

Urban Renewal

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[0:00] When we come to Nehemiah 11 that we're going to start with tonight, we continue the subject! that we last looked at in Nehemiah chapter 7. If you remember a few weeks ago in Nehemiah chapter 7, we learned that Nehemiah was concerned about the sparse population of Jerusalem and he'd begun to do something about remedying that problem. But before he got very far in helping the population, he was interrupted by a month of spiritual festivities. Those festivities were what we looked at in chapters 8, 9, and 10. Now that that month has been completed for the Israelites, they're able to proceed with repopulating Jerusalem. So this month of interruption for spiritual matters actually was a help to them. It helped prepare the people's heart for the repopulation of the city. Repopulating Jerusalem was going to require much sacrifice by many people, and a spiritual revival would help the people to be more willing to sacrifice to help the population of the city. Just for some review, let's look at Nehemiah 7 verses 1 through 4. They summarize what

Jerusalem was like after the wall had been rebuilt. Nehemiah 7 1 through 4 are where Nehemiah wrote, Then it was, when the wall was rebuilt, and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah, the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

And I said to them, Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened up until the sun is hot, and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors, and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house. Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.

The last verse of chapter 7, Nehemiah 7 73, told us that the people preferred to dwell in other places instead of Jerusalem. Nehemiah 7 73 says, So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethanim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. Think about why the people would have preferred to live elsewhere. For one thing, until they just finished the wall, Jerusalem had been without a wall for 142 years. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC, and they finished rebuilding the wall in 444 BC, so the city had been defenseless and decaying for a long time. We just read from Nehemiah 7 4 that the houses had not yet been rebuilt. Even though the wall was now finished, Jerusalem would still have been filled with rubble, and during the nearly century and a half that it was unoccupied, then grass and trees would have grown up everywhere in the yards, the streets, and the passageways, so it would be a very difficult place to live, and that would make it an even more difficult place to make a living. Living in Jerusalem would have been dangerous too. In the early chapters of Nehemiah, we saw how the surrounding provinces opposed the rebuilding. Another invasion was a real possibility from them. Because Jerusalem was the capital city of Judah, and it was now fortified with walls, it was the greatest threat of any city to take the preeminence away from the important cities of the other provinces around them. So this made Jerusalem the main Jewish city that would be targeted by the enemy. That meant that no city needed to be guarded more than Jerusalem.

Nehemiah himself certainly perceived a threat to the city. We just read verse 7 3. There he told the gatekeepers to avoid opening the gates until the sun was hot. He also reminded the people to guard what houses that they had. Think about Jerusalem in the event of an attack, because that would be a really dangerous place to be if the city was attacked, because if you were a farmer living in the country, you might have your crops plundered, and you might have your herds driven off, but you could escape into the countryside. The people in the city behind the wall wouldn't have any place to go. So that person would be stuck in the city. He would be easy to attack. And the city, because it had few people and few defenders, would pretty much be defenseless. And that's why it

was important that the people guarded the fortifications constantly. And of course, having to participate in the guarding posed additional responsibilities for the citizens. So are you starting to see why 773 tells us that the people preferred to live elsewhere? Virtually nobody would have wanted to live in a city with less suitable housing and fewer ways to make a living, especially if that city was more susceptible to attack from the enemy. So even the best marketers in the Jerusalem Chamber of

[5:26] Commerce would struggle to entice people under those circumstances. The main things Jerusalem had going for it were the rebuilt wall and the spiritual momentum from the previous month.

We do know that each Jew now feels that Jerusalem is defensible again. The wall around the city gives them a sense of national identity. And with this rekindling of a nationalistic spirit, there's a new awareness of their relationship to God. They know and they've been reminded that they are his covenant people and they're secure in their standing before God. So even if they don't feel secure in the city, they feel secure with their God. And that covenant relationship was reconfirmed in the month of spiritual renewal that we studied in chapters 8 through 10. Earlier, I said that Nehemiah's plan to repopulate the city was interrupted by the month of spiritual renewal. But as we look at 11.1 through 12.26 tonight, we'll see that that spiritual renewal activity actually was the foundation for the urban renewal. God's timing sometimes fails to make sense to us, but with the benefit of history, we see evidence of God working things together for the good of his people and working them according to his plan.

The spiritual renewal reminded the people that Jerusalem was the most sacred city of the Jews. And this was the city in which the great temple was located. It was the city known as God's dwelling place. And the Jews gladly proclaimed that the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than the dwellings of all of Jacob. That comes from Psalm 87.2. When we look at Nehemiah 11, it's twice called the holy city.

