



Let's jump into **Ezra and Nehemiah** together!

This is the story of the return of God's people from exile in Babylon as they rebuild – the temple, the Jerusalem city walls, and their spiritual lives.

Each week we will have these packets available to pick up, and they will lead you through the chapters. There are five days' worth of material each week. If you miss a Sunday you can always find a digital copy at [ihccdanville.org](http://ihccdanville.org).

In the past we have printed out the Scriptures to go with these packets, but we aren't doing that this year because we want you to **use your Bible**. Preferably your actual Bible, not a Bible app or a website. This year at IHCC we are trying to get into the habit of carrying and using our Bibles.

Let me know if you have any questions!

Jim

Looking to go deeper? Here are some of the book resources I'm using to put together our lessons and sermons from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah:

*Ezra and Nehemiah: The Quest for Restoration* by Dale Ralph Davis (2025)

*Ezra and Nehemiah* by Derek Kidner (1979)

*The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)* by Hannah K. Harrington (2022)

*The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Eerdmans Classic Biblical Commentaries)*  
by F. Charles Fensham (1983)

*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (The Expositor's Bible Commentary)* by Edwin M. Yamauchi (Ezra and Nehemiah) (2010)

*A Commentary on the Whole Bible, Volume 2: Joshua to Esther* by Matthew Henry (1710)

## **Rebuild: Ezra and Nehemiah**

### Week One

#### Day One

##### Introduction

Here at Indian Hills we spent the last three winters in the book of Isaiah. It's a roller coaster of a book. It starts with miraculous intervention – Jerusalem is completely surrounded by the Assyrian army. This happens because God's people wouldn't listen to him when he tried to tell them the best way to live their lives. But right as the enemy is about to close in and finish them off, the people fall on their knees in repentance, and God rescues them (in one of the coolest moments in the entire Old Testament).

But instead of sticking with God, the people fall back into their old ways. The prophet Isaiah tries to warn the people that if they don't straighten up disaster will come. They don't listen. And the next nation to come sweeping into Judah is Babylon. This time there is no rescue. The city of Jerusalem is burned, and all its inhabitants are taken off as slaves. They stay there for decades.

But the end of the book is hopeful. Isaiah lets the people know that this exile is temporary. And the book ends with God's people, after seventy years, beginning their walk back to Jerusalem.

That brings us to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. We'll spend the next several weeks following God's people as they return to Jerusalem and begin the rebuilding of both the city and their lives.

The story is told across two books of the Bible, but it's really a story in three parts. Each part focuses on a different leader God sends to guide his people.

Look up the scriptures below and fill in the blanks to see an outline of what we'll be learning about in Ezra and Nehemiah. In the space given, write out the key verses.

**Part One (Ezra 1-6)**

The leader: Z\_\_\_\_\_ (Ezra 2:2)

His mission: Rebuilding the \_\_\_\_\_ (Ezra 1:3)

A key verse: Ezra 3:11 (Write it below)

**Part Two (Ezra 7-10)**

The leader: \_\_\_\_\_ (Ezra 7:11)

His mission: Rebuilding the people by teaching them the L\_\_\_\_\_ of G\_\_\_\_\_. (Ezra 7:25-26)

A key verse: Ezra 7:10 (Write it below)

**Part Three (Nehemiah 1-13)**

The leader: N\_\_\_\_\_ (Nehemiah 1:1)

His mission: Rebuilding the w\_\_\_\_\_ and g\_\_\_\_\_. (Nehemiah 2:13)

A key verse: Nehemiah 6:3 (Write it below)

Tomorrow we'll begin!

## Day Two

### Overnight Revolution

Read Ezra 1.

Any way you look at it, the United States gaining their independence from Great Britain was a miracle. A ragtag group of colonists – mostly farmers and mechanics – without an organized army managed to rise up and wrangle their freedom from the world's most dominant power.

It wasn't easy, and the odds were long that they could pull it off even up until the very last days of the war. It took a lot of sacrifice, suffering, planning, fighting, and negotiating with allies around the world to make it happen. And it was costly ...

