

Inhabiting the Land

Nehemiah 11

Dwelling in the City: *Nehemiah 11:1-19*

Repopulating Jerusalem

Jerusalem, the holy city, remained in ruins. The wall was complete and the gates were in place; however, inside the city it was a mess. Nehemiah was in the process of rebuilding the city when revival broke out. For one month the work in Jerusalem stopped as the people looked to the LORD (Psalm 46:10). Wisely, Nehemiah encouraged the Jews to put spiritual needs before the physical work (1 Timothy 4:8). When the feasts were complete Nehemiah turned his attention towards repopulating the city of Jerusalem. It was important to inhabit and protect the city that many wanted to destroy. Since Jerusalem was large it required many people to maintain it. The problem was that few were willing to live in the city, which may have been for several reasons. Jerusalem was in poor condition, knowing hard work was necessary to rebuild the city it may have been easier to inhabit smaller villages. Others stayed away because of the danger that came with the city. It was despised by many and would continue to face fierce ridicule and attacks. If one chose to live in Jerusalem they would have to be prepared to take a stand. Another obstacle to population was the declined state of the city. It was poor financially, which meant it was not a place to make a fortune. For whatever reason, few chose to live in Jerusalem. Nehemiah knew this would have to change for the nation to be blessed.

Although few were interested in living in the city, the rulers resided at Jerusalem because it was the center of leadership (Psalm 122:3-5). Their presence encouraged others to remain in the city. Since the city required people, lots were cast to determine who would reside there. This process was done trusting the LORD to guide (Proverbs 3:5-6). It also deterred accusations of unfairness. Apparently, everyone accepted the situation and made the best of it. Those chosen to dwell in Jerusalem moved there to rebuild the city, apparently content with the situation. We are not always able to choose our situation or surroundings but we can decide how to deal with them. The believer can be content knowing God is in control (Philippians 4:11). Not everyone was reluctant to serve; there were some that

*"In every time there are some pious and God-fearing people who separate themselves from the world, and seek the good of their souls rather than of their bodies."
John Lange*

volunteered to live in Jerusalem. This commitment displayed a willingness to sacrifice for God's glory. By moving to Jerusalem these people set aside personal gain to serve the LORD. It was a testimony of dedication, which was recognized by their fellow countrymen. These volunteers set a great example for others to follow, including believers today. It's best to live for God, even if it means denying personal desires.

Residing in Jerusalem

Here we find a record of those that dwelt in the city of Jerusalem. The families came from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. This is expected, since the people chose to dwell in the location of their

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ancestors. When David established Jerusalem as the capital it was inhabited by both Judah and Benjamin (2 Samuel 5:1-10). The numbers were smaller in Nehemiah's time but both tribes were strongly represented. Judah is mentioned first with 468 men, which were probably the heads of families. They were descendants of Perez, also known as Pharez and Phares (Genesis 38:29; Matthew 1:3). Jesus Christ also came from this lineage (Matthew 1:3). This tells us that the line of the Messiah remained intact following the Babylonian captivity. The men of Judah were noted for being valiant; perhaps this courage was displayed while rebuilding and defending the city. The men of Benjamin totaled 928; once again the number indicates the heads of the families. Amongst them are two leaders, Joel the son of Zichri and Judah the son of Senuah, who were probably part of the rulers that remained in the city. This record is a testimony to their diligence.

Following the people from the two tribes we find those that worked in the temple, beginning with the priests. Like the rulers they remained faithful to their responsibility. Many were involved with the LORD'S service, including Seraiah the ruler of the house of God. Some priests were distinguished as men of valour. They were involved in defending the city but also led the way in spiritual battle. The Levites were mentioned next. Their numbers are small in comparison to the priests, but since they were responsible for teaching God's Word, many lived throughout the land. Shabbethai and Jozabad, two chiefs of the Levites, were assigned the outside business of the temple. This may have included necessities to maintain the temple, such as wood for the sacrifices, collecting the offering, purchasing for the temple, etc. The outward work was just as important as the inner work, for the temple to function it needed to remain open. Mattaniah the son of Micha began the thanksgiving in prayer, likely leading the song for the daily offering. Lastly, the porters were mentioned. These men guarded the gates of the temple and city, providing security for Jerusalem. It was a difficult work that required faithful courageous men. What stands out is the great organization involved in the LORD'S service. Today churches are to be organized and operated efficiently (Titus 1:5). To reject God's organizational plan for the church is to deny His authority, since He has given the pattern for the church in the New Testament. When we follow His Word, all will be done correctly.

