

Dedication of the Wall

Bible Background • NEHEMIAH 12:27–43

Printed Text • NEHEMIAH 12:27–36, 38, 43 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 96

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson we will: **KNOW** that a part of our worship is thanking God and celebrating our restoration; **RECALL** times when God restored us; and **THANK** God for restoring us.

In Focus

Deshawn attended church with his parents as he grew up, sang in the choir throughout his childhood, and participated in the church youth group. He loved the Lord and committed his life to Christ at a young age. When Deshawn went away to college, he found a church to attend, but did not attend regularly due to a lack of transportation. In time, Deshawn became involved in activities unbecoming of a Christian and soon found himself in a backslidden state. He stopped trying to attend church at all, stopped praying, and turned away from God almost completely.

When Deshawn went home for summer break, he wanted to recommit himself to God. He missed feeling connected to his faith, the church community, and the love God always gave him, but he felt ashamed and guilty for falling into a lifestyle of sin. Deshawn's old youth pastor saw the tug he was experiencing and reminded him from the Word about the love of God and how nothing could separate him from His love. Deshawn heard and embraced His Word in his heart and rededicated his life to God.

Today's lesson reminds us that no pit exists where the restoration of God's love can never find or rescue us.

Keep In Mind

"Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off" (Nehemiah 12:43, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Purified (Nehemiah 12:30) *taher* (Heb.) – Cleansed and made undefiled ceremonially.

B. Rejoiced (v. 43) *samach* (Heb.) – Gladdened, made glad.

Say It Correctly

Azariah. az-uh-RI-uh

Ezra. EZ-ruh

Mattaniah. mat-uh-NI-uh

Micaiah. muh-KI-uh, mih-KAY-yuh

Nehemiah. nee-(h)uh-MI-uh

Zechariah. zek-us-RI-ah, -uh

KJV

Nehemiah 12:27 And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.

28 And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi;

29 Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem.

30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.

31 Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate:

32 And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah,

33 And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam,

34 Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah,

35 And certain of the priests' sons with trumpets; namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph:

36 And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them.

38 And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall;

43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

NLT

Nehemiah 12:27 For the dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem, the Levites throughout the land were asked to come to Jerusalem to assist in the ceremonies. They were to take part in the joyous occasion with their songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres.

28 The singers were brought together from the region around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites.

29 They also came from Beth-gilgal and the rural areas near Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built their own settlements around Jerusalem.

30 The priests and Levites first purified themselves; then they purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

31 I led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and organized two large choirs to give thanks. One of the choirs proceeded southward along the top of the wall to the Dung Gate.

32 Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them,

33 along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam,

34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah.

35 Then came some priests who played trumpets, including Zechariah son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, a descendant of Asaph.

36 And Zechariah's colleagues were Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. They used the musical instruments prescribed by David, the man of God. Ezra the scribe led this procession.

38 The second choir giving thanks went northward[a] around the other way to meet them. I followed them, together with the other half of the people, along the top of the wall past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall,

43 Many sacrifices were offered on that joyous day, for God had given the people cause for great joy. The women and children also participated in the celebration, and the joy of the people of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

The People, Places, and Times

The book of Nehemiah occurs during the post-exilic history of the Children of Israel after they were in bondage to Babylon for 70 years. During their bondage, they were bound to the rulers of Babylon and Persia and no longer lived in the Promised Land, which God gave them years prior. Because of their wanton disobedience and apostasy from God, everything they previously had was stripped and taken away. Their plight appeared hopeless and any prospect to rebuild or restore themselves looked impossible.

As the Israelites transitioned back to their land, the true plight of their low state came to light. God promised them after exile that they would return to their land and that He would restore them to fruitfulness, blessings and plenty. Any excitement or hope they left was replaced with wonder, doubt, and disappointment at the task that lay ahead for them to do. Restoration of their land, nation, and status would take time.

Background

Nehemiah, an Israelite who lived in postexilic times served the king of Persia as a cupbearer. While serving, he asked other Jews who passed through his town about Israelites who previously escaped captivity and still lived in Jerusalem. They gave a negative report: "The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire" (Nehemiah 1:3). When Nehemiah heard this, it caused him much distress, and he fasted and prayed to hear what God thought about the situation. Nehemiah asked God for favor so that, when he went to the king to ask for help, the king would grant him his request. And God granted Nehemiah his request. He gave Nehemiah favor and Nehemiah received permission from the king to go and assist the Jews in Jerusalem with rebuilding the wall of their city. When Nehemiah sought God, he reminded Him of His Word and His promise to restore Judah from their reproach: "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there" (Nehemiah 1:8–9).

