

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: SESSION 10

**A NATION RESTORED
CELEBRATING GOD'S WORK
NEHEMIAH 12:27-47
04/02/2017**



MAIN POINT

Spiritual growth as individuals and as a church requires remembering what God has done in the past and trusting Him to direct our future.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Begin by taking a poll to figure out who in your group has been at our church the longest amount of time and who has been there the least amount of time. When you reflect on your time as a part of our church, what stands out as one of the high points?

What is one way you would like to see our church grow as we follow God into the future?

Today we are taking the time to both celebrate where God has brought us from and get excited about where He is taking us in the days ahead. The grand finale of Nehemiah's ministry took place with the joyous dedication of the rebuilt wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah's task, along with Ezra's, was to restore the people as well as the wall. The dedication celebrated the rebuilt wall as well as the revitalized people.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ NEHEMIAH 12:27-30.

How did the people celebrate the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem? What specific actions did the priests, Levites, and singers take?

Why was worship the appropriate and best response to the completion of this massive project? What does this celebration tell us about the people and their relationship with God?

After the wall rebuilding project was completed, the people held a celebrative worship service to dedicate the wall to God and thank Him for His provisions in the project. Because of the significance of this moment, singers and musicians from around the region were brought in to lead in the worship, and religious leaders from the area came to participate, too. The people understood that only through God's provision and protection were they able to complete this project and complete it as quickly as they did. They saw their work as a way to serve God and a way to reunite them as His people.

What is the biggest step of faith God has asked you to take during your time at our church? What role did our church play in helping you take that step of faith?

What are the broken walls in your life at this time? In the life of our church? What would a step of faith look like for you or our church in that area?

Our obedience provides the best vantage point from which to observe God's power at work. For the Israelites, there was no doubt that only because of the miraculous power of God were they able to complete this project. As a church, we have the opportunity to watch God work miraculously in our midst, and reflecting on the "walls" we have built together as a church is one way we communicate God's greatness.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ NEHEMIAH 12:31-43.

What was the purpose of the processions? Which groups were included in the processions? Who led each group?

Review Nehemiah's walk around Jerusalem from chapter 2. How does that compare with the procession here?

This must have been an impressive celebration. In Nehemiah 2, we read how Nehemiah took a secret trek around Jerusalem to assess the state of the wall and prepare for the work ahead. Now, having completed the work, he led in another procession around the city. This time, however, the procession was a very public display of worship, celebration, and thanksgiving.

Why do we have difficulty remembering to credit God for victories and blessings rather than attributing them to self-effort or good fortune?

What happens in the "house of God" (vv. 40-43)?

Sacrifice is still an important part of worship today, but it looks different for Christians following the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. What sacrifices does God expect of His children today?

Read Romans 12:1. How is sacrificial living worship? What does it look like practically to offer yourselves as a living sacrifice each day?

Here as elsewhere in the Old Testament, thanksgiving and celebration were expressed through sacrifice. Although the type of sacrifice is different in New Testament worship, sacrifice is still important (see Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15). If we love God, we must give ourselves and our goods to Him. The joy that God gives is genuine and can best be experienced in fellowship with the community of God's people.

HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ NEHEMIAH 12:44-47.

What steps of appreciation do the people take to ensure that those who serve at the temple—priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers—are cared for?

As a part of their worship, the people also were obedient in their offering, which included a daily contribution from their goods, crops, and money in order to support those serving in the temple. This was so important that the storerooms required their own staff to oversee the collection and distribution of the offerings.

What is the point of our tithes and offerings today? Why are they important parts of worship?

What steps as an individual and as a community of faith are we taking to care for those who are serving the Lord at our church? What additional steps could we take?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

The completion of the wall of Jerusalem gives us an inspiring “before” and “after” story of what God can do through His people. Have you seen or experienced anything like that in your life?

How can commemorating spiritual victories help others recognize the mighty nature of God?

What is preventing us from sharing the message of God’s faithfulness with people around us who need to know and revere God?

PRAY

Close in prayer, asking that your eyes will be open to recognize God’s mighty work in the days ahead. Spend time thanking God for all the ways He has worked through our church to change lives in our church, our community, and the world. Pray also for the days ahead, that He would work in even more powerful ways and that we would be obedient to join Him in His mission.

COMMENTARY

NEHEMIAH 12:27-47

The completion of the wall of Jerusalem was cause for a time of dedication and celebration. Music filled the air (vv. 31,38), and there was great joy (v. 43). God calls us to celebration as well as service. The law even commands thankfulness and rejoicing (see Deut. 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11-15; 26:11; 27:7; cf. 28:47). All had been completed. The decree of Cyrus (see Ezra 1:1-4) had been fulfilled (see Ezra 1:5 to Neh. 7:73a), and the community had been restored (see Neh. 7:73b–12:26). The prophecy of Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1) had begun to be fulfilled, and the stage was now set for the completion of God’s work in Israel (Jer. 31:31-34). All of this would be acknowledged in the dedication of the work brought about by God.

12:27. The text does not tell us how long after the completion of the wall this dedication took place. We can assume it was very soon. Nehemiah did not separate the secular (wall building) from the sacred (worship), which was all part of the community’s dedication to God. It was natural and appropriate to call a special worship service at the completion of the wall-building project that God had guided and protected.

The worship leaders are very important in the celebration: “the Levites were sought out.” “Songs of thanksgiving” translates a Hebrew word that in vv. 31,38,40 is translated “choirs.” The term should be translated throughout the passage as “thanksgiving choirs.”

12:28-29. “The singers also were brought.” It is not clear whether the singers were counted among the Levites or considered a separate group.

These villages were not all in the same area. Netopha was southeast of Bethlehem; Gilgal was near Jericho; Geba and Azmaveth were northeast of Jerusalem in the Benjamite area.

12:30. The text does not give details on exactly what the purification included. It no doubt included fasting, abstaining from marital intercourse, making sacrifices, and perhaps bathing and using clean garments (see Gen. 35:2-3; Num. 8:21-22; 1 Chron. 29:15; 35:6; Ezra 6:20; Neh. 13:22; Mal. 3:3).

Under the new covenant we are not bound by strict regulations regarding sacrifices and cleansings (cf. 1 John 1:7-9). But we should recognize the emphasis here on holiness. The leaders of God's people must be sensitive to things that defile them. They must constantly be cleansed in order to be holy instruments in God's hand. Holiness is one of the central themes of the Bible and something that God calls us to (see Lev. 11:44; 20:7; 20:26; Rom. 7:12; 12:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 2 Pet. 3:11).

12:31-43. The first person narrative with "I" appears again, the first time since 7:5. This must be from the Nehemiah Memoirs. No doubt the whole section of vv. 27-47 is based on these memoirs; they have been incorporated into the whole. Nehemiah was careful to give the leaders their proper place and responsibilities.

The walls were wide enough for the processions referred to. According to Kenyon's excavations, Nehemiah's wall was nearly nine feet wide. Although it is not specified, the starting point must have been the Valley Gate (Neh. 2:13). The first group, Ezra's procession, went to the south ("to the right") and followed the wall in a counterclockwise direction. The second part of the procession started off to the north and followed the wall in a clockwise direction (v. 38). "Along with Azariah, Ezra" (v. 33) indicates Ezra apparently continued to live in Jerusalem as part of the priestly community.

Here as elsewhere in the Old Testament, thanksgiving and celebration were expressed through sacrifice. Although the type of sacrifice is different in New Testament worship, sacrifice is still important (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:15). If we love God, we must give ourselves and our goods to him. The joy that God gives is genuine and can best be experienced in fellowship with the community of God's people. We should not be ashamed to be heard when we praise God.

"God had given them great joy" is the climax of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah.

12:44-47. The priests and Levites pleased the people because they "performed the service of their God ... according to the commands of David." Their goal was not to please people but God; their model for worship was not the current fad but biblical instruction. They were careful to follow what was stipulated in God's Word. The ministers 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.

The result of a ministry that aimed to please God and to be faithful to His Word was that "all Israel contributed the daily portions" (v. 47). Faithful ministers encourage faithful worshipers.