

WORLD CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Front Row in the Fire

Nehemiah 11.

Setting: The Book of Nehemiah

The city of Jerusalem had lain in ruins for over **140 years**. Nebuchadnezzar had torn down its walls in **586 BC**, deported its people to Babylon, and extinguished the lamp of God's city in the world. Decades later, the first exiles returned under **Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6)**.

The Temple was rebuilt, but Jerusalem itself remained a broken shell. The wall that had defined the city, protected its people, and announced to the nations that this was the dwelling place of the living God was still rubble. Charred stone. Open breach. Scattered ash.

Then came Nehemiah. A cupbearer to the king of Persia, a man with no army, no political office, and no engineering credentials who heard the news of Jerusalem's desolation, wept for days, fasted and prayed, and then walked into the throne room of the most powerful man on earth and asked for permission to go and rebuild a wall. The king said yes. Nehemiah went.

Under relentless opposition, mockery, conspiracy, and physical threat in **52 days the wall was rebuilt (Nehemiah 6:15)**. **Fifty-two days for what 140 years had not accomplished.**

But a city is not just walls.

Chapters 7–10 record the great revival that followed. Ezra reading the Law before the whole assembly, the people weeping and repenting, the Levites explaining the Word to those who did not understand it, the corporate confession of sin spanning centuries, the covenant renewal in which the people signed their names to obedience. God had given them the wall. Now they needed to fill the city.

A wall without residents is an empty shell. A rebuilt structure without a living people is an archaeological site. God had rebuilt the wall. Now He needed people willing to live inside it. This is the moment Nehemiah 11 addresses — and it is one of the most searching chapters in the entire Old Testament for any community that claims to belong to God.

Introduction: The problem nobody wanted to Solve

The problem with moving back In

There is a story told of a church in a declining neighbourhood in a major Western city. The congregation had moved to the suburbs decades earlier following their people to the comfortable outskirts, away from the noise and danger and poverty of the inner city.

A new pastor arrived and felt the conviction that the church needed to return to the neighbourhood it had abandoned. He preached it. People agreed in principle. They voted yes to the vision.

But when it came to who would relocate, who would actually sell their suburban home and move back into the neighbourhood — the

room went quiet. It turned out that everyone supported the idea of others going. Nobody wanted to go themselves. The wall had been rebuilt. Nobody wanted to live in the city.

Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day had a problem. The wall was rebuilt. God's city stood again. The covenant had been renewed. But Jerusalem was under-populated.

The city was large, but the people in it were few (**Nehemiah 7:4**).

The reason was not mysterious. Jerusalem was a dangerous place. It had been destroyed twice. It had enemies on every side. **Sanballat in the north, Tobiah in the east, Geshem in the south.**

To live in Jerusalem was to live on the front line.

To live in the other cities and towns of Judah away from the threat, away from the pressure, away from the constant exposure was simply more comfortable.

So, a decision was made. The leaders would dwell in Jerusalem that much was settled. But for the rest of the people, lots would be cast. One household in ten, chosen by lot, would come to Jerusalem. Nine out of ten could remain in the easier places.

V 2, *And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.*

One of the most quietly extraordinary statements in the entire book: ***the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.***

Nādab — *to volunteer, to offer freely, to give oneself willingly the same root as the freewill offering; motivated by love, not compulsion*

Bārak — *to bless the people spoke a benediction over those who volunteered; to be a willing one was a recognised and honoured act*

The word willingly offered — nādab — is the same Hebrew root used for freewill offerings in the worship of God.

These were not people who were conscripted. They were not people under compulsion. They were not even people drawn by the lot. They were people who looked at Jerusalem exposed, dangerous, demanding, costly and said: I will go. I will live there. Not because I have to. Because it matters.

The people blessed them. The community recognised the rare and precious nature of what these people were doing.

Nehemiah records their names verse after verse of names that are almost impossible to pronounce, as if to say to every generation that comes after: these people mattered. They were willing.

God remembered them.

One chapter of names. One list of obscure people nobody can pronounce. But behind every name is a story and the story is always the same. They were willing. That is why they are here. That is why God remembered them.

1. The Sacred cost of the Holy City (11:1–2)

Jerusalem was not just a location. It was a declaration.

Nehemiah 11:1–2, "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. ²And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem."

A. Jerusalem was more than a city — It was a Statement

The text calls Jerusalem the holy city.

- Not simply the capital city.
- Not the historic city.
- The holy city.
- The city set apart to God.

The city where the Temple stood, where the sacrifices were offered, where the Name of God dwelt, where heaven and earth met in the Most Holy Place. To live in Jerusalem was not simply a residential choice. **It was a theological commitment.**

This is why the problem of its under-population was not merely a demographic inconvenience. An empty holy city was a theological contradiction.

- ✓ God had brought His people back.
- ✓ God had provided Nehemiah.

- ✓ God had engineered the 52-day rebuilding of the wall in the face of every opposition.
- ✓ God had sent **Ezra** with the Law.
- ✓ God had moved the people to repentance.

Now when God's city needed people willing to fill it and inhabit it and make it live the people calculated the cost and quietly drifted toward the more comfortable option.

A designation as Holy City for Jerusalem that appears only here in the Old Testament historical books. It is the city set apart to bear the Name of God in the world

Think carefully about what Jerusalem meant in the ancient world.

Every nation had a city that was the seat of its god. When you saw that city its walls, its temple, its activity you were seeing a statement about the god who dwelt there.

- A prosperous, populated, walled city said: our god is powerful, present, and worth serving.
- A ruined, empty, abandoned city said: our god has failed, or has been conquered, or has abandoned his people.

Jerusalem's desolation for 140 years had been a theological problem, not just a political one. The nations looked at the ruins and drew conclusions about Yahweh.

Now the wall was rebuilt.
Now the city was restored.

But a walled city with no one willing to live in it still told a story. The question was: **what story would God's people tell by their choices about where to live?**

B. The Cost was real — Not imaginary.

We must not romanticise the decision these volunteers were making. The list of names in **Nehemiah 11** is **not** a list of people who made a costless, comfortable, and spiritually satisfying decision.

Jerusalem was exposed. Its enemies were still there **Sanballat in Samaria, Tobiah in Ammon, Geshem in the south**. The wall was rebuilt but the threats had not evaporated. The people of the towns and villages had their farms, their established social networks, their family inheritances, their places of relative security. Jerusalem had the wall and the danger that came with being the city the enemy most wanted to destroy.

- The willing ones were not naive.
- They understood exactly what they were choosing.
- They chose it anyway.

The community recognised the weight of that choice and they blessed them.

- Not congratulated them.
- Not thanked them.
- Blessed them.

This was a covenantal, God-invoking word. May God be with you in what you are about to take on. You are going somewhere the rest of us are not willing to go. May the God of this city go with you into it.

Every generation of God's people has a Jerusalem a costly, exposed, demanding place where God's purposes require willing people. The question Nehemiah 11 asks every church, every individual believer, every person sitting in a comfortable seat on a Sunday morning is this: will you be one of the willing ones?

2. What willingness looks like? (11:3–24)

The names God remembers are the names of those who showed up.

Nehemiah 11:3, *"These are the heads of the province who dwelt in Jerusalem, but in the cities of Judah everyone dwelt in his own possession in their cities — Israelites, priests, Levites, Nethinim, and descendants of Solomon's servants."*

Verses 3–24 record the populations of Jerusalem by category:

Who filled Jerusalem in Nehemiah 11:

- ▶ The sons of Judah (V 4–6) — **468 men** of valour who could defend the city
- ▶ The sons of Benjamin (V 7–9) — **928 men**, the largest single group in the city
- ▶ The priests (V 10–14) — those who served the house **822** doing the work of the Temple
- ▶ The Levites (V 15–18) — the worship leaders, those who led the praise of the city

- ▶ The gatekeepers (V 19) — **172 men** who maintained the access points. Not glamorous, but essential.
- ▶ The **Nethinim** and servants (V 21–24) — the lowest in social status, the most invisible, every bit as necessary.

