

Bible Study of Nehemiah
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Nehemiah – ‘A Man who Prepared’ chs.7-8

No.7

When the Wall was finished (6v15) then the real work began.
What had been done had only taken 52 days, but what remained to be done was a life-time of work in careful and prayerful ministry.

Ch 1-6 were about Reconstruction - but what follows is Renewal of the Worship;
Re-emphasis of the Word - and Renewal of the Vows.
So after Construction came Consolidation ch.7 -and Consecration ch.8.

The Wall wasn't the end, but it was a means to an end. It provided the protection that the people required in which a relationship with God could grow.

Ezra had already been there 13 years as the priest-preacher in Jerusalem – but without the Walls to conserve what he preached there was little progress. Outsiders (non-believers) had infiltrated their ideas everywhere and consequently both the Worship of God and the Word of God were held in very low esteem. Many of the practices which were so readily accepted were dishonouring to God. They had grown up used to slovenly worship and a disregard of the whole truth in the Word of God.

It was Nehemiah's next priority now that the Wall was finished, to see a renewal of true Worship of God based on the Word of God.

1. A Renewal of the Worship - Read ch.7 vv1-3

The Walls alone would not keep out a determined enemy.
v1 – Doors were needed and watchmen – gatekeepers.
v3 -Also in addition to the guards at the gates, the people of the city were appointed to guard their own homes.

The enemy was still outside and his spies and collaborators were still inside. Both need to be watched carefully. Simply because one phase of the work has been successfully completed doesn't mean we are to relax either our effort or vigilance. Tobiah has ways of getting within the ranks of God's people - and he takes some watching because he is so plausible and clever.

Look at some of the measures that Nehemiah took to Re-establish the Worship.

Some were clearly spiritual – but others were immensely practical. It takes a balance of both to achieve a rich blend of worship.

Many problems in worship can be solved by good administration making the right decisions and putting them, into practice. They pave the way to a real experience of

spiritual things.

There are some things only God can do for us – they are the spiritual – and there are some things we have to do for ourselves. They are the practical things we have to arrange to make worship possible. E.g. it requires stewards ; musicians; promptness ; preparation – and preachers.

It was the same for Nehemiah –

i. Gatekeepers – stewards at the door

ii. Singers v1 – musicians to lead the praise.

iii. Levites - Deacons there to serve in the worship service

iv. Administrators – like Hanani and Hananiah to oversee the Fellowship.

These 2 men are described as ‘men of integrity who feared God more than most men do.’

Remember that Hanani was the man who first brought the trouble in Jerusalem to Nehemiah’s attention in Babylon ch.1 v2

All these things are within our own power to do in order to make it easier for ourselves, and others, to participate in worship and to be able to relax and be ready to hear God’s Word being preached and taught. There is no need for an atmosphere of constant disorder to attend a service called principally for worship. Things are to be done ‘decently and in order’.

It is not enough to rebuild the Wall and leave the gates unguarded. We must never be careless or casual about either our spiritual values or practices.

There is a dual principle involved here - Watchfulness and Worship.

Too much organisation can kill the spirit of worship – but we need just enough good organisation of ourselves so that we can be relieved of any anxiety and be able to relax in worship. So the appointment of Stewards, Musicians and Doorkeepers are important practical issues to aid our spiritual worship which God seeks. Nehemiah certainly thought so.

v2 – Administrators were appointed to govern the city.

Notice the qualifications of these men – they were more faithful and God-fearing than many.

Hanani who first brought the plight of the people in Jerusalem to the notice of Nehemiah obviously had the work of God and the welfare of the people much on his own heart.

Hananiah was made governor of the castle, which might indicate he was a man with a military background.

These 2 men had been in Jerusalem much longer than Nehemiah, and they could be relied upon to see that conditions prevailed to allow a recovery of all the splendour associated with the City of God. They knew that the physical ruins were there because spiritually the priesthood had turned away from serving the Living God.

These men of the Old Testament were like deacons in the New Testament – they were

servants of God – faithful men appointed to ensure that there was nothing to hinder the work of renewal and revival.

v3 – Nehemiah gave them clear instructions about the need for watchfulness – and having delegated the responsibility gave them the authority needed to carry it out.

Many have the idea that they can have authority without responsibility – but the end of that is Apathy. On the other hand, Responsibility without Authority leads to despondency.

You cannot have one without the other. The reason given for this additional watchfulness was because there were so few people living inside the wall and too many outside it.

v4 - there was plenty of room within the city, but who was willing to come and live there?

