

Ezra-Nehemiah

Purpose: To defend the legitimacy of the Ezra-Nehemiah program and the need to continue it.

Outline: I. Struggle and Success for Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-6:22)

II. Struggle and Success for Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10:44)

III. Struggle and Success for Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:1-7:7)

IV. Celebration of Successes (Nehemiah 8:1-12:47)

{Ezra's memoirs – part 2 (Neh. 7-10)

Nehemiah's memoirs – part 2 (Neh. 11-13)}

V. Continuing Struggle for Restoration (Nehemiah 13:1-31)

Author: The post-exilic Chronicler

Date: Division of the Kingdom –922...Fall of Samaria (capital of Israel,northern kingdom) – 722...Fall of Jerusalem (capital of Judah, southern kingdom) –586...Cyrus Edict (releasing all of the Israelites from captivity and returning to their land) – 538...Temple Rebuilt – 515.

Book written after Nehemiah's reign (400 BC?)

Highlights:

First question– who are Ezra and Nehemiah? They were co-reformers who worked together in the restoration of Jerusalem. Ezra was a scribe and a priest. Nehemiah was a governor of Judah.Ezra returned in 458 BC. Nehemiah returned in 445 BC.

Second question– who is Zerubbabel? He is the heir to the throne of Judah (but subservience to the Persian overlord prohibited the reestablishment of Israel as a nation-state ruled by a “Davidic” King). The first remnant (those returning from exile) returned under Sheshbazzar– who is called governor. The second remnant returned under Zerubbabel – who is also referred to as governor. Nehemiah is named as governor from 445 until sometime after 433.

Third question– what is going on? Read below:

“Each major portion of the book contains an apologetic quality.

“(I) It begins with the divine authorization of Zerubbabel's temple reconstruction, traces the opposition that occurred, and recounts the prophetic and royal support that made the rebuilding succeed in grand celebration.

“(II) Then attention turns to the divine authorization of Ezra's reforms, the opposition he received, and his success in challenging intermarriage.

“(III) Nehemiah's mission to rebuild and repopulate Jerusalem also received divine authorization, faced human opposition, and was finally successful.

“(IV) These successes climax in worshipful confession and celebration.

“(V) But in the end, the book stresses the need for continuing the restoration program by reporting Nehemiah's further reforms” (From He Gave Us Stories by Richard Pratt).

EZRA

The book of Ezra begins with the same words that ended 2 Chronicles – the words of the “Cyrus Edict.”

A remnant of people, along with the treasures of the temple returned to Israel under Sheshbazzar. A second remnant of people returned under Zerubbabel. (Chapters 1-2)

The rebuilding of the temple was the early focus. First, the altar was rebuilt; and then the foundation was laid for the temple. The completed work on the foundation of the temple was met with shouts of joy and weeping. The joy came in thanksgiving for God's faithfulness in allowing them to return to their land and rebuild. The weeping came from the elders who had seen the superior former temple of Solomon. (Chapter 3)

There was ongoing opposition to the rebuilding of Jerusalem by the enemies of Judah. We even read about a letter that was sent in regards to the rebuilding of the wall. (Chapter 4).

Ezra-Nehemiah (continued)

Ezra Highlights (continued):

Work on the temple started again under Zerubbabel with the help of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. A letter was written to the Persian King Darius about this. King Darius discovered that King Cyrus had, indeed, decreed that the temple was to be rebuilt. So Darius re-issued the decree that nothing should interrupt the rebuilding of the temple. The temple was completed 70 years after its destruction; and 20 years after the work began. (Chapters 5-6).

Ezra, a devoted man of God (see 7:10), was sent by King Artaxerxes to Jerusalem with another remnant of Israelites. (Chapter 7-8)

Soon after Ezra arrives it is brought to his attention that the Levite priests are marrying foreign women. Ezra preaches some strong words about this (chapter 9) and the people respond by confessing their sin (chapter 10).

NEHEMIAH

We first see Nehemiah as he is being called by God to return to Jerusalem (chapter 1).

Nehemiah is then sent to Jerusalem by King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah's first order of business is to inspect the wall of Jerusalem (chapter 2).

The rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem is a massive project, in which Nehemiah inspires the work of many people. (Chapters 3-6)

There is a brief pause (chapter 5) in the account of the wall restoration project as Nehemiah has to deal with the problem of the poor paying interest (usury) to fellow Israelites. Nehemiah, undoubtedly drawing upon the Law of Moses (Exodus 22:25-27) demands that this stop. The Israelites repent, even paying back any usury that has been paid. Nehemiah's abilities of godly leadership are ever-present in his administering the work on the wall as well as his compassionate work in resolving the problem with the poor.

There is opposition to the rebuilding of this wall (chapter 6). In Ezra 4 we read the letter that was sent to Artaxerxes about this. Nehemiah gives a great reply to the false charges (see 6:8). The wall, which had been in ruins for almost a century, is completed in 52 days (see 6:15) – An awesome testimony of the fervent work of the people under Nehemiah's godly leadership.

Nehemiah gives a listing (similar to the one in Ezra 2) of the exiles who have returned. The total number of the remnant is 42,360 (plus servants, etc.).

In chapter 8 we return to hearing about the spiritual ministry of Ezra. Extensive reading, and expositing of the Law of Moses brings about an amazing confession by the Israelites (see 9:5b-37). The Israelites conclude by making an oath to uphold the Law of Moses (10:29).

We go back to Nehemiah's memoirs of repopulating Jerusalem (chapters 11-12). There is a great dedication ceremony for the wall of Jerusalem given at the end of chapter 12.

The book ends with Nehemiah's final exhortations about not marrying foreign women. Nehemiah, in prayer, uses varieties of the refrain "Remember me with favor, O my God" (13:14, 22, 29, 30).

"The dominant theological idea of the memoir material of both Ezra and Nehemiah is covenant renewal in the post-exilic community. The call to spiritual renewal and social justice by the two reformers was aimed at correcting abuses and gross misconduct among the returned remnant, and instilling hope and boosting the morale of the people. It was important for the community despairing over God's apparent neglect to recognize that obedience to covenant stipulations was a mandatory prerequisite for Yahweh's blessing and restoration of Israel as his special possession" (*A Survey of the Old Testament* by Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton).