

Worship the Lord!



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Nehemiah 12:27–29; 1 Chronicles 25:6–8; 1 John 1:7–9; Nehemiah 12:31–42; Hebrews 9:1–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “They sang to the Lord. They praised him. They gave thanks to him. They said, ‘The Lord is good. His faithful [loyal] love to Israel continues forever’ ” (Ezra 3:11, NlrV).

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE helps us understand how the Jews worship God in Ezra's time. We see how thankful to God they are. So, they start to praise Him. In 515 B.C., the Jews finish building the temple (Ezra 6:15–18). Then “they gave the Temple to God to honor him” (Ezra 6:16, ICB). About 60 years later, the people finish building Jerusalem's wall. The Jews also give the city's wall to God. They celebrate that time too (Nehemiah 6:15–7:3; Nehemiah 12:27–43).

In those days, God's people often gave Him the things they built. It was part of their way of life. What else did the Jews give to God? They also gave Him houses and public buildings. They celebrated these times with singing, music, feasts, and joy. The priests, or religious leaders, made God's people clean during these times. In the past, King David gave an animal gift to God during a celebration. The animal was killed. So, after that, Israel's leaders copied what David did. Solomon gave God an animal offering. Then he brought God's ark back to the temple (1 Kings 8:5).

This week, we will look at how the Jews worshiped God in Nehemiah's time. What can we learn from their worship?



The people “gave the temple to God to honor him” (Ezra 6:16, ICB).

SONGS ABOUT THE LORD (Nehemiah 12:27–29)

The Levites helped the priests, or holy leaders, in God’s temple. A special group of Levites was put in charge of singing and music. God wanted worship in the temple to be beautiful. So, God gave the Levites special rules to follow when they sang and played music in the temple.

King David chose Asaph to be the worship leader in the temple. So, all Asaph’s future sons were singers. They were “musicians in charge of the worship services at the house of God” (Nehemiah 11:22, NIV).

In 1 Chronicles 25:6–8, we read about the singers in the temple. “They played music for the LORD’s temple” (1 Chronicles 25:6, NIV). What do these verses teach us about how important music is to their worship?



When we praise God, we must praise Him from our hearts.

The singers are Levites. They come from one of the 12 family groups of Israel. As Levites, they already work in the temple. So, it is part of their job to provide music during worship in the temple. In King David’s day, a music school is opened. David is in charge of the school. The school has teachers and students. The students are young and old. They take turns working in the temple. They play music for worship. Some Levites use instruments. Some Levites sing. Other Levites take care of the music instruments and the clothes the musicians wore. Why does the temple in David’s time have so many musicians with different jobs? God wants His people to grow as musicians. He wants their music skills to get better and better. Then their worship in the temple will be better too. God wants their worship to be excellent.

What else can we learn from the school of music in David’s time? When we praise God, we must praise Him from our hearts. Then our praises will bring other people to God.

How do the songs and music in your church give you joy? What has been your experience with music and worship?

CLEAN HEARTS AND MINDS (1 John 1:7–9)

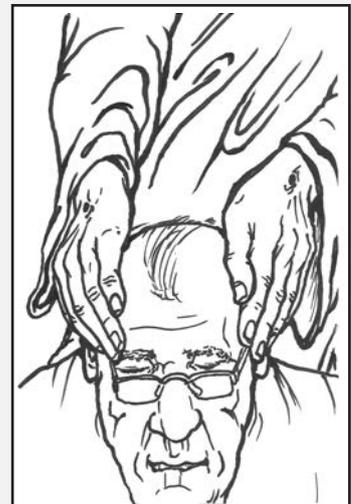
The Bible tells us that the people give the city's wall to God. Next, the singers come to Jerusalem. Then "the religious leaders and the Levites made themselves holy, and they made the people, the gates, and the wall holy" (Nehemiah 12:30, NLV). The Hebrew word written as "made holy" is "ta-HAR." It means "to be clean." This word is used in many parts of the Old Testament. It shows that God makes us clean. He cleans our hearts and minds from sin.

"God is in the light. We should live in the light, too. If we live in the light, we share fellowship with each other. And when we live in the light, the blood of the death of Jesus, God's Son, is making us clean from every sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins. We can trust God. He does what is right. He will make us clean from all the wrongs we have done" (1 John 1:7–9, ICB). What do these verses teach us about God's power in our lives? Why do we need God's forgiveness?