### American Revolution

American deaths: 25,000

Cost: \$101 million (\$2.5 billion in 2025 dollars)

Time to achieve independence: 7 years

Major cities and towns destroyed: 7

And even after the war ended, the United States wasn't totally out of the woods. It wasn't until the end of their *next* war in 1814 – thirty years later – that Britain was no longer a threat to retake the Americas.

We just read about a similar revolution in Ezra chapter 1.

	1776 AD	538 BC
Ruler	<b>King George III</b>	<b>Cyrus</b>
World Power	<b>Great Britain</b>	<b>Persia</b>
Won Independence	<b>American Colonists</b>	<b>Israelites</b>
What kind of people won their freedom?	<b>Farmers, mechanics, merchants</b>	<b>Slaves</b>

The story is similar – a ragtag group of average, everyday people breaking themselves off from a world power to start their own nation when no one in the world thought it could be done.

But remember that the American colonists had been in their “new” home for over 150 years. They were separated from their ruler by thousands of miles of ocean. Eventually it became too costly for King George to keep trying to hold onto them.

The Israelites on the other hand were basically indentured servants living right under the thumb of Cyrus, King of Persia. As we saw in our Isaiah study, their work was a large part of the Babylonian economy. Cyrus had no reason to let them go. As a matter of fact, it was *completely unheard of* in world history that a conquered and assimilated people would go free and return to their original home. It hadn’t happened before, and it hasn’t happened since.

But here’s the biggest difference in the two revolutions:

### Israelite Revolution

Israelite deaths: 0

Cost: \$0 (Wealth actually *given* to Israelites instead)

Time to achieve independence: **Overnight**

Major cities and towns destroyed: None (towns and cities *rebuilt* instead)

If you remember from last winter, God told the Israelites a hundred years in advance that a world leader would eventually rise up and set them free from bondage in Babylon. He told them this to encourage them, so that they wouldn’t lose hope while they were there.

But God knew this prophecy would seem too good to be true. The Israelites would say, “We’ve been away from our homes for seventy years! We have no money, no weapons, no resources. Nobody knows our history. We barely remember it. Why would any ruler care about us at all, much less set us free?”

So in his prophecy about their rescue, God called back to a book they all knew – the book of Genesis.

In the space below, write out Isaiah 45:12-13:

God tells the Israelites to think of his intervention in their situation the same way they think of creation in Genesis 1. “I am the God of all creation, the one who made everything out of nothing. The circumstances in front of you seem like obstacles to you. They do not seem that way to me.”

According to Psalm 33:6, what did God use to create everything?

God tells his people, “I will rescue you from Babylon the same way I created everything. Not by wrestling with the circumstances, but by speaking over top of them.”

**God does not wrestle his will into effect. He commands it. And that's why Ezra 1 doesn't read like a war story. It reads like a memo.** Cyrus' decree isn't dramatic because the dramatic part had already happened. God spoke.

Look at Isaiah 45:13 again –

*“I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, **but not for a price or reward,**” says the Lord Almighty.*

God doesn't have to bargain. He doesn't have to negotiate. He doesn't have to leverage anything. He just says it and it happens.

God is unbothered by roadblocks. And that means you can be unbothered by them too. No battles necessary. No emergency strategy sessions. God has taken on himself the burden of outcomes and results.

I obey ... God handles results.

I speak the truth ... God handles other peoples' response to it.

I step out in faith ... God handles provision.

What is circumstance in your life right now that looks to you like a roadblock?

What does it look like to the creator of the cosmos?

What has he *already said* about your life that can help you see things his way? (For example: Romans 8:28, Matthew 7:9-11, Matthew 6:25-34, Romans 8:14-17, John 3:16)

## Day Three

### “A Rump People”

Re-read Ezra 1:1-3.

The opening paragraph on a person’s Wikipedia page gives you a quick breakdown of all the highlights of a person’s life before getting into more of the details later on in the article. It’s meant to be a synopsis of the person’s place in history.

Here’s the one for Lyndon Johnson:

Lyndon Baines Johnson (August 27, 1908 – January 22, 1973), also known as LBJ, was the 36th president of the United States, serving from 1963 to 1969. He became president after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, under whom he had served as the 37th vice president from 1961 to 1963. A Southern Democrat, Johnson previously represented Texas in Congress for over 23 years, first as a U.S. representative from 1937 to 1949, and then as a U.S. senator from 1949 to 1961.

