

### Volunteers Needed

#### Nehemiah 11

Nehemiah 11:1-2 - *“Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities. <sup>2</sup> And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.”*

#### Background Notes

As we saw in earlier Talks, the people of Jerusalem completed the major task of rebuilding of the wall around the city. After Cyrus, the Persian emperor, issued the well-known “Edict of Cyrus” in 539BC, 50,000 Jews returned from Babylon, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, in 538BC. They eventually rebuilt the Temple, but the city wall remained in ruins for almost 100 years - until Nehemiah came back.

At first glance, rebuilding the city wall seemed like an insurmountable task. The job included clearing away all the rubble of the ruined wall - by hand! But under the inspiring leadership of Nehemiah, the entire project was completed in just 52 days! A truly remarkable accomplishment! It really does show what the Lord’s people can do when they are united. And God can accomplish amazing things through us today - when we’re united!

Once the wall was completed, it was decided that more people needed to move into Jerusalem. Why? The main reason was to help defend the city in case of attack. God wanted His holy city and His Temple to be protected. So the call went out for volunteers (v1-2). Although some people volunteered, more were needed.

You might think that everyone would want to move into Jerusalem. After all, the Temple was located there, and the big city was now protected by a new wall. Why didn’t everyone want to move in? Well, relocating to Jerusalem meant building another home, moving the family, reestablishing a business, a lot of hard work and change. There may have been other reasons, too, but probably the main reason people didn’t want to move into the city was the trouble and cost of moving and getting reestablished. Would you have volunteered?

So lots were cast, and one out of every ten families was chosen to move into the city. Apparently they went willingly, even though it meant sacrifice. They moved in spite of the hardships. They sacrificed for the good of all.

Notice that Jerusalem is called *“the holy city”* in verses 1 and 18. (Some people think it gets that name only on trips to the Holy Land – but no! It’s in the Bible!) This holy city is the place where God chose to place His dwelling and establish His Name. Looking forward to the choosing of Jerusalem for His holy city and the place of His Temple, Moses said, *“But you*

*shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His habitation, and there you shall go...*" (Deuteronomy 12:5). And by the way, the term "Holy Land" is not just a name for Israel that's used to hype tours! It's also a biblical name that's used in Zechariah 2:12.

Most of the rest of Nehemiah 11 is a listing of those who already lived in Jerusalem, and those who were relocating there. (And by the way, Uzzi (v22) is not the inventor of the Israeli semi-automatic machine gun!) [Laughter.]

The "king" (v23-24) was not Nehemiah. Nehemiah was the governor – he was not a king. And this "king" was not a king of Israel or Judah - there were no longer any kings in Israel. Remember - Judah was now a province of the Persian Empire. So the king mentioned here was the Persian king, Artaxerxes I. Ezra and Nehemiah both returned to Jerusalem during the reign of Persian emperor Artaxerxes I.

According to Ezra 7, Artaxerxes I arranged for the financial needs of the restored Temple and for the rebuilding of the wall - by decree. Ezra 7:21 & 23 quotes from this decree "*Now I, King Artaxerxes, decree that all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, the teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you... Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should his wrath fall on the realm of the king and of his sons?*"

Why were the Persian kings so helpful to the Jews? The answer is right there in verse 23. It wasn't because the Persians had become believers in "*the God of heaven*" – it was because the Persian king wanted to appease and please "all the gods." He thought he would gain favor with all the gods by honoring their various temples in the conquered countries that were now part of the Persian Empire. So, from the Persian perspective, it was advantageous to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem, and to actually help them rebuild their city and their Temple.

Of course we know that God was in control! He overruled, and He directed the king to benefit His people, the Jews. "*In the Lord's hand, the king's heart is a stream of water that He channels toward all who please Him*" (Proverbs 21:1). God not only used the Persian king to send His people back to their homeland – He even caused the Persian king to supply them with the materials needed for the rebuilding projects!

The last part of the chapter gives a listing of towns that were settled just outside of Jerusalem, and where most of the volunteers came from.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God keeps track of individual efforts.

God did not just take general notice that there was an effort to get people to move into Jerusalem. He took note of the specific names and numbers of those living or moving into Jerusalem.

Look at verse 6: *“All the sons of Perez who dwelt at Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men.”* And verse 13, *“And his brethren, heads of the fathers’ houses, were two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer...”* And all the way through verses 18-19, *“All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred and eighty-four. Moreover the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren who kept the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two.”*

This detailed account is not only an accurate historical record - it's the inspired Word of God! Why would the Holy Spirit choose to record all these names and numbers? One reason is to let us know for certain that God takes note of every individual effort that's made to serve Him.

Be encouraged if you think no one appreciates your effort. **God notices!** 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, *“Finally my brethren, be steadfast, unmoving, always abounding in the work of the Lord inasmuch as you know your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”* Even though others may not notice, God takes note.

## 2. God looks for individuals who can defend the faith.

God wanted His holy city to be a strong city, with people who could defend it. After all, it was the city of the Temple, God's dwelling place in the midst of His people. And there's a spiritual lesson here.

God wants us to be strong Christians, able to defend the faith. As individuals, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6), and as a Church, we are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3). So we, as individuals, are to be strong Christians who are able to defend the faith. And local churches, as local gatherings of the body of Christ, are to be strong, speaking forth the pure gospel and defending the faith.

Jude 3 says, *“Contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.”* Another good verse in this connection is 1 Peter 3:15: *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”* Always be ready to give an answer to those who ask about your faith. Be ready to defend your faith!

In 1 Peter 3:15, the Greek word used for “defense” or “answer” is *“apologia.”* In ancient Greece, this word referred to a legal defense made as part of a trial. From this Greek word we get our English word “apologetics” - a defense of the Christian faith. We all should study apologetics so that we'll be able to better defend the Christian faith.

## Practical Application

### Don't lose out on blessing by refusing to volunteer!

Verse 2 once again: *"The people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem."* The people who volunteered to move into the holy city were blessed. The people blessed and thanked them, and we know God blessed them because He recorded and took note of their service and their personal sacrifice. If they had refused to move, they would have missed out on the blessing! What about those who did refuse? They lost out on that particular blessing.

Do you want more blessing in your life? Do you feel like you're "in the wilderness" - dry, barren, and not experiencing God's blessing? Why not volunteer to serve the Lord in some capacity? There are many ways you can help in church or church-related ministries!

When I preach at various churches, it's always great to hear reports about successful ministries, like VBS or summer camps, and the Christians who volunteer and commit themselves to serving. There are always reports of blessing! Not only were those who were brought to the Lord blessed, and those who grew in the Lord blessed, but those who gave sacrificially of their time and energy were blessed as well!

Don't lose out on God's blessing by refusing to volunteer for His service. Remember - God is looking for volunteers. There are so many things we can do if we would just give our time and energy and spiritual gifts to serving others. You might think that you're just "helping out" or doing a "little part." No! You're blessing others! And furthermore, you'll be blessed yourself as well. That's the way it works!

God blesses those who will volunteer - so don't lose out on blessing by refusing to volunteer!