

CHAPTER 11

Jerusalem was walled round, but it was not as yet fully inhabited, and therefore was weak and despicable. Nehemiah's next care is to bring people into it; of that we have here an account.

- I. The methods taken to replenish it (v. 1, 2).
- II. The principal persons that resided there, of Judah and Benjamin (v. 3-9), of the priests and Levites (v. 10-19).
- III. The several cities and villages of Judah and Benjamin that were peopled by the rest of their families (v. 20-36).

NEHEMIAH 11:1-19

THE RE-PEOPLING OF JERUSALEM

Jerusalem is called here *the holy city* (v. 1), because there the temple was, and that was the place God had chosen to put his name there; upon this account, one would think, the holy seed should all have chosen to dwell there and have striven for a habitation there; but, on the contrary, it seems they declined dwelling there,

1. Because a greater strictness of conversation was expected from the inhabitants of Jerusalem than from others, which they were not willing to come up to. Those who care not for being holy themselves are shy of dwelling in a holy city; they would not dwell in the *New Jerusalem* itself for that reason, but would wish to have a continuing city here upon earth. Or,
2. Because Jerusalem, of all places, was most hated by the heathen their neighbours, and against it their malicious designs were levelled, which made that the post of danger (as the post of honour usually is) and therefore they were not willing to expose themselves there. Fear of persecution and reproach, and of running themselves into trouble, keeps many out of the holy city, and makes them backward to appear for God and religion, not considering that, as Jerusalem is with a special malice threatened and insulted by its enemies, so it is with a special care protected

by its God and made a *quiet habitation*, ^{<3330>}Isaiah 33:20; ^{<1940>}Psalms 46:4, 5.
Or,

3. 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. Note, *All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's*, ^{<1621>}Philippians 2:21. It is a general and just complaint that most people prefer their own wealth, credit, pleasure, ease, and safety, before the glory of God and the public good. People being thus backward to dwell at Jerusalem, now that it was poor, we are here told,

I. By what means it was replenished.

1. The rulers dwelt there, v. 1. That was the proper place for them to reside in, because *there were set the thrones of judgment* (^{<1621>}Psalms 122:5), and thither, in all difficult matters, the people resorted with their last appeals. And if it were an instance of eminent affection to the house of God, zeal for the public good, and of faith, and holy courage, and self-denial, to dwell there at this time, the rulers would be examples of these to their inferiors. Their dwelling there would invite and encourage others to dwell there too. *Magnates magnetes — the mighty are magnetic*. When great men choose the holy city for their habitation their example brings holiness into reputation, and their zeal will provoke very many.

2. There were some that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem, nobly foregoing their own secular interest for the public welfare, v. 2. It is upon record, to their honour, that when others were shy of venturing upon difficulty, loss, and danger, they *sought the good of Jerusalem, because of the house of the Lord their God. Those shall prosper that thus love Zion*, ^{<1621>}Psalms 122:6, 9. It is said, *The people blessed them*. They praised them; they prayed for them; they praised God for them. Many that do not appear forward themselves for the public good will yet give a good word to those that do. God and man will bless those that are public blessings, which should encourage us to be zealous in doing good.

3. They, finding that *yet there was room*, concluded upon a review of their whole body to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem; who they should be was determined by lot, the disposal whereof, all knew, was of the Lord. This would prevent strife, and would be a great satisfaction to those on whom the lot fell to dwell at Jerusalem, that they plainly saw God

appointing the bounds of their habitation. They observed the proportion of one in ten, as we may suppose, to bring the balance between the city and country to a just and equal poise; so it seems to refer to the ancient rule of giving the tenth to God; and what is given to the holy city he reckons given to himself.

II. By what persons it was replenished. A general account is here given of the inhabitants of Jerusalem because the *governors of Judah* looked upon them as *their strength in the Lord of hosts their God*, and valued them accordingly, ^{<3126>}Zechariah 12:5.

1. Many of the children of Judah and Benjamin dwelt there; for, originally, part of the city lay in the lot of one of those tribes and part in that of the other; but the greater part was in the lot of Benjamin, and therefore here we find of the children of Judah only 468 families in Jerusalem (v. 6), but of Benjamin 928, v. 7, 8. Thus small were its beginnings, but afterwards, before our Saviour's time, it grew much more populous. Those of Judah all descended from Perez, or Pharez, that son of Judah of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. And, though the Benjamites were more in number, yet of the men of Judah it is said (v. 6) that they were valiant men, fit for service, and able to defend the city in case of an attack. Judah has not lost its ancient character of a lion's whelp, bold and daring. Of the Benjamites that dwelt in Jerusalem we are here told who was *overseer*, and who was second, v. 9. For it is as necessary for a people to have good order kept up among themselves as to be fortified against the attacks of their enemies from abroad, to have good magistrates as to have good soldiers.

