

# OpenTheo

## August 1st: Nehemiah 12 & John 6:22-40

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Dedicating the wall. The bread that came down from heaven.

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## Transcript

Nehemiah chapter 12. These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua. Saraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malak, Hathash, Shekiniah, Reham, Merimoth, Iddo, Ginnathoi, Abijah, Midjamin, Meadiah, Bilger, Shemiah, Joirib, Jediah, Salu, Amach, Hilkiah, Jediah.

These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brothers in the days of Jeshua. And the Levites, Jeshua, Binuai, Kadmiel, Sherubbiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his brothers was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. And Bakbukiah, and Juniah and their brothers stood opposite them in the service.

And Jeshua was the father of Joachim, Joachim the father of Eliaship, Eliaship the father of Joida, Joida the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Judah. And in the days of Joachim were priests, heads of fathers' houses, of Saraiah, Mariah, of Jeremiah,

Hananiah, of Ezra, Meshulam, of Amariah, Jehohanan, of Malukai, Jonathan, of Shebaniah, Joseph, of Harim, Adna, of Miriath, Helkiah, of Iddo, Zechariah, of Ginnathon, Meshulam, of Abijah, Zichriah, of Minyamin, of Moadiah, Piltai, of Bilger, Shemua, of Shemiah, Jehonathan, of Joirib, Mattaniah, of Jodiah, Uziah, of Salai, Kalai, of Amark, Eber, of Hilkiah, Hashabiah, of Jodiah, Nethanel. In the days of Eliaship, Joida, Johanan, and Jada, the Levites were recorded as heads of fathers' houses.

So too were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian. As for the sons of Levi, their heads of fathers' houses were written in the book of the chronicles, until the days of Johanan, the son of Eliaship, and the chiefs of the Levites, Hashabiah, Sherubiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers who stood opposite them, to praise and to give thanks according to the commandment of David the man of God, watch by watch. Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshulam, Talmon, and Aqab were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates.

These were in the days of Joachim, the son of Jeshua, son of Josedach, and in the days of Nehemiah, the governor, and of Ezra, the priest and scribe. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the districts surrounding Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites, also from Beth Gilgal, and from the region of Geba and Asmaveth.

For the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people, and the gates, and the wall. Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall, and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks.

One went to the south on the wall to the dungate, and after them went Hoshiah and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshulam, Judah, Benjamin, Shammaiah, and Jeremiah, and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets, Zachariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shammaiah, son of Mataniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zechariah, son of Asaph, and his relatives Shammaiah, Azariah, Mililai, Gililai, Maiiai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe went before them. At the fountain gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David. At the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the water gate on the east, the other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall above the tower of the ovens, to the broad wall, and above the gate of Ephraim, and by the gate of Yeshanna, and by the fish gate, and the tower of Hananel, and the tower of the hundred, to the sheep gate, and they came to a halt at the gate of the guard.

So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the

officials with me, and the priests, Eliakim, Meosiah, Minyamin, Micaiah, Eli O'Enai, Zechariah, and Hananiah with trumpets, and Meosiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uziah, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer, and the singers sang with Jezrehaiah as their leader, and they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy. The women and children also rejoiced, and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away, on that day men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites, according to the fields of the towns. For Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered, and they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon.

For long ago in the days of David and Asaph there were directors of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, and they set apart that which was for the Levites, and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron. Nehemiah chapter 12 records the priests and Levites who served in the temple and recounts the dedication of the wall.

There are many similarities between the lists here and the lists of returnees at various periods elsewhere in Ezra and Nehemiah. Such lists would be especially important for priests and Levites, as offices and duties were passed down genealogically. We also find priestly genealogies in places like 1 Chronicles.

The chapter opens with a list of the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel, the son of Sheol-Tiel. The date of Zerubbabel's return is debated by scholars, especially as Sheol-Tiel was seemingly the governor at the time of the initial return. The question of the relationship between these two figures is an interesting one.

