

Topic	Celebrating a Moment of Joy in Jerusalem
Reference	
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Speaker	Dr Kyle Essary

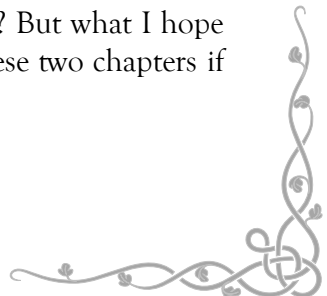
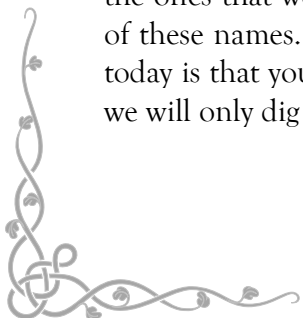
If you have a Bible, I want you to go ahead and open it to Nehemiah chapter 11. To have a family Bible. Have you ever seen these? These are usually very large Bibles. Your family might have used them for family devotions, but they would sit on the living room table. Now, these big Bibles were more of an heirloom than actually a Bible to be used, and so it was unsurprising in many of these family Bibles for you to open up into the first few pages, and there would be written the names of the ancestors who had passed down the Bible.

It would often have their birth date, their date of marriage, their death date, and it would list their number of children. Now, this was actually so common in the Midwest in America, that today genealogists whenever they're looking to find out the history of a family, they will use these Bibles for research. They may be the only record of, for instance, a marriage date or a birth date that we have, but this tradition from the Midwest in America in my grandmother's day is not only something that Midwest Americans do. So for a number of years, my family lived in Malacca, and if you were to speak to some of the old Baba Nyonya families, they could tell you with precision every auntie and uncle in their line, going back to the days of the Malacca Sultanate. They could point out to you where each of their family members were buried from those first generations on Bukit Cina. They could tell you stories of ancestors whom they never met. Why? Because those names and those people influenced who they were.

Names are so important. Even in our day to day, think about whenever we went to name a child, their surname is already given. We do not even get to choose what their surname will be. For instance, in my American culture, my surname is Essary. I was given it by my father and his father and his father on back to the days whenever our family came from Wales in the mid 18th century. My wife in our culture took my surname on the day that we were married. Each of our children have that surname as well.

Here in Malaysia it is typical for the children to take the father's surname and they will keep that surname all of the days of their life. If you come from a good lineage, we might talk about being proud and living up to your name. If you come from a shameful lineage, you may talk about having to redeem your name.

Yes, names are so important, and in our passage today, as you've already heard, we get a lot of names. In fact, the entire chapter 11 is basically a list of names. 51 of the 83 verses in chapters 11 and 12 are merely names of people. Whenever you add to that, the fact that about 15 more verses, which are merely the names of locations. You see that these are chapters fully about names. If I'm being honest with you, aren't these the type of chapters that we like to skip over in our devotions? Let's be honest. Aren't these the ones that we get to it? And we'll read three or four verses, and we can't even think the pronunciation of these names. And so we just sort a skim down, oh, look, okay, here's the story, right? But what I hope today is that you will see after this morning's message, that there is so much depth in these two chapters if we will only dig for it.



The first thing I want to see this morning comes from chapter 11. The main point that I would summarize for chapter 11 is this, **God faithfully restored Jerusalem**. As you've looked at the book of Nehemiah, you've seen that the book begins with Nehemiah being dismayed as he hears that the great city of Jerusalem, now some decades after the people could return, that the great city of Jerusalem remains uninhabited, that people are not dwelling there, that people are still attacked and pressed against by peoples who oppose them. And so his heart is broken and he goes to the Persian King and he wants to go back and help restore the city. And at this point in the book of Nehemiah, all the walls have been rebuilt. But if you look at Nehemiah chapter 7 verse 4 we see there still remains a problem. Nehemiah says that even though the city was spacious, nobody was living there. It was empty. It was desolate.

