

The INPUT	The OUTPUT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. giving ourselves to God. (Neh. 11:1-12:26) 2. giving our praise to God. (Neh. 12:27-42) 3. giving our gifts to God. (Neh. 12:44-47) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The separation promise (Neh. 13:1-9, 23-31) 2. The support promise (Neh. 13:10-14) 3. The Sabbath promise (Neh. 13:15-22)

1. giving ourselves to God. ([Neh. 11:1-12:26](#))

Now that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were restored, it was important that the Jews inhabit their capital city and make the population grow

- people were needed to protect the city; for they never knew when the enemy might decide to attack. It may have been safer for the people to live in the small outlying villages that were no threat to the Gentile society, but somebody had to take the risk and move into the big city.

Also, if the people really loved God and their holy city, they would want to live there, if only as a witness to the sceptical Gentiles around them. After all, why rebuild the city if you don't plan to live there? But most of all, God had brought the remnant back home because He had a special job for them to do; and to abandon the restored city was to obstruct the working out of God's will through Israel.

In other words, God needed people—live bodies—in the holy city. The Jews were asked to heed a call not unlike the one Paul wrote in [Romans 12:1: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.](#) Never underestimate the importance of simply being physically present in the place where God wants you. You may not be asked to perform some dramatic ministry, but simply being there is a ministry. The men, women, and children who helped to populate the city of Jerusalem were serving God, their nation, and future generations by their step of faith.

Some volunteered willingly while others had to be "drafted" ([Neh. 11:1-2](#)). The people had promised to tithe their produce ([10:37-38](#)), so Nehemiah decided to tithe the people; and 10 percent were chosen by lot to move from the villages into Jerusalem. Since there were few residents in the city and since the housing situation was bad ([7:4](#)), it isn't surprising that many of the Jews were unwilling to move.

We have grown accustomed to Nehemiah's practice of listing the names of the people involved in his projects. In chapter 3, he told us who the people were who worked on the wall and what part of the wall they repaired. Chapter 7 lists the names of the people who returned with Zerubbabel, and chapter 8 records the names of the leaders involved in the "Bible conference" at the Water Gate. Chapter 10 contains the names of eighty-four men who set their seals to the dedication covenant. In listing these names, Nehemiah was giving evidence of his sincere appreciation for each individual who assisted in the work. It also reminds us that God sees and records what His people do as they serve Him. Even if others don't recognize or appreciate your ministry, you can be sure that God knows all about it and will reward you accordingly.

The people of Judah and Benjamin who lived in Jerusalem are listed first ([11:4-9](#)). These two tribes composed the kingdom of Judah after the nation divided ([1 Kings 11-12](#)).

The priests, Levites, and temple workers are named next ([Neh. 11:10-24](#)). God had set aside special cities for them ([Josh. 21](#)), so they could have legitimately lived outside Jerusalem; but they chose to be with the people

as they served God in the temple. Like Jeremiah, they chose to remain with God's people, even though it might have been safer and more comfortable elsewhere (Jer. 40:1-6).

A variety of people were needed for the temple ministry that was so important to the Jewish nation. The priests officiated at the altar, and the Levites assisted them. Some supervised the maintenance of the building (Neh. 11:16) while others ministered with prayer and praise (vv. 17, 22); and both were important. There were nearly 300 men appointed to guard the temple (v. 19). Since the tithes and offerings were stored in the temple, it was important that the building be protected. It took many people, with many skills, to maintain the ministry in Jerusalem.

God uses many people with different gifts and skills to get His work done in this world. The important thing is that we give our bodies to the Lord so that He can use us as His tools to accomplish His work. Each person is important and each task is significant. Note that Nehemiah lists other temple ministers in 12:1-26.

