

ZEAL FOR THE LORD: NEHEMIAH 12:27-47

“...during the half-century that I have been a Christian [Nehemiah] has helped me enormously, more perhaps than any other Bible character apart from the Lord Jesus Christ...no one should wonder, therefore, that I now regard him as a particular friend.” - J.I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 29.

I. Review

- A. The Word of God has been read and expounded by Ezra (for 5 hours!): “So Ezra the priest brought the Law... And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.” (Neh 8:2-3)
- B. The people celebrated the Passover and gave themselves to a covenant before the Lord: “Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them...Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. (Neh 9:34, 38)
- C. Nehemiah has done the hard work of organizing the repopulation of Jerusalem: “Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And 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. ² And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.” (Neh 11:1-2)

II. Nehemiah 12:27-47 – “So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.” (Neh 6:15)

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. 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. (Neh 12:27-47)

1. What preparations were required before the dedication ceremony began (vv. 27-30)?
2. What greater New Testament sign and reality did the preparation of purification foreshadow? How does this sign depict for us today the work of Christ on our behalf?

“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.” (Ps 69:1-2)

“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50)

“New covenant baptism is baptism into the name of Jesus, i.e., it signifies and seals the substance of faith union with Christ to that very faith which unites us to him. From it, therefore, faith draws all that is signified and sealed by water baptism. In this way, the Spirit draws our eyes to the inner meaning of the baptism of Jesus on the cross for us.”
 - Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 197.

3. Where did the procession walk during the ceremony? What did the two groups do? Who led them?

Thanksgiving Choir 1 (heading south):

----->

Ezra the secretary (v. 36)
 First half of leaders of Judah
 Zechariah and his fellow priests
 and companions

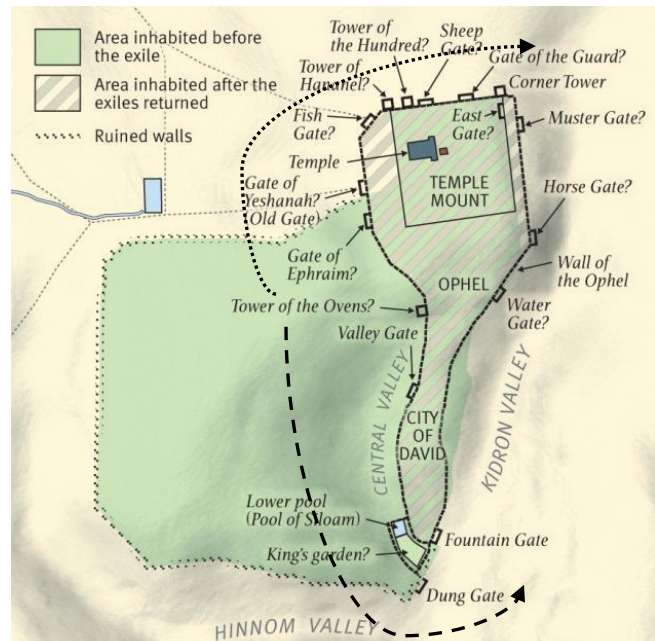
Thanksgiving Choir 2 (north and east):

.....>

Nehemiah
 Second half of leaders of Judah (v. 38)

“The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel... For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you.” (Ps 147:2,13)

4. What is the emphasis of v. 43? How can you tell? What was so important about the fact that this day had finally come?



“Let Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments! Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.” (Ps 48:11-14)

5. Why do you think joy is not more widespread in the Reformed community? What do you think is the stereotype of the Reformed community? Do you agree?

*“Fading is the worldling’s pleasure,
 All his boasted pomp and show;
 Solid joys and lasting treasure
 None but Zion’s children know.”*

*“Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD
 is your strength.” (Neh 8:10)*

6. Where does biblical joy come from? Where did it come from in v. 43? How is this true today? Is it for YOU?

“This spiritual joy consists in a delightful motion of the soul, generated by the Holy Spirit in the heart of believers, whereby He convinces them of the felicity of their state, causes them to enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace, and assures them of their future felicity.” – Wilhelmus a Brakel, a Dutch Puritan