

## The Path to Restoration

### Guarding the Walls

#### Nehemiah 7

#### Introduction

*"The strength of walls depends on the courage of those who guard them."* – Genghis Khan

In Isaiah 58, the prophet writes, "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called repairer of broken walls, restorer of streets with dwellings."

In Chapter 7, the people have completed the work of restoring the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah now appoints security guards around the walls to protect the citizens of the city. He then focuses his attention on the spiritual restoration of the people. Spiritual restoration begins with authentic worship.

#### I. Worship Matters to God

Verse one tells us that worship matters to God. "Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he *was* a faithful man and feared God more than many." (Neh 7:1-2 NKJV)

The work on the wall is complete. The gates are in place. Nehemiah also assigns guard duty to the worship leaders. The wall passes inspection, and so Nehemiah appoints gatekeepers, singers, and Levites to begin preparing for worship. Not only did the wall provide protection, but it also gave the people the confidence to worship God in His temple with joy and freedom.

When the people finished the wall and hung the gates, they were able to step back and realize with awe and amazement how spectacular their achievement really was. They were ready to enter the temple with shouts of joy and praise to God. They wanted to worship Him for this incredible miracle. Heaven will be like that! Spontaneous praise will spring forth from our hearts as we celebrate the wonder and majesty of God! Every victory in your life should do that! Every miracle in your life should bring forth worship and praise to God.

The deeper the despair and trials of life, the greater the praise and rejoicing for God's deliverance. Some people survive tough times only to emerge more bitter

and sour than ever before. The victory of God is much different from that. God's victory leads you to a more profound spirit of worship and a joyful attitude of praise.

In verse 2, we also realize that character matters to God as well.

## **II. Character Matters to God**

Nehemiah was a revered leader, but he was also a very effective leader. Part of being effective is knowing when and how to delegate responsibility to other competent people. Specific administrative skills are necessary for effective leadership, but the main requirement is character. When Nehemiah finished his mission, he turned things over to Hanani. Nehemiah wasn't interested in receiving the glory. He had completed the work he came to do. For God to use him in a more significant way, he knew he must select capable people to oversee what he had already accomplished.

Hanani was Nehemiah's brother and the one who first told him about the sad state of affairs in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:2). Nehemiah says that Hanani and Hananiah were faithful men who feared God more than others. Their loyalty to God, along with their initiative and concern, made Nehemiah feel they were qualified to govern Jerusalem. He appoints Hanani as the civil leader of Jerusalem and Hananiah as the military leader. Their charge is to open the city gates when the sun was hot and bolt them and post guards in the evening. City residents were to guard their own houses.

Nehemiah mentions three essential character traits good leaders must have. The first is faithfulness. A faithful person is reliable, truthful, and firm. Nehemiah knew he could depend upon Hananiah and Hanani. They spoke the truth and followed through on promises.

Faith is a fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in us as we learn to depend upon God. The Bible teaches us to be stewards of the gifts and time that God gives us. Faithfulness is also essential to enduring relationships. Faithful people take responsibility. They aren't slackers! They get in there and do what was needed. They are an example of God's command to live a morally pure life that honors God.

Faithfulness is what causes a person to want to provide the basic needs for their family. Faithfulness is what causes parents to train their children to honor God and follow His ways? Faithfulness is what causes us to reach out to others in need.

The Bible teaches that faithfulness begins in the little things. Luke 16:10 says, "If you're faithful in little things, you will be faithful with much." In context, the "little things" Luke refers to starts with managing your money and resources God has entrusted to you. It includes making wise purchases, paying your bills on time, being honest about your finances, keeping your word, and keeping your appointments on time.

A faithful person sets proper priorities. Relationally they put God first, their spouse next, then their children, and finally their relationships with others. Faithful people also manage their time wisely. There are only twenty-four hours in each day. How much of it do you waste, and how much do you use wisely? Faithfulness is an essential quality of good leadership.

Another character trait Nehemiah emphasizes is a healthy respect for God. Hanani and Hananiah "feared God more than many." Many people today have no fear of God at all! Some may fear him a little, but those who know Him well greatly fear Him because they know what He can do! The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom - not the paralyzing fear that renders its victims useless but a healthy reverence and respect for God. The Apostle Paul said, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, I persuade men!" When you realize how awesome God is and who you are in comparison, all you can do is pray His mercy will be great! We cannot presume upon the grace of God; we can only be grateful for it.

A third character trait Nehemiah looks for is watchfulness. In Chapter 4, they built the wall with the sword in one hand and a trowel in the other hand. In Chapter 7, Nehemiah posts guards and gives careful instructions on how to secure the city. Yes, they trusted in God, but they also set up a watch. That's some good advice we also need to take to heart. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1Pe 5:8 NKJV)

Watch out for the pitfalls Satan tries to use to defeat you. He is always at work, tempting us to fall into sin. Married couples need to be alert to the dangers that destroy marriages. Parents need to be alert to the dangers that could destroy their children. Church leaders need to be alert to the dangers that could damage God's flock.

Sometimes the most critical moment to be on guard is following a success. It's always a temptation time to let down your guard. So, in verse 3, Nehemiah said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand *guard*, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house." (Neh 7:3 NKJV)

God had given Israel a tremendous victory. They rebuilt the walls in record time. But the walls alone will not protect you. It takes diligent watchmen to guard the walls. The gates were to be opened late and closed early – they were on high alert! A victory can be won and then lost because the victors let down their guard. The enemy comes in because we are not watching. You can't stop the enemy if you're not guarding the wall.

