

Restoring Kingdom Witness

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading, and you'll see that we're back in our studies in Ezra and Nehemiah, and this morning we come to chapter 11 of the book of Nehemiah.

If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, I think that's page 407 or 406 thereabouts. And we're looking this morning at the whole of chapter 11 and a good chunk of chapter 12 down to verse 26, and you'll see that, again, there's lots of names and lists.

So although we have read faithfully through, I think, every single name in the list of Nehemiah thus far, this morning it's just a little too long, so I'm going to summarize for you.

But follow with me because I want us to get the main point of this section. Let's start reading at chapter 11 and verse 1. And notice the last verse of chapter 10 where the resounding message at the end of that great chapter of rededication and commitment of the people, not least in giving of their financial substance, was this.

We will not neglect the house of our God. Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns.

[1 : 28] And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. These are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem. And then there's this little parenthesis.

But in the towns of Judah, everyone lived on his property in their towns, Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants. And in Jerusalem lived certain, that is the ten, one in ten, of the sons of Judah and of the sons of Benjamin.

Then we have listed the sons of Judah down to verse 6. Notice many of them valiant men, end of verse 6. And then the sons of Benjamin, verse 7, down to verse 9.

And then of the priests, verse 10, a whole list of them. And of the Levites, verse 15. And the gatekeepers, verse 19, who were some of the Levites.

And then verse 22, the overseers of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzi, the son of Bani, son of Hashabiah, son of Mataniah, son of Micah, of the sons of Asaph, the singers, over the work of the house of God.

[2 : 36] Notice that phrase cropping up again. It's there in verse 12 and it's there in verse 16. It's very important. Listen to this, verse 23. For there was a command from the king, that is the Persian emperor, concerning them, the singers and the keepers of the house.

And a fixed provision for the singers is every day required. You'll find that back in Ezra chapter 6.

And Petathiah, the son of Meshazabel, of the sons of Zerah, of the sons of Judah, was at the king's side in all matters concerning the people.

And then we're back to those 90%. As for the villagers with their field, some of the people of Judah, all these names of villagers, they encamped, verse 30, from Beersheba to the valley of Hinnom.

And the people of Benjamin also lived in all these places of their own towns. And then chapter 12. These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua.

That's right at the very beginning of the book of Ezra, the first exiles coming back. All the lists of these names, priests and Levites, down to verse 9. And Jeshua, that's the one who was the high priest at the time of the first exiles returning.

[3 : 52] He was the father of Joachim. Joachim, the father of Eliashib. Eliashib, the father of Joida. Joida, the father of Jonathan. And Jonathan, the father of Jada.

And in the days of Joachim, that's the second generation, the son of Jeshua. These were the priests. And you've got their names again. All very much the same names because it's the same names of the father's house, down to verse 21.

And then we've got this little detail in verses 22 and 23 about how all these lists were compiled. In the days of Eliashib, Joida, Jochanan, and Jaduah, the Levites were recorded as heads of their father's houses.

So too were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian. That's really to explain why a lot of these names are the same in both lists because it's family names. As for the sons of Levi, their heads of father's houses were written in the book of the Chronicles until the days of Jochanan, the son of Eliashib.

And the chiefs of the Levites, Hashabiah, Sherebi, and Jeshua, the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers who stood opposite them to praise and to give thanks according to the commandment of David, the man of God.

[5 : 01] Watch by watch. Read about all of that back in 1 Chronicles. Great emphasis here on continuity. Mataniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshulam, Talmon, and Akub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates.

These were in the days of Joachim, the son of Jeshua, son of Josedach, and in the days of Nehemiah, the governor, and Ezra, the priest and scribe.

So all the lists from the very beginning right up until that day. Well, may God bless to us this is word and help us as we come to study and to understand it shortly.

Well, if you would turn with me to the passages we read in Nehemiah 11 and 12, page 406. And you'll see, I hope, by the time we've finished, that these sections are all about restoring a kingdom witness among God's people.

You may have groaned silently when you saw the reading and thought, oh my goodness, not another great long list of names. But as we've been seeing in these chapters and in these books, the Bible considers names very important, and so should we.

[6 : 21] Remember what Jesus said when all his disciples were highly excited that he had given them the power to cast out evil spirits and demons. What did Jesus say? Don't rejoice in that.