At this point, though, the people have confessed their sins in that great chapter 9 as they recount the history of their people and how they were unfaithful to God's covenant and how in response, God's sent them into exile, but then at the end, they repent and they say that they are sorry for the sins of their ancestors. They turn to the Lord and they commit. They even signed a document saying that they will be committed to faithfully live for the Lord. Oh, what a day this must have been, but Jerusalem still remains empty.

And so that brings us to chapter 11. If you look at the passage in the first four verses, it says that they resolve that 10% of the people who lived in the surrounding area would go to Jerusalem.

They decided that some of the leaders would go to Jerusalem as well, but if you look at verses 5-9 you see a list of names, but these names follow a specific order. First it says that the names came from the descendants of Judah, particularly these descendants came from Judas son Perez. It's very important that Judah comes first. On the one hand, it makes sense that all of the names in verses 5 through to 9 would be from Judah and Benjamin. Now, you may remember from biblical history that Judah and Benjamin were the children of Rachel, who was loved so much by their father Jacob.

And it was Judah and Benjamin, the tribes that were allotted the land that surrounded Jerusalem. So it's not surprising that the names here of the people who would populate Jerusalem would come from the surrounding areas of Judah and Benjamin. But there's more to it. There's more to it. Judah plays a most prominent role in the history of Israel. Their forefather, the man Judah himself, he had been the one who Jacob sent first into Egypt to meet with Joseph and lead the people of Israel down to Egypt. It was Judah who had been the one who was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his father and for the sake of his brother Benjamin, as Joseph threatened their lives.

Yes, it was Judah who was the leader. It was Judah, whom his father Jacob, whenever he spoke prophetically of him, said though the lion of Judah, called him the lion of Judah, and he said, the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruling staff from between his feet until he receives the obedience of the peoples in Genesis 49. Yes, Judah was somebody important. And so I wonder as they heard the list of the families who were returning to Jerusalem, if they started to wonder in their mind, is that great lion of Judah, one of these who will return? Which one of these families will be the family from which the scepter, the great ruler, God's Messiah King will come?

You see, despite the joy of returning to Jerusalem, they still remain under Persian rule. They are not independent. They are only living in Jerusalem because the Persian King has allowed them to live in

Jerusalem. They still have no Messiah King. But if you think about verses like these were name after name after name is mentioned, one thing that should stick out to us today is how individuals matter in God's plan. Isn't it interesting? It didn't just say the people of Judah returned to Jerusalem. It listed names. First Baptist, you are a church, but you are a church made up of individuals and as individuals you matter to God.

Imagine this generation as they heard these names listed and they thought, hey, I know that guy. That's my uncle, that's my dad. These were people that they knew. These were people with jobs, people with relationships and children. It wasn't just the people of Judah who returned to Jerusalem. It was individuals known by others and known by God.

Do not forget church that you, an individual matters to God and within God's plan. But if you look back at your Bibles, look in chapter 11 in verses 10 through to 19, we have more names, so many names, but notice their titles above each section of names from the priests in verse 10 from the Levites in verse 15 and the gatekeepers in verse 19. Now with the end of this section, as it's mentioning names, it mentions other roles as well.

So within just these verses, we see the types of people who returned. Priests, officials in charge of the temple associates of the priests, those who led in Thanksgiving, those who had in prayer, Levites who took care of the administrative and physical tasks in the temple and gatekeepers who would ask questions such as what we read in Psalm 24, who will ascend the Hill of the Lord. He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

The point of these verses isn't just to give the names, but if you think about these roles, the point is to say everybody who is necessary to serve God in the temple is here. All that we need to go back to the place where we can worship together in the temple is here.