2. The priests and Levites did many of them settle at Jerusalem; where else should men that were holy to God dwell, but in the holy city?

(1.) Most of the priests, we may suppose, dwelt there, for their business lay where the temple was. Of those that did the work of the house in their courses here were 822 of one family, 242 of another, and 128 of another, v. 12-14. It was well that those labourers were not few. It is said of some of them that they were *mighty men of valour* (v. 14); it was necessary that they should be so, for the priesthood was not only a work, which required might, but a warfare, which required valour, especially now. Of one of these priests it is said that he was *the son of one of the great men*. It was no disparagement to the greatest man they had to have his son in the

priesthood; he might magnify his office, for his office did not in the least diminish him.

(2.) Some of the Levites also came and dwelt at Jerusalem, yet but few in comparison, 284 in all (v. 18), with 172 porters (v. 19), for much of their work was to *teach the good knowledge of God* up and down the country, for which purpose they were to be scattered in Israel. As many as there was occasion for attended at Jerusalem; the rest were doing good elsewhere.

[1.] It is said of one of the Levites that he had *the oversight of the outward business of the house of God*, v. 16. The priests were chief managers of the business within the temple gates; but this Levite was entrusted with the secular concerns of God's house, that were *in ordine ad spiritualia* — *subservient to its spiritual concerns*, the collecting of the contributions, the providing of materials for the temple service, and the like, which it was necessary to oversee, else the inward business would have been starved and have stood still. Those who take care of the *ta exo* — *the outward concerns* of the church, the serving of its tables, are as necessary in their place as those who take care of its *ta eso* — *its inward concerns*, who give themselves to the word and prayer.

[2.] It is said of another that he was *the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer*. Probably he had a good ear and a good voice, and was a scientific singer, and therefore was chosen to lead the psalm. He was precentor in the temple. Observe, Thanksgiving is necessary in prayer; they should go together; giving thanks for former mercies is a becoming way of begging further mercies. And care should be taken in public service that every thing be done in the best manner, *decently and in good order* — in prayer, that one speak and the rest join — in singing, that one begin and the rest follow.

NEHEMIAH 11:20-36

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE PEOPLE

Having given an account of the principal persons that dwelt in Jerusalem (a larger account of whom he had before, ^{<30>}1 Chronicles 9:2, etc.), Nehemiah, in these verses, gives us some account of the other cities, in

which dwelt *the residue of Israel*, v. 20. It was requisite that Jerusalem should be replenished, yet not so as to drain the country. *The king himself is served of the field*, which will do little service if there be not hands to manage it. Let there therefore be no strife, no envy, no contempt, no ill will, between the inhabitants of the cities and those of the villages; both are needful, both useful, and neither can be spared.

1. The Nethinims, the posterity of the Gibeonites, dwelt in Ophel, which was upon the wall of Jerusalem (^{<1485>}Nehemiah 3:26), because they were to do the servile work of the temple, which therefore they must be posted near to, that they might be ready to attend, v. 21.

2. Though the Levites were dispersed through the cities of Judah, yet they had an overseer who resided in Jerusalem, superior of their order and their provincial, to whom they applied for direction, who took care of their affairs and took cognizance of their conduct, whether they did their duty, v. 22.

3. Some of the singers were appointed to look after the necessary repairs of the temple, being ingenious men, and having leisure between their hours of service; they were *over the business of the house of God*, v. 22. And, it seems, the king of Persia had such a kindness for their office that he allotted a particular maintenance for them, besides what belonged to them as Levites, v. 23.

4. Here is one that was the king's commissioner at Jerusalem. He was of the posterity of Zerah (v. 24); for of *that* family of Judah there were some new settled in Jerusalem, and not all of Pharez, as appears by that other catalogue, ^{<1486>}1 Chronicles 9:6. He is said to be *at the king's hand*, or *on the king's part*, in *all matters concerning the people*, to determine controversies that arose between the king's officers and his subjects, to see that what was due to the king from the people was duly paid in and what was allowed by the king for the temple service was duly paid out, and happy it was for the Jews that one of themselves was in this post.

5. Here is an account of the villages, or country towns, which were inhabited by the residue of Israel — the towns in which the children of Judah dwelt (v. 25-30), those that were inhabited by the children of Benjamin (v. 31-35), and divisions for the Levites among both, v. 36. We will now suppose them safe and easy, though few and poor, but by the blessing of God they were likely to increase in wealth and power, and they

would have been more likely if there had not been that general profaneness among them, and lukewarmness in religion, with which they were charged in God's name by the prophet Malachi, who, it is supposed, prophesied about this time, and in whom prophecy ceased for some ages, till it revived in the great prophet and his forerunner.