Some scholars speculate that they were related, and that Zerubbabel, who was much younger, took over from his elder relative. Another possibility is that Sheol-Tiel was the official leader of the Jews at the time of the return, but Zerubbabel, as the heir in the Davidic line, enjoyed a special status and was treated as a de facto leader in many respects. Zerubbabel's return occurred at some point after 538 BC, but before 520 BC.

I'm inclined to place it nearer to the time of Cyrus' decree, in the later 530s. Jeshua was the high priest that accompanied him. Andrew Steinman draws attention to the prophecy concerning Jeshua in Zechariah 6, verses 9-15.

And the word of the Lord came to me, Take from the exiles Heldi, Tobijah, and Jediah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Jeziah the son of Zephaniah. Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak the high priest, and say to him, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the branch, for he will branch out from his place, and he

shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne.

And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the council of peace shall be between them both. And the crown shall be in the temple of the Lord, as a reminder to Helam, Tobijah, Jediah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. And those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the Lord.

And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you, and this shall come to pass, if you will diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God. On the basis of this prophecy of the glories of Joshua's tenure as high priest, Steinman maintains that he should be presumed to have been high priest for some years following the completion of the temple, around 515 BC. He proposes 500 BC as a likely date for the conclusion of his period as high priest.

There are 22 priestly families listed, and 8 Levitical ones. King David had appointed 24 divisions of priests in 1 Chronicles chapter 24, so perhaps two of the families were lost in exile. The list of the high priests in verses 10-11 has 6 generations, perhaps covering a span of time close to 200 years, as in Josephus, Jadaia seems to have served as high priest until around the 330s BC.

The most important names in the list are Jeshua the high priest at the time of the initial return, Elisha the high priest when Nehemiah returned, also mentioned as a leading figure in the rebuilding of the wall. In the next chapter we find that Joida had a son who had married a daughter of Sambalat. Jonathan is perhaps Johenon or Jehohenon and is mentioned in Aramaic papyri from Egypt around 407 BC.

We also have a coin with his inscription on it. Verses 12-21 relate the priests of the second generation of the returnees, during the tenure of Joachim, the son of Jeshua as high priest. The head of the priestly family in the return is given, following the order of the preceding list in verses 1-7, along with the name of the head at that later time.

The name of the head of Minyamin's family has dropped out in verse 17, also there is no reference to Hatush. Verses 22-23 assure the reader of the continuity of the records during the tenure of the high priests that succeeded them. The identity of Darius the Persian here is a matter of some controversy, with scholars wishing to identify him with each of Darius I, the king at the time of the rebuilding of the temple, Darius II, who reigned from 424-404 BC, or Darius III, who reigned from 336-330 BC.

Steinman suggests Darius III as his reign was around the time of the conclusion of Jeshua's tenure as high priest. H.G.M. Williamson, however, argues that the figure is rather the earlier Darius I, who preceded the high priest mentioned in the earlier part of verse 22. The point is to highlight that the priests were recorded as heads of fathers' houses in that earlier period too.

The close attention given to careful preservation of genealogies and regard for proper sources is seen in verse 23. Verses 24-26 give us a list of Levites from the second generation of returnees, including singers and gatekeepers. Many of these men also served during the later period of Nehemiah and Ezra.

In verse 27 we return to the Nehemiah memoir, as we can see from the first person pronoun in verse 31. For the dedication of the wall, Nehemiah gathered all of the Levites from their places to Jerusalem for a general joyous celebration, accompanied by the Levites' music and song. The Levites purified themselves and also richly purified the people, as the people were purified for special covenant occasions, such as the meeting with the Lord at Sinai in Exodus chapter 19.

They also purified the gates and wall of the city. The tabernacle building was consecrated back in Leviticus chapter 8, so buildings could be set apart and cleansed. However, the walls are not consecrated so much as they are cleansed, which suggests that perhaps something closer to a cleansing like that employed on leprous houses in Leviticus chapter 14 might be in view.

The dedication ceremony involved two processions on the wall, one going counter-clockwise to the south of the wall and then to the east, and the other clockwise to the north. Both groups were led by choirs, with Ezra at the head of the first group, with half of the officers and people in each procession, with seven priests with trumpets, and eight more with musical instruments. Having travelled around the wall, they descended and joined together at the temple.

