

Return from Exile

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Call to Excellence

Part 9 – Priesthood. November 27, 2016

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they brought the Levites to Jerusalem to celebrate with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced .. the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.– Ezra and Nehemiah @ Chapter 12

The Story

Nehemiah 11-12

538 B.C.	Cyrus issues decree for exiles to return to Jerusalem
458 B.C.	Ezra returns to reinstitute the Law
445 B.C.	1 st month – Nehemiah returns to rebuild the city wall
445 B.C.	7 th month – They dedicate the City Wall w/ great joy!

As we go deep into the story and chapters of Nehemiah we discover five very important goals and accomplishments shortly after the wall is rebuilt:

- *They celebrate the Feast of Booths
- *They have a time of public and mass repentance where both women and children are present
- *They draw lots to determine who will resettle the city of Jerusalem from surrounding towns
- *They dedicate the city wall with great celebration and choruses led by Ezra and Nehemiah
- *They make certain the Temple infrastructure is maintained and sustained and priests/Levites are funded

The latter three accomplishments are described at length in Chapters 11 and 12. Read the chapters and take special note of these sections: 11:1-2; 12:27-30; 12:40-44. They will provide 90-95% of the most salient information in the chapters. Much of the rest is a re-expression of the genealogies and record of those Israelites who returned in the first wave of the return from exile, along with leaders who were present now.

Looking at the map on next page and reading Chapter 12:31-43 can you retrace the routes of Ezra and Nehemiah's choral processions during the dedication? The starting point most likely was the Valley Gate!

The two leaders who stand tallest in these two stories are Ezra and Nehemiah themselves. In this section there is great emphasis as well on the Levites and priests.

Levites were all descended from Jacob's third son, Levi, and were dedicated to the service of the Tabernacle/Temple under three family divisions (Gershon, Kohath and Merari). They entered into service @ age 25 and were considered ready to serve at the Temple by age 30. By age 50 they were reassigned to less arduous duties. Their duties included keeping and guarding the sanctuary and its gates, counting and maintaining the sacred vessels, oil, flour, sacrifices, etc., preparing the sacrifices for the priests, tearing down and setting up the Tabernacle, cleaning and purifying all things sacred, judging certain controversies and being an instrumental part of the singing and worship on various occasions (sorry for the pun :)! They gave their tithes to the priests and they did not share directly in the allotment of land (inheritance) as the other tribes, but were given cities to dwell and in which to farm in each of the other 11 tribes.

Priests were all descended from Aaron, the first high priest, and Moses' brother. Their duties included offering the various sacrifices and offerings at the Temple, public consecration and sanctification (set apart) for the Lord's service, keeping the Holy Place of the Temple lit, cleansed, bread replaced and incense burned. They would decide many civil disputes and would help decide whether someone was clean or unclean, especially in cases of leprosy. They carried the ark of the covenant, blessed the people and were responsible for teach the law and it's statutes to the Israelites.

How do the offices of priest and Levite relate to the New Testament offices of elder and deacon (see I Timothy 3:1-10 and I Peter 5:1-4). What are similarities and what are some differences do you think? Here are some additional takeaways from the message:

We should serve with eagerness and gladness

I Peter 2:4-5; Psalm 100:1-2; John 13:34-35; I Peter 4:10

I Timothy 3:1 and 8-10; I Peter 5:1-4

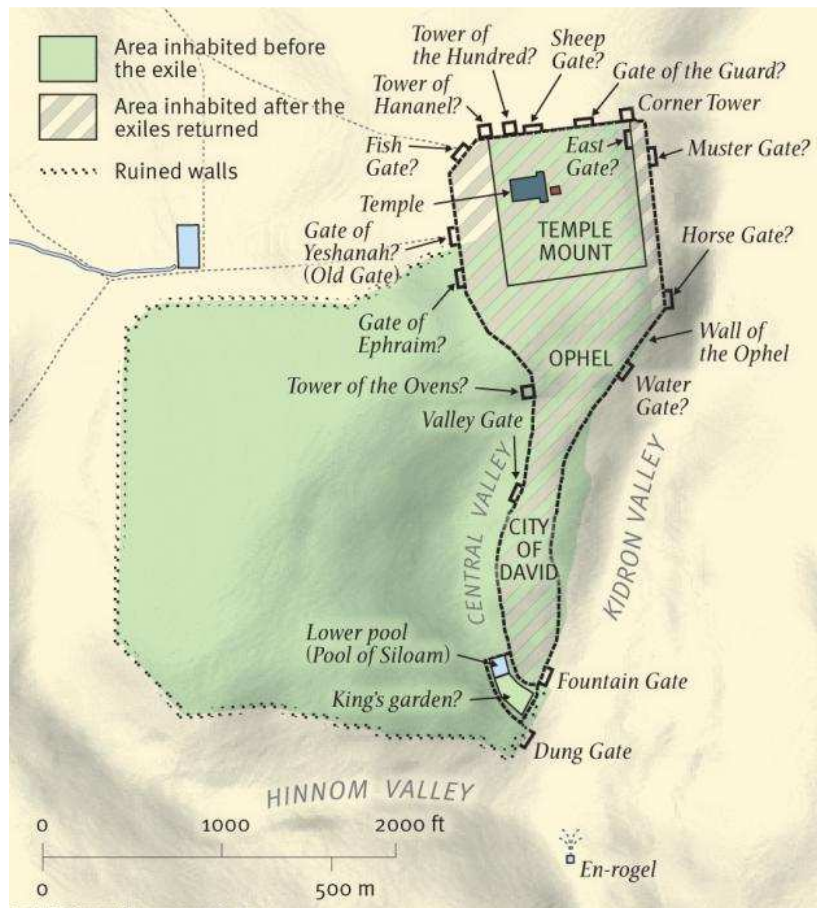
Do you think deacons and elders are held to a higher standard of character and eagerness to serve than others in the body of Christ? If not, why not? If so, why do you think that is so?

We must regain our calling

Acts 13:36

We must renew our gratitude

II Corinthians 8:9; Luke 22:14-15



Next Week ... Part 10 – Sharpen the Saw