

CHAPTER 12

In this chapter are preserved upon record,

- I.** The names of the chief of the priests and the Levites that came up with Zerubbabel (v. 1-9).
- II.** The succession of the high priests (v. 10, 11).
- III.** The names of the next generation of the other chief priests (v. 12-21).
- IV.** The eminent Levites that were in Nehemiah's time (v. 22-26).
- V.** The solemnity of dedicating the wall of Jerusalem (v. 27-43).
- VI.** The settling of the offices of the priests and Levites in the temple (v. 44-47).

<621> NEHEMIAH 12:1-26

THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES THAT RETURNED

We have here the names, and little more than the names, of a great many priests and Levites, that were eminent in their day among the returned Jews. Why this register should be here inserted by Nehemiah does not appear, perhaps to keep in remembrance those good men, that posterity might know to whom they were beholden, under God, for the happy revival and re-establishment of their religion among them. Thus must we contribute towards the performance of that promise, <616> Psalm 112:6, *The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.* Let the memory of the just be blessed, be perpetuated. It is a debt we still owe to faithful ministers to *remember our guides, who have spoken to us the word of God,* <810> Hebrews 13:7. Perhaps it is intended to stir up their posterity, who succeeded them in the priest's office and inherited their dignities and preferments, to imitate their courage and fidelity. It is good to know what our godly ancestors and predecessors were, that we may learn thereby what we should be. We have here,

1. The names of the priests and Levites that came up with the first out of Babylon, when Jeshua was high priest. Jeremiah and Ezra are mentioned with the first (v. 1), but, it is supposed, not Jeremiah the prophet nor Ezra the scribe; the fame of the one was long before and that of the other some time after, though both of them were priests. Of one of the Levites it is said (v. 8) that he was *over the thanksgiving*, that is, he was entrusted to see that the psalms, the thanksgiving psalms, were constantly sung in the temple in due time and manner. The Levites kept their turns in their watches, reliving one another as becomes brethren, fellow-labourers, and fellow-soldiers.

2. The succession of high priests during the Persian monarchy, from Jeshua (or Jesus), who was high priest at the time of the restoration, to Jaddua (or Jaddus), who was high priest when Alexander the Great, after the conquest of Tyre, came to Jerusalem, and paid great respect to this Jaddus, who met him in his pontifical habit, and showed him the prophecy of Daniel, which foretold his conquests.

3. The next generation of priests, who were chief men, and active in the days of Joiakim, sons of the first set. Note, We have reason to acknowledge God's favour to his church, and care of it, in that, as one generation of ministers passes away, another comes. All those who are mentioned v. 1, etc., as eminent in their generation, are again mentioned, though with some variation in several of the names, v. 12, etc., except two, as having sons that were likewise eminent in their generation — a rare instance, that twenty good fathers should leave behind them twenty good sons (for so many here are) that filled up their places.

4. The next generation of Levites, or rather a latter generation; for those priests who are mentioned flourished in the days of Joiakim the high priest, these Levites in the days of Eliashib, v. 22. Perhaps *then* the forementioned families of the priests began to degenerate, and the third generation of them came short of the first two; but the work of God shall never fail for want of instruments. Then a generation of Levites was *raised up*, who were *recorded chief of the fathers* (v. 22), and were eminently serviceable to the interests of the church, and their service not the less acceptable either to God or to his people for their being Levites only, of the lower rank of ministers. Eliashib the high priest being allied to Tobiah (^{<1>13:4} Nehemiah 13:4), the other priests grew remiss; but then the Levites appeared the more zealous, as appears by this, that those who were now

employed in expounding (^{<1687>}Nehemiah 8:7) and in praying (^{<1694>}Nehemiah 9:4, 5) were all Levites, not priests, regard being had to their personal qualifications more than to their order. These Levites were some of them singers (v. 24), *to praise and give thanks*, others of them porters (v. 25), *keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates, and both according to the command of David*.

