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Nehemiah 11

(2021)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Nehemiah 11.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

In 445 B.C. the Persian King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah, an Israelite who was a trusted official written permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah went with the third wave of returning Jewish exiles. There was intense opposition from other people in the land, and disunity within Jerusalem. Despite the strong opposition, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and overcame many threats. He served twice as governor and did what God had put in his heart (Neh. 2:12) (Neh. 7:5), and found that the joy of the LORD was his strength (Neh. 8:10). For an overview of the entire book see the title: "Overview of the Book of Nehemiah" (at the beginning of the index to Nehemiah).

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

Firstly, the chapter gives a list of all the names written on the seals of the covenant Israel made and secondly upon Israel as a nation, repenting of their sins and the sins of the nation and entering into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses to observe and do all the commandments, duties and laws of the LORD, of which they had not only been previously guilty of neglecting, but also guilty of grossly breaking.

NEHEMIAH 11:1-2

- **Nehemiah 11:1-2:** 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, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns. ² And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, being the capitol city of the nation, was the seat of government, so it was only natural that the rulers and the principal men of the people dwelt there to better serve in their various ministerial services and the performance of their office. It appears that the majority of the Jews, preferred to live in the country rather than Jerusalem perhaps for the following two reasons:

1. They were generally shepherds, and lovers of agriculture, therefore the country was more suited to their manner of life than the city.
2. Their enemies were extremely enraged to see Jerusalem's walls built again, and desired to stop Jerusalem from rising to its previous strength and splendour, that many were very likely afraid to dwell in Jerusalem for fear of attack, and thinking they would be much safer in the country, where their enemies had far less reason to trouble them.

The rest of the people: since the great part of the returned exiles preferred to live in the country area or the provincial towns, they chose to cast lots, to bring one man and his family from every ten to dwell in Jerusalem for the following reasons:

- To insure there would be an adequate population to complete the buildings, houses, roads and streets etc., so that the city would be fully completed.
- To establish a strong defence force to protect the city from enemies, especially those who had previously tried every means to prevent the success of the rebuilding of the walls.

- To ensure there would be a sufficient number of people to repopulate the city with new born children.

Casting of lots was forbidden when it was done from a spirit of superstition, or if the lot fell one way it determined a good result, but if it fell the other way it determined an evil and harmful result, such choices were never to be left to chance, however, on some occasions it was permitted by God Himself, and some of God's most faithful men both in the Old and New Testament, have practised it in particular cases. Added to this we read in the book of proverbs:

- The lot puts an end to quarrels and decides between powerful contenders. (Prov. 18:18).

When everyone is in agreement with whichever way the lot falls, all contentions are put to an end, therefore in this situation it was a good way to determine what families would go to dwell in Jerusalem, especially since the casting of the lot, does away with any chance of favouritism.

Following are two good practical examples that show when casting lots is a good idea:

1. Many years ago, when my building partner and I decided to end the partnership, to do other things we had a lot of tools to divide up. To avoid squabble and arguments we drew his name on one side of a square block of wood and mine on the other, we then threw the block high in the air to see who would have first choice and afterward chose alternatively which tool we would take, and in this way divided up our tools without quarrel and contentions.
2. When the apostles cast a lot to choose whether Joseph (also called Barsabbas and Justus), or Matthias would replace Judas is also a good example, since both men faithfully accompanied the apostles during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among the people, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up it mattered not which of the two the lot chose, because either one was a good choice. (Acts 1:21-26).

Casting lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem: (v1) since this was a time when a strong national spirit had been awakened the people willingly sacrificed their own desire and submitted to the results that the casting of lots determined, for the interests of the community and because Jerusalem was the capital of the nation and God's Holy City. Enlarging and populating capital cities by forcible or willing transfers of this kind to enlarge them and promote their success was not an unusual practise in ancient times.

OVERVIEW: amongst all Israel's generation there have always been those who preferred their own ease and advantage rather than the well-being of the nation. Even many of their priests and ministers too commonly sought their own advantage, rather than what was good for the nation and right before God. History shows that amongst their generations there was but a few that had godly passion and zeal for the holy things of God and the well-being of their nation that they willingly forsook their own advantage to serve the LORD.

Those who have this love toward everything that will assist their communion with the Saviour, will enjoy the company of others with the same faith and where spiritual growth will most abound and do what they can for the well-being of the body of Christ and ultimately be willing to depart from this world to be present with the Lord. May the highest priority of our mind and heart be to seek first the favour of God and His glory, and be useful in whatever we are able, while we patiently wait with joyful hope, for acceptance into the holy city of God.

