

Joy in Jerusalem
Nehemiah 11-12
July 27th, 2025

1. The importance of _____

2. _____ in Jerusalem (11:1-36)

3. _____ as priests and Levites (12:1-26)

4. _____ the wall of Jerusalem (12:27-47)

5. Applying the Word
 - a. Rest in God's _____ to His own promises.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Nehemiah 11-12

1. What challenges come from reading, studying, teaching, and discussing detailed passages full of names or genealogies in the Bible? How can we get the most out of them?
2. Read the following passages that reference Jerusalem/Zion. How is the city described? Ps. 2:6; 9:11; 48:1-14; 69:35-36
 - a. If the returned exiles faithfully sang this Psalms as they were growing up, how would that affect their view of the city?
3. Volunteering to live in Jerusalem (11:2) was an act of sacrifice for the greater good of the people of Israel and the security of the city. What are some ways that we might make voluntary, sacrificial decisions for the good of the church body and God's work in the world?
4. What stands out to you after reading about the preparations for the dedication of the wall (12:27-30)?
 - a. Read the background of purification ceremonies in Exodus 19:10-15. Although we do not conduct such ceremonies today, what might we learn from this preparation for worship?
5. What accounts for the overflowing joy in the people in 12:43?
6. Notice the final phrase in Nehemiah 12:43 and in Ezra 3:13. How do you think the surrounding peoples responded to this sound? In what ways is joy a crucial witness to the world around God's people?

Note: Some questions adapted from *Knowing the Bible: Nehemiah* by Crossway

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Big idea: Reflecting God's enduring commitment to His people and His place – and His people's commitment to His place – the Jews strategically populated Jerusalem and celebrated the wall.

Intro

When the book of Nehemiah began, Nehemiah was in Susa, the winter Persian capital, 800 miles away. He asked about the condition of Jerusalem and wept as he heard of the damage and disrepair. That kicked off a bold request to rebuild the wall, a relocation, a term as governor, and perseverance through opposition.

By the time we get to chapter 7, the wall is rebuilt but the city is still fairly empty.

Nehemiah 7:4 Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.

Chapter 11 includes a plan to populate the city and a list of the inhabitants.

Chapter 12 includes a joyful celebration at the dedication of the wall.

But it raises the question, what's the big deal about Jerusalem?

Simon Sebag Montefiore wrote in his massive secular history book on Jerusalem, "[it has always been] the desire and prize of empires, yet of no strategic value." He asked the question, "of all the places in the world, why Jerusalem? The site was remote from the trade routes of the Mediterranean coast; it was short of water, baked in the summer sun, chilled by winter winds, its jagged rocks blistered and inhospitable."

1. The importance of Jerusalem

a. History

- i. In a tomb south of the old wall of the city, pottery has been found that dates to 3,200 BC. Referred to by name in Egyptian texts around 1,800 BC.
 1. There are more than 2,000 current, active archeological sites within Jerusalem.
- ii. Zion – name originally given to the southeast hill where the earliest fortress was located
- iii. Ruled by Jebusites as the time of the conquest – Joshua defeated them but never took Jerusalem – David conquered 2 Sam. 5:6-10 and established Jerusalem as his strategic center and capital.
 1. 2 Sam. 5:7 Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David.
- iv. Decline began after divided kingdom as remained the capital only of the southern kingdom
 1. It has been besieged 23 times, conquered more than 40 times in their recorded history.
 2. Montefiore said virtually every stone in Jerusalem once stood in a long-forgotten temple of another faith or the victory arch of another empire.
 3. Today is has a population as of 2022 was just under one million people, 60% of whom are Jewish, 37% Muslim, less than 2% Christian.
 4. Pics – building codes require even modern buildings to use Jerusalem stone to keep the historic feel of the city.