But do rejoice in what? That your names are written on a list in heaven. So let's not despise lists.

These are very important indeed, which is why the Holy Spirit has preserved them for us.

Listen to Derek Kidner's comment on this. He said, It's not bureaucratic pedantry that has preserved these names. The point is, once more, that the people and their chronicler are conscious of their roots and of their structure as God's company.

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.

He's referring, of course, to Israel's calling as the redeemed people of God, right back in Exodus chapter 19, called to be witnesses to the nations all around of the grace and the goodness and the power of the one true God.

[7 : 29] And ultimately, this holy calling of Israel to all the nations to be witnesses, it was centered on this house of God, the temple of God, at the heart of Jerusalem, at the heart of the city of David, the great king, the holy one of Israel, the holy city of Israel.

Its holy mountain is the joy of the whole earth, says Psalm 48. The city of our God, which God will establish forever and ever. It's from here, says the psalmist, that God's praise will reach to the ends of the earth, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God, forever and ever.

Now, after the tragedy of the exile for nearly 70 years, there was no temple, there was no nation, there was no people, no city of God to witness to his name. And the story in Ezra and Nehemiah began right back at the beginning with that extraordinary decree, remember, from the pagan emperor Cyrus, that the house of the Lord, the God of heaven, was to be rebuilt and the city restored.

And we've seen that story unfolding amazingly under God's hand. And so the temple is built, and now the city is built, and now the people also have been renewed and reformed through the receiving of God's word.

So that at the end of chapter 10, as we looked last time, after pledging all their financial gifts, their tithes, their offerings, and all the rest of it, for the service of the house of God, they are determined.

[9 : 00] We will not neglect the house of our God. But of course, the work of the house of God needs the work and witness of the household of God, the people of God.

A holy city can't be an empty city, just a monument. But remember back in chapter 7, after the walls were built, in chapter 7, verse 4, Nehemiah had noted and said, the city was wide and large, but the

people in it were very few.

And it needed God's people to be about God's true purpose once again. And Nehemiah was determined that at long last, they would recover that true kingdom witness, which was their calling. And that's what these verses are all about. Lots of names, but they tell a great story, a story about the centrality of the work of God, and of the certainty of the word of God, and of the continuity of the worship of God, which links all of these people's lives with our lives today, inseparably, and indeed for all eternity, as citizens, fellow citizens of the holy city of God.

So since we all share in that same ultimate calling, and we are all to tell forth the excellencies of the one who called us out of darkness into light, then surely there must be a lot for us to learn today about our own kingdom witness, in our day, in our generation.

[10:25] So let's look at these verses then. First of all, verses 1 to 24 of chapter 11, are all about the populating of the city. And these verses speak about the centrality of the work of God, which challenges the whole people of God in every generation.

A challenge to fulfill their calling to be the light to the whole world, to show the world the way to the one true God of heaven, and where that can be found on earth.

The first thing you see, I think, in these verses, is that the call of God involves cost. It involves real sacrifice. Well, we saw that last time in chapter 10, all about their determination to give of their substance, for the service of the house of God, for the work of the house of God.

But sacrificial giving is one thing. It's absolutely essential. But these verses show us that more is needed than just money. Jerusalem was like a ghost town.

It was virtually empty of people. And it had to be repopulated, if the witness of the holy city was going to be restored. And verses 1 and 2 describe the plan to do just that.

[11:40] In addition to all the tithes of their substance, the people would give a tithe of themselves, to the work of God's kingdom, so that it would be restored. We're told that only the leaders were living in the city.

So lots were cost, for one in ten of the entire population, to go and live in the cities. And this was a real sacrifice.

And to leave the security of their own land, and therefore the security of food, and so on, property. And as well as that, they were putting themselves in real danger, in the front line.

We've seen how many enemies there were, against the city, Jerusalem. But they were all ready and willing, to go into this ballot. And when God's choice was made known by the lot, remember Proverbs 16, 33 says, every lot is cast by man, but the decision is from the Lord.

But notice verse 2, when the Lord made his decision, each so chosen, we're told, willingly offered himself. That's a mark, isn't it, of where God's spirit is truly at work.

