

## **Ezra-Nehemiah**

The goal of this Bible Class is to give the students a working knowledge of the books of Ezra-Nehemiah. It is based on an expository approach to teaching the Bible, preparing the students for the worship of our Savior. The various lessons are to be viewed by the teacher as thematic suggestions to help with preparation. While the lessons are not intended to be read to the class word for word, the main ideas should be the substance of what is taught. The teacher, in preparation for the class, should consider reading through the whole curriculum before beginning the class, as well as the books of Ezra-Nehemiah several times. This will provide the instructor with a broad and comprehensive understanding of Ezra-Nehemiah as it is being taught. At the end of the course, the class will be concluded with a Bible Knowledge Evaluation. The instructor should be sure to review the material sufficiently that the students are able to correctly answer the questions on the evaluation at the end of the course.

It is important that the instructor be not only knowledgeable about the material, but also able to teach it with enthusiasm and conviction. Students best learn from teachers that are themselves excited about the scriptures. The use of maps, diagrams, white boards etc. is extremely helpful. Some of these have been provided in the curriculum. It is suggested that the class be conducted in an interactive manner. This can be accomplished by having them read short portions of the scripture texts, asking them questions, and wholeheartedly encouraging them to ask questions. All students should be encouraged to bring a Bible to class.

The inclusion of the Westminster Shorter Catechism as part of the curriculum is designed to help the students acquire a broad understanding of Christian doctrine along with the specific Bible teaching. The Elders of the church will coordinate the specific questions and answers to be used in the class.

It will become evident to the teacher that this course curriculum, while not dealing with every verse and concept in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, is comprehensive and deeply theological. It is designed to help the students understand the book of Ezra-Nehemiah in its wider biblical context, with emphasis on its place in the redemptive history of God's covenant people. The students will be confronted with and asked to understand and remember fairly difficult concepts. It should be remembered that children are able to comprehend much more than we often give them credit for. While this class will be a challenge for both the teacher and the

students, the rewards for the efforts of those in the class will be surprising and exciting.

In preparation for these lessons, it would be helpful to consult the following:

Dorsey, David A. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1999), pp. 158-161.

Jordan, James B., *Darius, Artaxerxes, and Ahasuerus in the Bible: Studies in Biblical Chronology No. 5*, (Niceville, Biblical Horizons, 2001)

Leithart, Peter, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID, Canon Press, 2000), pp. 229-238.

Leithart, Peter, "The Holy City," *Biblical Horizons*, No. 55, November 1993.

The maps were taken from the Logos Bible Atlas.

**Week One: Ezra-Nehemiah:**  
**Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees**  
**Ezra 1-2**

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

**Introduction to Ezra - Nehemiah**

[Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.]

As we said when we began our study of the book of Daniel, the sins of Israel (idolatry and social injustices) had made Jerusalem like Egypt. God not only judged His people by sending them into exile, but also delivered those oppressed by perpetual slavery. This second exodus from Egypt/Jerusalem was necessary because Israel had defiled the land by becoming like those whom they had expelled when they first conquered the land. With this second exodus, the people were sent out of the land of bondage and idolatry to wander in the wilderness of exile in Babylon and Persia until God determined to bring them back to re-conquer the land (Is. 11:15-16; 43:14-21).

This exodus pattern is seen fairly clearly in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. As the Israelites leave, they are encouraged by the Gentiles “around them,” who give them gifts of silver, gold, livestock and other precious things. This is what happened when Israel left Egypt during the first exodus (Ex. 11:2-3; 12:35-36). Whereas Israel plundered the Egyptians, the plunder of the Persians was a freewill offering (Ezra 1:6). Not only so, Cyrus returned the gold and silver articles of the House of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon. The riches of Babylon and Persia were going to be used to build the House of God, just as the plunder of the Egyptians was used to construct the tabernacle. Additionally, Ezra 2 lists the various tribes and families that returned to the land and the numbers of each. This reminds us of the book of Numbers, but in this case instead of there being 600,000 men of fighting age, Ezra 2:64 tells us that there were only 42,360 that returned from Babylon. Some Jews remained behind in Babylon, and some never left the land.

Just as leaving Babylon is a *new exodus* out of Egypt/Jerusalem and wandering in the wilderness, reentering the land is a *new conquest*. While the people were in the wilderness of exile, the Lord purified them so that when the new generation of faithful Israelites entered the land there would be a new conquest of the land. Just as in the first exodus and conquest, so now, in the second exodus and conquest, Israel would go out of exile with the goal of setting up the Lord's house in the land and to establish true worship. They will bring the land to rest and build the place

where the Lord's name would dwell. Just as the people met with opposition in the first conquest, so too, Israel again faced opposition. They had to contend with the "people of the land," whom they must overcome. Even some of the names are similar; Joshua lead Israel during the first conquest, and the High Priest who leads the people after the return from Babylon is also named Joshua.

There are also come differences between the first exodus and the return of Israel from their exile in Babylon. Pharaoh released the Israelites to go free only after suffering greatly under the plagues sent by God. But Cyrus let the people go as soon as he took over Babylon, and encouraged them with gifts and gave them permission to re-build the Lord's House (Ezra 1:1-4). Because the Jews had repented of their hostility to the Gentile Empire (as seen in Daniel and Esther), there are good relations between Israel and the Gentiles. Additionally, there are almost no miracles or signs in this second exodus. Although Isaiah prophesied that the sea would be divided to provide entrance back into the land (Is. 11:15-16), we see nothing of this in Ezra-Nehemiah. There is no pillar of cloud and fire to lead the people. When the Temple is rebuilt (in Ezra 6:16-18), the glory of the Lord does not appear in the Most Holy Place (cf. Ex. 40; 1 Kings 8). This is not because God is not with His people in the land, but because He was beginning to lead them in a different way. Yahweh guides His people less by visions, miracles and signs, and more by the written word and through the teachers of Israel. This is the beginning of the "New Covenant" promised by Jeremiah, the Restoration Covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

As we will see in the next several weeks, Ezra-Nehemiah is concerned with the restoration of the people of God as the House of God. *The House of Israel is the House of God*. The Temple and Jerusalem are pictures of the people of God gathered around the throne of God. The Lord dwells in the midst of Israel (the people), not just in the Temple. Because of this, it is not only the Temple (representing the worshipping community), but also the city of Jerusalem (and surrounding area) that need to be rebuilt. Rebuilding the walls represents

rebuilding the house of God, because the whole nation had been restored as the House of God. The Holy City, with the Temple, represents the people of God. The New Covenant, the Restoration Covenant, is the restoration of God's people to a proper relationship with Himself, and the world around them. Ezra-Nehemiah are concerned with not only the rebuilding of the Temple and walls of Jerusalem, but the covenant purity of the people. As you remember from our studies in the book of Daniel, it was the desecration of the Temple by the priesthood, and the sinfulness of the people generally, that caused God to desolate His sanctuary and leave. When He left, He took the people with Him into exile. But now, in Ezra-Nehemiah, we see that God is returning with His people to His Temple and the Holy City. We will see that Ezra and Nehemiah are very concerned with the holiness of the people so that God will not abandon them again.

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Ezra and Nehemiah are really one book (as shown on the outline), and should also be thought of as the last part of the book of Chronicles (first and second Chronicles being one book). 2 Chron. 36:22-23 is identical to Ezra 1:1-3, the one seeming to overlap the other. As regards Ezra and Nehemiah, each book can stand-alone. They are like twins. Ezra is concerned with holiness in the sanctuary, while Nehemiah is concerned with holiness in society. Ezra focuses on the Temple and its ethical boundaries; Nehemiah focuses on the city and its physical-symbolic boundary (the wall).

Both books have similar outlines (see the chart at the bottom of the outline). In each we begin with a word of God appointed sovereign, a word that authorizes the reestablishment of God's kingdom (Ezra 1-3; Neh. 1:1-2:16). In each book this is followed by a time of opposition, as enemies try to prevent the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra) and the wall (Nehemiah), but in each book God's people emerge victorious and the project is completed (Ezra 4:1-6:15; Neh. 2:17-6:19).

After the completion of the project, there is a formal covenant renewal, and associated with this are other events. In Ezra, the covenant renewal is followed by Ezra's visit to Jerusalem bring spoils from the Gentiles to adorn the Temple (Ezra 6:16-8:36). In Nehemiah, the covenant renewal is accompanied by a reorganization of the people and of their leaders (Neh. 7:1-13:3). Virtually every time the covenant is renewed formally in the Old Testament, there is immediately a fall into sin." Ezra and Nehemiah both reveal this same pattern of Covenant Renewal, Fall and Renewal, both concerning "the sin of intermarriage of the Jews with unbelieving Gentiles; the same sin committed by the Sethites before the Flood (Gen. 6; Ezra 9-10 and Neh. 13:14-31).

Though these two books are twins, the fact that they are one book helps us to see that the rebuilding of the Temple is in fact not completed until the wall of the Holy City is built around it; and that the rebuilding of the city actually begins when the exiles return and build the altar.

### **The beginning of the Restoration Covenant – Ezra 1-2**

Let's look very briefly at Ezra 1-2. Isaiah 44 promises that God will remember Israel while she is in exile (vv. 21-23), and will bring her back into the land (vv. 24-27). In Isaiah 44:28-45:1 we read the following:

Who says of **Cyrus**, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." ' "Thus says the LORD to **His anointed, To Cyrus**, whose right hand I have held—To subdue nations before him.

Cyrus, King of Persia, is said in this text to be the servant of Yahweh to do His will to restore the House of Israel. What is significant about this is that this prophecy was written before the exile began and before Cyrus was even born. He is said to be the Lord's "Anointed," (literally Messiah or Christ), and is another picture of the great Messianic world ruler to come, Jesus Christ. We know that Daniel served Cyrus (Dan. 1:21; 6:28), and probably instructed him in the biblical faith, and the prophecy concerning him. Imagine being Cyrus and having Daniel tell you that God had revealed this about him over seventy years before! Now turn to Ezra 1:1-4, where we see that God stirred the spirit of Cyrus to faith and to take the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:12-14; 29:10; 33:7-13) and Isaiah seriously and worked to fulfill his role as the servant of God. His proclamation is full of faith in God and the wellbeing of His people Israel. This is important to the story laid out in Ezra-Nehemiah because as the years roll on, it will become important to remember the proclamation of Cyrus to complete the rebuilding of the House of God.

