



Nehemiah 11-12

Dedication and Worship at Jerusalem's Wall

In Nehemiah chapter eleven we learn that the city of Jerusalem had been without a protective wall around it for about 150 years. From the destruction of the city by Babylonian invaders in 586 B.C. until Nehemiah arrived in 444 B.C. the city was unprotected.

Under Nehemiah's leadership the city had been ravaged by invading armies and stripped of everything valuable over the past century and a half. The people who lived in Judah resided in small hamlets and villages away from the city of Jerusalem. The city was still filled with the rubble and ruin of the destruction years earlier. Only the leaders lived in the city (11:1, 3). Jerusalem was not a nice piece of well-groomed land in suburbia ready on which to build. It was filled with rubble.

The city was now secure. It just needed to be repopulated.

Nehemiah 7:14 tells us after the wall was completed there was plenty of room for future growth. "Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built" (Nehemiah 7:4, NASB 1995).

The people living in Jerusalem were few and there were no houses. The people had built for themselves spacious, lavishly furnished homes on the hillsides and valleys. In the city they would have to remove the debris, rubble and stumps before building houses.

An uninhabited capital city is not of much use.

With chapters eleven and twelve, we see fresh signs of growth from a barren city. Business begins to bloom again, homes are rebuilt, and people were moving into the city. Jerusalem was coming alive again.

REPOPULATION OF JERUSALEM

Not only did the wall need to be rebuilt, but the city also needed to be restored. You cannot have a city without having people live there.

How did Nehemiah go about getting people to resettle in the city?

"Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in the other cities" (v. 1).

The tenth were chosen by casting lots. Nehemiah went through the towns and numbered the people, counting them off by tens, and then they threw a dice (actually the word is die), with ten numbers on it and whatever number came up the man with that number was expected to move his family to Jerusalem.

The relation between verses one and two are a little ambiguous. However, if you relate this drafting of people in verse one with those who volunteered in verse two it is apparent that when a man was chosen to move to Jerusalem it was because God wanted him to do this. It would appear that the man was permitted to decline if he wanted to. God moved the hearts of His people to desire to live there. Then the lot would be cast again and another name chosen. The people commended those who chose to go to Jerusalem. And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem. ”

The leaders moved into the city and then the people cast lots to select one out of every ten Israelites to join them. God worked in the hearts of the people, and it may have been that some who hadn't been chosen volunteered to live in Jerusalem (v. 2). They were moved by God to go and live there. These became the inhabitants; perhaps 10,000 people living there of the 100,000 living in Judah.

The word volunteer is from a Hebrew word meaning to impel, to incite from within. The idea is filled with generosity and willingness.

The people of Judah were active participants in the resettlement of the city. There was an orderly arrangement upon which the population as a whole agreed (v. 2).

There was a total of 1192 priests selected to live in Jerusalem of whom 822 carried on the work from the temple (v. 12). These were namely officiating priests who offered sacrifices, offerings and performed the rituals of worship. Another 242 were heads of families (v. 13) who did counseling, administration, civil affairs, etc. and who ministered to priestly families. Another 128 men defended the city as brave warriors (v. 14). They were probably the security guards on the walls and at the gates.

There were men who maintained the exterior beauty of the temple and temple grounds. There were Levites, who were in charge of the outside work of the house of God (v. 16).

Let's not overlook one person of special interests. His name was Mattaniah, who was the leader in beginning the thanksgiving at prayer . . . (v. 17). He had a prayer ministry in Jerusalem.

He was the prayer leader. Every great ministry has someone on his or her knees before God. C. H. Spurgeon had a large group of men who met in the boiler room before and during every service praying for him.

Alan Redpath tells of visiting in the home of an invalid member of his church who greeted him saying, Please don't offer your sympathy. I don't need it. I would not have missed the experience of these past nine

Please don't offer your sympathy. I don't need it. I would not have missed the experience of these past nine years for anything in the world. Why? Because she had an intercessory prayer ministry. I remember yielding my life completely to the Lord saying to Him, Lord, I am ready for anything You may want me to do for You or be for You. Only a few weeks later His hand touched my body and laid me aside. Through these past years He has become so infinitely more precious to me than He could ever have been in all the busy round of Christian service. She had a long prayer list, and every day she spent hours in prayer for missionaries, preachers, and teachers of the Word of God.

I thank God for those faithful prayer warriors who had upheld us in prayer through the years of our ministry.

Jerusalem was the tribal territory of Judah (11:4-6), and bordered with Benjamin (vv. 7-9). Most of the people carried into Babylonian captivity were from these two tribes, which composed the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Nehemiah tells us 468 brave men from Judah volunteered to live in the city, and 928 men from the smaller tribe of Benjamin. The descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totaled 468. That is the lineage of the Messiah (Matthew 1:3). He was regarded as one of the heroes of the nation.

