

Nehemiah 7:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ² I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many. ³ And I said to them, "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes." ⁴ The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. ⁵ So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it: ⁶ These were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried into exile. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town. . .

Nehemiah 11:1-36 (ESV)

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 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.

⁴ 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 Uzziah, 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-hozei, 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. ⁷ And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, son of Joed, son of Pedaiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiah, ⁸ and his brothers, men of valor, 928. ⁹ 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 Haggedolim.

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁹ The gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their brothers, who kept watch at the gates, were 172. ²⁰ 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.

²² 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. 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.

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 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. ³¹ 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.

Nehemiah is a book with insights for us into restoration, renewal, leadership, and God's faithfulness.

Read Nehemiah 7:1-73 (Questions for later personal reflection)

30. At the beginning and end of chapter 7 is an indication that walls are not enough. Why? What does Jerusalem still need?

31. Why was a list of those who returned with Zerubbabel useful to Nehemiah and the Leadership?

Read Nehemiah 11:1—36

32. What was agreed upon as a solution to re-populating the city? What kind of sacrifices did those who moved into the city make?

33. Nehemiah 7:1 and 73 indicate a number of “classes” of people, which are also delineated in the lists of chapter 11. What were these, and what would their roles be in the city?

Nehemiah 7:4 and 6 describes the problem that Jerusalem now faced. The city had lain in ruins for many years – but needed to be revitalized. Demographic studies by Nehemiah (7:5, 6-73; 1 Chronicles 9:2-34 has a parallel list, with some differences.) found most of those who had returned had settled in surrounding towns. (vs 6, 73; 11:3).

The solution in Nehemiah 11:1-2 was for the leaders to live in Jerusalem, along with a “tithing” of the regional population relocating into Jerusalem – this made up both of volunteers and those chosen by lot. This resulted in an influx of several thousand families into the city.

It is notable that a number of Christians involved in urban revitalization have drawn many principles from Nehemiah in engaging in successful projects. In particular, one need is to “re-neighbor” people back into blighted and distressed communities. Robert Lupton in his book: Renewing the City says of Nehemiah's Jerusalem: *“Nehemiah was painfully aware that a vital urban center had to be filled with permanent, vested residents engaged with self interest in every facet of city life. Abandoned real estate shouts out disinvestment and devaluation. The city, in order to be a desirable place to live had to be rich with educational and cultural interest and alive with vigorous commerce.”*

John M. Perkins also talks of this need of re-neighborhooding in his books, in particular – Restoring At-Risk Communities: *“Of the three Rs that anchor the guiding philosophy of the Christian community development movement, relocation is clearly the most distinctive and troublesome. . . there is a growing consensus among committed urban practitioners that being a vested member of the community one is called is an important key to effectiveness.”*

A comment on these ponderous lists of names. The books of Ezra-Nehemiah lists hundreds of people by name. Most we know almost nothing about. But that their names are recorded is an indication that no one is insignificant in the people of God. The Lord has a book with all the names of His own listed!

Buried in that mass of names are various roles and tasks: Oversight and leadership roles, doing work within and outside of the Temple; military and police functions, worship leaders and musicians, lots of service people, perhaps even a lawyer! (vs. 24).

Nehemiah mentions the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers and temple servants. Priests were able men responsible for ministering in the house of God. Gatekeepers obviously maintained order and security, Levites and singers often had cultural tasks, and lots of servants supported the work in numerous ways.

One of the obvious needs the city had was for guards and gatekeepers. Sufficient forces needed to be within to hold the city in case of assault or siege, and to maintain security within were essential. The references to gatekeepers and to “valiant men” (11:6; 14) underline this need.

Mentions of the Levites stand out. When Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan, the Levites were the only tribe that received cities but were not allowed to be landowners “because the Lord the God of Israel himself is their inheritance” (Deuteronomy 18:2). The Tribe of Levi served particular religious duties for the Israelites, The priests were drawn from them, they were often worship officiants and teachers (as we see elsewhere in Nehemiah), and had political responsibilities as well. Only a small number returned with Zerubbabel - Ezra had to deal with a shortage of Levites when he came as well. (Ezra 8:15ff) That Nehemiah plugged them into a variety of positions both in the city and the region is interesting. Nehemiah 12:1-26 is a genealogical list of the priests and levites from the days to Zerubbabel to those of Nehemiah.

The needs of the region were not neglected – as the curious list in 11:25ff indicates. The references to “camping” may be in part an allusion to the wilderness, but also to the vision of God's future who has prepared a city for them. (cf Hebrew 11:13-16).