

Nehemiah 6:15-7:73 Completion & Consolidation Fintry, 20/3/2011, pm

- Read Nehemiah 6:15-7:7

Introduction

- Climax to narrative of first half of the book - completion of the walls
- In face of original apparently hopeless situation; in face of opposition; in face of injustice locally - **the work of rebuilding the walls has been completed**
 - (and in record time! 52 days - 7.5 weeks, 2 months)
- Perhaps surprising what we find in the account next - no immediate celebration or dedication (that comes in chapter 12)
 - neither do we have an **end to the opposition** - no "and they all lived happily ever after"!
- Rather, bulk of chapter 7 is a list of names of those who came back in the first return from exile, around 100 years before (copy of the list Ezra 2, modulo copying errors)
- List is presented in the context of a registration, a kind of census, of the people
- **What, then, is going on here in Ezra 6/7?**

Completion and Consolidation

- I was intrigued that the last time I preached on this passage was in March 1997, while on probation in DMPC, and shortly after the stated annual meeting!!
 - for the congregation of DMPC one of the themes was **consolidation**:
 - **they'd completed a hall redevelopment, a youth worker had been employed, they were getting going into outreach into their community...** lots of long-term plans were really getting going
- So there were obvious **parallels** with the situation Nehemiah and Jews in Jerusalem were facing in the passage we are looking at:
 - they have just finished a building programme that has stretched them;
 - that programme has not been without its difficulties, the hard questions it has asked of those involved;
 - they have identified the need to consolidate the good work that has gone before in the security and other arrangements they make
- I think it would be helpful if we spent just a little time "unpacking" some of these elements, and learning from the way Nehemiah approached the task he and the people faced before God

God's Work brings Glory to God

- v.16 - **glory went to God, not Nehemiah**
- Great extent of opposition (see 4:7 - encircled) brought greater glory to God!
 - whatever stage of work we happen to be at - perhaps particular when previous ground breaking is consolidated - we need to **guard against bringing glory our way**
- In DMPC lots of people came into the newly redeveloped halls and said "this is great"
 - all too easy to bask in the admiration for the halls, for the busy active congregation, for the good teaching, even for people being helped by the Reception Area, whatever...
 - for us it may currently be round our financial situation, or seeing new people come around the congregation...?
- **Lets resolve to give glory to God for what he is doing**, and set our priorities in that same way - to bring glory to God

Success will never see the end of opposition

- **vs.17-19** - despite failure of plans to halt rebuilding, **opposition & difficulties persisted**
- Focus shifts from Sanballat, the outsider, more or less thwarted, to **Tobiah**, who with Jewish connections (by marriage and trade) sought to carve out a position of influence - without changing his priorities

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- later in the book we'll find that Tobiah continued to be a thorn in Nehemiah's flesh, working in opposition to God's ways, for many years - room in the temple, (13:4-7)
- Same principle - we'll continue to face discouragements, difficulties, even opposition - it comes with the territory!
 - Jesus said we'd face all this - see, eg, Mark 13:9-13, Matthew 10:34-39
- Without being masochists, we should almost be suspicious if Satan does not try and divert us away from the plans God has for us - often through direct opposition, from within as well as without

Success needs proper consolidation

- Nehemiah was acutely concerned that what had been completed should not be lost
 - he starts by appointing gatekeepers to guard the gates - counter against terrorist attacks - large city, sparsely populated (7:4), probably easy for raid to go undetected for a while!
 - that probably explains the extra-precautions taken in v.4 (Hebrew unclear)
- Nehemiah also sets out the priorities for the consolidation by also appointing worship-related workers - the singers and Levites
 - priority for God's people should always be His worship
- We too need to ensure our consolidation is of God:
 - consolidating what he has called us to and not our own empires
 - and never neglecting, but continually building up, the worshipping life of his people

Success requires Godly leadership

- One particular aspect of the consolidation was the appointment of leaders
 - Nehemiah probably had wider responsibilities - could neglect for 52 days, but not for much longer
 - perhaps he had to back to Artaxerxes and report on progress - needed a strong hand at the wheel while he was away!
- Kind of leaders - integrity and godly - feared God more than most men (v.2)
- So for us - for elders, and for all called to different leadership roles:
 - competence is less important than godliness

Success doesn't mean the end of the work

- Success doesn't mean the end of the work
 - this is implicit in appointment of godly leaders
 - but more explicit in the bulk of chapter 7
- Nehemiah had not simply come to restore walls, but to build up God's people
 - walls were a critical first phase in that
 - but couldn't stop there - when you stop growing, you start dying
- So v.5 - registration, census
- Why? Check against genealogical records from first returnees, 100 years before
 - to establish Jewish identity
 - why? In chapter 11 we see the population of Jerusalem "beefed up" by one-in-ten of the surrounding population
 - without an accurate census, impossible to sort out who should go into Jerusalem
- Groundwork for next step
- This further re-establishment of Jerusalem, widening the restoration of God's people, was the next stage in what God had called Nehemiah to do
 - while we need to consolidate - and do it well, giving glory to God always, expecting opposition, promoting Godly leadership and priorities - we must never tire of looking and working forward to where God wants to take us next
- At any given point we may be consolidating - but lets not get stuck consolidating