



# Finer Grounds

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## Nehemiah

### Lesson 7: Nehemiah 7

As we discovered by working through chapter 6, the people have finished building the wall. Now you would think “the wall is done, so Nehemiah is done.” However, if you have been reading through the entire book of Nehemiah, you know that the restoration process is just beginning. With the wall complete, the people had physical protection from surrounding provinces. In addition, the city could now be protected from the immoral influences of the world, although a system had to be put in place to ensure that Jerusalem could return to its sanctified state. A system could only be reinstated once Nehemiah knew who was available to help.

#### Read Nehemiah 7:1-4

With the wall being complete, the first order of duty is to put the right people in charge to make sure it serves its intended purpose. Nehemiah begins appointing people for specific duties regarding guarding the wall, keeping the gates, and appointing Levites to their proper stations. Nehemiah is wholly concerned with trying to restore God’s commands and His establishments to their original state in His holy city.

**Read 2 Chronicles 8:14 and 1 Chronicles 15:16. Do you think it matters who fulfills these duties as long as the job is being done?**

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Nehemiah was under a lot of pressure as a leader to accomplish and complete tasks as quickly and efficiently as possible. Nehemiah could have appointed anyone to fulfill the roles of gatekeepers, singers and ministers. Everyone helped equally to build the wall, but now Nehemiah becomes very selective in who gets to serve and where. God was specific in His instructions as to who should fill those roles. Nehemiah went back to what was originally commanded (through God’s servant David) as the city of Jerusalem got its new start. In addition to appointing specific roles, Nehemiah appointed the right kind of people, like his brother Hanani and Hananiah, to be in charge of Jerusalem.

**Read Nehemiah 1:2-3. From that passage, and 7:3, what do you see about Hanani and Hananiah’s character that they could be trusted with being in charge of Jerusalem?**

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Nehemiah put these two men in charge of a very important role in protecting the city. Not anybody would do, so Nehemiah had to appoint trustworthy guards who would hold firm to the regulations for when the gates would open and close. Nehemiah had to trust a God-fearing man who would respect the commands and expectations for God’s people. A position like keeper of the city, would certainly be vulnerable to bribes and corruption. So their most important



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qualification for being “in charge of Jerusalem” was their remarkable reverence for God and His will. How admirable it would be to be described as a person who “feared God more than many.” It would have been obvious to Nehemiah, and the people alike, that these were the right men for the job. Like Nehemiah, we must select leaders who meet God’s acceptable criteria, not our own. Whether it is appointing elders, deacons, Bible class teachers, or even ladies day coordinators, we should be willing to evaluate their character to see if they fear God and His commands. It shouldn’t just be because they are charismatic, organized, can speak publicly, or because nobody else is willing to step up.

**Read Nehemiah 7:5-69.**

**In the beginning of this passage, what prompts Nehemiah to organize the people in a genealogical census?**

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This section of text can be tedious to read through. It is tempting to merely skim through the chapter because it appears to be one long list. However, I would caution you against skimming through chapter 7 because, within the census, we find some very significant commentary that we need to learn from. We know from verse 4 that Jerusalem was mostly uninhabited at this point. This is significant since Jerusalem was the home of God’s temple (the symbolic dwelling place of God on earth). If few people lived in Jerusalem, how could worship be properly conducted at the temple? How could sacrifices be offered? Who would clean up after the sacrifices or store and

catalog the offerings? How would commerce begin again? Jerusalem needed people to occupy it now that it was properly fortified. Duties had to be assigned, but a census was needed in order to figure out which people were available. Nehemiah enrolls the people in a census because “God put it into” his heart (v. 5). There are a few possibilities of what “my God put into my heart” could mean. It could possibly mean that Nehemiah was receiving supernatural revelation from God (perhaps he received a vision from God). However, it could also refer to a more providential act of God (i.e. God allowed Nehemiah to find the book of genealogy, and Nehemiah’s love of God prompted him to organize the people in this way). Being a faithful follower of God, Nehemiah would have known the scriptures and what was expected of God’s people. Finding the genealogy book would have allowed Nehemiah to accurately trace the lineage of the families of God’s people.

As you read through the list you will see the genealogy broken up into major divisions.

