THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

"Appointment for Service"

Nehemiah 7:1-4

Introduction

1. It is a truism that God's work done in God's way will never lack God's blessing. Yet, rest assured that God's work will never lack opposition. All sorts of problems, frictions will plague the true testimony of the Lord. A spiritual warfare is ever present. Count on it!

2. A positive spiritual leadership is required at all times in the Lord's work. While wonderful goals may be reached in the work, it must ever be assumed that vigilance is always a priority. What appears to be a reached goal is in fact the commencement of more work! Moreover, what is recorded here is " written for our learning" (1 Cor. 10:11).

3. Consider Nehemiah's leadership and oversight of the nation. It included:

1. PREPARATION v. 1

a. Accomplishment

Two specifics are recorded as having come to pass: 1) The "building" of the walls. 2) The "setting up" of the doors. Only God knows how much is represented by these few words. Note: The walls connote separation to the Lord and from the world. The doors denote admission to privilege and exclusion of the unwanted. Consider these matters concerning doctrine, fellowship and practice. Surely godly care is in order among the saints. Eternal vigilance is the price of purity and unity in an assembly (and our homes!). Read again 6:15-19 and allow those matters to grab your soul!

b. Appointment v. 1

1) Porters The verb "appoint" is variously rendered as "visit, fall upon," or "give oversight." The porter is in fact the "gate-keeper." True the building of the wall and gates (cf. 6:15) was not the end of the job. Now a watch had to be set. This is the business of the porters. They acted as watchmen permitting only these for ingress who could evidence their right so to do (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 John 10, 11). The porter must be a person who is discreet and cautious to perform his duties. Sentimentality must not be allowed to erode godly holiness and separation in fellowship. Protection against treachery of whatever sort is necessary.

2) Singers v. 1 Surely the spirit of praise gives glory to God and brings blessing. In Israel singers were a distinct group, separated from the people. But the N.T. does not contemplate a choir – surpliced or otherwise – to lead the praises of the congregation, hence no N.T. evidence of "praise and worship teams." All believers are the choristers (cf. 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19, 20; Col. 3:16, see Ps. 105:1-4). Orthodoxy without a song may become a dirge. Musical emotion without solid doctrine is a questionable spiritual exercise.

3) Levites This is the third class mentioned. The Levites are the ministering servants in the O.T. Service was limited to one tribe. Today in the N.T. (cf. progressive revelation), all are servants, albeit each one has his own work (cf. 1 Pet. 1:17; Ro. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11). Nonetheless, it is admitted that some are gifts to the church for edification (Eph. 4:11, 12). Only God knows these so equipped and one's gifts will make room for him (Prov. 18:16 cf. 25:14).

NOTE: Review the three appointments: a. Porters for the protection. b. Singers for the praise. c. Levites for the service.

2. INSTRUCTION v. 2

a. Designations

Two men are charged to the administration of Jerusalem: 1) Hanani who was Nehemiah's brother (cf. 1:2). His name means "gracious." 2) Hananiah means the "LORD (Hashem) is gracious." He was governor of the palace (cf. 2:8).

b. Explanations

Since the third person singular pronoun is employed, the two characteristics qualifying Hananiah for his part in administration are significant. He not only had professional competence (faithful man) but devotion to God (he feared God above many) i.e. he was head and shoulders over others. Such qualities are priorities with God!

3. INJUNCTION v. 3

a. Negative

The gates were not to be opened until the sun was fully up. Moreover, they were to be closed while the guards were still on duty. With a sparsely inhabited city, this command is understandable so as to control suspicious persons.

b. Positive

In addition to the special workers (v. 1) and the credentialed administration (v. 2) a citizen's patrol was appointed (v. 3b). No one just lived in Jerusalem. Everyone was marshaled for protection and everyone watched his own house.

NOTE: All of this is instructive for our assemblies today (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:11, 12).

4. FRUSTRATION

a. About the City

Nehemiah complained (happily) that the city was large on every side (Hebrew: a hand strength). It is also described as "great." May have been as much as 260 acres. This posed problems. Bigger is not always better. In any case, the city was properly defended, but poorly populated. This accounts for the census (vv. 5-67).

b. About the People

As indicated above the residents of the city of Jerusalem were very few. In view of the sad conditions, many did not want to be there. This is similar to the people of God today. If circumstances are not just right in the assembly, few want to hold the ropes (i.e. stay with the stuff)!

c. About the Houses

This is interesting – walls up, gates built and protected, but no houses. Nehemiah is pointing out the general apathy in the city. There was need for an energetic excitement for God and His city.

Conclusion The laborer with the Lord will never find a time for absolute rest this side of Glory. There is always a challenge for forward growth and progress. The job is laid out before us until He comes. Christianity does not entertain stagnation, but growth (2 Pet. 3:18).