

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

January 24, 2018

Ezra / Nehemiah

Answers to the Questions (Lesson 12)

Page 65 – In the New Testament (in the death of Christ on the cross), Jesus will take upon himself the sins of the entire world. In Matthew 27:46 we hear his anguished cry:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

We witness the human Christ experiencing the separation from God as he offers himself up for our sin. Even in the *Book of Revelation* it warns that on the day of the final judgment there will be a penalty to pay for sin.

Page 66 – Some examples include 1:17 (so he died according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken) and 3:25 (the prophecy of victory over Moab is now fulfilled) and 7:16 (it was prophesied that in the midst of famine there will be an improvement in the price of flour and barley). It was fulfilled as the Lord had said).

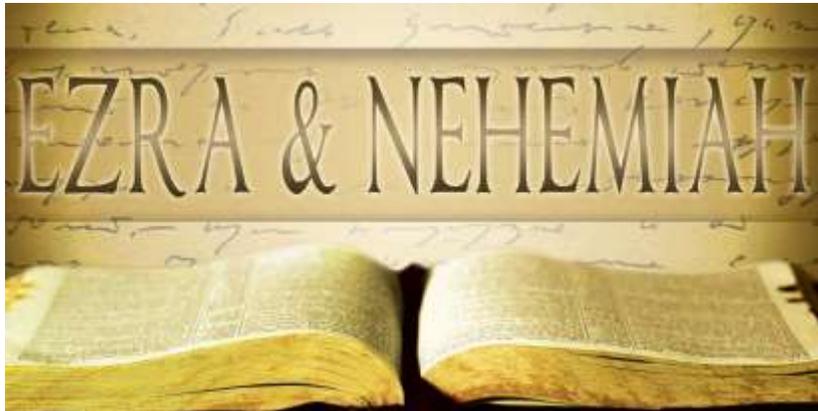
In 1 Kings 21:17-24 there is a judgment placed on Ahab (fulfilled in 2 Kings 9:24-26).

In 1 Kings 21:23 the death of Jezebel is prophesied (fulfilled in 2 Kings 9:30-37).

Examples of the grace of God are also evident in the midst of judgment.

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| Chapter 2 | Elijah is taken up to heaven and the ministry of Elisha begins. |
| Chapter 4 | The oil does not run out for the widow.
God provides a son for the Shunammite woman who has no children. |
| Chapter 5 | Naaman is healed of leprosy. |
| Chapter 7 | God ends the siege on Samaria along with the famine. |
| Chapter 14 | God sees how bitterly the people are suffering and saves them. |

Page 67 – Revival under Josiah is too little, too late. Judah will be removed from the presence of God (like Israel). God offered plenty of opportunities for Israel to turn to him and obey him. He showed them compassion but the persistence of their sins eventually brought judgment on them.



The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally considered a single literary work called Ezra. Scholars unanimously agree that the author of this work lived in Palestine. In these two books God restores his people. This time period is referred to as *The Second Exodus*.

Historical Context

The Assyrians take captive the people of the Northern Kingdom in 722 / 721 BCE.
The Babylonian captivity takes place in 586 BCE (Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed).
The deportation of the Jews begins in 605 BCE (the book of Daniel is written during the Exile).
The Persian Empire becomes the dominant world power when it captures Babylon in 539 BCE.

Cyrus (the king of Persia) issues a decree in 538 BCE allowing exiles to return to their homes. God is restoring the people and is continuing his promise of redemption. His desire is for them to turn back to him in humility and serve him completely.
Never again is Israel guilty of idolatry.

The punishment of God seemed severe but it was necessary to rid Israel of their love for idols. About 70 years after the first deportation of the Jews in 605 BCE they return to Jerusalem. Only about 50,000 Jews return during the time of Zerubbabel. Psalm 85 refers to the restoration from exile.

Ezra / Nehemiah

Ezra 1-6 Focuses on the first generation after the return from the Babylonian exile. It includes two leaders – Zerubbabel (governor) and Jeshua (high priest). The rebuilding and dedication of the temple are the main events. Worship once more becomes a priority for the restored community.

Ezra 7-10 This section is referred to as the *Ezra Memoir*.

