

TAKING PRIDE IN AN ACCOMPLISHMENT Sunday, August 18, 2013

Unifying Topic: DEDICATION OF THE WALL

Lesson Text

I. Purifying The City (Nehemiah 12:27-30)

II. Dedication Celebration (Nehemiah 12:31- 38)

III. Rejoicing Without Weeping (Nehemiah 12:43)

The Main Thought: 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).

Unifying Principle: A sense of pride, joy, and thankfulness goes with the accomplishment of tasks. What triggers people to desire to celebrate specific accomplishments? Nehemiah's portrayal of the dedication of the wall is an act of worship thanking God and celebrating a community being restored.

Lesson Aim: To acquaint students with the celebration of joy the returning Israelites had at the completion of the walls of Jerusalem.

Life Aim: To point students away from self-interest in accomplishments, and turn instead to pointing to the glory and faithfulness of God.

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.

12:28 And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi;

12:29 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.

12:30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.

12:31 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:

12:32 And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah,

12:33 And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam,

12:34 Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah,

12:35 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:

12:36 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.

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;

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.

HISTORY:

Nehemiah 12:1-26

¹The priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel (1-9) — ²Nehemiah recorded the names of the first priests and Levites to return from exile. Zerubbabel led the people back to Judah about 93 years before the time when Nehemiah and his companions returned. Jeshua was the name of the chief priest at the time of Zerubbabel (vv.1-9).

Succession of High Priests (10-11) — Nehemiah then recorded the family of the chief priest. It was important for Jews to know about their ancestors. But it was especially important for the priests to know about their ancestors also. They could only do their special work if they were genuine descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses. The chief priests came from one family. When the people had had a king, they had counted their dates by the years of the king's rule. But now they did not have a king, so they counted their dates by the names of the chief priests (1 Chronicles 6:3-15; Nehemiah 12:12) (vv.10-11).

Priests "in the days of Joiakim" (12-21) — Then Nehemiah recorded the names of the most important priests at his own time. These men were the heads of the families of the priests when he was the ruler of Judah. Joiakim was the chief priest. Most of the family names are the same as those of Zerubbabel's time when Jeshua was the chief priest (Nehemiah 12:1-7). The priests clearly used the same family names. It was important for them to know to which family they belonged (vv.12-21).

Records kept "in the days of Darius the Persian," and "in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and in the days of Ezra, the priest, the scribe." (22-26)— The people kept records for many years of the families of the priests and the Levites;

¹ http://www.tbcpdx.org/curriculum/10-3_exile/lesson_13_faithful.pdf

² <http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/nehemiah-lbw.htm>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

(Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua were the chief priests during these years.) These records were very important. Only the descendants of Levi, the son of Jacob, could serve as Levites. Only the descendants of Aaron, who was a Levite and the brother of Moses, could serve as priests (Nehemiah 7:63-65). Some of the Levites praised and thanked God. This was their special task at the temple. Centuries before, King David had made rules about the worship at the temple. David also wrote many of the Psalms (songs) that these Levites used to praise God. Other Levites took care of the temple and the equipment for the temple (vv.22-26).

LESSON:

Nehemiah 12:27-30 Purifying The City

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. This begins to describe the role of the Levites at the dedication of the city wall. The Levites had settled in various places surrounding Jerusalem but they were brought back for the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. The job of the Levites was to lead the people when they praised God. The dedication was to be a time of gladness, with thanksgiving. There would be much singing, playing of instruments, praising God, and blowing of the victory trumpet. Singing is reminiscent of the joy at the completion of the temple. Joy is the right attitude at all feasts of celebration before the Lord. ³To dedicate something to God means that you are giving it to God. The Jews knew that God helped them to build the wall.

12:28 And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi;— There were specific Levitical families that came from the villages round Netophathi (south of Jerusalem). They were the sons of the singers; all Levites. Their responsibility involved singing.

12:29 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. The sons of the singers also came from Beth-Gilgal, a village erected where the Israelites encamped after they had crossed the Jordan. ⁴The singers had built them villages round about Jerusalem; that they might be near it, to do their duty when required; by which it appears that the said places were near Jerusalem. They periodically had to come to Jerusalem to minister with their music and song.

12:30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall. Before they commenced dedication of the walls, the priests and Levites realized the necessity for self-purification. They would be instrumental to sanctify others and set themselves apart for God, with purity of mind and sincerity of intention. Without the purity and holiness, we cannot effectively communicate with or worship God. Sometimes they killed an animal for a sacrifice (2Chron.29:20-24) or they washed their bodies and their clothes, perhaps by sprinkling the water of purification on them (Numbers 8:6-7). Purify means to make something clean. ⁵The purification of the priests and Levites was of a spiritual nature. The purification of gates and wall would be of a more physical nature. All was purified to honor God.