They finished the walls, and the gates were in place. It would have been easy to forget about walls and just start celebrating. But that's when we need to be especially careful. The enemy often hits right after a victory. And he loves to hit you in your own home. Nehemiah instructed that each person stand guard in front

of his own house (7:3). Do you guard against what movies and TV shows you allow in your home? Do you guard what you're viewing through the internet on your home computer or smartphone? Do you take caution if your child plans to spend the night at a friend's home? Do you check out their plans and find out who is supervising? Do you regularly instruct and warn your kids about the dangers of life and how to call if they need help?

Character does matter to God! And what you say is never as powerful as what you do! Whether you realize it or not, someone is always watching you. Certainly, God is watching, but there's always someone else who is taking notice too. How we live affects other people, and every person matters to God! Faithfulness, a healthy respect for God, and remaining watchful are key character traits that protect God's investment in you! Worship matters to God; character matters to God, and so do people!

### III. People Matter to God

Nehemiah sees the need to populate and develop Jerusalem. So he compares a list of the returned families that Ezra had made with a list he compiles. Verse 4 says, "Now the city *was* large and spacious, but the people in it *were* few, and the houses *were* not rebuilt. Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first *return*, and found written in it:" (Neh 7:4-5 NKJV)

Since the walls were rebuilt, Nehemiah looks to see how he can further bless the people. From a historical and spiritual perspective, Jewish genealogy records were important. When the Messiah came, they believed it was necessary to prove that He descended from Judah's tribe and David's lineage.

But it also reveals how important each individual is to God. These names may be hard to pronounce and may not mean anything to us, but they obviously mean something to God. God knows you by name. The fact that people matter to God means they should matter to us too.

Nehemiah's list also contains many family groups. While each individual is important to God, so is each family! The family is the basic unit of society. The family is also a fundamental building block of the church. The church is only spiritual when the families in that church are spiritual.

Nehemiah noticed that the population in Jerusalem was sparse, and there were many abandoned houses. So God gave Nehemiah a plan to repopulate the city. In Chapter 2, we saw that Nehemiah toured the broken down walls before he began the task of rebuilding them. Once again, he wants to get a handle on this problem so, he takes a census and compares it to the registry first written by Ezra in Chapter 2.

Verses 6 through 73 lists the citizens who returned from the Babylonian captivity and were now living in Jerusalem. Verse 6 says, "These *are* the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city." (Neh 7:6 NKJV)

What follows is a lot of names to read! But this list is vital because each of these families was considered by God to be families of faith. They did what so few of their fellow Jews did; they returned to the Promised Land after they had already set down roots for seventy years in the Babylonian empire.

These people had a pioneer spirit. They were willing to endure hardship and discomfort because they believed in God and Abraham's legacy and the Covenant of Blessing! The call to follow God was more desirable than their own comfort. Certainly, life was more comfortable in Babylon, but it was far better in Jerusalem! Only about 2% of the Jews who were carried away into exile by the Babylonians ever returned to Jerusalem. The ones mentioned in these verses were the ones who came back. They are the ones with the pioneer spirit, and they are the ones God considered worthy of mention not just once but twice in scripture! (Once in Ezra 2 and here in Chapter 7)

As Christians, our physical lineage is not nearly as important as our spiritual heritage. As Christ-followers, we have been born spiritually into God's family through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And there should be some evidence of that in your life.

God does keep track of names and people! He does have an eternal Book of Remembrance with the names of all the faithful followers and pioneers of faith! The critical question is, "Is your name in that book?"

Nehemiah's list provides us with several important observations. People of faith are important to God. He identifies the names of specific persons and has Nehemiah record them here. Families are also important to God. Each family's head is mentioned, but every family member who came with him received credit for having faith in God.

And, of course, God also records the gifts they gave to support the work. The Bible says that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also! If you want to rank the priorities in your life, just do an inventory of how you spend your money. God also records the gifts of those who love him! The people on this list who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem could easily have stayed in Babylon. Their families had been there for several generations. They were established and comfortable there. It couldn't have been easy to pack up and travel hundreds of miles across hostile territories to a land ravaged and devastated by war. But they believed in God's promise to their forefather Abraham that this land belonged to them.

God said that His name would dwell in this temple and in this city, as a glory to all the nations. These pioneers believed that! They understood and committed themselves to God's purpose, even though it meant hardship and difficulty.

## Conclusion

God has also called us and given us spiritual gifts and material resources to use to make His name glorious. When we commit ourselves to God's purpose, our name is recorded in His eternal book of remembrances.

There is no greater reason to live on this earth than to live for God's purpose! You are unique and important to God. God has a plan and purpose for your life. Nehemiah 7 says some were priests; others were gatekeepers; some were singers, and some were temple servants. Whatever your role is, it is important to God.

Jim Elliot was a sold-out Christian who was one of five missionaries killed while participating in Operation Auca, an attempt to evangelize the Huaorani people of Ecuador. He was just 28 years old when he was martyred for his faith. Before his death, he wrote these words in his diary, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to keep what he cannot lose."

God wants each of us to discover the purpose for which we have been created and commit ourselves fully to become all that God wants us to be. Commit yourself to the eternal things that matter to God - to praise and worship, to developing character, and helping people!

Building walls was not God's primary focus! God wanted to bless them because of their faith in Him. The project of building the walls brought the people together and unified them in purpose and service. Completing the task enabled them to live in peace and security. In Wall Building 10, they learned to work hard, work together, work through adversity and attack, and work till the job was completed. Those are the essential ingredients to experience on the path to restoration.