

The Joy of the Lord is My Strength
A study in the book of Nehemiah
#11 God Uses Willing Volunteers (11:1-12:47)

Introduction-See Neh. 7:4

Jerusalem was a ghost town. It needed to be repopulated (Neh. 3:20, 23, 26 does indicate that some settlers had inhabited one section of the city). It had been without a wall for about 160 years (70 years while they were in exile and 90 years before Nehemiah arrived). The city could only be defended if it was filled with people.

The rubble was everywhere. The people needed a vision for what it could be (see Zech. 4:10 and Heb. 11:39-40).

“The holy city”- The prophets promised that Jerusalem was to be a purified, holy city (see Isa. 52:1 and Dan. 9:24). There are eschatological overtones to the restoration of Jerusalem (see Heb. 12:22, Rev. 21:2).

Those Inside the Walls (Neh. 11:1-19)

- A. Vs. 1 The Leaders: Hanani and Hananiah
See Neh.7:1-2

- B. Those chosen by casting lots (a lottery). But apparently, they had a choice. They were permitted to decline if they didn't want to go.
 - Lots (stones or pieces of wood) were used as a means to determine God's will. Some examples: the distribution of the land (Num. 26:55), the choice of the first king, the settlement of disputes (Prov. 18:18) and the choice of Judas' replacement (Acts 1:26).

- C. Vs. 2 The Volunteers: Literally the “commended” or the “blessed”
 - 1. They had to give up their land in a previous region and take up new business in Jerusalem
 - 2. They had to rearrange their social life- new friends, family left behind
 - 3. They had a willingness to live amongst rubble
 - 4. They had to know they were a target for the enemies of Israel

- D. Vs. 4-7 The descendants of Judah (468 men) and Benjamin (928 men)
These two tribes made up the Kingdom of Judah.

- E. Vs. 10-14 The priests: “Who carried on work for the temple” (242 men + 128 able men)

For a list of their names see Neh. 12:1-7

- F. Vs. 15-18 The Levites: Who worked outside the House of God and led in thanksgiving and prayer (vs. 22). They were also the “singers responsible for the service of the house of God.” See I Chron.6:31-39. (284)

For a list of their names see Neh. 12:8-21

- G. Vs. 19 The gatekeepers (172 men)
 - They were responsible for the overall security of the Temple area.
 - See I Chron. 9:22-32 for details of their work
 - Notice the mention of Asaph and Jeduthun: called “Chief Musicians” in the book of Psalms.

The total number of men inside the walls: 2222. (The Chronicler stated there were 2928)

Those Outside the Walls (vs. 25-36)

From Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom (50-60 miles apart)



The Wall is Dedicated (12:27-46)

- A. Their Preparation: vs. 27-29
 - They gathered the people from the surrounding areas
- B. Their Purification: vs. 30
 - “You can’t celebrate with a hypocritical heart.” See I Tim. 1:5

The priests and the Levites:

1. Ceremonially washed themselves and their clothes
2. They fasted
3. They abstained from sexual intimacy
4. They presented sin offerings

C. The Procession: vs. 31-38

Everyone joined them up on the wall. The choirs were in place. The people marched around the city with Ezra (who went first) and then Nehemiah. (Special note: “walking around” something in the Bible was a sign of claiming something for the Lord. Consider the walk around Jericho in Joshua 6.) They stopped every now and again for thanksgiving and worship.

D. The result: vs.43

The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away!

The German philosopher Nietzsche said, “If Christians expect me to believe in their redeemer, they have got to look more redeemed.”

So What?

God’s work gets done when God’s people volunteer to get involved.

I Cor. 16:15 The first converts devoted themselves to the service of others

II Cor. 8:5 They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to the work of the ministry

Judges 5:2 The people willingly offer themselves

When we get involved, we grow in our relationship to the Lord. We can see our church thrive (not just get by). Volunteering underscores our own sense of purpose and will help strengthen our self-confidence

Go, get involved!

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Jerusalem need to be repopulated? Discuss the kinds of people who moved into the city. Why were they so commended?
2. As they made plans for the dedication of the wall, what kinds of actions did they take? How do those actions speak to the way we prepare ourselves for worship?
3. Rejoicing is part of the Christian experience. A joy filled life affects others. How do you exhibit the “joy of the Lord?”
4. Do you volunteer around the church (or out in the community)? What does that look like in your life?

Personal Reflections

1. Have you thought much about the city of Jerusalem? What are your thoughts when you read Isa. 52:1, Dan. 9:24 and Rev. 21:2?
2. Decisions in the Bible were often predicated on the casting of lots. What do you think about that method? Would you trust it? Why or why not?
3. Consider your own level of volunteerism... are you active in your church? Your community? Does that service bring you joy?
4. If you are not an active volunteer, what are the reasons or things holding you back?
5. Thinking about the quote from Nietzsche, does your life reflect a vibrant relationship with the Redeemer? Do you usually "look redeemed?" What can you do to change that?