Ezra 1:5 says that there were certain groups of people that were also stirred in their spirits to go up to Jerusalem to help rebuild the house of God. These were the heads of the houses of Judah, Benjamin and the Levites. Why do you think these three tribes of Israel are mentioned? [Judah = David; Benjamin = Saul; Levites – the priesthood.] All of these together are the old lines of authority in Israel – all are together united to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem. There is no longer any division between the people of God (Southern kingdom of Judah and Northern Kingdom of Israel united under Zerubbabel and Joshua as we will see). What follows is the list of all of those who returned to the land with Zerubbabel (who was a descendent of David). In Ezra 2:70 we see that all of these people returned

and dwelt in their ancient cities (according to the divisions of Joshua 13-21 in the first conquest) throughout the land.

The lessons that we should learn from this include:

- 1) God is always faithful to His promises.
- 2) God's Messianic kingdom was beginning to be built through the Restoration Covenant, and would eventually come in its fullness with the coming of Jesus, the true Messianic King.

**Remind the students to do the homework assignment: Read Ezra 3-6.**

## Outline of Ezra – Nehemiah

- A. Zerubbabel’s Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**
  - 1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God’s Kingdom
  - 2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
  - 3. List of Returnees
  
- B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**
  
- C. Ezra’s Return (Ezra 6-8)**
  - 1. Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)
  
- D. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**
  - 1. Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)
  
- C’ Nehemiah’s Return (Neh. 1-2)**
  - 1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God’s Kingdom
  
- B’ Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**
  
- A’ Zerubbabel’s Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**
  - 1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
  - 2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
  - 3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

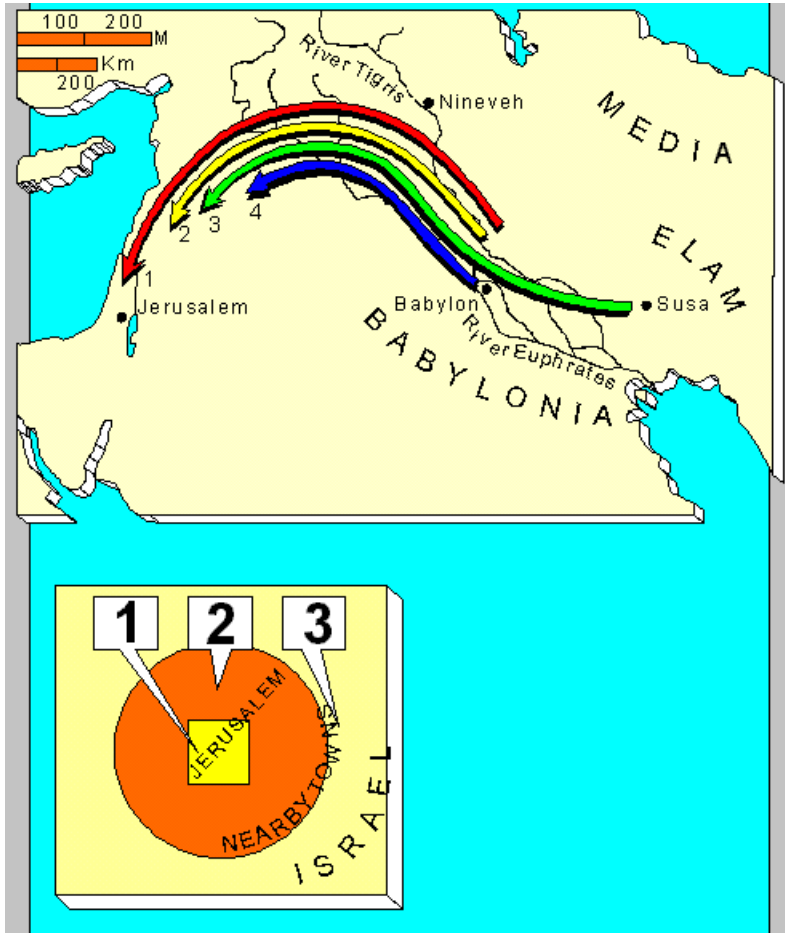
**{Students: You should memorize the bold headings above}**

	<b>Ezra</b>	<b>Nehemiah</b>
God’s appointed sovereign authorizing the reestablishment of God’s Kingdom	Ezra 1-3	Nehemiah :1-2:16
A time of opposition by enemies – But God give victory & project completed.	Rebuilding the Temple Ezra 4:1-6:15;	Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem Neh. 2:17-6:19
Covenant Renewal	Followed by Ezra’s return with spoils 6:16-8:36	Followed by reorganization of the people and leaders Neh. 7:1-13:3
Sin of Intermarriage (Gen. 6)	Ezra 9-10	Neh. 13:14-31



## Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees Ezra 1-2

In 539BC the Babylonian Empire was taken over by Cyrus, the Persian king. He issued commands that all the displaced exiles should return home to worship their own gods. The exiles were free to return to Judah.



- 1 **Sheshbazzar**, a Jewish exile, is made governor of Judah. He is given the temple treasures taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and returns to Judah with a group of exiles (Ezra 1).
- 2 **Zerubbabel** (grandson of King Jehoiachin, of the line of David) and **Joshua**, a priest, lead another group home in 525 BC.
- 3 **Nehemiah**, cupbearer in the Persian court to King Artaxerxes I, is sent to Jerusalem to repair the walls of Jerusalem. An armed guard escorts him (Neh. 1-2).
- 4 **Ezra**, a scholar and Jewish priest, is given royal authority to renew the religious practices of Jerusalem. He leads exiles

home (Ezra 7:1-10).

### **Inset:**

- 1 Priests, Levites, and others settle in or near Jerusalem.
- 2 Musicians, temple guards, workmen settle locally.
- 3 Rest of returned exiles settle in the towns of their ancestors.

**Homework assignment:** Read Ezra 3-6.



**Week Two: Ezra-Nehemiah:**  
**Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies**  
**Ezra 3-6**

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Review**

As we have seen in the books of Daniel, Esther and now in Ezra, beginning with the exile, God was establishing His international kingdom in the world. With the transition from the *former days* (the period of Israel's history from Moses through the Kings) to the *latter days* (the period of Israel's history from the exile to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70), the Jews would no longer be the exclusive

center of God's attention. God began to deal with the nations in a special way. It is the period of *empire* building. The Kingdom of God would grow and develop into a great international empire, with the Messiah as the True King of kings, whose Kingdom and dominion will last forever. The various kings of the various empires leading up to Christ would be a type of

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- C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**  
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- D. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**  
Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)
  
- C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**  
Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
  
- B' Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**
  
- A' Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**
  - 1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
  - 2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
  - 3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

Christ. They would be like Christ in that they would be rulers that would move the Kingdom of God ahead towards its future glory under the Son of Man. As long as the Jews were *faithful* to THE God and were true *witnesses* to Him they would be protected and nurtured inside of these kingdoms. But if the Jews became unfaithful to God and refused to witness, God would judge them.

[Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.]

## I. 7 Significant People in Ezra-Nehemiah

Last week we saw in Ezra 1 that **Cyrus**, King of Persia, was a believer that was fulfilling the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah with respect to the return of the exiles back into the land to rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem. This return came under the leadership of **Zerubbabel** [Sheshbazzar (made the Prince or Governor of Judah by Cyrus) was the one who lead the exiles back to Jerusalem (1:8, 11), but Zerubbabel and Joshua were probably the active leaders of the returnees.] Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jehoiakim, of the line of David, which gives us the reason that he played such an important role in the leadership of the people at this time. Although the prophecy of Jer. 22:30 says that no purely human descendant of David would sit on the throne of Israel, it was the line of David that provided the primary leaders of the people during the Restoration Era (Zech. 12:7-8). **Joshua** was the High Priest that led the Levites. Together we see both Zerubbabel and Joshua leading the people in both the civil and religious life of the people that returned to the land. After the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple, **Ezra** returned to the land (Ezra 7). **Nehemiah** also later returned to the land and provided leadership for the people. There were two prophets that prophesied during this period to give the exiles guidance from the Lord: **Haggai** and **Zechariah** (Ezra 5:1-2). [Teacher: You may want to note here that in Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7 we see that Mordecai is listed as one of the returnees to the land. Apparently he sometime later returned to Shushan, the Persian capital city, where the events of the book of Esther take place.]

It is important to understand that in the theology of Ezra-Nehemiah the “house of God” refers not only to the Temple itself, but also to the whole city of Jerusalem. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah...are from beginning to end about the building of the house of the Lord. The books may be organized according to the four stages in the completion of the house. First the altar; then the temple; then the reformation of the people-house; finally, the city walls are finished and dedicated. Cyrus's decree permitting the Jews to rebuild the Lord's house, quoted at the beginning of Ezra, was not fulfilled until the end of Nehemiah (Leithart, “The Holy City”).

As we noted last week, Yahweh not only “stirred up the spirit of Cyrus” to make a proclamation to rebuild the house of Yahweh God of Israel (Ezra 1:1-3), but He also “stirred up the spirits” of the Jews to build the house of Yahweh which was in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5). This is important because as we saw last week, in the “New Covenant,” the Restoration Covenant, the Holy Spirit would be “poured out” on all flesh (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32; Joel 2:28-32). Although this would be fulfilled in its fullest sense at Pentecost in Acts 2, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit

was initially fulfilled during this period following the exile, in the Restoration Era. “The first temple was built by a king, but there is no king in the restoration community. Far from being highlighted, Zerubbabel's Davidic ancestry is not even mentioned in Ezra or Nehemiah. Instead, the main builders are the people; every Israelite has a hand in building the temple, an activity normally reserved to kings in the Ancient Near East and in Israel” (Leithart, “The Holy City”).

“Moses was aided in the construction of the tabernacle by the Spirit-anointed Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex. 31:1-6), and Solomon by Hiram of Tyre (1 Ki. 7:13-14), but there is no master architect in Ezra or Nehemiah. Instead the Lord stirred up the spirits of the whole people to build (Ez. 1:5); we have here a nation of Bezalels, all equipped by the Spirit to build the house of God. When the house of the Lord is finished, the people pray, not the king (compare Neh. 9; 2 Chron. 6); what we have, again, is a nation of Solomons. The people bow to the ground when Ezra blesses the Lord and reads the Torah, but no cloud appears (Neh. 8:6). The people are the glory-canopy, and their shouts of praise resound through the land (Neh. 12:43)” (Leithart, “The Holy City). The “House of God” is the Temple and Jerusalem, and is referred to as the “Holy City” because the people are to be a holy people.

## **II. Worship Restored in Jerusalem**

Turn now to Ezra 3. V. 1 tells us that all the people gathered together in Jerusalem in the *seventh month*. This is the month in which the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths is celebrated to remember that God made His people dwell in booths/tents when He brought them out of Egypt (Lev. 23:34-43; Ex. 23:16; Num. 29:12-38; Deut. 16:13-15; 31:10-12). Every seventh year the law was read at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 31:10-12). This is the same month in which Solomon dedicated the first Temple (1 Kings 8:2; 2 Chron. 5:3; 7:8-10). Ezra 3:2-6 tells us that Joshua and Zerubbabel built the altar of God so that the people could offer sacrifices in connection with the Feast. This celebration marks the beginning of the rebuilding of the house of God. In the seventh month, when Nehemiah finished leading the people in building the walls, they had a covenant renewal ceremony in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:2, 13-18). This marked the end of the rebuilding of the House of God, because both the Temple and walls were built, and Israel was formed up as the holy people of God.

## **III. Rebuilding of the Temple Began**

Ezra 3:8-13 describes the process of beginning to rebuild the Temple. Zerubbabel and Joshua organized all of those who came out of captivity, under the leadership of the Levites to rebuild the Temple. It was necessary for the Levites to oversee the

work because the rebuilding the Temple was a holy work, and needed to be accomplished according to the pattern given to Israel by God. The work of rebuilding the Temple was an act of worship, led by the Levites in song [read 3:10-11.] When David brought the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem before the first Temple was built by Solomon, he directed the Levites to begin special musical worship that became the pattern of Temple worship later on, also known as Zion worship (1 Chron. 15:1-29; 16:1-42; 25:1-7; 2 Chron. 25-30). The people sang and gave thanks and praise to God because the foundation of the Temple was laid.

As the people were building, many of those who were old and had seen the first Temple before the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians wept because the second Temple was not as great as the first (cf. Hag. 2:3). The noise of both the shouts of joy and the weeping were so loud that it could be heard afar off.

#### **IV. Opposition to the Building Project**

In Ezra 4 we see that they encountered opposition from “the people of the land,” who tried to discourage the people of Judah and frightened them from building (v. 4). From the book of Haggai we learn that the people left off working on the temple and devoted themselves to building nice homes for themselves and working on the wall (Haggai 1). God in His mercy raised up these adversaries who complained to the King of Persia (not Cyrus, but probably Darius) about this wall building (Ezra 4:12). The adversaries argued that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city, and warned the King that if they succeeded in rebuilding Jerusalem, they would rebel against him as they had the Babylonians. At the beginning of his reign King Darius forbade them to work on the wall and city (Ezra 4:21). They were not, however, forbidden to work on the Temple. Thus, God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who told them that they were in sin for not having finished the temple first before the built for themselves nice houses (Haggai 1). The people were not prospering in the land because they had stopped working of the Lord’s house. Zerubbabel listened to the voice of the prophets and resumed the work (Hag. 1:12-15; Ezra 5:1-2).

#### **V. The Temple Completed and Dedicated**

No longer able to work on walls and houses, the people devoted themselves to rebuilding the temple. This aroused more questions, and another letter was sent to Darius asking about the Temple (Ezra 5:3-17). Darius gave permission to rebuild the Temple because it was discovered that Cyrus had originally given the Jews permission to build it. In the decree issued by King Darius, he not only gave permission to finish the Temple (Ezra 6:7), but also commanded that money be provided at the king’s expense from taxes from the region where the opposition

had come from (Ezra 6:8-13). As the people of God responded in faith and obedience to the words of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they prospered and the Temple was completed in the 6th year of Darius (Ezra 6: 14-15). Having completed the Temple, they dedicated the Temple and began to properly and fully keep the sacrificial laws, as given to them in the law of Moses (Ezra 6:16-18). As we will see next week, the next year Ezra arrived, and noted that both the temple and a rudimentary wall had been completed. The rebuilding of the Holy City, the House of God, was moving forward to completion.

The lesson that this portion of scripture teaches us is that we should do what the Lord commands of us, regardless of the opposition that we encounter. God had sent the people to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God (through the prophets and Cyrus), but they lost heart to do the work when they were opposed. They had not been forbidden by the king to rebuild the Temple; rather, it was only the work on the walls of the city that were stopped by royal decree. They should have continued to do what God had sent them to do, and trust Yahweh to arrange a way for them to complete the walls afterward. Instead of acting in faith, they lost heart from fear, and selfishly turned to building their own homes.

Another lesson in this is that we should first and foremost be concerned to maintain the worship of God, and only secondarily our home and the society around us. If we are faithful to God in worship, He will grant us success in the building the Kingdom of God culturally around us. Godly culture flows from faithful worship!

**Remind the students about the homework assignment: Read Ezra 7-8**

## Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies Ezra 3-6

### A. **Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
3. List of Returnees

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### E. **Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

Cyrus  
Zerubbabel  
Joshua  
Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Haggai  
Zechariah

The "House of God" – The "Holy City"

The Feast of Tabernacles

Rebuilding the Temple

Opposition and the failure of faith

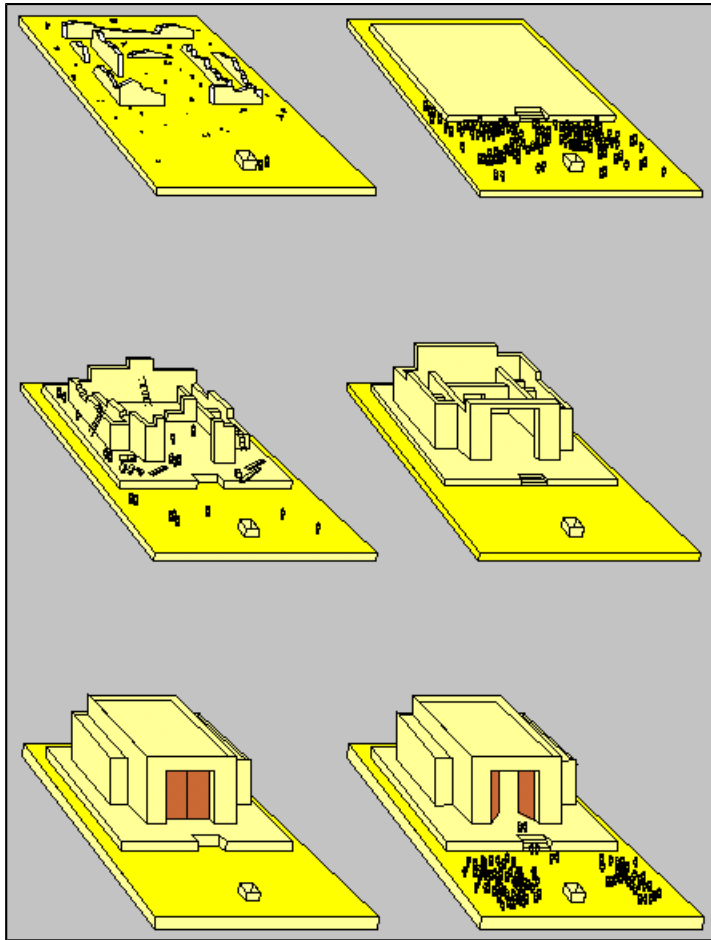
Repentance and obedience to the word of the prophets Haggai & Zechariah

Temple completed and dedicated – Worship performed according to the Law

**Homework assignment:** Read Ezra 7-8



## The Rebuilding of the House of God



- 1 **Ezra 3:1-6.** On the site of Solomon's temple, 50 years after its destruction, returned exiles rebuild the altar and begin to worship God there daily again.
- 2 **Ezra 3:7-13.** The site is cleared and foundations for the new temple laid. The people sing and shout for joy. Some people present had seen the previous temple and wept.
- 3 **Ezra 4:1-5.** The work continues, but the local inhabitants try to stop the returned exiles from continuing.
- 4 **Ezra 4:24.** The work on the temple stops for 16 years. This is partly due to opposition, but also because of laziness and selfishness (Haggai 1:2-8).
- 5 **Ezra 5:1-6:15.** Under the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the building continues again. The governor of the region complains, but Emperor Darius orders the temple to be built. It is finally completed after another 4 years.
- 6 **Ezra 6:16-22.** The temple is joyfully dedicated, and it starts to be used regularly for worship. This temple stood for nearly 500 years—longer than its predecessor (Solomon's) or its successor (Herod's).

## Week Three: Ezra-Nehemiah:

### Ezra's Return

#### **Ezra (6:19-22) 7-8**

#### ❖ Westminster Shorter Catechism

#### ❖ Review

It is important to understand that in the theology of Ezra-Nehemiah the “house of God” refers not only to the Temple itself, but also to the whole city of Jerusalem.

#### **Outline of Ezra-Nehemiah**

- A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**
  - 1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
  - 2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
  - 3. List of Returnees
  
- B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**
  
- C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**  
Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)
  
- D. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**  
Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)
  
- C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**  
Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
  
- B' Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**
  
- A' Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**
  - 1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
  - 2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
  - 3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah...are from beginning to end about the building of the house of the Lord. The books may be organized according to the four stages in the completion of the house. First the altar; then the temple; then the reformation of the people-house; finally, the city walls are finished and dedicated. Cyrus's decree permitting the Jews to rebuild the Lord's house, quoted at the beginning of

Ezra, was not fulfilled until the end of Nehemiah (Leithart, “The Holy City).

This week and next we come to the central section of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah where we see that Yahweh is concerned to restore not only the physical structures of His house, but also, more importantly, reformed the people of God into a holy covenant community. [Teacher: review the outline of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, and give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.]

## **I. Covenant Renewal and Holiness**

Last week we saw that not only did the people finish rebuilding the Temple house of God, but they also dedicated it to God with joy by offering sacrifices. They organized the priests and Levites according to their divisions in the law of God so that the worship of God would be conducted according to the scriptures (6:16-18). In 6:19-22 we see that the returnees kept the feast of Passover. This is important because frequently in the Old Testament eating the feast of Passover represents a time of covenant renewal. The Passover – Covenant Renewal pattern in the Old Testament signals a time of transition from judgment to restoration by God. At the original Passover the Hebrews were not only saved by Yahweh from their slavery in Egypt, but the process of God forming them into a new covenant people began. One year after the first Passover, they celebrated the second Passover just before they began to move toward the Promised Land (Num. 9-10). This happened after the Hebrews had been united to Yahweh at Mt. Sinai as the covenant people of God. But the people were rebellious and refused to enter the Promised Land, and were condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years. After the death of Moses and Aaron the high priest, the people returned to conquer the Promised Land. After they entered the land, the people celebrated Passover and renewed covenant with God. During the time of the kings of Israel both Hezekiah (2 Chron. 30:1-18) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:21-23; 2 Chron. 35:1-19) celebrated Passover as a time of covenant renewal to reestablish the people of God as a faithful people. Now in Ezra 6 we see that the people, having been restored to the Promised Land, renewed covenant again with the Lord as a way of moving from the judgments of God into covenant faithfulness with Him.