- **Nehemiah 11:3:** These are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem; but in the towns of Judah everyone lived on his property in their towns: Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants (Nethinims in KJV), and the descendants of Solomon's servants.

The name Israel now embraces the people of Israel, Judah, Benjamin, or any other tribe, for since the exile many of the tribes were mixed together. At this time Nehemiah was still a Persian official as well as a governor of Judah. However, Judah was reduced to a province by the king of Babylon, and now, at this time was a province of the Persian monarchy. Every returned exile who had come from Babylon, naturally returned to the lands, towns and cities throughout the country that had been anciently assigned to them. Though they dwelt in the land that was rightly theirs, they were under the rule and authority of the Persian king.

Israel, Judah and Benjamin: originally the name Israel embraced all the descendants of Jacob, prior to the sad division of the two kingdoms, Judah and Israel. Israel is used here as a general name, that embraces all tribes, for the following reason. After their seventy-year captivity, the nation was once again restored as one nation, for all tribes were mixed together and all traces of their previous separation were obliterated. This is why even though the majority of the returned exiles belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, they are now called Israel, since such large numbers out of all the tribes were now intermingled. The majority of these were primarily the occupiers of the rural towns and villages, while only those of Judah and Benjamin dwelt in Jerusalem.

The Levites: as opportunity allowed them the Levites took possession of the cities allotted to them

The temple servants (Nethinims in KJV): refers to persons who assisted the Levites and attended to the practical service of the temple.

NEHEMIAH 11:4-6

- **Nehemiah 11:4-6:** 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 Shephatiah, son of Mahalalel, of the sons of Perez; ⁵ and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, son of Col-hozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Joiarib, son of Zechariah, son of the Shilonite. ⁶ All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were 468 valiant men.

Various families from the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin dwelt in Jerusalem, the city where they anciently belonged, however, some from other tribes also now dwelt in the city.

NEHEMIAH 11:7-8

- **Nehemiah 11:7-8:** And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, son of Joed, son of Pedaiiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiah, ⁸ and his brothers, men of valor, 928.

There are some discrepancy between the catalogue of names in this list and the list mentioned in (Neh. 11:4-36) and the list previously given in (1Chron. 9:1-9). Following are some of the possible reasons for this:

- From the Jewish and Oriental practice of changing or modifying names because of a change of circumstances, or the alteration of names that occurred over the course of time.
- The list in Chronicles contains those who returned to Jerusalem in the first group of returned exiles, while the list in this passage most likely also includes those who returned with Ezra and Nehemiah.

- The list was very likely made after some had died, or some had joined themselves to the returning exiles as they saw them travelling to Jerusalem.
- Some may not have travelled all the way to Jerusalem, but rather chosen to settle in some other place.

NEHEMIAH 11:9-14

- **Nehemiah 11:9-14:** Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah the son of Hassenuah was second over the city. ¹⁰ Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin, ¹¹ Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, ruler of the house of God, ¹² and their brothers who did the work of the house, 822; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, ¹³ and his brothers, heads of fathers' houses, 242; and Amashsai, the son of Azarel, son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer, ¹⁴ and their brothers, mighty men of valor, 128; their overseer was Zabdiel the son of Haggadolim.

Joel was the overseer (captain and chief) of the people.

Judah was second over the city.

NEHEMIAH 11:15-18

- **Nehemiah 11:15-18:** And of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni; ¹⁶ and Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chiefs of the Levites, who were over the outside work of the house of God; ¹⁷ and Mattaniah the son of Mica, son of Zabdi, son of Asaph, who was the leader of the praise, who gave thanks, and Bakbukiah, the second among his brothers; and Abda the son of Shammua, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸ All the Levites in the holy city were 284.

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The leader of praise who gave thanks, refers to the leader of the choir that sang the public praise at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice. It was a principal, that the service always began with a prayer of thanksgiving and by some appropriate psalm, of which the sacred music was selected and guided by the leader of the praise.

NEHEMIAH 11:19

- **Nehemiah 11:19:** The gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their brothers, who kept watch at the gates, were 172.

Here we have one hundred seventy and two, while in 1 Chronicles 9 the number is 212. On possible reason for the difference between the two accounts may partly be explained by the fact that those who came with Zerubbabel are recorded in the list in Chronicles while the list here is made of those who came with Ezra. For other possible reasons see the notes following (Neh. 11:7-8) (above).

NEHEMIAH 11:20-21

- **Nehemiah 11:20-21:** And the rest of Israel, and of the priests and the Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, every one in his inheritance. ²¹ But the temple servants lived on Ophel; and Ziha and Gishpa were over the temple servants.