This is a census.

It is also a theology.

Every category of person that God's holy city required was present.

- The sacrificial priests were there.
- The Levites who led worship were there.
- The gatekeepers who protected access were there.
- The administrators who organised the community were there.

God's city was not meant to function with only one type of person.

- It needed the preacher and the administrator.
- It needed the worship leader and the gatekeeper.
- It needed the priest who offered sacrifices and the official who managed daily life.

A city, like a church, is a body. It needs every part. Every one of these parts had to be filled by people who were willing to be in Jerusalem rather than somewhere safer and more comfortable.

A. The sons of Judah — 468 valiant men

Men of valour — not merely residents, but warriors; capable men prepared to defend what they had chosen to inhabit

V 6 describes the sons of Judah who lived in Jerusalem as **468 men** and calls them men of valour. Warriors.

The willing ones were not passive residents. They were capable, alert, ready to fight for the city they had chosen to inhabit.

This is the consistent pattern of the willing life in Scripture. The person who volunteers for the costly assignment does not arrive as a passive occupant. They arrive as a committed defender.

There is a word for people who live in a place without being willing to fight for it tourists.

The willing ones in Nehemiah 11 were not tourists in Jerusalem. They had staked their lives there.

Scripture honours them as people of valour not because they performed miracles but because they showed up and stayed.

B. The Priests — Those who served the House of God.

The priests are described with precision in **V 10–14**.

Their leader, Seraiah, is traced back through his genealogy as son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, all the way back to Ahitub.

God's memory for lineage is not arbitrary.

It is a declaration that the priestly ministry did not begin in Nehemiah's day.

It was a thread running back through the centuries back **to Aaron**, back to the Levitical covenant, back to **Sinai**. The priests who chose to dwell in Jerusalem were not beginning something new. They were inhabiting the ancient purpose of God.

V 12 adds a detail worth noting. Those who did the work of the house. The priests were not in Jerusalem for ceremonial decoration. They were there to work.

The holy city required people who understood that presence implies service. You do not dwell in God's city merely to enjoy its privileges. You dwell there to do its work.

C. The Levites — Those who led the Praise

The Levites in **V 15–18** are described in terms of their worship function. Mattaniah is named specifically as the one who led in thanksgiving and prayer, the one who opened every public gathering of God's people with praise.

He had chosen to live in Jerusalem because Jerusalem needed someone to begin each day and end each day with the praise of God. The city was not just a geographical entity. It was a worshipping community.

A worshipping community needs people who are committed to initiating, sustaining, and leading that worship not occasionally, but continuously.

V 17 also names Bakbukiah, the second among his brothers. Not the leader. The second.

The person who was not at the front, but who made the front person possible. In every community that God builds, there are named people in second place, the ones who serve, support, and make the visible ministry possible from the invisible position. God names Bakkukiah. He saw the second place. He honoured it.

D. The Gatekeepers — The unsung essential

V 19 records **172 gatekeepers**.

Their job is not glamorous.

- They do not preach.
- They do not lead worship.
- They do not serve at the altar.
- They stand at the gates.
- They check who comes in and who goes out.
- They are the last line of defence between the holy city and everything outside it that would corrupt, compromise, or destroy it.

But remove the gatekeepers from Jerusalem and within a generation the holy city would be indistinguishable from the nations around it.

The gates Nehemiah had rebuilt were not mere architectural features. They were the boundary markers of a holy community the visible expression of the difference between inside and outside, between set apart and mixed in, between the covenant people and the surrounding world.

The **172 people** who chose to be gatekeepers in Jerusalem were doing invisible, unglamorous, essential work. And God put their number in His book.

In the kingdom of God, the gatekeeper who shows up every day and does unglamorous work that no one sees is as necessary to the mission as the preacher who stands before thousands. Both are in the list. Both are named. Both are remembered.

3. The Cities and the Villages (11:25–36)

Not everyone is called to Jerusalem — but everyone is called.