Notice in Ezra 6:20-21 that the priests and Levites, and the children of Israel who had returned from captivity are said to have been purified and separated unto the Lord. This is important to the theology of Ezra-Nehemiah because one of the themes is being a holy people. The words holy & holiness mean to be separated or set apart unto God. The people had “separated themselves from the filth or uncleanness of the nations of the land (i.e. the Gentile unbelievers in the land) in order to seek Yahweh God of Israel.” They were self-consciously trying to be holy unto the Lord and faithful to Him by not being contaminated/polluted by the world around them. Like them, we are live in the world, but not be conformed to the patterns of thinking and living of the world (Rom. 12:2; Jn. 17:14; James 4:4).

## **II. Ezra – The Expert in the Law of God**

Turn to Jeremiah 31:31-34. In this passage God promised before the exile to make a new covenant with His people (Israel – Northern Kingdom and Judah – Southern Kingdom). This new covenant, the Restoration Covenant, would be for the purpose

of gathering His divided and dispersed people into one covenant community that would faithfully worship Him. Central to this covenant would be the reformation of the people on the basis of His Law. The Law would be put in their minds and written on their hearts. In this way, God would bind Himself to His people, and they would be bound to them in holy fellowship. God also promised to cleanse His people by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon them (see Ezek. 36:22-32; Joel 2:28-32), who would empower them to live according to His law. To accomplish this, God raised up Ezra.

Turn to Ezra 7, where we see that Ezra (who had not appeared in the book of Ezra in the first six chapters), after the Temple is rebuilt, comes from Babylon. We learn that he is a priest (vv. 1-5) and expert in the law of God (vv. 6, 11). V. 10 tells us that Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of God and to teach it to the people of Israel.

Not only had God raised up Ezra to do this work, but also inclined the heart of the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to enable him to do so. In vv. 11-28 we see that God put in the heart of the king to do many things that would support Ezra as he returned to Jerusalem. The king not only sent with Ezra offerings of silver and gold for the beautification of the house of the Lord, but also sent sacrifices to be offered on the altar in the Temple on behalf of the king for the wellbeing of the kingdom (v. 23). Clearly, the king was a believer, and desired God's blessing. He knew that his kingdom would only prosper if the God of Israel were blessing Him. Artaxerxes commissioned Ezra set in order in Israel all that is required by God, so that the Law of God would be come the law of the land (vv. 23-26). In vv. 27-28 Ezra blessed the Lord for putting such a great thing in the heart of the king. Ezra was encouraged because the hand of God was clearly upon him in what he had set his hear to do (v. 10).

God had sent His people into exile as not only a judgment against them, but as a means of setting up His international kingdom in the world. Through their presence among the nations, God used His people as His witnesses, and many of the kings of the empires of Babylon and Persia became believers as a result (Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus, Darius/Artaxerxes). Now God was using these Gentile God-fearers to support the Jews as they rebuilt the house of God.

### **III. Ezra returned to Jerusalem**

In Ezra 8 we learn that Ezra returned to Jerusalem. Before leaving Babylon he gathered the chief men of Israel to go up to Jerusalem with Him. In vv. 21-23 Ezra proclaimed a fast of the people at the river Ahava in Babylon (see the map on the

back of the handout) so that they would proceed on their journey having humbled themselves before God and to seek His protection. He did this because he had told the king that “The hand of our god is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him” (v. 22). Having made this statement of faith in God, Ezra was ashamed to ask for an armed escort to keep them safe during their long journey to Jerusalem. This is significant because the king had provided a great deal of silver and gold and many other possessions that thieves would want to steal from them. Ezra desired to see the power of God to protect His returning people demonstrated to the king. God answered their prayers, and protected them (cf. 8:23, 31).

In vv. 24-30, Ezra divided the silver and gold and other articles offered by the king for the house of God to the twelve leaders of the priests. In vv. 28-29 he said to them, “***You are holy*** to the Lord; and the ***articles are holy also***...***watch and keep them***...” The work they were doing was to be considered a holy work, and they were to be holy servants of the Lord. This is important because as we have seen, the House of God is not just the Temple, but is the people of God gathered around His throne. Yahweh dwells in the midst of Israel, not merely in the Temple. The Temple will only be holy if the people live righteously in the land. Solomon’s Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar because it was filled with the abominations of Israel’s sins (particularly by the priests in the temple). God desolated His sanctuary because His people (especially the priests) were not holy. Now Ezra called upon the priests to be holy, and to take upon themselves the responsibility to care for the articles of the Temple as men who were set aside (holy/consecrated) for a holy work. In this way, they would please the Lord who dwelt amongst His people, and not abandon His sanctuary again.

It took four months for Ezra to arrive safely in Jerusalem (cf. 7: 8-9; 8:31-32). When they arrived in Jerusalem, they set in order all that the king had commanded them (8:33-36).

The lessons of this passage:

With the exile, the society of Israel was destroyed. The former days (from Sinai through the kingdom period) had passed away. Now, with the return of the exiles, the latter days had begun. During the restoration period, the society of Israel needed to be rebuilt. Jerusalem and the Temple were physical representations of the culture of God’s people. We learn from Ezra-Nehemiah that culture building begins with the establishment of biblical worship. Once the temple was rebuilt, the people needed to continue to build their culture according to the pattern found in scripture. In raising up Ezra, God was making His Word the foundation of the new

culture of Israel. Holiness flowing out of faithful worship is the key to seeing a godly culture established. You cannot have a godly society without biblical holiness in the people. And you cannot have biblical holiness without biblical worship.

We live in a time when the Christian culture developed over the last two thousand years is in decline. The Church of Jesus Christ has largely neglected biblical worship, and as a result, biblical holiness is not the governing principle of our society. We are in a time of judgment from God, and we need to be a people that humble ourselves before the Lord. As we do so, we can rest assured that He will hear us and begin to build His kingdom again through us.

But as we seek to rebuild culture along biblical lines, we must look first and foremost to the Bible as our guide. While it is true that we have much to learn from history in the last two thousand years to help us, we must be strictly biblical in our reformation of culture. It is not enough to look at the Middle Ages, the Reformation period, or early American history. We must seek an explicitly biblical view of the Church, the family, government, economics, art and culture, etc. May God grant that you will be so familiar with the Bible that when you have opportunity to influence the society, you will not be tempted to adopt the ways of the world around, but will courageously proclaim the whole Word of God and trust Him to build His kingdom biblically through you.

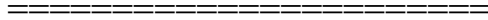
**Homework assignment:** Read Ezra 9-10

## **Ezra's Return** **Ezra (6:19-22) 7-8**

**A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
3. List of Returnees

**F. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**



**G. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**

**Covenant Renewal and Holiness**

Ezra 6:16-22

Numbers 9-10; Joshua 5

2 Kings 23:21-23; 2 Chron. 30:1-18; 35:1-19

**Ezra – The Expert in the Law of God**

Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32; Joel 2:28-32

**Ezra returned to Jerusalem**

**Homework assignment: Read Ezra 9-10**





## Week Four: Ezra-Nehemiah Purification of the People

### **Ezra 9-10**

#### ❖ Westminster Shorter Catechism

#### ❖ Review

As we have seen, the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is about the rebuilding and restoration of the Holy City. We have said that the *Holy City* required a *holy people*, because God dwelt in the midst of His people in the Jerusalem Temple. The abominations that caused God to desolate/leave the first Temple before the exile were failures of holiness. During the exile the Jews were taught to live among the nations faithfully to THE God, Yahweh, without compromise. Now that the

people were back in the land, would they remain faithful to the Lord, being holy and unpolluted by the nations, or would they slip back into the sins that cause them to go into exile in the first place?

[Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.]

When Adam fell in the Garden of Eden (the first fall), he failed to guard his bride

from the serpent, and impatiently seized the fruit God had withheld from him (the sin of impatience against the Father. The curse upon the serpent included a promise to mankind that God would raise up a seed (descendent) of the woman that would crush his head (Gen. 3:15). The raising of a godly seed (i.e. godly children) was from the beginning an important part of God's plan for the family. In Genesis 4-5 we learn that there were two descendents of Adam that developed in the world

#### **Outline of Ezra-Nehemiah**

##### **A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
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3. List of Returnees

##### **B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

##### **C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**

Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)

##### **D. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**

Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)

##### **C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**

Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom

##### **B' Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**

##### **A' Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**

1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

after Cain killed his brother Abel (the second fall): the wicked line of Cain, and the godly line of Seth (which means “Appointed,” the line God had appointed as the holy seed). In Genesis 6 we learn that the godly line of Seth (“the sons of God”) *intermarried* with the ungodly line of Cain (“the daughters of men”). This was the third fall. Each of the three falls of men were judged by God by casting them further away from His presence.

After the flood in Genesis 6-9 we see that God raised up a new seed in Abraham. God promise the give him the land of Palestine, the make his descendents a great nation, and that he would be a blessing to the nations. Abraham was a greater Adam because he patiently waited for God to give what had been promised. Jacob did not sin against his brother, but sought to live peacefully with him. And Joseph remained holy, fleeing the temptation of Potiphar’s wife. In these Patriarchal fathers we see examples of holiness and faithfulness to Yahweh God.

When the Hebrews were delivered by God from Egypt in the Exodus there was mixed multitude of both Hebrews and those Egyptians that believed in Yahweh (Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4). As the people came into the Promised Land and conquered it, they renewed covenant with God and promised to remain faithful to Him (Joshua 24). But after the death of Moses, we learn in Judges 2:10 that, “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.” Israel did not teach their children about the Lord, and the importance of remaining faithful to him. They did not raise a godly seed that would forsake the idolatry of the nations around them, and so God judged them. This became a spiritual problem for Israel throughout her history, right down to the exile.

Turn now to Malachi 2:14-15, the last book of the Old Testament Bible, written during the Restoration period, that part of Israel’s history that we are studying in Ezra-Nehemiah. In this passage, God lists the sins of Israel that will eventually lead to their judgment if they do not repent. In 2:14-15 God says that they have not been faithful to their wives, whom God had joined together by covenant. In v. 15 God told them why He brings families together: “He seeks a godly offspring.” Faithfulness to God requires faithfulness to the one you are married to. Biblical faithfulness in marriage produces a godly seed for the Lord.

Now turn to Ezra 9 where we see that after Ezra had returned to the land from Babylon and had begun his work as the teacher of Israel, the leaders of the people came and told him about the sin of the people, the priest and Levites. V. 1 says that they had not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands around them, and

were practicing the *abominations* of the people in the land. This means that in the years that followed the original return of the Jews to the land, some of them had fallen into some form of open idolatry. They had started well (6:21-22), but many had fallen into the abominations of the *same unbelieving peoples that were in the land when Joshua conquered the land* (Ex. 23:23; Deut. 20:17-18). The first generation of Israelites in the land failed to destroy the peoples of the land as they had been commanded, with the result that several hundred years later they were still causing God's people to stumble into sin. Just as the exile was a second exodus, so too, the return to the land was a second conquest of the land. V. 2 goes on to say that the way that the people had been led into this sin was by intermarrying with the people of the land. It says, "the *holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands.*" Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass." When Nehemiah had to deal with it a generation later, the situation he dealt with was one in which the mother had complete dominance over the rearing of the children (which we will study when we get to Neh. 13).