Never forget that in ancient Israel, the temple was central. The temple was where the people met with God. This is where the priest would intercede before God on behalf of the nation. This is where the Holy Ark of God sat in the midst of the Holy of Holies. Yes. It was at this temple where the sacrifices took place. In chapter nine the people had repented of their national sin. They've confessed that they were now committed to the Lord. It would have been at the temple where they could show that commitment through the rituals and through the sacrifices that needed to be made. It's hard for us to imagine the sight and the smell of such a temple. Maybe if you go to the meat section of a wet market, that would have been the smell. As the animals were killed and were cut up and were drained of their blood and were sacrificed on the altar, this was essential. And now we see that the people are in place for this to become the normative means of worship again. You see, it had been almost 150 years at this point since regular sacrifices had been made in the temple.

So what these verses are telling us with this list of names is signaling to us that God is ready to restore worship. If you remember in the time of Ezra, the foundations of the temple had been laid, and now we see the people are in place. But I want you to also notice in verse 18 something that is said, it says the Levites in the Holy city total 284, Jerusalem was also referred to as a Holy city in verse one. What could this mean to call Jerusalem a Holy city? I believe that this is a statement made in hope. They recognize that

their ancestors had been sinners. They recognize that they are sinners. They know that holiness refers to the purity, to the set apart nature of their God. And so they know that anything that is Holy is only Holy to the degree that it is like God or to the degree that God has made it and declared it Holy.

And so Jerusalem at this point is not Holy. In those days, they would have had to have kept all of the rituals, to make all of the sacrifices without fail for it to be Holy. In fact, the six or seven other times in the Bible that Jerusalem is referred to as the Holy city, all referred to the end times when God will reign over the new Jerusalem as king.

I believe that this is a statement of hope. Because Nehemiah 13 tells us very clearly that they did not live up to this hope. As sinners do, they sinned, and so the city did not remain Holy. Where should they place their hope? Should they place their hope in their ability to keep the rituals? Should they place their hope in their ability to do the daily sacrifices. Where should they place their hope? Verses 20 to 36 give us mainly a list of location names. If you're tired of people names, here you go. Here's some location names. All right. These verses remind us that whenever the people return, they didn't just come to Jerusalem, but they also went to the surrounding areas.

I want you to notice that a phrase is used where it says that they return to the lands of their ancestors. It's to remind us that these lands had been given to their ancestors by God's promise. What's interesting is that the places that are listed here, they're not all within the Persian province of Judah. They're, some of them are in other Persian provinces that historical you were part of Judah. It's almost saying that by faith they're dwelling in all of the places that had been promised to their ancestors, regardless of what the current government may say, God's people have returned to God's place. It's a statement of hope. God will restore his people to his place in his time under his King.

If we turn to chapter 12 the passage continues and we actually get a lot more names. If you were missing out on the names from the beginning of chapter 11 now we have more names in the beginning of chapter 12, for 26 verses. Now, if chapter 11 was about God faithfully repopulating Jerusalem, chapter 12 is about God faithfully restoring worship.

Everything in chapter 12 builds to the verses that were read earlier. In verses 27 to 43 we see through these first 26 verses with the list of the names of these priests and their lineages and the Levites and their lineages. We see that God preserved persons to lead worship in the temple. Whereas the previous chapter mentioned priests and Levites. The focus then was on their structure. Here though, the focus is on the role. Notice here, as the verses are mentioned, it says that they had leaders, they had assignments. It emphasizes that they are all from the proper lines needed to lead the people in worship. If you remember in the time of Moses, God made a covenant, a national covenant with Israel, and in that national covenant God said that only the Levites could lead the people in worship. But only certain families of the Levites, those from the line of Aaron could serve as priests. These verses, verse 1 to 26 remind us that God has brought the proper people in to the proper place of worship. And so we see in our key verses 27 to 43 that everything comes together. People are living in Jerusalem, the priests and the Levites necessary for this national ceremony are in place.

