

EZRA-NEHEMIAH, part 18 **The Work of Consolidation, part 1 (Nehemiah 11:1-12:26)**

by Dr. Ralph Davis

I. The Order of the People of the Lord (Neh. 11:1-12:26) [background: 7:4-5,73]

A. Anchoring the city (Neh. 11:1-24)

1. The plan to be followed (Neh. 11:1-2)

Not all will agree on how to take these verses. I think they indicate that the leaders already lived in Jerusalem. Then there was the lot-casting scheme, and those who “volunteered” (v. 2) were those who had been selected by lot.

a. The need

Remember this is the “holy city” (vv. 1,18), and yet the present situation was a far cry from all nations streaming to it as depicted in Isaiah 2. There are not even enough Jews living in it to make it secure.

b. The design/proposal: one out of ten living in the territory of Judah should relocate and reside in Jerusalem.

c. The manner: casting lots

In this way, it is not Nehemiah who forces them to live in Jerusalem, but it is the will of God. So they could not bear a grudge against Nehemiah.¹ They had been drafted by the Lord! And yet these folks so selected “gave themselves willingly” (v. 2; “volunteered” NASB). Here was a sovereign direction willingly accepted. The viewpoint is that of Proverbs 16:33.

d. The sacrifice (v. 2)

Why would these people be commended unless what they did was *inconvenient* to them? They did not prefer to live in Jerusalem or they already would have been settled there. So they faced the trouble of uprooting themselves from homes, leaving them for the city. Would it involve in some cases a change of work, of means of livelihood? Perhaps. Anyway, a sacrifice was made for the people of God. This poses a question: Is this ever a move we are called to make? Are there points where self-denial must take precedence over our “druthers,” and

¹ Cf. NICOT, 243.

when consideration of the people of God must be placed above our interests?

2. The people that are settled (Neh. 11:3-24)

There is a possible parallel to this list in 1 Chronicles 9, yet that list may reflect a Jerusalem-list some 60 years or more before the situation in Nehemiah 11. One needn't be bent out of shape, then, over differences between 1 Chronicles 9 and Nehemiah 11.

Keil is probably right to assume the heading of verses 3-4a covers all of verses 4b-36, so that the listing for Jerusalem is part of a list of the population of the whole province of Judah in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. I think this means that the population of Jerusalem in verses 3-19 tallies both the newcomers (see vv. 1-2) and all others who were already in Jerusalem. If the tallies are followed (vv. 6,8,12,13,14,18,19), we have 3,044, so that, including wives and children, one could estimate a population between 10,000-12,000.

Verses 20-24 tie up some loose ends. In any case, a holy city (vv. 1,18) is not worth much if it is an *empty* city, and that has been the concern of Nehemiah 11:3-24.

B. Possessing the land (Neh. 11:25-36)

On the place names and locations, see Yamauchi.² On the approximate locations visually, see *Macmillan Bible Atlas*.³

As Kidner observes,⁴ this resettlement goes beyond the confines of the new post-exilic province of Judah to include places belonging to Judah in pre-exilic days (such as Hebron and Beersheba). But as citizens of one empire, these people are free to settle where they will if they keep the peace.

Though it is a small, mustard-seed sort of beginning, can we not see in these mundane verses a renewing (even in dark, hard times!) of the place-element (i.e. land) of the Abrahamic covenant? Hence, there is a hint of the fidelity of God in the geography of Judah here.

² *EBC*, 4:748-51.

³ 3rd ed., p. 129, map no. 170.

⁴ P. 121.

C. Structuring the worship (Neh. 12:1-26)

These verses break down as follows:

12:1-9 – Priestly families & Levites at time of Zerubbabel & Jeshua (536 B.C.)

12:10-11 – List of high priests

12:12-21 – Priests during Joiakim's time (2nd generation)

12:22-23 – Notes about records

12:24-26 – Levites in Joiakim's time and following

Everything for a re-ordered people of God has now been touched upon: city (11:1-24); land (11:25-36); temple/worship (12:1-26).

On the problem of dates and the high priests in verses 10-11, see Yamauchi.⁵ The Jaddua of verse 11 is not the contemporary of Alexander the Great (*a la* Josephus), but a much earlier one. One runs into the same name in high priestly records because of the practice of papponymy (the repetition of the same name in alternating generations so that grandsons were named after their grandfathers), hence confusion can occur. With, however, the mention of Jaddua, we are down to at least 400 B.C. (note v. 22 where Darius the Persian is likely Darius II, 423-404 B.C.). This means (if you care for the critical implications) that Ezra-Nehemiah is the product of an author/editor from ca. 400 B.C. who incorporated the memoirs of both as a part of his overall document, for a testimony to post-exilic Judah.

What is the significance of 12:1-26? Well, basically, you have two historical generations of priests and Levites here, 12:1-9 over against 12:12-21,24-26 (with emphasis in vv. 24-26 on praise and guard duty). So what do we have? Folks who are *still serving* in the worship of sacrifice and praise and vigilance as did an earlier generation. Is it not *thrilling* to see the true worship of God continuing in a subsequent generation? Is it not marvelous, as God's people, to show ourselves as part of a whole *history of devotion* in our own time? Kidner rightly says:

“Continuity is again a major interest here. Unexciting as the first half of the chapter is, it has a point to make by its refusal to treat bygone generations as of no further interest. And if history-writing inevitably distorts reality by its concentration on outstanding

⁵ EBC, 4:580-83.

people and on the forces of change, here is something to redress the balance.”⁶

We are non-biblical, then, if we despise or ignore the record of those who have served Yahweh before our own time.

⁶ *Ezra and Nehemiah*, TOTC, 121.