

Celebration

Nehemiah 11-12



Settling In

- ❑ In Lesson 7, we talked about “people needed.” Jerusalem was surrounded by a newly rebuilt wall (*Nehemiah 6:15*). The temple had been rebuilt earlier (*Ezra 6:15*). But the city needed more people (*Nehemiah 7:4*). So Nehemiah sought to get more people into the city.¹
- ❑ Nehemiah 11 continues the story of Nehemiah 7. Read Nehemiah 11:1-2.
- ❑ Nehemiah 11:3-24 provides a list of people who settled in Jerusalem.² Nehemiah 12:1-26 also provides a list of people. People are important!
- ❑ With the wall rebuilt and the city repopulated, it was time for celebration. Nehemiah 12:27-43 talks about the dedication³ of the wall, which was accompanied by joyful celebration.

Gathering Together

- ❑ Read Nehemiah 12:27-30. The Levites and musicians (singers)⁴ were brought together to help lead the joyful celebration (*12:27-28*).
 1. How did they celebrate? What did their celebration include?

- ❑ Before leading the people in worship, the priests and Levites ceremonially purified themselves; then purified the people, the gates and the wall (*12:30*).

📖 “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

Who may stand in his holy place?

The one who has clean hands and a pure heart...”
(*Psalms 24:3-4a, NIV*)

📖 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (*1 John 1:9, NIV*).⁵

Arranging the Service

- ❑ Read Nehemiah 12:31-39. Nehemiah arranged the worship service. After getting the leaders to go up on top of the wall, he assigned two large choirs to proceed (in opposite directions) around the top of the wall (*12:31, 38*). Nehemiah followed.



¹ Apparently many of the Jews preferred to live outside Jerusalem, but the city needed more people to increase its safety and strength.

² Nehemiah 11: 25-36 provides a list of places in which the Jews lived outside Jerusalem.

³ ‘dedication’ (*Heb. ḥănūkkā*) – initiation, inauguration, consecration. The Jewish holiday Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple in 165 BC.

⁴ ‘Levites’ – descendants of Levi assigned to various duties in the temple; ‘musicians’ (singers) – those skilled in playing instruments and singing, usually for the purpose of worship. “Music, then as now, was both a stimulus to, and expression of, joy...” (H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah* [Waco, TX: Word, 1985], 372).

⁵ The ceremonial purification in the Old Testament pointed to Jesus Christ in whom forgiveness and purification are ultimately realized. For it is ‘the blood of Jesus [that] purifies us from all sin’ (*1 John 1:7*). In the light of God’s holiness and righteousness, impurity brings shame and prevents true joyful celebration. Purification is necessary.

2. Besides proceeding along the wall, what were the two choirs assigned to do? (12:31)⁶

Participating in the Service

- Read Nehemiah 12:40-43. The two thanksgiving-choirs took their places in the ‘house of God’ (temple) along with Nehemiah, some of the officials, and the priests.

3. Based on verses 42-43, what did they do?

4. This celebration occurred on a particular occasion during Old Testament times. But God’s people should still be celebrating joyfully, singing songs of thanksgiving, offering sacrifices⁷ and rejoicing. How does this apply to Christians today?⁸

5. The people loudly rejoiced (12:43, cp. 12:27). What was the basis for their joy? What is the basis for Christian joy?⁹

- “The sound of their rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (12:43b). As Christians, we should be known for our joy, and our rejoicing should be “heard far away.” In Christ, we should bear the “fruit of joy” for the glory of God (Galatians 5:22, John 15:5, 8).

Worshiping after the Service

- The peoples’ worship did not stop after the special worship service. Contributions, offerings, giving, songs of praise and thanksgiving, and the various ministries in the house of God were continual expressions of worship before the one true God (Nehemiah 12:44-47).
- Our worship should be continual, characterizing every aspect of our lives (Romans 12:1).

Reflection/Application

- In Nehemiah’s day, God’s people could celebrate joyfully because of God’s gracious provision for them. God’s gracious provision for *us* is the crucified and risen Christ, in whom we celebrate with deep peace and joy in our hearts. Do you need to receive him?
- Believers, are you experiencing joy and thankfulness in your heart? Are you expressing it, both inside and outside worship services? Reflect on Colossians 3:15-17. Review this lesson (including the footnotes and Bible references) and ask God to refresh your heart.

⁶ ‘choirs to give thanks’ (Heb. *tôdâ*) – confession, praise, sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, thank-offering (12:27). In the context of verses 31, 38 and 40, the word *tôdâ* is more literally ‘praise-choirs’ or ‘thanksgiving-choirs.’

⁷ Since Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament law (Heb. 10:1-18), Christians don’t offer animal sacrifices. But we offer ‘sacrifices of praise [and service]’ (13:15-16). We give to others – ‘an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God’ (Phil. 4:14-18). We offer ‘spiritual sacrifices,’ declaring the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:5, 9). We ‘offer [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God’ (Rom. 12:1).

⁸ Of course, we do these types of things in our weekly worship services, but this also applies to special occasions. It should be noted that the occasion of the worship service in Nehemiah 12 was the dedication of a wall – a physical structure. ‘Nehemiah did not separate the secular (wall building) from the sacred (worship), which was all part of the community’s dedication to God’ (Mervin Breneman, *Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther* [Nashville: B&H Publishing], 264).

⁹ Christian joy is from God. It is realized through God’s gracious provision, and it’s based on our relationship with Him through Jesus Christ (see 1 Peter 1:8-9, Colossians 1:12-14, Galatians 5:22).