

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

Outlined Bible

Introduction: The books of Ezra and Nehemiah provide our primary source of information about the 100 years following the Babylonian captivity. They tell us of the repopulation of Palestine by the Jews, the rebuilding of the temple, and the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem.

Name - Each book is named for its central character.

1. At one time the two books were treated as one and called Ezra.
2. There is further evidence that both were once part of Chronicles.

Author - The books were likely written by their namesakes.

1. In both books the central characters speak frequently in the first person. (cf. Ezra 8:15f; Nehemiah 1:1f)
2. Both authors used various sources in writing their books. (Ezra 1:2-4; 4:8f; 6:3f)

Purpose

1. The book of Ezra was written to record the faithfulness of God in reestablishing the Jews in the land.
2. The book of Nehemiah was written to show the work of God through a devoted leader - Nehemiah.

I. Background of the books.

A. The Babylonian captivity.

1. Babylon conquered Judah and took the first captives out of the land in 606 BC. (cf. Daniel 1:1-7)
2. In 597 BC and 586, two other major deportations took place.
3. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years. (Jeremiah 25:12)

B. The return.

1. In 539 BC, Babylon fell to Darius, the Mede, and the Persian reign began. (cf. Daniel 5:30)
2. Ezra 1:1-4 speaks of "Cyrus, King of Persia" who issued a proclamation allowing the Jews return home and rebuild their Temple.
 - a. This Cyrus was apparently Cyrus II, Cyrus the Great, who ruled the Achaemenid Persian Empire from 539 to 530 BC.
 - b. The prophet Isaiah predicted Cyrus' precise role in the rebuilding of the temple 150 to 200 years before it occurred.
3. Just as the Israelites had gone into Babylon in three stages (606, 597, and 586 BC); their return was in three stages.
 - a. Zerubbabel led the first group home in 536 BC. (Note: The Temple was rebuilt and dedicated in 515 BC, during the time of Esther.)
 - b. Ezra led the second group of captives home in 458 BC and a great revival ensued.
 - c. Nehemiah led the last group of exiles home in 445 BC and rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem.

C. The restoration of Judah. The following chart offers a chronology of major characters and events of the restoration of Judah:

PERSIAN KING	DATES	BIBLICAL CHARACTERS	SCRIPTURE	EVENT
Cyrus	539-530	Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai, Zechariah	Ezra 1-4	First return Temple begun then stopped
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		Zechariah		
Cambyses	530-521	—————	—————	No work on Temple
Darius 1	521-486	Haggai, Zechariah	Ezra 4-6	Temple work completed
Xerxes -Ahasuerus	486-465	Ester, Mordecai	Esther 1-10	Story of Jews' preservation
Artaxerxes	465-423	Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi	Ezra 7-10 Nehemiah	Second return under Ezra Third return Nehemiah Ministry of Malachi
END OF	OLD	TESTAMENT	HISTORY	

D. The period covered by these two books ranges from 536 BC (the beginning of Cyrus' reign) to 433 BC (Nehemiah's second governorship).

E. It is during this period that the term "Jew" replaced "Hebrew" or "Israelite" as the common term for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

1. The northern kingdom disappeared after the Assyrian captivity.
2. The surviving nation was comprised primarily by the house of Judah.
3. The word Jew originally signified "one from Judah".

II. Main Message of the book. The main message of the two books is that God restores, rebuilds and revives through devoted leaders.^s

A. Ezra was a Priest and a scribe. (Ezra 7:10)

1. The book of Ezra focuses on the restoration of the Temple and reestablishing it as the center of Judah's culture.
2. Ezra 7:27-28 summarizes the book. "Praise be to the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me."

B. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to Artaxerxes I of Persia.

1. While in exile he grieved over the desolation of Jerusalem's wall, and he desired to rebuild it.
2. With Artaxerxes permission, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem thirteen years after Ezra.
3. Nehemiah's devotion to the cause is best summarized in 6:3a. "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"

III. Outline of the books.

A. The return under Zerubbabel. (Ezra 1-6)

1. After conquering Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple. (Ezra)
2. A detailed census of the 50,000 Zerubbabel would lead back is given. (Ezra 2)
3. The Altar and Temple are rebuilt. (Ezra 3:1-13)
4. Opposition to the building arose. (Ezra 4:1-24)
5. Challenged and motivated by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the people resumed work on the Temple. (Ezra 5:1-17)
6. King Darius issued a decree for the rebuilding of the Temple. (Ezra 6:1-12)
7. After four years of hard work, the Temple was completed and dedicated. (Ezra 6:13-18)
8. The Passover was observed. (Ezra 6:19-22)

