

Nehemiah 11:1-12:26

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 March 2020

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 0 0] So again, the scripture reading is going to be Nehemiah chapter 11, verses 1 to 6, and Nehemiah chapter 12, verses 22 to 26. 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 Jerusalem, the holy city.

Well, nine out of ten remained in the other towns, and the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. These are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem. In the towns of Judah, everyone lived on his property in their towns.

Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants. And in Jerusalem lived certain of the sons of Judah and of the sons of Benjamin. Of the sons of Judah, Athaiah, the son of Uziah, son of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Shephethiah, son of Mahalalel, of the sons of Perez.

And Maseah, the son of Baruch, son of Kolhose, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Zerub, son of Zechariah, son of the Shilonite. And all the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were 468 valiant men.

Nehemiah 12, 22 to 26. In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jedua, the Levites were recorded as heads of fathers' houses.

[1 : 2 5] So too were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian. As for the sons of Levi, their heads of fathers' houses were written in the book of Chronicles until the days of Johanan, the son of Eliashib.

And the chiefs of the Levites, Hashabiah, Sherabiah, and Jeshua, the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers who stood opposite them to praise and to give thanks according to the commandment of David, the man of God, watch by watch.

Madaniah, Bacabukiah, Obadiah, Meshulam, Talam, and Akub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates. These were in the days of Joachim, the son of Jeshua, son of Josedek, in the days of Nehemiah, the governor, and of Ezra, the priest and scribe.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, it's great to be with you this morning.

And as usual, we turn to the Lord's word. Earlier this morning, we were praying together, and someone mentioned in the prayer, we may be the only congregation in the whole wide world that turns to Nehemiah 11 this Sunday.

[2 : 4 0] And the more I thought about it, I think that may be true. And so let's turn to the Lord for a brief prayer, and then we will look to Nehemiah 11.

Father, we are incredibly thankful to be together. We're thankful for the means and the medium that allows us to assemble in this way.

And we pray that as we assemble as your people, that you, the living God who sits enthroned even now, will speak to your people.

You would give us words that impart life and vitality and strength and encouragement as we face uncertain days ahead.

And so be our help in these next moments, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Daniel Burnham.

[3 : 41] Some may be familiar with the name of the architect and the urban planner. I was not prior to moving to the city of Chicago. But he's credited with a 1909 publication titled Plan of Chicago, which laid out the plans and the future of our city.

It recommended an integrated series of projects, including new and widened roads, parks, railroad facilities, harbor facilities, and civic buildings.

He had intentions, and I quote, of taking Chicago and making it the Paris on the prairie. Being a strong visionary, he was known for this statement, make no little plans.

They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will not themselves be realized. His plans reshaped Chicago. If you drive north on Lakeshore, you will see the Burnham Sanctuary adjacent to the lakefront.

And this morning we come to our text, and we see another individual who's ordering a city, namely Nehemiah, the city of Jerusalem. The walls we know are already standing, and the temple was in place.

[5 : 03] But the establishing of the physical space was only one aspect of the city. There were other facets that needed to be incorporated. And in our time this morning, I would like us to see that Nehemiah orders a city around two things, around security and song.

Security and song. Nehemiah is reconstructing a city that prioritizes protection that enables praise. In other words, as far as he is able, Nehemiah would establish a city that would be free from fear and filled with worship.

The purpose of our text this morning is to demonstrate God's concern to provide a place where his people would dwell secure and be filled with song.

God's purpose, and I would say for all of human history, is that to provide a place where his people would dwell secure and be filled with song.

Well, firstly, a city that would dwell secure. A city that would dwell secure. Chapter 11 can be seen as resuming from chapter 10, verse 39.

[6 : 29] There you see it, the last sentence of the previous chapter. We will not neglect the house of our God. Chapter 10 records the people's provision.

They would bring their gifts sacrificially, their tithes and their offerings, to really fund not only the building, but the work of God. And in chapter 11, we will see the provision of the people themselves.

The people themselves would provide themselves as the means of not neglecting the house of God. Chapter 11 really resumes on the heels of chapter 10, but it's answering a problem that was mentioned in chapter 7.

Since you have your Bibles, I encourage you to turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 7. And this is right after the announcement that the wall had been complete. The gates were set.

The doors were set. There were the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed. And in Nehemiah chapter 7, verse 4, the writer leaves us with this sentence.

