

Nehemiah 12:1-26 (ESV)

¹ These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, ² Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, ³ Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, ⁴ Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, ⁵ Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, ⁶ Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, ⁷ Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brothers in the days of Jeshua. ⁸ And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his brothers was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. ⁹ And Bakbukiah and Unni and their brothers stood opposite them in the service. ¹⁰ And Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada, ¹¹ Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua.

¹² And in the days of Joiakim were priests, heads of fathers' houses: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; ¹³ of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; ¹⁴ of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; ¹⁵ of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; ¹⁶ of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; ¹⁷ of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; ¹⁸ of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; ¹⁹ of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; ²⁰ of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; ²¹ of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

²² In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, the Levites were recorded as heads of fathers' houses; so too were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian. ²³ As for the sons of Levi, their heads of fathers' houses were written in the Book of the Chronicles until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. ²⁴ And the chiefs of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, 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, watch by watch. ²⁵ Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates.

²⁶ These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra, the priest and scribe.

Nehemiah 12:27-13:3 (ESV)

²⁷ And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. ²⁸ And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; ²⁹ also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰ And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

³¹ Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate. ³² And after them went Hoshai and half of the leaders of Judah, ³³ and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴ Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, ³⁵ and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph; ³⁶ and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them.

³⁷ At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east. ³⁸ The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, ³⁹ and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Gate of Yeshanah, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. ⁴⁰ So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; ⁴¹ and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; ⁴² and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader.

⁴³ And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. ⁴⁴ On that day men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the Law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns, for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered. ⁴⁵ And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon.

⁴⁶ For long ago in the days of David and Asaph there were directors of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. ⁴⁷ And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers; and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron.

¹ On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, ² for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³ As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

Nehemiah is a book with insights for us into restoration, renewal, leadership, and God's faithfulness.

Read Nehemiah 12:1—13:3

32. Who were the Levites and what roles did they perform within the community?

33. This is a “dedication” of the Wall (vs 27) – what “elements” went into preparing and staging this ceremony? What is purification (vs 30) and why? Visualize the ceremonies in your mind – the sights and sounds – what should be the role of music in worship? How great was the joy?

34. Tithing is the subject of Vss 44-47. How does it answer the three basic questions concerning tithing: “What” is to be given? “To whom?” and “where”?

Nehemiah 12:1-26 is another of those long lists of Names found in Ezra-Nehemiah – This time a list of 22 households of Priests from the days of Jeshua, the High Priest when the first return in 538 BC, narrated in Ezra 1-6, took place (vss 1-11) A corresponding list of households of the “next” generation (Joiakim's) follows in verse 12-21. Some have kept their household names, some did not. Fifteen of these are mentioned in Nehemiah's list in Neh 10:2-8. Vss 22-26 lists the heads of the Levitical families. Vs 26 is a summary. The list is relevant to the prominent appearance of the Levites in chapter 11, and even more so, their role in the Service for Dedicating the Wall to follow in Nehemiah 12. The list indicates continuity of the God's work and people.

When Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan, the Levites were the only tribe that received cities but were not allowed to be landowners “because the Lord the God of Israel himself is their inheritance” (Deuteronomy 18:2). Thus they were scattered among the tribes to keep alive the knowledge and service of God. The Tribe of Levi served particular religious duties for the Israelites both in the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple. Only a small number had returned with Zerubbabel - Ezra had to deal with a shortage of Levites when he came as well. (Ezra 8:15ff) That Nehemiah plugged them into a variety of positions both in the city and the region is interesting. The priests were drawn from the sons of Aaron, whose father was one of Levi's three sons. The rest of the Levites were servants of the priesthood and often worship officiants and teachers (as we see elsewhere in Nehemiah), and had political responsibilities as well. The gatekeepers were drawn from the Levites and had charge over the storerooms (vs 25).

The Levites were the “professional” musicians of returned Judah. They were musicians and singers – leading in songs of thanksgiving – Vss 8-9 and 24 indicate an antiphonal style of worship dating back to David and Solomon (cf vss 43-46). Many lived outside of Jerusalem, they needed to be sought out and brought to Jerusalem for the dedication of the Wall, as they were scattered among the people. (12:27-29)

The completion of a project was observed with an inauguration of the structure, an event appropriately accompanied by sacrifice and joy. Rites of inauguration have their place. The spectacle of the Dedication Service for the Wall could easily have been staged by Cecil B. DeMille. More than anything else – Joyful rejoicing is the theme of this chapter.

Two processions were formed, one with Ezra and Hoshai (a prominent layman) proceeded around the East Wall to the Watergate, the other with Nehemiah around the West to the Sheep Gate. The processions included a choir, half the leaders, seven priests with trumpets, and nine instrumentalists playing cymbals, harps and lyres, and singers. Starting perhaps at the Valley gate, the two groups marched on top of the wall in opposite directions, singing songs of thanks giving, accompanied by the instruments and trumpets, then joining together at the Temple for an elaborate ceremony. There were great sacrifices offered, and offerings for the Levites. Vs 47 summarizes again the continuity between the days of Zerubbabel and those of Nehemiah.

In marching around the city, on the walls – we see allusions to Joshua marching around Jericho, and Nehemiah's late night survey of the fallen walls condition in Neh. 2. For those marching on the walls were also many personal memories of the work they had put into them as they were rebuilt. Much more so, the providential Good Hand of God that had restored His Holy City. Psalm 48:12-14

The chapter ends with discussion of the organization and administration of the contributions and tithes given to support the ministry of the priests and Levites. The Mosaic Law answers three basic questions concerning tithing ... What is to be given? Lev 17:30-34, To whom? Num 18:21-32 and Where? Deut 12:1-14 and 14:22-29. These offerings were meant to come out of joyful worship and to serve the community - both those in service to God and the poor and the needy (Deut 14:29).