything that follows. We know that because in Nehemiah chapter 1 if you remember Nehemiah chapter 1 when Nehemiah first gets concerned about the wall it is not because he asked his brother concerning the wall of Jerusalem. What did he do? He asked his brother concerning the Jewish people who had left the captivity. Nehemiah's concern and his purpose were the people that were there and what he was burdened over was that there were people living in a city without a wall and that the people were comfortable living among the rubble that was screaming a testimony God does not like us because people were wagging the finger and shaking their head rather than saying God's favor rests upon us. So with reconstructed walls and a beautiful city and everything re-inhabited you say what does that mean? Well it's just like we've shared here before like it or not people's perception of how we view the Lord our God its first impression is when they drive by our building. That's just the way it is.

Statistically not that I'm a big fan of statistically but statistically most people have already made a judgment about the church about 95% of their judgment happens before they ever open the front door.

You do it subconsciously you do it I do it because that's just how we are. Now if we know the people inside there we may can overlook some external factors but if we're driving down the road I know I do it maybe just because I'm a pastor and you see a church that is not well kept that is really in a mess you say well that's what that's a dead church. Maybe it is and maybe it's not but that's how we pass judgment and that is exactly what's going on when the people around Jerusalem walk by Jerusalem and the walls are in a mess. What they are saying is the God that they claim to serve has forsaken them. So Nehemiah's concern his purpose is not the wall. It's the people who live inside the wall and the people that are affected because of the testimony of the wall. He asked concerning the people everything he does even in the seventh chapter says like what he says when the walls have been set the doors have been hung and all the things were there he appointed gatekeepers and singers and

[8 : 50] Levites and then he had Hanani his brother and Hananiah. I know the two names are very similar some Bible scholars will tell you that is the same individual but really we have to challenge that because in the very next sentence Nehemiah uses the plural form when he speaks of them so either he has bad grammar or it's two separate people and it's two separate people it's Hanani his brother and Hananiah whose name is very similar to his brother's name but is a different individual and I love why he chose Hananiah because it tells us he was a faithful man who feared God more than many. It's pretty good qualification right and he appointed them to be overseers of the city and to appoint guards and he told them don't open the gates until the sun is hot that is make sure everybody's awake before we open the gates why because there's a lot of people out there saying when it's dark they'll come and kill you and make sure you have people stationed on the walls. Why does he do all of that? Because of the people. His purpose is to raise up people. I say this because the temptation for every one of us as individuals and the temptation as a church is to get so caught up in the process and in the work we are doing that we forget about people.

I used to say it quite often and Carrie reminds me of it. People are more important than process which means if I have to change how I want to do something to serve people better people are more important than process. I get hung up I like for things to run smooth. I used to be really bad about it trying to start on time trying to make sure the only world I do that in is the church world but then I realized that what I was doing is I was cutting every conversation with people that I was having off to hurry up and do the process and so if I get hung up it's okay. That conversation and that moment is more important than me doing the process the right way but we have this tendency right to think well I'm here to rebuild the wall I'm here to rebuild the wall I'm here to rebuild the wall tonight we're here because we're going to look at the church calendar we're going to look at our church budget we're going to vote on giving some money from our budget and our mission fund away and we say we came to do that no we came to do that because every one of those decisions are connected to people. It matters. Our purpose matters.

Number two notice not only his purpose notice the passion that stirred his heart. It says then my God put it into my heart to assemble the people the priests the nobles and leaders and all the people then my God put it into my heart.

When we're reading scripture we understand that often and some people will tell you that in scripture they thought the seat of emotions was in your mind and your your decision-making was made from the heart and we said they kind of had it backwards they didn't really understand you know your body and they didn't understand how all these things work.

Sometimes I think scripture has it right because actually all the time I think scripture has it right because when we have something in our mind we can nod to heads and say nod to head and say yeah that's a good idea that should be done but it's not until it moves beyond our mind and into our heart and it becomes a passion of our heart will we actually do something about it. It has to be a passion of the heart something that stirs us beyond an intellect because there are a number of things that intellectually I can affirm and intellectually I can agree with and intellectually I can say yes we ought to be doing that but it's only those matters which grip our heart that we say yes I am going to do that.

