



Time to Reflect

- In what ways do we respond to the goodness, greatness and grace of God? Do we offer our gifts to God with joy and thanksgiving?
- Can you think of examples of Christian leaders who have inspired and encouraged you? What made these leaders so inspirational for you?

Last week we focused on the theme of praise. We saw how Nehemiah and the Israelites offered their praise and thanksgiving to God after they had rebuilt the walls and invested in community development. This week we move to consider the theme of giving and we see how the community sought to support and resource the spiritual leaders of the nation.

“This final section of chapter 12 may seem like a bit of a comedown after the euphoria of the preceding verses. But what use is our worship of God, however enthusiastic, if it does not lead to practical godliness?”

(Stan Evers, Doing A Great Work: Ezra And Nehemiah Simply Explained, p218)

Specifics

- From the very beginning of the passage, our attention is drawn to the practice of giving (v43). We discover that on the same day as the celebration, the people made offerings to God. A reason is given for this practice.
- We read that “...God had given them great joy.” The offerings were the people’s response to the goodness, greatness and grace of God. We could, perhaps, suggest that they were giving out of the overflow of their hearts.
- Note how the word ‘rejoice’ is utilised three times in (v43). As we read this particular verse, we can visualise the sense of joy and fulfilment that there was in Jerusalem. Indeed, this “...could be heard far away.”
- In the midst of this celebration Nehemiah saw an opportunity. Stan Evers reflects on this as he writes, “Nehemiah was a man to strike while the iron was hot; therefore ‘at that time’ (12:44), which means either on that day or shortly afterwards, he put in hand arrangements to care for the needs of the spiritual leaders of the nation.¹”
- Nehemiah was keen that the people would be able demonstrate their thankfulness to God in a practical way. He also encouraged them to keep the promises that they had previously made.
- In Nehemiah 10:32-39 we saw how the people had covenanted with God to support the temple ministry. Now they moved to fulfil that promise.
- (v44) records the actual offering of gifts. Note how there were storehouses for the gifts and some men were appointed to oversee the receipt of the contributions, first fruits and tithes.
- It is worth noting that the people didn’t give reluctantly or because they were commanded to. (v44) offers an additional reason for their generosity – they were pleased with their spiritual leaders.

¹ Stan Evers, *Doing A Great Work: Ezra And Nehemiah Simply Explained* (EP Books, 2015), p219.

- Warren Wiersbe highlights, “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).²”
- In other words, the people were also responding with thankfulness for the ministry of their spiritual leaders. (v45) reveals that these leaders fulfilled their duties with diligence and faithfulness.
- Their commitment to their calling is also demonstrated in (12:30) where we read of the priests and Levites engaging in personal purification.
- It is refreshing and encouraging to see this model of good spiritual leadership. These leaders were devoted to God and His will, and they wanted to serve Him with faithfulness and wholeheartedly.
- Their example inspired the people to give their gifts to the glory of God. Wiersbe unpacks this further with an excellent point of application as he observes, “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. A worldly ministry that seeks only to fulfil its own ambitions does not deserve the support of God’s people.³”
- It is heart-warming to read of the Israelites giving their gifts to God with joy and gratitude. The gifts that we offer, and our attitudes in offering them, really matter to God.
- The apostle Paul referred to the gifts of the Philippian church as “...an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God” (Phi.4:18). Hebrews 13:16 also reminds us that doing good and sharing are sacrifices that please God.
- The opposite is also true. The story of Cain and Abel contains important lessons about our attitudes towards giving.
- It is widely accepted by scholars that Cain’s offering was not accepted by God because his attitude was wrong. In Genesis 4:5 our attention is called to Cain’s reaction when God didn’t look with favour on his offering. We are told that he was “...very angry, and his face was downcast.”
- God was aware of this and spoke directly into the situation (Genesis 4:6-7). This is a clear reminder that God is interested in our attitudes towards giving.
- It is also important to remember that our gifts are never a substitute for actually giving of ourselves to God.
- Wiersbe contends, “...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 ‘first gave themselves to the Lord’ (2nd Cor. 8:5), before they shared in the missionary offering he was receiving for the needy believers in Jerusalem.⁴”
- This week we are encouraged to give to God out of the overflow of our own hearts. The example of Nehemiah and the people in Jerusalem is an inspiration and a challenge to each of us.
- The people were united in praise and thanksgiving, and they were also united in their giving (v47). This was a special time for the people in Jerusalem.
- As we approach the final chapter of Nehemiah, Wiersbe offers us a final word as he writes, “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 next study.⁵”

² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah* (David. C. Cook, 1992), p151.

³ Ibid, p151.

⁴ Ibid, p152.

⁵ Ibid, p152.