[12:42] There's a real alignment between God's will, and our willingness to serve him. It seemed good, to the Holy Spirit, and to us. It's what they said in Acts, chapter 15, when they made their decisions about the early church.

And in fact, this was a sacrifice made, and entered into, by all of the people together. It was a particular sacrifice for some, for those who went to live in Jerusalem. But notice verse 2, all the rest of them, blessed those who were sent.

I take it that that is not just a relief, oh bless you, off you go, thank God it wasn't me who was chosen. No, no, no. This is a substantial blessing. Those who stayed behind, were committed, to serve that decision, and to support it, and help in every practical way, and personal way.

In other words, by sharing of their livelihood, so that these people, who couldn't plant their crops anymore, were able to survive. This was a group effort. And that reminds us, doesn't it, that sacrifices, for the work of God, have to be borne by all of God's people.

Those who are sent, on special missions, whatever those might be, but also those who do the sending. And the New Testament, is very clear, of course, on that. But second, notice the diversity of people, and indeed the courage, and the order, and the leadership, that is needed for God's work.

[14:02] Not just bodies. Verses 3 to 24, in these long lists, tell us, who went to live in Jerusalem. There's a parenthesis, as I said, in verses 3 and 4, that tell us, that most lived in the towns, verse 3, but in Jerusalem, just certain ones, of Judah and Benjamin.

That's the 10%. And then we have them, all listed in their groups, the Judahites, the Benjamites, then the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, and so on. And then again, verse 20, sort of

summarizes, the rest of Israel, were in the towns, everyone in his inheritance.

So, if you read through these lists, you'll see it is a diverse group. They're people of every age, every stage of life. All of God's people are needed for a holy city's witness, not just a particular elite group.

That's important to notice, isn't it? It's very like what Paul emphasizes to the Corinthian church, who had very strongly elitist tendencies. Remember in 1 Corinthians 12, he says to them, no, no, no, God gives a whole variety of gifts by his spirit, to all different, not just to some, but to all.

Many and varied parts to the body of Christ, but all one body, serving for the common good. Read that later in 1 Corinthians 12. It's very instructive.

[15 : 21] But clearly, courageous people are needed for the task. Notice verse 6, that little detail, valiant men. It's there again in verse 14, isn't it?

Men of valor, and their leader, Zabdiel, of the Haggadolim. Haggadolim probably isn't a name, it just means literally the great ones. He was the son of the great ones. So whatever it's telling us, these were impressive people.

And notice that word overseer in verse 14. He was their overseer. It's there in verse 9 as well, and again in verse 22. And that indicates that there was a clear order, there was a clear leadership among these people.

This wasn't just a haphazard group of people. Of course not. If the witness of God's people is to prove valuable and lasting, it needs real diversity, it needs real courage, and it also needs real leadership.

And above all, what we see very clearly here is it needs real focus. Notice how just as all through chapter 10, last time we saw, the focus of everything here is very clear.

[16 : 26] It's on the one great unifying task, which is the work of the house of God. Verse 12. It's there again in verse 16, the outside work of the house of God, all the administration to enable the inside work to work, to go on.

The teaching of God's word. And of course, verse 17, the other work of the leading of prayers of thanksgiving in response to God. It's there again in verses 22 to 24.

Again, the focus of all the priests and all the people and all the provision is on the work of the house of God. Verse 22. In fact, so determined, notice verse 23, so determined was the Lord himself that this work must flourish, that remember, he had even made the pagan Persian emperor, the king here, have a decree in perpetuity that all of this should be provided for out of public funds.

Remember back in Ezra chapter 6, when we looked at that, he said, all of this has got to be provided. And if you don't do it, I'll pull your house down, impale you on its pole, and make an example of you to everybody. Persian emperors, you know, were quite dramatic in the way they made their point.

But isn't that an extraordinary thing? He wanted them to do it, of course, because they would pray for him and for his sons and for his own livelihood. He had totally mixed motives. But the God of heaven uses even the mixed motives of pagan kings for the sake of the ongoing task of his witness and the witness of his people to the world.

[17 : 58] That's a marvelous thing, isn't it? If you think back in the history of our own country here, the United Kingdom, certainly in England, the Reformation in England was far more driven by Henry VIII's godliness than by his godliness.