B. The return under Ezra. (Ezra 7-10)

1. About 80 years after the first return under Zerubbabel, Ezra the scribe returned with about 1700 people. (Ezra 7:1-10)
 - a. King Artaxerxes issued a decree to accompany them. (Ezra 7:13-27)
 - b. A list of the heads of families is given. (Ezra 8:1-14)
2. Upon arrival, Ezra was disturbed at finding that intermarriage with the people of the land had compromised their spiritual devotion. (Ezra 9:1-4)
 - a. He offered prayers for the people. (Ezra 9:5-15)
 - b. The people repented and confessed their sins. (Ezra 10:1-17)
 - c. A list of those who inter-married foreign wives was given. (Ezra 10:18-44)
- C. The return under Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 1-13)
 1. About 445 BC word came to Nehemiah of the dilapidation of Jerusalem's wall. (Nehemiah 1:1-11)
 2. With permission from Artaxerxes, he returned to the holy city determined to rebuild the wall. (Nehemiah 2:1-20)
 3. Well-planned and methodical, the work began. (Nehemiah 3:1-32)
 4. Trouble began.
 - a. Unfriendly neighbors heckled them. (Nehemiah 4:1-23)
 - b. There is an outcry from the Jews. (Nehemiah 5:1-19)
 - c. There is even a plot against Nehemiah's life. (6:1-14)
 5. Under Nehemiah's leadership, the wall is completed in less than two months. (Nehemiah 6:15 - 7:1-4)
 6. The returning exiles are named and numbered. (7:5-73)
 7. Ezra read and explained the Law of Moses. (Nehemiah 8:1-18)
 8. The people confessed their sins and rededicated themselves to the Lord. (Nehemiah 9:1 -10:39)
 9. Lots are cast, and one-tenth of the people are chosen to live in Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 11:1-36)
 10. A list of priests and Levites is given. (Nehemiah 12:1-26)
 11. The wall is dedicated to the Lord. (Nehemiah 12:27-47)
 12. When Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes, much of his influence left also. (Nehemiah 13:1-6)
 13. Coming back to Jerusalem, Nehemiah zealously dealt with the offenders. (Nehemiah 13:7-11, 23-25)
 14. The people were encouraged to support the priests (Nehemiah 13:10-14) and to obey the Sabbath laws. (13:10-14)

IV. The themes of the Book

- A. An intolerance for compromise.
 1. Upon returning to Jerusalem, Ezra was disturbed that the Hebrews had intermarried with the Canaanite peoples and participated in idolatrous practices. (Ezra 9:1-4)
 2. Nehemiah faced the same problem later. (Nehemiah 13:23-27)
 3. Both leaders spoke and acted decisively. (Ezra 10:10-12; Nehemiah 13:25-26)
 4. Our God is absolutely unsympathetic to our alliance with anything that leads us away from Him.
- B. Doing something great for God.
 1. The process begins with recognizing a need. (Nehemiah 1:3)
 2. The recognition of need is followed by much prayer. (Nehemiah 1:4-11; 2:4b)
 3. Servants of God are recruited, and work is delegated. (Nehemiah 3:1-32)
 4. Problems will arise. (Nehemiah 5:1-7a)
 5. Opposition will come. (Nehemiah 2:19, 4:7-8:6:1-14)
 - a. Battle it with prayer and prudent precaution. (Nehemiah 4:9)
 - b. Trust in God to thwart the opposition. (Nehemiah 4:14)
 6. Keep your focus. (Nehemiah 4:6; 6:15)
 7. Praise God. (Nehemiah 8:2-6)
- C. The impact of the captivity.
 1. Three significant institutions came from the captivity:

- a. The synagogue - a place of local worship.
 - b. The scribe - a student/teacher of the law.
 - c. The *diaspora* - those Jews who stayed scattered among nations.
2. The captivity and return led to orthodox Judaism.

Ezra & Nehemiah

Summarized Bible

EZRA

From Exile to Home

Israel had forsaken God by worshiping idols like the nations around them.

Each of their kings was more-evil than those before them. The prophets warned but they would not listen. Finally, God had enough. Nebuchadnezzar conquered them taking many into exile in Babylon.

