

NEHEMIAH 12

DEDICATION OF THE CITY WALLS

The beginning of this chapter details the names of a large number of priests and Levites, who were eminent in their day among the Jews who returned from Babylonian captivity. This register was inserted here in order to keep those righteous men in remembrance, for Psalm 112:6 says that “the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.” This register begins with the names of the priests and Levites who came with Zerubbabel when he led the first group of Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem. The succession of high priests during the Persian monarchy is recorded in verses 10 and 11 – from Jeshua (who was high priest at the time when the people returned from Babylon) down to Jaddua (who was the high priest when Alexander the Great came to Jerusalem after he conquered Tyre). As we read this record of the succession of the priests and Levites, we have good reason to acknowledge God’s favor and care for His people; for as one generation of ministers passes into heavenly glory, another one always comes!

The building of the city walls of Jerusalem was done with a great deal of fear and trembling; but now this chapter gives us an account of the dedicating of the walls, with a great deal of joy and triumph! “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Ps. 126:5). Nehemiah’s beloved and beautiful Zion was once more enclosed by walls and bulwarks; the burden which had temporarily weighed him down while he was an exile in a strange land was now lifted off. But until the entirety of the accomplished work was laid as a thank-offering at the feet of his Heavenly Father and Friend, Nehemiah’s heart was not satisfied; nor could he thoroughly enjoy the results of his labor. On the day that was appointed for this dedication ceremony, the Levites were called to assemble themselves; and songs of rejoicing were practiced before the big day arrived, so that there might be one loud, harmonious thanksgiving arising from the long procession that would be formed. Preparations for this special occasion involved the purification of the priests, the Levites, the people, the city gates, and the walls. This purification was probably done by the sprinkling of the water of separation (as it was called in Numbers 19:9); and this water was a foreshadowing of the blood of Jesus, which purges away our sins, causing us to become fit to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14).

After being divided into two groups, the dedication-procession started from a common point on top of the city walls. One group – headed by Ezra the scribe, along with half the rulers of Jerusalem and a number of priests and singers – filed off to the right. At the same time, the other group – accompanied by

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A record of the priests and Levites who came up with Zerubbabel, and their succession of descent – verses 1-26
- ❖ The dedication ceremony for the walls of Jerusalem – verses 27-43
- ❖ The settling of the offices of the priests and Levites in the Temple – verses 44-47



Nehemiah and another band of rulers and leaders – started in the other direction. As they marched around the top of the city walls, they sang, the bands played, and the people followed. At last, both groups arrived at the same part of the wall; and there – standing opposite to each other – they united their song. The “singers sang loud,” the people rejoiced, and even the wives and children chimed in! So great was the noise, and so joyous was the sound, that the “joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off!” (verse 43) What a welcome tribute was thus laid at the feet of the King of Heaven; and what a blessed influ-

ence was now cast upon the enemies who had opposed the work, and who were now unwilling witnesses of its success! As Nehemiah laid his head upon his pillow to sleep that night, he was surely lulled to rest by the sweet words and sweeter realization that “they that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him!” (Psalm 126:5-6)

The last four verses of this chapter give an account of the remaining good effects of the universal joy that was exhibited at the dedication of the city wall. When the solemnities of a thanksgiving-day leave such impressions upon ministers and people, so that both are more careful and cheerful in doing their duty afterward – then they are indeed acceptable to the Lord. Such was the case here. The ministers were more careful than they had formerly been of their work; and the people were also more careful than they had been before, concerning the support of their ministers. When they observed how diligently these Godly men served, and what pains they took in their important work; the people thought nothing too much to do for them, in order to encourage them. Care was taken for the collecting of the dues for these faithful ministers; and care was also taken that after they had been gathered in, they were also properly paid out.

The scene that was depicted in this chapter was truly one of great thanksgiving; and even as we read it now, thousands of years later, we cannot help sharing the same feelings of joy and gratitude to the Lord that filled the minds of those happy Jews. But something even better than all of these things has happened to us! Our Savior has secured for us a place in the New Jerusalem above! We were once outside the covenant, and outside of God’s family. But by His grace, we can do much more than merely look at this passage in the Book of Nehemiah and say, “What a beautiful story!” Truly, we have an even better story! Jesus has torn aside the veil that once shut us out of the Holy of holies in the heavenly Temple, and now He graciously invites us to enter into His presence!

Lord, we ascribe thanksgiving to You for all the mercies that we enjoy; and we pray that just as You preserved and protected Your holy city of Jerusalem, You would also extend Your Divine protection to our families, churches, and nation! Amen.