

Nehemiah 12

Read Nehemiah 12:1-26: There seems to be lot of priests and Levites involved in this ceremony. We need to look at the temple as more than a local church. There is only one Temple. The building itself was very small. The actual building of the Temple could fit inside the infield of any baseball stadium. However, later on in history; there was a large structure added all around it. There was a large plaza, the porticos, the columns, the staircases, all of that, were built up by Herod the Great on a monumental scale, filling up, I think something like ten football fields.... So we have then a very large, very conspicuous, grandiose, grand... structure in the center of Jerusalem which attracted pilgrims from near and far, both Jews and Gentile....

In the little and simple temple itself, we have priests, all descending from Aaron, the High Priest, back in time, brother of Moses - the tribe of priests who officiated at the altar. They slaughtered animals; they took the animal carcasses on the altar, roasted the animals, spattered the blood on the corners of the altar, dispensed the meat, and the bones and the blood and so on, and performed other similar tasks inside the Temple. It would require many priests to sacrifice animals for a hundred thousand or more pilgrims. I know that to skin an animal, and cut through a couple of bones will required continual knife sharpening; and would have to take more than 30 minutes. On one hand we could wonder how much work could there be for so many priests?

Only the priests were actually able to penetrate the innermost areas of the Temple. Even full blooded religious pious Jews could only go near, just get to the outskirts of the Temple. Further back, even gentiles could attend....

The actual religious rituals of the Temple were solely in the hands of the priests. The worshipers brought their own sacrifice to the Temple because say, your wife had a baby, say a child recovered from illness, or say you're at a pilgrimage festival and you're celebrating at the pilgrimage. So, you bring your animal offering to the Temple, the priest takes it away from you and brings it back, brings you back roast beef or roast lamb in a little while where you and your family sit and eat. So, even though the actual doing, the actual performing [of rituals] were in the hands of the priests, nonetheless, the Temple played a large role in a collective religious mentality and a collective religion of the people, as a whole. Everybody realized that this was the one most sacred place on earth, the one place on earth where somehow heaven and earth meet, where somehow there is a telephone connection, perhaps we would say, between heaven and earth, where the earth rises up and

heavens somehow descend just enough, that they just touch.... So, even though it was a small institution, entirely run by a small caste of people and even though most people can never ever get in, get inside the innermost precincts, nonetheless, the Temple as a whole, the institution, the values and the structure played a very important role in the society at large.

Read Nehemiah 12:27-30: We have lost track that it is our relationship with God that makes our country strong. We could save trillions of dollars and millions of lives by focusing on the causes, and not the effects. The Jews knew this. The wall around Jerusalem was dedicated in an event involving musicians from all over the region. What were these kinds of dedications like? It was a musical event. It was a joyful celebration. They were very involved. There had only been a couple of similar events in the past. One was for the dedication of the tabernacle, and then later, there was one for the temple.

Moses dedicated the tabernacle. He repeated the procedure below every day for 12 days::

When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils. ² Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of families who were the tribal leaders in charge of those who were counted, made offerings. ³ They brought as their gifts before the LORD six covered carts and twelve oxen—an ox from each leader and a cart from every two. These they presented before the tabernacle. ⁴ The LORD said to Moses, ⁵ “Accept these from them, that they may be used in the work at the tent of meeting. Give them to the Levites as each man’s work requires.” ⁶ So Moses took the carts and oxen and gave them to the Levites. ⁷ He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required, ⁸ and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, as their work required. They were all under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest. ⁹ But Moses did not give any to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible. ¹⁰ When the altar was anointed, the leaders brought their offerings for its dedication and presented them before the altar. ¹¹ For the LORD had said to Moses, “Each day one leader is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar.” ¹² The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah. ¹³ His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels^[a] and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels,^[b] both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with the finest flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering; ¹⁴ one gold dish weighing ten shekels,^[c]

filled with incense; ¹⁵ one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering; ¹⁶ one male goat for a sin offering¹⁷; ¹⁷ and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering. This was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab. (Numbers 7:1-12)

Then Moses told Aaron to have his people bring in the holy furniture. Then the priests were purified. Then the Levites were purified.

Many years later the children of Israel went from using a tabernacle to using a temple. When Solomon dedicated the temple the ark was brought into it by the priests. There were many sacrifices, payers and speeches.

Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; ¹³ I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.”¹⁴ While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king turned around and blessed them. ¹⁵ Then he said: “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David. For he said, ¹⁶ ‘Since the day I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city in any tribe of Israel to have a temple built so that my Name might be there, but I have chosen David to rule my people Israel.’ (1 Kings 8:12-16)

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven ²³ and said: “LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. ²⁴ You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today. (1 Kings 8:22-24)

Read Nehemiah 12:31-47: These leaders and officials and priests and musicians and scribes spent a lot of time in an elaborate ‘worship musical arrangement’. It was like a party; where there was ongoing worship and sacrifices taking place. We have an hour for church or Bible study in our society. When was the last time that America had a day-long, widely observed time of intense worship and gathering and celebration just to honor God? Never? Do we have a completely-wrong mind set? We need to monitor how anxious we are to move on as we read our Bibles or pray or sit in church.