We see that in verse 1 and verse 18. And without the reminder of the importance of Jerusalem, virtually nobody would have wanted to live there. Tonight, we will see the urban renewal of Jerusalem.

And we'll cover this renewal in two main sections. In verses 11.1 and 2, we'll see the process. So we'll first look at the process. It's a short section. Verses 11.1 and 2 say this.

[7:44] Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city. And nine tenths were to dwell in other cities. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. The beginning of verse 1 refers to the rulers who were already living in Jerusalem. To their credit, they didn't have to be told to move there. They knew that they belonged in the holy city. And so they set the example for the people. They realized their responsibility. Matthew Henry highlights a spiritual lesson here. He said this.

He said when great men choose the holy city for their habitation, their example brings holiness into reputation and their zeal will inspire very many. Even with the rulers there, though, Jerusalem still needed people to live in the city. Nehemiah could have arbitrarily demanded that certain families sell their farms and move into the city, but this wasn't the way he did it. The decision to start the repopulation process and the urban renewal was done by casting lots, and that came from the people themselves. So this is a mark of patriotism as well as self-denial. It looks like Nehemiah probably explained the need to the leaders of the different towns and villages, and they must have called town meetings to discuss the best means of meeting the need of repopulating Jerusalem. And so the people responded positively to this kind of approach, and they decided on the casting lots method to repopulate the city. We talked a little bit about how life in the city would have been very different from life in an outlying town or village. Casting lots had no respect for family ties. They would have had to make sacrifices as they moved away from family and friends, and adults and children would move into

Jerusalem but leave other people behind. So urban renewal was a difficult issue then, just as it is for us today in our inner cities. So that's why we say that the people moving to Jerusalem showed self-denial. They gave up the comforts and fellowships of home and moved to a place that would require a lot of hard work once they got there. We know that God can use different means to make his will known, and the use of the lot is seen a number of times in the Old Testament. Today we don't have to depend upon this method of ascertaining God's will. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling

in us, and we can expect God to make his will known through his word, through inner convictions, and through his guidance of the circumstances. But we still shouldn't limit what God can do. He's sovereign, and he may choose to use unusual circumstances sometimes. The important matter is that, like the people in Jerusalem, we need to learn to trust God for the guidance. Verse 2 actually generates a lot more discussion in the commentaries than it should. The verse says, and the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

The argument among the commentators is whether this constitutes a third group of people, or whether it includes the people who were chosen by lot. The verse's placement and the wording of verse 1 seems to indicate that the blessing includes everyone who moved to Jerusalem, whether they voluntarily moved there or whether they moved there after they were chosen by the lot. It certainly seems as if the people chosen by lot willingly moved there anyway. They willingly accepted the results and went.

Nobody seems to have forced them to move into the city. Most likely, the people chosen by lot were considered part of the people who were blessed or commended by the others. Then from 11.3 to 12.26, we have the second section of the lesson. It's going to be an extremely long section, and in that section, we see the people. So the people is what goes in your next blank there.

[11 : 55] Because the section is so long, we're going to break it into subsections as we go through it. Verses 3 and the first part of verse 4 give us an introduction to the first main group of people.

They say, So verses 3 and 4a introduce us to the city dwellers.

So the city dwellers is the next blank for you. The city dwellers are going to be listed in several different subgroupings from here all the way through 11.24.

We'll see that most of these city dwellers are the ones that repopulated Jerusalem, but some of them actually lived in other cities of Judah. We already read 3 and 4a. They talk about the first subgroupings.

We see the heads of the province, and that's another way of describing the leaders that were also mentioned in verse 1. We also see the descendants of Judah and the descendants of Benjamin.

[13 : 19] Beginning with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin is appropriate because Jerusalem was in the tribal territory of Judah, and it bordered Benjamin, which extended northward from it.

Most of the people then would be from those tribes, and they had been the chief tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah and were the last to have been overthrown in the invasions. If you look ahead at the rest of the chapter, you can think that the details possess very little interest because it's another tabulation of families and individuals whose names are often unpronounceable, and usually we forget them as soon as we read those names.

But it's important to remember that in the sight of God, the tabulation is of great importance. Like the other list we've seen in Nehemiah, this list will be consulted at the judgment seat of Christ, and these willing people will learn how good their choice was when they accepted loss in this world so that they could better care for the city of God's choice.