Nehemiah 12:31- 38 Dedication Celebration

12:31 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: Nehemiah brings up; brought the princes of Judah. These were all the leaders from Jerusalem and its surrounding villages and cities. These were the chiefs of the nation, both lay and clerical. The leadership of the entire Jewish community gathered for the dedication festivities. Nehemiah divided the people up into two companies or processions (singers or choirs). This first group led by Ezra went on the right hand upon the wall toward the Dung Gate. The Dung Gate was leading to the city dump. You arrived at the Dung Gate after you have passed the Valley Gate. The Valley Gate and the Dung Gate are linked together. Spiritual "dung" represents two things: The shame of the old life and the glory of the old life. The wall was their accomplishment. It was protected for the temple, but it also protected the people. Without walls, the Jews would become even weaker. The people were spread across the wall.

12:32 And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah,— Then followed Hoshaiah and half of the princes of Judah. These processions advanced in different directions; the first one went right and they proceeded to gave thanks and sang psalms.

12:33 And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam,— Along came Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam in this procession.

12:34 Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah,— Along came Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah in this procession.

³ <http://www.easyenglish.info/english-learners-bible/nehemiah-taw.htm>

⁴ <http://biblecommenter.com/nehemiah/12-29.htm>

⁵ <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/nehemiah/13.html>

12:35 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:— These certain priest's sons blew the trumpets, marched, and thanked God with joy in coming to the wall.

12:36 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. At the head of one procession went Ezra, the scribe with the musical instruments of David. This refers to the same kind of instruments David's musicians used, or the actual instruments constructed in David's time.

NOT APART OF THE LESSON: Verse 37

12:37 And at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward. The walls were so wide and strong that the people could march on them. The Fountain Gate was the gate by the Pool of Siloah. The fountain represents the life source of God Himself. They went up by the stairs to the Water Gate on the east wall of the city.

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;— Now we get to the second company that marched upon the wall. At the head of the second half of the procession was Nehemiah marching clockwise to the north. Ezra and his group went right; Nehemiah and his group went left going from the Tower of the Furnaces to the Broad Wall.

NOT APART OF THE LESSON: Verses 39-42

They proceeded around the city in a different direction. The idea described in these verses is that there were two distinct processions moving in opposite directions. As they walked around the wall, they gave thanks and praised the Lord. After walking around the circumference of the walls, they met at the Temple.

Nehemiah 12:43 Rejoicing Without Weeping

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. This was a great day of rejoicing as they offered great sacrifices. These sacrifices probably referred to thank offerings. The people would partake and eat of these offerings and rejoice for it was God who made them rejoice with great joy. The entire family rejoiced including the wives and children for the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

SUMMARY:

⁶The Jews were accustomed to having workers and watchers on the walls of Jerusalem, but now Nehemiah and Ezra assigned people to be worshipers on the walls. They conducted a dedication service with such enthusiasm that their shouts and songs were heard "afar off" (v. 43). Note that the emphasis was on joyful praise on the part of all the people. Singing is mentioned eight times in this chapter, thanksgiving six times, rejoicing seven times, and musical instruments three times. Thankfulness is always part of true celebration. These people were thankful.

The order for the dedication service was unique. The leaders and singers were divided into two groups, with Ezra leading one group and Nehemiah (following the choir) directing the second group. Why did Ezra and Nehemiah organize this special kind of a dedication service? Why not just meet at the temple area, let the Levites sing and offer sacrifices to the Lord, and send everybody home? To begin with, it was the walls and gates that were being dedicated; and it was only right that the people see and touch them. But there is another reason for this unique service: The people were bearing witness to the watching world that God had done the work, and He alone should be glorified. The enemy had said that the walls would be so weak that a fox could knock them down (4:3), but here were the people marching on the walls! What a testimony to the unbelieving Gentiles of the power of God

But the most important thing about this dedication service was not the march around the walls. It was the expression of joyful praise that came from the people. They offered their praise thankfully (vv. 27, 31, 38, 46), joyfully (vv. 27, 43-44), and loudly (vv. 42-43), accompanied by various instruments (vv. 27, 35-36). It was not a time for a quiet and meditative worship. It was a time for "pulling out all the stops" and praising the Lord enthusiastically.

APPLICATION:

In completing a specific task, we would want everyone to know that God made it happen! So as we celebrate with others, God should never be left out. God should ever be before us because in accomplishing the task, it was never in our ability, but it was His ability in us! Praise God!

⁶ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/nehemiah-dedicates-the-wall/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>