Dwelling in the Country: *Nehemiah 11:20-36*

Leaders

Jerusalem was the capital city but it could not stand by itself. It required provisions found throughout the land and assistance from neighboring cities. With other cities and villages populated Jerusalem would be safer and stronger. That's why Nehemiah took only one out of ten to Jerusalem. The goal was to repopulate the city but not at the expense of the other villages. In this passage we're given a list of those that inhabited the land, it's made up of leaders and locations.

When the Jews returned they did their best to reside where their families belonged. The Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, which was a tower or high place on the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:26; 2 Chronicles 27:3). Since they served in the temple it was important for them to live near the city. Uzzi the son of Bani was the overseer of the Levites at Jerusalem. He probably managed their work, addressed their conduct, answered their questions, and made decisions. The sons of Asaph, singing Levites, oversaw the business at the house of God. These men were given a daily portion from the king, which allowed them to focus their energy on the LORD'S work. The last leader, Pethahiah the son of

Meshezabeel, was extremely important because he stood before the people and the king. His responsibility probably included hearing grievances, dealing with civil problems, ensuring the king's law was maintained, etc. It was a blessing for the people to have a Jewish man represent them before the king. It's possible the Persian king assigned a representative for every province under his authority.

Locations

The villages in Judah and Benjamin were not neglected while Jerusalem was repopulated. The Jews established themselves throughout the area. In this passage there are no families mentioned, only locations. It seems the emphasis was placed on those that sacrificed to reside in Jerusalem, because of their willingness to live for the LORD. Some of the villages listed are familiar while others remain a mystery. To the Jews in Nehemiah's time they were home. The villages in Benjamin were also inhabited at this time. Once again we find cities mentioned but no families, a reminder of the importance of self-sacrifice. Today many want to be recognized without the sacrifice. It's good to remember that the LORD is aware of our conduct and knows what we are willing to do for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The chapter concludes with the dwelling places of the Levites. They were dispersed throughout the land to live amongst the people. This was due to their responsibility to teach the God's Word. By living with the people they were able to provide instruction and encouragement. These men did not choose their place of residence but lived where they could serve the LORD.

Cities of Interest

Kirjatharba – Also known as Hebron, it was Abraham's residence for many years (Joshua 14:15). It was also the area Caleb requested and conquered.

Beersheba – One of the southernmost villages in Israel, so it is associated with the southern boundary of the nation.

Ziklag – A city given to David by a Philistine king and where he resided for a time.

Adullam – It was known for a cave nearby where David hid from Saul.

Michmash – The location of Jonathan's great victory over the Philistines.

Bethel – The location of many Biblical events.

Questions for Consideration

In what condition was Jerusalem?

What delayed the rebuilding of the city?

Why did the city remain unpopulated?

What methods did they adopt in populating Jerusalem and the cities round about?

Why was it necessary to populate Jerusalem?

In what ways was it a sacrifice to volunteer to live in Jerusalem?

What role did the porters play in Jerusalem?

What are some reasons for populating the rest of the land?

Why was it important for the Jews to dwell in their portion of the land?

Why were the Levites scattered throughout the land?

Points to Ponder

Are spiritual matters important?

They were to Nehemiah. When the Jews took time to seek after God he wisely stopped the physical work. He did not set the spiritual aside for a later date or attempt to do the physical work at the same time. It's good to make time for God and His word.

Are you dedicated to what the LORD has?

The rulers remained in Jerusalem to serve the LORD. They did not have to be told where to live or what to do. These men knew their responsibilities and remained to carry them out. Be dedicated to what the LORD has for you.

Are you willing to sacrifice for God's glory?

Evidently the Jews were reluctant to move to Jerusalem. They knew it was the holy city but stayed away. That is often the case with church. Many attend but few commit to be involved. Be willing to serve the LORD.

Are you courageous?

Some priests were considered mighty men of valour. These men discovered that serving the LORD required work as well as warfare. When attacked they were willing to stand for God and His ways. You must determine to stand for the LORD.

Are you faithful where you are?

The Jews had to rebuild and maintain their cities, so they had to remain faithful where they were. There is no job too small when it comes to serving the LORD. Be faithful wherever God chooses to place you – work hard for the LORD.