

Repopulation – Nehemiah 11:1-12:26

Scripture Reading: Revelation 21:2; 22-27

Introduction

Did you know, there are over 58,000 names inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC – commonly referred to by a simpler name, “The Wall”?

I visited the memorial some years ago and, even though I don’t personally know anyone who died in that war, seeing all the names listed there was a stirring sight

Simply recognizing that each of those names represented a life that was given in service to our nation one cannot help but be moved because, even if we don’t know them personally, those names personalize the sacrifices made

The vast majority of the names inscribed on the memorial belong to young men who hadn’t accomplished great things – the kind of people that history tends to forget after a generation or two

And it’s only proper that a grateful nation make the effort to record the names of those brave men and women for posterity

As you opened your Bible this week to read ahead to see what we would be studying this morning, you may well have groaned at the sight of another long list of names and people groups

I have to admit that lists of names can appear rather boring and it is tempting to pass over chapters like chapters 11 and 12 of Nehemiah as we read Scripture – to be perfectly frank, even preachers are tempted to skip them

But lists like the one before us serve to show us that these events actually took place in the lives of real people who were busy leading real lives – just like us

And we must never forget that the Holy Spirit inspired the recording and preservation of the lists we find in God’s Word

They aren’t there because God had a certain number of pages to fill – God cares about his people as individuals and, as we just heard in our Scripture reading, each of his children have their names inscribed in the Lamb’s book of life

And as we also heard, in the New Jerusalem to come, real people – people with names – will dwell in community with one another and with their Savior in a city populated only with the faithful

Jerusalem in Nehemiah’s day was also in need of the right people and our main focus this morning will be on the repopulation of the city and the nature of the people involved in it

As we begin, our first Roman numeral is: Deciding who would move

I. Deciding who would move

Nehemiah had first begun to think about the need to repopulate the city of Jerusalem clear back in chapter 7 when he noted in **Nehemiah 7:4** that *“the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt”*

After all, a city with a rebuilt wall was still not much of a city unless people were living there

But, even with the wall, the city was in a state of disrepair and not an attractive place to live

And we know all too well that the rural life is attractive because cities have always been less than wholesome hotbeds of sinful behavior

Thomas Jefferson once referred to cities as “pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties of men”

Life in the city would have been very different from the life those living in the country were used to and it would require sacrifice on the part of the people who moved there

But if the holy city of God, Jerusalem, were left underpopulated, the quality of worship at the temple which stood at its center would decline so there was a redemptive need to repopulate to ensure its vitality

Jeremiah had prophesied that the people would be restored to the land after 70 years (**Jeremiah 29:10**) and the people had returned but the restoration God intended was incomplete as long as Jerusalem remained relatively empty

We need to recognize that there was likely no sentimentality attached to Jerusalem and the people who returned to Jerusalem weren't exactly returning home because most of them had never even laid eyes on it before arriving

Their return was prompted by redemptive concern and the fact that God had promised to return his people to the city and make his name dwell there (**Neh. 1:9**)

Look with me at **Nehemiah 11:1-2** where we see how the people who would move were chosen –

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. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.

Apparently, the leaders of the people had either already been living in Jerusalem all along or they moved to Jerusalem ahead of the larger contingent to set an example for the people

But their number was not enough so the people decided that 10% of those who lived outside the city would move to the city

When we looked at chapter 10 last week we saw the people commit to tithing of their goods (**Neh. 10:37**) and now we see them commit to tithing of themselves

And the way they chose the 10% was by the casting of lots which was a trusted means of determining God's will because they trusted in the sovereign power of God at work in every facet of their lives

In **Proverbs 16:33** we read of God's governance of all events as we read:

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

When we consider that the act of casting lots didn't take into account family ties, friendships, investments, comfort, convenience, or even preferences as the people were uprooted to move into Jerusalem

And yet we see from the first list below 3,044 men and their families were prepared to move from their rural settings to Jerusalem, not because they believed in luck or fate but because they trusted the sovereign power of God to work in their lives

These willing volunteers were prepared to change their entire existence because they viewed obeying the Lord as more important than their preferences

One has to admire this level of commitment because there was no guarantee that moving to the city wasn't going to be detrimental to their families – given the general moral decay that characterizes most cities it was a distinct possibility

But these volunteers based their decision on a firm belief in God's providence, power, and promise to look after their ultimate welfare

The willingness of the people to actually comply with such a difficult and costly decision is exemplary

I doubt very many of us would be ready to commit to having where we live determined by a roll of the dice or a coin-toss

Still, one of the primary considerations for any Christ-follower should be, "Where does God want me to live?" and that should be determined in no small degree by the potential for ministry in the new location

How often, when contemplating a move, do we look for a solid, Bible-teaching church in which we can grow and serve?

