

Ezra – Nehemiah

2020 Bible Class

Newton church of Christ

Ezra – Nehemiah Introduction

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Jewish canon of scripture because they are so closely related. They both show the providential working of God as He fulfills His promise to bring the children of Israel back from captivity.

Ezra details the first return of captives and their initial efforts to reestablish worship in Jerusalem. These efforts were not without problems as they faced opposition on a number of fronts. However, with God's help, they eventually completed the temple.

Nehemiah records the later return of more captives who rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Again, they face opposition because the surrounding people did not want to see the Jews prosper and/or lose their favored status before the king.

The New American Commentary on Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, notes the following common themes in Ezra & Nehemiah.

1. Continuity of God's Plan.
2. Separation (from other people).
3. Scripture (teaching, learning).
4. Worship.
5. Prayer.
6. History (from the perspective of fulfillment of God's plan).

Though Esther will not be the focus of this class, the book and its events help fill out the picture of what is happening during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The events of Esther fall between Ezra chapters 6 & 7. It is another view of God's working in the lives of His people.

All three books show the sovereignty of God over the nations. He directed Cyrus to order the return of the captives. He raised up men like Ezra and Nehemiah and women like Esther to lead and protect His people.

Beyond the history of the books, we will note a number of lessons to apply in our lives, including leadership, devotion, sacrifice, boldness, and love of God and His law (among others).

**Take a quiz at:
BibleInfo.co/ezra**

NOTE your score and bring it to class.

Ezra

Chapters 1 & 2

Royal Permission To Return **Ezra 1:1-4**

King Cyrus was moved by God to allow the Jews to return and rebuild the temple. This, however, did not mean Cyrus was a true believer or that God miraculously worked on his heart. History tells us that Cyrus made nearly identical decrees concerning other nationalities. In other words, it was not unique that the Jews were allowed to return.

Further, God works in providence to accomplish His will. The prophets had foretold of Cyrus' actions about 170 years before (Isa. 44:28-45:13). It is entirely possible that some among the Jews showed Cyrus the prophecy and it prompted him to not only permit a return, but also to encourage and support it with the king's treasury.

However it came about, the author of Ezra saw Cyrus' actions as the work of God. His view is that God was working to restore His people to their land.

Those Who Returned **Ezra 1:5-11**

Three tribes are specifically mentioned in this first return. The mention of Judah, Benjamin, and the Levites indicate these are Babylonian captives, that is, they were from the southern kingdom of Judah. No mention is made of any from the northern kingdom of Israel returning from captivity.

Those who returned were committed to the cause. They gave up their settled life of relative ease and prosperity to journey to Canaan and rebuild the nation. Yet, they did so because God moved them in their spirits.

Listing of The Returnees **Ezra 2:1-70**

While we do not know much about the majority of those listed, there are a few things we need to note.

Zerubbabel was a descendent of David and governor of Judah (Ezra 2:2; 3:2; 1 Chron. 3:1, 17). Jeshua was high priest (Hag. 1:1). The Nehemiah mentioned in Ezra 2:2 is not the same Nehemiah who returned over 90 years later.

Why did the Holy Spirit direct the author to compile a list of names? What purpose does this serve? The New American Commentary suggests "the author and his readers were concerned about the continuity of this community with the preexilic Jewish nation" (73). The intent is to firmly establish a connection between those taken into captivity and those returning from it. To show God was fulfilling His promise to Israel.

The group that returned was not very large, but sufficient to reestablish a community in Israel. There would have been a mix of ages, wealth, and skills. Such a small group would be forced to work with and support one another if they hoped to accomplish their task.

Assignment

- Read Ezra 1 & 2
- Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra to take the quiz
- Do the questions and discussions

Questions & Discussion

1. How do you think the Lord stirred the spirit of Cyrus?
2. Would you be willing to uproot your family from the life they knew – maybe the only life they knew – and expose them to hardship and danger? Explain.
3. What would it take for you to leave a settled life of prosperity & security to build a new nation?
4. How do you think God moved the people in their spirits?
5. In the global scheme of things, how do you think a group of less than 50,000 Jews were viewed? What was God's view of them?

Ezra

Chapters 3 & 4

The Altar Was Rebuilt **Ezra 3:1-7**

The priority of the returned captives was to reestablish the worship of Jehovah according to the Law of Moses. To accomplish this, one of the first things needed was the ability to sacrifice to Him. Thus, the people began with rebuilding the altar.

It is important to note they rebuilt the altar “as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God” (Ezra 3:2) and kept the Feast of Tabernacles “as it is written” (Ezra 3:4).

The Law was written about 900 years before this time. Yet, it was still in effect. It would remain so for another 500 years, until God established a new law – the gospel. The lesson is, God’s law remains in effect until He changes it no

The Temple Began **Ezra 3:8-13**

The next order of business was to rebuild the temple. The original one was built by Solomon around 1000 BC (1 Kgs. 5-8). However, in the third wave of Babylonian captivity, it was razed to the ground and its treasures carried off. Now the people start to rebuild the temple, but it is not quite the same.

When the foundations were laid, there was a mixed reaction (Ezra 3:11-13). The younger people were excited and filled with joy. Those who remembered Solomon’s temple wept because the new one was so inferior.

The Work Stopped **Ezra 4:1-24**

Israel’s enemies wanted to join in building the temple, claiming an allegiance in worshipping God. However, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and others rejected their offer because it was not their place to help. In this incident is an important lesson of fellowship – God’s people are not to have it with our “enemies.”

After the rejection, Israel’s enemies labored to stop their work. A deceptive letter was written to the king stating the Jews would rebel if the temple were finished. Fearing an uprising, the king ordered the work stopped.