^{<1627>}NEHEMIAH 12:27-43

THE DEDICATION OF THE WALL

We have read of the building of the wall of Jerusalem with a great deal of fear and trembling; we have here an account of the dedicating of it with a great deal of joy and triumph. *Those that sow in tears shall thus reap*.

1. We must enquire what was the meaning of this dedication of the wall; we will suppose it to include the dedication of the city too (*continens pro contento — the thing containing for the thing contained*), and therefore it was not done till the city was pretty well replenished, ^{<1610>}Nehemiah 11:1. It was a solemn thanksgiving to God for his great mercy to them in the perfecting of this undertaking, of which they were the more sensible because of the difficulty and opposition they had met with in it.

2. They hereby devoted the city in a peculiar manner to God and to his honour, and took possession of it for him and in his name. All our cities, all our houses, must have holiness to the Lord written upon them; but this city was (so as never any other was) a *holy city*, the *city of the great King* (^{<1681>}Psalms 48:2 and ^{<1615>}Matthew 5:35): it had been so ever since God chose it to put his name there, and as such, it being now refitted, it was afresh dedicated to God by the builders and inhabitants, in token of their acknowledgment that they were his tenants, and their desire that it might still be is and that the property of it might never be altered. Whatever is done for their safety, ease, and comfort, must be designed for God's honour and glory.

3. They hereby put the city and its walls under the divine protection, owning that *unless the Lord kept the city* the walls were *built in vain*. When this city was in possession of the Jebusites, they committed the guardianship of it to their gods, though they were blind and lame ones,

~~<10R6>~~2 Samuel 5:6. With much more reason do the people of God commit it to his keeping who is all-wise and almighty. The superstitious founders of cities had an eye to the lucky position of the heavens (see Mr. Gregory's works, p. 29, etc.); but these pious founders had an eye to God only, to his providence, and not to fortune.

II. We must observe with what solemnity it was performed, under the direction of Nehemiah.

1. The Levites from all parts of the country were summoned to attend. The city must be dedicated to God, and therefore his ministers must be employed in the dedicating of it, and the surrender must pass through their hands. When those solemn feasts were over (Nehemiah 8 and 9) they went home to their respective posts, to mind their cures in the country; but now their presence and assistance were again called for.

2. Pursuant to this summons, there was a general rendezvous of all the Levites, v. 28, 29. Observe in what method they proceeded.

(1.) They *purified themselves*, v. 30. We are concerned to *cleanse our hands*, and *purify our hearts*, when any work for God is to pass through them. They purified themselves and then the people. Those that would be instrumental to sanctify others must sanctify themselves, and set themselves apart for God, with purity of mind and sincerity of intention. Then they purified *the gates and the wall*. Then may we expect comfort when we are prepared to receive it. *To the pure all things are pure* (~~<5015>~~Titus 1:15); and, to those who are sanctified, houses and tables, and all their creature comforts and enjoyments, are sanctified, ~~<5004>~~1 Timothy 4:4, 5. This purification was performed, it is probable, by sprinkling the *water of purifying* (or of *separation*, as it is called, ~~<0490>~~Numbers 19:9) on *themselves* and the *people*, the walls and the gates — a type of the blood of Christ, with which our consciences being *purged from dead works*, we become fit to *serve the living God* (~~<3014>~~Hebrews 9:14) and to be his care.

(2.) The princes, priests, and Levites, walked round upon the wall in two companies, with musical instruments, to signify the dedication of it all to God, the whole circuit of it (v. 36); so that it is likely they sung psalms as they went along, to the praise and glory of God. This procession is here largely described. They had a rendezvous at one certain place, where they divided themselves into two companies. Half of the princes, with several priests and Levites, went on the right hand, Ezra leading their van, v. 36.

The other half of the princes and priests, who gave thanks likewise, went to the left hand, Nehemiah bringing up the rear, v. 38. At length both companies met in the temple, where they joined their thanksgivings, v. 40. The crowd of people, it is likely, walked on the ground, some within the wall and others without, one end of this ceremony being to affect them with the mercy they were giving thanks for, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it among them. Processions, for such purposes, have their use.

