

Ezra/Nehemiah: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and 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. 1-3

Historical Background

Author

It is unknown who wrote Ezra and Nehemiah. Historically it was believed that Ezra and Nehemiah author each book that carries their names in the title. Primarily because of the memoirs that exist in each book (Ezra 7-10; Neh. 8-9) and the first person pronouns that are included throughout each book.

Setting

- Israel's capital is Jerusalem which is a vassal state under the control of the Persian King.
- Most Jews were exiled to Babylon / Persia. Some were left behind and remained in the land.
- When the Jewish exiles returned to the land, they faced opposition from enemies, particularly the Samaritans who lived there.
- When the exiles returned to the land, they discovered that the distinctiveness of the Jews who were not deported had been compromised. Many had intermarried with non-Jews, which was forbidden in the Law (Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 13:23-29).
- God called Ezra (priest) to bring the community back to covenant faithfulness (Torah).
- God called Nehemiah (governor) to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, to secure the city.
- The repopulation of the Promised Land was a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy (Isa. 40:1-11, Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10)

Date

The events in both books take place over a span of roughly 60yrs (Ezra 539-458; Neh. 445-420).

Purpose

A reminder that God keeps His promises. Through the prophets, God had ordained that His chosen people would return to their land after a seventy-year exile. Ezra's account proclaims that God kept His word, and it shows that when God's people remained faithful to Him, He would continue to bless them. Hence, the book emphasizes the temple and proper worship, similar to Chronicles (which was also written during these days).¹

¹ <https://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-historical-books/ezra>

Outline & Observations

Outline

Ezra

I. Restoration to the Land of Promise 1 - 6 (539 - 458)

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| A. <u>1:1-2:70 First Group Returns</u>
1:1-11 – Preparation for the first wave
2:1-70 – A holy nation accounted for | B. <u>3:1-6:22 Rebuilding the Temple</u>
3:1-13 – Rebuilding begins
4:1-5:17 – Opposition to rebuilding
6:1-22 – Rebuilding complete |
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II. Re-Commitment To Holiness in the Land of Promise

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| A. <u>7:1-8:36 – Second Group Returns</u>
7:1-22 – Preparation for the second wave
8:1-36 – Lists & details of the journey | B. <u>9:1-10:44 – Community Reform</u>
9:1-4 Sin confronted
9:5-15 Ezra confronts God in prayer
10 Confession of sin |
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Nehemiah

I. Nehemiah's Return and Reconstruction (1:1-7:73)

- 1:1-11 – Nehemiah's Prayer for God to Pardon Sin and Provide Success
- 2:1-8 – Nehemiah's Prayer Answered and Preparations Awarded
- 2:9-20 – Nehemiah Inspects the Wall and Inspires the Workers
- 3:1-32 – Nehemiah Entrusts the Work to the People
- 4:1-6:14 – Nehemiah Faces Opposition with Faith and Courage
- 6:15-7:4 – Nehemiah's Completion of the Wall Brings Praise and Persecution
- 7:5-73 – Nehemiah Recalls the Return Under Zerubbabel

II. EZRA'S REVIVAL AND RENEWAL (8:1-10:39)

- 8:1-12 – Ezra Proclaims the Law to the People
- 8:13-9:37 – Remembering God's Faithfulness and Repentance
- 9:38-10:1-39 – The People Renew the Covenant with God

III. ISRAEL'S RESETTLEMENT AND REJOICING

- 11:1-12:26 – A Record of Repopulated Jerusalem
- 12:27-47 – Nehemiah Dedicates the Wall with Great Rejoicing
- 13:1-31 – Nehemiah's Final Reforms

Key Terms & Ideas:

- “wall” [x32] a wall provided Israel protection from their enemies,
- “work” [x24] Nehemiah rallies the nation to diligently invest their efforts into rebuilding
- “Law” [x23] ignoring God’s Law led to captivity, but embracing it is central to the restoration process.
- “pray” [x4] Nehemiah is a man of prayer who constantly turns to God for wisdom, assistance and praise.
- “enemies” [x8] God and His people are constantly opposed by those who hate righteousness and love evil.
- “my God / our God” [x30] Nehemiah and the people have been brought back not only to the land, but personally to God

Themes

God’s Written Word

It is Yahweh’s written word that binds Israel to their God in covenant relationship (cf. Ex 24:4; Deut 31:9-13; 32:47). In the Prophets, it is the law of Moses that encourages and chastens Israel as they conquer the promised land and then stumble their way through the era of the judges (cf. Josh. 1:1-9; Jud. 2:10-23). Israel’s neglect of God’s written law and spoken prophetic word leads to the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, according to 2 Kings 17:7-23.

