



## Nehemiah - Chapter Twelve

### **V Nehemiah 11:1-12:43 - The Population of Jerusalem and the Villages; Priests and Levites (continues/concludes)**

#### Summary of Chapter Twelve

The chapter commences by naming the priests and Levites who had returned from exile starting with those in the original group under Zerubbabel and Jeshua through to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Nehemiah then goes on to describe the dedication of the walls following the successful task of rebuilding them. This was a joyful celebration that could be heard for miles outside of the city itself.

The chapter concludes with information regarding the allocation of the various tasks to the Levites and the priests.

#### **V.b Nehemiah 12:1-26 - A List of Priests and Levites**

This section records the priests and Levites from the time of Zerubbabel circa 538-535 BC to Nehemiah in 445 BC. The aim is to show that the Levitical service was sustained during a very difficult era in Israel's history.

<sup>1</sup> These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, <sup>2</sup> Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, <sup>3</sup> Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, <sup>4</sup> Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, <sup>5</sup> Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, <sup>6</sup> Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, <sup>7</sup> Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and of their associates in the days of Jeshua.

<sup>8</sup> And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his associates was in charge of the songs of

thanksgiving. <sup>9</sup> And Bakbukiah and Unno their associates stood opposite them in the service. <sup>10</sup> Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada, <sup>11</sup> Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua.

### Nehemiah 12:1-11

These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel. A list of priests in the time of Zerubbabel is listed, followed by a list of Levites from the same time. These were the original exiles to return from Babylonia.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Zerubbabel was the first leader of the exiles who returned to Judæa following the decree of King Cyrus in 538 BC, and Jeshua or Joshua was the high priest who returned with him. This was almost a century before Nehemiah; refer to the comment made on Ezra 2:2a.

<sup>12</sup> In the days of Joiakim the priests, heads of ancestral houses, were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; <sup>13</sup> of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; <sup>14</sup> of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; <sup>15</sup> of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; <sup>16</sup> of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; <sup>17</sup> of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; <sup>18</sup> of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; <sup>19</sup> of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; <sup>20</sup> of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; <sup>21</sup> of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

### Nehemiah 12:12-21

Joiakim was high priest in succession to Jeshua (v.10), so this list now gives the priests in his day. It includes Ezra, so Joiakim was evidently still high priest when Ezra arrived in Jerusalem.

Heads of ancestral houses. The list proceeds by family names: thus, Meraiah was priest in the priestly family of Seraiah. Some of the family names occur in vv.1-7.

<sup>22</sup> As for the Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, there were recorded the heads of ancestral houses; also the priests until the reign of Darius the Persian. <sup>23</sup> The Levites, heads of ancestral houses, were recorded in the Book of the Annals until the days of Johanan son of Eliashib. <sup>24</sup> And the leaders of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua son of Kadmiel, with their associates over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, section opposite to section. <sup>25</sup> Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were

gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates.<sup>26</sup> These were in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and in the days of the governor Nehemiah and of the priest Ezra, the scribe.

### Nehemiah 12:22-26

The Levites are now recorded by family. The period from the high priesthoods of Eliashib to Jaddua corresponds approximately to that in vv.10-11. As with the priests, a record was kept according to families.

Darius the Persian is a reference to Darius I (522-486 BC), king of Persia at the time of Zerubbabel and the building of the temple; refer to Ezra 4:5, 4:24, 5:1-17 and 6:1-22.

The Book of the Annals or Chronicles. This is not a biblical book but simply a record of names, most likely kept by the priests.

Verses 24-26 provide a similar record for the time of Joiakim and later (v.10). Joiakim was high priest in Ezra's time (v.12), although by Nehemiah's time apparently Eliashib held that office: <<***Then the high priest Eliashib set to work with his fellow-priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set up its doors; they consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel***>> (Nehemiah 3:1). However, the whole period of Ezra and Nehemiah is here regarded as unified and associated with Joiakim.