Very little is said of these members of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in verses 4 through 9, and then Levi, who is mentioned in verses 10 through 18. But every one of these people was well known to the Lord, and every word and act that told of their devotedness to God will be manifested in that day of judgment.

Also think about how the original readers of the book of Nehemiah would have viewed the names. The original readers would have known, or at least would have known of, some of the people listed.

[14 : 52] They would have been their friends and relatives. Consider how much they would have enjoyed hearing about what cousin or grandpa Mahalel did during that time period. And the list of people from Judah and Benjamin runs through the end of verse 9.

We won't read all of the verses word for word, but we'll hit the key points of a lot of these verses.

Verse 9 gives us some details about one person in particular of the tribe of Benjamin.

Verse 9 says, Joel, the son of Zichri, was their overseer, and Judah, the son of Senua, was second over the city. Put together with what we know about the city's leadership from verse 2, we have this organization structure in the city.

We know that Nehemiah was the governor of the whole province of Judah. Hanani was the civil leader. He was first in command of Jerusalem. Hananiah was the military commander of Jerusalem.

And the man named Judah of Benjamin was second in command of the city, probably reporting to Hanani. Joel would have represented the concerns of the descendants of Benjamin.

[16:02] Presumably, there would have been another officer to represent the people from the tribe of Judah, but for some reason, that person is not mentioned. Forming the city government from both tribes may seem like a small detail to us, but it likely was a big item for the people from each of those tribes.

Judah is a large tribe, and Benjamin is a small tribe. From the time of the divided kingdom, the tribe of Benjamin had been included in the southern kingdom, under the title of Judah.

It was only natural that their individual identity would gradually have been eroded. Meanwhile, Judah's sons of Perez, mentioned in verse 6, have a long and enviable history.

They are looked up to and respected, and they're accustomed to having their own way. The people of Benjamin, on the other hand, are renowned for their savage bravery and skill in war.

So now that they've begun to feel the first resurgence of tribal pride, the Benjamites are not likely to take kindly to others dictating the terms of the city to them. So you have one person that's always had a proud history, or one tribe that's always had a proud history, and another that's been very good at war.

[17:16] So you can see where there would be a conflict, potentially. So with two such proud tribes working and living in the same city, Nehemiah diffuses the potential problem and the potential conflict by making sure that both tribes are represented in the leadership.

We see that people from different tribes and different backgrounds are now working together for the glory of God. And verses 10 through 18 tell us about the priest and the Levites.

Verse 10 starts with the words of the priest. In addition to the names of the priest, we learn something about what they did. Verse 11 says that Saraiah was the leader of the house of God.

This most likely means that he was the high priest at that time, and he was supported by a team of priests mentioned in verses 12 through 14. According to verse 12, the priest did the work of the house.

So this was their activity, their calling, and their vocation. God's people need to know the work of God's servants. And verse 14 describes the priest as mighty men of valor.

[18:28] This is a similar description to the valiant men of the tribe of Judah. So these priests weren't a bunch of sissies and cream puffs. They were tough people who actually knew how to defend themselves.

And the phrase mighty men of valor is often used of military personnel. Most people think that means that these men may have been trained for defending the temple area.

So you can see that even the religious leaders were trained to defend the city and the temple.

Verse 15 begins telling us about the Levites.

And through verse 18, we see several jobs of those Levites. Verse 16 says that Shabbathiah and Jehozabad had oversight of the business outside of the house of God.

Most likely, this refers to the maintenance of the temple, including repairs to the temple. Verse 17 says that Mataniah was the leader who began the thanksgiving with prayer.

[19:26] Important to notice that prayer was to begin with thanksgiving in the temple services. One of the Levites then oversaw this duty. So this work probably involved some song of praise that preceded the prayers.

But whatever it involved, the important point is that when we pray, we should start with thanksgiving. Here's another quote from Matthew Henry. He said, Giving thanks for former mercies is a becoming way of begging for further mercies.

So in other words, if you're thankful, it doesn't look so bad when you ask God to do more things for you. The next group of people that we see listed is the group of gatekeepers.

And that duty was a very important duty. If the gates to the wall of the city weren't faithfully guarded, the enemy could enter the city easily and bring great ruin to the city.

The gates had to be guarded faithfully or the wall became useless. And gatekeeping may not have been given high status by society, but that still doesn't mean the work was unimportant.

