



REVIVAL

An Introduction to Ezra & Nehemiah

INTRODUCTION

Why This Might Be Helpful

Let's be honest, the Bible can sometimes be tough to understand.

Since the Bible was written a long time ago, by people living in a very different time, who were experiencing very different circumstances from many of us -- learning to understand and apply its truths to our lives can often be very difficult.

For many years I read the Bible without getting much out of it. I knew that reading the Bible was something "good Christians" were supposed to do, but truthfully I rarely understood what I was reading. With the exception of a few of my favorite Biblical Books and stories, I often struggled to connect the dots between the promises of God in the Old Testament, and the reality of those promises fulfilled in Jesus as presented in the New Testament.

As we begin our study through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, my prayer is that this small booklet will help you navigate through some of the most common issues and questions that often keep people from uncovering the great truths of God revealed in these books.

Together we will look at:

- * **STORY** : *Overview of the Story found in Ezra & Nehemiah*
- * **DEEPER** : *Answers to Common Questions About Ezra & Nehemiah*
- * **JESUS** : *How Ezra & Nehemiah Point to Jesus*
- * **OUTLINES** : *Ezra & Nehemiah*

Father God,

We ask that you will open our hearts and our minds to the great truths of your Word taught in these two books. By the power of your Holy Spirit, will you please teach us, guide us, encourage us, rebuke us, and most importantly point us to Jesus as we study Ezra and Nehemiah. Lead us towards a deeper love for you.

In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.



STORY

Overview of the Story found in Ezra & Nehemiah

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the story of the Jewish people as they struggled to regain their spiritual, national, and personal identity as the people of God. After spending 70 years as slaves under the brutal Babylonian Empire, they returned home to find the place they once called their own -- now inhabited by people who did not love and worship God.

Ezra 1-6

Ezra Chapter 1 begins one year after King Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon and thus inherits all of the land and its people -- including the Jewish exiles. After proclaiming himself the liberator of the people, he issued a decree that gave the Jewish people the freedom to return to their homeland. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, 50,000 Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem. Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, the Jewish people were faced with the harsh reality that they were now strangers in their own land. The people who had inhabited Jerusalem during their captivity did not love or worship God. Despite the opposition, the people rebuilt the altar and temple of God.

Ezra 7-10

Ezra Chapter 7 begins the second section of this great story. Nearly 80 years have gone by since Zerubbabel and the first group of Jewish people returned home. This time Ezra is leading the charge, and he has one thing on his mind -- Revival. Although the altar and the temple had been rebuilt, the Jewish people are not living the lives God created them to live. Under God's guidance Ezra sought to bring about a great revival.

Nehemiah

The final section of this great story picks up 13 years after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem. Upon receiving news that the walls of Jerusalem still lie in ruins, Nehemiah the cupbearer to the Persian King, was heartbroken. After seeking the Lord's favor and wisdom, Nehemiah asked permission to return home to rebuild the walls. God's hand was with Nehemiah, and King Artaxerxes gave him permission to leave his duties at the palace and return to Jerusalem. Upon his arrival, Nehemiah surveyed the damage, and then prepared an incredible plan that resulted in the completion of the wall around Jerusalem in 52 days. Now that the altar, the temple, and the walls had been completed, the stage was set for revival. In Nehemiah Chapter 8, the people gathered to hear Ezra declare the Word of God and the people responded in repentance, joy, & worship.

Despite their challenges and insecurities, under the guidance of God and several great leaders, the Jewish people rebuilt the temple, the walls, and ultimately their spiritual identity.



DEEPER

Answers to Common Questions About Ezra & Nehemiah

WHO WROTE EZRA & NEHEMIAH?

In the earliest copies of the Hebrew Bible, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were one book. Although some believe the Chronicler (the same author of 1 and 2 Chronicles) is responsible for these two books, most evidence suggests that Ezra wrote and compiled Ezra and Nehemiah. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Ezra used carefully researched historical data, government documents from Persian Officials, and his personal journals, as well as the journal of Nehemiah to compile these two incredible books.

WHEN WAS EZRA & NEHEMIAH WRITTEN?

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah were compiled after the last events of Nehemiah Chapter 13 took place thus dating the compilation of these books between the years 433-424 B.C.