b. In poetry

- i. We'll look at a bunch of passages briefly as an overview, each would deserve it's own detailed study, but I want you to see that Jerusalem as the holy city of God is a major theme in the Psalms, not a minor theme.
 - ii. **Psalms 9:11** Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion; Declare among the peoples His deeds.
 - iii. **Psalms 48:1-2, 8** Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain. ² Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion *in* the far north, The city of the great King... ⁸ As we have heard, so have we seen In the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God; God will establish her forever. Selah.
 - 1. Most of us grew up singing "America, the Beautiful" in school – purple mountains, majesty, above the fruited plains
 - iv. **Psalms 50:2** Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth.
 - v. **Psalms 69:35-36** For God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah, That they may dwell there and possess it. ³⁶ The descendants of His servants will inherit it, And those who love His name will dwell in it.
 - vi. **Psalms 87:1-5** A Psalm of the sons of Korah. A Song. His foundation is in the holy mountains. ² The LORD loves the gates of Zion More than all the *other* dwelling places of Jacob. ³ Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. Selah. ⁴ "I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me; Behold, Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.'" ⁵ But of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; And the Most High Himself will establish her.
 - vii. **Psalms 110:1-2** A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." ² The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies."
 - 1. One of the (maybe THE) most quoted OT passage about the messiah in the NT
 - viii. **Psalms 132:13-14** For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. ¹⁴ "This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
 - ix. **Psalms 137:1-5** By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion. ² Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps. ³ For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, *saying*, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." ⁴ How can we sing the LORD'S song In a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, May my right hand forget *her skill*.
- c. In the life of Christ
- i. Jesus traveled to Jerusalem and taught there several times.
 - ii. He grieved over their rejection, that continued the historical pattern of rejection, equating the city with the people of Israel
 - 1. **Matthew 23:37** "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.
 - iii. His betrayal, arrest, trials, crucifixion, and resurrection took place in or around Jerusalem.
- d. In the early church
- i. The early church began in Jerusalem

1. **Acts 1:7-8** He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
 - ii. The story of the book of Acts is the fulfillment of this as the gospel goes out from Jerusalem as the epicenter.
 - e. In the millennial kingdom after the return of Christ, Jesus will rule from Jerusalem
 - i. **Zechariah 8:3** "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts *will be called* the Holy Mountain.'
2. **Living** in Jerusalem (11:1-36)
- a. Living in Jerusalem was not desirable for many.
 - i. They had to cast lots to find people to live in Jerusalem.
 1. They tithed the people, in a sense.
 - ii. They blessed the people who volunteered to live there.
 - iii. Why?
 1. **Nehemiah 7:4** Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.
 2. Unbuilt homes, rubble, threat of attack
 - iv. And yet its still "the holy city."
 1. Davis – this resettlement would, probably, in most cases, involve sacrifice. Because they did this willingly does not mean they did it thrillingly. Why would these people be commended unless they did what was inconvenient for them?
 2. Is there ever a time when self-denial must take precedence over preferences, and when consideration for the people of God must be placed above my interests?
 3. What if we as a church had to make a decision that affected you? Maybe we decided we needed to adjust the worship service times or Sunday school room locations. How would you process that decision? Would it be only about how you personally are affected or would you be willing to consider it from the perspective of the greater good of the whole church body?
 - b. Numbers are included for the different groups that lived in the city.
 - i. Total is 3,044 able men, probably 10-12,000 total people.
 - c. Different villages are mentioned in vv. 25ff –
 - i. You can find them on a map, you can see many of the same villages listed in Joshua 15 where the allotments for the tribe of Judah are described.
 1. Some of the places are 20-45 miles away from Jerusalem.
 2. The land component of the promise to Abraham is behind this. After being in exile the people are "beginning to sprinkle themselves over Abraham-turf once more" (Davis)
 - d. They are a fraction of the people they were under David and Solomon.

