

Chapter Seven

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS

1. Why do you suppose Nehemiah appointed his brother to an important government post?
2. Who else besides his brother was appointed?
3. How thickly was Jerusalem populated at this time?
4. Why did Nehemiah stress that God put it into his heart to take a census?

OUTLINE

- G. Nehemiah finds the list of the first exiles to return.
1. Nehemiah makes arrangements for the continued defense and administration of the city (vss. 1-4).
 2. He retraces the genealogies of the first returning exiles (vss. 5-73).

TEXT AND VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENT

- G. Nehemiah finds the list of the first exiles to return.
1. Nehemiah makes arrangements for the continued defense and administration of the city.

TEXT, 7:1-4

- 1 Now it came about when the wall was rebuilt and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed,
- 2 that I put Hanani 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.
- 3 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."

- 4 Now the city was large and spacious but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.

COMMENT

The occasion for Nehemiah's activity was probably his anticipated return to his duties in Persia. Since the purpose for which he had come was now completed, he could return things to the hands of the permanent residents.

Verse 1 speaks of the appointing of gatekeepers; we seldom read of these in the Bible, but we know they were there. These were times when their work was especially important.

Levites and singers are also mentioned, probably to help man the watchtowers, since the population of the city now consisted of such a disproportionate number of temple personnel.

Verse 2 records two personal appointments. Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, who had alerted him to the problem at the book's beginning (1:2), was one, and Hananiah, a military leader known for his religious profession and consistency, was the other.

Verse 3 bespeaks the continued tension in the city; the gates were not to be opened until the citizens were well awake and active, rather than at the first rays of dawn. The doors were not to be shut only, but bolted for security, as in times of active threat. Sentries were to consist of security police and a citizen patrol.

Verse 4 is another reminder that the city's greatness in the past far outstripped the present. There was still a need for restoring more of the houses for the residents and for prospective growth.

2. Nehemiah retraces the genealogies of first returning exiles.

TEXT, 7:5-73

- 5 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:

- 6 These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city,
 - 7 who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.
- The number of men of the people of Israel:
- 8 the sons of Parosh, 2,172;
 - 9 the sons of Shephatiah, 372;
 - 10 the sons of Arah, 652;
 - 11 the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818;
 - 12 the sons of Elam, 1,254;
 - 13 the sons of Zattu, 845;
 - 14 the sons of Zaccai, 760;
 - 15 the sons of Binnui, 648;
 - 16 the sons of Bebai, 628;
 - 17 the sons of Azgad, 2,322;
 - 18 the sons of Adonikam, 667;
 - 19 the sons of Bigvai, 2,067;
 - 20 the sons of Adin, 655;
 - 21 the sons of Ater, of Hezekiah, 98;
 - 22 the sons of Hashum, 328;
 - 23 the sons of Bezai, 324;
 - 24 the sons of Hariph, 112;
 - 25 the sons of Gibeon, 95;
 - 26 the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188;
 - 27 the men of Anathoth, 128;
 - 28 the men of Beth-azmaveth, 42;
 - 29 the men of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743;
 - 30 the men of Ramah and Geba, 621;
 - 31 the men of Michmas, 122;
 - 32 the men of Bethel and Ai, 123;
 - 33 the men of the other Nebo, 52;
 - 34 the sons of the other Elam, 1,254;
 - 35 the sons of Harim, 320;
 - 36 the men of Jericho, 345;
 - 37 the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, 721;

- 38 the sons of Senaah, 3,930;
- 39 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973;
- 40 the sons of Immer, 1,052;
- 41 the sons of Pashhur, 1,247;
- 42 the sons of Harim, 1,017.
- 43 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, 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.
- 46 The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,
- 47 the sons of Keros, the sons of Sia, the sons of Padon,
- 48 the sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagaba, the sons of Shalmal,
- 49 the sons of Hanan, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar,
- 50 the sons of Reaiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda,
- 51 the sons of Gazzam, the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah,
- 52 the sons of Besai, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephuseshim,
- 53 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,
- 54 the sons of Bazlith, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,
- 55 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,
- 56 the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatipha.
- 57 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Perida,
- 58 the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,
- 59 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Amon.
- 60 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants, were 392.
- 61 And these were they who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses or their descendants, whether they were of Israel:
- 62 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 642.