[7 : 36] The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. And so you can envision this city.

The walls were constructed. The gates were operating. The temple was standing. But the city itself was empty, sparse, underpopulated.

The Bible tells us in Nehemiah chapter 7, verse 4, there were few inhabitants inside the city walls. And so when we get to Nehemiah chapter 11, Nehemiah needs to address this issue.

It almost seems like Nehemiah chapter 11 picks up where Nehemiah 7 leaves off. And Nehemiah inserts chapters 8, 9, and 10, almost to say that before you populate the city, there are a few things you need to do.

First, chapter 8, make sure your hearts are under the word of God. Then in chapter 9, make sure your hearts are repentant under the faithfulness of God.

[8 : 47] And in chapter 10, make sure your hearts are committed to doing something hard. And before you move in, make sure those three things are in place.

You are under the word. You are aware of your brokenness and sinfulness and need of God's faithfulness. And that you have committed wholeheartedly to moving in.

And so chapter 11, verse 1, indicates this plan to fill the city. The leaders of the people appear to already live in the city of Jerusalem.

And Nehemiah implements a divine lottery of sorts, the casting of lots. He would take 10% of the population that lived in the villages and towns that surrounded Jerusalem and relocate them within the city.

Any cursory glance of the text will demonstrate that it's filled with names. Thank you, Jeremy, for reading some of them. But there's many of them in this chapter. It's like picking up in a...

[9 : 54] Our chapter is like picking up in the bridge version of the yellow pages. And for some of us, the yellow pages are a memory. For others of us, the yellow pages are a history lesson.

Let me tell you what the yellow pages were. So you might ask the question, before the internet, how did you find phone numbers? Well, routinely, I don't know, maybe quarterly, maybe annually, a large volume, probably the largest volume you've ever seen.

I wouldn't underestimate it was three to four inches thick, would be dropped on your doorstep. And it would be colored yellow. And inside, for your precinct or your district or your neighborhood, there you can look under your last name.

And you would find the list of your home phone number. It's incredible. I never saw another person with my last name. But it was a large volume filled with phone numbers.

And of course, included in it were businesses. The names of the local laundromat, the local restaurant. Because prior to either cell phones, internet, Yelp, Google, that's what we relied on.

[11 : 08] And here we have, Nehemiah gives us a snapshot of the yellow pages of Jerusalem. The yellow pages of Jerusalem. The text is certainly not a comprehensive list of names.

If you just cross-reference to 1 Chronicles 9, 1 Chronicles 9 actually expands on this list. But the list is distinguished by two things.

Firstly, it's distinguished by tribal affiliation and familial lineage. You'll see that because verse 4 tells us that this compilation is primarily concerned with the sons of Judah and the sons of Benjamin.

These are the two southern tribes that severed from the 12 total tribes of Israel. But the list also tells us that within the tribal affiliations, there is familial lineage.

You'll see it just in the verse that Jeremy read for us. In verse 6, All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were 468 valiant men.

[12 : 14] And so here we have in chapter 11, Sons, brothers, families who replenished and filled the city of Jerusalem.

But along with these names, there are additional side comments that we shouldn't overlook, that we need to take note of. It appeared that Nehemiah had already implemented a system to govern Jerusalem.

The city had to be an ordered city. Nehemiah communicated that there was an infrastructure to it. So in verse 9, you have a mention of Joel, the son of Zikri, was their overseer.

And Judah, the son of Hanesua, Sanua, was second over the city. There seems to be some organization, some ranking that was taking place in this city.

Nehemiah, the acting governor at the time, had put into place a system to establish order and stability. And additionally, a second comment alongside the ordering of society.

[13 : 22] There comes a description, a peculiar description, of a handful of people that moved into this city. You might have caught it. Verse 6 mentions that there were 468 valiant men that moved in.

Verse 7, beginning of verse 8, referring to the sons of Benjamin, Salou, and his brothers, men of valor, numbering 928.

Again, in verse 14, you have the same phraseology. And their brothers, mighty men of valor. 128.

These are certainly militaristic undertones. These are people who were recognized for their bravery. They were individuals who were willing to take their lives and uproot them from outside the city walls and relocate them into, within the city walls.

These would be those who would not only fill the hollow city, but these would be those who would fortify the city from foreign enemies.

