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The Dedication of the Walls of Jerusalem
Nehemiah 12: 27-47

The dedication of the walls of Jerusalem DIG: How did the people celebrate the dedication of the wall in Jerusalem? What specific actions did the priests, the Levites and the singers take? What was the purpose of the processions? What groups were included? Who led each group? What direction did they go? If you were there, what would you see? Hear? Feel? If your local media were covering this event for the evening news, what picture stories and interviews would they be sure to get? What was the mood of the dedication ceremony? What steps of appreciation do the people take to ensure that those who served in the Temple – the priests, the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers – were cared for?

REFLECT: When you think of Nehemiah's lonely walk around Jerusalem, how does that compare with the grand procession here? What "before" and "after" story could you write from Nehemiah's diary? Have you seen or experienced anything like that in your life? What steps is your place of worship taking to ensure you are taking care of those who are serving the Lord? How do you go about thanking ADONAI for shoring up the spiritual resources of your life? How are you, like Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah in finding, developing and using your gifts to build up God's Kingdom?

445 BC During the ministry of Nehemiah (**to see link click Bt – The Third Return**).
Compiled by: The Chronicler from the Ezra and Nehemiah Memoirs
(see **Ac – Ezra-Nehemiah from a Jewish Perspective: The Nehemiah Memoirs**)**.**

Ezra made it a priority to read **the book of the Torah** to all the people when **he** arrived in **Jerusalem** (**to see link click Bm – Ezra Reads the Torah Scroll of Moses**), and over a decade later, **Nehemiah** was glad to **dedicate the walls** after **they** were **completed** and held a joyous **dedication** (see **Ch – The Completion of the Walls Despite Opposition**).

The dedication (Hebrew: *hanukkah*) of the wall culminates the efforts of **the people** under **Nehemiah's** inspired leadership. Great enthusiasm must have characterized **their** procession to the **joyful** music. After the recapture of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus from the Seleucids on 25 Kislev 165 BC, **the Temple** was again rededicated (Second Maccabeus 1:18), an act that was the basis for the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

A Preparation for the joyous dedication: Even though **the people** of Judah had left **their** comfortable village life for the challenges of living in the big **City**, they carried with them a positive attitude, an infectious joy. Despite having to scrounge around for building materials and basic resources, **they** considered the adventure a privilege? Why? How? Because **they** fixed **their** eyes on **ADONAI.**[273] **At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought out Levites from all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with joy and thanksgiving, and songs with cymbals, harps and lyres. The companies of singers were also assembled from the district around Jerusalem and from the Netophathite villages (Ezra 2:22), and from Beth-gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmavet, for the singers had built communities for themselves round about Jerusalem. After the cohanim and the Levites had purified themselves, they purified the people, the gates, and the wall (Nehemiah 12:27-30).** We are not sure about the details of exactly what the purification included. It probably included fasting, abstaining form sexual intercourse, making sacrifices, and perhaps bathing and using clean garments **(Genesis 35:2-3; Numbers 8:21-22; First Chronicles 29:15** and **35:6; Ezra 6:20; Nehemiah 12:22; Malachi 3:3).**[274]

> **B1 Two large choirs started at the Valley Gate: Then I led the leaders of Judah up on top of the wall, and I appointed two great choirs to give thanks (Nehemiah 12:31a). Two processions led by priests and**

Levites, set out from the Valley Gate in opposite directions and made a circuit of the wall, meeting at the East Gate. Their "stepping out by faith" was a symbolic act to claim the blessing of **ADONAI**. In **their** day, to walk on a piece of property was to claim it as your own. **YHVH** said to **Abraham, "Get up! Walk about the Land through its length and width – for I will give it to you (Genesis 13:17). He** also said to **Joshua, "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I am giving it to you" (Joshua 1:3).** So, that **joyful march on the walls** was **their** way of saying, "**We** claim from **YHVH** all that **He** has for us, just as **our forefathers** claimed this **Land** by faith."[275]

B2 The first large thanksgiving choir, moved counterclockwise, walking to the right:

Ba Hoshaiah and the Levitical choir: And going after them, Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah (Nehemiah 12:32).