The problem was not just that the people were engaged in mixed marriages (which is a sin), but that it is mixed marriage + committing the abominations of the people of the land + destroying the children (not raising a godly seed – Mal. 2:15). The unbelieving spouses continued to practice their idolatry, which influenced both the other spouse and the children.

In 9:3-15 we see Ezra's response to the sins of Israel. V. 3 says that he tore his clothing (as a symbol of spiritual death) and plucked out some of his hair and beard (as a symbol of shame). When Nehemiah dealt with this problem many years later, he pulled out their hair and made them swear an oath to stop the intermarriage (Neh. 13:25). The shame of this sin was so great that Ezra sat down astonished and appalled. He went into the Temple and prayed a prayer of confession (similar to the prayer of Daniel, Dan. 9:4-19; and Nehemiah, Neh. 1:4-11). As he prayed a very large congregation of men, women and children gathered to him and also wept for the sins of Israel (Ezra 10:1). In vv. 2-3 they expressed their desire to renew covenant with God and to put away their pagan wives and the children that had been born to them. They encouraged Ezra to be strong and of good courage to lead the people in this matter (10:3), just as Joshua had been encouraged by the Lord and the people (Joshua 1). And so, Ezra arose and issued a command that all the descendants of the captivity had to go to Jerusalem to be confronted with their sin. When they confessed their sin, they promised to obey the Lord by separating themselves from the people of the land and from their pagan wives (vv. 9-12). Ezra questioned the people, household by household, to determine who needed to put away their pagan wives.

In order for the land to be the dwelling of the people of God, they had to be a holy people. It was one thing for a man to marry a gentile woman who had become a believer, or to have a wife that did not practice her pagan religion. It was another thing altogether for her to lead her family away from the Lord.

Let take an example to illustrate how this would have looked. Israelite man marries an Ashdodite woman. She comes to Temple once or twice, but then stops coming. She does not interfere with the husband's rearing of the children in Temple and synagogue. She's not burning incense on high places with other pagans, but just stays home. What would Ezra do? Probably nothing. But if his wife were interfering with his practice of the biblical faith and making it hard for him to raise the children in the Lord, Ezra would have insisted that the man put away his wife. The difficulty of this process and the need to exercise biblical wisdom required Ezra to carefully question all of the men with regard to their households.

### **Application**

How does this apply to us today? Turn briefly to 1 Cor. 7:12-16. This passage tells us that if you are married to an unbeliever, and he/she is willing to live with you, you are free not to divorce him/her. The unbelieving spouse is in some way is influenced/sanctified by the believing spouse. By staying with the unbeliever, the believer may be able to save him/her. How would Paul counsel a Christian who was married to someone actively practicing witchcraft and training the children in it? Probably he would see this as "moral desertion."

Intermarriage is always wrong. But marrying a man who does not go to church and stays home to watch TV on Sunday is not the same as marrying a man who is practicing abominations. We need to update what abominations are, but surely they are things like being an active member of the communist or nazi party, or being an active Klansman or practicing witchcraft. Ezra and Nehemiah is an application of the Law's command to separate from abominations, not a new notion that all mixed marriages must be broken up.

**Homework assignment:** Read Nehemiah 1-2

## Purification of the People Ezra 9-10

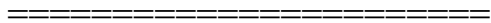
**A. Zerubbabel’s Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God’s Kingdom
2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
3. List of Returnees

**B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

**C. Ezra’s Return (Ezra 6-8)**

Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)



**H. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**

Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)

The “Holy Seed”

### The Three Falls

Place	Sinner	Sin	Judgment	Virtue
Garden	Adam	Eats fruit	Cast out of Garden	Patience
Land	Cain	Kills Brother	Cast out of land	Kindness
World	Sons of God	Marry Unbelievers	Cast out of World	Holiness

Intermarriage & Ezra’s prayer – Ezra 9

Ezra’s Reformation of Israel – Ezra 10

Application

**Homework assignment:** Read Nehemiah 1-2



## Week Five: Ezra-Nehemiah: Nehemiah's Return

### Nehemiah 1-2

#### ❖ Westminster Shorter Catechism

#### ❖ Review

The book of Ezra-Nehemiah deals with the restoration of the holy people in the land as God had promised by the prophets before the exile. The New Covenant, the

#### Outline of Ezra-Nehemiah

##### **A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

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##### **B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

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Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)

##### **D. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**

Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)

##### **C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**

Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom

##### **B' Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**

##### **A' Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**

1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

Restoration Covenant, is the restoration of God's people to a proper relationship with Himself, and the world around them.

Ezra-Nehemiah is concerned with the restoration of the people of God as the House of God. *The House of Israel is the House of God.* The Temple and Jerusalem are pictures of the people of God

gathered around the throne of God. The Lord dwells in the midst of Israel (the people), not just in the Temple. Because of this, it is not only the Temple (representing the worshipping community), but it is also the city of Jerusalem (and surrounding area) that needed to be rebuilt. Rebuilding the walls represents rebuilding the house of God, because the whole nation had been restored as the House of God.

In order for God's people to dwell in the land according to His covenant promises, the Holy City needed to be rebuilt. This began with the building of the altar, and the rebuilding of the Temple. After the Temple was dedicated and worship was restored, Ezra came to Jerusalem to instruct the people in the Law of God. The

people were being reformed/recreated into the worshipping community that God intended them to be.

We need to remember that when the Jews were opposed by their enemies as they were rebuilding the Temple, they continued to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and their homes. After the King of Persia gave them permission to rebuild the Temple, they needed encouragement from the Lord by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to be motivated to finish the Temple. After the Temple was rebuilt, the walls apparently remained unfinished. The House of God was not complete until the walls had been rebuilt as well.

Turn to Nehemiah 1. [Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.]

Nehemiah 1:1 says that these are the words of Nehemiah, indicating that he was the writer of the book. It is probable that Ezra and Nehemiah worked together on the two books (Ezra writing the first half). Nehemiah's name means "Yahweh Comforts." God would use Nehemiah to bring comfort to His people by the completion of the Holy City. Nehemiah was a high official in the court of the Persian King Artaxerxes. He was the cupbearer for Artaxerxes (1:11-2:1), which meant that he not only insured that the wine that the king would drink was safe, but that he was also an advisor to the King as well. Nehemiah served the King in the Persian capital city of Shushan probably during the time that Mordecai and Esther were there (2:6).

While serving the King in Shushan, Nehemiah heard from some of the men from Judah about Jerusalem. V. 3 says that they told him that Jews were in great distress and reproach because the walls of Jerusalem remained broken down, and the gates were burned with fire. This distressed Nehemiah greatly, and he sat down and wept and mourned for many days in prayer and fasting. **The book of Nehemiah is filled with prayers** (1:4-11; 4:4-5, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:22). In vv. 5-11 we see the prayer of Nehemiah. [Read this prayer out loud.] He begins by addressing his prayer to the great and awesome covenant-keeping God. He confessed the sins of the children of Israel, and reminds God that He promised to restore His people if they repented. He prayed that God would use him to help his people.

This is a good model of prayer for us. Focus on the person of God and His covenant relationship with His people. Confess personal sin and the sins of His people. Remind God of His covenant promises, and pray for restoration. Ask God



to help you make a difference in the Kingdom, and to find favor with those whom you intend to influence in the kingdom.

### **Nehemiah sent by the King to Judah (2:1-8)**

After his prayer, Nehemiah went to the King to perform his duty as the King's cupbearer. He was still very sad about how his countrymen were doing, and the King noticed this. The King asked Nehemiah why he was sad. When Nehemiah told the King what was wrong, Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah what he wanted. Again, as he spoke to the King, Nehemiah prayed (2:4). Nehemiah requested that he be allowed to return to Judah to rebuild the city. When the King heard how long he intended to be gone, Nehemiah was given permission to return. He was appointed governor of the province of Judah, and was given letters to the other governors to grant him permission to return to the land of Judah, and to be given timber for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was appointed governor two different times. The first time was for twelve years (Nehemiah 1:1, 5:14, 13:6), after which time he returned to serve the King. After "certain days" Nehemiah received permission by the King to return to Jerusalem to deal with problems that had arisen in the Holy City (Neh. 13:6).

### **Nehemiah returned (2:9-20)**

Nehemiah 2:9 says that Nehemiah traveled beyond the River separating the eastern and western part of the Persian empire and delivered the letters that declared his authority as a governor. He traveled with an armed escort, unlike Ezra when He returned many years before (cf. Ezra 8:22). When Sanballat and Tobiah, other officials in the region, heard of Nehemiah's coming to seek the well-being of the children of Israel, they were deeply disturbed. This is the first mention in the book of Nehemiah that there were enemies that would need to be dealt with, just as the people did when trying to rebuild the Temple [refer the students to the outline].

When Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem, he stayed there three days without telling the people what God had put on his heart to do at Jerusalem. He went at night to investigate the condition of the walls and gates of the city.

In vv. 17-20, when Nehemiah had finished his investigation, he spoke to the Jews, the priests, nobles and officials about his intentions. He laid out before them the distress that they were in by having the walls and gates in disrepair. They were vulnerable to the attacks of their enemies, not being able to defend themselves. Not only so, they would not be able to fully rebuild their culture so long as they were in

such a condition. Nehemiah challenged them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem so that they would no longer be a reproach to the peoples around them. He told them how God had been with him and had given him favor before the King. This encouraged the people, and they agreed to do the work needed to rebuild the city.

They set their hands to the task. But Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem heard about what they were doing, they laughed them to scorn. They made fun of them for thinking that they would be able to rebuild the Jewish culture because Israel had been so thoroughly destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Not only so, they accused them of being rebellious against the King of Persia. This is the same accusation that the people heard when they started the project many years before (Ezra 4:12-16).

Nehemiah, with faith in God, responded to those who reproached them that God would prosper them and asserted that the Jews, the servants of God, would arise and build. Those who would seek to stop them have not right to the prosperity that God would bring to the Jews.

There may be times when we are laughed to scorn, and would seem to be a reproach to the people that see what we are doing in the world. But if we trust the Lord and obey His word, God will bless our work in the world.

