



Studies in Ezra & Nehemiah

Text

Nehemiah 6:15-19 & 7:1-73

Topic

Nehemiah facilitates worship in the Temple by appointing gatekeepers, Levites, and singers

Title

“Doin’ That Sing You Do”

I took a walk down ‘Memory Lane’ for businesses that no longer exist in Kings County. I asked my FaceBook friends to remember a few of them. Is your former favorite place on the list?

Orchard Supply Hardware... Papa Murphy’s (Lemoore)... Gottschalks... Iseman’s... Miller’s Jewelry... Food King... Sears... K-Mart (twice)... Unique Boutique... Robert’s Jewelers... and Mervyn’s.

There have been more than a few restaurant closures: The Purple Potato... Pedens... Poor Richard's Pizza... Debs Main Street Deli... The Old Hanford Cantina... Rubalcava's... and Maccagno's. I'd put Wired Angels on the list.

The restaurant that a lot of you seem to miss the most is Del Taco.

The restaurant business is hard. A bunch of chains have announced closures coming in 2019:

- Burgers didn't help IHOP. They're closing 30-40 stores.
- Papa John's - closing 85 stores.
- Chipotle - closing 65 stores.
- Cheesecake Factory - closing 10 stores.
- Applebees - closing 189 stores.

Do you know who the largest fast-food chain in the world is? Not McArches; it's Subway - and they will be closing 500 of their over 44,000 locations.

With church attendance in America at an historic low, **church closures are high**. Likely this number is inflated, but just about every search for church closures says between 6,000 and 10,000 annually. If true, it means over 100 churches are having their last gathering this morning.

Coming together... Gathering as believers for worship... Is something we can talk about from the seventh chapter of Nehemiah. With the wall now finished, Nehemiah appointed the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites to serve at the Temple (7:1). They would facilitate worship as the people gathered before the house of the Lord.

Since we are the house of the Lord on the earth - His Temple - we want to facilitate worship.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 When We Come Together, Nonbelievers Are To Wonder, and #2 When We Come Together, Believers Are To Worship.

#1 When We Come Together, Nonbelievers Are To Wonder

(6:15-19)

Can anyone really know the true number of churches closing? How many are being planted while those are closing?

The church has two expressions:

1. The larger, invisible church consisting of all born-again believers throughout the Church Age.
2. And the local, visible church - believers who gather together as a congregation to worship the Lord.

While visible churches may close, the invisible church cannot fail. As imperfect as we are, we are the Lord's beloved and we will one day be presented by Jesus without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27).

As we seek to draw application from this text, it is important that we not confuse Israel with the church.

First, our theology tells us to keep them separate. We are what is called Dispensationalists. Dispensationalism is an approach to biblical interpretation which recognizes that God uses different means of working with people during different periods of history.

Everyone is, to some extent, dispensational. Does a Christian in the Church Age bring a sheep to sacrifice? No; so there are at least two dispensations - Law and Grace.

Salvation is always the same in any dispensation - it is by grace, through faith, not of works. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness. Same for you.

As obvious as it is, we have something more that tells us not to confuse Israel and the church. The apostle Paul presents the church as a “mystery” in his letter to the Ephesians. A “mystery” in the New Testament is something that had at one time been hidden but is now revealed to God’s people.

If the church was hidden... a mystery revealed in the first century... *Then it did not exist on earth before that time.*

We can nevertheless look at the gathering of Israel as a congregation, at the Temple, and make certain comparisons to our gathering together as God's Temple. One such comparison is to notice that the nonbelievers looked upon the Jews and wondered at their God.

Neh 6:15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days.

Too bad this crew couldn't work on the High speed Rail.

What many thought could not be accomplished was finished in astonishing time.

There are many things in life that folks think cannot be accomplished: Saving a marriage... Overcoming an addiction.

Many of you who got saved later in life could testify right now how, in an astonishing fashion, God saved your marriage... How He overcame your addiction.

You became a new creation in Christ. It caused folks to wonder.

Neh 6:16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations around us saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

Enemies and *frenemies* all around Jerusalem were greatly affected by what God had done. Not what Nehemiah had done; what God had.

One reason they may have been “disheartened” is that they understood that neither they nor their gods had any real power to do a work like that.

There needs to be in our lives the testimony that some things only God can do in us and through us. If I have no more victory in my life than my nonbelieving family and friends, where is the wonder of His power and grace?

Neh 6:17 Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and *the letters of Tobiah* came to them.

Neh 6:18 For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Neh 6:19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

God had given Nehemiah a great victory; but his enemies were already previously plotting from a different, less obvious but more sinister, angle. Nehemiah's enemy had married in to the nation of Israel.

No matter how great Jesus' victory over them, our spiritual enemies will never relent. Not this side of Heaven. There is always a Plan B - all the way to Plan Z.

Nonbelievers can, and should, be struck with wonder at what Jesus does and can do.

They should wonder about each of us. They should also wonder at our meetings.

The Second Temple, with its Holy of Holies, represented the presence of God on the earth. Our meetings as the Temple on earth should represent the Person and work of Jesus.

They will if we keep in mind, every time we are gathered, that He is Wonderful.

#2 When We Come Together, Believers Are To Worship

(7:1-73)

When you try to discover what worship *is*, you are mostly told what it *is not*. Always on the list of things worship is not is “just singing.”

9 of 21

Nehemiah 6:15-19 & 7:1-73

“Doin’ That Sing You Do”

Eventually the author or speaker gets to his point - which is some variation of “worship is our lifestyle.”

While it is true that worship is more than “just singing,” ***those who make worship a lifestyle do an awful lot of singing.***

Repetition doesn't always mean something, but it can be interesting. In my NKJV, the word “singers” is used 38 times in the Old Testament. Almost half of them - 16 times - are found in Nehemiah; 4 times in this chapter alone. Nehemiah's contemporary, Ezra, used the word another 6 times.

