

# OpenTheo

## Nehemiah 11

March 29, 2022



### Alastair Roberts

Solving the problem of Jerusalem's underpopulation.

My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here:  
<https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you are interested in supporting this project, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X330?ref_=wl_share)).

You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes:  
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Nehemiah chapter 11. So, Nehemiah chapter 11. So, Nehemiah chapter 11.

So, Nehemiah chapter 11. So, Nehemiah chapter 11. So, Nehemiah chapter 11.

So, Nehemiah chapter 11. So, Nehemiah chapter 11. So, Nehemiah chapter 11.

So, Nehemiah chapter 11. The rest of Israel and of the priests and the Levites were in all the towns of Judah. Every one in his inheritance.

But the temple's servants lived on Ophel and Zeher and Gish'pah were over the temple servants. The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi, son of Bainai, son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micah, sons of Asaph, the singers, over the work of the house of God. For there was a command from the King concerning them, and a fixed provision for the singers as every day required.

And Pethahar the son of Meshetabel, of the sons of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's side in all matters concerning the people. And as for the villagers with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath Abba and its villages, and in Dibon and its

villages, and in Jekabsiel and its villages, and in Jeshua, and in Moleda and Beth-pelot, in Hazar-shuel, in Beersheba and its villages, in Ziklag, in Mekona and its villages, in En-ri-man, in Zorah, in Jarmoth, Zenoah, Adulim and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azikah and its villages. So they encamp from Beersheba to the valley of Hinnom.

The people of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, at Mikdash, Ijer, Bethel and its villages, Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittayim, Hadad, Zeboim, Neballot, Lod, and Ono, the valley of Craftsman, and certain divisions of the Levites and Judah were assigned to Benjamin. In Nehemiah chapter 10 the people made a solemn oath, binding themselves to the covenant and the law of Moses, to refrain from intermarriage, to observe the Sabbath, and to offer first fruits and tithes. Chapter 11 needs to be read in terms of this.

In chapter 10 the people were to offer tithes from their ground. In chapter 11 the land offers a tithe of its people to the holy city of Jerusalem. In chapter 7 a list of the returnees according to their clans and towns was recorded.

In that chapter, however, we saw the problem of Jerusalem's underpopulation and Nehemiah's concern to address it. The tithe of the wider population in chapter 11 is the solution to that problem. The practice of a tithe of the people is consistent with a broader theme of the passage and context.

The principle of holiness is extended beyond merely the temple and its priests. Now the city of Jerusalem is referred to as the holy city in verses 1 and 18, two of a very small handful of occasions in the Old Testament where we encounter this expression. The focus upon the walls of the city in the book of Nehemiah and the possible placing of Levites and singers among its guards might also indicate this extension of holiness to encompass the wider city and not merely the temple and its precincts.

While we can often think of buildings and towns independently of the people who inhabit them or cohabit, form neighbourhoods and assemble within them, it might help us to consider them more as the banks and channels through which the waters of community flow and the pools in which they gather. A good house is a place that is apt to be filled with life, becoming a home. A poorly designed house, by contrast, makes it more difficult for people to live together.

Perhaps they are crammed together, or maybe they're too spread out and there's no point of gathering. Likewise, while a church is principally a group of people who worship God together, it is difficult for such a people to exist well without a suitable shared building within which they can assemble, and a well designed building can help the church's life to flourish. Understanding this, the importance of the reconstruction work in Jerusalem should become more apparent.

If the people were to be a single unified people, they needed a focal point for their

national life, and Jerusalem and its temple provided this. When hardly anyone lived in Jerusalem and much of it was still in ruins, it was not able to perform its role in the heart of the nation. Devoting a tenth of their population to Jerusalem, submitting to rulers in Jerusalem and ascending to Jerusalem for the various feasts would all strengthen the people's sense of being one.

The title of the people to be brought into Jerusalem was selected by lot, but the people also volunteered themselves. Perhaps the lots selected certain clans and families among the people to provide the inhabitants of Jerusalem from among their ranks, and then subgroups within those groups volunteered themselves to make up the required numbers. As in other places in Ezra and Nehemiah, the willing hearts of the people are emphasised.

The people, the temple, the walls, and the city of Jerusalem are being re-established, and throughout the process the Lord is stirring up people to act freely and joyfully in these endeavours. The attention given to the people and their gift of themselves, their labours and their wealth in Ezra and Nehemiah also has the effect of foregrounding the people themselves, rather than those physical structures that they are reconstructing. The primary reconstruction work going on is the reconstruction of the people themselves, their willing contributions to the various physical projects of rebuilding highlights the reality that the Lord principally dwells not in physical buildings and locations, but in a people of committed hearts.

In prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, the return from exile is related to themes of renewed and cleansed hearts, a sort of initial form of the new covenant. While Jerusalem and its temple seem much diminished from their former glories under Solomon, there is a new sort of glory being established here, something prophesied in Zechariah for instance. While the glory is less visible, it is now more extensive.

There are many similarities between this list and that of 1 Chronicles chapter 9, with many shared names. However the differences are considerable. Most scholars believe the list to be independent of each other, but Andrew Steinman takes a different position.

He writes There is another solution that is apparent if one simply pays attention to what each list claims to be. The list in 1 Chronicles is a list of peoples who lived on their ancestral property, especially those who lived in Jerusalem. The list in Nehemiah is less comprehensive however.

It claims to be a list only of the heads of the province who lived in Jerusalem. The list in Nehemiah is shorter because it does not claim to be a list of all the people, but only of the heads of the province, probably a list of minor officials. Other people are not named, but are counted in the numbers in this list.

Of the peoples settled in Jerusalem, companies of priests and Levites with their families

and other associates make up the best part of half of their number, with priest clans accounting for about 40%. We can imagine that the temple would have dominated Jerusalem's life at this time. The entire number of the persons enumerated in chapter 11 is 3044, a tenth of the total of the persons numbered in chapter 7 without the slaves and those ineligible due to uncertain ancestry.

That number came to 30447. The numbering of the people here is probably an indication of the holy purpose to which they are being appointed. They are a holy people within a holy city.

The remainder of the chapter lists various settlements of Judahites and Benjaminites, giving the hearer a sense of the scope of their resettlement of the land. The scope of their resettlement implied by these verses seems to exceed the scope of the Persian province of Judah, perhaps alerting us to the fact that returnees could be found throughout the region of Judah's pre-exilic territory, not merely in Judah's now shrunken borders. A question to consider, where else in the Old Testament do we have indications of the greater extension of the principle of holiness to include the whole city and also its people?