Later, God delivered a message to Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, by writing it on his wall. Daniel interpreted the message – God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

The time of their exile was drawing to an end. Cyrus king of Persia issued a proclamation “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel— he is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1:1-4)

There were 42,360, besides their male and female servants who went up from exile to Jerusalem.

Key points from Exile to Home

- God is never pleased when His people, Children of Israel or Christians, cease doing His will.
- The Lord told His Old Testament people the consequence of following other gods, idols was physical captivity.
- Christ tells His New Testament people the consequences of their unrepentant sins is eternal captivity with the Devil and His angels.

Rebuilding the Temple

Judah was carried away into captivity at three different times. After seventy years in captivity, the first of three groups have returned and after seven months, they built an altar and offered burnt offerings to God. But the foundation for the temple had not been laid. So, they appointed workers and supervisors and when the foundation was laid, they sang praises and shouted greatly.

Doing God’s will always bring opposition so the adversaries of Judah attempted several ways to stop the rebuilding; making fun, bribing and making false statements and rumors. “Then the people of the land

discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build” so the work stopped. Discouragement is one of Satan’s most powerful tools.

Later Zerubbabel built the wall. He was challenged by the nearby governors which did not stop the rebuilding. The governors sent letters to King Darius for orders to cease rebuilding. His reply was not what they desired or expected “Let the work on this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue. ... let it be done with diligence.”

They finished their building on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the King. At the dedication, they offered sacrifices of sin for all Israel and set the priests and Levites in their divisions for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

Key points from Rebuilding the Temple

- It pleases God when people’s hearts are set on pleasing Him. Nothing can stop God’s will from being done. So, if we are not willing to do the work He desires, then someone else will do that work.

NEHEMIAH

Returning to Rebuild the Wall

Zerubbabel had led the first group from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra led the second group years later and restored the Temple but not the wall around Jerusalem. Some 10 to 15 years later Nehemiah wanted to go to Jerusalem because of a report he received. “In the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, while I was at the citadel of Shushan, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men ... They said to me, those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire. When I heard those things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:1, 3, 4)

The king noticed Nehemiah’s sad countenance as he was being served wine and asked what was troubling him. As a result, Nehemiah was authorized to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall which the Lord had put into his heart to do. After inspecting the condition of the wall, he told all who were to do the work “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build. (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

Key Point from Returning to Rebuild the Wall

- One must recognize the problem and the situation surrounding it.
- Have a willing heart that allows God to use you.
- Pray for guidance.
- Communicate God’s will to others.

Rebuilding the Wall

The king of Persia gave leave to his cupbearer to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah first surveyed the torn-down walls and gates destroyed by the Babylonian fire that burned Jerusalem. He called the people together telling them now is the time to “Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.”

So, they started rebuilding the wall. The non-Jews living in the area were angry, greatly enraged, jeered and said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” But the rebuilding continued as “the people had a mind.”

Since ridicule did not work, they plotted to wage war. Neither did this work for one group stood guard while another laid the wall. Their faith was strong knowing “Our God will fight for us.” So, the wall was rebuilt.

All was not well as the nobles and officials took advantage of their brethren causing them to exist in poverty. Nehemiah became angry and brought charges against them stating we have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations. But you treat them as your slaves. Therefore, abandon this exacting of interest, and return to them what has been wrongly exacting. The nobles and officials said “We will restore these and require nothing from them.” (Nehemiah 3 – 7)

Key Points from Rebuilding the Wall

- Do we really believe “Our God will fight for us?”
- God’s people, both Old and New Covenant people, will be mocked, ridiculed and threatened when they set their hearts to do His will.

Rebuilding Spiritual Lives

The wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt with much opposition. Oppression by their nobles and officials ceased and property was restored. Spiritual awareness began to enter the hearts of the people.

The people gathered together in the square at the Water Gate. Ezra, a descendant of Aaron, began to read the Book of the Law of Moses. Then Nehemiah, Ezra and Levites taught the people. They wept as they heard God’s Word. They declared it to be a holy day and sent away to eat and rejoice for they had heard and understood the words declared to them.

The next day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law. All the people began to confess their and their father’s sins and to keep the commandments of the Law of Moses. They made a firm covenant in writing and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes. (Nehemiah 8 – 13)

Key Points from Rebuilding Spiritual Lives

- Respect God and His word - whether given by God through Moses or through Christ and His apostles.
- Confessed sins while recognizing the faithfulness of God who is from everlasting to everlasting.
- Change your life by removing sin – repent.
- Begin doing His will and Plead for mercy.