(3.) The people *greatly rejoiced*, v. 43. While the princes, priests, and Levites, testified their joy and thankfulness by *great sacrifices, sound of trumpet, musical instruments, and songs of praise*, the common people testified theirs by loud shouts, which were heard afar off, further than the more harmonious sound of their songs and music: and these shouts, coming from a sincere and hearty joy, are here taken notice of; for God overlooks not, but graciously accepts, the honest zealous services of mean people, though there is in them little of art and they are far from being fine. It is observed that *the women and children rejoiced*; and their hosannas were not despised, but recorded to their praise. All that share in public mercies ought to join in public thanksgivings. The reason given is that *God had made them rejoice with great joy*. He had given them both matter for joy and hearts to rejoice; his providence had made them safe and easy, and then his grace made them cheerful and thankful. The baffled opposition of their enemies, no doubt, added to their joy and mixed triumph with it. Great mercies call for the most solemn returns of praise, *in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem!*

~~1624~~ NEHEMIAH 12:44-47

THE PEOPLE'S ATTENTION TO THEIR DUTY

We have here an account of the remaining good effects of the universal joy that was at the dedication of the wall. When the solemnities of a thanksgiving day leave such impressions on ministers and people as that both are more careful and cheerful in doing their duty afterwards, then they are indeed acceptable to God and turn to a good account. So it was here.

1. The ministers were more careful than they had been of their work; the respect the people paid them upon this occasion encouraged them to

diligence and watchfulness, v. 45. *The singers kept the ward of their God*, attending in due time to the duty of their office; the *porters*, too, *kept the ward of the purification*, that is, they took care to preserve the purity of the temple by denying admission to those that were ceremonially unclean. When the joy of the Lord thus engages us to our duty, and enlarges us in it, it is then an earnest of that joy which, in concurrence with the perfection of holiness, will be our everlasting bliss.

2. The people were more careful than they had been of the maintenance of their ministers. The people, at the dedication of the wall, among other things which they made matter of their joy, rejoiced *for the priests and for the Levites that waited*, v. 44. They had a great deal of comfort in their ministers, and were glad of them. When they observed how diligently they waited, and what pains they took in their work, they rejoiced in them. Note, The surest way for ministers to recommend themselves to their people, and gain an interest in their affections, is *to wait on their ministry* (~~45~~ Romans 12:7), to be humble and industrious, and to mind their business. When these did so the people thought nothing too much to do for them, to encourage them. The law had provided then *their portions* (v. 44), but what the better were they for that provision if what the law appointed them either was not duly collected or not justly paid to them? Now,

(1.) Care is here taken for the collecting of their dues. They were modest, and would rather lose their right than call for it themselves. The people were many of them careless and would not bring their dues unless they were called upon; and therefore *some were appointed* whose office it should be to gather into the treasuries, *out of the fields of the cities, the portions of the law for the priests and Levites* (v. 44), that their portion might not be lost for want of being demanded. This is a piece of good service both to ministers and people, that the one may not come short of their maintenance nor the other of their duty.

(2.) Care is taken that, being *gathered in*, they might be duly *paid out*, v. 47. They gave the singers and porters their daily portion, over and above what was due to them as Levites; for we may suppose that when David and Solomon appointed them their work (v. 45, 46), above what was required from them as Levites, they settled a fund for their further encouragement. Let those that labour more abundantly in the word and doctrine be counted worthy of this double honour. As for the other Levites, the tithes, here called *the holy things*, were duly set apart for them, out of which they paid

the priests their tithe according to the law. Both are said to be *sanctified*; when what is contributed, either voluntarily or by law, for the support of religion and the maintenance of the ministry, is given with an eye to God and his honour, it is sanctified, and shall be accepted of him accordingly, and it will *cause the blessing to rest on the house* and all that is in it,

~~264B~~ Ezekiel 44:30.