

# WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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## STUDY NOTES ON NEHEMIAH

### Chapter 11: Recruiting Citizens of Jerusalem

In Nehemiah 9 and 10, we saw that the people of Israel recognized their sin, repented of it, and entered into an agreement to walk rightly before the Lord from then on. Now, as we pick up in chapter 11, Nehemiah is documenting some details regarding population dispersion.

#### **Jerusalem's Population Problem (Nehemiah 11:1-2)**

As you recall from chapter seven, Nehemiah had previously made the comment that Jerusalem "...was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt" (Nehemiah 7:4). The population problem is still prominent at this point in the book. Let me explain why. In an agrarian society, you grow your own food to sustain yourself, and to sell or trade for other necessities. But when living in a city, you make your living by offering support systems to other city dwellers, and purchasing food from the agrarian bunch. The city has to be populated enough to require your service and to generate the income necessary to buy the food. The catch-22 of city populations is that if no one is there, no one moves there. If no one moves there, no one is there. There were also issues related to security. Walls or no walls a large city with a small population is not easily defended, and the few living there would feel like sitting ducks. So, in order to populate the city, lots were cast, choosing one out of every ten Israelite families to live in the city. Additionally, some others volunteered to live there, for which they were thanked by the people.

**To bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem:** It wasn't enough to see the city walls rebuilt and the spiritual renewal of the people of Jerusalem; now they concerned themselves with getting more people into the city. For a city to prosper and be great, it must be populated. Nehemiah also knew that the bigger the population of Jerusalem, the greater the resources for defence and strength in battle. He didn't rebuild the walls just to see some conquering army come and break them down again!

**Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem:** It was a good thing that the **leaders of the people** set the example by living in Jerusalem. Leaders must set the pattern by their lives. They had no right to expect the people to live in Jerusalem if they themselves were not living there.

**One out of ten:** The rest of the people submitted themselves to a ballot system, where one out of ten would be selected to move from the surrounding regions into the city of Jerusalem. So, in the end, at least ten percent of Judah's population would live in Jerusalem.

Apart from the leaders (who had a special obligation) and those selected in the ballot, there were some who **willingly offered themselves to reside in Jerusalem**. These men had a special blessing. They had a unique pioneer spirit. They had the ability to endure some measure of hardship or discomfort in order to accomplish a greater work for God's kingdom.

It was in those days in the rebuilding of Jerusalem that God asked an important question through the prophet Zechariah: "who despises the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10). The answer is, "Many of us have!" But these who offered themselves to **willingly** live at Jerusalem, so as to take what is small and build it up before the Lord, have decided to not despise the day of small things.

If such a blessing is reserved for those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem, there was something special about the challenge of living in Jerusalem. To live in Jerusalem, you had to re-order your view of material things; you had to re-arrange your social priorities, certainly leaving some friends and family behind in your old village; you had to give up land in your previous region and take up some kind of new business in Jerusalem. To live in Jerusalem, you had to have a mind to endure the problems in the city. It had been a ghost town for 70 years, and was now basically a slightly rebuilt, somewhat repopulated ghost town. The city didn't look all that glorious and it needed work. To live in Jerusalem, you had to live knowing you were a target for the enemy. There were strong walls to protect you, but since Jerusalem was now a notable city with rebuilt walls, the fear was more from whole armies than bands of robbers. The old village was nice, but not in much danger from great armies. It was a calling to a sacrificial lifestyle.

The Bible tells us there is a city coming down from heaven to earth, when God is done with this earth as we know it, and it calls that city "New Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:2). People don't want to be citizens of the New Jerusalem for the same reasons many didn't want to be citizens of Nehemiah's Jerusalem.

## **Rota of Those Living in Jerusalem and in Judea**

### **Neh. 11:4-19: Those who lived in Jerusalem.**

From here through verse 19, there is a list of those who lived in Jerusalem. While we won't be reading these 16 verses aloud, we also don't want to skip over them so fast that we miss the fact that there are several ministry job titles sandwiched in between some of these names.