So what are his highlights? President, Vice-President, Congressman and Senator.

Here’s the first paragraph for Dale Earnhardt:

Ralph Dale Earnhardt (April 29, 1951 – February 18, 2001) was an American professional stock car driver and racing team owner, who raced from 1975 to 2001 in the former NASCAR Winston Cup Series, most notably driving the No. 3 Chevrolet for Richard Childress Racing. His aggressive driving style earned him the nicknames "the Intimidator", and "the Man in Black." He won 76 Winston Cup races and seven Winston Cup championships. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest drivers in NASCAR history and was named as one of the NASCAR's 50 Greatest Drivers class in 1998.

Known as “the Intimidator,” won 76 races and seven championships, one of the greatest drivers of all time. The first paragraph gives you just the most important information about a person’s life. A synopsis of what made them great.

On your phone or computer, go to the Wikipedia page titled “Cyrus the

Great." What are some of the things mentioned in his first paragraph?

Now read the second paragraph. What are some things about his life listed there?

It is not until the middle of the *third* paragraph of the Cyrus the Great Wikipedia article that we read anything about his involvement in the release of the Israelites to go back to Jerusalem in 538 BC. You have to wait a full 263 words into the page.

Historians just don't view that as an important moment of his life. It's seen as an afterthought to a busy and important life. Just a memo he wrote. It pales in comparison to creating the world's largest empire, and conquering nation after nation.

For that matter, writing the memo that released the Israelites in 538 BC probably wasn't a highlight for Cyrus either. It happened in the middle of his reign. By the time he died, he may not have even remembered that he did it.

But Isaiah 45:13 reveals a fact about Cyrus' life that would shock and/or confuse world historians.

*"I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward," says the Lord Almighty.*

Historians might try to tell you that defeating the Median Empire and taking control of Anatolia and the Fertile Crescent were the big moments in Cyrus' life. But God takes us by the hand, walks us into the throne room of history,

and pulls back the curtain to reveal the truth – the only reason Cyrus got any power at all was because God wanted him to write that memo. All of the defeating and capturing and conquering were just side notes to the piece of paper he wrote in 538 BC.

I like how Dale Ralph Davis puts it – he says, “All this is not really so surprising for the Most High who rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will (Daniel 4). Here is a rump people – and a God who runs history for their benefit.”

Why did Cyrus become a world-dominating leader? Because God was manipulating his life to be a benefit to his sons and daughters.

**All of history is being written for you, not the people in the news.** You should remind yourself of that every single day. You are not a side note in history, you are the focus! You are a son and daughter of the Most High. You will be living in glory long after the world’s kings, presidents, and celebrities have vanished from the scene.

Yesterday we said that it’s important that God *spoke* everything into existence. It shows that he is dominant, in control. *Above* everything there is. That’s comforting to us, but let me show you something even better.

Write Genesis 2:7 in the space below.

God spoke the oceans into existence. He spoke the sun, moon, and stars into their places. He spoke the koalas, and ostriches, and monkeys. That’s important. It shows he’s *above* the cosmos.

But when it came time to create *people*, Almighty God got down in the dirt and did the creating with his own two hands. Why? Because you are treasured far above the rest of creation.

When he made *you*, he took time. Every detail was important and intentional. Nothing about you is an afterthought. Nothing about you is generic. You are personally and irreplaceably made.

And when you accepted Jesus as your Savior, it brought you even closer to him. You are his *family* now.

The news might be full of war, but it's not war that God is focused on. It's you.

The television might be full of powerful and evil leaders and influencers. But it's not their story he's focused on. It's yours.

You might not be remembered in the world's history books. But that's ok. You can be sure that your name is written in a far more important book.

## Day Four

### Every Good Work

Let's go back for a minute to the book of Exodus. When the Israelites left Egypt, they were headed out to start a new life with God. One of the ways that God planned to be with his people was through the Tabernacle, a movable tent where God's presence would come down so that he could be among them.

God commanded the Israelites to make this tent. But that was going to require gold, silver, and luxurious cloth. The Israelites had just left slavery. None of them had ever possessed anything like the materials needed for the Tabernacle.

Read Exodus 12:31-36. How did God provide the materials needed to make the Tabernacle?