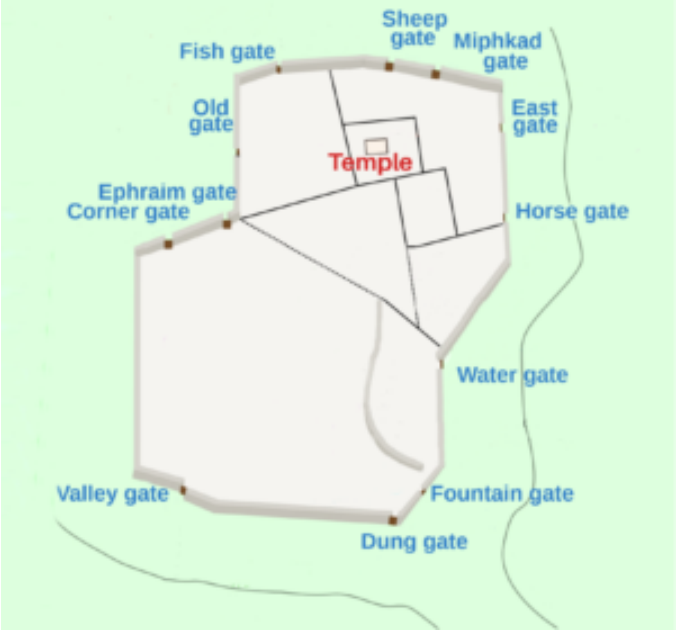
Bb Seven priests with trumpets: Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah and Jeremiah, some of the cohanim with trumpets (Nehemiah 12:33-35a)

Bc Zechariah and eight Levitical musical instruments: Zechariah son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph, and his brothers, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani – all with the musical instruments of David the man of God (Nehemiah 12:35b-36a)

Bd Ezra the scribe: And Ezra the scribe was ahead of them (Nehemiah 12:36b). Ezra led the first large choir walking to the right and Nehemiah led the other choir walking to the left. Apparently **Ezra** continued to live in **Jerusalem** as part of the priestly community, thirteen years after arriving in **the Holy City**.

C One choir right moving counterclockwise on top of the right side of the wall: One of the processions went to the right on top of the wall toward the Dung Gate. They went over the Fountain

Gate (Nehemiah 3:15) and continued up the stairs of the city of David at the ascent to the wall, and passed, above the house of David all the way to the Water Gate (Nehemiah 3:26) toward the east (Nehemiah 12:31b and **37).**



There were two great processions, probably starting at **the Valley Gate** on the western section of **the wall**, the point at which **Nehemiah's** inspection of **the walls** began (see **Bx – Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls**). By starting at that strategic location and walking in opposite directions on top of the wall, the two choirs reenacted his earlier midnight investigation, arriving at **the Temple** for the dedication service. The first procession led by **Ezra** and **Hoshaiah** moved in a counterclockwise direction on **the wall**; the second with **Nehemiah** moved in a clockwise direction. **They** met at **the East Gate** and entered **the Temple** and entered there with much **joy. A joyful heart is good medicine (Proverbs 17:22 NASB),** and **A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken (Proverbs 15:13 NASB).** Isn't that the truth! People want to be near the person who smiles and sings their way through life**. A joyful heart** is contagious. And it fits any situation, no matter how bad the circumstances.[276]

Their walking **on top of the wall** visually demonstrated that **the walls**

were strong, a rejoinder to Tobiah's earlier mocking claim that the wall would be so weak that even a fox on top of it would crumble it **(Nehemiah 4:3)**. Perhaps **Nehemiah** wanted Tobiah to see that with **God's** help the project was completed in spite of his and others opposition. Since **the people** carried no spears, swords, or bows, because the enemy had no doubt withdrawn. Seeing the two large parallel **choirs** parading **on the walls** drawing a sacred circle must have been an impressive sight.[277]

C One choir went left moving clockwise on top of the left side of the wall: The second thanksgiving choir proceeded to the left. I followed them, along with half of the people on the wall above the Tower of the Furnaces as far as the Broad Wall, over the Ephraim Gate (or **the Fish Gate** as seen in **Nehemiah 3:3 located in the center of the north wall**)**, the gate of the old city, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate. They stopped at the Gate of the Guard (Nehemiah 12:38-39). Nehemiah, behind the singers, led the other half of the procession.**

B1 Two large choirs meet and stood in the House of God: So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the House of God (Nehemiah 12:40). The walls were, appropriately, the circumference, not the focal point of the celebration, and it was **the choirs**, not the officials, who led the way.[278] When **the** two **choirs** met **in the Temple** the three motifs which have dominated **Ezra-Nehemiah** – **the Temple,** spiritual revival**,** and **the walls** – were brought together.