According to the commandment of David the man of God. That is, David as a prophet as recorded in v.36, 1 Chronicles 25:2 and 2 Chronicles 8:14. In each of these texts his prophetic ministry was in connection with the organisation of the priests and Levites for the temple service.

### V.c Nehemiah 12:27-43 - Dedication of the City Wall

This section describes the Levites' role at the dedication of the completed city wall. Two great choirs preceded the leaders in two companies on the wall, north and south.

<sup>27</sup> Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with rejoicing, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

### Nehemiah 12:27

They sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem. The Levites had many responsibilities in the life and worship of Israel, but one of the

most important jobs they had was to lead the people in songs of worship and praise to God.

Rejoicing, with thanksgivings and with singing is reminiscent of the joy at the completion of the temple some seventy years earlier; refer to Ezra 3:10-13. Joy is the right attitude at all festivals of celebration before the Lord; refer to Deuteronomy 12:18 and 16:14, and Nehemiah 8:9-12. The singing was accompanied by the musicians with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

There are at least twenty two different musical instruments mentioned in the Bible, including the harp, the lyre (an ancient guitar), horns, trumpets, flutes, tambourines, drums, cymbals, and bells. The Levites were specially appointed to use these instruments to lead the people in worshipping God through singing.

<sup>28</sup> The companies of the singers gathered together from the circuit around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; <sup>29</sup> also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem.

#### Nehemiah 12:28-29

For the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. Families of Levitical singers had settled in villages around Jerusalem to be near the place of their work.

The Netophathites were from Netophah, near Bethlehem.

Beth-gilgal is presumably the same as Gilgal, near Jericho; refer to Joshua 4:19.

Geba and Azmaveth were to the north of Jerusalem.

The singers in Nehemiah's day had a close knit bond, both by families and living arrangements. Since the job of these singers was to lead the people in the worship of God, they had to be good singers; but more importantly, they had to be people of worship themselves. There is a huge difference between being a great singer and being a great worship leader of songs praising God. Worship should be excellent but it is not entertainment. The goal is not to give the people a good feeling even though that may happen; it is to give glory and honour to God.

<sup>30</sup> And the priests and the Levites purified themselves; and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

## Nehemiah 12:30

The Levites purified themselves, as in readiness for a solemn act of worship (Exodus 19:10 and 19:14-15), perhaps by certain ritual acts such as washing clothes; refer to Numbers 8:5-7. They purified themselves first. They could not effectively lead the people in worship of God unless they walked in purity before the Lord.

They purified the people and the gates and the wall. They did this next. They brought cleansing to the people the way the Bible instructed them to, knowing that only a purified people could really worship and praise God. Even the walls were ritually cleansed, probably by sprinkling water as they went.

<sup>31</sup> Then I brought the leaders of Judah up on to the wall, and appointed two great companies that gave thanks and went in procession. One went to the right on the wall to the Dung Gate; <sup>32</sup> and after them went Hoshaiah and half the officials of Judah, <sup>33</sup> and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, <sup>34</sup> Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, <sup>35</sup> and some of the young priests with trumpets: Zechariah son of Jonathan son of Shemaiah son of Mattaniah son of Micaiah son of Zaccur son of Asaph; <sup>36</sup> and his kindred, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and the scribe Ezra went in front of them. <sup>37</sup> At the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went straight up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east.

## Nehemiah 12:31-37

Two great companies or choirs symbolically enclose the whole city for the purpose of the dedication. Ezra goes with the southern group, accompanied by half the leaders of Judah and priests playing instruments.