**From verses 7-63, underline in your Bible all the different major divisions the genealogy is broken up by.**

It is helpful to see these different divisions in the genealogical record in order to understand how roles would be assigned to God’s people in His holy city. For a Jew, they may have been assigned a specific task based on their lineage. In verses 7, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 57 and 63 Nehemiah singles out eight specific groups of people and their lineage. Priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants had to come from a specific family. For example, in order to be a singer in Jewish temple worship, you had to be a



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descendant of Asaph (v.44). Sacrifices could only be offered by Levites. God was very specific about those commands and Nehemiah needed to be sure that the right people were performing God’s sanctified worship.

**In Nehemiah 7:61-65, Nehemiah excludes a group of Jews from serving in the priesthood. According to the passage, why are they excluded?**

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**Was Nehemiah being unfair? Why or why not?**

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These Israelites that came back from a specific region in Babylon could not prove what their genealogy was. They wanted to serve as priests, and who wouldn’t want to? It was a noble and honorable position among God’s people, plus they were allowed God to eat the food from the offerings. Claiming to be of the priestly line, these individuals probably even had good intentions in wanting to restore God’s worship. However, without the proper proof of lineage, they weren’t qualified to serve God in that way. Some of these families even intermarried with gentiles, which was forbidden of God’s people (v. 63; cf. Deuteronomy 7:3). Nehemiah (“the governor”) forbids them from eating from the “most holy things” (v. 65). God’s people today have been designated for specific roles in His church. God has also given us commands regarding what we are to offer Him as worship, how it should be

offered, the attitude of our worship, what day of the week we must worship as a collective body, who is supposed to lead us in that worship assembly, and in what ways. However, we can easily stray from what God has commanded without knowing it. We may have the best of intentions, and be sincerely devoted to pleasing God, but unless we go back to what God originally commanded we can’t be pleasing to God in our worship to Him. Nehemiah wasn’t interested in appeasing the feelings or emotions of those that he excluded from the priesthood. He simply cared about restoring God’s people and His commands. Let’s strive to be like Nehemiah and seek God’s will above our own.

**Read Nehemiah 7:70-73.**

**Why does Nehemiah include a list of donations in the census?**

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**Why does is Nehemiah being referred to in the third person as “the governor” in verses 65 and 70?**

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It is interesting that Nehemiah listed the money and materials donated in the census. Is Nehemiah boasting about all the gifts that he and the people are putting forth? That doesn’t really seem to fit Nehemiah’s character. This brings us to the issue of Nehemiah being referred to in the third person twice in verses 65 and 70. Since a substantial gift is recorded as coming from



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Nehemiah, it may be that he wants to appear humble by omitting his name and distancing himself from this section of the narrative. Remember, up until this point in the text, Nehemiah has given all credit to his position and authority to God’s providence. God used natural circumstances to assure Nehemiah would have this governorship. Being governor gave him wealth and power he would not have had otherwise. Remember in 5:10, he uses himself as a positive example to the nobles who are cheating there fellow brothers and sisters. Perhaps since his donation is included in the rest of the census, he wanted to make himself slightly anonymous. Another possibility for the brief change to a third person narrator (note: in chapter 8 Nehemiah resumes referring to himself in the first person), is that those comments were added later by someone else. Perhaps a scribe (possibly Ezra) inserted the commentary on what Nehemiah did as governor in order to clarify exactly what happened for future generations. The many gifts included in the census may simply be for cataloging purposes (that way nobody “misplaces” some of the 20,000 gold drachmas). It may also demonstrate the willingness of God’s people to restore the temple and rightful worship of God. Many Jews could not directly serve in the worship of God, but donating materials and money was one way to ensure the Lord’s work would continue. It is clear by the amount of their donations that God’s work was important to them.

**Whether it is your time, talents, skills, money or other resources, your individual giving reflects how important God’s work is to you. In what areas do you feeling your giving to God is where it should be? In what areas do**

**you think you need to make some changes?**

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It is important for us to evaluate where our personal priorities are. Nehemiah placed God as his number one priority. He recognized that God made it possible for him to have this governorship and the wealth that came with it. He saw his money as actually being God’s, so he freely gave large amounts of it back to God’s work. Our independent American mindset might lead us to think that our money, possessions and jobs all came from our own efforts. Such is not the case (cf. Deuteronomy 8:17-18). We need to be honest about evaluating our personal priorities and determine if they align with God or the world’s desires.

Nehemiah finally concludes the census by reporting that everyone had returned to their respective cities once the work of the census had been complete. For Nehemiah it was important that order and function be restored to the city of Jerusalem. He did it the right way by restoring positions back to only the appropriate people and making sure God’s work had the financial and material goods it needed to continue.