It was a disgraceful business. And yet, we have to recognize, don't we, in the providence of God, that for hundreds of years, whatever we may think of the problems of established churches in our nation, and my goodness, we know all about those, of all people.

We have to recognize, don't we, that we have had monarchs who at their coronation promise on oath to be defenders of the faith, which is Protestant Christian Orthodox faith.

At least up to now, of course, Prince Charles doesn't seem to be so keen to be that in the future, does he? But there is another example of exactly the same thing. God's extraordinary providence through a pagan king.

But why all this focus on the work of the house of God? Well, of course, because, look at verse 1 again. It's there again in verse 18 as well, because this city is the holy city.

[19 : 07] This city's mission is absolutely essential to the whole of God's plan of salvation for this world, for all nations. It's interesting that that term, the holy city, is only used in two other places in the Old Testament.

I discovered that this week, because it pricked my interest. And both times, it's in prophecies that relate to the return of Israel from exile, and especially are talking about Israel's role as God's servant, as an instrument of salvation to all the nations.

First time is in the prophet Isaiah, in chapter 48 and 49, where God speaks of his true servant, who will restore Israel to be a true servant, to bring lights to the ends of the earth.

And again in chapter 52, where he calls Jerusalem the holy city, and says, Awake, because your watchmen are going to proclaim the return of the Lord to Zion, and the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

That's Isaiah chapter 52. And how will that happen? Through the work of the servant of the Lord, who will suffer in Isaiah 53, in order that he might sprinkle all nations.

[20 : 17] That's the first one. And the second time is in Daniel chapter 9, where Daniel is told about a vision of 70 weeks of years, 70 times seven years, decreed for the holy city, until at last the anointed one would come to atone for sin forever.

Referring, referring, of course, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who came at last to bring an end to sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, for all the peoples of the earth.

You see, the holy city, and the work of its house, its temple, its place of sacrifice, is the essential thing for this world's salvation. And that's why its work is the central thing for God's people to be concerned with.

It is the world's most vital work of all. Because it was preparing the way for the coming of the Savior of the world. But you see, and this is the really important thing for us to grasp, even when Jesus had come, even when he had fulfilled the work of the temple of God, by bringing atonement for sin, by securing everlasting righteousness for his people, the work of his people was not done, was it?

The witness of that house is not yet complete. Because as Jesus himself tells us, his coming is not the end of the last days, but the beginning of the last days. Because God is merciful, God is patient, God does not want yet to judge the earth.

[21 : 46] He desires that none should perish. And he has created this great day of salvation. When his promise, through Isaiah, is going to be fulfilled in all its glory.

When all who thirst can come to the waters, from all over the world. When men can seek the Lord, and call upon him when he is near. When foreigners from all places, will be joined into his household.

And my house, said Isaiah, my house, says the Lord, shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Because the Lord who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, I will gather yet others, besides those who are already gathered.

And that's why the apostle Peter is explicit in his first letter, to us, to the Christian church, to we Christians who are followers of Jesus. He says, his house, is what you are now.

You're a holy priesthood. You're set apart to offer spiritual sacrifices. As you proclaim the excellencies, of him who called you out of darkness and into light.

[22 : 51] And as you do that, so that all the world and its peoples will see through you, the deeds that will turn their eyes to our Father in heaven.

And bring them to bow down and praise him on a day of great visitation, when the power of this gospel witness touches their lives also. That's the centrality of the work of God, that challenges his people in every generation through the ages.

The witness to the kingdom of God. The witness to the great salvation that can be found only there, for all peoples of the world, through his grace, which is shed abroad now at last in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That was Israel's task then, but how much more wonderful and glorious is the work that you and I are called to, in these last days, as we proclaim to the world the fulfillment of all these things, in the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Isn't that something worth sacrificing, whatever God may call us to sacrifice, in order to serve? I think it's rather striking that we have this passage on today of all days, when some of us are going to go to a new place for us, and begin that new meeting of the Tron at Queen's Park, just as we did earlier in the year at Kelvin Grove.

[24 : 09] Of course, there's very little sacrifice in that, just means that we won't see everybody in quite the same way every time on Sunday as we used to. A little bit more work for us, a little bit more cost, it's nothing really.

