

CHAPTER 11

God Knows His Children By Name

God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.

C.S. Lewis

Our God is a sovereign God. Nothing happens outside His will and plan. He may scatter people in order to accomplish His eternal purpose, even though we don't fully understand. Often we are not comfortable when God brings changes in our present context because we are accustomed to, and content with, the status quo. In Chapter 11, we see how underpopulated the city is, and how God orchestrated various circumstances in order to bring in people from the neighboring towns and villages. When God moves, He looks for people to joyfully join with Him in order to advance His kingdom.

I. Selection of the new residents (1-2)

Verse 1 *Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns.*

“Lots” were made from small stones or small pieces of wood. They were shaken (Prov. 16:33) and cast (Obad. 11, Nah. 3:10) on the ground (1 Chron. 24:31; Ezek. 24:6; Jonah 1:7).

“Holy City” is generally found in prophetic texts (e.g., Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24; Joel 3:17). The Arabic name for Jerusalem is *al-Quds* (The Holy City).

The practice of population redistribution was also used to establish Greek and Hellenistic cities. Known as *synoikismos*, the practice involved the forcible transfer from rural settlements to urban centers. The City of Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee was populated using such a process by Herod Antipas in A.D. 18 (Jos. Antiq. XVIII, 36-38 (ii 3)).¹

Scholars agree that the population of Jerusalem during Nehemiah's time was about eight thousand.

Because God is sovereign, He is behind the movement of people from one place to another, whether for political or spiritual reasons. He has a great plan to accomplish for His own glory.

Verse 2 The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

People volunteered to move to Jerusalem in addition to the selection of those by lot. Most of them certainly would have preferred to stay in their own native towns and villages.

“Commended” (meaning blessed) is usually used of God, but at times is used of men (cf. 2 Chron. 16:2; 2 Chron. 6:3; 30:27).

II. Provincial Leaders (3-24)

Verses 3-4a³ *These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem (now some Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants and descendants of Solomon's servants lived in the towns of Judah, each on their own property in the various towns, ⁴ while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem):*

The author gives a preview of the specifics of vv. 4b-36. Verses 3-19 are a census roster of the first residents in Jerusalem after the return from Babylon that can be matched with the list in 1 Chron. 9:2-21. About half of the names in the two lists are identical.

Verses 3-24 provide a categorical listing of those who settled in Jerusalem:

- The children of Judah (4-6)
- The sons of Benjamin (7-9)
- The Priests (10-14)
- The Levites (15-18)
- Others (19-24)

¹ Expositor's commentary on Nehemiah P.744
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A. The Children of Judah Verses 4b-6

Athaiah son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, a descendant of Perez;⁵ and Maaseiah son of Baruch, the son of Kol-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah.⁶ The descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totaled 468 men of standing.

“Athaiah” occurs only here and means “Yahweh has shown himself preeminent”. “Mahalael” means “God is one who illuminates.” “Perez” (breach) was also the name of one of the twin sons born to Judah (Gen. 38:29).

“Hazaiah” means “Yahweh has seen” and occurs only here. “Shelah” (Shiloah) are the inhabitants of Shiloah. The KJV renders this “the son of Shiloni.”

“Men of standing” (the KJV translates as “valiant men”) means able men or men of valor. These men later became wealthy and served in the armed forces (cf. v14; 2:9; 4:2; 2 Kings 15:20; Ezra 8:22).

B. The Sons of Benjamin Verses 7-9

⁷ Sallu son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah,⁸ and his followers, Gabbai and Sallai—928 men.⁹ Joel, son of Zikri was their chief officer, and Judah son of Hassenuah was over the New Quarter of the city.

Nehemiah gives a list of laities who agreed to move to the city from the tribe of Benjamin. “Joed” (Yahweh is witness) occurs only here. “Kolaiah” (voice of Yahweh) occurs here and in Jeremiah 29:21. “Ithiel” (God is with me) occurs here and in Prov 30:1.

“Gabbai” derives from the verb “to be high”. Notice here that Benjamin provided twice as many men (928) as Judah (468) to take care of the city of Jerusalem.

“Zikri” is the short form of Zechariah. He was their chief officer (overseer in the KJV), and Judah was the new quarter of the city (the KJV translates as “Judah the son of Senuah was second over the city”).