In verse 23, Nehemiah states that the king of Persia helped support the ministry at the temple. Since the king wanted the Jewish people to pray for him and his family, he shared in the temple expenses (Ezra 6:8-10; 7:20-24). The province of Judah was one small part of a great empire, ruled by an all-powerful king; and the king did for the Jews what he did for all the other provinces. Christians today are commanded to pray for civil leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2; see Jer. 29:7).

Pethahiah (Neh. 12:24) was the "king's agent" who represented the Jews at court. People involved in government are God's ministers (Rom. 13:1-7), whether they realize it or not; and if they are faithful, they are seeing the Lord just as much as the priests and Levites in the temple.

In Nehemiah 12:25-36, Nehemiah names the villages where the Jews were living, some of which were quite a distance from Jerusalem. When the exiles returned to the land from Babylon, they would naturally want to settle in their native towns and villages. They would still be under the authority of Nehemiah and expected to be loyal to the king of Persia. This loyalty to their native cities was what helped make it difficult for Nehemiah to get people to reside in Jerusalem. While it is good to cultivate local loyalties, we must remember that there are larger obligations that must also be considered. The work of the Lord is bigger than any one person's ministry or the ministry of any one church.

2. giving our praise to God. (Neh. 12:27-42)

The Jews were accustomed to having workers and watchers on the walls of Jerusalem, but now Nehemiah and Ezra assigned people to be worshipers on the walls. They conducted a dedication service with such enthusiasm that their shouts and songs were heard "far away" (v. 43).

The people had been dedicated (chaps. 8-10); now it was time to dedicate the work that the people had done. This is the correct order, for what good are dedicated walls and gates without dedicated people? Note that the emphasis was on *joyful praise* on the part of all the people. Singing is mentioned eight times in this chapter, thanksgiving six times, rejoicing seven times, and musical instruments three times.

The order for the dedication service was unique. The leaders and singers were divided into two groups, with Ezra leading one group and Nehemiah (following the choir) directing the second group. The processions started probably from the Valley Gate on the west wall, marching in opposite directions. Ezra's company (12:31-37) went south on the walls to the Dung Gate, then to the Fountain Gate and the Water Gate on the east wall of the city. Nehemiah's company went north (vv. 38-39) past the Old Gate, the Ephraim Gate, the Fish Gate, the Sheep Gate, and the Muster Gate ("gate of the guard"). Both groups met at the temple area where the service climaxed with sacrifices offered to the Lord.

Why did Ezra and Nehemiah organize this kind of a dedication service? Why not just meet at the temple area, let the Levites sing and offer sacrifices to the Lord, and send everybody home?

To begin with, it was the walls and gates that were being dedicated; and it was only right that the people see and touch them.

But there is another reason for this unique service: The people were bearing witness to the watching world that God had done the work, and He alone should be glorified. The enemy had said that the walls would be so weak that a fox could knock them down (4:3), but here were the people *marching on the walls!* What a testimony to the unbelieving Gentiles of the power of God and the reality of faith. It was another opportunity to prove to them that **"this work had been done with the help of our God." (6:16).**

By marching on the walls, the people had an opportunity to see the results of their labours and realize anew that the work had not been done by one person. True, Nehemiah had been their leader, and they needed him; but "the people had a mind to work" (4:6). Various people and families had laboured on different parts of the wall (chap. 3), but nobody "owned" the part he or she had worked on. The wall belonged to God.

As the Jews marched around the walls, they were symbolically saying, "Yes, we all had a part in the work and a place to serve, but now we are giving it all to the Lord that He alone might be glorified!"

Let me suggest another reason for this march around the walls: It was a symbolic act by which they "stepped out by faith" to claim God's blessing. In that day, to walk on a piece of property meant to claim it as your own. God said to Abraham, "Arise, walk through the land...for I will give it to you" (Gen. 13:17); and He said to Joshua, "I will give you every place where you set your foot" (Josh. 1:3). This joyful march around the walls was their way of saying, "We claim from our God all that He has for us, just as our forebears claimed this land by faith!"