[20:32] And if you think about it, we have a parallel in the church today. Many jobs in the church are not deemed very important by some people, and they're not given much status.

But God knows the importance of those jobs, and he's going to reward the people who do them. Verses 20 and 21 break from the list of Jerusalem residents, and these verses summarize the people who live in the other cities of Judah.

So here are verses 20 and 21. They say, The Israelites were very attentive to their ancestral heritage.

When they returned from the Babylonian captivity to their land, they naturally settled in the cities of their inheritance, wherever it was possible for them to do that. The inheritance was a divine possession, and it wasn't to be sold to anyone outside of the family.

So a lot of sentiment would be involved in the inheritance, and that sentiment would be a part of the great sacrifice involved in moving to Jerusalem. We know they wouldn't give up their inheritance, but they had to move away from it for a while to live elsewhere.

[21 : 54] And that's a good lesson for us, too, because doing God's work always involves sacrifice of some kind, and these people were willing to make that sacrifice. Verses 22 through 24 return the focus to the people dwelling in Jerusalem.

They say, Also the overseers of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzah, the son of Bonnie, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mataniah, the son of Micah, the sons of Asaph, the singers in charge of the service of the house of God.

For it was the king's command concerning them that a certain portion should be for the singers a quota day by day. Verse 23 is an interesting verse to think about.

Notice that the king himself mandated that funds should be set aside to support the singers. And if you remember from the early chapters of Nehemiah, the king is not a Jewish king, it's King Artaxerxes.

So like others in the Lord's work, the singers couldn't be employed in another job if the work of the temple took up their entire time, and the king of Persia actually was moved by God to provide for them.

[23 : 17] So that's an illustration that God can move in the heart of anyone to support his work, even someone who's a pagan king. So this should give much encouragement to those in God's work, especially at times when the need is great and there's no ready or usual source of help available to them.

Verse 24 ends the list of city dwellers, and the people mentioned in the remainder of chapter 11 are grouped according to the size of their towns. And in verses 25 through 36, we learn about the village people.

So the village people is your next handout section. The village people is not a reference to the singing group, but I see Mike picked up that reference there.

We've already seen that some of the guys of Nehemiah's day, the mighty men of valor, could qualify as a macho man, even though they never worked out at the YMCA. Boo! We'll skip reading all the verses word for word, but verse 25 alone will give you the sense of why the village people is not just a good pun, it's also a good heading for this group of people.

Look at verse 25, it says, And as for the villages with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt in Kirjath Arba and its villages, Devon and its villages, Jacobil and its villages.

[24 : 45] So just in verse 25, the word villages is mentioned four times. And if you look through verse 36, villages is mentioned a total of ten times in those verses.

So that's why you can see that they really are the village people. Four groups are listed who lived in the country rather than Jerusalem. And these village people consisted of the Judeans in verse 25, the Benjamites in verse 31, the priests are mentioned in verse 20, and the Levites are mentioned in verse 20, and also verse 36.

Something that's unusual about this section is that individual names weren't given here, like what they were regarding Jerusalem. So the honor was given to moving to Jerusalem.

If you wanted your name on an important list, you had to make the sacrifice and do the honorable work of moving. When we looked at the people of Jerusalem, we talked about what the four groups did, and we see that we have those groups represented here in the villages as well.

So let's just spend some time reminding ourselves about why these villages were so important to the people of Israel. Verse 25 mentions Kirjath Arba, and that's better known as Hebron.

[26 : 03] Abraham lived there for many years, and it was there that he pleaded with God to spare the city of Sodom. Centuries later, Caleb requested and conquered this area during the days of Joshua.

Beersheba is mentioned in verse 26, and it's one of the southernmost towns of Judah and of Israel. Abraham also lived there for part of his life. Ziklag, mentioned in verse 28, is famous for David's

association with it.

It was given to David by a Philistine king, and later it was burned to the ground by some Amalekites when David was unwisely with the Philistine army when they were about to attack Israel. You'll remember Ziklag from Pastor Dan's studies in 2 Samuel.

Adullam in verse 29 is famous for the cave of Adullam where David hid from Saul for some time. Michmash in verse 31 will always be associated with Jonathan's great victory over the Philistines. This victory occurred in spite of the stupid and bumbling leadership of his father Saul. Bethel in verse 31 is mentioned many times in the Bible. Abraham, Jacob, Elisha, and Amos all have been associated with this town.