A modern counterpart to this situation applies in the church – there are too many outside it and not enough inside. So the few had to be watchful and ready to welcome anyone who wanted to come and fill the empty places within. Newcomers have to be made welcome if they want to live among God's people. They may bring new ideas and shake up some of our old traditions – but they must be welcomed.

v5 – A census was taken of all the people to identify who were truly God's people and who were not. Nehemiah had in mind certain necessary reforms and he wanted men and women he could trust to carry them through. Un-spiritual people will never be enthusiastic about spiritual things. He had chosen 2 men he could trust with Civil leadership and now he wanted similar men to take the spiritual leadership.

Sometimes God disapproves of counting heads, when we are only interested in the numbers and not the people these numbers represent. But in this case it was God who put it into his heart v4. The census showed the strength of the nation (as also in Ezra ch.2) The accounts may differ, because Ezra listed all who could have returned earlier and Nehemiah's list identifies only those who did.

We will not read verses 6-60 which is a list of many names, but in v61 a very serious situation is revealed. 642 people from the towns and villages around Jerusalem could not prove that they were true Israelites. Many of these were due to having been transported earlier from their own countries into exile in Judea – and some were the result of Israelites intermarrying with these non-Israelites. Tobiah is mentioned as one of them v62.

He keeps cropping up time and time again - yet he was an open opponent of Nehemiah and poured scorn and ridicule on Nehemiah and the work he was doing for God.

Men like Tobiah think that they can say and do what they like and get away with it.

Unfortunately, too often the people of God don't recognise the danger – or minimise it and do nothing about it. A man like Nehemiah is not so compliant.

v63 – even some who claimed to be priests could not prove their right or calling to be so – and even to this day we many men in the ministry who have no calling from God.

v65 – the Governor ordered that their stipend be cut and they were dismissed from the priesthood to which they should never had been ordained in the first place.

Nehemiah needed to be sure that every child of God was truly His and recognised as belonging to God – and also that every leader was consecrated to his service.

vv70 -73 indicate that now the stage was set for true worship to begin.

The priests, Levites, musicians and doorkeepers were in place.

v70 - the people had showed their devotion in giving of their wealth along with their lives.

Freewill offerings began to be one way in which God's people expressed their worship – the rich gave much and all the people gave their share as they were able.

All that was needed to complete the arrangement was the gathering together of the congregation to listen to the Word of God brought to them by a man called and gifted to preach. His name was Ezra.

2. A Re-emphasis of the Word - Read – vv1-8

Coming together to hear the Word of God is an important part of the worship and growth of both the individual believer and the church. We can never know the Will of God without the Word of God. What God want us to be and to do is to be found in his Word. The Word will direct us how to know the Will of God and how to co-operate with him to do it. This only comes through a deliberate submission to what God's Word says. It is not a matter of what we think - but of what God says.

The Open Word will lead us to the Will of God;

The Will of God will lead us into the Work of God;

The Work of God will mean the rebuilding of Walls and the renewal of Worship.

So an Open-air Convention took place almost spontaneously.

v1. says 'that all the people assembled as one man in the Square before the Water Gate.' I wonder if the choice of that Gate implies that a time of spiritual refreshment was to follow.

A Convention is the gathering of God's people around the Word, with the objective of hearing it explained, and then going away and doing what it says.

This is why The Keswick Convention in England has been the gathering place for over 125 years for the hearing and learning about God from His Word.

The people were hungry to hear. They told Ezra to bring the Word. For them this was the Pentateuch – the Book of the Law – the 5 books of Moses.

v4 – they made a platform for Ezra to preach from. Why is there a present trend to avoid using the pulpit – as though by standing on ground level helps the preacher get nearer the people. The people need to see as well as hear the Preacher.

The congregation had gathered in expectancy and was made up of men and women, and

children old enough to understand. cp v3c We are instructed in Hebrews 10v25 -‘not to give up meeting together as the habit of some is’ – Rather we are to take every opportunity of coming together to listen and learn from the Word of God . This is the only way in which we will learn more of the ‘God of the Word’.

We are to be hungry for the ‘meat’ of the Word, and not be satisfied with mere morsels and titbits. We should sit down to some sound, well prepared words from the Word.

So the people gathered – and the preacher mounted his pulpit and opened his Bible. He read from it and taught what it meant for 6 hours. v3 - from daybreak until noon (i.e. from 6am until noon) and all the people stood rather than sat down. Aren’t we so lucky as to be provided with soft seats in order to endure, or enjoy, a 10-20 minute sermon. We are not told whether the congregation grew hot and tired, but simply that they ‘listened attentively’ to the Word of God being preached. cp v3c
Not only were their ears open – but also their hearts.