At-A-Glance

1. Dedication and Purification (Nehemiah 12:27–36)
2. Restoration and Thanksgiving (vv. 38, 43)

In Depth

1. Dedication and Purification (Nehemiah 12:27–36)

Once Nehemiah received God's sanction and approval evidenced by the king's permission, he proceeded to rally the Israelites into rebuilding the wall, which they did amid great opposition. Every step of the way, their enemies ridiculed them, which added to the monumental task they faced. Here was a group of slaves, previously scattered all over, and they now began to band together as a nation to rebuild a city ravaged and completely destroyed by fire. Because of their own disobedience, apostasy, and rebellion, God had removed them from their land and taken everything from them. Now, as they turned their focus back to Him as their God, He made the way for them to return to the Promised Land.

Regardless of how far the people scattered, how far they strayed or how damaged they were, Nehemiah's visit promised hope as he declared even to those who tried to stop their work: "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:20). No longer would they be a reproach as God made a way for their restoration and reestablishing them as a nation. With the promise of God's favor and the king's permission, the Israelites began to work toward ultimate restoration. They believed God's promise and confirmed this by declaring, "'Let us arise and build.' So they put their hands to the good work" (2:18, NASB). Throughout the remainder of Nehemiah, we see that the Israelites faced obstacle after obstacle as they tried to rebuild the wall. Ridicule, accusations, harmful plots, and other injuries hurt them and threatened to kill them.

Each time, Nehemiah led the small nation to pray and seek the wisdom of God. Each time God gave them instruction on how to respond. Every time they prayed, their faith increased and strengthened even though they feared for their families and their lives. They responded in wisdom, set up guards, prepared to fight and never entangled themselves with their enemies' trouble. The Israelites remained focused on the task at hand. As a result, "the wall was completed... When all [their] enemies heard of it, and all the nations... saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God" (6:15-17, NASB).

Once the remnant finished the work, they also recognized that success was not based on their own hands or their own efforts but was due to the help of the Lord. Therefore, they dedicated the wall to God (12:27). A dedication refers to "a religious ceremony in which a person or a thing is set aside or consecrated to God's service" (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 345). After experiencing God's punishment for their rebellion, the Israelites expressed their gratitude to God by first dedicating or giving back to Him what He enabled them to complete. It showed they learned from their mistakes and were now ready to move forward with the next phase of their new beginning.

In addition to dedicating the wall, the priests and Levites purified themselves and the people (12:30). Purification referred to "the process by which an unclean person, according to the Levitical law, and thereby cut off from the sanctuary and the festivals, was restored to the enjoyment of all these privileges" (Easton's Bible Dictionary). Purification symbolized the washing away of their previous trespasses and gross misconduct and their renewed clean and righteous relationship with God. It demonstrated a cleansing of their association with the surrounding heathen nations and their affirmation as a people to be set apart for and by God. Dedication of the wall and of themselves represented an act of worship and celebration over their restoration.

2. Restoration and Thanksgiving (vv. 38, 43)

After a second choir sings and Nehemiah follows the remaining group in a procession to the Broad Wall (v. 38), Nehemiah 12:43 says, "that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." When the Israelites rejoiced, they verbally and physically expressed gratitude to God for the blessings He allowed to occur on their behalf. This was in spite of their circumstances and the still present uphill battle they faced to rebuild their city. Despite their uncertain future and the trial of rebuilding their nation and their lives, they rejoiced at achieving and fulfilling the task of building the wall. This one task symbolized that with God all things were possible and through a restored relationship with Him, He would not only direct the people's paths, but also allow them continued success.

The order and structure of their worship, with two choirs organized and placed in specific places around the wall and the city, demonstrated the seriousness of their experience and intentions. Not only was there much order, but also their worship was "heard from afar" (v. 43, NASB). Nations had

seen the threatened demise of the Israelites, and now they would see the people's renewal and restored place of blessing and favor with God.

Search the Scriptures

1. Describe the various duties of the Levites as it pertains to worship (Nehemiah 12:27, 30).
2. How do dedication and purification lead one to restoration (12:43)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Again, the link between confession of one's sin and the reading and hearing of Scripture is the beginning of one's journey of faith. With the hearing and reading of Scripture, the act of forgiveness emerges as the vehicle to accept that only God can and does change or transform us.

Liberating Lesson

Many times Christians tend to hold mistakes and past sins of other believers over their heads, even though the Bible says all sin and fall short of His glory. Why do Christians tend to condemn believers who fall or make mistakes when God Himself says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34)?