The temple is an important part of the Jewish religion in Bible times. God wants the worship in the temple to lead people to Him to be saved. Animal offerings are an important part of that worship. They are word pictures. They help God's people see that Jesus' blood makes them clean from sin. In the same way, we must understand what Jesus does for us. Then we will learn to love Him more. That is why the Israelites often talked about what God did for them in the past. It helped them to know God's love. It helped them to see that God is good. The same thing is true for us. When we know God's love, we will worship Him with joy.

Today, we should feel joy in the Lord too. We should thank God for His forgiveness. A thankful heart helps us to have hope. Then it is easy to praise the Lord. We will see that God's love is beautiful. What is the most beautiful picture of God's love? Jesus' death for us on the cross.

We all have sinned in the past. Each of us fight against sin every day. But there is hope at the cross. There, Jesus forgives us fully. Why not ask Jesus for this forgiveness right now?



God cleans our hearts and minds from sin.

TWO LARGE SINGING GROUPS (Nehemiah 12:31–42)

Read about the celebration in Nehemiah 12:31–42. Why is music an important part of it?

In Nehemiah's time, the priests, or religious leaders, start two big singing groups. These two groups, or choirs, walk around Jerusalem. They sing praises to God. They thank God for everything He does for them. Some people in the choirs play music while other people sing. Ezra stands at the front of one choir. He leads it through the city. Nehemiah stands at the back of the 2nd choir. He follows the musicians from behind. The two choirs start in the same place. Then they separate. The 1st choir goes around the city walls. The 2nd choir goes around the walls too. But they go in a different direction. The two choirs meet up again at the Valley Gate. Then together they go to the temple. Outside, the priests blow the trumpets. Then the choirs go inside. The two choirs stand in the temple and face each other.

Let us answer the question at the top of this page: Why is music an important part of the worship in the temple? To answer this question, we must understand worship in the temple. Music in the temple is not a concert! People do not come to the temple only to enjoy the music. Music is a part of worship. As the musicians sing and play, the people pray. The music helps them honor God in the temple.

The animal offerings are the most important part of worship at the temple. The animals are killed. Yes, each animal's death is sad. But it is a necessary part of the temple worship. The killed animals show the people Jesus' future death on the cross for their sins. Of course, it must have been hard for the people to watch the animals die. So, the beautiful music helps lift the people's thoughts to heaven. The music helps make their whole worship experience better. It helps them feel better too.

Find examples in the Bible where music is an important part of worship. Look at Exodus 15:1; 2 Chronicles 20:21, 22; and Revelation 15:2–4. What is the singing all about?

Both on earth and in heaven, music is an important part of worship. In the verses above, the people sing about everything God does for them. That is why they praise Him.



The music helps the people honor God in the temple.

ANIMAL OFFERINGS (Nehemiah 12:43)

Read about the worship celebration in Nehemiah 12:43. Why do the priests, or religious leaders, offer God many animal gifts? Why are these gifts an important part of the worship celebration?

As we read yesterday, animal gifts are the most important part of worship at the temple. These animal gifts have a special name: sacrifices. That name shows us two things. The animals must be killed. And their death is a word picture. It shows the Jews Jesus' death on the cross for sin. There are many different sacrifices in Old Testament times. Some animals are killed to show God's forgiveness for sin. People also bring animal gifts to the temple to thank God for His love. The sacrifices help the people to remember the truth about God. He is holy. He is a God of love. These animal gifts also help the people to remember God's promise. God promises to send a Savior to His people. The Savior will die for them. That is why the Savior is named God's Lamb.

Read Nehemiah 12:43 again. Then read John 1:29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7; and Revelation 5:6, 12, 13. What do these verses teach us about the sacrifices or animal gifts? What truth do these animal gifts show?