Nehemiah 11:25–30, *"And as for the villages with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt in Kirjath Arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, Jekabzeel and its villages;²⁶ in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet,²⁷ Hazar Shual, and Beersheba and its villages;²⁸ in Ziklag and Meconah and its villages;²⁹ in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth,³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages; in Lachish and its fields; in Azekah and its villages. They dwelt from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom."*

The chapter does not end with Jerusalem.

V 25–36 record the towns and villages in which the nine-tenths who did not go to Jerusalem lived. This is significant.

The text does not treat the village-dwellers as second-class or spiritually lesser for remaining in their cities. They are named too. Their towns are listed. Their presence throughout the land of Judah is part of God's design, not a failure of commitment.

God's purposes require two things simultaneously:

- People willing to go to the dangerous, strategic, exposed Jerusalem, and
- People willing to faithfully occupy the towns, villages, and ordinary places that sustain the whole community.

Not everyone is called to the front line.

But everyone is called to faithfulness in the place where God has put them.

The error is not staying in the villages.

The error is staying in the villages when God is calling you to Jerusalem or going to Jerusalem when God has specifically placed you in Beersheba.

Notice the geography of **Nehemiah 11:25–36**.

These are not random villages.

The towns listed represent the reconstituted presence of God's people across the full extent of the promised land from Beersheba in the south to the valley of craftsmen in the north.

The community that rebuilt Jerusalem's wall was also reclaiming and repopulating the land. The strategic city could not stand in isolation from the community that surrounded and supported it. The Jerusalem volunteers needed the village people just as much as the village people needed a holy city to orient around.

*Jerusalem needs the villages. The villages need Jerusalem.
The missionary needs the sender. The sender needs the
missionary.*

*The preacher needs the prayer warrior. The prayer warrior needs
a community gathered around the Word.*

*The body of Christ does not function by one part heroically
carrying everything. It functions by every part doing what it was
placed and called to do.*

4. The New Jerusalem and the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:19; Revelation 21:2)

*The willing ones in Nehemiah are a shadow of what God is building
now.*

We cannot read Nehemiah 11 as merely a historical record of population movements **in fifth-century BC Judah**. Every page of the Old Testament is a preparation for and pointer toward the Lord Jesus Christ and His purposes through the church. Nehemiah 11 is no exception. In fact, it is one of the most profound Old Testament mirrors of the New Testament's missionary calling.

A. Jerusalem was always a Prototype.

Galatians 4:26, *"But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

Revelation 21:2, *"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

The holy city of Nehemiah 11 was a shadow and a type.

The rebuilt Jerusalem with its wall and its Temple was a material, earthly expression of something God was building that would far exceed it.

The New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 is not a metaphor for the old Jerusalem improved.

It is the fulfilment of everything the old Jerusalem was pointing to the city where God dwells fully with His people, where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain, where the nations walk by its light and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it.

The reason God worked so hard to get His people back into Jerusalem the reason Nehemiah wept over its ruins, the reason God raised up the resources and the courage for its rebuilding, the reason He needed willing ones to inhabit it was not primarily about fifth-century BC urban planning.

It was because Jerusalem was the embassy of heaven on earth.

Every time the nations looked at Jerusalem and saw a walled city with a living worshipping community inside it, they were seeing a glimpse of what God intended for the whole world.

The willing ones who filled that city were carrying that witness whether they knew it or not.

B. The Church is the New Jerusalem Community

The church of Jesus Christ is the New Testament counterpart of the Jerusalem community in Nehemiah 11.

Not geographically we are not all called to the physical city of Jerusalem. But functionally and theologically, the church is the holy city in the world.

- We are the community set apart to God.
- We are the people who bear His name in the nations.
- We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19**) individually and corporately in which God has chosen to dwell.

Just as Nehemiah's Jerusalem needed willing ones who counted the cost and chose the exposed, demanding, holy calling over the comfortable, distant, safer option the church of Jesus Christ in every generation needs willing ones.

People who say: the Lord's city needs people willing to inhabit it fully.

