

## #12. THE BOOKS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

1. ***Ezra follows 2 Chronicles as a history of Israel's return to The Land following their Exile in Assyria and Babylon.*** Ezra and Nehemiah (one book in the Hebrew Bible) are the recollections of perhaps the most undervalued character in the Old Testament. Along with Esther, they are the three Post-Exilic historical books.
2. **The author, according to strong Jewish and Christian tradition, is Ezra (Ezra 7:1-6). Nehemiah's account is in the first person, indicating that Ezra was probably the recorder of Nehemiah's narrative.** Ezra's name means *help*, and he was a noted scribe, priest, and leader. He is generally accepted as the author of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and probably Psalm 119. He is credited with the development of The Great Synagogue (and the synagogue system), and was the leader of the council of 120 men who formalized the Old Testament Canon.  
  
He is also a noted intercessor, leading Israel in repentance and in a second return from Persia (this occurred 58 years after Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah, and 42,360 Jews first returned with the blessing of Cyrus and Darius). Ezra returned to Israel as an administrator and reformer, leading them into the first post-exilic revival.
3. **The Date:** the date of composition was about 450BC. The events of Ezra cover the years from 538BC until 450BC. There is a gap in the narrative concerning the events of 516-458 BC (58 years). Nehemiah was written between 445BC and 432BC.

### Timeline of Ezra-Nehemiah

- 585BC - Jerusalem destroyed and the Captivity of Judah in Babylon (the Northern Kingdom had been exiled in 722BC by the Assyrians).
- 539BC - Babylon is overthrown by Cyrus of Persia.
- 538BC - Cyrus issues the decree for the return of the Jews from Persia (Babylon).
- 536BC - Work begins on The Temple by Zerubbabel.
- 530BC - The Temple project is halted.
- 520BC - The Temple project resumes under the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah, and

Zerubbabel.

- 486BC - Xerxes becomes King of Persia.
- 465BC - Artaxerxes I becomes King of Persia.
- 458BC - Ezra comes to Jerusalem with the second group of Exiles.
- 445BC - Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem. The walls of the city are rebuilt.
- 433BC - Nehemiah returns to Babylon.
- 432BC - Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem.
- 430BC - Possibly a date for the ministry of Malachi.

#### 4. Key Chapters

- Ezra
  - Chapters 1:1-6:22 is the story of the first returning group of Exiles, led by Zerubbabel. They were the group who rebuilt the Temple. The work was stopped because of opposition, but with the prophetic encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, the Temple was eventually restored.
  - Chapters 7:1-10:44 is the story of the second returning group, led by Ezra. Ezra returned to Jerusalem nearly 80 years after Zerubbabel's initial return. Because of the Exile, the people of God had engaged in intermarriage with unbelievers. This put the destiny of the nation in danger. These chapters contain the story of Ezra's correction of the dangerous situation.
- Nehemiah
  - Chapters 1:1-7:73 is the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city walls.
  - Chapters 7:73-13:31 is the story of the reformation under Ezra and Nehemiah.

## 5. Key Verses

- **Ezra 1:2, 3 NASB** Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup>Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! 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.
- **Ezra 3:8 NASB** Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began *the work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the Lord.
- **Ezra 7:1-7 NASB** Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, *there went up* Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, <sup>2</sup>son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, <sup>3</sup>son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, <sup>4</sup>son of Zerariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, <sup>5</sup>son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest. <sup>6</sup>This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God *was* upon him. <sup>7</sup>Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.
- **Ezra 9:10-15 NASB** “Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, <sup>11</sup>which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end *and* with their impurity. <sup>12</sup>So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good *things* of the land and leave *it* as an inheritance to your sons forever.’ <sup>13</sup>After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited *us* less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, <sup>14</sup>shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples [f]who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape? <sup>15</sup>O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as *it is* this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this.”
- **Nehemiah 2:11, 12 NASB** So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. <sup>12</sup>And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding.
- **Nehemiah 4:1-6 NASB** Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were

rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. <sup>2</sup>He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy *men* of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore *it* for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?” <sup>3</sup>Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* near him and he said, “Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on *it*, he would break their stone wall down!”<sup>4</sup>Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. <sup>5</sup>Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders. <sup>6</sup>So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