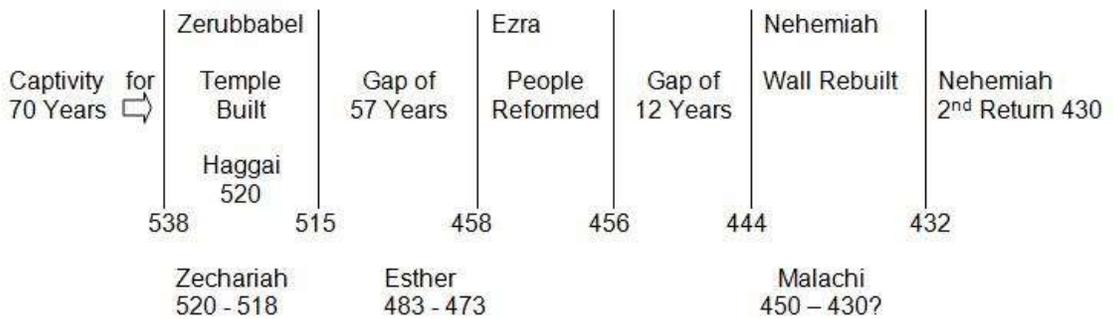
Nehemiah 1-7 Nehemiah provides an account of the building of the walls of Jerusalem. Much of the book is a first-person narrative (*Nehemiah Memoir*). It contains a series of four formulaic prayers. These prayers all contain the word – Remember (*zākar*)
The prayers are found in 5:19 and in the last section 13:14 / 13:22 / 13:31b

Nehemiah 8-10 This section is not part of the *Nehemiah Memoir*. Ezra reads the law to the people. Preparations take place for a great day of repentance. The people make a firm agreement to keep the law (a human pledge).

Nehemiah 11-13 The new settlers in Jerusalem are listed. The list of priests, Levites, and high priests are listed. There is a dedication of the city wall around Jerusalem.

Ezra and Nehemiah CHARTS

The Three Returns from Exile



The Return from Exile – The Kings – A Chronology of "Postexilic" Years

From Willmington's Bible Guide 30th Edition

One generation passes from the arrival of Ezra (458 BCE) to the second term of Nehemiah (432). This period is defined by its leaders and not by its projects.

Ezra works alone / Nehemiah works alone / Ezra and Nehemiah are together / Nehemiah alone
Nehemiah works on the walls, the social reform, and the repopulating of Jerusalem.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah are present for the reading of the Torah and the dedication of the wall.

The author affirms that change and renewal for Judah took place because of the Persian kings (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes) and the Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon. God offered grace to those who returned from exile by means of the kings of Persia.

In More Detail ...

Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 BCE.

The king issued a decree that commanded the Jews to return home and rebuild the Temple.

Sheshbazzar led the first group home. He was replaced by Zerubbabel and Jeshua.

Their initial efforts to rebuild the Temple were interrupted by opposition from the local people.

Darius I reaffirmed the decree of Cyrus and ordered the rebuilding of the Temple to continue.

The Temple was dedicated in 516 BCE.

About 58 years later, Artaxerxes I (465-424) sent Ezra to Jerusalem.

Ezra was to lead the Jews to Jerusalem. His mission was to rebuild the people.

He was to deliver gifts offered by the Persian authorities and by the people to the Temple.

He was to have the people confirm the laws in Judah and Jerusalem.

He was to appoint magistrates and judges to teach the law.

In his first year Ezra led the people in a public confession of sin.

A commission also carried out the removal of the foreign wives and children.

The book of Nehemiah continues the story of the restoration of the remnant of Israel.

It begins in 446 BCE (about 13 years after the close of the book of Ezra).

The two books have the same author and the same purpose so we see similarities between them.

In 445 BCE Artaxerxes I sent Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

The task was completed within 52 days.

He also corrected abuses in the making of loans and the charging of interest.

Before Nehemiah could carry out the repopulation of Jerusalem, Ezra reappeared.

Ezra read the law to the people who studied it and then celebrated the *Feast of Tabernacles*.

In a public ceremony, the people separated themselves from foreigners.

The community also decided to relocate 10% of the population to Jerusalem.

In the final chapter of Nehemiah, he returns to the court of Artaxerxes.

But when he returns to Jerusalem he finds many abuses among the people.

The people are not tithing.

They are working and selling on the Sabbath.

They are intermarrying.

The history of the people of Israel ends as it started – full of promise and obedience.

They have just come through a second exodus and have a restored relationship with God.

God remains faithful to the people and is still gracious and forgiving.

Restoration is possible ...

through understanding the Word of God

devoting ourselves to his Word and praying continually

Review the *Return from Exile* and *Zerubbabel's Temple* on Page 73

Lessons from Ezra / Nehemiah to be read on a Sunday morning in 2018 (None)

Link to Daily Readings from the Revised Common Lectionary –

<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/daily.php?year=B>

Assignment for January 31, 2018

Complete the Exercises on Pages 69-72

Read Esther (or the portions outlined on Page 72)

Old Testament

Books In Chronological Order