[12:33] Even in your own life there are any number of things that appeal to your mind and to your intellect things that say this would be good for you to do this would be good and if you did everything that came into your mind you would not be doing much at all but you generally and genuinely do those matters which move beyond your mind and they stir your heart and it is put into your heart and now all of a sudden it becomes a passion and then you have to do it.

Scripture says there is a fire in our bones. Paul would say woe is me if I do not proclaim the gospel. Why? Not because intellectually he knew God had called him to preach the gospel. No because his heart was so moved with a burden to proclaim the gospel he beat his chest and says woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. I have to do it. We don't get to the have to until we get to the hearts.

In any matter of our life we have to get to a heart passion and say what moves me? What is it that I should do? What do I have? We would call that a conviction. Then the Lord my God put it into my heart to gather the people. So notice that Nehemiah is working according to his purpose. He came for the people according to his passion. God was stirring his heart to call the people and third and finally I told you we'd be quick tonight. We've got a lot to cover. There's the purpose of Nehemiah. There's the passion that stirs his heart and there's a preservation of the covenant people. There's preservation.

He says God put it into my heart to call the people together. Why did he call the people together? Not so that he can tell them hey look at the wall we built. They will do that later. Actually it seems to be this great interruption because halfway what he's doing if we want to finish the seventh chapter we get to the end of the seventh chapter Nehemiah has called everybody there and everybody's in the city and if we want to see what happens when he gets everybody in the city the actual genealogies and the record we have to go to chapter 11 and so the temptation is to connect chapter 8 I mean the end of chapter 7 to the verse verse in chapter 11 because it says now they were all in the city of Jerusalem but what happens in chapters 8 9 and 10 you might know that's where the revival is that's when he gets everybody in the city Ezra stands up and preaches and and so before he does what he is calling everybody together to do there's this great awakening because it got interrupted by the reading of the word and the broken heartedness of the people and the weeping and mourning and crying and all that and it's good again people are more important than process his process doesn't conclude until chapter 11 some scholars I've read say well that was interjected that was added it's it's an addition no I think Nehemiah genuinely stopped and said and while we were there after I got everybody there this happened and then we carried on with what I was going to do which is the preservation I'm glad he did it because it tells us that he does this and he found he called the people together to be enrolled by genealogies now to you and I that really does it matter a lot because genealogies aren't that important Braden brought a book home from the school library and it's about Leonard Calvert and I said hey man that's our family we'll bring the so we brought the family tree down and I showed him Leonard Calvert that's a direct descendant of our family it's really cool you know we have the genealogical knot I didn't do ancestry.com it's just I've had it since

I was a kid okay so I didn't ask the LDS to tell me where I came from I know from history books where we came from it's really cool we found out even more as he's reading the book George which is Leonard's dad was the secretary of state he was actually knighted by King James he was there in the court of King James until he fell out of favor with him because he was not Church of England but anyway he was there I always tell people you know my ancestors were there when the Bible was translated and I come found out they were I mean I didn't really I used to say it but they were but so the genealogies but the question is so what you know we don't we don't really have any of that we read in that book and it says that they called Leonard a blockhead and Braden says that must be why all the Calverts have big heads I said thanks son but other than that so what genealogies aren't really that important it doesn't change my life doesn't change my circumstances I don't have any of that wealth I don't have any of that prestige I'm still just Billy Joe

[16:57] Calvert from Ward Trace Tennessee it really doesn't change anything that book's not about me it's about someone so far back it's hard to trace to our family but here they matter because even then he finds the book in which it was written the genealogies of those who came back so twice we see it is the genealogies and I love what Warren Weirsby says about what the remainder of the seventh chapter says he says that these are the heroes of the faith like Hebrews chapter 11 because these in this listing these names are the people who left the comforts of the Persian Empire to come and live in an uninhabited city called Jerusalem all we know about them is they moved it's all we know but why is it important that they move and why is it important that Nehemiah is going to gather the people together so that he can enroll them by genealogies is because it absolutely matters in scripture every promise and every covenant of God is dependent upon the purity of the nation of Israel unless we know who they are we do not know that Jesus is the descendant of