But it's a bit of an effort, it'll be a bit hard, but this is what it's for. Don't forget, just as it's hard, isn't it, to colonize the city center, to meet here, in order to reach the people all over this city.

It's difficult, you can't find a parking place, it's going to get worse and worse, from now till Christmas. It'll be an effort, in the traffic, to come in, to come back on a Sunday evening, in order to help serve, among the many folk from Iran, and other countries who come to us.

But wasn't seeing, 30 of these folk baptized, last Sunday evening, among us, wasn't that, something that makes, all that sacrifice, immensely worth it? It's much more sacrifice, for us, isn't it, when we send people, far away, like Roy Murray, or the Robries, or others, to other parts of the world.

It's a sacrifice for them, far away from friends, and families. And it's a sacrifice for us, we miss them, we would love to have them, serving here. Just as it is, when we send leaders, who have trained here, to go and minister, in other churches.

[25 : 21] My goodness, we miss them, but isn't it worth it? Because this is the task, that we're involved in. It's the central calling, upon all God's people, in every generation, to serve the witness, of his glorious kingdom.

That's why Jesus questioned to us, is will you serve first, my kingdom? And not just your own ambitions, your own desires.

Friends, the work of the kingdom, needs valiant men, as recorded here. It needs, the mighty men of valor still. And we need to challenge, the church today, especially ourselves, and our young people. We've lived through an age, where we've become, very, very soft, I think, in the church. The churches, in our country, so often, are cosseting their young people, instead of challenging them. In 1945, when William Still, was called to be minister, in Gilcomson Church, in Aberdeen, somebody on the vacancy committee, said to him, he used to tell us this story often, what will you provide, for our young people?

And he looked to them, with his look, and said, provide for them, nothing, but I will ask of them, everything. And he did.

[26 : 36] And that is why, that church sent, many, many men, valiant men, and women, but especially men, into ministry, and mission, and all over the country, and all over the world.

And I want to challenge you, especially you young people here, especially you men, don't shirk, the challenge, of the central call of God, on his church, for every generation.

Don't shirk that challenge, to give yourself, and your life, to the work and witness, of his kingdom. Whatever that means, for your particular path in life, it may be, you are one of those, sent for a particular task.

It may be that you are one of those, who is to devote your life, to supporting those, in those particular tasks. But play your part. I want to challenge us, as a church, wouldn't it be a great thing, to make it our ambition, to tithe our people, for particular ministry, and mission work, throughout this country, and throughout the world.

To send a tenth of our people, to do that. Not all at once, not tomorrow, but to have it, as a great desire, as an aim, that we should be, constantly sending out, and blessing, supporting, paying to train, and paying to support.

[27 : 56] Wouldn't it be a great ambition, for us to have as a church? That's what they did here, that's what happened here. And that population, of the city of God, speaks of their commitment, to the centrality, of the kingdom work of God, which is, the great challenge, upon God's people, in every single generation, including our own.

Well, let's think about that. But now look at verse 20, and verses 25 to 36, which are all about, the possession of the land.

And these verses, I think, speak about the certainty, of the word of God, that encourages God's people, in every generation. The prophetic hope, for the glorious future, of God's city, and his holy people, and his holy land, began with the return, of God's people from exile.

And as we read, in Isaiah chapter 2, at the beginning of the service, that envisaged people, from all nations, streaming to God's city. The earth will be filled, with the knowledge, of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.

Read the later chapters, of Isaiah, and you'll see, it's all about, God's final destruction, of all his enemies. It's the bringing together, of heaven and earth, and a whole new creation, when the world is filled, with God's glory.

[29 : 16] That is the word of faith, that was given, to these people. That was the word, the promise, that they were living by. But their earthly eyes, revealed something, very different.

It was a feeble remnant, wasn't it, who returned, to this land. And it was a land, still ruled by the Persians, that lamented that, remember back in chapter 9, in their prayer, behold, we are slaves today, in this land, that you gave our fathers.

And the all Israel, that we keep, seeing referred to, through this book, it's just a rump, of its former glory. It's just two tribes, mainly, Judah and Benjamin, and a few stragglers, and a few priests, and Levites.