Far too often, that's a remote consideration, if it's considered at all, and many people only begin to look for a church home after they have moved

I can't tell you how many conversations I have had with believers who, after moving, lament the ability to find a church home due to a lack of good churches near their new home

If you have been saved by the blood of Christ you have been called to ministry and where and how you will minister should always be a primary consideration for you (**Ephesians 2:10**)

Having seen how the people who moved were selected, we now turn our attention to who it was that moved

II. The people involved

What looks like one continuous list is actually multiple lists all strung together and the list found in verses 3-19 contains the people who moved into Jerusalem

When we add up the numbers listed we see that 3,044 men moved into the city which means a rather conservative estimate of the total number of people who moved would be around 10,000 when we consider wives and children

And when we look at the list we see a wide variety of people who willingly moved into the city

In addition to the leaders of the people who were already living within the city walls, we see the heads of families, priests, Levites, gatekeepers and temple servants and each of them served in their various capacities for the good of the city

There were those who had the gift of administration which would be needed to make certain the city ran effectively and efficiently

We see listed temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants – those who took care of maintenance in and around the temple

These men likely served much like our modern-day deacons who often labor in relative anonymity but, without whom, the church building and grounds would fall into disrepair and without whom the church could not function

We see several times the descriptors, "men of valor" or "mighty men of valor" ascribed to some of those who relocated to the city and such men were undoubtedly invaluable in the defense of the city along with the gatekeepers

We even see one man named who was "the leader of the praise who gave thanks"

And others had responsibility in the temple worship such as the priests, the musicians, and the singers

Each of them moved to Jerusalem to serve according to their giftedness

Just as the city of Jerusalem required the regular and harmonious functioning of a variety of gifts, so does the church

The apostle Paul wrote about the spiritual gifts in **Romans 12:6-8** and **1Corinthians 12:4-11** and the apostle Peter wrote about them in **1Peter 4:10-11** – those are the key texts concerning the gifts of the Spirit

From those texts we see that there is a wide diversity of gifts meant to be used for the benefit of the church so that God might be glorified

And each believer is a member of the Body of Christ and every member is vital to the overall functioning and health of the body

Just as the disparate people of Nehemiah's day had to learn to work together in a harmonious and complementary fashion, so must Christ-followers today according to God's distribution of gifts

But God's people still must be willing to submit to God's will in all things, including where they live

Moving one's place of residence isn't something that people tend to think of as important to God's kingdom and we often place other factors – proximity to work, good schools, shopping, etc. ahead of the church we will attend

But, as this passage shows, even relatively unspectacular acts of obedience are important to God's plan

Moving was probably more of an inconvenience, a lot of hard work, and adjustment to new surroundings and, probably, occupations, than it was miraculous

But what God wants done in this world is seldom convenient or pleasant and God wants us to give him ourselves completely before we think about giving in other ways

And while God can and will perform miracles on a grand scale to achieve his will, he more often prefers to see his will accomplished through the ordinary, yet faithful and sacrificial, acts carried out by his people in their daily lives

We often lament that our ministry doesn't seem that significant or that important – especially when we compare it to someone else's ministry that seems much more glamorous or meaningful

When we look at this long list of difficult-to-pronounce names each individual name doesn't mean much, if anything, to us but each of those men and the ministries they performed are important to God and isn't that what matters?

Should you start to wonder if what you do in service to the Lord matters, remember **Hebrews 6:10** –

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

Always remember that you're not home yet and even if your rewards are delayed until you reach heaven, God will remember your faithfulness – in things that seem small and insignificant as well as the grand things of this life

Next we want to take just a few moments to look at the rest of the lists contained in the conglomerate list of our passage

III. The remaining lists

As we have just seen, 10% of the population was chosen by lot and willingly moved to within the city walls

But what about those who remained in the countryside and small villages?

As we see in verses 25-30, there were villages that were inhabited by men of the tribe of Judah

And in verses 31-35 we see other villages that were inhabited by men of the tribe of Benjamin and in verse 36 that some of the Levites were assigned to serve Benjamin probably because of their remoteness from the temple

We have considered the various gifts of those who moved to the city but those who remained had a vital function to fulfill as well

They were largely herdsmen and farmers and their job was to provide food to those who lived in the city

Each person, whether city or country dweller had a role to fulfill and they were all different but necessary to the cause

And many of those who remained outside the city were living in places they didn't fully control in a sort of occupation looking forward to the day when all the land will be theirs

So, even though moving to the city was a hardship, so was living in occupied territory but every believer is meant to live so as to function as a witness to the rest of the world concerning how believers should live in the world

Look with me at **Jeremiah 29:4-7** –

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

God wants us to grow and thrive where he plants us because the world, including its cities, is for believers to love and win by seeking its welfare and showing the value of following, serving, and worshipping God

There are four additional lists in chapter 12 that serve, primarily, to show the continuity of the community of God's people

First, we have a list of the priests who returned with Zerubbabel in verses 1-9

Then we have a list that shows the succession of high priests in verses 10-11 and the heads of priestly families in verses 12-21

And after a note on times when the heads of families were recorded we see a list of the heads of Levitical families in the time of Joiakim in verses 24-26

As we have noted these lists serve to show not only the continuity of God's people but also serve as a record of God's generational faithfulness and reveals the continuity of worship through the generations

The people in these lists wouldn't make anyone's who's who of particularly special people but they were special to God And that reveals how God works through ordinary people leading fairly mundane lives to accomplish his will in the world

Conclusion

Revelation 21:2; 22-27 (page 1250)

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.