Not attend it occasionally.

Not support it from a comfortable distance.

- Inhabit it.
- Serve it.
- Defend it.
- Worship in it.
- Bear its costs.
- Carry its burdens.

1 Peter 2:9, *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."*

Peter uses the language of the Old Testament community royal priesthood, holy nation and applies it to the church.

The categories of Nehemiah 11 are alive in the New Testament those who do the work of the house (priests), those who lead the worship (Levites), those who guard the gates (gatekeepers), those who inhabit the city fully (the willing ones). The titles have changed. The calling has not.

C. The Great Commission is the call to fill God's city

When Jesus stood on a mountain in Galilee and said to eleven ordinary people: Go and make disciples of all nations, He was giving a command that was perfectly continuous with what Nehemiah needed from his community in Jerusalem.

- Nehemiah needed people willing to leave comfort and inhabit the holy city.
- Jesus needed and still needs people willing to leave comfort and take the holy city's message to every nation on earth.
- **Matthew 28:19** is the Great Commission.
- **Nehemiah 11:2** is its shadow.

Both require the same thing:

- Voluntary,
- Costly, and
- Blessed willingness.

Both pronounce the same benediction on those who respond.

- In **Nehemiah 11** the people blessed the willing ones.
- In **Matthew 28:20** the risen Christ said: I am with you always.

The blessing is deeper in the New Covenant.

- ✓ The Presence that accompanied the willing ones in Jerusalem was the presence of Nehemiah's God magnificent, powerful, but external.
- ✓ The Presence that accompanies the willing ones in the Great Commission is the indwelling Spirit of the risen Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, permanently residing in the people He has commissioned.

Nehemiah 11 and Matthew 28 — the same call across the Testaments:

- ▶ **Both required voluntary, costly commitment** — not conscription but freewill offering
- ▶ **Both required inhabiting a holy city**, Nehemiah's Jerusalem and the worldwide community of the church
- ▶ **Both required every function**. Preachers, worshippers, gatekeepers, administrators, the visible and the invisible
- ▶ **Both pronounced a blessing on the willing ones**. The community in Nehemiah. The risen Christ in Matthew 28
- ▶ **Both pointed beyond themselves**. Nehemiah's Jerusalem pointed to Revelation 21. Matthew 28 is heading there

► **Both left a list.** Nehemiah 11 lists names. Revelation 21:27 says only those written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter the New Jerusalem

The Call — Will you be one of the willing ones?

We have read a chapter of names. We have studied a census. We have walked the streets of a repopulated city. But this is not ancient history. This is a mirror.

The question that Nehemiah 11 places before us is personal, urgent, and non-negotiable.

*The wall has been rebuilt. The covenant has been renewed.
The Word has been preached. The Spirit has been poured out.
God's city His church needs willing ones.
Will you be one of them?*

A. To those who have not yet committed Your life to Christ

Before you can be one of the willing ones, you must be inside the covenant.

The community of God's willing people is not open to those who have not entered through the gate.

The only gate is Jesus Christ.

John 10:9, 'I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved'

The holy city of the New Jerusalem has one entrance requirement: the blood of the Lamb.

You have come today to a community that has been rebuilt. The wall is up. The worship is happening. The Word is being preached. You have sat in the presence of God today.

The question the risen Christ asks you is the same question He asked Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Do you love Me?

- Not: do you understand Me fully?
- Not: have you resolved every theological question?

Do you love Me? Come to Him today. Enter through the gate. Join the community of the willing.

Romans 10:9, *"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

B. To Those Who Already Know Jesus Christ

If you belong to Christ, if you have repented of your sin, trusted His death and resurrection, and surrendered your life to Him then **Nehemiah 11** is speaking directly to you.

The question is not whether you are in the covenant. The question is what kind of covenant member you are.

Five questions Nehemiah 11 asks every believer:

▶ **Are you a willing one or a nine-tenths?**

Not everyone is called to Jerusalem. But have you honestly asked God where He is calling you, and honestly answered? Or have you quietly defaulted to the comfortable option without ever bringing the question before Him?