C. The Priests Verses 10-14

¹⁰ Jedaiah; the son of Joiarib; Jakin; ¹¹ Seraiah son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the official in charge of the house of God, ¹² and their associates, who carried on work for the temple – 822 men; Adaiah son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah, ¹³ and his associates, who were heads of families – 242 men; Amashsai son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, ¹⁴ and his associates, who were men of standing – 128. Their chief officer was Zabdiel son of Haggadolim.

Here Nehemiah provides a summary list of priests who had moved to the city of Jerusalem to carry out priestly ministries.

Verse 10 “Jakin” means “He establishes” (cf. the parallel in 1 Chron. 9:10).

Verse 11 “Seraiah” was the descendant of the high priest who was taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-21). “Official in charge” is rendered by KJV as “ruler of the house of God.” It simply means “chief, leader, prince.”

Verse 12 So far, eight hundred and twenty-two men carried on the work of the temple. “Pelaliah” (Yahweh has interposed) occurs only here. “Amzi” (my strong one) is a short form of Amaziah. It occurs here and in 1 Chron. 6:46.

Verse 13 Another group of priests mentioned here totaled two hundred and forty-two men. “Amashsai” means “burdensome.” “Ahzai” is the shorted form of Ahaziah (Yahweh has grasped), which occurs only here.

Verse 14 “Zabdiel” (God has given) occurs only here and in 1 Chron. 27:2. “Haggadolim” means “the great ones.”

See the translation of the above section from Living Bible

Leaders from among the priests:

Jedaiah (son of Joiarib); Jachin; Seraiah (son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub the chief priest). In all, there were 822 priests doing the work at the Temple under the leadership of these men.

And there were 242 priests under the leadership of Adaiiah (son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah).

There were also 128 stalwart men under the leadership of Amashsai (son of Azarel, son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer), who was assisted by Zabdiel (son of Haggadolim).

D. The Levites

¹⁵ Shemaiah son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; ¹⁶ Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the heads of the Levites, who had charge of the outside work of the house of God; ¹⁷ Mattaniah son of Mika, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the director who led in thanksgiving and prayer; Bakbukiah, second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸ The Levites in the holy city totaled 284.

The Levite leaders are: Shemaiah (son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni); Shabbethai and Jozabad, who were in charge of the work outside of the Temple; Mattaniah (son of Mica, son of Zabdi, son of Asaph) was the one who began the thanksgiving services with prayer; Bakbukiah and Abda (son of Shammua, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun) were his assistants (TLB).

Verse 15 “Hasshub” means “considerate.” “Azrikam” means “my help has arisen.”

Verse 16 “The outside work” (*hisonah*) means “lying outside, outer” (cf. 1 Chron. 26:29). It references duties outside the Temple but connected with it, especially the work of repairing the temple.

Verse 17 “Mika” is short for Michael or possibly for Michaiah (“Who is like Yahweh?” “Asaph” was one of the three leaders of the temple choirs (1 Chron. 25:1-2; Ps. 50; 73-83). “Bakbukiah” possibly means “the bottle of Yahweh.” The name of “Abda” (slave or servant), occurs here and in 1 Kings 4:6. “Galal” means “tortoise.” “Jeduthun” whose name means “lauder or praising” was the chief of one of the three choirs (1 Chron. 16:42; 25:1; 2 Chron. 5:12; Ps. 39, 62, 77).

Verse 18 The Levites totaled two hundred and eighty-four; it is a small number compared to the priests, which totaled one thousand one hundred ninety-two.

E. The Temple Staff (19-24)

The gatekeepers:

¹⁹ Akkub, Talmon and their associates, who kept watch at the gates—172 men. ²⁰ The rest of the Israelites, with the priests and Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, each on their ancestral property. ²¹ The temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them. ²² The chief officer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mika. Uzzi was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the musicians responsible for the service of the house of God. ²³ The musicians were under the king's orders, which regulated their daily activity. ²⁴ Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, one of the descendants of Zerach son of Judah, was the king's agent in all affairs relating to the people.

Verse 19 There were one hundred and seventy-two gate keepers who were led by Akkub, Talmon, and their associates.

Verse 20 The other priests, Levites, and people lived wherever their family inheritance was located. “Ancestral property” designates the inalienable hereditary possession including land, buildings, and movable goods acquired either by conquest or inheritance (Gen. 31:14; Num. 18:21; 27:7; 34:2; 1 Kings 21:3-4).²

Verse 21 However, the Temple workers (whose leaders were Ziha and Gishpa) all lived in Ophel. “Ziha” occurs three times; he is a ruler among the Nethinim. The children of Ziha were a family of Nethinim who returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:43; Nehemiah 7:46). “Gishpa” (the King James Version reads Gispa; gishpa) was an officer of the Nethinim. A comparison with Ezra 2:43 makes it probable that he is to be identified with Hasupha, and quite possible that this word is a corruption of Hasuphah.