It's a barely viable number. If 3,000 men, was a tenth, 30,000 men, maybe with wives, and children, 100,000. It's hardly a big town, let alone a city, let alone a nation.

It's a far, far cry, from Zechariah, the prophet's vision, in chapter 8, of his prophecy, that the streets, would be teeming, with children. There'd be so many, old people, living so long, you couldn't get up the road, because they'd all be, blocking it.

[30 : 25] And God said to the people, don't think that's credulous, I will do it. I will fill my city, from east to west. Don't despise, the day of small things.

You did that before, didn't you? When I promised, that Zerubbabel, would begin the temple, and complete it? He didn't believe it, but he did. And now look, you see, what this is saying to us is, this may be another day, of small things, but look at verse 20.

The people are back, everyone in his own, inheritance. They may be, but a remnant, they may be a little better, than campers. Notice verse 30, they were encamped.

That takes us right back, doesn't it? To the wilderness days, to the days of Joshua, before they'd even built, a house in the land. They may be encamped, but, they are back, in their inheritances, in the land of promise.

And Derek Kidner, again, is so helpful. He says that the geography, here in verses 25 to 36, tell a very interesting story, because, these names of places, far exceeds, the territory, of just the Persian, territory of Judah.

[31 : 35] It extends right north, into Samaria, and right south, into Edomia. In other words, what we're being told, is they're not just back, into a land allotted to them, by the Persians, but they are back, in the place that, God has promised them, the whole land.

And from, it's going all the way, back to Abraham. And it might not look much, but remember, it didn't look much, in Abraham's time. How much real estate, did Abraham own, in the land of Israel? A graveyard.

That was all. A grave, for his wife. And Isaac, and Jacob, they lived in tents, wandering in and out of the land, for 400 years. The people, were then out of the land, in Egypt, and then in the desert, before ever, they built a homestead, in the land of Israel.

But, God's word, was certain. And surely, these words here, about these towns, and the villages, the inheritances, of the families, each one, with their allotted place, surely, that must have encouraged, every first reader, of this book, say around 400 BC, a few decades, after this time, that God, can still be trusted.

That he has brought, our people back. And that even though, still, we must walk by faith, not yet seeing, all that he has promised. We can trust, his promised word, to us.

[33 : 02] Isn't that still, so for us today? Didn't Jesus promise, that his church, would be built, that the gates of hell, would never withstand it? Doesn't the New Testament, tell us that we have been, appointed as a, a kingdom of priests, with God, to reign on this earth?

It doesn't look that way, yet does it? It doesn't look that way, here in 2016. Peter tells us, doesn't he? We have an inheritance. It's imperishable, it's undefiled, it's unfading.

But what does he say? To these earthly eyes, it's only going to be revealed, at the last time, the last day. Until then, what does he say?

We're exiles, sojourners, we're camped out, here on earth. Isn't that striking? Paul uses exactly, that same language, in 2nd Corinthians 5. We walk by faith, not by sight.

He says, we're still in these earthly tents. Tents, he calls these bodies. We're groaning, we're burdened still. We too, have an inheritance, but we too, are still in camp, waiting, for so much more, waiting for the glory, to come.

[34 : 16] But we too, have a promise, we have, the certainty, of God's word. And Paul says to us, we have the Holy Spirit, as a guarantee. And we do know God, through the Holy Spirit, who has led

us to Jesus, so we can know the Father.

And we can pray to him, through the Spirit, of the Lord Jesus. And so we can love him, and we can rejoice, even now, as Peter says, with great joy, because we know, that we are receiving, what God has promised, the salvation of our souls.

And we will receive, all that he has promised, on the day of his coming. And that means, friends, that we can trust, his every word. Things that seem so small, just now, just like a, just like a mustard seed.

Like a tiny remnant, of people coming back, to this country, in the land of Judah. Or like a tiny remnant, of Jews, responding to the gospel, of Jesus, that Paul saw, in his own ministry.

That's all. Or like tiny groups, of Christian people, in the city of Glasgow, moving out to different places, that seem like, absolutely nothing, in the midst, of a great big modern city, that wants to know, nothing of God.

[35 : 31] Everything, he has promised, will come to fruition, in God's perfect time. And Habakkuk, the prophet was right, the earth will be filled, with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea.