[27 : 19] It was a town that was the scene of many significant events in Israel's history. Anathoth is mentioned in verse 32, and that's the city where the great prophet Jeremiah was born and where he performed some of his ministry.

Another city that's mentioned is Nob, and Nob brings bloody memories. It was there where over 80 priests were slain by Doeg, the Edomite, because of the wicked orders of King Saul.

So these villages and the other villages listed in these verses are where 90% of the returning Israelites lived. We know that 10% went to Jerusalem. The people of Judah lived in 17 towns and their surrounding villages.

The descendants of Benjamin occupied 15 sites. So you can see that the village people were spread out across the province.

The last group of people we'll talk about tonight contains the historical priests and Levites, and we see that group in the first 26 verses of chapter 12. The list here shows Nehemiah's concern to maintain the authentic traditions of his people.

[28 : 30] He goes back to Zerubbabel 90 years earlier and surveys the history of the priestly and Levitical families from then until his own time. In naming these names, specific mention is made for the high priest from Yeshua to Jeduah.

So we're reminded again of the importance of those who have labored for the Lord before us. We should be encouraged by their example and their lives should motivate us. This section also reminds us that there are different kinds of ministries.

Every priest in Israel couldn't have been the high priest. Because of their number, we know that David had divided the priesthood into groups. They didn't minister all the time. Some were assigned menial tasks, and others enjoyed prestigious duties.

Some worked inside the temple. Others served outside of it. Those who worked outside the temple were also descendants of the tribe of Levi. And as we've seen, they included the gatekeepers, the singers, and the other temple servants.

Each one, though, was important. Each one contributed to the whole. And the overall result was again that God was glorified. So as we think about the chapter overall, let's consider what we can learn from it.

[29 : 47] Because temptations to pass over passages like we studied tonight suggest that these chapters are less inspired than other parts of Scripture. And to be honest, most of us would prefer to have Romans 8 read at our deathbed than Nehemiah 11 and 12.

Just as a foundation, though, is to a house, these verses are foundational to what's coming for God's people.

Because these verses relate a redemptive purpose for the city of Jerusalem that will only develop into something deeper and far more glorious as history moves on. God intends to populate a city, and that, of course, is a new Jerusalem into which the nations will come.

And in that new Jerusalem, there will be people, and those people will have names, and they'll dwell in community with one another and with their Savior. So however tedious these lists may appear, to the individuals themselves and their families and friends, these lists no doubt brought an emotional response of recognition and gratitude.

And we can relate a little bit to that, too, because think about the memorials and lists that we have in our day. In our day, memorials to fallen soldiers or victims of terrorism are resonating with us.

[31 : 06] We see names on those lists, and we appreciate those names with affection, even if we didn't know those people personally. They still personalize the history to us. In our text tonight, the lists are far more than lists of names.

They're lists of family names with family ties and connections that stretch back over several generations. We see children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, down through six or seven generations listed here.

The faith that we see evidenced in these lists was nurtured and encouraged in godly homes. It's a demonstration of God's covenant faithfulness to His people, and we see that throughout the generations.

Behind these lists, we see the care and devotion of parents rearing their children in the training and admonition of the Lord. In addition to honoring and admiring the faith of these listed people, we can learn other things for them, though.

Some of these things we've touched on as we've gone through the verses, but let's go ahead and recap them here. The first thing we can learn is submission to the will of God. So, submission to the will of God is the first thing we learn.

[32 : 20] We talked at the beginning of the study how the city dwellers were chosen by lot. These people were prepared to change their lives entirely, for themselves and for their families, because they viewed obeying the Lord as more important than making a comfortable future for themselves.

From a human point of view, there were no guarantees in moving into the city. There was every reason to be concerned for the welfare of their families, given the general downward trend and morality that characterized the cities then and still characterizes the cities now.

But these people viewed their decision as being based on a firm belief in God's providence.

Somewhere around 5,000 people were prepared to abroot from their natural and rural settings and move into the city because they trusted the sovereign power of God at work in their lives.

The next thing we can learn is that these verses show us the importance of organization.

Organization is no doubt one of the things that Nehemiah intended to make clear when he composed the passage.

We see from the organized list that this was no rabble of refugees merely settling down anywhere.

These people knew their ancestry and they knew their present family and religious leaders.

[33 : 39] Jerusalem had a well-organized government. Even the Jews who settled outside the city didn't settle just anywhere. the list at the end of chapter 11 suggests that they tried to settle as best as possible in their ancestral homes.

