

**Let Us Arise and Build
(Lessons from Nehemiah)
Dedicating Our Work to God**

Intro: You have been both gracious and appreciative as we have studied Nehemiah together each week. I have heard people at times says, “I do not enjoy studying passages about ancient times; I just don’t like history.” But maybe their attitude would change if they thought about what that history is. Bible “history” is “His story.” It is the story of what God has been doing in and through His people. If we read Nehemiah with that attitude it will capture our interest and instruct us greatly in our relationship with the Lord as well.

Today we look at what may be the climactic paragraph in the book of Nehemiah. As we have followed the story we have seen how God’s people worked together to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by the Babylonians over a 144 years before. Remarkably in 52 days, with the leadership of Nehemiah and the hard and cooperative work of all the people, they cleared the rubble and repaired the walls and restored the gates of the city—a remarkable story.

But that effort was the starting point for a spiritual revival as well. No wall, no matter how strong, could protect a people whose lives were disobedient to the Lord. Therefore it was imperative that God’s people experience spiritual revival. Both Nehemiah and Ezra the priest led them toward this renewal. In our last earlier lessons we’ve seen the components of that revival: 1) reading the Law; 2) reinstating divinely-commanded worship; 3) confessing sin; and 4) committing to personal holiness.

And as we saw last week, after the wall had been repaired and the people had renewed their commitment, Nehemiah instituted the process of making Jerusalem a populous and holy city once more, filling it with people who wanted to live near the Lord.

But now that all of this has been done, it was appropriate for there to be a formal dedication of the work to God. Nehemiah gathered God’s people together to celebrate—not dull meaningless history, but “His story”—the exciting and joyous reflection upon what He had done among them.

The Dedication of Jerusalem’s Wall

“Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres.” (Nehemiah 12:27)
Note that this verse mentions the “dedication” of the wall two times. You have heard the Hebrew word for “dedication”—Hanukah. That word is used today for the December festival that commemorates the re-dedication

of the temple in 164 BC after its desecration of Antiochus Epiphanes. But here it is also used in the Hebrew text to describe the dedication of the wall. But why a dedication ceremony like this we might ask?

This dedication was an acknowledgement of the Lord's role in accomplishing this task.

Note how that all along Nehemiah had related all that he had done to God.

He spoke of it as what his God was putting in his mind to do for Jerusalem" (2:12)

He spoke of the king's help as how the hand of God had been favorable to him (2:18).

He assured the people, "The God of heaven will give us success." (2:20).

He observed that God had frustrated the plans of the enemies to halt the work (4:15).

Finally he observed that the work had been accomplished with the help of our God (6:16).

He lived with this awareness of that God was working through him and his fellow-Jews. Consequently it was only natural then to complete the task by thanking and worshipping Him for all that had been accomplished.

The dedication was intended to present the finished product to Him, for His purposes and for His glory.

Just as altars and the restored temple had been consecrated to God, so now the very walls of the city and perhaps what they represented, the whole city, was consecrated to God.

Note the features of Israel's dedication ceremony.

The priests from around the city were summoned to participate.

According to the Law, it was their privilege to conduct the activities of worship:

"So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites, from Bethgilgal, and from their fields in Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 12:28–29)

Everything was ceremonially purified so that it could be consecrated to the Lord without the offense of ceremonial uncleanness.

"And the priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates, and the wall." (Nehemiah 12:30)

A procession of two thanksgiving choruses went up on the wall and walking in opposite directions they made a large semi-circle around the temple below. There was Nehemiah and Ezra, along with the leaders of the city, and the priests who blew their trumpets, and the Levitical singers who would play on their instruments and sing praises to God.

Maybe all these people standing on the wall was Nehemiah's answer to Tobiah's taunts months before, "Even if a fox should

stand on that wall it would fall down.” No, this nine-foot-wide wall would support hundreds of people.

But more importantly the singers sang songs of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord while all down below rejoiced with great joy at what the Lord had accomplished through them. It was a time of joyous worship. The two processions would finally come down from the wall to worship as sacrifices were offered to the Lord on the temple altar. *“and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.”* (Nehemiah 12:43)

What a scene that must have been—a well organized effort to bring everyone together in celebration for the success of a divinely-inspired and divinely assisted effort. It was the culmination of months of hard work, of trying times as enemies opposed them; yet with faith and perseverance they saw it through and glorified the Lord for all that had been done. And

The Dedication of Our Work

The Lord is continuing to work through His people.

It would be a sad day when God’s people can only thinking of Him working in the past and not in the present. If we cannot see ourselves as a part of the continuing story of God’s work in the world, we need to take another look.

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12–13)

As we carry out the work of teaching the gospel and showing love to others God is working through us to save souls and to work out His vision of a redeemed humanity.

We need to celebrate our successes with worship (thanksgiving and offerings).

When we see success in the Lord’s work we may prematurely celebrate our efforts and forget the one who made it all possible. When we celebrate success without honoring God, then we idolize ourselves and the project, and forget who makes our success possible. So then we could say, “No work is complete until God has been thanked and praised.”

And, He is pleased when we honor Him for His guidance and help.

We need to approach God with holiness.

Like the people of Nehemiah’s day we need to appreciate the principles of consecration of ourselves and our work to God. Though God’s temple is a spiritual house and the concepts of ceremonial cleanness have passed away with the coming of the better things of the new covenant, the need for consecration to God remains important.

God wants to be served by a holy people who present holy offerings. Consider these verses:

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”” (1 Peter 1:14–16)

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8)

We need to worship in God’s prescribed way.

In their zeal to celebrate, God’s people did not resort to innovation to express their worship. They respected what the Lord had revealed in the Law about who was to conduct the worship and how it was to be presented to the Lord. We should remember that even the singers and instruments of David mentioned were not unauthorized innovations though not originally part of the Law, but commands that came through God’s prophets after the Law was given

“He then stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the LORD through His prophets.” (2 Chronicles 29:25)

And so today, the forms of worship change from OT to NT (Levitical priests vs. all disciples as priests, physical temple vs. spiritual temple, musical instruments vs. melody in the heart, animals sacrifices vs. spiritual sacrifices); but the need to worship in God’s prescribed way is still important.

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)

We need to worship with real joy and enthusiasm.

Most churches begin at 11 o'clock sharp and end at 12 o'clock dull! It is hard to keep up our enthusiasm when we are overworked, worn out, and mostly uninvolved in the activities of worship. It is just easier to fall asleep, to daydream or to think on other things that peak our interest. But the Lord deserves better. He has given us reasons to rejoice and to be enthusiastic in worship.

When the gospel came to Samaria and people experienced the blessings of the kingdom Luke says, *“There was much rejoicing in that city.” (ac. 8:8)*

When Peter described the attitude of the Christians of northern Turkey he wrote:

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen

Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:6–9)

Conclusion: Let us not miss the important lesson of Nehemiah 12! Nothing we do for God can be accomplished without His help. Let us do His work; and when we accomplish it, let us thank and praise Him for what He has done in us.

And on a personal level, the same thing is true. Whatever the Lord may accomplish through you, never forget to complete the work by thanking and praising Him!