▶ **What function has God given you in His city?**

Nehemiah 11 needed priests, Levites, gatekeepers, warriors, and administrators. The New Jerusalem community needs preachers, worshippers, those who guard access to truth, those who defend the community from what would corrupt it, and those who serve in invisible administrative faithfulness.

Which of these are you? Are you doing it?

▶ **Are you a valiant resident or a comfortable tourist?**

The sons of Judah were called men of valour. They were prepared to fight for what they had chosen to inhabit. Are you fighting for the community God has placed you in? Or are you merely present?

▶ **Are you blessing the willing ones?**

The community in **Nehemiah 11** blessed those who volunteered. Who in your church family has taken on a costly, demanding, exposed assignment for the sake of God's purposes? Have you prayed over them, supported them, blessed them?

▶ **What name will be in the list?**

Nehemiah recorded the names of those who showed up and stayed. The Lamb's Book of Life records those who were faithful. What will be written next to your name?

Application

Nehemiah 11 is not abstract theology. It is practical, personal, and immediate.

1. Commit fully to the local church — not peripherally

The nine-tenths who lived in the other cities were not spiritually lesser. But God needed willing ones in Jerusalem people for whom the holy city was not one among several competing commitments but the primary place they had chosen to invest their lives.

The local church needs people who are fully inside, fully committed, fully present not people for whom the church is one activity competing with many others for a small slice of their available time and energy.

There is a kind of Christianity that never inhabits the holy city. It attends. It consumes.

It benefits from the worship, the preaching, the community and then goes back to its own town without contributing to the rebuilding. **Nehemiah 11** calls it by its name: that is not a willing one. That is a nine-tenths.

2. Serve in the unglamorous — the gatekeepers are needed

172 gatekeepers.

No one preached a sermon about them.

No one wrote a biography about the most faithful gatekeeper of Nehemiah's day.

But remove them and the holy city falls. Every church needs the person who sets up the chairs, cleans the building, welcomes at the door, manages the logistics, sends the pastoral emails, makes the phone calls, processes the administration. These are the gatekeepers. They are in the list. God saw them. He counted them. He named them.

If you are a gatekeeper, if you serve in invisible, unglamorous, essential faithfulness know this: you are in the book.

What is done for the sake of God's city, done willingly, done faithfully, is not wasted. It is recorded. It is blessed. And the community that knows its gatekeepers are faithfully at their posts can worship freely.

3. Give God the freewill offering of your whole life

The word ***willingly offered*** was the same word used for the freewill offering in the Tabernacle and Temple worship.

In the sacrificial system, there were offerings that were required by law the daily sacrifices, the sin offerings, the guilt offerings. And then there was the freewill offering: the offering brought not because the law demanded it but because the worshipper wanted to give more than was required. Not duty. Devotion.

The willing ones in Nehemiah 11 were a freewill offering.
Nobody required them to move to Jerusalem.

- The lots had **NOT** fallen on them.
- They were not compelled.
- They offered themselves.

They said: God, here I am. Not because I have to!

- Because I want to.
- Because Your city matters.
- Because the holy things You are doing in the world are worth the cost of my comfort.

Romans 12:1, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*

Paul's word for this in Romans 12 is 'living sacrifice.'

The freewill offering of Nehemiah 11 has a New Testament counterpart, and it is not the occasional sacrifice of a Sunday morning, but the daily, living, voluntary presentation of your whole self to the God who has made you His own.

This is nādab in the New Covenant: reasonable service, Paul calls it. The only reasonable response to the mercies of God.

4. Understand your calling within the whole community

Not everyone is called to Jerusalem. This is important to say, because the application of Nehemiah 11 is not that every Christian must perform the same kind of conspicuous, front-line ministry.

The chapter records warriors and worshippers and gatekeepers and administrators and village-dwellers all needed, all named, all part of the community God was building.