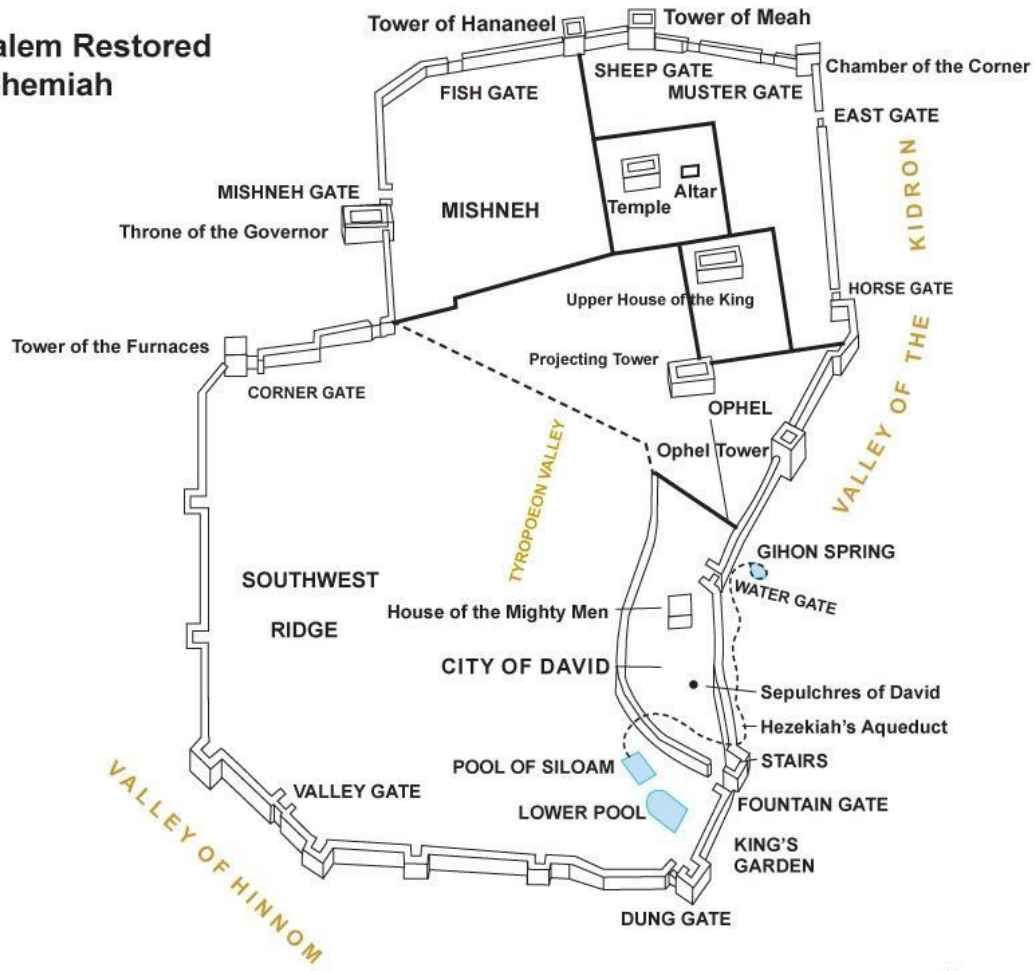
Israel’s neglect of God’s written law and spoken prophetic word leads to the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, according to 2 Kings 17:7-23. Ezra himself is depicted in Ezra 7:6-10 as a man committed to the Law and in 9:1-15 as one who understands that disobedience of the revealed word of God is a recipe for national disgrace and disaster.

- **God**
steadfastness & sovereignty to fulfill his promise and protect his people (Ez. 1:1; Neh. 2:6)
- **People of God**
the small but faith remnant returning to the mighty God (Isa. 10:21-22; Ez.9:15)
- **Means of grace**
God maintains his covenant relationship with his people through worship prayer and scripture (Ez 2:3; 3:11; 6:20; 9:3 10:1 Neh. 1; 9:1, 7-15; 11:17, 23;

539 BC	Fall of Babylon	Daniel 5:30	Cyrus 550-530BC in Persia
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539-38	First-year of Cyrus in Babylon	Ezra 1:1-4	Cyrus 539-530BC over Babylon
538	Zerubbabel and 1st return of exiles	Ezra 1-6	.
537	Building of Altar	Ezra 3:1-3	7th month = Tishri – Sep/Oct
536	Rebuilding begins	Ezra 3:8	.
536-530	Opposition during Cyrus's reign	Ezra 4:1-5	.
530-520	Work on temple ceases	Ezra 4:24	Persian Kings: Cambyses 530-522 Smerdis 522
520	Work begins again under Darius	Ezra 5:2	Darius I 522-486
520	Events of the book of Haggai	Haggai 1	.
520-518	Events of the book of Zechariah 1-8	Zechariah 1	.
516	Temple completed	Ezra 6:15	.
483-471	Events of Book of Esther	Esther	Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) 486-465
458	Ezra and 2nd return of exiles	Ezra 7-10	.
445-444	20th year Artaxerxes 1	Nehemiah 1:1	Artaxerxes I (Artahasta) 465-424; Chislev=Nov/Dec
444	Nehemiah approaches the King	Nehemiah 2:1	Nisan=Mar/Apr
444	Nehemiah and 3rd return of exiles	Nehemiah 2:11	.
444	wall complete	Neh 6:15	Elul = Aug/Sep
444-432	Nehemiah governor of Judah	Nehemiah 5:14	.
432	Nehemiah goes to Babylon	Nehemiah 13:6	.
430?	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem	Nehemiah 13:6	Xerxes II 424; Darius II 423-404

Jerusalem Restored by Nehemiah



Bible History Online