There were special groups of singers (vv. 22-23) for the service of the house of God. They led the song service day by day. These were musicians who developed their talents and gifts as a ministry in the Temple to the glory of God.

Observe how many people were involved in the Temple ministry in chapter eleven. Their lives were dedicated to God to minister to others.

This also helped to establish a strong religious community that focused the people's spiritual life on the LORD God. A strong religious commitment is essential if a democratic form of administration is to succeed. Without adequate spiritual values it is hard, if not impossible, to retain the idea of obligation and responsibility, writes Cyril Barber.

As an application the repopulating of Jerusalem is a reminder that God is building His eternal city, the New Jerusalem. It is not like the old one, made of bricks and mortar, but a new city built with spiritual stones. In deed, living stones. The apostle Peter writes, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

Redeemed people, purchased by the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God, will inhabit the new city of God.

In 12:1 Nehemiah looks back almost a hundred years to the time when Zerubbabel led the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem in 537 B.C.

Of interest is that 12:8-12 traces the priestly line down to a priest known as Jaddua. The priest named Jaddua was the source of a great deal of criticism of the book of Nehemiah a century ago by scholars who wanted to place the writing of Nehemiah in the time of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.). This would place the book 100 years after Nehemiah lived. When Alexander was ready to invade the city of Jerusalem he was met by a company of priests led by the high priest, named Jaddua. He showed Alexander the prophecy in Daniel chapter eight regarding the he-goat who would be a world conqueror. Alexander was so impressed he abandoned Jerusalem and invaded Egypt and established the city of Alexander. The modern critics of Nehemiah seized on the name of this priest Jaddua to prove you cannot trust the early dating of Nehemiah and that the Scriptures are not trustworthy. However, numerous archaeological finds have proven their theory incorrect because there is evidence to prove there were several priests named Jaddua, and several governors of Samaria named Sanballat. Men passed their name on to their sons.

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As we move on to chapter twelve we see things from God's perspective. Never judge God by your circumstances. Always look at your circumstances through the eyes of God. Let Him interpret your situation. Get eternity into the picture. In Nehemiah 12 the people are happy because their eyes are on the LORD God.

The people of Judah have now experienced revival and rededication, and they are now ready to throw the biggest celebration party in history.

Obviously, they have postponed the event until the city was repopulated. The wall was rebuilt, the gates hung, the city is secure and filled with people. The time has come to celebrate and dedicate the wall.

DEDICATION OF THE WALL (12:27-47)

It is now time to celebrate. Dedication means giving the object of dedication to the Lord for its use and control.

Preparation for worship (v. 27-29)

The Levites come to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres (v. 27).

One of the elements of true celebration is the expression of joy. Their hearts were right with God and they expressed it.

This group was probably a special ensemble selected from among the Levitical families. They may have been music teachers. "So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites," (v. 28).

The Hebrew word for gladness means gaiety, pleasure, delight. "

The musical instruments were cymbals, much like cymbals of our day. The harps were possibly like mandolins with several strings. The lyres were probably string instruments with two arms joined at the top by a crosspiece.

A time for purification (v. 30)

"The priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates and the wall" (v. 30).

Purification is necessary for celebration. You cannot celebrate with a hypocritical heart.

God does not do His work with dirty vessels.

These were probably sin offerings on behalf of the Levites and the people. The people's hearts needed to be pure, cleansed from sin through confession and sacrificial offerings.

This purification ceremony for the priests and Levites was probably ceremonial washing of themselves and their clothes, fasting, abstinence from sexual intercourse, and presentation of sin offerings.

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The people probably washed themselves and their clothing. The gates and the wall were dedicated by using a hyssop to sprinkle them with the blood of sacrifices.

To minister the Word of God our hearts must be clean before God. Holiness precedes happiness. We who minister the Word of God must do our personal spiritual preparation before we stand before God and the people. You cannot fake a clean heart before God. Moral carelessness and borderline sin is a disgrace to the ministry. Every spiritual ministry must begin with purification.

How do Christians purify themselves?

Christians do not purify themselves by rituals, or cutting themselves, but by confessing our sins, and believing that the all-sufficient death of Jesus covers all our sins.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confess your sins to God and believe they are all under the atoning sacrifice of Christ. We receive immediate forgiveness and are made useful vessels that He can employ to His glory.

The verses that follow (vv. 31-38) present the amazing picture of hundreds of singers and musicians gathering on the newly constructed wall getting ready to celebrate God's faithfulness.