[14 : 38] See, Nehemiah understood that cities needed a population in order to sustain themselves. And here we see Jerusalem was being repopulated and reestablished in such a way to communicate that God's people would dwell secure.

There would be valiant and brave men and women, families, to settle in a city that needed to be rebuilt.

See, it's the desire of every city. We see it routinely on the news, in articles. The top 10 safest cities in America.

You might see it the other end. The top 10 most dangerous cities in America. And for whatever reason, the desire is there that when we read those articles, we acknowledge something's wrong when cities are broken.

Something's unjust when they are insecure. And here we are. Here we see families that desire for their children to be able to walk through the city unharmed.

[15 : 51] And this is the vision of Nehemiah, to establish a city that would dwell secure. Why? Secondly, why is security so important?

Because it enables a city to be filled with song. It was necessary for Nehemiah to lay the infrastructure of the city.

The text is alluded to an organized government and has recognized the presence of mighty men of valor. The text also communicates the centrality of Israel's worship.

The centrality of Israel's worship. The list in chapter 11 highlights particularly those who were implementers of Israel's worship.

The names focus in on priests and Levites, caretakers of the nation's worship.

[16 : 51] There were those identified according to chapter 11 verse 16. Those who were working or entrusted with the work of the house of God.

There were those who were temple servants. For Nehemiah, the value of the city lay in the fact that Jerusalem housed the house of God.

It was where God had promised to meet his people. It was there where the people would direct their attention to God in worship and more specifically song.

You have to see this because it's actually bizarre how many times Jerusalem is mentioned in the first six verses. It's mentioned in verse 1.

Twice. Again in verse 2. In Jerusalem. And in verse 3. In Jerusalem. Verse 4. And in Jerusalem.

[17 : 47] And in verse 6. The sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem. Why was the focus on Jerusalem? Because Jerusalem for the people of God was a great city.

It was not only where God's temple sat. But it really was for the Israelites where heaven met earth. Or heaven touched earth.

Of all the places in the world. For the Old Testament believer. That was a sacred place. You only have to turn to 2 Chronicles 6.

Verse 6. In the dedication of the temple. God says to Solomon. I have chosen Jerusalem. I have chosen Jerusalem. That my name may be there.

No other place in all the world. Is that said to be true. The place of Jerusalem was of immense significance for Jewish life.

[18 : 47] There certainly the sacrificial system was implemented. Certainly the ceremonial washings were practiced. But it was there where the songs of Israel could be sung.

Psalms 137. If you have your Bible. It's a powerful song. It recalls when the people are in exile.

Prior to coming back to Jerusalem. And Psalm 137. Has really 6 verses. I'd like us to read.

Because it gives us the centrality of Jerusalem. The ability to sing. And here the exilic community writes.

By the waters of Babylon. There we sat. And we wept. When we remembered Zion. On the willows. There we hung our lyres.

[19 : 47] For there our captors required of us songs. And our tormentors mirth. Saying sing us one of the songs of Zion. And the psalmist responds.

How can we sing? The Lord's song in a foreign land. If I forget you oh Jerusalem. Let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth.

If I do not remember you. If I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. And there you have it. That from Jerusalem.

The great songs of redemption should resound. And here in 11 and part of chapter 12. This is actually situated in our text.

You see it in verse 17. That Mataniah. The son of Mekah. The son of Zabdi. The son of Asaph. Who was the leader. Of the praise.

[20 : 50] Again in verse 22. You see it. That the sons of Asaph. The singers. Over the work of the house of God.

And in verse 23. There's a striking. Almost side comment. There was a command. Given. Given. By the king. Concerning the singers. And a fixed provision.

For the singers. As every day. Required. For some reason. Nehemiah notes. That the Persian king. It was funding.

The praise team. Of Jerusalem. This is a conversation. You and I would love to have. With Nehemiah. How did that transpire? How did you get a foreign.

Or not even a foreign. The superpower. That reigned over Israel. To fund Israel's. Worship. Tell me how that happened. Nehemiah. It is as to say.

[21 : 48] I think the text is getting that. That of all things. That must continue. The singing. Must. Go on.

The songs. Must be sung. The music. Must go on. The praise. Must. Endure. The worship. Cannot. Cease.

Jerusalem. Was a city. That would be filled. With song. And here. At the end of chapter 11. What we. Find is. It rounds off. With the surrounding villages.