- **Nehemiah 6:15, 16 NASB** So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of *the month* Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup>When all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations surrounding us saw *it*, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.
- **Nehemiah 8:1-18 The Day of Revival**

## 6. Key People

- **Cyrus** - the King of Persia who enabled Israel to return from Babylonian exile
- **Zerubbabel** - grandson of Jehoiachin and governor of the Persian Province of Judah
- **Haggai** - a Jewish prophet during the building of the second Temple
- **Zechariah** - another Jewish Prophet who, along with Haggai, was instrumental in encouraging the returned Remnant to build the Second Temple
- **Darius** - the third king of the Persian Empire; instrumental in the continued return of Israel
- **Artaxerxes I** - the fifth king of Persia, from 465-424BC
- **Ezra** - also called Ezra the Scribe and Ezra the Priest, was a Jewish scribe and a priest. who returned from the Babylonian exile and reintroduced the Torah in Jerusalem. He was one of the great R\reformers in Israel after the Exile.
- **Nehemiah** - Nehemiah was a high official in the Persian (modern Iran) court of King

Artaxerxes I. Nehemiah served as the king's cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:11), which evidently put him in a position to speak to the king and request favors from him. After hearing about the sad state of affairs in Judah, Nehemiah acquired the king's permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and its fortifications.

- **Sanballat** - a Samaritan leader who opposed the rebuilding efforts of Nehemiah
- **Tobiah** - an Ammonite official who opposed the rebuilding project in Jerusalem.

## 7. Key Places

- **Jerusalem** - the capital city of Judah. The focus is on the restoration of The Temple and the rebuilding of the city's defensive walls.
- **Susa** - the capital of Persia (modern Iran)

## 8. Key Themes

- **Return** - God promised the Remnant that they would return after seventy years of captivity. Included in the return would be the rebuilding of the Temple and the rededication of Jerusalem.
- **Enemies**- although Israel would always face opposition, God would be the source of their ultimate victory.
- **Focused Vision** - the people of God would be in better position to receive their destiny when they followed a vision. Vision has been defined as *a preferred future*.
- **Leadership** - though the Lord is ultimately the source of Israel's victory, He uses men and women of vision to enable us to achieve those victories.

## 9. The Contents of Ezra and Nehemiah

- The First Return Under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-6:22)
  - Cyrus's decree to return (1:1-4)
  - Offerings and treasures to rebuild the Temple (1:5-11)

- At list of Jews who returned (2:1-70)
  
- The Construction of the Second Temple (3:1-6:22)
  - The building begins (3:1-13)
  - Opposition against the project arises (4:1-5)
  - Discussions of future opposition (4:6-23)
  - Construction renewed (4:24-5:2)
  - Opposition resurfaces (5:3-6:12)
  - The Temple is completed and dedicated (6:13-22)
  
- The Second Return Under Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10:44)
  - Ezra's return (7:1-8:36)
  
  - Ezra's revival (9:1-10:44)
  
- Nehemiah's First Term as Governor (Nehemiah 1:1-12:47)
  - Nehemiah's return - rebuilding the walls (1:1-7:73)
    - Nehemiah's arrival at Jerusalem (1:1-2:20)
    - The rebuilding of the walls (3:1-7:3)
    - Nehemiah remembers the first return under Zerubbabel (3:4-73)
  
  - Ezra's revival and renewal (7:73-10:39)
    - Ezra teaches the Law (7:73-8:12)
    - The people of God worship and repent (8:13-9:37)
    - Ezra and the priests renew the Covenant (9:38-10:39)
  
  - Nehemiah's resettlement and celebration (11:1-12:47)
    - The resettlement of Jerusalem (11:1-12:26)

- The dedication of the walls (12:27-43;13:1-3)
- Various Temple responsibilities (12:44-47)
- Nehemiah's Second Term as Governor (Nehemiah 13:1-31)

### **Worth noting**

- Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26 are written in Aramaic.
- It appears Ezra had access to a collection of Persian administrative records.

### **When reading Ezra and Nehemiah:**

- Remember the opposition to both building projects came from the Samaritan residents whose ancestors had been imported to Israel by Assyria. This was another reason for the extreme prejudice between the Jews and Samaritans as evidenced in John 4:4-42 and the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).
- Remember that your worship and reformation begins with the Presence of God. The Temple was restored before the walls. God certainly seeks to restore our shattered lives, but the project begins at the Cross!