

Notes on Nehemiah Chapter 12

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V. The Dedication of the Wall – Chap. 12

A. A Genealogy of the Priests and Levites

Verses 1-11

1. What information is given in 12:1-11?

List of the priests who returned with Zerubbabel

Vv 1-26 names the priests and Levites who had returned with Zerubbabel in the first group, along with some of their descendants. Perhaps these lists are included because the priests and Levites led in the celebration of the wall in the last part of this chapter.

Vv 1-7 lists the heads of the priests in the days of Jeshua, who came up with Zerubbabel. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7:6ff had listed some of the people in general who returned with Zerubbabel. These verses lists the leaders of the priests in that group.

The Levites who came with Zerubbabel and Jeshua

The priests were of the tribe of Levi, but the other Levites were assigned to help the priests in their work in the temple. Verses 8-11 list Levites with Jeshua, the high priest who had come with Zerubbabel.

It includes those who led in the praises and thanksgiving to God (v8). It also lists the descendants of Jeshua, who would also have served as priests, perhaps as high priests.

Verses 12-26

2. What information is given in 12:12-26?

Priests who were in the days of Jeshua's son Joiakim

V10 says that Jeshua's son was Joiakim. Verses 12-21 list the priests who served in the days of Joiakim. These appear to be the sons of the priests listed in vv 1-7.

Priests during the days of Joiakim's son Eliashib and his sons

Vv 10,11 listed the descendants of Jeshua, including his son Joiakim and Joiakim's son Eliashib, etc. Verses 22,23 simply informs us that a record of the heads of the houses of the priests and Levites were kept during the reign of Darius the Persian in the days of these descendants of Jeshua till Jaddua.

And heads of the houses of the Levites till Eliashib's descendant Johana were written in the book of the chronicles. (I am not sure what chronicles this refers to. I cannot find this information in the Old Testament books of 1 or 2 Chronicles. But the reference here could be to some other chronicles, which may not have been important enough to place in the inspired record.)

List of the Levites of the next generation

Vv 8,9 had listed leaders of the Levites during the days of Jeshua, including those who led in thanksgiving. Now verses 24-26 list leading men among the Levites who lived during the days of Joiakim, son of Jeshua the priest. These would have been descendants of the Levites named in vv 8,9 and would have lived during the days of Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe.

Again he lists those who led in giving thanks. These were organized in the manner arranged by David. Also listed are those who were gatekeepers or porters. These would guard the store-rooms (presumably where the gifts described in 10:35-39 were kept).

Dedication of the Wall

Verses 27-29

3. For what purpose did people gather at Jerusalem in 12:27-29?

Levites brought to Jerusalem for the dedication of the wall

Nehemiah here returns to the discussion of the wall. He describes the celebration that occurred when the wall was dedicated after its completion. Since this was to be a big celebration, the Levites were brought into Jerusalem to lead it. They lived in other villages around Jerusalem (vv 28,29).

The Levites were to lead the thanksgiving and singing at the dedication, also using various instruments of music. Most likely the songs used were religious and involved praise to God. But we remember that the Old Testament expressly allowed for the use of instrumental music in such worship. See 1 Chronicles 25:6; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:6. Once again, the contrast to the New Testament, rather than convincing us to use instruments in worship today, shows that God has not approved such for today. When they were allowed in the Old Testament, they were clearly and expressly named and described. If God wants them today, why are they not likewise today named and described?

For further information, see our articles about instrumental music in worship at our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verse 30-37

4. How many groups of celebrants were appointed (v31)? Where did the first group go?

5. What did the people do as they marched?

The priests and Levites purified

In preparation for the dedication ceremony, the priests and Levites performed ceremonial purifications for themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall. No one could participate in any congregational worship if he were ceremonially unclean, and no one could touch what was unclean without himself becoming unclean. The laws of cleanness and uncleanness related to such things as touching a dead body, secretion of various body fluids, etc. Before these leaders could purify others, they first had to purify themselves.

See Ezra 6:20; Nehemiah 13:22,30.

The first group of celebrants described

The celebration consisted of two large groups of choirs or singers who marched around the wall in opposite directions. They apparently both began at one point of the wall, then one group marched in one direction around the wall, while the other group marched in the other direction. Then they met on the other side of the city. As they went, they praised God and gave thanks.

The first group is here described. It was led by Ezra the scribe (v36). From the original meeting place, this group traveled to the right toward the Refuse or Dung gate. Various leaders who went with them are named, and some of the points they passed on the wall are named. Apparently the wall had stairs at one point, at least, that this group had to ascend.

Verses 38,39

6. Which way did the second group go? Who went with them (v38)?

The second group described

Nehemiah accompanied the second group, that marched the opposite direction around the wall. These verses describe some of the gates and towers on the wall that they passed. They too offered thanksgiving as they marched.

Verses 40-43

7. Where did the two groups meet? What did they do when they met (vv 40-43)?

The two groups meet at the temple

The two groups of worshipers then met and worshiped at the temple, the house of God. These verses then name some of the leaders of the group that accompanied Nehemiah. Some played trumpets, and others sang led by a director.

Having met at the temple, they then offered sacrifices to God and rejoiced. Apparently those who marched around the walls were men, but the women and children met them at the temple and joined them in rejoicing and praising God, so that the sound of the rejoicing could be heard a long ways away.

In this way the wall was dedicated, and the people expressed their joy in having completed it. The reason for their joy was attributed to God for His blessings to them.

Verse 44

8. What arrangements were made in 12:44?

People appointed various remaining jobs

Besides the dedication of the wall, the people took the opportunity to appoint other tasks to various people. In particular, some were put in charge of the rooms where the gifts of the people would be stored. These included the offerings, firstfruits, tithes, etc., as required by the law. In chap. 10, as part of their covenant to serve God, the people had promised to bring in these gifts to the temple. The people of Judah likewise rejoiced for the ministry of the priests and Levites.

Verses 45-47

9. Who was provided for in vv 45-47?

Portions set aside for the singers and gatekeepers

The priests and Levites performed the duties that had been assigned to them. But the singers and the gatekeepers had been organized and assigned duties by David and Solomon. In particular, the singers had been led by Asaph. They led the people in praising and thanking God. See 1 Chronicles 25 & 26; 2 Chronicles 29:30.

In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah, portions were given to provide for these singers and for the gatekeepers. They were given a portion for their provision each day. So the Levites and priests and all the spiritual leaders were provided for by the people. See notes on chap. 10; cf. Numbers 18:21,24.

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