

Handout: Nehemiah Lesson 6

Now when the walls were finished, Nehemiah and the multitude offered sacrifices to God for the building of them; and they continued feasting for eight days. However, when the nations which dwelt in Syria heard that the building of the wall was finished, they had indignation at it; but when Nehemiah saw that the city was thin of people, he exhorted the priests and the Levites, that they would leave the country, and remove themselves to the city, and there continue, and he built them houses at his own expenses; and he commanded that part of the people who were employed in cultivating the land, to bring the tithes of their fruits to Jerusalem that the priests and Levites having whereof they might live perpetually might not leave the divine worship who willing harkened to the constitutions of Nehemiah by which means the city Jerusalem came to be fuller of people than it was before.

Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.5.8

The outline of chapters 11-13:

Obedience to the Covenant (11:1-13:31)

- A. Resettlement of the Citizens (11:1-36)
- B. Register of the Priests and Levites (12:1-26)
- C. Dedication of Jerusalem's Wall (12:27-47)
- D. Spiritual Restoration of the Covenant People (13:1-31)

Nehemiah's memoirs resume only to be interrupted again in 11:3 by several lists. Nehemiah Chapter 11 has two different literary additions: verses 1-2, 20, 25a, and 36 are included by the Chronicler on the basis of the Memoirs of Nehemiah, but a later editor has inserted the lists of verses 4-19 and 25b-35 that he must have discovered among the documents in the Jerusalem archives. He introduced them by the heading in verse 4 and added the notes of verses 21-24.

The list of names and occupations in 11:4-24 of those chosen to live in Jerusalem:

1. The leaders of the tribe of Judah from the clan of Perez numbering 468 men (verse 4, 6)
2. One Judahite man from the clan of Shelah (verses 5).
3. The leaders of the tribe of Benjamin from the clans of Sallu and his brothers were 928 men (verses 7-9).
4. Priests from the line of Zadok the descendant of Eleazar son of Aaron were 822 men (verses 10-12a).
5. Priests from the line of Aaron's son Ithamar were 242 men (verse 12b-13a).
6. Priests who could not prove their lineage from Aaron and his sons numbered 128 men (verses 13b-14).
7. The Levitical leaders responsible for work outside the Temple (verses 15-16).
8. The Levites who led the praise and thanksgiving prayers in the liturgy of worship (verse 17), and the total number of Levites numbering 284 men (verse 18).
9. The gatekeepers were 172 men (verse 19).
10. The Temple servants (verse 21)

In 12:10-11, the inspired writer lists the high priests from 520 BC during the reign of Darius I to about 405 BC during the reign of Persian King Darius II.

→ over

1. Jeshua/Joshua* was the high priest during the time of the first return from exile when Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were governors (Ezra 5:2; Hag 1:1; Zech 6:11).
2. Joiakim son of Jeshua* was the high priest during the time of Ezra (Neh 12:10, 12, 26).
3. Eliashib son of Joiakim was the high priest during the time of Nehemiah (Neh 3:1, 20; 12:22, 23; 13:4, 7, 28).
4. Joiada succeeded his father Eliashib.
5. Johanan succeeded his father Joiada.
6. Jaddua succeeded his father Johanan.

*Jeshua in Hebrew is the same name as the Aramaic form of Joshua (see Hag 2:2, 4), and Joiakim is the shortened form of Jehoiakim. The first-century AD Jewish priest and historian, Flavius Josephus, recorded that both Ezra and Joiakim died before Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem.

Chapter 13: Nehemiah departed for Persia in 433 BC. When he returned to Judah to resume a second term as the royal governor, he discovered the reoccurrence of violations against the covenant commands and prohibitions. Nehemiah dealt with three serious violations:

1. A pagan Ammonite was living within the sacred Temple precincts that were limited to the priests and Levitical ministers (Neh 13:4-9).
2. The Levites were no longer receiving their allocations and to feed their families had returned to their farms, abandoning their Temple duties (Neh 13:10).
3. The citizens of Judah and Jerusalem were profaning the Sabbath day by buying and selling on the Sabbath (Neh 13:15-16).

Nehemiah asks God three times in verses 14, 22, and 30 to remember the religious reforms he instituted in Jerusalem and to bring judgment against anyone who defiled the priesthood or married outside the covenant. In his prayer, he asked God to give him credit:

1. for reinstating material support for the clergy
2. for enforcing the regulations concerning the Sabbath rest
3. for purifying the priesthood of illicit marriages to foreigners and for redefining the duties of the priests and Levites

Nehemiah acted out of zeal for Yahweh and not for his own advancement or glory, and he asks for these good works to be credited to his accomplishments in service to the Lord God.

However, he also asks God to remember those who defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priests and Levites.

The priestly historian, Flavius Josephus, offers a fitting conclusion to the story of Nehemiah's mission: *So when Nehemiah had done many other excellent things, and things worthy of commendation in a glorious manner, he came to a great age, and then he died. He was a man of good and righteous disposition and very ambitious to make his own nation happy, and he hath lifted the walls of Jerusalem as an eternal monument for himself* (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.5.8 [183]).