



Nehemiah - Chapter Eleven

Summary of Chapter Eleven

This chapter addresses the need to maintain a proportion of the population in Jerusalem and records the names of leaders who lived there. Populated villages of Judæa are also named.

V Nehemiah 11:1-12:43 - The Population of Jerusalem and the Villages; Priests and Levites

These two chapters depict the people's efforts to populate Jerusalem.

V.a Nehemiah 11:1-36 - Inhabitants of Jerusalem and the Villages of Judah

Refer to the chapter summary above.

V.a.i Nehemiah 11:1-24 - Population of the City Increased

The city of Jerusalem was under-populated and so lots were drawn in each community in the surrounding towns and villages to nominate the people who should relocate to the city to join their leaders. This raised the population of Jerusalem up to at least ten percent of the entire nation. This subsection then goes on to name the various leaders, their groups and their numbers.

¹ Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem; and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in the holy city Jerusalem, while nine-tenths remained in the other towns. ² And the people blessed all those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 11:1-2

The leaders of the community are concentrated in **Jerusalem**, but the picture of an under-populated city is reinforced here: <<***The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been built***>> (Nehemiah 7:4).

The people in the provincial towns cast lots to decide who should relocate to the capital. It was good that the leaders of the people set the example by already living in Jerusalem, where they could influence the decision making for the entire nation. Leaders must set the pattern by their own lives. They had no right to expect the people to live in Jerusalem if they themselves were not living there.

Although not stated here it is also likely that each community had a group of elders as well as Levites to look after their local affairs.

One out of ten. It is not said how the people decided on this plan or how they reached a figure of approximately ten percent of the total population to live in the holy city Jerusalem.

It was not 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. And for more than seventy years Jerusalem had been little more than a ghost town. Now, over the last eighty or so years, it has been repopulated, with a new temple built by 516 BC and the walls rebuilt under Nehemiah in 445 BC. However, the city still needed more people. Nehemiah also knew the bigger the population of Jerusalem the greater the resources for defence and strength in battle. He did not rebuild the walls just to see some conquering army come and break them down again! Also a strong vibrant city would be more likely to be commercially successful and the income generated by trading with its neighbours would benefit the entire nation.

And the people blessed all those who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. Perhaps this implies that there were not enough of them to make up the required one in ten so additional men volunteered to go, although another interpretation is that this is simply another way of describing those who were chosen by lot to go to Jerusalem, i.e. they did not refuse the outcome of the lot.

It was in these days in the rebuilding of Jerusalem that God asked an important question through the prophet Zechariah: <<*For who has despised the day of small things?*>> (Zechariah 4:10a NASB). The answer is, “Many people have!” However, those here who offered themselves to willingly live in 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 at that time. To live in Jerusalem:

- A person had to re-order their view of material things. They had to give up land in their previous region and take up some kind of new business in Jerusalem.

- They had to rearrange their social priorities, certainly leaving some friends and family behind in their old town or village.
- They had to have a mind to endure the problems in the city. It had been a ghost town for seventy years and was now basically a slightly rebuilt, somewhat repopulated ghost town. The city did not look all that glorious and it needed additional work from those who resided there.
- They had to live knowing they were a target for the enemy. There were strong walls to protect them 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 comfortable and not in much danger from great armies.

The Bible reveals there is a city coming down from heaven to earth, when God is done with this earth as it is now known, and it refers to that city as the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:2. People do not want to be citizens of the New Jerusalem for the same reasons many did not want to be citizens of Nehemiah's Jerusalem - it is not an easy choice to get there.

³ These are the leaders of the province who lived in Jerusalem; but in the towns of Judah all lived on their property in their towns: Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants. ⁴ And in Jerusalem lived some of the Judahites and of the Benjaminites. Of the Judahites: Athaiah son of Uziah son of Zechariah son of Amariah son of Shephatiah son of Mahalalel, of the descendants of Perez; ⁵ and Maaseiah son of Baruch son of Col-hozeh son of Hazaiah son of Adaiiah son of Joiarib son of Zechariah son of the Shilonite. ⁶ All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant warriors.

Nehemiah 11:3-6

These are the leaders of the province who lived in Jerusalem. This extensive list includes tribal leaders Judah and Benjamin, military men, priests, Levites, gatekeepers, and civil and royal servants. All these notable men and their families took the lead by choosing to settle in Jerusalem, setting a good example for all God's people.

The temple servants, along with gatekeepers (v.19) and singers (v.22), were classes of Levites; refer to the comments made on Ezra 2:40-42.

The descendants of Solomon's servants may be connected with foreigners whom Solomon originally drafted for building the temple: *<<All the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel – their descendants who were still left in the land, whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely –*

these Solomon conscripted for slave labour, and so they are to this day>> (1 Kings 9:20-21). They are included here along with the temple servants, and like them are not regarded as slaves. Presumably they were the descendants of those who voluntarily returned from Babylon in the original wave: <<*The descendants of Solomon's servants: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth-hazzebaim, and Ami. All the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two>>* (Ezra 2:55-58).

And in Jerusalem lived some of the Judahites and of the Benjaminites. These were the two tribes of the southern kingdom under King Rehoboam who had succeeded his father Solomon: <<*When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen troops to fight against the house of Israel, to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon>>* (1 Kings 12:21). It was predominately these two tribes along with Levites that had composed the exiles in Babylon and now compose the community that has been restored.

