

Stirred by the Spirit

– Nehemiah 7

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

Nehemiah 7:1-4 – *The city was large and spacious...and no houses had been built yet.*

- How would you feel if you had to move to a place like Jerusalem is described (un-safe/run-down/poor/un-protected)?
- What reason would you need to move home? What would convince you to 'go'?

Nehemiah 7:5-69 – *Then my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles...*

- What is your immediate reaction to this long list of names in the Bible? How can we disconnect from these large numbers?
- Each of these people were stirred by God (see *Ezra 1:5*). Do you make time to listen to how God's Spirit is stirring you?

Nehemiah 7:70-73 – *Some of the family heads contributed to the project.*

- What comforts / past lifestyles has God stirred you to give up for the sake of His purpose and presence?
- What changes are you prepared to make to pursue more of God's glory in your life?
- Are you ready to act – to tell someone about these changes, and take steps to seek God over comfort?

Sermon Overview (Stirred by the Spirit)

God created the universe, and humans messed it up – bringing sin into the world. God makes a plan to restore His creation – picking a man called Abraham who – along with his descendants – would know God. Through this people, God promised to bless the nations, and repair His creation. Still, this people turn from God, and the story continues with periods of exile. By this point in the story, the nation of Israel had been invaded by a foreign nation – Babylon. The walls have been destroyed; the temple – the place of God's presence, which makes them a special people – has been torn down; many of the population have been taken from their homes and moved to Babylon.

Hope is returning for the nation. God allowed Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the temple. Ezra is raised up and returns to rebuild the altar – and the Biblical laws. Nehemiah has been called by God – and has returned to Jerusalem, restoring the walls. By the end of Nehemiah 6, the walls have been rebuilt – and so it is time for this nation to be powerful once again. The reach peak of this crescendo – the restoration of God's people in the city of Jerusalem – but rather than an epic tale of God at work, we have a list of names and numbers. What is the importance here? How does this tell God's story?

A People Returned to Jerusalem (verse 15-16).

Nehemiah 7 includes 62 verses listing the people who were part of this project - the whole assembly totalled 42,360. Reading this list, and considering over 42,000 people, it's easy to gloss over and dismiss it as a statistic. If we think about these people as individuals – with families, hopes, dreams and fears - the impact is much greater. These 42,000 people have left their homes in Babylon and neighbours who loved them enough to gift gold and silver. They travelled over 600 miles, to a place with no homes, to a dangerous place where guards are needed – and walls had to be built as defence because they had no protection.

They have not travelled in an attempt to achieve prosperity – the 'Jerusalem Dream'. They have seen great favour in Babylon - bringing over 7 thousand slaves with them - so Jerusalem does not offer a better life. They are not returning to their childhood homes, with fond memories. Zerubbabel translates as 'planted in Babylon' – and like the vast majority returning, would likely have been born in Babylon during the 70 years of exile – and never even visited Jerusalem. Those with fond childhood memories would have died, and those returning would be leaving their fond childhood homes to return. So, why did they return?

With Spirits Stirred (verses 7-13).

Nehemiah fits into a three-part story of the restoration of Jerusalem. If we look at the beginning of the story, we see another list of names, which closely resembles this list (see ***Ezra 2***). Nehemiah 7 doesn't explain why this people had gone to Jerusalem, but it directs us back to the beginning – where we see some idea of their purpose. We see that these people, the 42,360 people who had returned from Babylon, had been roused and stirred by God's message (see ***Ezra 1:5***) – to restore His dwelling place.

They are so captivated by this mission, that they don't care about leaving jobs. They are not stopped by the long and dangerous journey ahead of them. Their spirit has been stirred by God that they are willing to lay aside their lives in Babylon – to serve their God and to return to His presence. While they did not see God's presence return as it had in the past – their obedience led to a restored Jerusalem – and a city where Jesus could walk centuries later and bring an even great presence of God for His people.

Leaving their Past to Seek God's Presence in the Future (verses 14-19)

The people were stirred and left behind comfort. They left behind homes, wealth, security - all for the sake of seeking God's presence. We can miss out on God's presence, because we cling on to our comfort: getting to church early committing to serve; attending a prayer meeting; speaking to someone different and not in our normal group; talking about God in the workplace, with friends and family – the list goes on. It feels awkward to leave our comforts, but if we want to flourish as God has intended, we need to be obedient and follow His stirring.

The people were stirred and left behind sin and evil. Babylon is the archetypal Biblical city of evil – from the tower of Babel (another name for Babylon), to the Book of Revelation - the great example of sin and temptation. God stirs us to leave behind sinful behaviours and lifestyles in order to seek His presence. They were no less God's people while they were in exile – but God will stir us to greater intimacy with Him by leaving things behind.

When God stirs our hearts, He leads us to action. When He meets us, we come away changed. If we want to see more of God's presence, if we want to know more of His purpose, we need to leave behind our comforts, leave behind our sinful behaviours and act on His stirring.