- The error is not serving in the village.
- The error is serving in the village when God has been calling you to Jerusalem and avoiding the question through busyness, comfort, or fear.
- The error is insisting on Jerusalem when God has specifically placed you in Beersheba to sustain the nine-tenths who will support the mission from there.

Am I in the role God has called me to, doing it fully, doing it willingly?

Every member of the body of Christ is called to the freewill offering of their whole self. Not every member is called to the same post. But every member is called to occupy their post fully, faithfully, and willingly — until the holy city is complete.

Conclusion

Perpetua of Carthage (AD 203) Vibia Perpetua was 22 years old, a nursing mother from a wealthy Roman family, when she was arrested for being a Christian in Carthage. Her father came to her in prison repeatedly, begging her to recant and save her life. She could have walked free. She refused. She kept a diary in prison — one of the only surviving documents written by a Christian woman from the ancient world — and her final entry reads: *I have become what God wanted me to become.*

She was killed in the arena.

She was not a missionary.

She was not a church leader.

She was a young mother who simply refused to leave the city God had placed her in. The community she left behind preserved her name for 1,800 years. *God kept the list.*

Nehemiah 11:36, *'And some of the divisions of the Levites of Judah were in Benjamin.'*

Even the boundaries between the tribes were crossed in the service of God's city. People went where the need was, not where their tribal affiliation said they should be.

God's purposes are not confined to the comfortable, the convenient, or the tribal. They extend to every place where there are people willing to go.

The wall is rebuilt. The city is open. The holy community is being built one willing person at a time. And the question that this ancient list of unpronounceable names places before every follower of Jesus Christ in every century has never changed:

*Will you willingly offer yourself to dwell in the holy city?
Will you be one of the ones the community can bless as you go to
the place others are unwilling to go?*

Revelation 21:27, *"But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."*

One day the New Jerusalem will descend.

The ultimate holy city will be complete, and every nation will walk in its light. On that day the names in Nehemiah 11 will have found their fulfilment.

Every willing one from every generation who said here I am, I will go will be at home in the city they were always building toward.

We are not there yet.

- The city is still being built.
- The nations are still being reached.
- The gatekeepers are still at their posts.
- The warriors are still at the wall.
- The worshippers are still in the Temple courts.

The risen King is still asking the same question He has always asked His willing ones.

Here I am, Lord. Send me. I will willingly offer myself to dwell in Your holy city — wherever You place me, whatever the cost — until the New Jerusalem descends and the work is done.

RESPONSE QUESTIONS — Not Discussion. Decision.

These questions are for a quiet moment alone before God. Read them slowly. Answer them honestly. Let the God of Nehemiah, who rebuilt a wall in 52 days and filled a city with willing ones speak to you through them.

1. The people in Nehemiah 11 had a choice: remain in the comfortable option or willingly offer themselves for the costly one.

Where in your life right now is God presenting you with that same choice?

What is the 'Jerusalem' He may be calling you to inhabit the costly, exposed, demanding thing you have been calculating the price of without yet saying yes?

2. Nehemiah 11 lists priests, Levites, warriors, gatekeepers, administrators, and village-dwellers everyone needed, everyone named.

What is your specific function in God's city your community, your church, your family?

Are you doing it willingly, fully, and faithfully? Or are you present without being inhabiting?

3. The word to willingly offer was the same root as the freewill offering in Temple worship. Paul says in Romans 12:1 that presenting your body as a living sacrifice is your reasonable service.

What would it look like for you to make a freewill offering of something time, money, security, reputation, comfort to God's purposes in the next six months?

4. **172 gatekeepers.** Not famous. Not visible. Absolutely essential. Is there an unglamorous, invisible, essential service you have been avoiding because it lacks status or recognition?

What would it mean to offer yourself for that role willingly not for the blessing of men, but for the blessing of God?

5. The community blessed the willing ones.

Who in your church family is currently serving in a costly, demanding, exposed role for the sake of God's purposes?

Have you prayed over them recently, encouraged them specifically, and blessed them not just appreciated them in general, but named them before God and asked Him to sustain them?

*"And the people blessed all the men
who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem."*

— Nehemiah 11:2