The vision, hastens towards its end, he says, it will not lie, it will surely come. And the righteous, will live by sight? No, by faith, in that sure and certain word.

Faith, in the certainty, of God's word, that encourages, his people, in every generation, theirs and ours, when what they see, with their eyes, would otherwise, make them cast down, and despondent, and despairing.

And surely, these verses here, for us, are for our encouragement, as Paul says, for our hope, because we can see, what did come of this. We read on in our Bibles, and what do we find, happened, in one of these, unknown little places, the towns, and the villages of Judah, in Bethlehem, was born, the son of David, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was to come. So friends, never let's despise, the day of small things, the works that we begin, in Jesus name, can seem so very small, and so very feeble. That's what it's like, when you set up a little group, in a primary school, with scripture union, isn't it, to teach them the Bible.

[36 : 57] That's what it's like, when you start a little, Bible study, in your retirement home, to share in your later years, the gospel with others, who are coming towards, the end of their lives. That's what it looks like, when you go and meet, in a little upstairs room, above a bank, near to Queens Park, at 4.30 this afternoon, and nobody knows.

It's what it's like, when you just, want to read the Bible, with a friend, or a loved one, to share the love of Jesus, with them. Looks like nothing, but we have the certainty, of God's word of promise. My word, will not return, to be empty, it will accomplish, everything, that I purpose, as the Lord. So be encouraged, we walk by faith, not by sight, but we know, that none of our labors, in the Lord, are in vain.

And we need to remind, one another that, and it seems like, the day of small things. Well finally, a word, briefly about chapter 12, and these verses, about the preservation, of the priesthood.

These speak, of the continuity, of the worship of God, that unites, the people of God, down every generation. Everything now, for the restoration, of kingdom witness, is in place, the temple, the city, the population, the lands inhabited, the work of God's house, is provided for, so that, the witness, to the one true God, can be made, in the one way, that he is appointed, for himself, in his unique temple, the place where he's chosen, to dwell.

[38 : 29] And so of course, a priesthood is necessary, and that's why we have, this list of names. It's a bit confusing, a lot of the names are, repeated, because they're family names, that repeat down the generations. But what we have here, is a record of, unbroken succession, of the priesthood, from the very original return, under Zerubbabel in verse 1, when Jeshua was the high priest, right down verse 26, to the present day, and Ezra's day, and Nehemiah's day, and in fact, actually, beyond them, because verse 10 and 11, give us five generations, of the high priests.

Now don't get bogged down, in the detail, because the main point here, is really clear. It's all about continuity. Continuity of the worship, of the one true God, in the one true way, that God has revealed himself, and in the one place, that God has chosen, which is his holy temple.

So that teaches us, two really important things, about the people of God, that the Bible teaches, so clearly. First, there is continuity, in our calling. Ours is a historical faith.

It's rooted in real history, it's rooted in biblical history, but also world history. And so our faith, impinges upon all men, in all places, at all times, because, there is only one God, and there is only one, mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

And that means, that God can only be found, only encountered, only known one way, in the place, he himself chooses. That's what these chapters, are all about.

[40 : 04] They're about the restoration, of the possibility, of true worship, for the world, through the one house of God, the one temple of God, on earth. You see, every generation, of God's people, has the same calling, to witness, to the world, that unique way of worship, of this God, the God of earth in heaven.

And all through history, God has had, his witnesses. And every one of them, is just a link, in a chain, that stretches all the way back, to the beginning of human history, and will stretch right to the end, when Jesus comes, of people, who are making known, to the peoples of this world, where the gate of heaven, truly is.

And we still stand, in that train, along with all of these, named here. Because we now point, the whole world, don't we, to the living temple, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who became God, in the flesh, on this earth, to open the way, to the holy place, to all peoples.

He became the great high priest, and he became that forever. But we too, are a royal priesthood, says Peter. We are a living temple. We are part, of the great cloud of witnesses, called to show the way, to him, and to lead others, to that unique way, of knowing the God, of heaven and earth.

There's a continuity, of your calling, and mine, with every one, of the names here. And that means, that if each one, of these names, counts, in the eternal purposes, of God, then each one, of our names, counts too.

