

Nehemiah: Rebuild and Renew

Lesson 8: Dedication and the Work Goes On

Key Verse: *“And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (Nehemiah 12:43).*

Priests and Levites (12:1-26)

- David had appointed 24 priestly divisions to serve in the temple (1 Chron 24:7-19). Nehemiah names 22 priests who had returned from Babylon with the Governor, Zerubbabel, and the high priest, Joshua (vv 1-7). These names roughly correspond to the names of those in charge of the priestly families in 12-21.
- Nehemiah names the Levites who returned with Zerubbabel (vv 8-9).
- Nehemiah then lists the High Priests since the return from Babylon (vv 10-11).
- Nehemiah concludes by listing the Levite and priestly families in the reign of Darius (probably Darius II). Ancient lists of names are notoriously difficult to pin down with variants occurring within and across various source documents.

Dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem (12:27-47)

- Nehemiah has the Levites from throughout the country come to Jerusalem for a joyful dedication ceremony (v 27).
 - o The festivities include songs of thanksgiving, instrumental music, and singing (vv 27-29).
 - o As a part of the ceremony, the priests and Levites purified themselves, the people, and the gates and wall likely by sprinkling them with the blood of sacrificed animals (v 30).
- During the ceremony, Nehemiah organized two great choirs to circle the city in opposite directions upon the wall (vv 21-39).
 - o The first choir included Ezra, a group of people, the choir, some priests with trumpets, Zechariah, musicians, and half the leaders of Judah.
 - o The second choir included Nehemiah, half the officials, priests with trumpets, and some singers.
- Their circling the city atop the walls was a firm rebuke to Tobiah's mocking that the wall would not hold a fox (see 4:3).
- After the groups completed the circle they met at the Temple for more singing, sacrificing, and rejoicing (vv 40-43).
- As a part of the ceremony, people brought their firstfruits offerings and tithes to the Temple (v 44) in fulfillment of the commitments they made in 10:37-39.
- Five hundred years after the Temple liturgy was established, worship again happened according to the plan first laid out by David (vv 45-47; 1 Chron 15: 19, 16:4-5, 37).

Nehemiah's Final Reforms (13:1-31).

- The chronology of chapter 13 is a little difficult to follow and is likely a summary of the reforms that happened throughout the end of Nehemiah's second stint as governor (see vv 6-7).
- After hearing the book of Moses read, especially the part about the Ammonites and Moabites being banned from temple worship, the people excluded the foreigners from their midst (vv 1-3).
- When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem for a second stint as governor, he was shocked to discover that Eliashib, the high priest, had permitted Tobiah a room in the Temple (v 7-8).
 - o Tobiah had family ties to Eliashib (6:17-18).
 - o Tobiah had been an enemy of Israel, opposing the wall (2:10-19; 4:3, 7; 6:1, 12, 17, 19).
 - o Tobiah was an Ammonite – a group of people banned from the Temple – and he was now living in one of the storerooms of the Temple (see vv 1-3).
 - o Nehemiah responded by throwing Tobiah out of the temple, having the rooms purified, and restored to their original purpose (vv 8-9).
- Nehemiah discovered that the Levites were not being provided for – so he rectified that problem and rebuked those not doing their job (vv 10-11).
- Nehemiah made sure the Temple was being properly supplied and put new people, people he could trust, into leadership positions (vv 12-13).
- Nehemiah corrected the fact that people were doing business on the Sabbath (vv 15-22).
 - o Nehemiah verbally rebuked the leaders of Israel reminding them of the trouble Sabbath breaking had caused the people in the past (v 17-18; see Jeremiah 17:19-27).
 - o He took action to have the gates of the city locked on the Sabbath (v 19).
 - o He explained to the merchants the change and created consequences for violating those changes (vv 20-21)
 - o He posted the Levites as guards of the gates (v 22).
- Nehemiah took on those who had married foreign women (vv 23-31).
 - o Apparently, many men had violated the promise of 10:30 to not take on foreign wives.
 - o Not only had they done so, but the children were adopting the culture/language of their pagan mothers (v 24).
 - o Nehemiah verbally rebuked them and physically shamed them by publicly beating them and pulling out their hair (v 25; see 2 Samuel 10:4; Isaiah 50:6).
 - o Even some of the priests had violated this commitment. A grandson of the high priest had married Sanballat, one of the enemies of Israel. Nehemiah chased him away (v 28).
- Nehemiah's efforts were for the purpose of keeping the Jewish worship free from idolatry. After addressing the problem of foreign wives, he once again attempted to get Temple worship back on track (vv 30-31).
- Three times in this chapter, Nehemiah asks God to remember him (vv 22, 29, 31). Nehemiah understands the fragility of the work and is asking God to sustain the work he gave his life to.

Sources

- Derek Kinder, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1979).
- Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022).
- Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1992).