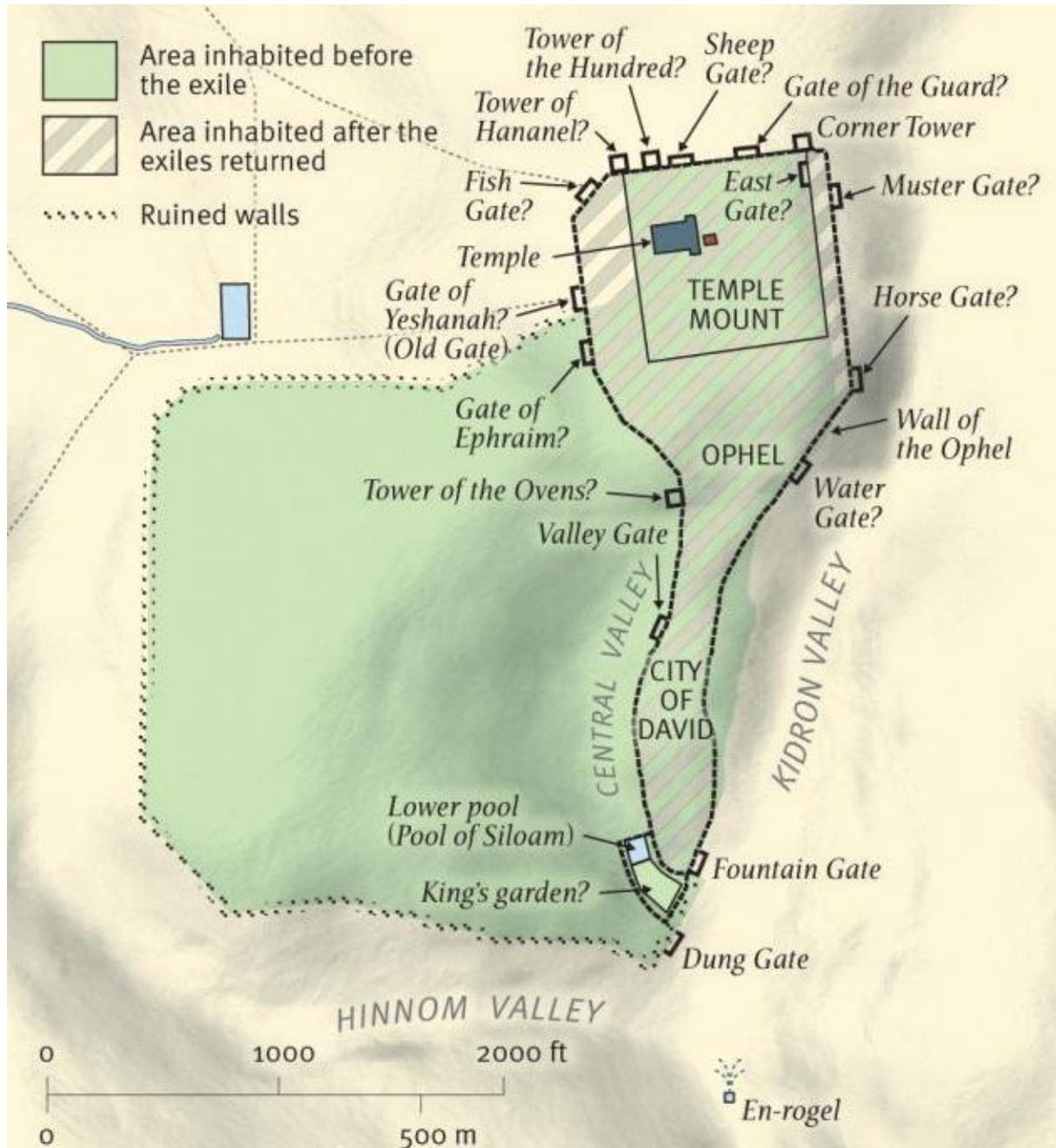
The two large choirs were called thanksgiving choirs for good reason. All praise and worship must have a strong element of thanksgiving to God for it to be genuine. Notice that the singers sang loudly. They had to be heard because, as glorious as the instruments were, the people would follow the lead of the singers in worship.