**Homework assignment:** Read Nehemiah 3-6

## Nehemiah's Return Nehemiah 1-2

**A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
3. List of Returnees

**B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

**C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**

Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)

**I. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**

Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)

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**C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**

2. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom

Nehemiah – “Yahweh Comforts”

The prayers of Nehemiah (1:4-11; 5:19; 6:9; 13:22)

Nehemiah sent by the King to Judah (2:1-8)

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem (2:9-20)

**Homework assignment: Read Nehemiah 3-6**

**Week Six: Ezra-Nehemiah:**  
**Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies**  
**Nehemiah 3:1-7:3**

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Review**

In the book of Ezra, we learned that when Zerubbabel first returned to Jerusalem with the exiles he was commanded to do so by Cyrus, the King of the Persian empire (Ch. 1). When Ezra returned to Jerusalem he too was commissioned by King Artaxerxes to establish the social order of Israel according to the law of God (Ch. 7). Last we learned that Nehemiah returned to the Jerusalem with the blessing

of Artaxerxes (Neh. 2).

In each of these returns to Jerusalem, the world emperor was used by God to legally authorize the re-establishment of the Kingdom of God. As we have seen in the books of Daniel and Esther, these kings were types or pictures of the coming Messianic King that would come to finally establish the Kingdom of God

**Outline of Ezra-Nehemiah**

**A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
3. List of Returnees

**B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

**C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**  
Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)

**D. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**  
Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)

**C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**  
Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom

**B' Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**

**A' Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**

1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

in the world. Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah were each given documents that legally demonstrated that they had authority to do the kingdom work they were engaged in.

When the people encountered opposition from enemies to their rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple in Ezra 4-6, the battle was fought on legal grounds.

Letters were sent to the king about the legality and advisability of allowing the Jews to rebuild their society. The King issued a legal decree forbidding the Jews to continue the building project. The elders of the Jews sent a letter asking the king to research to legal history of Persia to see if they should be permitted to continue to rebuild house of God in Jerusalem. When Darius had completed the search of the records, he finally allowed the Jews to finish the rebuilding of the Temple.

Today we will see that the battles that the Jews fought against their enemies a generation latter under the leadership of Nehemiah was not a legal fight, but involved physical warfare. Assaults against the Kingdom of God take many forms, and we must be wise enough to know the times in which we live, and to engage the enemies of God in the most effective way.

### **I. Rebuilding the walls and gates begun Nehemiah 3**

Turn now to Nehemiah 3. [Teacher: Give the students the handout at the end of this lesson.] In chapter 2:18-20 Nehemiah had reported to the people how the hand of God had been good upon him and how God had turned the King's heart to help the Jews. The people had agreed with the plan of Nehemiah and set their hands to work. But right enemies began to oppose them. Now in Nehemiah 3 we see that the Jews began the work of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem. The whole chapter is a long description of who built what part of the walls and repair which gates. On your handout there is a picture that shows the progress of the repairs.

### **II. Opposition from enemies Nehemiah 4-6**

#### **A. External enemies Ch. 4**

In Nehemiah 4 we see how the enemies opposed the building project. The passage moves quickly back and forth from the words and actions of the enemies to the words and actions of Nehemiah and the people. Let's quickly look at the conflict.

- 4:1-3 Enemies furious and mocked the Jews
- 4:4-5 Prayer
- 4:6 Wall joined to half it's height
- 4:7-8 Enemies angry & conspired to attack and confuse the Jews
- 4:9-10 Prayer & guarding the work, strength failing because of rubble
- 4:11 Threat from enemies
- 4:12-14 Jews concerned – Nehemiah strengthens (“Yahweh Comforts”)
- 4:15 Enemies heard God caused their plans to fail, rebuilding continued
- 4:16-23 Building continued with guards & weapons & plans

Notice the difference between the first opposition the Jews experienced during Zerubbabel's time compared to that which they experienced under Nehemiah.

There are no letters to the King of Persia. There are no legal battles being fought. When it becomes clear to the enemies of God's people that they cannot prevail through legal channels, they do not give up. They use more direct, even violent means to stop the building of the Kingdom and House of God.

### **B. Internal Enemies Ch. 5**

Nehemiah 5 tells us that it was not just external enemies that caused problems for the Jews. There were internal enemies as well. In vv. 1-13 we see that the people of Israel began to cry out because of economic problems in the Jewish society. There was a famine in the land, and many of the people had borrowed money to pay for food (vv. 1-3). They also had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on their land and vineyards (v. 4). Because the debt was so great, many of them had their adult sons and daughters taken as slaves to help pay the debt. Because the economy was so bad and they had so much debt, they could not redeem their children from the slavery (v. 5). This was a violation of the laws concerning slavery in the law (Ex. 21:1-11; Lev. 25:39-43).

In vv. 6-13 we see Nehemiah's response. He was very angry and spoke strongly against the people committing this sin against their own people. In speaking to them, he took time to give "serious thought" about the problem and what should be done about it. This is a good example to us when we need to deal with problems. He said that they were guilty of "exacting usury from his brother." Do you know what this means? The law forbids charging interest on a loan to a poor brother in the faith (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 23:19-20; 24:10-13). This social injustice is, in part, what led to the original exile into Babylon. By enslaving the holy people, Israel had become another Egypt. Now, Israel was committing the same sin again! Nehemiah commanded these slave owners and loan sharks to return to the poor people of the land what had been taken from them. In v. 12 they said that they would make right what they had taken from the people. In v. 13, Nehemiah "shook out the fold of his garment" as a symbol of the curse that would be upon them if they did not do as they promised.

### **C. Nehemiah's generosity to the people of Israel in 5:14-19.**

Before Nehemiah had been appointed as governor, previous governors had exacted taxes that were a burden to the people economically. Because He feared the Lord, and wanted his government to be a blessing to the people, Nehemiah did not do so. Not only so, he and his servants did work on the wall, and Nehemiah provided food for 150 of the Jews and rulers, in addition to those who visited from the nations around. His hospitality was not at the expense of the people, but came from his own wealth. What a great example of godly leadership Nehemiah is for us. He

not only dealt wisely in dealing with external problems and opposition, but also help to correct the economic problems of the people.

#### **D. Conspiracy against Nehemiah      Nehemiah 6:1-14**

In 6:1-14 we see that the external enemies continued to be a problem for Nehemiah. When they heard that the walls were joined, they conspired to do harm to Nehemiah by calling for a meeting. Four times they tried to get Nehemiah to meet with them, but each time he refused. Finally, they sent a letter accusing the Jews of rebellion against the Persian King. They planned to send a letter to the King reporting lies. The enemies of God and His people had failed legally under Ezra; and failed to disrupt the work by threats of violence under Nehemiah; and finally would try again through deception to defeat God's people in their kingdom building work. They were trying to intimidate and cause the people to be fearful to continue the work. But once again, Nehemiah prayed (v. 9). They also tried to trick Nehemiah into stopping his involvement in the building project by making him afraid and fleeing to the Temple. They hired a previous informer as a prophet to say that they were planning to kill Nehemiah, but Nehemiah saw through the plot. In v. 14 Nehemiah prayed against his enemies.

#### **III. The wall completed      Nehemiah 6:15-7:3**

The wall was finished in fifty-two days! This was an amazing accomplishment. God had enabled them not only to complete the project, but also to do so in such a quick manner. When their enemies saw what had been done, they were very disheartened and discouraged in their own eyes, because they could see that God had been prospering the Jews.

After the walls and gates were completed, Nehemiah gave instructions that the gates of Jerusalem be guarded. This represented the final establishment of the Jewish culture – independent from the unbelievers around them. The enemies would no longer be threat to the people, and the process of building their culture could continue without interruption from their enemies.

Lessons to be learned:

- 1) Enemies of the Kingdom of God cannot be ignored, nor can we give into their opposition to the Kingdom. We must fight against their attempts to destroy the manifestation of God's Kingdom in the world. We must be willing to not only fight, but to build the Kingdom through our labors, money and time.

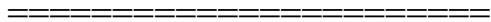
- 2) We need to take seriously the financial teachings of the Bible and deal with people in a godly way. If we sin against God and people around us by being greedy or unjust, God will not bless us until we repent.
- 3) We need to be prayerful when we deal with problems that arise. Nehemiah continually prayed about the issues he had to deal with.
- 4) We need to be wise in the way we deal with the problems. Nehemiah thought carefully about what he would do and say. He also had wisdom to see through the deceit of people around him. May God grant that we are so wise.

**Homework assignment:** Read Nehemiah 7-10



**Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies**  
**Nehemiah 3:1-7:3**

- A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**
  - 1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
  - 2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
  - 3. List of Returnees
- B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**
  - C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**
    - Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)
    - J. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**
      - Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)
  - C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**
    - Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom



**B' Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition from Enemies (Neh. 3-6)**

**Rebuilding the walls and gates begun      Nehemiah 3**

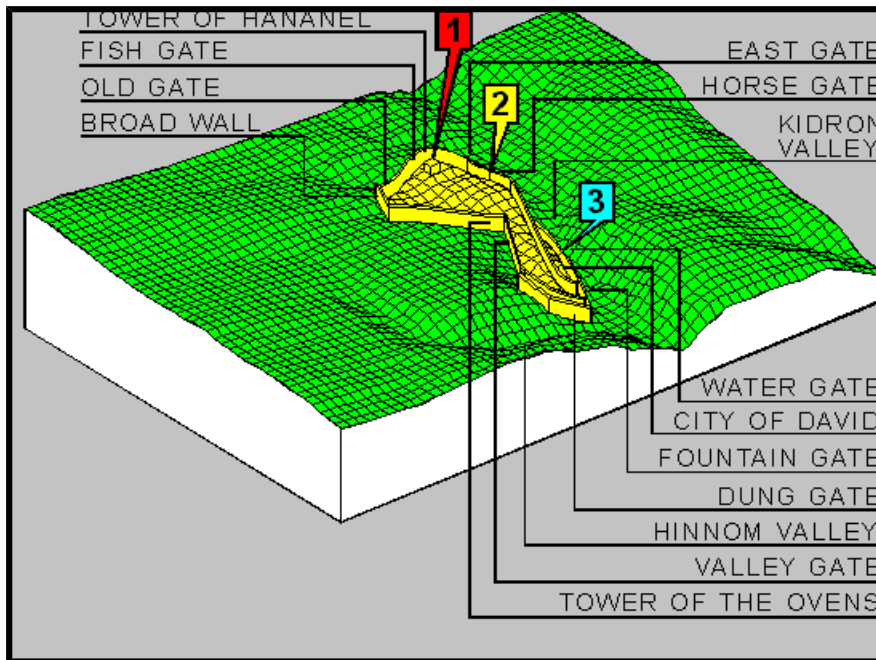
**Opposition from enemies      Nehemiah 4-6**

- A. External enemies (Ch. 4)**
  
- B. Internal Enemies (Ch. 5)**
  
- C. Nehemiah's generosity to the people of Israel (5:14-19)**
  
- D. Conspiracy against Nehemiah (6:1-14)**

**The wall completed (6:15-7:3)**

**Homework assignment: Read Nehemiah 7-10**

What did the different groups of returning exiles achieve in Jerusalem?