Application For Activation

As believers, we should define our forgiveness and restoration in terms of God's revelation and not our own perspective. When we accept Christ, we accept the Lord: "The repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in" (Isaiah 58:12). Just as God promised the nation of Judah restoration through the coming of Christ, we possess an even greater hope for experiencing fruitfulness and success because He actually lives within us. He is with and in us. He is able to repair every broken situation, fragmented relationship or disparaging circumstance if our lives are committed to Him and if we commit these areas to Him.

Over the next week, review any areas of your life that you need the Repairer and Restorer to fix and heal. Have you prayed and given these areas to Him? Do you trust Him to fix them in spite of opposition, trials, or temptations? Can you rejoice as you experience small wins? Make a commitment this week to trust God and to rejoice in who He is and what He has the power to do in your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Nehemiah 12:27–36, 38, 43

This Scripture shows how God calls and uses ordinary people to do His will—to do extraordinary things. If we are willing to obey Him and follow His lead, great works can be done to help build God’s kingdom. Even though Nehemiah was in a foreign land, he did not forget his homeland. With God’s lead and the permission of Artaxerxes, he was able to restore the dignity of his ancestral home. After being appointed governor of the province surrounding Jerusalem, Nehemiah was given permission to secure the materials he needed to rebuild the fallen wall. In today’s discussion, after much opposition, the work was completed. The wall was finished in fifty-two days. However, the first-century historian

Josephus said that the duration was two years and four months (Wycliffe, 906–911). It was time for the dedication of the wall to Almighty God who made the work possible. He brought about the success.

27 And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.

In Hebrew, “dedication” is chanukkah and is pronounced (khan-ook-KAW). It means “consecration—set aside or consecrated to God’s service.” During the hard work of rebuilding the wall, the people were opposed by Sanballat of Samaria, Tobiah of the Ammonites, and Geshem of Arabia. Nonetheless, the work was complete and it was time to consecrate this great work to God. So the Levite priests came to Jerusalem to assist in the consecration ceremonies. On such a momentous occasion, they sang songs of thanksgiving with the music of cymbals, psalteries, and harps.

28 And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; 29 Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem.

Israelites from surrounding villages joined in the celebration. Many knew firsthand what mighty works God had done in their lives. God led them back to their homeland. Therefore, they recognized how far God had brought them to a better place—a blessed place. Therefore, He deserved praise and thanksgiving.

30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.

The word “priests” in Hebrew is kohen (ko-HANE). This could have been the levitical priests or high priests. Along with the Levites, they purified themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall. In the Hebrew “purified” is taheer (tah-HARE), and it means “to be clean ceremonially.” In other words, they prepared themselves to go before a holy God.

31 Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate:

In Hebrew, “dung” is ‘ashpoth (ash-POHTH). It means “ash heap,” “refuse heap,” “dunghill.” Nehemiah appointed the positions the worshipers were to take as they gave thanks unto the Lord.

32 And after them went Hoshaiiah, and half of the princes of Judah, 33 And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, 34 Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, 35 And certain of the priests’

sons with trumpets; namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph: 36 And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them.

The list of participants in the ceremony is presented here. Included in that number was Ezra the scribe who had also led a group back to Jerusalem from captivity. This was indeed a time of great celebration.

12:38 And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall;

Nehemiah showed that there was an important crowd of people who worshiped that day and gave thanks for what God had done. God restored their dignity and their safety by allowing the wall to be built. In the eyes of their enemies, the Israelites were elevated because they could see that indeed God was with His people. He had not deserted them, even though God's people had deserted Him many times.

12:43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

The word "sacrifices" in Hebrew is zebach (ZEH-bakh), which means "thanks offering." Therefore, they gave thanks and they rejoiced. The word "rejoiced" in Hebrew, samach (sawmakh), means "gladdened," or "made glad." The Israelites appreciated what God had done for them. Therefore, even the wives and children were glad. Those around the Israelites saw their worship and thanksgiving. They saw what God had done for His people. Not only were the people celebrating a completed task, the wall being built, they were celebrating their restored nation—the restored Jerusalem.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Celebrating God's Greatness
(Psalm 96:1-9)

TUESDAY

Celebrating the Lord's Coming
(Psalm 96:10-13)

WEDNESDAY

Celebrating God's Blessings
(Deuteronomy 12:2-7)

THURSDAY

Celebrating Freedom from Oppression
(Nahum 1:6-15)

FRIDAY

Celebrating the Restored Nation
(Jeremiah 30:18-22)

SATURDAY

Celebrating the Restored Jerusalem
(Isaiah 66:10-14)

SUNDAY

Celebrating a Completed Task
(Nehemiah 12:27-36, 38, 43)