At some point there was a break in the reading of God’s Word.
Also Ezra did not do all the reading himself – there were 13 others who helped in turn cp v7
They read and explained the Word as they went along so that people could understand.v8

Eventually the Preaching gave way to worship. v6
Ezra praised the Lord – the people all lifted their hands and agreed by saying AMEN – and then instead of standing they bowed down with their faces to the ground.

Preachers don’t expect to be applauded when they preach, but they are encouraged by an occasional AMEN - even if it only proves that not all the congregation have switched off, or gone to sleep.
Hands were lifted up in worship long before the present charismatic response in worship. Heads were bowed in reverence; and faces were turned to the ground in repentance.

Our physical reaction to the Word of God is very important as it is often an indication of how we are receiving spiritual blessing during, or after, the Word is preached..

The Service pattern was -
i. The Reading of the Word;
ii. The Worship of the Lord ;
iii The Sermon to explain the Word.

v8 - The Levites made it ‘clear and gave the meaning’ It was explained simply so that it could be fully understood and acted upon.

The effect was terrific. There was conviction followed by confession.
v9c – All the people were reduced to tears as they heard the Word of God.
I had such an experience at the Keswick Convention last year. Normally I take notes of things said by the Preacher which are relevant to me –but on that occasion as I listened to

the glory of the Gospel being taught from Romans I sat there in tears as I realised what God had done for me in Christ.

For those at the Watergate there was a sense of failure and sin. The Word ‘wounded’ the hearer - and the exposure of their sin caused sadness and tears. Does the reminder of ‘broken walls’ cause us to feel sad at the way we have allowed the Work of God to become ruins.? Do ruined Walls make you weep?

vv 9-10 Rejoicing only comes – but it will come – following repentance and forgiveness that result is a new relationship with the Lord.

Nehemiah saw it all happen. People flocking to hear the Word of God – and being challenged by it, so that they repented with tears. Then he stood up and gave them a thrilling message.

‘This is a Day sacred to the Lord – stop weeping and start rejoicing.’

We are brought low in order to be lifted up. We come to an end in order to have a new beginning. When the Word of God has a deep and profound effect on the people, then God can do something new with them.

The Word is like a ‘2 edged sword’ and it wounds in order to heal.

Nehemiah’s Message was – ‘ Enjoy the Lord’ v10c ‘ the joy of the Lord is your strength.’

What a joy the Word brings when we heed it and obey it. We have the joy of forgiveness.

We have joy which doesn’t depend on circumstances. They had joy in the ‘school of adversity.’

In God there is a place of calm in every storm; of quietness amid the noise; and serenity instead of panic and fear. ‘The joy of the Lord is our strength’ – and it should show in our words and way of living. Joyful people will show joy without showing the circumstances. They have learned to leave their burdens at the Cross.

v10 - Nehemiah was, if nothing else, a very practical man.

‘Get something to eat and go home – and prepare something for those who have less than you.’ v12 – says that they did as they were told – and went on to celebrate in great joy. WHY? Because they now understood through faithful preaching and teaching what God required of them. They understood the Word and were prepared to do what it said.

We should associate our God with Joy – and as we know it in the Gospels – with Jesus Joy.

Being part of God’s church is not something to endure – but something to enjoy.

v11 - the Levites calmed the people – ‘Do not be sad – but instead be glad.’

Read vv13-18

The Next Day – the leaders came for more of the Word.

By leaders it means – ‘Leaders of families’. Those who had families wanted to know more in order to lead their families in the right way. They came to know for themselves in order to teach others. They were to give attention to the Law; find out what it said in order to do it and teach others to do so by their example and obedience.

Here are some of the things that they found out –

v14 - The Feast of Tabernacles had not been kept since their deliverance from Egypt.

vv15-16 – So they re-instated the Feast at once and did everything as it was written in the Law.

It is by our obedience that we show just how genuine our desire is not only to Hear the Word – but to do what it says. We pay too much attention to our own preferences -and listen too much to the opinions of others - that we confuse our Will with God’s Will. God’s Will comes from the depths of His Word and not from the shallowness of our desires.

Obedience has one very positive result – v17c – ‘their joy was very great’

So for 7 days at the Convention the Word of God was preached – and the Will of God was revealed – and the joy of the Lord was experienced. This is the ground for Revival – a readiness to hear the Word of the Lord -and a willingness to obey it..

Because in doing so there is the Joy of Salvation we have only in the Lord our Saviour.

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