In Ezra chapter 1, God also has commands for his people – return home and rebuild the temple. But that is going to be incredibly expensive. First, how will they survive the trip back? It's a four-month journey to walk back to Jerusalem. What will they eat? Secondly, the temple was a huge building, and God's designs for it called for very expensive furnishings.

Re-read Ezra 1:4-6. How did God provide the food necessary for the trip back to Jerusalem and the funds needed to rebuild the temple?

(Side note - What are some other ways that Ezra chapter 1 is like the Exodus story?)

In the space below, write out 2 Corinthians 9:8.

When you walk with Jesus, you aren't left to make your own schedule. Discipleship with him will require kingdom work. But the good news is, **if God commands it, he will also fund it.** He will never give you a "good work" to do without providing all you need to do it.

Is God leading you to do something you are uncomfortable with because of what it might cost you? ...

Do you feel led to make a career change to spend more time leading and loving your family, but are worried about how it will affect you financially? If so, remember that God wouldn't lead you to do it without having a plan in place to meet your needs. Step out on faith. If God commands it, he will also fund it.

Do you feel led to leave a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend that is pulling you away from God, but are hesitant because you are afraid of loneliness? Remember that God wouldn't lead you *away* from them without also leading you *into* relationships and situations to supply what you need. Step out on faith. If God commands it, he will also fund it.

Do you feel led to get up earlier in the morning to study God's word and pray, but you are hesitant because you are already burning the candle at both ends? Remember that God wouldn't ask you to spend that time with Jesus and then abandon you in your needs at home and at work. Step out on faith. If God commands it, he will also fund it.

What is something in your life that you know you should be doing, but you haven't yet because you are afraid of the cost?

## Day Five

### Special Purposes, Common Use

Write out Ezra 1:7 in the space below.

It was Babylonian tradition that when a nation was conquered, their gods would be removed from their land and brought back to Babylon to sit in the temple of Marduk. It was a symbol – a way of saying that the Babylonian gods were greater than all the lesser gods of the conquered lands.

But Israel didn't have any gods to take (Exodus 20:4), so Nebuchadnezzar had to settle for the gold and silver goblets, plates, bowls, and candlesticks in the Jerusalem temple. These were supposed to be used only for worshipping God, but now they were destined to spend the next seventy years sitting in a Babylonian temple.

But these items were not in that temple for the *entirety* of the Israelite exile in Babylon.

Read Daniel 5:1-4. Who in Babylon brought the gold goblets out of storage, and why?

This misuse of the sacred goblets angered God, and he sent the “writing on the wall” as a symbol that Belshazzar’s time as the Babylonian king was up.

But now, in Ezra 1, the goblets and plates and bowls and candlesticks are on their way back to Jerusalem, where they will be placed back in a rebuilt temple, and eventually used again in temple worship services.

Look at what Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:19-21:

*“Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.” In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but*

*also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

A toothbrush is a great tool to use to clean your toilet bowl. The size is right to get up under the inside lid. The stiff bristles do a great job of breaking up grime. But once you have used a toothbrush for that job, it's no longer fit to go back into your mouth to clean your teeth.

That's Paul's point in 2 Timothy 2. As a disciple of Jesus, you are like the gold goblets in the temple. You have been set aside for special, holy work:

Leading your kids to a saving relationship with Jesus. (Eph 6:4)  
 Representing Jesus accurately in a confused world. (Eph 5:1-21)  
 Being a peacemaker in broken relationships. (Matthew 5:9)  
 Representing God in the excellence of your daily work. (Col 3:17)

But when we allow ourselves to be used for the world's purposes instead, we disqualify ourselves from the holy work we were meant to do. God *can't* use us for it.

Have you been seeing spiritual growth in your family?  
 Have you been an accurate representative of Jesus at your job?  
 Are the broken relationships among your family and friends being healed because of your influence?  
 Are people coming to you for godly wisdom?

If not, you might have a "common use" problem. Ask yourself:

What media am I consuming that is moving my mind away from God?  
 Are there people I'm spending time with who are influencing my heart away from godliness?  
 What worldly thing is in my schedule that is keeping me from having daily time with Jesus?  
 What's a bigger influence on my time – the Bible, or social media?