

CHAPTER 7

The success of one good design for God and our generation should encourage us to proceed and form some other; Nehemiah did so, having fortified Jerusalem with gates and walls, his next care is,

- I. To see the city well kept (v. 1-4).
- II. To see it well peopled, in order to which he here reviews and calls over the register of the children of the captivity, the families that returned at first, and records it (v. 5-73). It is the same, in effect, with that which we had, Ezra 2. What use he made of it we shall find afterwards, when he brought one of ten to live in Jerusalem, 11:1.

~~<1670>~~ NEHEMIAH 7:1-4

THE COMPLETION OF THE WALL

God saith concerning his church (~~<2316>~~ Isaiah 62:6), *I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem!* This is Nehemiah's care here; for dead walls, without living watchmen, are but a poor defence to a city.

I. He appointed *the porters, singers, and Levites*, in their places to their work. This is meant of their work in general, which was to attend the temple service; it had been neglected in some degree, but now was revived. God's worship is the defence of a place, and his ministers, when they mind their duty, are watchmen on the walls. Or, in particular, he ordered them to be ready against the wall was to be dedicated, that they might perform that service in an orderly and solemn manner; and the dedication of it was its strength. That is likely to be beneficial to us which is devoted to God.

II. He appointed two governors or consuls, to whom he committed the care of the city, and gave them in charge to provide for the public peace and safety. Hanani, his brother, who came to him with the tidings of the desolations of Jerusalem, was one, a man of approved integrity and affection to his country; the other was Hananiah, who had been ruler of the palace: for he that has approved himself faithful in less shall be entrusted

with more. Of this Hananiah it is said that he was a *faithful man and one that feared God above many*, v. 2. Note,

1. Among those who fear God truly there are some who fear him greatly, and excel others in the expressions and instances of that fear; and they are worthy a double portion of that honour which is due to those that *fear the Lord*, ^{<DISE>}Psalm 15:4. There were many in Jerusalem that feared God, but this good man was more eminent for religion and serious godliness than any.

2. Those that fear God must evidence it by their being faithful to all men and universally conscientious.

3. God's Jerusalem is then likely to flourish when those rule in it, and have charge of it, who excel in virtue, and are eminent both for godliness and honesty. It is supposed, by some, that Nehemiah was now about to return to the Persian court to have his commission renewed, and that he left these two worthy men in charge with the affairs of the city in his absence. Good governors, when and where they cannot act themselves, must be very careful whom they depute.

III. He gave orders about the shutting of the gates and the guarding of the walls, v. 3, 4. See here,

1. What the present state of Jerusalem was. The city, in compass, was large and great. The walls enclosed the same ground as formerly; but much of it lay waste, for the houses were not built, few at least in comparison with what had been; so that Nehemiah walled the city in faith, and with an eye to that promise of the replenishing of it which God had lately made by the prophet, ^{<SRR>}Zechariah 8:3, etc. Though the people were now few, he believed they would be multiplied, and therefore built the walls so as to make room for them; had he not depended upon this he might have thought walls without a city as great a reproach as a city without walls.

2. What was the care of Nehemiah for it. He ordered the rulers of the city themselves,

(1.) To stand by, and see the city-gates shut up and barred every night; for in vain had they a wall if they were careless of their gates.

(2.) To take care that they should not be opened in the morning till they could see that all was clear and quiet.

(3.) To set sentinels upon the walls, or elsewhere, at convenient distances, who should, in case of the approach of the enemy, give timely notice to the city of the danger; and, as it came to their turn to watch, they must post themselves *over against their own houses*, because of them, it might be presumed, they would be in a particular manner careful. The public safety depends upon every one's particular care to guard himself and his own family against sin, that common enemy. It is every one's interest to watch, but many understand not their own interest; it is therefore incumbent upon magistrates to appoint watches. And as this people had lately found God with them in their building (else they would have built in vain), so now that the wall was built, no doubt, they were made sensible that *except the Lord kept the city the watchman waked but in vain*, ~~<100B>~~ Psalm 127:1.

