

June 1, 2025

Nehemiah 11:1-3

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. 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, and the descendants of Solomon's servants.

Scriptures for further study:

1 Chronicles 9:1-3

Hebrews 11:10

Hebrews 12:22-24

Hebrews 13:14

Revelation 21:1-14

“At that point in human history, God was pursuing His program in the world through the holy city, despite the rubble that remained. Jerusalem was God’s holy city.”

- James Hamilton

“Jerusalem was no ordinary city. It was “the holy city”. The exiles returned from Babylon to Jerusalem not simply out of sentimental attachment to “home” - after all, most of those who returned had never seen the city. What lay uttermost in the call to Jerusalem was redemptive concern - God promises “to make my name dwell there” (Nehemiah 1:9).”

- Derek Thomas



The Hand of God and the City of God Nehemiah 11:1-35

BIG IDEA: Because the hand of God guides the ends and means of our salvation, we are to look to the God-given means to grow in grace and to get the strength for our journey to the New Jerusalem.

OUTLINE

1. Populating Old Jerusalem

2. Populating New Jerusalem

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. The Christian life means that we are followers of Christ and no longer follow the ways of this sinful world. In what areas of life are you following Christ? In what areas are you struggling to follow Christ?
2. What are the means that God has given to His Church to grow in grace and to have the strength to be a part of His mission? Which of these do you utilize the most? Which of these do you utilize the least? Why do you think that is?
3. Recall the description of this city in Nehemiah 7:1-4. Obviously, people had been taking the more comfortable choice of resettling in surrounding towns. How does the process of repopulating Jerusalem show God’s gracious working among his people (11:1-2)?
4. How often do you remember and focus on the hope of our life in the New Jerusalem? How would that focus change how you work, parent, love your spouse, or go about your life?

“These people who willingly gave themselves to live in Jerusalem were putting God’s program over their own individual desires.”
- James Hamilton

“God intends to populate a city - the New Jerusalem into which the nations will come (Revelation 21:2, 22-26).”
- Derek Thomas

“The life of faith is to be a life of confidence in God’s promise to establish His city.”
- Dictionary of Biblical Imagery

Praise to Jesus. Take time today to offer a sacrifice of praise to God who delivered his people from exile and brought them home to Jerusalem, where they are now able to live and worship safely within its walls. Through Jesus, we have been rescued and redeemed so that we will one day live and worship Him in the Jerusalem to come.

Repentance through Jesus. Spend time in confession and repentance for not maintaining our God-given spiritual unity as true believers through pride, harshness, or impatience with members of our church family, thinking of ourselves first.

Consecration to Jesus. Because the hand of God guides the ends and means of our salvation, we are to look to the God-given means to grow in grace and to get the strength for our journey to the New Jerusalem.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The returning exiles resettled the land as an ordered and unified people, according to the tribes God had established through Abraham's descendants. The lines of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi continued, lines that contained priests and kings, including David's line leading to the promised King. The "holy city" of Jerusalem with its temple is a central focus (v. 1)—holy only because of the presence and promises of their merciful God.

This city was built and rebuilt on God's promises, which pointed toward Jesus and toward the city Abraham looked for: "the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). The apostle John saw this city: "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2), where God will dwell with his people forever. There, the final temple is found, though not built with wood and stone but rather existing as Christ himself (Rev. 21:22).

- ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. Have you ever followed bad directions and gotten lost? What was that experience like? (Talk with your children about how this passage shows us what it looks like to follow God's plan for our lives instead of our plans. Our plans are like bad directions as they will get us lost.)

2. What was the role of Jerusalem for the Jews in the Old Covenant? (Jerusalem became the center of the nation of Israel when King David brought the ark to Jerusalem and then Solomon built the Temple there.)

3. Why would the Jews make it a priority to repopulate Jerusalem? (This was a priority because of the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem as the place of worship. It was a priority also because Jerusalem was the place where the Davidic Kings would reign.)

4. In verse 2, we read that "the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem". Why do you think these people were honored and praised for agreeing to move to Jerusalem? (This was because these people showed their willingness to move and that they trusted in God's plan for their lives more than their own plan. Talk with your children about how we might live out our faith and trust in God's plan for our lives.)

5. What are the ways or means that God has given us as Christians to grow in grace and to strengthen us for our lives? (The most common are prayer, Scripture reading, studying Scripture, listening to sermons, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and Christian fellowship. Talk with your children about the reason we do these is not to earn God's love but because we have God's love through faith in Jesus.)

Scriptures for further study:

Hebrews 11:10

Hebrews 12:22-24

Revelation 21:1-4

FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Psalms 132:13-14

Nehemiah 1:9

John 1:14

Hebrews 12:22-24

Philippians 3:20

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 6:33

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

1. In this passage, some of God's people were chosen or volunteered to move into Jerusalem and help repopulate it. What kind of sacrifices or challenges might they have faced by leaving their homes and comforts behind? How does this relate to following God in your own life, even when it's hard or uncomfortable?

2. The city of Jerusalem was called "the holy city (v.1) not because it was perfect, but because it was where God had chosen to dwell with His people. What makes a place "holy" today? How does knowing that God's presence is with us change how you live or worship?

3. Hebrews 11:10 says that Abraham was looking forward to a city "whose designer and builder is God." How does the hope of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-4) shape the way you view your life now? How would focusing more on eternity change the way you make decisions, spend your time, or treat others?

4. In Nehemiah's time, many people served in different roles to support worship and community life—priests, musicians, gatekeepers, and more. What role do you think God is calling you to play in your church? How can you use your gifts to serve others and point them to Jesus?

5. Some people volunteered to move into the city because they believed in God's greater plan. What's one area in your life where you're being called to trust God's plan more than your own? What's holding you back?

6. In your daily life, where do you turn for strength and direction? How can God's Word, the church, and the hope of the New Jerusalem help you grow in grace and give you strength for the journey?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Here we learn that a tenth of the people were either conscripted or they volunteered to move into the city of Jerusalem. Doing so would have meant being uprooted from their homes and property, their comforts, their work, and their families, and starting a whole new and unfamiliar life in the city. QUESTION: What kind of costly faith must this have required? How subservient must they have been to the will of God over their own wants and desires? Do you think you would have answered the call? Have there been times in your life when God called you to something different or scary or costly? How did you respond? What was your experience?

2. Verses 15-23 indicate a real hive of activity taking place in the city: gatekeepers, handlers of utensils, those preparing the offering food, maintenance work, administration, chief officers, care for buildings and fabric, musicians and singers, priests, Levites, temple servants, etc. QUESTION: What are some lessons this teaches us about the church today? How do you see your own personal role in it? What special gifts or talents has God given you that you are using to build up the community of faith?

3. The text frequently refers to people as “descendants of” or “son of.” Their parentage in some cases would have gone back about 6 or 7 generations. These are families in which their faith would have been born and nurtured. Families are intended by God to play a vital role in handing down the word of God and nourishing faith in God. The Bible says elsewhere (Psalm 145:4), “One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.”

Question: In what ways are you, as a family member or as a church member actively ensuring that the knowledge and love of God is being taught to the younger generations?

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)