



Time to Reflect

- As you reflect on people of faith and courage who are named in the Bible, have you a particular biblical character who encourages you? Why do you find them inspirational?
- In what ways have your past experiences, of people and places, proven significant in your faith journey?

Our studies of Nehemiah have focused largely on the rebuilding of the walls. We have reflected on how he encountered opposition and demonstrated incredible faithfulness. In our last study, before the Christmas break, we saw how Nehemiah had to be vigilant as he sought to consolidate all that had been achieved. This week our attention is drawn to a long list of names and numbers. This was a census that was undertaken and one of the key lessons that this passage teaches us is that people matter to God.

“Reading this long list of difficult names might be boring to the modern student, but these were God’s ‘bridge’ from the defeats of the past to the hopes of the future.”

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, p99)

Specifics

- At the beginning of the passage, Nehemiah reveals that he “...found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return.” (v5b).
- The discovery of the old register meant that Nehemiah could use it as the basis for his own census and thereby ensure that the new descendants of Jerusalem were actually descended from the original population. This is a deliberate effort at maintaining continuity with the past.
- This passage parallels a list that we can read in Ezra 2. Yet a careful examination of both lists reveals the existence of some differences.
- Warren Wiersbe reflects on this and writes, “If you compare the two lists, you will see that some of Nehemiah’s names and numbers differ from those recorded nearly a century before when the exiles returned from Babylon. This does not suggest that there are either errors or contradictions in the Bible. Errors in spelling names or copying numbers could easily creep in over a century and none of these differences affects any matter of doctrine or duty.¹”
- It is also worth remembering that Ezra 2 lists the names of those who set out with Ezra, but it’s possible that others joined the group after the list was complete. Variations are to be expected in ancient documents.
- As we read both lists, what we encounter is a list of people who stepped out in faith and trusted God for their future. Wiersbe proves helpful as he contends, “Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 are to the Old Testament what Hebrews 11 is to the New Testament: a listing of the people whose faith and courage made things happen.²”
- There are many names listed in our passage. At the very beginning of this list are the leaders who returned to Jerusalem following the exile in Babylon (v7).

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah* (David. C. Cook, 1992), p98.

² Ibid, p99.

- The Nehemiah who is mentioned here is not the same person who we have been focusing on in our studies. It appears that these were the elders of people who helped Zerubbabel, the governor, establish the nation following the exile.
- In (v8-25) we encounter a list of families, along with the number of people in each family who returned to the land. (v27-38) records the people according to their villages.
- It is interesting that the largest group came from Senaah (v38), a town whose location is a mystery. Regardless of where exactly this group of people lived, we do know that they worked on the walls (3:3) and helped restore the city.
- As we read these verses we get details about people – who they were and where they came from. Wiersbe highlights, **“It is worth noting that these returned exiles had maintained their identification with their native towns and villages. They knew where they came from and were not ashamed of it!”³**
- It is important to remember where we came from and to give thanks to God for all the positive influences that have helped to shape us. These ‘influencers’ and ‘equippers’ are significant in our overall journeys of faith.
- (v39-60) focus on groups that we could classify as ‘temple personnel.’ Our attention is now drawn to the worship of God. It’s interesting that, in the book of Nehemiah, **“There are at least eighteen references to singers...and eight references to giving thanks to the Lord.”⁴**
- Worship was a priority in Jerusalem and God longs for His people to return to the heart of worship. Even in this long list of names we are reminded of the love of God for His people and His desire to have a meaningful relationship with them.
- Further lists are contained in our passage. Wiersbe offers a very important conclusion as he suggests, **“The important thing is not to count the people but to realize that *these people counted*. In leaving Babylon, they did much more than put their names on a list. They laid their lives on the altar and risked everything to obey the Lord and restore the Jewish nation. They were ‘pioneers of faith’ who trusted God to enable them to do the impossible.”⁵**
- Behind the list of names is a legacy of faithfulness and trust. These were people who stepped out in faith, obeying God and depending on His promises. They should be an encouragement to us as we seek to be the people that God longs for us to be.
- Our passage concludes with the encouraging of worship (v70-73). The leaders set the example as gifts were given generously to the temple ministry.
- Within the context in which the book of Nehemiah is set, this was now the seventh month (October/November) and God’s people were expected to celebrate the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles.
- Wiersbe concludes, **“There could have been no better time for Nehemiah to call the people together to honor the Word of God, confess their sins, and dedicate themselves and their work to the Lord. What began with concern (Neh. 1) led to construction (chaps. 2-3) and conflict (chaps. 4-7), and now it was time for consecration (chaps. 8-12).”⁶**
- As we leave this week’s passage, it is incredible to realise just how important people are to God. We are also reminded that details matter to God. Finally, God’s plans are not bound by time or location. He is always on the move and His mission is continuous. We are simply called to trust Him and be faithful.

³ Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, p100.

⁴ Ibid, p100.

⁵ Ibid, p101.

⁶ Ibid, p102.