“Ophel” (oh feel) is a place whose name means, “swelling, fat, bulge, or “mound.” It became the proper name of a portion of the hill on which the city of David was built (2 Chronicles 27:3). The Ophel was just south of Mount Moriah, on which the Temple was constructed, and joined the old city with the area of Solomon's palace and Temple. The NRSV translates it as “citadel” (studylight.org).

² Ibid P. 748

Verse 22. The supervisor of the Levites in Jerusalem and of those serving at the Temple was Uzzi (son of Bani, son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica), a descendant of Asaph, whose clan became the Tabernacle singers.

As soon as the exiles who were called to be temple singers returned to Jerusalem, they resumed their duties. It was a day of revival, restoration, and rebuilding: of the altar, the temple, and the city wall. When the foundation of the new temple had been laid, the singers sang again. Once more they sang the chorus that God’s mercy endures forever (Ezra 3:10-11). The choirs also played a significant role in celebrating the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27ff). Everything took place according to the command of David and Solomon his son, ‘for in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God’ (Neh. 12:45-46).³

Verse 23 David had regulated the services of the Levites, including the singers (1 Chron. 25). The Persian king, Artaxerxes I, may have given a royal stipend so that the Levite choir might sing and pray for “the well-being of the king” (Ezra 6:10).⁴

Verse 24 Pethahiah (son of Meshezabel, a descendant of Zerah, a son of Judah) assisted in all the matters of public administration. His name meant “freed by Jehovah.” He was a Judahite of the time of Nehemiah, who was “at the king’s hand in all matters concerning the people” (Neh. 11:24), which may mean that he served as an adviser on Jewish affairs at the Persian court.⁵

“Zerah” short for Zeremiah (Ezra 7:4) means “Yahweh has shone forth”. We need capable and faithful advisers and officers, like Zerah, for the administrative aspect of our ministries. If we fail in this area, it is likely we will fail in our ministry. Our integrity will be questioned.

F. Others (25-30)

²⁵ As for the villages with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its surrounding settlements, in Dibon and its settlements, in Jekabzeel and its villages, ²⁶ in Jeshua, in Moladah, in Beth Pelet, ²⁷ in Hazar Shual, in Beersheba and its settlements, ²⁸ in Ziklag, in Mekonah and its settlements, ²⁹ in En Rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, ³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, in Lachish and its fields, and in Azekah and its settlements. So they were living all the way from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

³ Biblecenter.org

⁴ Expositor’s commentary P.748

⁵ <https://www.biblestudy.org/bible/11/ezra/11-24/>

This important list matches the earlier list of Judean cities. All of these names appear in Joshua 15 except Dibon, Jeshua, and Meconah. The list of cities that the people of Judah settled in, that are mentioned here, is not complete.

Verse 25 “Kiriath Arba” (city of four giants) was the archaic name of the city of Hebron (Gen. 23:2; Judges 1:20). It is located twenty miles south of Jerusalem.

Hebron – Early Years

- First mentioned in Genesis 13:18
- Abram moved there; built altar there
- Semetic name refers to “colleague”, “unite”, or “friend” ; original – “alliance”?
- Num. 13:22 – “built 7 years before Zoan in Egypt”
- Originally called Kirjath-arba [Gen 23:2]
- “City of four” – ruled by 3 sons of Anak - giants



“Its settlements” literally means “its daughters,” likely referring to the surrounding villages (cf. Num. 21:25,32; 32:42; Josh. 15:45, 47; 1 Chron. 2:23; 2 Chron. 13:19).

“Jekabzeel” means “what God gathers.” It was the most remote city of Judah on the southern frontier.