⁷ And these are the Benjaminites: Sallu son of Meshullam son of Joed son of Pedaiah son of Kolaiah son of Maaseiah son of Ithiel son of Jeshaiiah. ⁸ And his brothers Gabbai, Sallai: nine hundred and twenty-eight. ⁹ Joel son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in charge of the city.

Nehemiah 11:7-9

Joel son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in charge of the city. It is not made clear how these offices relate. It appears to be city-wide posts that perhaps had authority over the district leaders: <<*Next to them Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house; and next to him Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs. Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Next to him Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters>>* (Nehemiah 3:9-12).

¹⁰ Of the priests: Jedaiah son of Joiarib, Jachin, ¹¹ Seraiah son of Hilkiyah son of Meshullam son of Zadok son of Meraioth son of Ahitub, officer of the house of God, ¹² and their associates who did the work of the house, eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah son of Jeroham son of Pelaliah son of Amzi son of Zechariah son of Pashhur son of Malchijah, ¹³ and his associates, heads of ancestral houses, two hundred and forty-two; and Amashsai son of Azarel son of Ahzai son of

Meshillemoth son of Immer, ¹⁴ and their associates, valiant warriors, one hundred and twenty-eight; their overseer was Zabdiel son of Haggadolim.

Nehemiah 11:10-14

The ruler or officer of the house of God was the high priest.

Their associates who did the work of the house. This probably means those whose duties were performed inside the main temple building in contrast to the Levites referred to in v.16.

¹⁵ And of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub son of Azrikam son of Hashabiah son of Bunni; ¹⁶ and Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the leaders of the Levites, who were over the outside work of the house of God; ¹⁷ and Mattaniah son of Mica son of Zabdi son of Asaph, who was the leader to begin the thanksgiving in prayer, and Bakbukiah, the second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua son of Galal son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸ All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred and eighty-four.

Nehemiah 11:15-18

The outside work of the house of God. This is a lesser role than that of the priests in v.12, befitting the Levites' lower rank. This could refer to tasks undertaken in the temple courts, the most likely interpretation, or indeed work such as teaching within the community.

¹⁹ The gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their associates, who kept watch at the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two. ²⁰ And the rest of Israel, and of the priests and the Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, all of them in their inheritance. ²¹ But the temple servants lived on Ophel; and Ziha and Gishpa were over the temple servants.

Nehemiah 11:19-21

The rest of Israel, that is, after a tenth of the population had been resettled in Jerusalem (v.1). Their inheritance refers to one's ancestral property; refer to the comment made on Ezra 2:59-63 for some of the towns that were their ancestral inheritance.

The temple servants lived on Ophel. The temple servants, Hebrew *netinim*, a term appearing only in Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 Chronicles 9:2, were a further, lower class of officials appointed by King David to help the Levites: *<<besides two hundred and twenty of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had*

Nehemiah 11:22-24

For there was a command from the king concerning them. This must mean the Persian king rather than King David, who had originally organised the Levitical singers in 1 Chronicles Chapter 25, since the note about Pethahiah as being at the king's hand or side must mean that this person was responsible for Jewish affairs at the royal court. He may have taken over in this role from Ezra.

V.a.ii Nehemiah 11:25-36 - Villages outside Jerusalem

This list of villages is prompted by the allusion to the population in the province as opposed to Jerusalem; refer to v.1. A number of the place names in Judah occur also in Joshua 15:20-63. For the villages of Benjamin, refer also to Ezra 2:26-33.



Judæa under Persian Rule 538-332 BC

Under Persian rule, the lands of Israel, now called Samaria, and Judah, now called Judæa, were minor provinces within the satrapy called Beyond the River. Returning Judæans settled mostly in the province of Judæa but a few settled in the plain of Ono and Idumæa as well. The fact that the plain of Ono lay outside the jurisdiction of Judæa may explain why Nehemiah suspected that the other local governors intended to do him harm there; refer to Nehemiah 6:1-14.

²⁵ And as for the villages, with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba and its villages, and in Dibon and its villages, and in Jekabzeel and its villages, ²⁶ and in Jeshua and in Moladah and Beth-pelet, ²⁷ in Hazar-shual, in Beer-sheba and its villages, ²⁸ in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages, ²⁹ in En-rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, ³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its villages. So they camped from Beer-sheba to the valley of Hinnom.

Nehemiah 11:25-30

From Beer-sheba to the valley of Hinnom. The people of Judah lived in the area south of Jerusalem. Beer-sheba was in the far south of the territory and the valley of Hinnom was on the southern edge of Jerusalem.

³¹ The people of Benjamin also lived from Geba onwards, at Michmash, Aija, Bethel and its villages, ³² Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, ³³ Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, ³⁴ Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, ³⁵ Lod, and Ono, the valley of artisans. ³⁶ And certain divisions of the Levites in Judah were joined to Benjamin.

Nehemiah 11:31-36

The villages of Benjamin lay mainly to the north and west of Jerusalem.

The Levites were in effect a third tribe in the restored community, for they originally had settlements throughout the land; refer to Joshua Chapter 21. This verse simply records that since the restored community did not consist of the tribe of Judah alone, the Levites did not relate only to that tribe.