Israel sang. They sang together, as worshippers.

What about us? Listen to these words of the apostle Paul: “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (5:19).

Paul's words - a command, really - establish two important things:

1. One: We are to “sing.” And not just as a melody in our hearts. You can’t sing silently, in your heart, AND be “speaking to one another” in songs of various genres.
2. Two: We must gather together in order to obey this command. Singing in the shower is great; but we must sing **together** - as a congregation.

I suppose we could sing to each other all the time. Today someone probably asked you how you are doing, or some such thing:

- If you’re abounding, you could break out into, *I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.*
- Feeling abased? *Yet will I praise Him, even in the night; even in the midst of the storm.*

All the talk about worship being more than singing; about it being a lifestyle; can tend to lead us to conclude that gathering together as a congregation isn’t important. That’s just wrong.

Neh 7:1 Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the

gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed,

(These were the Temple gatekeepers - *not* the ones at the wall).

Nehemiah's first priority after securing the city was to have the Temple open and ready, staffed with the necessary personnel so that a worshipper could experience the presence of God.

The obvious application for us, as a congregation, is to do the same. We need to be staffed, and ready, to minister before the Lord in ways that lead His people into worship.

Yes, you *can* and you *should* worship Jesus anywhere. I suppose you can do it Sunday morning on the golf course. Listen, however, to what the Lord said in the Revelation. The apostle John turned to see Jesus:

Rev 1:12 ... And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,

Rev 1:13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man...

Rev 1:16 He had in His right hand seven stars...

Weird vision. What could it mean? As is common in the Revelation, we're told what it means a few verses later:

Rev 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

Jesus walks in the midst of the churches. And I know He meant the gatherings of each local church because He goes on to dictate letters to seven specific, geographical local churches.

Jesus did not say He walks in the midst of the 18 tees of the golf course.

The omnipresent God we worship really does manifest Himself in a unique way when we gather.

It's up to each of us to determine our church membership, and our level of attendance.

(BTW: You might be thinking of the famous verse, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). True - but the context of those words is church discipline - **not** a worship service, or a prayer meeting).

Neh 7:2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he *was* a faithful man and feared God more than many.

Faithful... Fearful... Two great qualities that any of us can cultivate with the empowering of the indwelling Spirit of God. Both are choices.

Neh 7:3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand *guard*, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

With enemies at the gates, Nehemiah restricted the hours they were opened.

Who, or what, is attacking you? Develop a strategy - a spiritual strategy. It might mean restricting something in your life; or avoiding it entirely.

Neh 7:4 Now the city *was* large and spacious, but the people in it *were* few, and the houses *were* not rebuilt.

On the very heels of the wall being completed, Nehemiah turned his attention to his next project - a housing development to repopulate Jerusalem. His work was not done.

Our work is not done until the last believer of the church age is saved and the church is resurrected and raptured. It's wrong for the righteous to rest or retire from reaching wretches who require redeeming.

Neh 7:5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first *return*, and found written in it:

The particular plan for getting people to move inside the city walls was something God “put” in Nehemiah’s heart.

In the New Testament, in the Book of Acts, while some men in the church at Antioch were praying, “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’ ” (13:1).

Yes, they confirmed it by waiting in prayer and fasting. But you cannot escape the truth that God still “speaks” to us; He still puts things in our hearts. It will never contradict His written Word... But He speaks, so learn to listen.

Neh 7:6 These *are* the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.

I was feeling bad because I decided to skip reading the list of names in verses 7-65. Then I read in verse sixty-six and sixty-seven,

Neh 7:66 Altogether the whole assembly *was* forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty,

Neh 7:67 besides their male and female servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers.

There were a total of 42,360 people. *There are not 42,360 names recorded in these verses.* Even Nehemiah decided not to read most of the names.

Neh 7:68 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five,
Neh 7:69 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, *and* donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

Earlier, on the night he first inspected the ruins, Nehemiah rode an animal - probably a donkey. He was a rider. Maybe that's why he mentioned these animals, but not sheep and oxen and goats.

We each have our own perspective on things - things we notice more than others. Meeting together gives us the bigger spiritual picture.

Neh 7:70 And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments.

Neh 7:71 Some of the heads of the fathers' *houses* gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas.

Neh 7:72 And that which the rest of the people gave *was* twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.

The ministry of the Temple was supported by generous free-will offerings. The “heads” gave; but so did “the rest of the people.” Some gave more; all gave some.

I won't go into a teaching on your giving to the ministry of the local church, except to say, it is obvious that all of us should give to the work. The generous amount is between you and the Lord to determine. Have the tithe-talk with Him.

Neh 7:73 So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, *some* of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

In its original manuscripts, the Bible did not have chapters and verses. Verse seventy-three makes more sense to most scholars as beginning chapter eight.

Chapter seven describes getting ready to gather for worship services; chapter eight records a gathering. It goes on to record the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. If you research it, you'll find that there was a lot of singing.

There is a lot of singing in Heaven. Have you been reading the Revelation as we suggested on Easter? One researcher counts at least twenty-seven songs in the last book of the Bible.

No pressure on you to sing; I'm just telling you what the Word teaches.

I'll end with this. **Someone else sings a lot when we gather:**

Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, **He will rejoice over you with singing."**

Yes, that was written to Israel; and the church is not Israel. But if God sang over His people under the dispensation of Law, how much more can we expect Him to sing over us in this Church Age of grace?

If you're not a believer, you should be hearing the Holy Spirit as He witnessed to your heart that your sins can be forgiven on account of Jesus dying on the Cross in your stead, and rising from the dead.