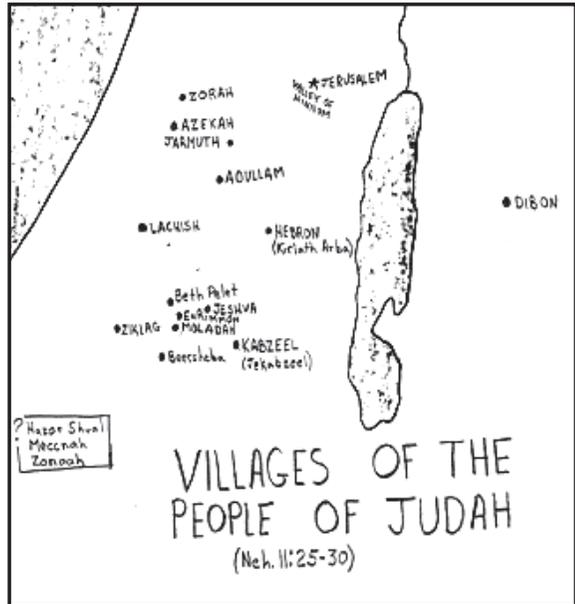
Verse 26 “Jeshua” was located northeast of Beersheba. “Moladah” was also close to Beersheba (Josh. 15:26). It was occupied by the Iudmaeans

and was perhaps the same as Malatha. “Beth Pelet” is a site near Beersheba (Josh. 15:27) and means “house of refuge.”

Verse 27 “Hazar Shual” means “enclosure of a fox or jackal” (cf. Josh. 15:28; 1 Chron. 4:28). “Beersheba” means “well of the seven” or “well of the oath.” This city was located about thirty miles south of Hebron.

Verse 28 “Ziklag” means “winding.” It was located in the Negev region in southwest Judah. It was given to David by Achish, king of Gath (1 Sam. 27:60 and taken by the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30:1). “Meconah” was a town near Ziklag.

Verse 29 “En Rimmon” meaning “spring of the pomegranate”, was located northeast of Beersheba. “Zorah” was Sarah on the north side of Wadi es Sarar (valley of the sorek). This was the home of Manoah, Samson’s father (Judg. 13:2). “Jarmuth” was located eight miles northeast of Beit-Jibrin. It was a Canaanite city in the south that attempted to block Joshua’s invasion (Josh. 10:3-5).

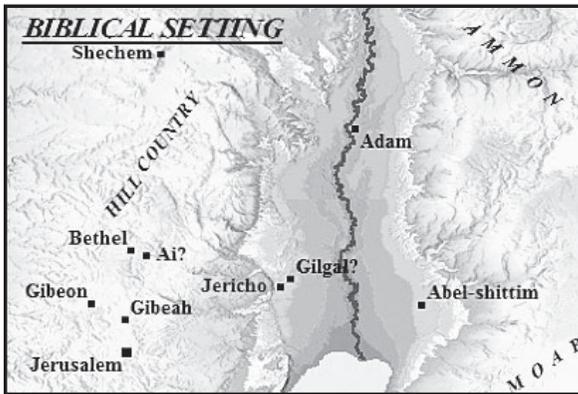


Verse 30 “Zanoah” was a village in the Shephelah, a district of low hills between Judah and the area of Philistia (Josh. 15:34). The men of Zanoah restored the Valley Gate (Neh. 3:13). “Adullam” was the city near where King David hid in a cave from Saul (1 Sam. 22:1). It was located between Jerusalem and Lachish. “Lachish” was a great Judean city midway between Jerusalem and Gaza. “Azekah,” today Tell Zakariyeth, is mentioned in Jeremiah 34:7.

“Hinnom” is the valley southwest of Jerusalem. The distance from Jerusalem to Beersheba is only forty miles.

G. Places Settled by Those from Benjamin (31-36)

³¹ *The descendants of the Benjamites from Geba lived in Mikdash, Aija, Bethel and its settlements,* ³² *in Anathoth, Nob and Ananiah,* ³³ *in Hazor, Ramah and Gittaim,* ³⁴ *in Hadid, Zeboim and Neballat,* ³⁵ *in Lod and Ono, and in Ge Harashim.* ³⁶ *Some of the divisions of the Levites of Judah settled in Benjamin.*



Verse 31 “Geba” (height) was Jeba, located six miles northeast of Jerusalem (cf. Josh. 18:24; Ezra 2:26). This city was fortified by King Asa (1 Kings 15:22). “Mikdash” is Mukhmas, seven miles northeast of Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 2:27; Neh. 7:31). This was

the place where Saul and Jonathan fought the Philistines (1 Sam. 13-14). “Aija” or “Ai” which means “ruins”, was located just three miles northeast of Bethel. This city was taken by Joshua following the initial disaster caused by sin in Israel’s camp (Josh. 7-8).

