

CAPITOL STUDIES

MARCH 30, 2022 • WEEK 14



NEHEMIAH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM SUSA

Contents

The Leaders of Worship	2
Past Leaders	2
Chief Priests	2
Chief Levites	3
The Day of Worship	3
Preparations	3
Processions	4
Programs	5
Portions	6
About Capitol Studies	7



Verse of the Week

Nehemiah 12:45-46

For they performed the worship of their God, ... ⁴⁶For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God.

Nehemiah: Builder with Praise



IN NEHEMIAH 12, WE READ AGAIN of those who did their work not for their own praise but wholly for the praise of God. When a job is done for the glory of God, no matter how menial it seems, God is honored as if it were the greatest job in the entire world.

Johann Sebastian Bach “would often write the Latin phrase, *Soli Deo gloria* – only to the glory of God, and sometimes, *In Nomine Jesu* – in the Name of Jesus, on his manuscripts, even on such instructive matters as the *Inventions*, written for his own children. Can you imagine helping your child, say, with his math homework, and writing on the paper, ‘In the Name of Jesus’ or ‘to God alone the glory’? It is interesting to see to what an extent Bach carried his faith, even in secular matters. Bach instructed his students ‘to make a well-sounding harmony to the glory of God’... [He said,] ‘The aim and final reason of all music should be none else but the glory of God’... His attitude was that of a servant of God, simply a craftsman doing what he was supposed to do, what he was hired to do, as a musician.”¹

Pastor Arin Hess

Chaplain, Capitol Studies



INTRODUCTION

Bach is known for his many antiphonal works. “By constantly repeating this rhythm and these words, Bach makes all the stronger point of the text.”² This was probably why the choirs of David and Nehemiah’s days used antiphony also.

“The earliest part of this chapter completes the listing of the priests and Levites involved in the worship of God at Jerusalem and in the care of the city. The major topic dealt with here, however, is the dedication of the wall, previously completed (6:15) but never formally dedicated with an activity recognizing the blessing of God on the nation.”³

I. THE LEADERS OF WORSHIP AND PRAISE

A. Past Worship Leaders

Nehemiah 12:1-11

Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, ²Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, ³Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth ⁴Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, ⁵Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, ⁶Shemaiah and Joiarib, Jedaiah, ⁷Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah and Jedaiah. These were the heads of the priests and their kinsmen in the days of Jeshua. ⁸The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah who was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving, he and his brothers. ⁹Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brothers, stood opposite them in their service divisions. ¹⁰Jeshua became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada, ¹¹and Joiada became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua.⁴

First, Nehemiah lists the 22 Levitical leaders who had arrived almost 100 years earlier. These godly leaders, led by Zerubbabel (sometimes called Sheshbazzar, Ezra 5:16) and Jeshua, returned from exile during the reign of Cyrus (538-536 BC). Zerubbabel was a descendent of the previous kings of Judah and, as such, would normally have been the heir apparent to the throne. Jeshua was the high priest under whom these Levite families would have served. Among these Levites were those whose job was to lead the music of thanksgiving and praise. It appears there were two choirs—Mattaniah leading one, and his brothers, Bakbukiah and Unni, leading the antiphonal (echo) responses in the second choir.⁵

B. Present Worship Leaders: The Chief Priests

Nehemiah 12:12-21

Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of fathers’ households were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; ¹³of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan ¹⁴of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; ¹⁵of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; ¹⁶of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; ¹⁷of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin,



of Moadiah, Piltai;¹⁸ of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan;¹⁹ of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;²⁰ of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber;²¹ of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah,

Because Darius II the Persian King (v. 22) reigned from 423-404 BC, we have another verification of the time frame of this book. Between 70 and 100 years have passed since Zerubbabel's return, but notice that most of the same priestly families are still listed. These families were led by godly men who instilled a spiritual zeal in their offspring. Now their offspring would lead the nation in worship of God, as they once had. Godly leaders in our families. Godly leaders in our churches. These are great needs in our world today!

C. Present Worship Leaders: The Chief Levites

Nehemiah 12:22-26

As for the Levites, the heads of fathers' households were registered in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan and Jaddua; so were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian.²³ The sons of Levi, the heads of fathers' households, were registered in the Book of the Chronicles up to the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib.²⁴ The heads of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers opposite them, to praise and give thanks, as prescribed by David the man of God, division corresponding to division.

²⁵Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers keeping watch at the storehouses of the gates.²⁶ These served in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.

We again see recognition of those faithfully serving God. Before the temple was initially erected, King David had established 24 priestly divisions, designating specific responsibilities to each. He assigned certain groups to sing and/or play instruments (1 Chron. 23:30; 25:1, 6). Even the way they sang was important. Choirs were to echo each other in praise to God. Praise and thanksgiving were the essence of all temple music. As a musician himself, David knew that music was an important vehicle to draw hearts to God.

Under the governorship of Nehemiah, some Levites were stationed as gatekeepers, keeping watch at the temple entrances and overseeing the temple storehouse (offering). Much like greeters and ushers who welcome in our local churches, these people were recognized as having essential positions.

II. THE DAY OF WORSHIP AND PRAISE

A. Preparations

Nehemiah 12:27-30

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they





might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres. ²⁸So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites, ²⁹from Beth-gilgal and from their fields in Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰The priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates and the wall.