[41 : 40] Jesus bids us, shine too, as the old, children's chorus says, as lights, in a dark world. You, in your small corner, and I, in mine. But each of our own, little part, is a link, in the chain, of the great story, of time and eternity, for which, this whole earth, was created.

And each of us, as living stones, in God's household, each of us, shares in this calling, that spans the ages, and whose fruit, will last, forever, and ever, and ever.

We share, this people's calling. And therefore, we share also, their citizenship. This continuity, in our citizenship, in Zion, in the holy city.

All of these generations, are remembered, as men of Zion. Their memorial, their name, is woven, into the holy city, of God forever. But friends, so are ours, if we belong, to Jesus Christ.

That's why Christ, the Messiah of Israel, came at last. So that through him, all nations, would come, to the light, and become, citizens forever, of the city of God.

[42 : 51] That's, what the blood of Jesus, accomplished at Calvary, for us. Paul, the apostle, to the Gentiles, he writes to the church, in Ephesus, Jews and Gentiles alike. And he says, God came in Jesus, to bring peace, to those who are near, the Jews, and to those who are far away.

That through him, we both, have access, in one spirit, to the Father. no longer, strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens, with the saints, and members, of the household of God, named, as people of Zion, the city of God.

And when Jesus Christ, rose from the dead, he opened, the kingdom of heaven, to all, who believe, in him. Earthly, the heavenly city, of Jerusalem. And all the world over, people who have faith in him, become, eternal citizens, of his city.

There's a wonderful little verse, in Matthew's account, of the crucifixion, and resurrection. Matthew 27, I think it's verse 53, where he says this, after Jesus' resurrection, many bodies of the saints, were raised, and went, into, the holy city.

The holy city. You see what he's telling us? They were brought back, up out of the graves, to their true home, in the eternal city of God. It's a preview, of what will happen, on the day the Lord Jesus comes, when he will gather together, every citizen of his city, and raise them up, along with all his saints, to everlasting life.

[44 : 27] These people, and us, and all throughout the world, who know and love his son. Not of course, the earthly city, but the heavenly Jerusalem. That was the city, that was in Abraham's sight, right from the very beginning, Hebrews 11 tells us.

He was looking for, an everlasting city, a heavenly country, a city, whose foundations, and whose architect, and builder is God. Jerusalem above, is our mother, says Paul, to the Galatian church.

And he quotes, Isaiah's promise, that the holy city's borders, will encompass, the whole world, and all its peoples. Isn't there something, I think there is, wonderfully thrilling, about this continuity, right down through the ages, all through human history, of this story, of the people, that God is drawing to himself, through the work of Christ.

That we share, this common calling, to make him known, on this earth. And we share, this marvelous citizenship, with all of his saints, all through history.

And even into the future. That we like them, are children of promise. And we have, God's certain word.

[45 : 42] That's what spurred them on, in their day, to be faithful servants. That's what enabled them, to be unique witnesses, to the one true God. How much more so, for us. We have, better promises.

We have a better hope. We have a better covenant, sealed forever, in the blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus. And we're surrounded, says the apostle, by such a great, cloud of witnesses, including every one, of these names.

All the saints, who have gone before us. Who to the world, by faith, their Lord confessed. Let us not, fail, to endure, in running the race, that's marked out for us.

Let's not fail, to grasp the challenge, that is common, to all God's people, all down the ages, to see, the work, of the house of God, the church of our Lord, Jesus Christ, as, absolutely central, worth, every sacrifice, if his glory, would be served.

The hymn says, O may we, soldiers, faithful, true, and bold, fight as the saints, who nobly fought of old, and win with them, the victor's crown of gold.

[46 : 56] Let me leave you, with the words, of the risen Lord Jesus. Hold fast, to what you have, so that no one, may seize your crown. To the one, who conquers, I will make him, a pillar, in the house of my God.

I will write on him, the name of my God, and the name, of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, who comes down, from heaven, and my own, new name.

He who has an ear to hear, says the Spirit, hear what the Spirit says, to the churches. Well, let's hear, and let's pray.

Almighty and merciful God, of whose gift alone, it comes, that thy people, do unto thee, true, and laudable service. Grant, we beseech thee, that we, may so faithfully, serve thee, in this life, that we fail not, finally to attain, thy heavenly promises, through the merits, of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.