Of Jerusalem. The villages. Certainly. Bolster. The city. It's not difficult. To envision. That part of Jerusalem's. Workforce. Was. And commerce. Emerged. From the surrounding.

Towns. Perhaps. The listing. Of the villages. Is more emblematic. Of the breath. Of God's people. They were everywhere. They were everywhere. God had kept.

[22 : 41] His promise. And he had brought them. Back. To their land. Beersheba. One of the towns. Mentioned. Twice. Sat. 20 miles. Away.

From Jerusalem. It certainly. Wasn't a simple journey. Yet God's people. Resided there. And the. What the Bible. The text. Is telling us. Is that the region. Was filled with those.

Who had an allegiance. To the God of Israel. And the city of Jerusalem. The community. Of believers. Went beyond. The city walls. There were those. Who. Worship. From afar.

And those. Who. Worship. From. Near. They were faithful. To the work. Going on. In Jerusalem. Well.

In chapter 12. We have another record. A long list. Of names. But it's noteworthy. For two things. It's noteworthy. First. That it's all religious officers.

[23 : 36] Jerusalem. Was. Is to be remembered. First and foremost. As a worshiping community. So we have a record. Of those who held. Religious office. Priests. And Levites.

The priests. And the Levites. Were tasked. With the upkeep. Of Israel's worship. However. In chapter 12. There's a. A special demarcation. In the text.

Chapter 12. If chapter 11. Is about the physical. World. Of Israel. And Jerusalem. Chapter.

Chapter 12. Is about. The temporal. Significance. Of the priesthood. And the Levites. You'll see it. Verse 7.

In the days. Of. Yeshua. The end of verse 7. Beginning in verse 12. In the days. Of Jehoiachim. 12.

[24 : 32] Verse 22. In the days. Of Eliashiv. Again. 12. Verse 26. In the days. Of Nehemiah. The governor.

And Ezra. What chapter 12. Is trying to show us. Is that. When the returnees. The exiles. Returned. To Jerusalem. Their first.

Order. Of business. Was to establish. Worship. They wanted. Us. The reader. To know. When God's people.

Arrive. At God's. Place. They. Sung. God's. Praise. They sung. God's. Praise.

Chapter 12. Is. Complex. You'll see. Certain names. Are being. Repeated. Certain. Um. It's really. Two waves. Of. Returnees. The first. When.

[25 : 28] Yeshua. The high priest. Reigned. In Israel. The second. Was. When joy. Came. The second. The second wave. Of. Returnees. Return. During his. Reign. As. High priest.

And these lists. Are fascinating. And admittedly. Easy. We can get. Easily bogged down. In these. Names. And associations. Yet. For our purposes. What I want us. To note. Is that.

When God's people. Are in God's place. They always. Sing. God's song. God's song. So here. The priestly line. The Levitic line.

Are all traced. And they made an effort. To restore themselves. According. To verse 24. To the commandment. Of David. And the commandment. Of David.

Is so fascinating. Maybe this afternoon. In your time. Turn to first. Chronicles. Chapter 25. And there. You have David. Implementing.

[26 : 22] A commandment. To develop. The centrality. Of music. To the worship. Of God. He sets aside. An entire. People.

That their. Whole task. Is to sing. And make noise. To the Lord. For Nehemiah. He was securing. The city. For the continued. Legacy. Of worship.

Nehemiah. Understood. That protection. Needed to be provided. To the city. So that praise. Could ensue. And for us today. Sure. You might be able.

To translate this. To oh. We should fight. For religious freedom. So that we can defend. Our freedom. To worship. Sure. We can do that. Maybe it's a valid application.

But let me ask you more. Pointingly. But are there things. We as a congregation. Need to do. Need to secure.

[27 : 19] In the city. So others. Can worship. Is it possible. That we are summoned. To a task. That enables.

Another. To worship. Is it possible. That you and I. Are called. As men and women. Of valor. And of bravery. To do something. So. Countercultural.

That the worship of God. May ensue. There are certainly. Systemic. Injustices. In our city. That we must fight. And disarm. So that worship. May prevail.

There are inequities. That need to be resolved. So that praise. May ensue. There is forgiveness. That needs to be. Both requested. And extended. And offered. So that songs. May be sung.