There was then a general celebration for all of the people, with great rejoicing and many sacrifices, participated in not just by the official priests and heads of families, but also by the entire body of the people, women and children included. The joy of the people was such that it could be heard far away, presumably striking fear into the opponents of the Jews. We might recognise the similarities between this celebration and the one described in Ezra chapter 3, at the laying of the foundation of the temple at the beginning.

The completion of the building of the temple and of the walls of Jerusalem would also be important milestones towards the future foretold in the prophecy of Daniel's seventy weeks, for instance. Besides the public festivities, people were set apart for various forms of service on that day. At the height of the celebration, Nehemiah was mindful of how to convert the exuberance and joy of that day into something more enduring.

The Levites continued in patterns of service, first established by David and Solomon. The reminder of David here creates a powerful bond between the height of the period of the kingdom and the time after the return. Nehemiah and Zerubbabel are here connected, as both of them oversaw the completion of great construction projects.

Zerubbabel oversaw the rebuilding of the temple and Nehemiah the rebuilding of the

wall. Now finally, with the dedication of the wall, Jerusalem is re-established as a city, after the painful years of exile. A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which this chapter creates or illustrates bonds between different generations of Israel's life as a nation? What purposes would such bonds serve? John chapter 6 verses 22 to 40.

On the next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had eaten the bread, after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus answered them, truly, truly I say to you, you are seeking me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.

Then they said to him, what must we do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered them, this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent. So they said to him, then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. Jesus then said to them, truly, truly I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They said to him, sir, give us this bread always. Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

Following the feeding of the five thousand in John chapter 6, the multitude followed Jesus to the other side of the sea. His feeding of the five thousand had caused a stir. This was a time of messianic fervour, and Jesus was a man who seemed marked out to be the leader of the people.

The crowd, many of whom probably lived in poverty, thought that following this wonder worker around, a man who was able to multiply loaves and fish, would be a way to enjoy food and security. This man was clearly destined to be a king or something. If they joined his mission as soon as possible they might receive some of the benefits, perhaps the power and the influence that might arise from it.

Jesus challenges them on this front. Although they have eaten their fill of the loaves and fish, they did not see the sign, they just saw the material benefit of eating the loaves and fish. They never really perceived what was being communicated through the miracle.

The sign is not just the great act of power. He tells them not to labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, the food which the Son of Man will give. This might again recall the conversation with the woman at the well back in chapter 4, where Jesus speaks about living water that is to be distinguished from the physical water in the well.

The person who drinks of the water in the well will thirst again, but the person who drinks of the water that Jesus will give, the water of the Spirit, will never thirst again. The food that Jesus promises here is food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give. The Father has set his seal upon the Son of Man, perhaps referring to the Spirit, marking him out as his anointed servant.

We should here recall Moses' conflicts with the wilderness generation, who looked back with fondness upon their time in Egypt when they ate their fill of bread. In Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 3, the Lord through Moses told the Israelites that he let them hunger and fed them with manna, so that they would learn that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Like the wilderness generation before them, the multitude here are focused upon the physical food.

They don't perceive the sign, nor the lesson in faith that the Lord is teaching them. The people respond by asking what they should do to do the works of God. This might be a question of the kind, what must we do to inherit eternal life? The question emphasises the commandments of God in their plurality and also the works of God as those that are required by him.

Jesus responds by redefining the key terms in the question. Instead of the works of God as the works required by God, there is the work of God, the singular work of God. And the work in question is not just a work that people are doing for God, it is, while people are doing this work, a work wrought by God in them.

Jesus' answer also makes clear that what the Lord requires of them is not primarily a diverse assortment of good deeds, but it's a singular work focused upon believing in the one that he has sent, in Jesus himself as the son of man. That act of belief, loyalty and commitment is the one integrating work that holds together everything else. Responding

to this claim, the people now challenge him to produce a sign.

Perhaps strange as he has already multiplied the loaves in their presence, what else is he expected to do? They focus on the example of Moses in particular, our father's eight man in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. Okay, you're the prophet like Moses, the prophet who was supposed to come into the world.

