

Good morning everyone!

My name is Caleb Farrow and it is a joy to continue our series working through Ezra-Nehemiah. The Hand of Our God is Good! Today we are taking a look at chapters 11-12.

I have been so encouraged, challenged and humbled by the Word of the Lord in these books as I'm sure many of you have as well!

The obedience of Ezra/Nehemiah to the scriptures brought a blessing to God's people by way of the city of Jerusalem being rebuilt, but also a blessing in their recommitment to the Lord as they responded to the Word in confession of sins, repentance of their disobedience, and covenant renewals! Those being to marry only within God's people, observe the Sabbath and as we will see today, a renewed commitment to celebrate the Lord's provision, faithfulness and mercy towards His people!

We begin this morning having just completed the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem! The completion of the wall was a major accomplishment but is only part of the story. The complete restoration of the holy city of Jerusalem is God's plan, so the job is incomplete.

Today we see the detailed and meticulous manner in which the Lord will restore the city and the incredible celebration/consecration of the people and city back to the Lord!

Start with me in verse 27 of chapter 12. Let us read through the rest of 12, then we will circle back to take a look at chapter 11 before landing back in 12.

Read 12:27-47

Pray

Before we spend time discussing this incredible celebration to the Lord, let's take some time to look back at how the Lord sovereignly sets this stage and organizes the successful repopulation and thriving of the city of Jerusalem.

Jump back to chapter 11 with me:

The Leaders in Jerusalem

11 Now the **leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem.** And the rest of the people **cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city,** while nine out of ten remained in the other towns. 2 **And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.**

So, there are already people living in Jerusalem. Not that many, however. Just the Israelite leaders at this point.

This is not enough to re-establish this HOLY CITY and for it to thrive, so the Lord has the Israelites cast lots in a way that would identify one in 10 families who would move from their homes into the city of Jerusalem. While casting lots is a foreign concept to us, this was a way to reveal trust in the sovereignty of the Lord.

How the lot fell is the will of the Lord.

We aren't sure if verse 2 is a blessing for the willing attitude of those that the lots fell to or if there were other men who just had an entrepreneurial spirit and were down for the adventure, but what we are certain of is these men and families were blessed for their willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to uproot from their homes and move to not just another city, but one without infrastructure and societal systems... yet.

Whether it be a restaurant owner, coffee shop, or a force to protect from outside invasions, while the city walls were complete, in many ways the work of restoring the city was not.

As we move through these chapters, let your hearts and minds be drawn to the simple truths, that our God is faithful to His covenant, He has an order and structure for us, and desires the best for His children which is ultimately a relationship with Himself achieved through a life in the manner He decides.

Admittedly there is an immense list of names in the following 34 verses of chapter 11 and the first 26 verses of chapter 12. And for several reasons I'm not going to read through them today.

Mostly, my southern draw stumbling through all of these Hebrew names will be more of a distraction than a help, but please understand the honor bestowed upon these families. All of Gods people blessed them and recognized their sacrifice to leave their homes and reestablishing the the holy city of the Lord! And the Lord saw fit to immortalize them here in His Word!

So, while I will not be reading every name this morning, every name is worthy of recognition and honor.

If names and history are your thing, check out 1 Chronicles 9. There you will find an expanded list from the next couple of chapters of who is moving into Jerusalem and their role in the new city.

Moving to the first section of honored people is **Vs 3-9**.

The first group of people we come to are men and families from Judah and Benjamin, but not the Levites, priests, or temple servants...

Listed here are the men from Judah and Benjamin and they were likely leaned on to protect the city. Which could be why they are described as men of valor or valiant men. Or simply for their bravery to live in the holy city while it was essentially desolate.

In **Vs 10-18** we see that through the hand of God, Nehemiah prioritizes the working and functioning of the temple, (i.e. the worship of the Lord). The establishment of the Levites and priests in Jerusalem was a significant piece in restoring the city so that others may come back as well as a priority to its establishment, including some of their specific roles.

For example: Ahitub *“the official in charge of the house of God”* and those *“who did the work of the house”* and further down in verses 15-18 those are listed Levites as *“those who do the outside work of the house of God”*

This is important to note, because it clues us in to the immense burden of duties surrounding around the temple that needed to be cared for according to the instruction of the Lord, as well as everyone working together, playing their part to accomplish the goals set before them according to the Lord. He has established this arrangement with purpose and intentionality.

This is true of Grace Auburn today. As God has ordained it then, it is today. There are many gifts in this body of believers and just as many needs. Don't withhold the grace of exercising your gifts and abilities to bless others.

Also in verse 17, Mattaniah is listed and described as the leader of praise, who gave thanks. His lineage is then traced back to Asaph, who along with King David are listed as establishing the the Temple choirs and band in 2 Chr. 5. The lineage of Asaph will be mentioned several times as a reference point for the validity of those leading the Temple worship!

In verse 18 Jerusalem is described as the holy city. We are not just reading a history book about the establishment of a new settlement. This is the detailed reestablishment of the holy city of God, that as we continue reading our Bibles, and eventually make it to the book of Revelation, we see that there will one day be another reestablishment of a holy city. The NEW Jerusalem will be the final holy city in the second coming of Jesus! What a glorious day that will be! All striving will cease. All sorrow will be traded for joy. Sickness healed. Enemies vanquished! All will be made right again! Come Lord Jesus!

More on that later though...

