

Revival, Reformation...Repopulation!

- We have been walking with the people of Jerusalem over the last few months as they have experienced revival and reformation. The hearing of the Word of God prompted repentance and revival in the city. That led to reformation and a turning away from sinful practices and re-establishment of the Sabbath and care for the temple. Now we see a third effect: a repopulation of the holy city, Jerusalem. It was a ghost town, for all practical purposes, and had been since the Babylonians came in and sacked the city. Why weren't there many people living there? Because for 142 years, the city's walls had been broken down. The people living there were unprotected. The city was filled with rubble, and it was a difficult place to live or to make a living. Now the temple has been rebuilt, the walls are back in place, the people have turned away from idols and back to the Lord, but Nehemiah had a problem. The city he had rebuilt was still a ghost town. It was time to repopulate. Let's look at this text today under these three headings: Intentional repopulation, Committed core, and Worship matters.
- **Intentional repopulation**
- Notice in 11:1 that in order to repopulate Jerusalem, the people cast lots, and every tenth family was chosen to move into the city. It's not a problem today to find people who want to live in cities. People all over the world have been moving back into the cities for the past two hundred years. In 1800, only 3% of the world's population lived in urban areas. Today, over 50% live in urban areas, and the number continues to rise as people crowd to the cities, especially in Asia and Africa, looking for work, housing, and food. That's where the greatest needs are, because that's where the greatest numbers of people live. Though we don't live in a large urban area, we cannot disengage from what is going on in our city or town. We want to see Burlington and Elon and Graham and all of the surrounding cities and towns repopulated with followers of Jesus, so we have to move into them with the Gospel. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." When Jesus became famous in Capernaum because he had cast out demons and healed many who had various diseases, He said to His disciples, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." He did not withdraw into the wilderness, unless He had to, but stayed in the towns and preached, as long as He was able. You see the same pattern in Paul. He went from city to city. Ministry on one level involves being willing to live where God wants us to live.
- The late EV Hill was pastor of the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles for many years, and was considered one of the great urban leaders of his time. James Boice tells the story of how, before EV Hill entered the ministry, he lived in Texas, where he was a ward leader for the Democratic party. His assignment was to get out votes for Democratic candidates and his chief strategy was to have a block captain for each block of his ward. They were to contact the people on their block on election day to make sure they voted. When EV Hill came to LA, he asked himself why he shouldn't do that for the Kingdom of God! He organized his congregation so that each of the 3,100 blocks of south central LA were assigned a block captain, who lived in that block. Yes, it was a very large church. Their job was to regularly reach out to the people in their block, offer to pray for them, invite them to their home, and invite them to church. One man got so tired of being invited to church by his neighbor, he decided to move across town. He loaded up his possessions. The block captain came to say goodbye. The truck left, and the block captain went inside, got out the church directory of block captains in LA, and called the person who lived in the block that the offended man was moving to. When he arrived at his new home, there was his new block captain standing on the street to welcome him and invite him to church. The man said, "My God, they're everywhere."
- This was an intentional repopulation and it was planned and organized. Even those who settled outside the city tried to settle in their ancestral homes. Derek Kidner wrote, "This is no rabble of refugees, settling down anywhere; they have the dignity of order and of known relationships; above all, of their calling to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'" (Exodus 19:6)
- **Committed Core**

- You will have noticed, if you read through chapters 11 and 12 this week, that there are two tribes of the Jews, Judah and Benjamin, who make up the committed core of this repopulation. That's because these are the two tribes that stayed faithful to the line of David, and made up the nucleus of the Kingdom of Judah after the nation of Israel was divided. They were valiant men (verse 6). They were mighty men of valor (verse 14). And if you read through the list of names, there is a strong emphasis on family lines. These men knew who they were, where they had come from, and why they were there. Look at verse 4. Athaiah traces his lineage back to Perez, who was one of the twin sons of Tamar, by Judah, who was Athaiah's great(X5)grandfather. Not a perfect spiritual heritage by any means, but a spiritual heritage. You and I also do not have a perfect spiritual heritage. I am sure in my line I am more likely to have horse thieves than governors or college presidents. But we all either have a spiritual heritage, OR are starting one. That's why we labor to raise children who know the Lord. By God's grace, you are raising a committed core. Ministry on another level, then, involves being faithful to leave a legacy of faith for the next generation to build on.
- **Worship Matters**
- There's a reminder in this text that God doesn't want our work if He doesn't have our worship. Because worship matters. Along with the committed core of men and women from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, there was a large group of faithful Levites and priests. These were some of the first people to move back into the city with their possessions, and they brought their musical instruments and they brought their passion for worshiping the Lord with song. Matt was the leader of the praise team. He lives in verse 17. His name was Mattaniah but his friends call him Matt, and you will see there in verse 17 that his great-grandfather was Asaph, who was a pretty famous songwriter back in his day. People argue about his biggest hit, whether it was Psalm 73 or Psalm 78, but they both went to the top of the Hebrew charts, as well as all the other psalms he wrote. The point is that when Nehemiah wrote this book, this chronicle of the revival and the reformation that took place under his watch, he obviously believed worship matters. A lot. Verse 23 says that there was a command from the King concerning the singers, and that they were provided for. Maybe that's where the big Methodist churches got the idea. But it reminds us what we already know: that worship through song is an important part of what God's people do. And we see in chapter 12 verse 8 that the Levites who led in singing were giving thanks to God, so their hearts were as important as their instruments, their voices. You will notice that they also used antiphonal singing, something we have never tried. The closest we come to it is when the women sing something different from the men, and it blends. Look at verse 9.
- You may have noticed that David is mentioned 6 times in chapter 12 and twice as the man of God. He is the one they looked to for instruction, and maybe they turned to **1 Chronicles 25**, as I would like for you to do now. Some of these men prophesied when they played their instruments and sang. Asaph certainly did, through his psalms. Miriam did in Exodus 15, after the Red Sea miracle. That speaks to their relationship with God. All of these men were under authority. See that in verses 2, 3, and 6. That speaks to their heart, their humility. And all of these men were trained and skillful. Verse 7. The least and the last in importance, but there nonetheless. The good news is that the rest of us don't have to have the third quality in our worship, skill and training. But we desperately need the first two: a relationship with God, and humility!
- Ministry on a third level, then, is learning to be a worshiper.
- Willing to live where God wants us to live. Faithful to leave a legacy of faith for the next generation. Learning to be a worshiper. That's ministry. I heard a story about the son of a pastor who decided he would follow in his father's footsteps. The dad told the son, "Keep close to God, keep close to men. And bring God and men together." That's ministry!