WHEN DID THESE EVENTS TAKE PLACE?

The events recorded in the Book of Ezra took place nearly 600 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, and cover nearly 100 years of life among the Jewish people who had been enslaved in Babylon.

Ezra Chapters 1-6 cover events that took place in the years 537-515 B.C.

Ezra Chapter 7 - Nehemiah Chapter 13 cover events that took place in the years 458 - 433 B.C.

In the year 586 B.C., the Jewish people were captured and taken as slaves into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Nearly 50 years later, in the year 539 B.C. King Cyrus and the Persian Armies conquered Babylon -- thereby inheriting the Jewish people who were living there as slaves. One year later, King Cyrus issued a decree that the Jewish Exiles were free to return to their home.

Ezra Chapters 1-6 tells the story of the first group of Jewish Exiles returning home under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem would have taken many months to travel, and with a group that size -- quite possibly even longer. The first section of Ezra (ch 1-6) ends around the time that the rebuilt temple is completed (516 B.C.).

Ezra Chapter 7 picks the storyline up 57 years later as Ezra arrives in Jerusalem ready to bring about revival among the people.

Nehemiah Chapter 1 begins 13 years after the last events in Ezra Chapter 10.



JESUS + EZRA

How Ezra Points to Jesus

The restoration and rebuilding after the exile, in fulfillment of prophecy (1:1), prefigure Christ's salvation (Col. 1:13) and the building of the church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20–22). They also look forward to the consummation of salvation in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1).

1:1 God's raising of King Cyrus prefigures his raising of Christ, who in the gospel sends out the proclamation to build the new people of God (Isa. 44:28–45:1).

1:5 It is God who empowers the restoration in the people as well as in King Cyrus, prefiguring the empowering of his people through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4; Rom. 8:10–11).

2:1 The detailed record of people shows God's knowledge of individuals and families, symbolizing his detailed knowledge of all people (Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

3:2 Restoration of true worship of God is central to the restoration of individuals and communities. Sacrificial worship prefigures the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10:1–10).

3:10 Temple building, analogous to what Solomon did (2 Chronicles 3), prefigures Christ's body as a temple (John 2:19–21), the church as a temple (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:20–22), and the new Jerusalem as a temple (Rev. 21:9–22:5). See Haggai and Zechariah for prophecy relating to the restoration.

3:11 The singing, using the refrain of 1 Chron. 16:34 and Psalm 136, follows the pattern in 1 Chronicles 25 and looks forward to the praise offered by Christ (Heb. 2:12) and his people (Heb. 13:15).

4:1 The adversaries, incited ultimately by Satan, symbolize opposition to God's purposes for his people and prefigure opposition to Christ and his people (Matt. 4:1–11; Rev. 12:3–4, 7–17).

5:1 Directives both from prophets and from Cyrus (1:1–4) have a key role in the restoration, prefiguring the role of God's word in building the church (Eph. 2:20–22; 4:6–16).

6:6 God reverses the plans of the opponents and uses Darius to favor the restoration, prefiguring God's work in blessing the church (Rom. 8:28; Acts 4:29–31; 8:4).

7:27 Through Ezra and Artaxerxes, God shows his providential blessing on the restoration, prefiguring his willingness to supply our needs in Christ (2 Cor. 9:6–12).



JESUS + EZRA

How Ezra Points to Jesus

8:31 God provides protection, prefiguring his protection to those in Christ (John 10:27–29).

9:1 Intermarriage was forbidden in Deut. 7:3–4 because it led to idolatry (see Ezra 9:11–14). Separation prefigures the need for uncompromising allegiance to Christ (Matt. 10:34–39; Luke 14:26–33; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).



JESUS + NEHEMIAH

How Nehemiah Points to Jesus

1:11 Nehemiah's intercession for the people prefigures Christ's intercession for us before God the Father (Heb. 7:25).

2:18 Rebuilding Jerusalem prefigures building the church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 14:4–5, 12; Gal. 4:26; Eph. 2:20–22).

3:1 God records the names of the builders, indicating his knowledge of each contribution. The division of labor prefigures the cooperation in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12; Eph. 4:1–16).

4:1 Opposition to building prefigures opposition to the church and to Christians (John 15:18–20).