Verses 19-36 list for us those in charge of protecting the Temple and all the treasures within it, the people who are in charge of the work of the Levites and other temple servants, including men from Asaph's lineage, who were singers in the temple, in charge of leading the singing of praises to the Lord in the temple!

And in verse 23 its important to note that we once again see the consistent theme of God using earthly kings who do not worship Him, to accomplish his will. This king is in reference to the Persian king, who was so involved in the dealings of Jerusalem had Pethahiah inform him of the updates. It is also this Persian king who, being used by the Lord, places a command on the Israelite people to provide for those serving in the Temple. Which was originally instituted by God in Deuteronomy, so God used the Persian king to remind His people of how He wanted to care for those leading in worship and committing their lives to the work of the Lord.

We pause here in 12:1-26 to acknowledge a shift.

We are now taking time to honor those who first came back with Zerubbabel in the beginning of Ezra. The first group of Israelites to enter Jerusalem and begin the rebuilding of the city!

And from there, we follow the lineage of Levites given in vs 10 as the framework to honor all who served the Lord in His temple through generations up until Nehemiah's day! Verse 26 tells us that all of this rebuilding and reestablishing of the city occurred under the authority and leadership of Joiakim the priest, Nehemiah the governor, and Ezra the scribe/teacher!

And now we have seen and have a better framework of who has come to this grand celebration and reopening! All the men whose families have committed to be obedient to the Lord and uproot their lives and commit to the thriving of the holy city of Jerusalem!

The moment we have arrived to now is this powerful text we read earlier of God's people's worship, sacrifice, and praise to the Lord! After all He has done for them, after His faithfulness to the covenant made with them, despite their unfaithfulness, what better response could they give than to worship Him?!

Vs. 27-47

We start back in verse 30 with the purification of the Levites, Priests, the people, and the wall! Step one of their dedication to the Lord was and is the priest's purification of themselves from their own

sin, then the others, then the wall before all three are dedicated to the Lord for His glory.

The joy of the Gospel, is that work of purification has been done on our behalf by Jesus! It is His perfection and righteousness that is now ours!

And like Gods people here, we should only respond with celebration and praise!

These two massive choirs of thanksgiving are orchestrated. One goes one direction on the city walls with Ezra. The other choir goes the other direction with Nehemiah. Both choirs circling the city, singing praises and worshipping the Lord! No doubt taking in the sights and remembering the places their own hands had put back together.

Imagine as they are singing praises to the Lord, remembering in real time the moments God was faithful to them, creating in them a beautiful cycle of remembering, reflecting, causing more praise!

We would be wise to take this example. Over the past 10 weeks we have taken time to consider the Good Hand of Our God, how quickly do we walk out these doors and move on to the Kroger or Foosacklys line without spending adequate time to reflect on the glory of God, His good hand in our lives, and let that well up in us an inextinguishable desire to sing praises to Him! That the unbelieving or often in our culture, apathetic neighbors can no longer deny.

So I think a challenge for us is to slow down, sabbath well, celebrate the Lord with unhurried hearts. And I get it. This is hard in our culture and in our seasons of life, but this text shows a people with a TON of work in front of them, and yet a heart willing to recognize the need for praising the one has been so merciful and kind.

And now they conclude this worship around the wall, meeting together at the Temple of the one true God! This will be the very place that God in flesh, Jesus Christ, will walk, teach, rebuke, and encourage with the news of the Gospel!

The sad thing is, Jesus visits this very Temple and He will see that it has been marred with greed and selfishness and pride.

This pattern in the Bible, of God being merciful and faithful while His people are rebellious and unfaithful draws up in us all a longing for a place void of sin to perfectly worship and glorify that God who perfectly loves and saves His people.

But in His mercy, the Lord has given us the glorious opportunity to look back and see all of this, as well as read of the promise made for a better Jerusalem! A true holy city unlike the imperfect holy city made by human hands, stained with the imperfect effort and imperfect hearts who made it.

The end of the Bible, in Revelation, John paints a picture for us all that this new city will be made perfect by the perfect hands of Jesus and we will be perfect, as we join the other saints and heavenly beings perfectly worshipping Him!

Revelation 5:11-14 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

It is Jesus, the perfect sacrifice and faithful priest interceding for us that we may be made new and holy in the new and holy city!

Unlike Nehemiah however, there will not only be a tenth of Gods people coming into new Jerusalem, but it is all who by grace through faith in Jesus that are saved from the wrath of their sin, which was poured out on Him on the cross, will be glorified in Jesus and enter into this incredible city!

Revelation 21:1-5 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

One day some day, you and I will take our last breath on this earth and then our first breath in heaven!

How does that impact you today? How does that impact the way you love one another? Patient with your children? Empathetic to the politically opposed? Generous to your neighbor? Merciful to the undeserving?

Remembering the faithfulness of the Lord, changes the very lens by which we view our own sin, the sins of others, and the hurting world around us!

Nehemiah 12:43 And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the

women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

Is your joy in the Lord seen by others? Do you live a life that glorifies the Lord in a way that reveals your trust in His way?

The joy the Israelites had in the Lord was so grand, they were talked about! They worshipped the Lord so greatly, the unbelieving world could not deny it!

We not only know the faithfulness of the Lord, but also have the promise of Jesus' second coming to reveal even more the commitment of the Father to save His children, even to the degree of laying our punishment on His innocent Son, that we might be saved from our sins, given his righteousness, and one day made whole in His presence to glorify his name forever!

May His Name and Glory and renown be seen and felt by those around us through our faithful worship and praise of His matchless grace and kindness!

Pray into communion