But the most important thing about this dedication service was not the march around the walls. It was the expression of joyful praise that came from the choirs and the people. **"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name." (Heb. 13:15).**

"I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hooves." (Ps. 69:30-31).

The people offered their praise thankfully (Neh. 12:24, 27, 31, 38, 46), joyfully (vv. 27, 43-44), and loudly (vv. 42-43), accompanied by various instruments (vv. 27, 35-36). It was not a time for muted, meditative worship. It was a time for "pulling out all the stops" and praising the Lord enthusiastically.

This special service of dedication would have been a failure were it not for a man who had been dead for over 500 years. That man was King David. It was David who had organized the priests and Levites (v. 24; 1 Chron. 24:7-19) and written many of the songs for the temple choirs (Neh. 12:46). He had also devised musical instruments for use in worship (v. 36; 2 Chron. 29:26-27). David had served his generation faithfully (Acts 13:36), but in doing so, he had also served every generation that followed! In fact, it was David who captured the Jebusite city of Jerusalem and made it his capital, the City of David (2 Sam. 5:6-10). It was also David who had provided the blueprints and much of the wealth for the building of the temple (1 Chron. 28:11-19).

It was not only the "professional musicians" who expressed praise to God, for the women and children also joined in the singing (Neh. 12:43). They had heard the Word at the Water Gate (8:2), so it was only right that they now express their worship; because learning the Word and worshiping the Lord must go together (Col.

3:12). When it comes to worship the only spectator should be God himself we should never allow ourselves to become spectators instead of participants; and spectators miss most of the blessing.

So great was the people's praise that "the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away" (Neh. 12:43). This was now the third time in Israel's history that their shouting was "heard far away." The soldiers shouted when the Ark of the Covenant came into their camp (1 Sam. 4:5), but that eventually led to shameful defeat. When the temple foundation was laid nearly a century before, the workers shouted for joy; but their joy was mingled with sorrow (Ezra 3:8-13). The shout from Jerusalem during this dedication service was unalloyed joy, to the glory of the Lord; and because of this record in the Word of God, *that shout has been heard around the world!*

3. giving our gifts to God. (Neh. 12:44-47)

The people had covenanted with God to support the temple ministry (10:32-39), and they kept their promises. Some of the Levites were appointed to supervise the collecting of the produce and the storing of it in the temple. Keep in mind that these tithes and offerings represented the support of the temple workers so that they could serve the Lord.

The people brought their tithes and offerings, not only because it was the commandment of God, but also because they were "pleased with the ministering priests and Levites" (12:44). The ministers at the temple were exemplary both in their personal purity and in their obedience to God's Word (vv. 30, 45). They conducted the worship, not according to their own ideas, but in obedience to the directions given by David and Solomon. When believers have a godly ministry that exalts the Lord and obeys the Word, they are only too glad to bring their tithes and offerings to support it.

The result of this joyful service of dedication was a plentiful supply of produce to sustain the work of the ministry. The people gave "not grudgingly or of necessity" but joyfully and gratefully (2 Cor. 9:7). Missionary leader J. Hudson Taylor used to say, "When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack God's support."

Our material gifts are really spiritual sacrifices to the Lord, if they are given in the right spirit. The Apostle Paul called the gifts from the Philippian church "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18). Jesus accepted Mary's gift of precious ointment as an act of worship, and Hebrews 13:16 reminds us that doing good and sharing are sacrifices that please the Lord.

But before we can bring our material gifts to the Lord, we must first give ourselves to Him. Paul commended the churches of Macedonia because they **"They gave themselves first of all to the Lord"** (2 Cor. 8:5), before they shared in the missionary offering he was receiving for the needy believers in Jerusalem. Our gifts cannot be a substitute for ourselves.

It was a high and holy day in Jerusalem, a happy day because the work had been completed and God had been glorified in a wonderful way. Did the blessing last? No, it didn't; and we will find out why in the last chapter.