**1 Rebuilding the temple.** The first 2 groups under Joshua and Zerubbabel began to rebuild the destroyed temple. This was financed partly by the Persian treasury and partly by the people themselves. Despite opposition from those who had not been exiled, the temple was completed about 22 years later (Ezra 3:1-13).

**2 Reconstructing the walls.** Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem signaled the start of work on Jerusalem's walls. The builders were determined to complete the work, even when it came to holding a trowel in one hand and a sword with the other (Nehemiah 1:1-7:7).

**3 Renewing the faith.** Ezra was commanded by the Persian Emperor to make sure that the Jewish Law was being observed fully in Jerusalem and Judah. The covenant was renewed at a public reading of the Law 'in the square just inside the Water Gate' (Nehemiah 8:1). Ezra and Nehemiah both dealt with the problem of mixed marriages (Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 8-9).

**Week Seven: Ezra-Nehemiah:**  
**Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees**  
**Nehemiah 7:4-10:39**

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

❖ **Review**

In Ezra 2 we have the list of those who returned with Zerubbabel. Turn briefly to Ezra 3. Right after the people had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the God of Israel, v. 1 tells us that all the people gathered together in Jerusalem in the *seventh month*. This is the month in which the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths is celebrated to remember that God made His people dwell in booths/tents when He brought them out of Egypt (Lev. 23:34-43; Ex. 23:16; Num. 29:12-38; Deut.

16:13-15). This is the same month that Solomon dedicated the first Temple (1 Kings 8:2; 2 Chron. 5:3; 7:8-10).

Ezra 3:2-6 tells us that Joshua and Zerubbabel built the altar of God so that the people could offer sacrifices in connection with the Feast. This celebration marks the beginning of the rebuilding of the house of God. When Nehemiah

**Outline of Ezra-Nehemiah**

**A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
3. List of Returnees

**B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

**C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**  
Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)

**D. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**  
Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)

**C'** **Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**  
Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom

**B'** **Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**

**A'** **Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**

1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

finished leading the people in building the walls, in the seventh month, they had a covenant renewal ceremony in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:2, 13-18). This marked the end of the rebuilding of the House of God, because both the Temple and walls were built, and Israel was formed up as the holy people of God.

## **I. Zerubbabel's List of Returnees Nehemiah 7:4-73**

After the completion of the wall in Nehemiah 7, the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few in number and many of the houses were not rebuilt (v. 4). This shows that although the wall was finished, the completion of the rebuilding of the Jewish society was yet incomplete. The people needed to grow in numbers to fill the city, and rebuild their houses and various structures of society. God put it in Nehemiah's heart to register/count the people by their genealogy. In Nehemiah 7:6-72 is the same list of people that returned to the land with Zerubbabel (previously listed in Ezra 2). The point of this is that *the Jews still need to be rebuilt into the holy people, ready to inhabit the holy city.*

## **II. The Feast of Tabernacles and the Reading of the Law Nehemiah 8**

The wall was completed in the sixth month (see Neh. 6:15, Elul = 6<sup>th</sup> month). Now at the end of 7:73 it says that when the seventh month came, the people dwelt in their cities. Just as when the Temple was rebuilt and dedicated, and Ezra returned to teach the people the law in Ezra 6-7, so now, in Nehemiah 8 we see that once the walls had been completed, Ezra read the law again. After the people began the conquest of the land after the first exodus, Joshua led the people in a covenant renewal ceremony. At that time he read the Book of the Law before all the congregation of Israel, including the women and little ones (Josh. 8:15). In Nehemiah 8:1-8 Ezra read the law to all the people, including "the men, women and all who could hear with understanding" (vv. 2-3). Vv. 7-8 tells us that there were other teachers that helped the people understand what was written in the law. These verses are part of the biblical basis for our Sunday Bible Classes.

According to vv. 9-12, the people were convicted by the reading of the Law, and mourned and wept because of their sins. The leaders of the people told them that they should not weep and mourn because that day was "holy to the Lord God." Instead of weeping there should be celebration and feasting with friends and giving of portions of the feast to those who need it. There is a time for feasting and a time for mourning. When God calls us to celebrate His goodness and mercy, we should put aside our mourning – rejoicing in His love and forgiveness.

What happens in the seventh month? [The Feast of Tabernacles – see above review.] What month was Solomon's Temple dedicated in, and in connection with which feast? [The seventh – the Feast of Tabernacles.] In Ezra 3, what month did Joshua and Zerubbabel build the altar, and in connection with which feast? [The seventh – the Feast of Tabernacles.] So now, in Nehemiah 8:13-18 we see that in the seventh month, immediately following the completion of the walls and the reading of the Law, the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. Apparently,

since the days of Joshua, the children of Israel had not celebrated the feast in the manner prescribed by the Law (i.e. making and sitting under booths made of the branches of trees). The people were trying to carefully follow the word of the Lord, unlike their forefathers. Every seventh year the law was read at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 31:10-12). Nehemiah 8:18 tells us that they not only kept the Feast according to the Law, but read the Law everyday during the Feast. This text clearly indicates that Israel was being formed into the holy people, ready to inhabit the holy city.

### **III. Confession of Sin and Worship      Nehemiah 9**

What follows in Nehemiah 9 is a long prayer of confession of sin and worship. In this prayer they acknowledged who God was, the Creator and Covenant-Keeping God of Israel. The prayer spoke of the long history of how Yahweh God related to his people from Abraham until their time. They confessed openly and honestly the sins of their forefathers and pledged to be the servants of God who would keep the new covenant they would soon make with Him. Read Nehemiah 9:30. It is important to understand that we participate with the people of God throughout history, and that their story is part of our story. If we understand their sins, we are more likely to resist the temptation to fall into the same sins in our own day. This pray is an example of having a broad view of our place in history so that we will be prepared to love and honor God in faith in our own day.

### **IV. Covenant Renewal      Nehemiah 10**

Nehemiah 10 recounts the process of making a covenant before the Lord. The names of those who renewed covenant are listed in Nehemiah10:1-27. What is important to see in this passage is that as they renewed covenant with God, they were very specific about the sins that they intended to avoid. Because they had just heard the reading of the Law, and knew themselves to be sinful in specific ways, they careful laid out the specific areas that they needed to be faithful to the Lord in. Not only so, as they renewed covenant before the Lord, they entered into a curse (upon disobedience) and took an oath (i.e. made a promise before God) to walk in God's Law, and to observe and to do all that Yahweh had commanded them (Neh. 10:29). There were four areas of biblical living that the people promised to be faithful in. These four areas of holy living were specified because these were continually problem areas for the people of the Restoration Era. They are:

- 1) **No mixed marriages (v. 30)**
- 2) **Observe the weekly Sabbath and the Sabbatical year (v. 31, cf. Ex. 20:10; 23:10-11; Lev. 23:3; 25:4-7; Deut. 5:12-14; 15:1-3, 7-9; Is. 58:13-14)**
- 3) **Temple tax for the work of the ministry in the Temple (vv. 32-33, cf. Ex. 30:11-16)**

- 4) Bring the **tithes and offerings** according to the law (**vv. 34-39**, cf. Lev. 6:12-13; Ex. 34:26; Deut. 26:2; Lev. 23:17; Deut. 18:4; Num. 18:26; 1 Chron. 9:26; 2 Chron. 31:11-12)

As we will see next week, the people did not keep their covenant oaths with regard to these sins. Throughout the Old Testament, virtually every time the covenant is renewed formally, there is immediately a fall into sin. Ezra and Nehemiah both reveal this same pattern of Covenant Renewal, Fall and Renewal. Remember that after the Temple was completed and the people renewed covenant, Ezra returned to Jerusalem and discovered the sin of intermarriage. At the end of the book of Ezra, he purified the people. This same pattern is repeated in the book of Nehemiah. We will conclude our study next week with the purification of the people following their fall into these four sins following their covenant renewal.

This text in Nehemiah 10 is part of the biblical basis for our church membership. When a household desires membership at RCC, the head of the household swears to keep the membership covenant, stating that the household will keep the word of God in several specifically named areas. These are areas of righteousness that the Church of Jesus Christ has for a long time struggled to keep. Members of RCC pledge to keep these are a way to hold one another accountable to the word of God.

Lessons learned in this lesson:

- 1) As the people of God, we must be a people centered around the word of God. We must hear it with attention – and be careful to do all that God commands us.
- 2) When we come to conviction of our sin, we must confess our sins to God, knowing that He is faithful and just to forgive us all our sins. When He tells us that we are forgiven, we must believe Him, and joyfully celebrate His love and mercy in our lives. Too many people struggle to know themselves to be forgiven, and continue to mourn over their sins. By continuing to reject the forgiveness promised by God, we are, in effect, saying that God has not done enough to remove the guilt of our sins.
- 3) When we renew covenant with the Lord in Worship each Lord's Day, we are promising to keep covenant with Him and obey Him. We need to continually be faithful to the Lord by loving and obeying Him.

**Homework assignment:** Read Nehemiah 11-13

**Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees**  
**Nehemiah 7-10**

- A. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**
  - 1. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
  - 2. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
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- B. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**
- C. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**
  - Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)
  - K. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**
    - Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)
- C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**
  - Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
- B' Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition from Enemies (Neh. 3-6)**

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- A' Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**
  - 1. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
  - 2. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
  - 3. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

- I. Zerubbabel's List of Returnees      Nehemiah 7:4-73**
  
- II. The Feast of Tabernacles and the Reading of the Law      Nehemiah 8**
  
- III. Confession of Sin and Worship      Nehemiah 9**
  
- IV. Covenant Renewal      Nehemiah 10**

**Homework assignment: Read Nehemiah 10-13**

**Week Eight: Ezra-Nehemiah:**  
**Covenant Renewal & Final Reforms**  
**Nehemiah 11-13**

❖ **Westminster Shorter Catechism**

**Q. 14 What is sin?**

A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. (1 John 3:4)

**Q. 15 What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?**

A. The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created was their eating the forbidden fruit. (Gen. 3:6)

As we have seen, the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is about the rebuilding and restoration of the house of Yahweh and the Holy City. *The House of Israel is the House of God.* The Temple and Jerusalem are pictures of the people of God gathered around the throne of God. The Lord dwells in the midst of Israel (the

people), not just in the Temple. Because of this, it is not only the Temple (representing the worshipping community), but it is also the city of Jerusalem (and surrounding area) that needed to be rebuilt. Rebuilding the walls represented rebuilding the house of God, because the whole nation had been restored as the House of God.

