

# The Revitalization of Grace Covenant Church “A Willing People”

## Scripture

*Nehemiah 11:1–4 (ESV)*

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. <sup>2</sup>And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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 Uzziyah, son of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Shephatiah, son of Mahalalel, of the sons of Perez;

*Nehemiah 11:7 (ESV)* 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 Jeshaiiah,

*Nehemiah 11:10 (ESV)* Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin,

*Nehemiah 11:15 (ESV)* And of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hashhub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni;

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

*Nehemiah 12:1 (ESV)* These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,

*Nehemiah 12:7 (ESV)* Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brothers in the days of Jeshua.

*Nehemiah 12:12 (ESV)* And in the days of Joiakim were priests, heads of fathers’ houses: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;

*Nehemiah 12:25–26 (ESV)* Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates. <sup>26</sup>These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra, the priest and scribe.

## Introduction

This is a passage that seems to be filled only with hard names and meagre details if the important truth is passed over that it is God’s own inspired honor-roll, never to be forgotten, of His willing people. People who caught a vision and were willing to live it.

## Sermon Guide

### Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah

Nehemiah had a city that was nearly empty. Nehemiah wanted to populate Jerusalem.

The problem is outlined briefly in Nehemiah 7:4: **“Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt.”**

### Why had the city not been occupied?

- **It had been without a wall for 142 years.**<sup>1</sup> This meant that the city had been defenseless for that time, and as a result it was dangerous to live there. Jerusalem was an example of urban blight. The city had been ravaged by invading armies, stripped of anything valuable more quickly and completely than an abandoned car in the ghetto.
- **Because a greater strictness of life was expected from the inhabitants of Jerusalem than from others.**
- **Because Jerusalem, of all places, was most hated by the heathen their neighbors.** Fear of persecution and reproach, and of running themselves into trouble, keeps many out of the holy city
- **Because it was more for their worldly advantage to dwell in the country.** Jerusalem was no trading city, and therefore there was no money to be got there by merchandise, as there was in the country by corn and cattle.<sup>2</sup>

### What did Nehemiah do?

1. At Nehemiah’s urging, the leaders moved to the newly walled city. Then the people cast lots to select one out of every ten Israelites to join them.

A free-will offering was made, not now of money or other means, but of men devoted to the Lord, to dwell in Jerusalem, that the holy city might be furnished and defended. “And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities.

And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem” (vers. 1, 2). As before they had tithed their produce and possessions, so now they tithed themselves. But it was not conscription; for each one chosen responded with a free heart, glad thus to be especially linked with the defense and up-building of the city of the Name. They loved the place where God’s honor dwelt, and they were pleased to be at home there.

2. **A religious base.** One in ten Jewish laypersons was chosen to relocate, but little is said about them. The bulk of the chapter (and the next chapter) details the families of priests, Levites, and other religious leaders who settled in the city. Why? Obviously because Nehemiah knew, as we also should know, that a community holds together only by some higher allegiance or priority and that the only truly adequate base for real brotherhood or community among people is devotion to God.

A strong religious commitment is essential if a democratic form of administration is to succeed. Without adequate spiritual values it is hard, if not impossible, to retain the idea of obligation and responsibility. Individualism cannot long be held in check by the concept of a calling embodying good works and self-restraint. When this control is weakened, legislation takes the place of spiritual convictions and becomes the foundation of the community. And with the increase in legislation there is a corresponding increase in bureaucracy with a minimizing of efficiency and a diminution of personal worth.<sup>3</sup>

Jerusalem had a religious base. Therefore, there was cohesion and efficiency among the people, as well as a strong sense of personal worth. They were people who **willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem, nobly foregoing their own secular interest for the public welfare, v. 2.**<sup>4</sup>

### Impacting Our Neighborhoods

**We need to establish in our cities and in our communities models of Christian community.** This goal should have the following essential elements:

#### 1. *We must live in our Communities.*

Our goal should be a Christian presence in our neighborhoods.

2. ***We must be a community in our communities.*** We must also be together in the cities; we must be a Christian community. It is only as a community that we can model what we are recommending.

“The church is first and foremost a spiritual family, a community. That’s why the Bible refers to the church as a ‘household of faith,’ ‘family of God’ and ‘brothers and sisters.’ It’s meant to function as a family, model family life, and care for the families it encompasses.”<sup>5</sup> The church can do that as no other organization can—not businesses, not schools, not the centers of entertainment or social life, not government or city agencies. Only the church!

If we can model attractive Christian community in a Christian or church setting, we can model it in other environments, as Christians in business show what it is to have a Christ-centered business. Christians in education show what it is to educate in a Christian way, politicians to act as Christian politicians, and so on in the other professions.

3. ***We must be a biblical community. Not only must we be in the city and be a community, but we must also be Bible directed.*** We must be the kind of community God wants us to be. “*What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*” (Mic. 6:8).

**First, to act justly.** This means justice for all, not just for Christians.

**Second, to love mercy.** This means showing mercy always and in all possible ways.

**Third, to walk humbly with God.**

4. **We need a vision.** For there to be an effective Christian presence in our communities we need a vision for the kind of society we hope to see established. The world is waiting to see what true Christians can do.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The city had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC and Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem in 444 BC, building the wall immediately.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 639). Peabody: Hendrickson.

<sup>3</sup>Cyril J. Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1976), 155.

<sup>4</sup>Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 639). Peabody: Hendrickson.

<sup>5</sup>Anthony T. Evans, “10 Steps to Urban Renewal,” *The Urban Alternative* 4, no. 2 (September 1988).

<sup>6</sup>Boice, J. M. (2005). *Nehemiah: an expositional commentary* (pp. 115–123). Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks.