

June 15, 2025

Nehemiah 12:27-47 NIV 1984

27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. 28 The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. 30 When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall. 31 I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. 32 Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, 33 along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, 35 as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, 36 and his associates—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani—with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the scribe led the procession. 37 At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east. 38 The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people—past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, 39 over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped. 40 The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, 41 as well as the priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets— 42 and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. 43 And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. 44 At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites. 45 They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. 46 For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. 47 So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron



The Hand of God in Worship and Celebration

Nehemiah 12:27-47

BIG IDEA: When we consider the greatness of God and all he has done for us, we naturally respond with a worship that pulls out all the stops.

OUTLINE

1. Introduction: context and circumstances
2. Worship is Focused on God
3. Worship Has Vitality
4. Worship is Done with Quality
 - Excellence
 - Preparation
5. Worship and music
 - Worship and music are not synonymous
 - Music is biblical
 - Music expresses God-glorifying emotion
 - Instrumentation
 - Variety
 - Congregational
6. Conclusion

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. What was the greatest celebration you have attended? What made it great?
2. Read about the preparations for this ceremony (12:27-30). What aspects stand out? Read the background of purification ceremonies in Exodus 19:10–15. Although we do not conduct such ceremonies in the church today, what might we learn from this preparation for worship?
3. Notice in 12:31 that Nehemiah has returned as the masterful administrator. (His first-person voice left temporarily after 7:5.) As you read verses 31–43, try to see, hear, and feel what this great gathering must have witnessed. Draw a simple picture that helps you imagine it. Ponder what this scene must have meant to those gathered, many of whom had helped rebuild the wall they were now walking on. What would it be like for you to be there?
4. What words in verses 27–43 show the attitudes of people’s hearts? Where have you found these words before in Ezra and Nehemiah? How would you sum up what these books are teaching us about the attitudes of our hearts in worship?
5. Notice the final phrase in Nehemiah 12:43 and in Ezra 3:13. How do you think the surrounding peoples responded to this sound? In what ways is joy a crucial witness to the world around God’s people?
6. The joy does not disappear! What is the focus of the joy in these verses? What can we learn here? In what ways might this passage and this lesson’s chapters (chapters 11–12) encourage us today as we think about ordering our lives as God’s joyful people in this needy world?

-Questions adapted from ESV Knowing the Bible: Ezra & Nehemiah; J.I. Packer, Dane Ortlund, Lane T. Dennis, and Douglas Sean O’Donnell, editors.

Praise to Jesus. Why not have a praise party today? The people of Judah used instruments “of David the man of God” (v. 36). It is reasonable to believe that their songs were found in the Psalms. Psalms 147-150 are songs of praise. Either alone with Jesus or with friends and family, praise the Lord who has done astounding things!

Repentance through Jesus. Spend time in confession and repentance. Confess the times when your attitude towards worship was perfunctory because you lost sight of the Lord by forgetting what he has done for you.

Consecration to Jesus. Consider the greatness of God and all he has done for us, made real for us through Jesus Christ. Pull out all the stops and worship God with singing and dancing in such a way that neighbors across town will hear!

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nehemiah 11 and 12 show God’s people together living out the faith they’ve affirmed: repopulating Jerusalem, celebrating in corporate worship, and institutionalizing ongoing temple worship.

Nehemiah 12:27–47 provides a glimpse of God’s people doing what we were created to do: worship him! Purification and sacrifices enfold this celebration (vv. 30, 43), showing the need for cleansing and mercy from a holy God. The celebration overflows with a joy that God intends and enables (see esp. v. 43). Music erupts, both vocal and instrumental.

- ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. Look at 12:27 and 12:43 and describe the emotions and conditions of the hearts of the Israelites who attended the Dedication of the Wall around Jerusalem. (The worshippers celebrated with “gladness,” “thanksgiving,” “rejoice with great joy,” and “rejoiced.”)
2. Have your children search the passage for when singing, the singers, and music are mentioned. Why is singing such a part of worship?
3. What is the basis of our worship? What has God done in history that deserves our celebration? What is God doing now that deserves our worship? What has God promised to do that deserves our worship? Worship is our response to God’s revelation to us of who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. When we worship, we lift high God for who He is and what He has done. The Bible records the amazing grace God has shown His people, primarily in the salvation that He won for believers in Christ. God has promised to always be with us, and He continues to seek and save the lost as well as protect and grow His people. He has also promised to make all things new and will return to bring in the new heavens and new earth.)

Scriptures for further study:

Psalms 48, 95

1 Chronicles 15:16-24

1 Chronicles 16:4-7

FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Psalms 95:1-3

Ephesians 5:18-20

Colossians 3:16

1 Chronicles 15:16-24

1. In verses 27 and 43, the people celebrate with gladness, thanksgiving, and great joy. What's something God has done in your life that makes you want to celebrate? How do you usually respond when you experience His goodness?

2. The passage shows that worship was focused on God and involved preparation and excellence. What does it look like for you to prepare your heart for worship—at youth group, Sunday worship, or even personal time with God?

3. Worship in Nehemiah 12 includes music, singing, instruments, and participation from the whole community. Why do you think music is such a powerful way to express worship? How do different types of music help you connect with God?

4. The passage reminds us that worship and music aren't the same thing, but music can express worship. Besides music, what are other ways you personally worship God?

5. Sometimes we come to worship distracted, tired, or just spectating instead of participating. What helps you focus on God in worship? What's one step you could take to be more engaged during worship services?

6. How can you honor the different worship styles or music preferences of others in your church, while still worshiping sincerely from your heart?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. As a non-believer or new believer, what have been some of your general impressions of church worship services in the time that you attended church? Has that been a largely positive experience, or not so much? What has most drawn you to worship, and what things have you most struggled with?
2. How can you tell when worship has a God-centeredness, or more of a man-centeredness?
3. What are some ways you can better prepare for worship?
4. In what ways can you be less of a spectator and more of a participant in worship?
5. Why do you think music is such a vital part of worship? Why does God desire for us to sing and make music to him? What kinds of worship music do you find particularly edifying when you worship God? Besides music, what other parts of the worship experience are most uplifting for you?
6. In what ways can you better appreciate that other people may speak a different musical heart language? How can you express your own preferences for worship while honoring the different preferences of others?

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)