For example, in verse eleven, Seraiah is named as "the **supervisor** in the house of God" (Nehemiah 11:11). He was the one overseeing the entire temple operation - all of the ministries that took place. Don't forget that a public building this large had, in addition to the many ministries taking place, would have administrative requirements of scheduling, pay, and organization, plus oversight of physical ministries like maintenance, and groundskeeping. This was no small task to keep everything up and running. Trust me, I know!

Verses 12 and 16 show us the next level of oversight: those who performed the **work of the temple**, and those who were in charge of the outside work. Verse 17 tells us that Mattaniah was the leader in charge of thanksgiving and prayer. A regular part of temple services was the giving of thanks in prayer.

Finally, in verse 19, we see the **gatekeepers**. These were not the guys at the gates in the wall around Jerusalem (“the gatekeepers of the city” as in 2 Kgs. 7:10). These are “the gatekeepers of the entrance of the tent of meeting” (1 Chr. 9:21), the guys who kept watch at the gates at each of the temple entrances (1 Chr. 9:17-27), stationed in the thresholds as guards on all four sides. Now, these weren’t simply doormen. They were in an office of trust, and were responsible for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God (1 Chr. 9:26-29). They spent the night around the house of God, because the watch was committed to them; and they (were) in charge of opening (it) morning by morning.

Now some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they counted them when they brought them in and when they took them out. Some of them also were appointed over the furniture and over all the utensils of the sanctuary and over the fine flour and the wine and the oil and the frankincense and the spices. There are so many things that need to happen in the house of God that most people never think about.

### **Neh. 11:20-21: The Temple servants living in Ophel.**

While many of the Israelites were spread all over the place, each in the cities of their inheritance, the temple servants were living in Ophel. Although this sounds like they were also living somewhere else, I should clarify that Ophel is a subdivision of Jerusalem, located in a ridge of hills inside Jerusalem just south of the temple area. In other words, the temple servants were living their ministry. They have invested their very lives in it.

And those who desperately thirst after the Lord and serving Him are completely content to give their entire lives for ministry. Jesus asked Peter if he wanted to go away like most of the crowd had done. But Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68) If your life is not devoted to serving the Lord and if you’re not called to it, it’s completely unbearable; too many hours and too much thankless work; but if it is, then the reward of serving the Lord is unimaginable.

### **Neh. 11:22-23: The overseer of the Levites.**

Now the chief officer (overseer) of the Levites in Jerusalem was Ozzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica. The overseer of the Levites was Ozzi who was one of Asaph’s descendants.

**The Sons of Asaph were the singers.** Music in worship has been - and continues to be - a controversial subject among many gatherings of believers. Some congregations have completely forsaken it, while other churches are making it the central point of ministry.

It is interesting that music had been a part of mankind before the flood (Gen. 4:21), but the first song that the Bible mentions being sung as worship to the Lord was not recorded until after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea (Exod. 15). From Scriptures, it does not appear that music was nearly as prominent in worship before the days of King David.

Being a skillful harp player with a huge heart for God, he began to organize and orchestrate music as part of the ministry services of the temple. In 1 Chronicles 16:4-5, “he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord...” At that point, Asaph and his relatives were appointed by David as the official “givers of thanks” (1 Chr. 16:7). The sons of Asaph eventually became the singers and musicians who led the worship of God in the temple services. I think the key is to understand that worship is not the style of music played in church. It is the act of revering the Lord, which is sometimes led through music and singing. If we keep that in mind, we will neither be guilty of forsaking it entirely, nor will we end up worshipping worship.

**Neh. 11:24: The King’s representative.**

“Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the sons of Zerah the son of Judah, was the king's representative in all matters concerning the people.” Even as life in Jerusalem was becoming somewhat normal, the fact still remained that they were still under the dominion of Persia’s King Artaxerxes in Babylon. But this mediator must have inspired great hope. For Pethahiah means, “Freed by Yahweh,” Meshezabel means “God delivers,” and Zerah means, “Rising.” In every matter between the people and the king, they were reminded that God was on their side, a God Who arises to bring deliverance and freedom.