~~<100B>~~ NEHEMIAH 7:5-73

THE REGISTER OF THE CAPTIVES

We have here another good project of Nehemiah's; for wise and zealous men will be always contriving something or other for the glory of God and the edification of his church. He knew very well that the safety of a city, under God, depends more upon the number and valour of the inhabitants than upon the height or strength of its walls; and therefore, observing that the people were few that dwelt in it, he thought fit to take an account of the people, that he might find what families had formerly had their settlement in Jerusalem, but were now removed into the country, that he might bring them back, and what families could in any other way be influenced by their religion, or by their business, to come and rebuild the houses in Jerusalem and dwell in them. So little reason have we to wish that we may be placed alone in the earth, or in Jerusalem itself, that much of our safety and comfort depends upon our neighbours and friends; the more the stronger, the more the merrier. It is the wisdom of the governors of a nation to keep the balance even between the city and country, that the metropolis be not so extravagantly large as to drain and impoverish the country, nor yet so weak as not to be able to protect it. Now observe,

I. Whence this good design of Nehemiah's came. He owns, *My God put it into my heart*, v. 5. Note, Whatever good motion is in our minds, either prudent or pious, we must acknowledge it to come from God. It was he

that *put it into our hearts*; for every good gift and every good work are from above. He gives knowledge; he gives grace; all is of him, and therefore all must be to him. What is done by human prudence must be ascribed to the direction of divine Providence; he that teaches the husbandman his discretion (~~2386~~ Isaiah 28:26) teaches the statesman his.

II. What method he took in prosecution of it.

1. He called the rulers together, and the people, that he might have an account of the present state of their families — their number and strength, and where they were settled. It is probable that when he summoned them to come together he ordered them to bring such an account along with them out of their several districts. And I doubt they were not so many but that it might be soon done.

2. He reviewed the old *register of the genealogy of those who came up at the first*, and compared the present accounts with that; and here we have the repetition of that out of Ezra 2. The title is the same here (v. 6, 7) as there (v. 1, 2): *These are the children of the province*, etc. Two things are here repeated and recorded a second time from thence — the names and numbers of their several families, and their oblations to the service of the temple. The repetition of these accounts may intimate to us the delight which the great God is pleased to take in the persons, families, and services of his spiritual Israel, and the particular notice he takes of them. He knows those that are his, knows them all, knows them by name, has his eye on the register of those children of the captivity, and does all according to the ancient counsel of his will concerning them.

(1.) Here is an account of the heads of the several families that first came up, v. 6-69. As to this,

[1.] Though it seem of little use to us now, yet then it was of great use, to compare what they had been with what they now were. We may suppose they were much increased by this time; but it would do well for them to remember their small beginnings, that they might acknowledge God in multiplying their families and building them up. By this means likewise their genealogies would be preserved, and the distinction of their families kept up, till the Messiah should come, and then an end be put to all their genealogies, which were preserved for his sake, but afterwards were endless. But,

[2.] There are many differences in the numbers between this catalogue and that in Ezra. Most of them indeed are exactly the same, and some others within a very few under or over (one or two perhaps); and therefore I cannot think, as some do, that that was the number of these families at their first coming and this as they were now, which was at least forty years after (some make it much more); for we cannot suppose so many families to be not at all, or but little, altered in their numbers in all that time; therefore what differences there are we may suppose to arise either from the mistakes of transcribers, which easily happen in numbers, or from the diversity of the copies from which they were taken. Or perhaps one was the account of them when they set out from Babylon with Zerubbabel, the other when they came to Jerusalem. The sum totals are all just the same there and here, except of the singing-men and singing-women, which there are 200, here 245. These were not of such importance as that they should keep any strict account of them.

(2.) Here is an account of the offerings which were given towards the work of God, v. 70, etc. This differs much from that in ~~<1578>~~ Ezra 2:68, 69, and it may be questioned whether it refers to the same contribution; here the tirshatha, or chief governor, who there was not mentioned, begins the offering; and the single sum mentioned there exceeds all those here put together; yet it is probable that it was the same, but that followed one copy of the lists, this another; for the last verse is the same here that it was ~~<1570>~~ Ezra 2:70, adding ~~<1601>~~ Nehemiah 3:1. Blessed be God that our faith and hope are not built upon the niceties of names and numbers, genealogy and chronology, but on the great things of the law and gospel. Whatever is given to the work of God, he is not unrighteous to forget it; nor shall even a cup of cold water, wherewith he is honoured, go without its reward.