The rest of Israel (the residue of the priests and the Levites) refers to those who did not dwell in Jerusalem. Though mainly consisting of members of the two tribes the returned community of exiles represented the entire people of Israel. However, the land that they occupied, was not

the whole land of Israel, but that part that formed the kingdom of Judah. They settled in their allotted inheritance, previously enjoyed by their ancestors, in the land, the cities, houses, and estates of Judah that their ancient priests, Levites and Israelites had occupied.

NEHEMIAH 11:22-23

- **Nehemiah 11:22-23:** The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica, of the sons of Asaph, the singers, over the work of the house of God. ²³ For there was a command from the king concerning them, and a fixed provision for the singers, as every day required.

Uzzi: was the overseer and supervisor of the Levites at Jerusalem

The singers: the duty of the singers was suitably assigned to the sons of Asaph some feel that the singers served the following two purposes:

1. They took charge of providing the things that were required for the interior of the temple and its service, for though they were Levites, they did not come and go to Jerusalem, as the other Levites did, but were permanent residents of the city and therefore were well suited to attend to the duties within the temple, while others attended to the outward care of it.
2. Other feel that their sole ministry lay in the service of music, singing, prayer and praise, at the morning and evening sacrifice, the Sabbaths and their festivals etc. Since much time would be given to practice and the writing of music and songs it is most likely that their service only required them to provide music and sing, though they may have willingly helped in other areas as they were able.

NEHEMIAH 11:24

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- **Nehemiah 11:24:** And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the sons of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's side in all matters concerning the people.

The statement, Pethahiah was at the king's side, means at this time he was the king's agent in all matters of the people of the province to perform the following duties:

- To determine civil causes and controversies amongst the people according to the laws of the Persian king's kingdom.
- To determine matters of tribute or grievances between the king of Persia and the people.
- To determine judicial cases and civil and financial disputes, especially those concerning taxes.
- To speak on behalf of the people to the king, when they had a favour to ask of him, or a petition to present to him, Pethahiah would deliver it for them, and by him the king would return his answer.

It is likely Pethahiah understood the laws of the Persian king better than Nehemiah, and therefore was appointed for this work, either by Nehemiah or by the king, whatever the case, he would have still been under Nehemiah who the king of Persia had appointed governor of the province.

NEHEMIAH 11:25

- **Nehemiah 11:25:** 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,

The whole region in which the villages mentioned here where the people were now dwelling had been completely devastated by the Chaldean invasion, so it must be assumed that the Jews had now made many of the ruined houses liveable and by degrees rebuilt others. In the absence of the Hebrews during the seventy-year captivity, the ancient place known as Hebron recovered its old name Kirjath-arba. (Josh. 15:13).

Dibon: is the same with Dimonah (Josh. 15:22).

Jekabzeel: is the same with Kabzeel, one of the uttermost cities of the tribe of Judah southward (Josh. 15:22).

NEHEMIAH 11:26

- **Nehemiah 11:26-30:** and in Jeshua and in Moladah and Beth-pelet, ²⁷ in Hazar-shual, in Beersheba 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 encamped from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

Many of the places mentioned in these verses are mentioned in (Josh. 15:27-39) (Josh. 18:21-28).

NEHEMIAH 11:31-36

- **Nehemiah 11:31-36:** The people of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, 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 craftsmen. ³⁶ And certain divisions of the Levites in Judah were assigned to Benjamin.

Geba and Michmash: and the four following verses contain the names of several cities in the tribe of Benjamin.

Alia: (also called Ai) lay on the east of Bethel (Josh. 7:2).

Anathoth: was also in the land of Benjamin (Jer. 1:1).

Nob: was where Ahimelech came to meet David (1 Sam. 21:1).

Ananiah: the name of a town in the tribe of Benjamin between Nob and Hazor (nowhere else mentioned).

Hazor: was a fortified city (Josh. 19:35-36).

Ramah: was a place well known in Benjamin (Josh. 18:21-25).

Gittaim: a place to which the Beerothites fled. (2 Sam 4:3).

Hadid: a place in the tribe of Benjamin near Lydda, or Lod, and Ono. (Ezra 2:33) (Neh. 7:37).

Neballat: A town occupied by the Benjamites after the exile.

Lod and Ono: the valley of craftsmen. (Neh. 11:35).

Of the Levites were divisions: referring to those who were not settled in Jerusalem. Within the various settlements throughout the provinces of Judah and Benjamin there were various places appointed for the Levites. Since there were only a small number of Levites in the country at this time, it is reasonable that the writer has only briefly mentioned them in this way. They could have lived a peaceful, prosperous and happy life, had they not become so lukewarm toward the things of God, of which the Prophet Malachi, who prophesied of this time charges them with.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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