B2 The second large thanksgiving choir, moved clockwise, walking to the left:

Ba Nehemiah and half of the officials: So did [Nehemiah] along with half the officials with me (Nehemiah 12:41a)

Bb Seven priests with trumpets: And the cohanim – Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah with their trumpets (Nehemiah 12:41b)

Bc Jezrahiah and eight Levitical singers: And also

> **Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer.** To the accompaniment of musical instruments, **the singers sang under the direction of Jezrahiah (Nehemiah 12:42).**

A Performance of the joyous dedication: Joy is not dependent on outward circumstances but upon an inward choice. When you have chosen to focus on what's important in any situation, have a positive attitude. It all depends upon what you choose to make your focus. **On that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced, for God had given them great joy (Psalm 48:12-14). The women and children also rejoiced. The joy in Jerusalem could be heard from far off (Nehemiah 12:43).** The emphasis at this concluding celebration is one of unqualified **joy**; the word itself, as a verb or a noun, comes no less than five times in this verse. One can only imagine the emotional impact of the procession, not only for **Nehemiah**, who would see it as a triumphant conclusion to **his** major task, but also for **the builders**, who had labored so courageously on **the wall**.[279]

This was the third time in **Isra'el's** history that **their shouting** was **heard from far off.** The soldiers **shouted** so **loud that the ground shook when the ark of the Covenant came into their camp (First Samuel 4:5)**, but that eventually led to shameful defeat. When **the Temple** foundation was laid nearly a century earlier, the workers **shouted for joy**, but **their joy was mingled with sorrow (Ezra 3:8-13).** However, because **the shout** from **Yerushalayim** during this dedication service was sheer **joy** to the glory of **ADONAI**, and because it is recorded in the Bible, it was **a shout** heard around the world![280]

In the twelfth and last example of leadership in the life of Nehemiah, effective leaders are positive people (see **Bt – The Third Return**)**.** Do you bring joy to those you lead? Is your leadership marked by a good sense of humor? I know of few things more magnetic than a smile or a cheerful disposition, especially among those in ministry. How easy it is to become intense, severe, grim, and even oppressive! **The people** under **Nehemiah's** leadership felt free to rejoice and laugh. Do the people under your leadership feel that freedom? **The Jews** on **the wall** rejoiced over **God's** provision. **They** sang together, and **their joy** flooded the hillside, so all could hear and be glad. Had **their** circumstances changed? No, **they** had changed. Have you?[281]

Not long after, **Nehemiah** took advantage of the celebration to provide ongoing worship. **On that day Jerusalem men were appointed over the storehouses**

for the offerings, firstfruits and tithes. They were to gather into them the portions from the fields of the cities required by the Torah for the kohanim and the Levites. Nehemiah had **the cohanim and in the Levites who were ministering** follow the order of responsibilities outlined more than five-hundred years earlier by **David** (see the commentary on **the Life of David Eq – David Makes Arrangements for Temple Services**)**,** and presumably established by **Solomon**. **They kept the ceremonial functions of their God and the ceremony of the purification according to the command of David and of Solomon his son. For of old, in the days of David and Asaph, the chief of the singers (First Chronicles 15:19, 16:4-5** and **37), there were leaders of the singers who sang songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.**

Their goal was not to please **people** but **ADONAI**; **their** model for worship was not the current fad but biblical instruction. They were careful to follow what was written in **God's** Word. They may have been torn between scriptural authority and the pull of creativity to adapt to a new situation. **God** is pleased with creativity; but more importantly **He** demands faithfulness to **His** revelation. The combination of the two is a constant challenge to those in charge of leading worship.[282]

The result of a ministry that aimed to please **God** and to be faithful to **His** Word was that **in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Isra'el gave daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers. They also set apart the portion for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the portion for the sons of Aaron (Nehemiah 12:44-47).**