Moses, the former prophet, gave us manna in the wilderness. You should do something similar. Jesus' response to them is an unpacking of their statement and an unpacking of words concerning the manna from Exodus and the Psalms, pushing them to recognise something more going on.

They attributed the bread given from heaven to Moses, but it was not actually Moses who gave that bread, but God gave the bread from heaven. And that bread is not the true bread. The true bread from heaven is the one that the father sends down, the son.

He is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Already in the book of John we've seen things described as true. There's the true vine, there's the true light, there's the true worshippers that will be established.

Christ is presented as the one who brings the reality that was always anticipated, the reality that the signs pointed forward to. He is the substance, the reality, the one that the signs foreshadowed. The manna was always something that anticipated the greater bread that would come from heaven.

The manna was bread from heaven, but the true bread from heaven is Jesus Christ himself. He comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Now Jesus is within this context working off the background of reflection upon the character of wisdom.

Wisdom comes down from heaven. Wisdom is associated with bread and food. We might think about wisdom's feast in Proverbs chapter 9. She invites people to taste of her bread and wine.

Jesus might be playing upon that, along with the tradition of reflection upon wisdom in intertestamental literature. Christ's claim that the one who comes to him shall not hunger and who believes in him shall never thirst might recall the conversation with the Samaritan woman. However, the people that he is speaking to here do not believe him.

There's a failure on their part to perceive what's taking place. Consequently, Jesus takes up the story of the manna that they reference and twists it to show that far more is going on in that story. That story was never merely about an earthly leader, Moses, providing material food for a people as a sign that he was anointed by God.

It was a sign that anticipated by God's action a greater gift, a greater manna that would come in the future. And that manna is seen in Christ. He is the fulfillment of wisdom, the



one who has come down from heaven.

He's also the fulfillment of the law. The law was also described in a way associated with bread. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The law, the words that proceed from the mouth of God, are seen as something that is like bread that we can eat, that gives strength and sustenance and even delight. We can live by such bread. Jesus' response to his interlocutors here is one that takes their words about the manna and unpacks and reveals a far more glorious picture that was always anticipating something greater that is now in effect.

Already in this chapter we've seen allusions to an exodus pattern is played out in the crossing of the Sea of Tiberias, in the leading of the people, a great multitude through the wilderness, in sitting down on the mountain to teach, dividing the people into groups and then miraculously feeding them. However, the pattern of exodus at work in Jesus' ministry is not just a repetition of the former exodus. It's an escalation.

There's a movement towards something anticipated by the first exodus that exceeds it. This is the true bread from heaven. Christ is the one who is not merely repeating what Moses did in the wilderness.

He is bringing the reality that was always looked forward to. This passage is clearly reminiscent of other points in the Gospel where Jesus presents himself as food and drink. He is the one who provides wine at the wedding feast.

He is the one who promises water that will mean that those who drink it will never thirst again. And the illustration of the manna brings another aspect of Christ to the foreground. Like the manna, Christ comes down from heaven.

He has come from the Father. He is the one who is sent on a mission. He has an existence that precedes his earthly life.

He comes down from above and as he does so, he brings the life of the Father down to earth. That heavenly origin of Christ, although it is something that we do see in the synoptics, is far clearer in the Gospel of John. This is one of the strongest declarations of Christ's source from above and also of the place to which he will return.

He has been sent on a mission by the Father, a mission to give life. The Father, as we see in verse 39, commits people into the charge of the Son and the Son preserves them and leads them to eternal life. The Son will not lose anyone who has been committed to his charge.

In the wording of verse 40, we might also have a recollection of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus where he compares himself to the serpent that was raised by Moses in the

wilderness. Those who looked at the bronze serpent were delivered. In a like manner, those who look on the Son of Man and believe in him will have eternal life.

They will receive the life of the Spirit, anticipating and serving as a down payment of final resurrection. On that great last day, they too will be raised up. A question to consider, Jesus here speaks of looking on the Son and believing in him as a statement of what faith is and involves.

In the Gospel of John, and even in this very chapter, faith and what it involves are described in several different ways. What other examples can you think of and how might these give us a fuller, orbbed understanding of what faith is?