We know from the book that the work on the walls has been finished. Everything is in place. And so notice in verses 27 to 43 all of the specifics of the worship service. Verse 27 says that people came from far away, verses 27 to 30 say that the Levites who played cymbals, harps and liars were brought into join the procession. Verse 31 says that the Judah Heights, when up first verse 31 also says that they prepared two large choirs. It specifies one large choir was led by Ezra, and then it gives the names of many of its leaders. The other choir we saw included Nehemiah, and in verse 43 says, it wasn't just these men who made the procession, but it says that the women and the children worship together with them. It specifies the route that they would take, the Gates that they would pass as they ended up at the temple for worship.

No details are left out as it recounts this momentous event. You can imagine in your mind as the leaders are walking along these massive gates and walls, as they're heading around the sides, until they reach the temple with the women and the children coming alongside, cheering, shouting, instruments are being played, the people are joyously worshipping God. This must have been an overwhelming event. Can you imagine their hope? As you read these verses, their hope, it is almost tangible, right? But I don't want us to miss verse 30. Look at verse 30 it says, when the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

All of the players in this ceremony needed purification. The priests needed to purify themselves. The people needed purification from the priests, the walls and the Gates needed purification. Why? Why did they need to be purified? Well, first and foremost, because God is Holy, God is absolutely pure, and for any of us who are sinners to bring our sin into the presence of a Holy God is dangerous. Do you realize that church that God could consume any one of us because of our sin and he would be right and good to do so? That's how Holy the God whom we worship is.

But historically on the one hand, for decades gentiles and idolaters had been living in Jerusalem, and so these gates, these walls, this city needed to be purified of these decades of idolatry, but we can't forget that the reason that the Israelites were removed to begin with was because of their sin and idolatry. And so the people needed purification for their own unholiness. You see, all the people have returned to Jerusalem, their sinful stains still remain. They need a perfect sacrifice. They still need purification to come before the Lord. I also want us to notice in these verses who receives the praise.

Now, if you and I were leading this project of building this big wall, we would have a celebration like this and we would probably give flowers to Nehemiah's wife. We would have Nehemiah and Ezra come up on stage and we would all clap for them for the great job they have done in leading the people. We would listen to them as they said, no, we want to give praise to the workers who worked on that wall and defended it, but that's not what we see here. Ezra, Nehemiah, and all the leaders are specified as being in the procession, but none of them receive praise for their leadership and efforts. They don't even rejoice and celebrate because the wall is complete. That is not their focus. We see in verse 43 that their focus and their praise and their thanksgiving is all pointed towards the Lord.

They realize that this momentous event in their day would not have happened if the Lord had not sovereignly brought the right people at the right time to the right place. Notice that it says they worship because God had given them joy. They realize that the joy that they are experiencing is all the result of a good and Holy God, and so they praise the one who truly deserves praise, God alone.

In the final four verses of chapter 12 Nehemiah points out to us that all of Israel provided for the worship in the temple. They gave of their produce. They gave of their blessing. So that they can make sure that there were Levites and there were priests and there were gatekeepers and there were officials who would maintain the worship in the temple. It doesn't focus on there being commanded to do this, although the law does command them to do this. These verses focus on their obedience. Everything seems to be right. Everything seems to be in place. The people are faithfully providing. So that the worship of the Lord will continue.

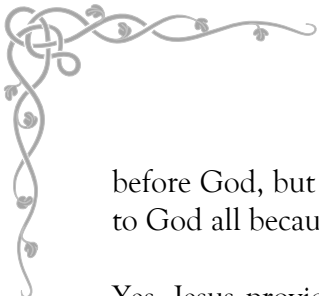
Now thinking about chapter 11 and 12, I think that even though we would admit that these are typically the type of chapters that we skip over in our devotions, we can see that there is a lot here. God never wastes a word. Every word in scripture we confess is divinely inspired. Every word is we as Baptist confess is totally true and trustworthy and points us to Christ. Yes, the theme of these chapters is God's faithfulness. In chapter 11 we see that God faithfully repopulated Jerusalem. In chapter 12 we see that God faithfully restored his worship, but as joyous as this moment would have been, I don't want us to miss the fact that this is not the complete fulfillment of God's promises.

