



The call of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:8

Ezra 4:6-23; Nehemiah 2:11-18; 4:1-15; 5:1-13; 13:4-30

The call of Nehemiah is another call of God in a different pattern and again there is no direct encounter with God face to face. The call is the need of the covenant-people in Jerusalem in distressing circumstances, brought about by an attack of the Samaritans on the beloved city (Nehemiah 1:3; Ezra 4:23) and upsetting the work of restoring the walls.

When we examine this type of call we see that there is nothing necessarily supernatural or spectacular, just the simple fact of human need.

Note too the comfortable circumstances of Nehemiah. He was a favourite of king Artaxerxes (464-424BC), eunuch and cupbearer to his household and a trusted and valued servant. Circumstances do not matter to the real follower of Jesus who had "not where to lay His head". The true follower must count the real cost and sincerely bear his cross.

It was a costly road that Nehemiah took, begun in the right way with prayer and open confession of guilt (1:4-11), finding the door open almost of its own accord (2:8 cf Acts 12:11) and bringing him to the unattractive and demanding setting of a Jerusalem in partial ruin.

The mark of the call of God is seen in:

- The vigour with which he tackled the work of rebuilding the walls, completing it in under two months - ***the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days Neh 6:15.***
- The fearlessness with which he met the opposition and the confidence in God he revealed (2:10; 4:9);
- The inspiration of his leadership upon his own people - ***I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. Neh 2:18***
- The energetic restoration of the people to the city - ***Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by***

families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there: Neh 7:4-5

- The elimination of a crippling system of exorbitant interest - ***I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil." Neh 5:9-11***
- The selfless example he himself set (5:14ff), meeting the expenses of his own servants and large scale entertaining out of his own purse; and in spite of giving twelve years to Judah, he insisted on returning again to complete his work of reform (432BC).

On this second visit he introduced reform, setting the Jews over against all other peoples and expelling those who were of impure race (Nehemiah 13:4-9). He had a high conception of his calling to prepare a holy people for a holy God; but, in this separation, how far does he stand out in contrast to Jesus (Luke 15:2; Mark 7:27ff), Paul (Ephesians 2:14), Peter (Acts 10:34)? Compare also what Jesus says in John 17:15.

Nehemiah insisted that every man should help to support the church - ***I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts. All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms. Neh 13:11-12***

Every believer has a duty to give to the upkeep and restoration of the church at home and abroad. If the Jews tithed when under the Law, then how much should the Christian give when he is under grace (Luke 18:12)? The Jew laid great stress on the Sabbath as a distinctive mark of the Jewish community (13:15-22). The Christian observes the Lord's Day as the day of resurrection, of the new Creation over against the Sabbath which celebrated the old Creation; and, by his observance of it in worship and festivity, he proclaims the resurrection and so the incarnation and Cross. The Lord's Day celebrates Jesus' triumph over sin and death and despair. It is vital for the life of the church never to forsake assembling together.

Discussion

Discuss this verdict on Nehemiah; "The record of his strength, generosity, unselfishness, patriotism, tenacity of purpose and religious zeal are an inspiration for reformers of all ages" (Healing (CA)). Compare other reformers, e.g. Josiah (2 Kings 22:1ff); Jesus (Mark 11:15-19); Luther; Calvin.

Q. How much work needs to be done in a world caught in a population explosion? How far is it true to say "it is either the evangelisation or damnation of the world in this generation"?