

ZEAL FOR THE LORD: NEHEMIAH 7:4-8:8

“...during the half-century that I have been a Christian [Nehemiah] has helped me enormously, more perhaps than any other Bible character apart from the Lord Jesus Christ...no one should wonder, therefore, that I now regard him as a particular friend.” - J.I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 29.

I. Review

A. Nehemiah stirringly calls the people to build the wall (“*The God of heaven will make us prosper...*”, Neh 2:20)

B. Representatives from surrounding nations (Sanballat [Samaria], Geshem [Edom/Moab], and Tobiah [Ammonite] taunt and malign Nehemiah and his work (“*For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.’*”, Neh 6:9)

C. Nehemiah’s instinct for prayer, strategic planning, and dependence on the Lord’s purpose propels the work ahead (“*But they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them, saying, ‘I am doing a great work and I cannot come down...But now, O God, strengthen my hands’*”, 6:2-3, 9).

II. “O No! More Names”: Nehemiah 7:4-65

The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. ⁵ Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it: ⁶ These were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried into exile. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town. ⁷ They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: ⁸ the sons of Parosh, 2,172...

⁴³ The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, namely of Kadmiel of the sons of Hodevah, 74. ⁴⁴ The singers: the sons of Asaph, 148. ⁴⁵ The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, the sons of Shobai, 138...

⁶¹ The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove their fathers' houses nor their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: ⁶² the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 642. ⁶³ Also, of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai... ⁶⁴ These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but it was not found there, so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. ⁶⁵ The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food until a priest with Urim and Thummim should arise. (Neh 7:4-65)

1. In his efforts to repopulate Jerusalem, why do you think Nehemiah chose to recite the list of original returnees from Babylon? How does this list relate to both their future task and past origins in encouraging ways?
2. What happened to the priests who could not trace their lineage to Israel? What does this teach us about their orientation to Mosaic law?
3. What is the prevailing opinion today regarding what the church’s future ought to be? What benefit can the modern church reap by remembering the past? Or is Nehemiah an old fuddy duddy who’s set in his ways?

The PCA is not a perfect Church, but it is a true Church of Jesus Christ: in her churches the Word of God is faithfully preached, the sacraments are administered according to the Bible, and loving discipline is exercised. The PCA is not the only work of God in this century, but it is one of the most significant. The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer, after addressing the General Assembly in 1982, exclaimed to Jack Williamson, “Do they know the opportunities they have?” “Do they have any idea of the challenge they face?”

- Taken from “The Presbyterian Church in America: A Brief History” by Paul G. Settle

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ² Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him.” (Is 51:1-2)

III. A REALLY Long Bible Study: Nehemiah 8:1-8

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. (Neh 8:1-8)

1. What does it say about Nehemiah that he is not found in this section? What does it say about God’s providence in using people? What can we learn from this?
2. What does the pulpit built here say about what was going on? What was the posture of the people (v. 3)? For how long?

“Live under the clearest, distinct, convincing teaching that possibly you can procure. There is an unspeakable difference as to the edification of the hearers, between a judicious, clear, distinct and useful preacher, and one that is ignorant, confused, general, dry, and only scrapeth together a cento or mingle-mangle of some undigested sayings to fill up the hour with.”

–Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, Chapter XIX (“Directions for profitable Hearing the Word Preached”)

3. Should we as God’s people long for days of extraordinary blessing like this? What do you think it would take?

*“The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church’s resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that *God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common.*” (my emphasis)*

– David Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, 30

“Above all set your hearts to the deepest contemplations of the wonderful love of God in Christ, and the sweetness and excellency of a holy life, and the certain incomprehensible glory which it tendeth to, that your souls may be in love with your dear Redeemer, and all that is holy, and love and obedience may be as natural to you. And then the practice of holy doctrine, will be easy to you, when it is your delight.”

–Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, Ch. XIX.