You see, God had promised Abraham that the people would return to the territory of the promised land, and they would enjoy the blessings of the land, and they would dwell in security. He even promised Abraham that Kings would come from him, yet here, they still remain under the authority of Persia. We saw that Judah has been mentioned as coming up first a number of times we see that the light of Perez has been mentioned, but they still await God's Messiah King who would rule over them.

We see in the sacrifices that they still need a priest who will mediate between them and God. We see in verse 43 that they still need multitudes of sacrifices to cover their sin. You see, from this perspective, this joyous ceremony and the re and the restoration of Jerusalem is only one step in God's great story of redemption. Even in the midst of this story, we hear these echoes, Judah Perez, but no Messiah. The nation remains a kingdom with priests instead of a kingdom of priests, as they were commanded to be in Exodus. The people call Jerusalem a Holy city, yet so much sin remains that they must sacrifice the bloody sacrifices.

All of these aspects of the story would have made the people in that day say, yes Lord, we praise you for your faithfulness, but we look forward to a future day with our King on the throne, with a better sacrifice that has been made where we are a kingdom of priests. Yes, Lord, you are faithful and continue to be faithful and bring about your promises, but you know what, God is faithful. And we as a church this morning, we know that God faithfully fulfilled their hopes in Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the lion of the tribe of Judah, a descended of Perez, came to earth to restore God's rule and show himself to be God's chosen Messiah King. Jesus now at this moment, Jesus now rules over his people from heaven and a day is coming and I pray that you are looking forward to that day when he will return with trumpet sound and he will reign over his people here on the earth. Jesus, our perfect high priest. He fulfilled all of the requirements of the law so that we, his church can be called a kingdom of priests and a Holy nation. As Baptists we believe in the priesthood of all believers. We don't need a priest to come



before God, but because of the work of our great high priest, you and I now have unmediated direct access to God all because of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Yes, Jesus provided purification for his people. They still needed to be purified, but Jesus has purified a people for his own sake. Our great Lord Jesus Christ willfully gave himself for the sake of sinners, like you and me. Whenever he died on the cross to take away our sin. He was the perfect sacrifice. His sacrifice was the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. There is no need for the bloody sacrifices in the temple anymore because the perfect high priest and the perfect sacrifice have already come.

In the days of Nehemiah, the people longed for the restoration of regular worship in Jerusalem, but they also looked beyond their day and longed for the coming days of the Messiah. They looked forward to our day.

We live in a day when the Messiah has come. So, let me ask you, church, whether you are an unbeliever or a believer, this morning. Do you trust in Jesus as your only hope? Do you long for his return? Now I am no fool, well, I kind of am at times, but I know that some of you this morning are sitting here and you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ. So, I just want to ask you this morning. What do you turn to for your hope? Do you put your hope in jaw sticks, ancestral traditions, rituals of prayer, trips to foreign religious sites, your own personal generosity or something else? Stop. Those will not bring the hope that you long for. Turn, just like the Israelites did, confess that even your ancestors have rebelled against God, but you today realize that Jesus Christ is your only hope.

He is our only hope in life and death. He lived the perfect life. Because you could not. He died on the cross for your sin so that you don't receive the punishment for it. And he rose from the dead and offers you today eternal life. Turn your life to Jesus today. Stop delaying. But most of us here today are followers of Jesus Christ. Then let us glory in the work of Jesus. Whenever you read chapters like Nehemiah 11 and 12 rejoice in the faithful God who restored Israel to Jerusalem and fulfilled his promises. Rejoice all the more in the faithful God who fulfilled all of the hopes of Israel by sending Jesus to be our Lord.

Church, may our worship look like the worship of Israel in that day, whenever they quote rejoiced because God had given them great joy. Yes, God has given us great joy.