Do you know how many times Nehemiah writes the word "happy" in Nehemiah 12:43? Four times! What does that show us? The people are happy. Yes, they also feel respect for God. They honor Him and feel holy fear for Him too. At the same time, look at all the joy they feel! When they worship God, they feel happy. When we worship God, we must respect Him. We also must have holy fear for Him in our hearts. But we also must remember to feel happy. Psalm 95 shows us how to worship God with hearts full of joy: "Come, let us sing praise to the LORD! Let us shout praises to the Rock [Jesus] who saves us" (Psalm 95:1, ERV). We also must remember to bow down and kneel in front of the Lord (Psalm 95:6). So, we must be happy when we worship God. We must worship Him with a joyful heart. At the same time, we also must remember to honor and respect Him.

Make a picture in your mind of Jesus on the cross. What do you feel? How can we find joy in the cross too?



We must worship God with a joyful heart. At the same time, we also must remember to honor and respect Him.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND LEVITES (Nehemiah 12:44–47)

Read about the gifts that the people bring for the priest, or religious leaders, and the Levites in Nehemiah 12:44–47. Why are the Jewish people happy about the priests and the Levites who serve God?

What is the work of the Levites a word picture for? For the answer, read Hebrews 9:1–11.



“By faith, we must join [Jesus] in heaven.”

“Jesus works for us right now in heaven. This work is a very important part of God’s plan to save us. It is as important as Jesus’ death on the cross. Jesus started His work for us on the cross. Then He went to finish that work in heaven. With faith, we must join Him in heaven. He is on the other side of the curtain in the Most Holy Room of the temple in heaven. ‘Jesus has already gone there. He has become our Religious Leader forever and has made the way for man to go to God. He is like [the same as] Melchizedek.’ Hebrews 6:20 [NLV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 489, adapted.

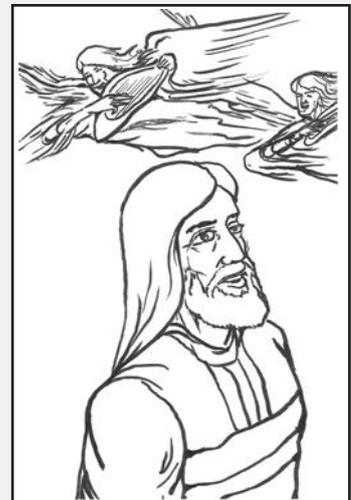
The people back then do not understand God’s saving plan the way we do today. But the people understand enough to know that the Levites’ work is important. The Levites help serve in the temple. So, the people are excited to help the Levites. Remember, the Jews spend a lot of time with God. They read the Bible. They pray. They worship. They give their lives to God again. As they do these things, God helps His people to understand something important. They need to start taking care of God’s house. The special work done in the temple stopped. So, it needs to start again. The people are happy when it does.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Growing Up Into Christ,” pages 67–75, in *Steps to Christ*.

“God will take His saved people to heaven. There, they will learn more about the cross. They will sing about the cross forever. In Jesus our King, we will see Jesus our Savior. We always will remember that Jesus’ power made the planets. He is God’s Beloved. He is the King of heaven. The angels love to praise Him. This same Jesus made Himself lower than the angels. He accepted the guilt and shame of our sins. Then His Father hid His face from Jesus. Jesus’ heart broke. His heart was filled with sadness for this lost planet. That sadness crushed out His life on the cross. This same Jesus made all the planets in outer space. He will decide what happens to everyone who ever lives. This same Jesus put aside His glory. He came down to this earth to save us. He loves us so much. This Bible truth will fill the minds and hearts of everyone in heaven. God’s story will fill everyone with wonder forever. They will never stop being excited about it. God’s saved people will look at their Savior in wonder. They will see the Father’s glory shining in Jesus’ face. God’s people also will look at Jesus’ throne. His throne will never end. When God’s people think about that, they will start singing: ‘The Lamb is very worthy! He was killed. He saved us. He buys us back from sin with His own precious blood!’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 651, 652.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why must we worship God with joy and respect? Talk about your answer in class.
- ② The Jews finish building their city wall. Then they give the wall to God. They ask Him to protect their wall. They understand that no wall by itself can keep them safe. So, God must protect their wall. Solomon says: “If it is not the LORD who builds a house, the builders are wasting their time. If it is not the LORD who watches over the city, the guards are wasting their time” (Psalm 127:1, ERV). What does Solomon’s wisdom here show us we should do first before we start any work for the Lord?



“The angels love to praise [Jesus].”