“Bethel” means “house of God.” Formerly known as Luz, it was where the Jewish people met with their God. This was the place where Jacob had a life-transforming encounter with the Lord as he saw in a dream a stairway to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it and the Lord standing above it (Genesis 28:10–22). Located to the west of Jericho and north of Jerusalem, it became the political and spiritual center of Israel.

Verse 32 “Anathoth” is Anata, three miles north of Jerusalem. It was the birthplace of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1). “Nob”, probably Mount Scopus, is just north of the Mount of Olives (Jer 7:14; Isa 10:27-32). “Ananiah” was probably Bethany (house of Ananiah), which was two miles northeast of Jerusalem. Today the Arabs call the village “el-Aziriyeh”, after Lazarus.⁶

Verse 33 “Hazor” is Khirbet Hazzur, west of Beit Hanina, located north of Jerusalem. “Gittaim” (two wine presses) was located near Remleh (cf 2 Sam. 4:3).

⁶ Expositor’s commentary P.751

Verse 34 “Hadid” which means “sharp” is el-Haditheh, four miles northeast of Lydda near the mouth of the Aijalon Valley (cf. Ezra 2:33; Neh. 7:37). “Zeboim” (hyenas) was located north of Lydda. “Neballat” or Beit Nebala, was four miles east of Lydda.

Verse 35 “Lod”, today the site of Israel’s international airport, is ten miles from the coast (cf. Ezra 2:33; Neh. 7:37). Peter healed Aeneas at Lydda (Acts 9:32-38). It became a spiritual center during the Talmudic period.

“Ono” means “vigorous.” A town of Benjamin, it was located in the “plain of Ono” (1 Chronicles 8:12; Ezra 2:33); now Kefr `Ana, 5 miles north of Lydda, and about thirty miles northwest of Jerusalem.

When they failed in their attempts to deter Nehemiah from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Sanballat and Tobiah resorted to a stratagem by pretending to want to hold a conference with him, and inviting him to meet them at Ono. Four times they made the request, and every time Nehemiah refused to come. Their object was to take him prisoner.⁷

The KJV translates verse 35 as “Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen.” The NIV translates “the valley of craftsmen” as “*Ge Harashim*.” It is a Hebrew phrase for “the valley of craftsmen.” The valley was named for the community of craftsmen who lived there (1 Chronicles 4:14).

Verse 36 The TLB translates this verse as “Some of the Levites who lived in Judah were sent to live with the tribe of Benjamin.” Certain divisions of Levites, who had been located in Judah, were now transferred to Benjamin to rectify the population disproportion presumably discovered in Nehemiah’s census.⁸

Conclusion and Application

Chapter 11, following on the heels of the covenant affirmation in 9:38 and the list of signees (10:1-31-note who was missing), plus the specific commitments that they made (vv. 32-39), highlights the fulfillment of everything the entire book of Nehemiah has been pointing to-- the faithfulness of God demonstrated in the resettlement of a walled and gated Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.

This is the climax of God working all things together for good for the people, and against His enemies. Victory is ours in Christ!

A special blessing was promised in verse two to those who volunteered to live in the city. May God raise up volunteers for His work today!

⁷ Eastern Bible Dictionary (<https://biblehub.com/topical/o/ono.htm>)

⁸ Expositor’s Bible Commentary P. 751

The reference to the ancestral property demonstrates the fulfillment of God's promise of the land to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob forever, which was fulfilled even though they had been away in captivity for 70 years.

Strategic cities such as Hebron and Beersheba were highlighted, again showing that God had not forgotten his people or their history.

God is faithful in all His promises, and we can be confident today that He will be faithful to us and our descendants. Continue to believe in Him and grow in Him daily. He has a great plan for you as you humble yourself and seek His face. Expect great things today from God!



¹⁰ This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Jeremiah 29:10-14



Discussion Questions

1. How did the Jews in chapter eleven decide who would live in Jerusalem? (V. 1)
2. Where is this method of choosing between people recommended in the Bible? How should such decisions be made within the church today?
3. What reasons do you think the people might have to not want to live in Jerusalem? (Vs. 2-3)
4. What reasons can you think of for these five groups of people to live in Jerusalem? (V. 3)
5. How many sons of Perez dwelt in Jerusalem? (V. 6)
6. According to this chapter, who had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God? (V. 16)
7. What practical lessons can you learn for your life and ministry by studying Chapter 11?