The time had come for the actual dedication of the completed city walls. Preparations needed to be made. Musicians were invited. Instruments were assigned. But this was, in a sense, a dedication of a revived and purified people also. It would have been worthless to dedicate the walls if the men and women behind it had no clear testimony for their God. In an outward display of their love and commitment to Him, the priests purified themselves, as did the rest of the Levites and the general population. Even the walls were purified. This meant they were being set apart for worshipping the almighty God. Here was a great event to tell the world what He had done. Every servant of God from in and around Jerusalem was invited to this celebration of thanksgiving.

B. Processions

Nehemiah 12:31-39

Then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall, and I appointed two great choirs, the first proceeding to the right on top of the wall toward the Refuse Gate. ³²Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah followed them, ³³with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, ³⁵and some of the sons of the priests with trumpets; and Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, ³⁶and his kinsmen, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. ³⁷At the Fountain Gate they went directly up the steps of the city of David by the stairway of the wall above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east. ³⁸The second choir proceeded to the left, while I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of Furnaces, to the Broad Wall, ³⁹and above the Gate of Ephraim, by the Old Gate, by the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

These musical groups led by Nehemiah and Ezra probably numbered into the hundreds. Can you imagine the big, beautiful sound of the combined voices and instrumental accompaniment? By this time even part of the populace was probably following them from gate to gate. The two groups marched in opposite directions atop the walls. Archaeological digs have uncovered what is thought to be a portion of Nehemiah's wall. It appears to be at least 9-10 feet wide at the top. This would allow for a large group to walk around the city over perhaps some of their families' very own construction. Remember how the opposition



had once said the walls would collapse if a fox walked on it? God will vindicate His own. You can depend on it.

It is interesting that the word “thanksgiving” and the word “choir” both come from the Hebrew word “todot.” All four times that it is used in this chapter (27, 31, 38, 40) it refers to a grateful heart and attitude. Scripture is full of verses admonishing us to praise God with music.

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things...” (Ephesians 5:19).

“I will praise the name of God with song and magnify Him with thanksgiving” (Psalm 69:30).

Do you have a song in your heart? Even if you can’t sing, you can make a “joyful noise” (Psalm 100:1, KJV). David, “the man of God,” and his instruments are also mentioned here. The same instruments used by David are being used to accompany these choirs. “And David and all Israel were rejoicing before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets” (1 Chron. 13:8, ESV). These cymbals were probably small finger cymbals. The harps were multi-stringed instruments for producing pleasing sounds. The lyre is also a several-stringed instrument, sometimes called the *kinner*.

Why do you think David is referred to as “the man of God” in this portion of Scripture instead of “the king”? Was it because he was perfect? How might this relate to you and me?

C. Programs

Nehemiah 12:40-43

Then the two choirs took their stand in the house of God. So did I and half of the officials with me; ⁴¹and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah, with the trumpets; ⁴²and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. And the singers sang, with Jezrahiah their leader, ⁴³and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

Along with their songs of praise, the priests offered sacrifices of praise. We do not need to offer such sacrifices today. “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but He [Jesus], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:11-12). We are called to present our bodies as *living sacrifices* to God in Romans 12:1-2.

The joy of Jerusalem was “heard from afar.” The testimony of the Israelites’ faithful God rang forth through the hills surrounding





Jerusalem. All neighboring groups of people, even those in opposition, could see and hear how God had blessed their efforts. Note that the rejoicing and joy were contagious. Complaining is also contagious. Which are you spreading?

D. Portions

Nehemiah 12:44-47

On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served. ⁴⁵For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon. ⁴⁶For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God. ⁴⁷So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required, and set apart the consecrated portion for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the consecrated portion for the sons of Aaron.

Once again affirming their commitment to keep the law of God, the Israelites designated people and places to hold the “contributions, the first fruits, and the tithes” which should be given to the priests and Levites. As servants of God, they were “worthy of double honor,” as well as worthy of their “wages” (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Do you honor your spiritual leaders? Have you let your pastor know that he is appreciated?

The product of revival was worship. This was not a performance to receive accolades of man but rather the surrendered service of people whose hearts God had touched. They were eager to offer praise to Him. Are you quick to praise Him?

CONCLUSION

“Nehemiah had the ministering priests and Levites follow the order of responsibilities outlined more than 500 years earlier by David (1 Chron. 22-26) and presumably established by Solomon. Music had been an important part of David’s preparations for the temple, under the leadership of the musician Asaph (1 Chron. 15:19; 16:4-5, 37). Besides being an effective administrator, Nehemiah was also a man of worship. He was concerned with praise by music and praise by gifts. The people had made a binding agreement to provide for the priests and Levites.”⁶

“Nehemiah’s life was an inspiring story of dedication. He was greatly dedicated to God which is why he accomplished so much for Him.”⁷

Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Duane White, "Soli Deo Gloria," *WMUU*, Volume XVII, Number 3, March-April, 1985, pg. 6.
2. Bach Choir of Bethlehem, *Motet BWV 159a*, www.bach.org.
3. Peter A. Steveson, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, BJU Press, 2011, pg. 180.
4. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.
5. Steveson, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, pg. 182.
6. Gene A. Getz in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Victor Books, 1985, pgs. 693-694.
7. John G. Butler, *Nehemiah: The Wall Builder*, LBC Publications, 1998, pg. 290.

Personal Study Notes

PAGE 7
MAR 30, 2022

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