- 63 And of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them.
- 64 These searched among their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.
- 65 And the governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim.
- 66 The whole assembly together was 42,360,
- 67 besides their male and their female servants, of whom there were 7,337; and they had 245 male and female singers.
- 68 Their horses were 736; their mules, 245;
- 69 their camels, 435; their donkeys, 6,720.
- 70 And some from among the heads of fathers' households gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments.
- 71 And some of the heads of fathers' households gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas, and 2,200 silver minas.
- 72 And that which the rest of the people gave was 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas, and 67 priests' garments.
- 73 Now the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel, lived in their cities.

And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.

COMMENT

Most of the remainder of this chapter is a repetition of material in Ezra 2, and therefore will need no further comment. Some additional differences beyond those noted there will be observed.

Verse 5 explains the situation which brought the genealogical records to light. Probably with a view to increasing the population of Jerusalem, Nehemiah was led of God to initiate a census

of the land. His emphasis on the Lord's leading may be explained if he was familiar with David's experience, arising out of pride, in II Sam. 24. In the course of these preparations he ran across the public register of those who had come with Zerubbabel, almost a hundred years before. These would be useful as a beginning point, as a means of comparison, and as a tool for exerting pressure to maintain or increase the population of the city and province.

Verse 6 begins the repetition of Ezra 2. Slight differences in spelling and the addition of the name of Nahamani have already been noted in Ezra 2. This additional name was on the genealogical list which Nehemiah consulted, and brings the number of men who had led the returning expedition to twelve. This parallels the first chapter of Numbers, where twelve men had been chosen to share leadership with Moses in bringing Israel to the Promised Land. They must have thought of themselves as their spiritual descendants, making a new beginning for Israel as much like the old as possible. However, Nehemiah's list does not identify each name with a specific tribe. This is another step toward the principle frequently observed in the O. T., and expressed by Paul in Rom. 9:6-8, that descent from the right forefathers is not only insufficient but also unnecessary. Some further comment on the change from Rehum (Ezra 2:2) to Nehum (Neh. 7:7) may be excusable. The letters N, L, and R are somewhat interchangeable in Hebrew; a familiar example is the spelling of Nebuchadnezzar and its variant, Nebuchadrezzar.

There are two words using these letters, which portray one's heart going out to another. One, Naham, means "comfort"; the other, Raham, means "compassion"; the distinction in meaning is rather small. Do you suppose that Nehemiah, in running across the name, Rehum (note the consonants only), may have recognized a variant spelling of the first component of his own name, and consciously or unconsciously spelled it like his own? We emphasize, many of these names were spelled correctly in more than one way.

In addition, there are several discrepancies in the number of people in various groups (example: sons of Arah, 775 in Ezra 2:5, in Neh. 7:10, 652. One suggestion is that Ezra quoted Babylonian

sources relative to those who planned to come; Nehemiah, with the Jerusalem records before him, those who actually arrived.¹ However, Nehemiah mentions one person, Nahamani (Neh. 7:7) whom Ezra doesn't list. Perhaps he made up his mind to go at the last minute! Also, the total would be expected to be less in Nehemiah if this were the case; but the total is identical (47,360 in Ezra 2:64 and Neh. 7:66). We suggest the possibility that some individuals may have been related to two clans and could be counted under either. The absence of one man's name, further, could be accounted for in that neither list claims to be complete.

The largest difference is in the list of materials: Neh. 7:70ff cf. Ezra 2:68f. But perhaps both lists are partial, and each author decided to include what impressed him.

The last part of *verse 73* has no parallel in Ezra. It really belongs topically with chapter 8 since it anticipates these events, and gives the date (seventh month, our September or thereabouts) when they began.

SUMMARY

Now Nehemiah appointed leaders to carry on the city's affairs, apparently in preparation for his return to Persia. The gates were not to be opened in the morning till it was safe; and were to be bolted when shut. Guards were posted on the wall and throughout the city.

Nehemiah sought to increase the number of the city's residents; he found the genealogical list of the first returnees from 91 years before, originally recorded in Ezra 2. This would be helpful in tracing down the present population. The remainder of the chapter duplicates this list, with some variations.

WORD STUDIES

HANANI and HANANIAH (vs. 2): these names are, as you can see, identical except for the ending which means "Jehovah" on the end of one of them. The base, represented by the first two consonants, means "grace, favor, kindness." Add another letter

1. Luck, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

and it becomes "bend, bow down, incline"; bowing is an act of graciousness. Add a different letter and it becomes, "incline, be favorably disposed, be gracious, merciful, compassionate." Nehemiah's brother Hanani's name then comes out, "Gracious"; the commander's name, "(Whom) Jehovah has graciously given."

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What precautions were taken regarding the gates?
2. How did Nehemiah run across the genealogical list included here?
3. Where else in the Bible is the list substantially recorded?