The Dung Gate led to the city dump at its southern tip.

Although not positively identified, the Fountain Gate was no doubt on the east side of the city where the Kidron Valley's water sources were.

The Water Gate, in the old wall, had probably opened onto the Gihon Spring, the main water source outside the city wall.

Refer to the illustration below for the likely locations of these gates.



Jerusalem at the Time of Nehemiah circa 445 BC

Although Nehemiah gives a careful listing of the sections of Jerusalem's walls that were rebuilt, it is difficult to be certain exactly which walls and gates he was referring to. The city had extended beyond the city of David and the Temple Mount by the time of Hezekiah, but it appears that only the Temple Mount and the city of David were enclosed within Nehemiah's walls. An

ambitious project nevertheless, it was completed in only fifty two days, providing Jerusalem with some measure of protection from its enemies.

<sup>38</sup> The other company of those who gave thanks went to the left, and I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, <sup>39</sup> and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Old Gate, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. <sup>40</sup> So both companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; <sup>41</sup> and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; <sup>42</sup> and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. <sup>43</sup> They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

#### Nehemiah 12:38-43

The other company of those who gave thanks went to the left, and I followed them. Nehemiah went with the group on the northern wall. The pattern is the same as that for the southern wall. For the topographical details, refer to Nehemiah 2:11-16 and 3:1-32.

So both companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God. Both processions continue into the temple area, where they meet for the culmination of the ceremony.

They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. God did this with the choirs assembled, and the people spread all about. They were then overwhelmed with joy and thanksgiving, considering all that God had done for his people. This tremendous experience of worship was for everyone. There were none who were unable to worship.

The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. Their worship was a testimony to others, and what others heard was not so much the singing itself as the joy. Some Christians often worry about others hearing them sing; however, what God wants to hear and what others should hear is not so much the singing, but the joy that comes from the act of song worship.

## VI Nehemiah 12:44-13:31 - Nehemiah Deals with Problems in the Community

This section records problems that arose in the administration and practice of storing contributions for the temple and its personnel. It also describes Nehemiah's ongoing problems with his people and his opponents.

### VI.a Nehemiah 12:44-47 - Temple Responsibilities

The purpose of this section is to recall that the work of the priests and Levites had been put in place from ancient times, and that since the days of Zerubbabel, almost a century before Nehemiah's day, they had been duly provided for.

<sup>44</sup> On that day men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites from the fields belonging to the towns; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered.

#### Nehemiah 12:44

On that day. Arrangements for overseeing the proper collection of tithes and other offerings are made afresh at the time of the dedication of the wall. For the offerings themselves, refer to the comments made on Nehemiah 10:35-39.

Men were appointed over the chambers for the stores. This was a day of giving. People brought their contributions, the first fruits, and the tithes to the storehouse of the Levites, and they did it with joy because they enjoyed supporting the priests and Levites ministering on their behalf.

The portions required by the law. The Pentateuchal requirement: <<*the one among the sons of Aaron who offers the blood and fat of the offering of well-being shall have the right thigh for a portion*>> (Leviticus 7:33) applied only to the priests, but here it is widened to include all the Levites, an adaptation to the needs of the postexilic community; 2 Chronicles 31:19 probably records a similar adaptation.

<sup>45</sup> They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon. <sup>46</sup> For in the days of David and Asaph long ago there was a leader of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. <sup>47</sup> In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the daily portions for the singers

and the gatekeepers. They set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the descendants of Aaron.

Nehemiah 12:45-47

They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers. This was a day of purity. It was an ongoing concern, not a one-time ceremony.

According to the command of David. Once again it is noted that it was David who determined the duties of the priests and Levites in the temple, even though it was not built until the reign of his son King Solomon.

They set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the descendants of Aaron. It was a day of consecration. Holy things were set apart for the Levites, who in turn set apart that which was for the priests, thus speaking of their separation unto God.