- i. They have been humbled by the exile but God has still been faithful.
- ii. This is a little glimpse of that.
 - 1. Similar to the end of the narrative with Sampson after he had been humiliated, his hair shaved, his strength gone but then the text says the hair of his head began to grow again – and the Lord used Him again.
 - 2. Or like king Jehoiachin at the end of 2 kings – in Babylon, the exile has happened, Jerusalem is destroyed but Jehoiachin is alive and the king shows him kindness and favor ... and that's how 2 Kings ends.
 - 3. William Barclay (in Davis) - London church prepared for a harvest festival but it was during the war – on the Saturday before came the first of the great blitzes and the harvest festival was never held because the church was a pile of ruins. On a table there had been sheaves of corn. Autumn came and passed, as did winter. Spring arrived and with it little green shoots all over the bomb site. Summer passed, autumn came, and on the bomb site was a flourishing patch of corn. So don't despise the small, mustard-seed sort of beginning. Looking at a distance you may not think those folks settling around Adullam or in Anathoth are of much account. If so, you will have forgotten that the Lord's promises pack a virile resilience.

3. ***Serving*** as priests and Levites (12:1-26)

- a. The chapter begins with another list, showing the continuity of the people and the promises of God.
 - i. It focuses on the priests and the Levites, the people involved in leading the worship and sacrificial system.
 - ii. Expository Commentary - Stated positively, the people care for the house of their God by repopulating his city, refilling his land, and remembering his gifts....
- b. Davis – everything for a re-ordered people of God has been touched upon
 - i. City – 11:1-24
 - ii. Land – 11:25-36
 - iii. Temple/worship – 12:1-26

4. ***Dedicating*** the wall of Jerusalem (12:27-47)

- a. Now the priests and Levites and singers that have been identified are put into service for a dedication of the rebuilt wall.
- b. The key idea is found in v. 43 – joy.
 - i. They rejoiced ... God had given them great joy...women and children rejoice...joy was heard from afar.
 - ii. There's joy in a job completed. Joy in security. Joy in remembering the promises of God and seeing them fulfilled, even if in small nuggets.
 - iii. This detailed description is given to highlight and describe the joy of the people.
- c. Back to Nehemiah's first person voice in v. 31
- d. Two "great choirs" on the wall – literally, "thanksgivings" – two great thanksgivings.
 - i. These choirs were the embodiment of what they sang.

- ii. They marched along the same sections of wall that were rebuilt – some of the people surely did the rebuilding. Walking the wall would have flooded them with memories as they saw stones that they placed with their own hands. It was a tangible, physical display of God’s faithfulness and their obedient work.
- iii. I remember coming out to this bare property in 2009 for the ground breaking. Some of the guys in the church had tried to clear out some weeds with weedwhackers before deciding that was impossible because they were so thick but they were able to connect with a farmer who agree to come cut it down. We came out later when the foundation slab was poured and it seemed small. We saw the walls go up. There’s a joy as we reflect on that experience of God providing when we gathered in the completed building for the first time. The acoustics were horrible. The building and landscaping was sparse. But there was joy.
- e. The detailed lists are given to savor and remember who was there. We might say, “get on with the description. Just tell us the relevant details.”
 - i. This is a historical document. It isn’t written as fiction. It isn’t written as a moral parable. It’s written as a historical, verifiable (at the time), record.

5. Applying the Word

- a. Rest in God’s **faithfulness** to His own promises.
- b.



Nehemiah 7:4 Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.

1. The importance of *Jerusalem*

2 Samuel 5:7 Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David.



Psalm 9:11 Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion; Declare among the peoples His deeds.

Psalm 48:1-2, 8 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain. ² Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion *in* the far north, The city of the great King... ⁸ As we have heard, so have we seen In the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God; God will establish her forever. Selah.

Psalm 50:2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth.

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Psalm 87:1-5 His foundation is in the holy mountains. ² The LORD loves the gates of Zion More than all the *other* dwelling places of Jacob. ³ Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. Selah.

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Psalm 110:1-2 A Psalm of David.
 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at
 My right hand Until I make Your
 enemies a footstool for Your feet."
² The LORD will stretch forth Your
 strong scepter from Zion, *saying*,
 "Rule in the midst of Your
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 there our captors demanded of us songs,
 And our tormentors mirth, *saying*, "Sing us
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 I forget you, O Jerusalem, May my right
 hand forget *her skill*.

Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem,
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 and stones those who are sent to
 her! How often I wanted to gather
 your children together, the way a
 hen gathers her chicks under her
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Acts 1:8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

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