**Outline of Ezra-Nehemiah**

**E. Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Ezra 1-2)**

4. Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom
5. Articles of House of God returned & Plunder for the Temple
6. List of Returnees

**F. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra 3-6)**

**G. Ezra's Return (Ezra 6-8)**

Covenant Renewal (6:16—8:36)

**H. Center: Purification of the People (Ezra 9-10)**

Sin of Intermarriage (9-10)

**C' Nehemiah's Return (Neh. 1-2)**

Messianic king authorizes reestablishment of God's Kingdom

**B' Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem & Opposition for enemies (Neh. 3-6)**

**A' Zerubbabel's Return and List of Returnees (Neh. 7-13)**

4. List of Returnees (7:4-69)
5. Covenant Renewal (Neh. 8:1-13:3)
6. Sins of the people (Neh. 13:14-31)

We have said that the *Holy City* required a *holy people*, because God dwelt in the midst of His people in the Jerusalem Temple. The abominations that caused God to desolate/leave the first Temple before the exile were failures of holiness. During the exile the Jews were taught to live among the nations faithfully to THE God,



Yahweh, without compromise. Now that the people were back in the land, would they remain faithful to the Lord, being holy and unpolluted by the nations, or would they slip back into the sins that cause them to go into exile in the first place?

## **I. Rebuilding the Society                      Nehemiah 11-12**

Nehemiah 6:15ff says that the Jews finished rebuilding the walls in fifty-two days. What followed in Nehemiah 7-10 is the rebuilding of the people. What happened in these chapters? [Nehemiah registered/numbered the people *because the city was large, but few people lived in it* because the houses were not rebuilt (7:4-73); Ezra read the law and the people were convicted of their sins. They kept the Feast of Tabernacles according to the law (Ch. 8-9); The people made a new covenant to keep the law of God (Ch. 10).] What four things did the people promise to do to keep covenant with God? [ 1) **No mixed marriages (v. 30)**; 2) **Observe the weekly Sabbath** and the Sabbatical year (v. 31, cf. Ex. 20:10; 23:10-11; Lev. 23:3; 25:4-7; Deut. 5:12-14; 15:1-3, 7-9; Is. 58:13-14); 3) **Temple tax** for the work of the ministry in the Temple (vv. 32-33, cf. Ex. 30:11-16); **Bring the tithes and offerings** according to the law (vv. 34-39, cf. Lev. 6:12-13; Ex. 34:26; Deut. 26:2; Lev. 23:17; Deut. 18:4; Num. 18:26; 1 Chron. 9:26; 2 Chron. 31:11-12)]

At this same period of time, Nehemiah 11:1-2 tells us that in order to populate the Holy City the leaders of the people lived at Jerusalem, and they cast lots to bring one out of ten of the people to live in Jerusalem. The people of Israel blessed/praised those who willingly volunteered to live in Jerusalem. The rest of Nehemiah 11 list some of the chief families living in Jerusalem at the time, and records the town outside of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was not only concerned that the city was rebuilt, but also to make sure that the people are formed into the covenant community. He wanted to make sure that the Jewish culture began to develop again. In order for the Kingdom of God to grow and prosper in the world, the people needed to not only worship Yahweh faithfully (according to the Word of God in the Temple), but they also needed to begin to apply His word to every area of life. They needed to establish homes and businesses. They needed to have a government to rule the people by the Law of God. They needed to have a fully developed culture that could continue into the future.

Nehemiah 12 begins with a list of the priests and Levites during the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua, and Nehemiah and Ezra (vv. 1-26). These led in the worship of Yahweh, including the singers to give praise and thanks to Yahweh, as well as the gatekeepers to keep watch over the storehouses in the gates. King David had put in order the priests and Levites to do these same things in 1 Chronicles 23-26 as he arranged for the building of the first Temple by his son

Solomon. It was David that established musical worship at Zion (1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chron. 16:1-7; 2 Chron. 29:25-30), which became part of the regular worship pattern for Israel in the Temple. Now, in Nehemiah 12:27-43, we learn that at the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem, the musical Levites were brought to Jerusalem to lead the people in the celebration with singing and musical instruments. There were two thanksgiving choirs that moved around the walls singing praises to God. Finally, in v. 40, the two choirs, the leaders of the people and all of people (cf. v. 43) came and stood in the “house of God” and sang with joy. What is interesting about v. 40 is that the choirs came together and stood in the city, which is now identified as the “house of God.” The city of Jerusalem is not dedicated as the Holy City, the House of God. Cyrus and the other kings of Persia had sent the people back to the land to rebuilt the house of God in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:3; 6:3, 7; Neh. 2:3-8). Now, the Temple and Jerusalem the Holy City, the House of God, had been finally rebuilt and dedicated. Part of dedicating the walls of the Holy City was the organization of the Levites to take care of the affairs of the Temple, including keeping the storehouses safe for the tithes and offerings for the Temple (Neh. 12:44) and the singers (12:45-46).

## **II. Nehemiah’s Final Reforms    Nehemiah 13**

Also on the day of dedication, they read from the Law of Moses in the hearing of the people and saw that they were to separate themselves from the people of Moab, and so the people obeyed the Lord (13:3)

After this time Nehemiah returned to the King of Persia. But things did not continue to go well in the land. Eliashib, the priest that had authority over the storerooms of the house of God was allied/associated with Tobiah. Do you remember who Tobiah was? [Tobiah the Ammonite was one of the men who opposed the rebuilding of the walls earlier in the book of Nehemiah (2:10, 19; 4:3, 7; 6:1-19).] Eliashib had prepared a room for Tobiah, where previously they had stored the tithes and offerings of the people given to the priests and Levites. The text does not say what Tobiah was doing with this room, but clearly it was wrong for an Ammonite to have an office in the House of God. It shows that the priesthood was cooperating with the enemies of the people of God. They were getting comfortable with unbelievers to the extent that they were willing to defile the Temple and the morals of the people. This had the possibility of being an abomination that could cause God to desolate His house again.

We do not know how long Nehemiah was gone from Jerusalem, but when he returned as Governor a second time (13:6), he discovered the evil that Eliashib had done by giving Tobiah a room in the House of God. Nehemiah cleansed the

Temple by throwing out the household goods of Tobiah. Then Nehemiah cleansed the rooms and brought back the articles that belonged in the house of God (Neh. 13:7-9). Jesus would later cleanse the Temple by throwing out the money changers (Matt. 21:12; Mk. 11:15; Jn. 2:14-15).

This was not the only sin that was being committed by the people. They were also failing in the other areas that they had promised to keep covenant with God in. In vv. 10-13 Nehemiah also saw that the people had not been giving the tithes and offerings to the Lord that were required by the Law. Because the Levites were not being supported financially by the people, the Levites left their work in the Temple and went to work in the fields to support themselves. The result was that the work of the Temple was being neglected. Nehemiah contended with the leaders of the Jews, and the people began to obey the Lord again.

In vv. 15-22 we see that the people failed to keep the Sabbath according to the Law. They were not only working on the Sabbath, but they were also buying and selling on the Sabbath. Again, Nehemiah contended with the rulers of Judah about the Sabbath-breaking of the children of Judah in Jerusalem. He reminded them that it was Sabbath-breaking that had brought the Lord to send them into exile (Jer. 17:21). Nehemiah arranged to have the gates of Jerusalem closed for the Sabbath. But some of the merchants lodged outside the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah threatened them, and they stopped profaning the Sabbath also.

Finally, in vv. 23-31 we learn that the people were again intermarrying with unbelievers. The influence on the Jewish society was that only half of the children could even speak the language of the Jews. The Jewish culture was being diluted and polluted so that they were being conformed to the world around them. As Nehemiah spoke with the people, he reminded them that even King Solomon had committed the same sin, and his unbelieving wives caused him to sin (vv. 25-27). One of the priests had married a daughter of Sanballat, who had been one of the chief enemies of the people earlier in the book of Nehemiah (cf. 4:1, 7; 6:1-2). Once again, Nehemiah cleansed the people of their sin of intermarriage and “everything pagan.” He also reorganized the priests and Levites to perform their services before the Lord.

Throughout the time when Nehemiah returned to purify the people, he conducted himself as a godly leader. He not only did everything according to the Law of God, but continually prayed that the Lord would bless his work (13:14; 22b; 29; 31b).

The greater Nehemiah, Jesus Christ, has come and once for all established the Kingdom of God in the world. He has cleansed His people once for all by His death on the cross, and now sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven ruling all things. He is building His Kingdom through the work of the Church. Throughout the centuries, Christ has raised up other Nehemiahs that have led the people of God into greater righteousness, and building the Kingdom of God in the various cultures where the gospel has gone.

Maybe some of you will be a Nehemiah to lead the people of God.

**Homework assignment:** Complete and return to the teacher the Student Evaluation.

# Ezra-Nehemiah: Student Evaluation

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ Return and List of Returnees (Ezra \_\_\_\_\_)
- L. Rebuilding of the Temple and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra \_\_\_\_\_)
- M. \_\_\_\_\_ Return (Ezra \_\_\_\_\_)
- N. Center: \_\_\_\_\_ of the People (Ezra \_\_\_\_\_)
- C' \_\_\_\_\_ Return (Neh. 1-2)
- B' Rebuilding of the \_\_\_\_\_ & Opposition for enemies (Neh. \_\_\_\_\_)
- A' \_\_\_\_\_ Return and List of Returnees (Neh. \_\_\_\_\_)

The House of God is:

- a) The Temple
- b) The city of Jerusalem
- c) The people of Israel
- d) All of the above

What Old Testament prophets ministered during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah? Circle two.

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| a) Habakkuk  | e) Haggai   |
| b) Ezekiel   | f) Malachi  |
| c) Zechariah | g) Jeremiah |
| d) Zephaniah | h) Daniel   |

What were some of the sins that the people committed during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah?

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# Ezra-Nehemiah: Student Evaluation Answer Key

- A. **Zerubbabel's** Return and List of Returnees (Ezra **1-2**)
- B. Rebuilding of the **Temple** and Opposition from Enemies (Ezra **3-6**)
- O. **Ezra's** Return (Ezra **6-8**)
- P. Center: **Purification** of the People (Ezra **9-10**)
- C' **Nehemiah's** Return (Neh. **1-2**)
- B' Rebuilding of the **Walls of Jerusalem** & Opposition for enemies (Neh. **3-6**)
- A' **Zerubbabels's** Return and List of Returnees (Neh. **7-13**)

The House of God is:

- a) The Temple
- b) The city of Jerusalem
- c) The people of Israel
- d) All of the above

What Old Testament prophets ministered during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah? Circle two.

- a) Habakkuk
- b) Ezekiel
- c) Zechariah
- d) Zephaniah
- e) Haggai
- f) Jeremiah
- g) Daniel

What were some of the sins that the people committed during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah?

- a) Not keeping the Sabbath
- b) Inter-marriage with unbelievers
- c) Not giving tithes and offerings
- d) cooperation with the enemies of God's people
- e) Failure to rebuild the Temple

