



### Time to Reflect

- Who are some of the people who encouraged us in our Christian faith? Take a few moments to give thanks to God for them and their faithfulness.
- In what ways can we strive to ensure that we are faithfully building our lives on a true Christian foundation?

Last week we focused on the rural community of the Israelites. We saw how some of the villages were a considerable distance from Jerusalem, yet they were still under the authority of Nehemiah and the king of Persia. The people who lived there demonstrated a deep level of local loyalty. This week we move to consider the organisation of spiritual leadership in Jerusalem. We will see how Nehemiah saw this as a key priority and he was intentional that the people should be consistently directed towards God.

**“These registers of the priests and Levites reminded the Jews that the priesthood had deep roots in the past...We too should praise God for those who in the past brought us the gospel...”**

(Stan Evers, *Doing A Great Work: Ezra And Nehemiah Simply Explained*, pp215-216)

### Specifics

- Our attention is drawn, once again, to a significant list of names. On this occasion they are the names of spiritual leaders and we are focusing on the next phase in Nehemiah’s redevelopment of Jerusalem and its population.
- In general terms, our passage draws our attention to several generations. Joshua was the high priest who returned with Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple before Nehemiah’s time. (v1-9) list the names of those who were in positions of spiritual leadership during Joshua’s tenure.
- (v10-11) introduce us to Joshua’s descendants – all the way down to his great-great-great grandson. Then (v12-26) list the names of the priests and the leaders of the people during the lifetimes of Joshua’s descendants.
- It is easy to read over this passage and conclude that it is merely a list of names of people who have been long forgotten. However, the passage reminds us of the longevity of spiritual leadership that was provided in Jerusalem.
- These verses also challenge us to give thanks to God for the spiritual leaders who have served God with faithfulness and encouraged us in our journeys of faith.
- (v1-7) record twenty-two family names of “...the priests and Levites who returned...” ninety years earlier in 537BC. They came back to Judah with Zerubbabel from Babylon. God’s plans for Jerusalem were not limited to a few years of activity. His will was gradually and purposefully enacted over an extended period of time.
- This challenges us to trust God and wait upon Him. All too often we are in a rush and want immediate answers. However, God knows best and His plans are perfect.
- (v8-9) record the Levitical families at the time of the return from exile, whereas (v10-21) focus on the priests of the next generation.

- (v22-26) contain a final register of family heads of the Levites in the days of Eliashib, the high priest when Nehemiah was governor of Judah.
- There is remarkable detail contained in these verses and there are some well-known names. For example, Zechariah (v16) was the prophet and writer of the Old Testament prophecy who worked alongside Haggai to encourage the temple builders (Ezra 5).
- Eric Mason reflects, “What we’re seeing here is that spiritual organization was the foundation of all other forms of organization. Political, economic, geographical, and family structures all came under and were to be influenced by the spiritual.<sup>1</sup>”
- This should be an encouragement to us. In following the leading of God and adhering to His guidance, Nehemiah wanted the community in Jerusalem to be firmly built on a spiritual foundation.
- He wanted to ensure that the people were taught about God and that they would remain faithful to God. As a leader, Nehemiah was concerned with the spiritual welfare of the people.
- In our modern world, it appears that this pattern is becoming less obvious as Christian values are continually eroded.
- As we reflect on the importance of what Nehemiah was doing, we must remember that he was insightful enough to seize the opportunity that was before him.
- Mason highlights, “No other era in Israelite history needed organization more than this second temple period, where effectively a whole new nation was being set up – but they had to start by getting their spiritual lives in order.<sup>2</sup>”
- Reflecting on Nehemiah’s leadership example, we are led to ask some important questions.
  1. What does God require of us as His people as we seek to bloom where He has planted us?
  2. Are there opportunities for us to engage in frontline mission and ministry today?
  3. What specific role could each of fulfil as we seek to share our faith with others?
- This passage reminds us of where the spiritual organisation of Jerusalem began and it records the continued development of that process. Small steps but faithful steps were taken in the first instance, they were built upon and the process sustained.
- Mason concludes, “The setting up of the priesthood and its legacy meant that the people would keep being helped to look Godward. That was how they would prevent further judgement and experience healthy fellowship with the Lord as a community. At least, that was the hope.<sup>3</sup>”
- As we seek to live out our faith, may we do all that we can to encourage others to turn to God and trust Him. Let us pray for our local communities and for the mission and ministry of our churches. Let us give ourselves entirely to God and His service.
- A church planter in North America once issued this challenge. “Church is what you do. Church is who you are. Church is the human outworking of the person of Jesus Christ. Let’s not go to Church, let’s be the Church.”

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Mason, *Nehemiah For You* (The Good Book Company, 2022), p146.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p146.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p146.