Physical security. Is the emphasis. Of the text. But there are so many. Other aspects. Of security. Aren't there? How can one worship. If they are crippled.

[28 : 17] By need. How can one. Worship. If they are victimized. By injustice. How can one worship.

If they are excluded. Or discriminated against. Because of the color. Of their skin. Or the background. Of their upbringing. We as a congregation.

Must wrestle. Through these issues. Because we are not only. Securing a place. Physically. We are securing. A place. So that. Any person.

That walks through. Our front doors. May engage. In worship. The church. Therefore. Must be a means. Of securing. Adequate. Adequate.

Provisions. So that song. Can go forth. We certainly. Won't do it. Comprehensively. Or perfectly. But we certainly. Can do it. Consistently.

[29 : 18] And progressively. Well. To close. Ironically. When the plan. Of Chicago. Was published. Daniel Burnham. The long time.

Chicago resident. Had moved out. Of the city. The city. That he had. Designed. He had become. Wary. Of the city.

Of Chicago. Which he felt. Had become. Dirtier. And more dangerous. As its population. Increased. Burnham. Explained. To his mother.

In a letter. He said. I can't. I did it. Because I can. No longer. Bear. To have my children. In the streets. Of Chicago. It was too dangerous. It was too dirty.

The city. Of which he had. Great intention. Failed to live up. In the city. To his vision. The city. Which he dreamt of. Could not protect. Her inhabitants.

[30 : 14] And would stifle. Human flourishing. See. Chicago is not a perfect city. But can I tell you. Of another city.

Can I tell you. Of a greater city. Can I tell you. Of a future city. Can I take. The language of the text. From verses 1. And verses 18.

And tell you. About Jerusalem. The holy city. It's a new Jerusalem. Actually. It's not. Nehemiah's. Jerusalem.

But it's the apostle. John's. Jerusalem. Jerusalem. Because there. In the book of Revelation. He has this vision. Of a new city. A holy city. Named Jerusalem.

Descending. From on high. Touching. Down. On earth. It's a glorious city. Adorn. And this city. Surpasses all cities. For it is.

[31 : 12] Secured from all evil. It will be absent. Of all threats. All physical evils. All social injustices. All emotional losses. All psychological darkness.

For her inhabitants. Would dwell. Secure. It would be a city. Joyfully. Bustling. With unending worship. With shouts. And song.

And the heart of the city. Is not its architecture. Though it will be unrivaled. The beauty of the city. Will not be found. In its natural.

Landscapes. And greenery. Though it will be unmatched. The attraction of the city. Will not be the absence of evil. Though it will. Bring great joy.

The centerpiece. And the showpiece. Of this city. Will be Jesus. A lamb. John actually doesn't want to use his name.

[32 : 13] He just calls him. The lamb. I think it's five or six times. In the last. Last few chapters of. Revelation. Why?

Because it's the self-sacrifice of the lamb. That secures a city. And propels us to praise. Jesus. The Bible tells us. That Jesus is the lamb of God.

Who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus was the lamb that was slain. And his shed blood. Causes the judgment of God. To pass over. The individual deserving.

Of punishment. See the holy city. Will have nothing unclean in it. And yet all of us. Have stained hands. And the end of the Bible.

Gives us a picture of a city. Of which we all have access to. Because there's this book. Of the lamb. It's a book of exceptions.

[33 : 12] I think of. It's all those. Who get into the city. Undeservedly. But it's. Those who have. By faith. Received the loving.

Sacrificial act of the lamb. And by faith. Are vigorously. Pursuing. To live. A life. Pleasing. To him.

It is. The holy city. God's city. The eternal city. Of which we're all. Looking.

Toward. So let us walk together. Toward that city. And Lord. Haste the day. When our faith. Be made sight.

Father. We come to you. And we look at these. Verses. And we thank you. That they are. In. Certain ways.

[34 : 10] A degree. Of foreshadowing. To a city. Where all its inhabitants. Will dwell secure. And all its inhabitants. Will sing your praise. And in the meantime. We're stuck.

In this place. Where. Security. Is not guaranteed. Or promised. And it may seem. That the songs of praise. Are far off in distance.

But yet. By faith. We take hold. Of the eternal city. That is promised to us. And may we walk. In that direction. Knowing that.

That we will inherit. That place. Be with us. As we close in song. May you seal. Your words.

Upon our heart. For our good. We ask these things. For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen.