

The Joy of the Lord
A Study in the Book of Nehemiah
#8 One of the Boring Parts of the Bible (7:1-73)

Introduction

Not all of the Bible is a flowing narrative or a concise bit of instruction, some of it just seems “a bit too much.” Nehemiah Chapter 7 might fall into that category of a “boring part of the Bible.”

We might question the importance of some of the lists in the scripture, or the elongated census information or the genealogies of people we know nothing about or the endless details about the tabernacle and the OT sacrifices or the territory allotments for each tribe. But God does not waste pages in His book. (See Philip Rosenbaum’s book, *The Boring Parts of the Bible*.)

1. Consider the use of LISTS in the Bible:

Look at Lev. 18 and 20...regarding immoral relationships

Look at Lev. 26 and Deut. 28...regarding blessings and curses

Look at Lev. 11 and Deut. 14...regarding clean and unclean animals

2. Consider the use of Census information:

For an example, look at Numbers 1: taken at Mt. Sinai showing 603, 550 males above the age of 20 who were fit for war.

Contrast that with Numbers 26: taken in the plains of Joab, just before entering Canaan, 40 years after Num. 1. This census is a monument to God’s faithfulness (see Num. 14:31).

3. Consider the Territory Allotments:

Look at Joshua 13-21 and read all the geographical details of the land in Canaan given to each tribe. Truthfully, if we were more familiar with the geography of Israel, those details would mean quite a lot.

4. Consider the details about the OT Tabernacle and Sacrifices:

All those details are flashing arrows directing our attention to the truths about our sin. Sin brings death and we need a Savior to rescue us from our predicament. We come to understand that forgiveness is made possible only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

5. Consider the use of Genealogies:

Their purpose:

1. To give “benchmarks” to reassure the reader of the historical accuracies of the Biblical account.
2. To “fill out” the family records and provide for clear continuous chronologies.
3. To reinforce the importance of fulfilled prophecy.
4. They are NOT intended to give us the age of human beings on the earth. But to trace in “outstanding representative names” the line of the Promised Redeemer (Gen. 3:15).

In the OT, symmetry is aimed at constructing Hebrew genealogical tables, rather than an exhibition of an unbroken descent from father to son. For some examples see Gen. 5, 11, I Chron. 1-8.

Remember: if you didn’t know your family lineage, you would be excluded from the priesthood (Neh. 7:61-64).

In the NT, there are two great examples:

1. Matthew 1:1-17- the genealogy of Joseph
“Using a pneumatic device for ease of memory (14 generations from Abraham to David...), it covers 42 generations in a descending genealogy showing Joseph’s line. It establishes that Jesus is the legal heir promised to Abraham and David.”
2. Luke 3:23-28- The genealogy of Mary (but in her husband’s name)
“It carries the lineage of Christ back to the beginning of the world. It is an ascending genealogy that establishes Jesus’ blood descent (Romans 1:3).”

Nehemiah is divided into two sections:

Chapters 1-6 cover the reconstruction of the wall. Chapters 7-15 focus on the re-instruction of the people. After 70 years, they are “Babylonian Jews” not Hebrew Jews. They intermarried with their heathen neighbors (Mal. 2:1). They neglected the temple services (Mal. 1:6-14).

An Outline of the Chapter:

7:1-3 How the Wall was to be Operated

7:4-69 The List of the Exiles who Returned

“A comparison of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 reveals several differences in both the names and the numbers that are listed. Though the lists of temple personnel show few

variations, there are differences in about half the case of the lists of the laity. Of the 153 numbers, 29 are not the same in Ezra and Nehemiah.” (Expositor’s Commentary #4, pg. 606).

Possible Explanations:

1. Ezra could have been counting just men or just heads of families. Nehemiah may be including women and children.
2. Ezra is the accurate account; Nehemiah is just a genealogical record Nehemiah found. (7:5)
3. The two census’ may have been taken at the two different time periods.
4. Some may have died in route.
5. Some names are mentioned in more than one form (“the children of Sia” in Neh. 7:47 are also the “children of Siaha” in Ezra 2:44).

Regardless of the explanation, our confidence is in His Word: Titus 1:2.

7:70-72 Records were kept of significant gifts

So What?

God’s Record Keeping is Astonishing. He gives it personal attention. (Which is why 7: 68-69 are my “favorite” verses in the Bible!) He keeps detailed records of:

- A. Our Tears: Ps. 56:8
- B. Our Hair: Luke 12:7
- C. The number of our Days: Job 14:5

God keeps excellent records, and He keeps His promises: Titus 1:2

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, why do you think the Lord included so many lists, census info and genealogies in the Bible?
2. Specifically, why do you think Nehemiah included so much detail in this chapter?
3. What is the implication of God knowing how many hairs we have on our head?
4. Is it comforting to know the Lord is capturing each of our tears? Why?
5. Is it easy or difficult for you to trust the Lord?

Personal Reflections

1. Consider Ps. 139. What does that psalm say to you about the insight God has into you and your life?
2. What is the implication of God numbering your days (Job 14:5)?
3. In what ways has the Lord proven Himself faithful to you? Does that increase your faith in Him? Why or why not?
4. When we live under the banner of trust, how does that affect our daily life? See Prov. 3:5 and 6.