With verse 31 the first-person narrative style is resumed again as it was in the first half of the book. Nehemiah is back in the leadership position, whereas Ezra was in the lead during the revival and rededication of the people. Now as we proceed to the dedication of the wall Nehemiah is in charge once again.

Remember what Tobiah the Ammonite said to Nehemiah about the early stages of the wall? Even what they are building —if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down! (4:3). Who is laughing now Toby?

The procession of worshippers singing (v. 31-43)

Verse 31 informs us the first great choir proceeded to Nehemiah's right, on top of the wall toward the gate down at the bottom of the city, the Refuse Gate. Verse 38 tells us the second choir proceeded to the left, while Nehemiah followed them with half of the people on the wall. They are probably singing all along the way.

Ezra was in the first choir; Nehemiah was with the second choir. The two groups circle the walls, which Nehemiah built and come together at the spiritual center of the nation.

Hundreds of singers, instruments, and thousands of people converge at the temple singing praise to the LORD God.

Singing has always been an important feature of the Old Testament and Christian worship. It is characteristically full of joy. Christians have composed the great oratorios. Christianity is full of joy, and joyous worship. Christians have the greatest reasons in the world to celebrate.

J. G. McConville says, "When the people march on the walls to the Temple they do so after having placed the Temple once again at the center of their thoughts (10:32-39). The walls [are] . . . God's gift for the protection and perpetuation of His name in the world. "

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In the Old Testament the action of walking around an object, or a city, or a piece of land is a way of claiming it for God. They were claiming Jerusalem as God's city.

Have you every done a prayer walk around your city or neighborhood? Claim it for God.

Moreover, "on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar" (v. 43).

These two great choirs sang atop the Temple walls, So that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar. ”

The words rejoiced, joy, rejoiced, and joy are stressed in verse 43. They had this joy because God had given them great joy. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he said, Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Phil. 4:4).

That is the way churches in Latin America worship. They turn the volume of the public address system at the highest level. It is not that no one can hear in the building; they want the whole wide world to hear! They sing and yes, you can hear the joy afar. ”

This consecration also included financial giving to the ministry (vv. 44, 47).

A great offering was taken at the service in the Temple. The people gave these offerings with great joy. They were cheerful givers.

They were given according to the command of David and his son Solomon. That was 500 years earlier! The wonderful shadow of David's love for Yahweh still cast itself over the people of Judah.

They set aside a portion for the Levite. God takes care of those who serve Him.

The people on this great day of worship had their complete focus upon the LORD God.

Joy is not dependent upon your circumstances. Nothing had really changed in Judah. These were still hard times. The difference was their focus was on the LORD. You will never be happy if your focus is on becoming happy. When we become what God wants us to be in Christ we are exceedingly happy. He fills us with joy unspeakable. Our primary goal in life is to glorify God. When we do that our hearts overflow with His presence.

William Barclay wrote: The Christian is the man of joy; the Christian is the laughing cavalier of Christ. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christians more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces. ”

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. God remembers your faithfulness to Him. "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints" (Hebrews 6:10). You may have only one gift, but determine to use it fully to the glory of God. He never overlooks one deed done for His glory. Thank God, as Swindoll says, God never checks an applause meter to determine our rewards. He never goes by the latest popularity polls.

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2. The joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar (12:43). How far can the people in your community hear your joy in the Lord? They rejoiced because God had given them great joy. Do you sing the song of Jesus? Do you sing the new song of the Lamb (Rev. 5:8-14)? Does your worship service celebrate the joy of the Lord with praise in singing? Every worship service ought to be filled with joy and great Christian hymns.

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;" (Ephesians 5:18-19, NASB 1995)

3. A joyful heart is good medicine, writes the author of Proverbs (17:22). A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken (15:13). People want to be around a joyful heart. No body wants to be around a whiner. Even whiners do not want to be around one another.

4. Happiness depends on the heart, not the circumstances.

5. Have you noticed that Christians sing on all occasions, even at funerals? It is a time for celebration when a person dies in Christ because we know our loved one and friend is with Jesus Christ in heaven.

6. John R. Sampey told his classes in the seminary, Give all the keys of our life to Jesus. Give Him all the keys. Give Him all the keys. That is what Nehemiah meant by dedication. God is sovereign in our lives. Lord here is my all. I give it to You. "

"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2).

7. There are never any songs of joy in the wayward Christian's life. Thanksgiving and rejoicing come from obedience and full surrender to Jesus.

"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Alan Redpath reminds us, It's not what we give to Jesus but what we take from Him that makes us strong and victorious day by day. To discover that in the Lord Jesus all the fullness of the God head dwells bodily, and to know that we are complete in Him, to know that there is nothing we need at all for life or character which is not in Him, and held by Him for each one of us—that is His purpose for us (*Victorious Christian Service*, p. 174).

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