5:7 God's law through Moses forbids exacting interest from a fellow Israelite (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36). The help to the poor anticipates the church's helping the poor (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37; 2 Cor. 9:6–15) on the basis of God's generosity in Christ (2 Cor. 8:9; 9:15).

8:3 Instruction from God's Word plays a key role in building up the people of God. It prefigures the role of Christ as the Word of God (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13), the role of the gospel (Rom. 1:16–17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:23), and the role of Scripture (1 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; see Psalm 119).

9:8 God's faithfulness is displayed in fulfilling the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17; 15:4, 13–21; 17:1–14). His faithfulness to his promises is supremely manifested in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20–22), who has brought everlasting blessings to God's people (Eph. 1:3–14).

9:38 The names indicate the personal commitment of individuals and families, prefiguring personal commitment to Christ (Acts 2:38–41; see note on Ezra 2:1).

10:29 Obedience to the law anticipates the obligation of disciples of Christ to follow him in everything (Matt. 10:37–39; Luke 14:25–33; John 14:15, 23). Christ alone is perfectly obedient to God (Heb. 4:15).

11:1 Jerusalem has a key role as the holy city. In the NT *all* of God's people are citizens in the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26–28; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 12:22–24).



JESUS + NEHEMIAH

How Nehemiah Points to Jesus

12:27 The Levites' role in singing was established in 1 Chronicles 25. The celebration anticipates the celebration and praise to God for the resurrection of Christ (Eph. 5:19–20; Heb. 13:15) and for the consummation (Rev. 19:1–8).

13:15 The people promised to keep the Sabbath in 10:31. The Sabbath is a sign of the covenant with God (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:12–17), celebrating creation (Ex. 20:11) and redemption (Deut. 5:15). It points forward to Christ, who is Creator (Col. 1:15–16) and Redeemer (Col. 1:18–20), and who has prepared our place of rest (John 14:2–3). See notes on Gen. 2:2 and 2:3.



OUTLINES

Ezra & Nehemiah

EZRA

- I. Cyrus' Decree & Return of Exiles (1:1-2:70)
 - A. The Decree (1:1-4)
 - B. The Exiles Respond (1:5-11)
 - C. The Exiles Return to their homes (2:1-70)
- II. The Temple is Rebuilt (3:1-6:22)
 - A. Foundation of the Temple is built (3:1-13)
 - B. Opposition (4:1-24)
 - C. Work on the Temple Resumed (5:1-17)
 - D. Work is Completed (6:1-22)
- III. Ezra Establishes the Law (7:1-8:36)
 - A. Ezra Teaches the Law (7:1-8:36)
 - B. Ezra Returns to Jerusalem (8:1-36)
- IV. Ezra Discovers and Confronts Sin (9:1-10:44)
 - A. Ezra discovers problems in marriage (9:1-15)
 - B. The people repent (10:1-44)

NEHEMIAH

- I. Nehemiah Returns to Rebuild the Walls (1:1-2:20)
 - A. The Leader's Broken Heart (1:1-11)
 - B. Permission from the King (2:1-16)
 - C. Opposition Part 1 (2:17-20)
- II. The Wall is Rebuilt (3:1-7:4)
 - A. A Good Plan (3:1-32)
 - B. More Opposition (4:1-23)
 - C. Dealing with Injustice (5:1-19)
 - D. The Wall is Completed (6:1-7:4)
- III. A Record of the Exiles (7:5-7:73)
- IV. Revival (8:1-10:39)
 - A. The Law is Read (8:1-8)
 - B. The Joy of the People (8:9-12)
 - C. Feast of Booths (8:13-18)
 - D. Prayer (9:1-38)
 - E. Commitments (10:1-39)
- V. Census of Jerusalem (11:1-12:43)
 - A. Jerusalem & the Villages of Judah (11:1-36)
 - B. High Priest & Leaders (12:1-26)
 - C. Dedication of the Walls (12:27-43)
- VI. Nehemiah Brings Reform (12:44-13:31)
 - A. Offerings for the Temple (12:44-47)
 - B. Dealing with Tobiah (13:1-9)
 - C. Dealing with Sin (13:10-29)
 - D. Summary of Reforms (13:30-31)