The next thing we can learn from these verses is that these verses show us the active participation of the people. We see that the people did have active participation in what was going on.

It's a bit excessive to call this democracy, but it wasn't an arbitrary action by Nehemiah either. We saw how Nehemiah used people in government from the different tribes to make sure he had a good coalition there.

And earlier in chapter 7, Nehemiah did exercise his prerogative as governor by appointing some people to the rulerships, but we don't have any suggestion of that here. The implication seems to be that each of the tribes and religious groupings selected its own leaders who then took part in the government of the city.

So just like the people in Nehemiah's day participated with their leaders, we also need to participate with our leaders. We should never expect our pastors to do everything related to the church.

[34 : 56] Devotion is the next thing we can learn from this passage. So let's talk about this devotion a little bit. We've hit on it as we've gone through the text, but chapter 11 shows us that devotion because it begins with an account of how one in ten of the Jewish laypeople was chosen to relocate, but little is said about them.

The bulk of this chapter and chapter 12 that we looked at detailed the families of the priests, Levites, and other religious leaders who settled in the city. Obviously, Nehemiah knew as we should know that a community holds together by some higher allegiance or priority.

The only truly adequate base for real brotherhood or community among people is devotion to God. Once again, the fact that different tribes worked together to govern Jerusalem shows devotion to God as well because they put aside any personal and tribal differences because they were devoted to God's glory.

I put a quote from Cyril Barber in your handout. He said, A strong religious commitment is essential if a democratic form of administration is to succeed.

Without adequate spiritual values, it is hard, if not impossible, to retain the idea of obligation and responsibility. Individualism cannot be long held in check by the concept of a calling embodying good works and self-restraint.

[36 : 23] When this control is weakened, legislation takes the place of spiritual convictions and becomes the foundation of the community. And with the increase in legislation, there is a corresponding increase in bureaucracy with a minimizing!

of efficiency and a decrease of personal worth. Amen. That last sentence kind of rings a bell, doesn't it? From what we've seen in our country through the years.

The next thing we can learn from this chapter and the part of chapter 12 is differentiation. We saw the differentiation as we went through the verses.

The people had different roles and responsibilities and they were willingly working together. We hit on this differentiation a couple of times as we went through the chapter.

Various gifts and varying social levels all worked in complete harmony. Some job descriptions may have seemed more important than others, but that interpretation would miss the point.

[37 : 25] The regular functioning of the city needed all gifts. Harmony came from diversity working toward a single goal and that was denying oneself for the sake of others or, more pointedly, actually denying oneself for the sake of God and His glory.

The Holy Spirit led the recording of such labor to remind us that the efficient running of the holy city, just as the efficient running of the church, depends on the skills of everyone.

We know that the Apostle Paul declared that the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped grows only as part, as each part is working properly.

And of course, that quote from the Apostle Paul was about the church and it was a paraphrase of Ephesians 4.16. So we've touched on some of these things already tonight, but this passage should also teach us a couple of things about the character of God.

The first thing we see is God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness, and it's actually throughout the entire passage. The message of this section is that God kept His word of promise to the community.

[38 : 39] Given their recent history, God remaining faithful to them was no small matter. He had every reason to be unfaithful to them because they had been unfaithful to Him, yet He remained faithful to them throughout.

And God promised to bring the people back to their land. The people saw God doing that and they responded to His faithfulness. And closely related to God's faithfulness, the next thing we see is God's grace.

God's grace. The exile was God's judgment on a disobedient and ungrateful people. But even though the Lord had every right to abandon His people forever, He didn't do that.

He returned them to their land and blessed them and their families. And this community of people represented in the list tonight is a sign of God's covenant faithfulness to many generations of believers.

grace prevailed. The rebuilding of the temple and its commitment to blood sacrifice was a daily reminder that the grace of God would always come at a cost.

[39 : 46] Sin had to be atoned for one way or another, and the constant repetition of animal sacrifices was symbolic and anticipatory. None of these animals had the power to forgive sin.

Only Jesus can do that. and these animals pointed forward to what Jesus would one day do for those people and for us. That's why the example of God's grace in our passage tonight should remind us of the ultimate example of God's grace.

And of course, that ultimate example is Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. The writer to the Hebrews says this in Hebrews 9.28, Let that verse sink in as we read it one more time.

It says, So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for him, he will appear a second time apart from sin for salvation.

And all three believers, including us, will be part of that salvation. So we'll be living examples of God's grace. And actually, we already are.