Assignment

1. Read Ezra 3 & 4
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 3
3. Do the questions & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

1. Read Exodus 27:1-8 and note three things required of the altar. What lesson can we learn from this?
2. Find at least two verses that show the gospel is the final revelation that we must follow no matter how much time passes.
3. Did the adversaries worship God (Ezra 4:1, 2)? Read 2 Kings 17:24-41 and explain what was going on.
4. What warnings are given to us about fellowship with non-Christians (cite passage)?
5. When we refuse to get involved with others in religious work, what reaction can we expect? How should we react?

Ezra

Chapters 5 & 6

Temple Work Resumed **Ezra 5:1-5**

In 520 BC, after 16 years of idleness, God sent Haggai and Zechariah to motivate the Jews to resume work on the temple. The Jews had been busy with their daily lives, building their homes, but had allowed opposition to stop them (Haggai 1:4; Ezra 4:23, 24).

The king's servants inquired about the work, not from a standpoint of hostility, but of looking out for the king's interest. The *New American Commentary* notes that during Darius' first years there were rebellions against him, especially west of the Euphrates (NAC, 108). However, God was with His people and the work continued.

Darius Authorized the Work To Continue **Ezra 5:6-6:12**

A letter was sent to Darius inquiring about any authority given the Jews by king Cyrus. It is interesting to note that the Jews of the return were well aware of and thinking about the rebellion of past generations (Ezra 5:12). Knowing the consequences of disobeying God was part of their motivation to keep building the temple.

Darius' reply was more than the Jews could have hoped for. Not only did he tell his officials to keep away from the Jews and their work, he also provided material support for the temple. Further, the king declared a punishment for anyone that would dare alter his decree stating that person would be crucified and his house made a refuse heap (Ezra 6:11).

The Temple Was Finished & The People Celebrated **Ezra 6:13-22**

The teaching done by Haggai and Zechariah resulted in prosperous work by the Jews – because they listened. Hence, they finished the temple about 4 ½ years after restarting the work (compare Ezra 5:1 and 6:15). This was an occasion of great joy as they dedicated the temple with multiple sacrifices.

With the rebuilt temple, they observed the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Note those who participated “separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel” (Ezra 6:21).

Assignment

1. Read Ezra 5 & 6
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 4
3. Do the questions & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion
Ezra 5 & 6

1. How did God motivate His people to get back to work? How does He motivate us today?

2. Read Haggai 1:1-11 and summarize his message to Israel.

3. What do you think it means for the eye of the Lord to be on His people (Ezra 5:5; cf. Psa. 33:18, 19; 34:15, 16).

4. What does Ezra 5:12 teach us about knowing the history of God's people? Does it help? How do we know it? How should it affect us?

5. Find a passage in the New Testament that addresses separation from the people around us & be prepared to briefly discuss it.

Ezra

Chapters 7 & 8

Preview of Ezra's Return **Ezra 7:1-10**

Fifty-seven years has passed since the events of Ezra 6. During this time Darius died, Xerxes (Ahasuerus), the story of Esther unfolded, and Artaxerxes began his reign. Thus, the Jews are now strongly supported by the Persian monarchy.

Ezra is presented as a man wholly dedicated to God (Ezra 7:10). His job was a "skilled scribe." The *New American Commentary* states that underlying the original meaning of the word is the idea of an official position something akin to "Secretary of Religion" for the region of Judea (think of the U.S. Secretary of Commerce or Secretary of Defense).

Artaxerxes Gave Ezra Broad Authority **Ezra 7:11-28**

An advisor, probably Ezra himself, likely wrote the letter from Artaxerxes. The letter reveals Persian support for the work (7:14-19), responsibility of local officials to aid Ezra (7:20-23), tax exemptions for Levites and temple workers (7:24), and Ezra's authority to enforce the Law in the region (7:25, 26). The writer views this as God's care for his people, not the random acts of a Persian king.

Preparations To Return **Ezra 8:1-30**

Chapter 8 opens with a list of the heads of families that returned with Ezra. When they gathered, Ezra discovered there were no Levites among them. Thus, he made an extra effort to recruit some to commit to the cause.

Before embarking on such a momentous journey Ezra proclaimed a fast (Ezra 8:21-23). He felt the keen need to seek God's blessing, as they would not only engage in a great work, but also face real dangers along the way.

The Return To Jerusalem **Ezra 8:31-36**

God granted them safety on their travel, apparently free of any harassment. After the four-month journey, the returnees rested for three days. The first priority after their rest was worship (Ezra 8:35). Other business followed.

Assignment

1. Read Ezra 7 & 8
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 6
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Ezra 7 & 8

1. What does Ezra's position and relationship to the king of Persia reveal about God's people & their relationship to government, if anything?
2. Elaborate on Ezra 7:10 (Ezra's character & actions) and what we can learn from it.
3. What is the difference between a volunteer and someone who is coerced or forced to do a work (cf. Ezra 7:13)?
4. How did the writer view the king's actions and what lesson can we draw from this (Ezra 7:27, 28)?
5. What was the purpose of fasting in Ezra 8:21-23? Find an instance where fasting is mentioned in the New Testament & prepare to briefly discuss it. Is fasting required today?

Ezra

Chapters 9 & 10

Ezra Was Informed Of Unlawful Marriages **Ezra 9:1-4**

In the Law, Moses specifically forbade Israelites from marrying pagans (Deut. 7:1-8). This is because the idolatrous religions would affect God's people. Two vivid examples of this are Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:1-8) and Ahab (1 Kgs. 16:29-33). Both were carried away into false religion and had a negative impact on the people over which they ruled.

Ironically, this incident shows Ezra's teaching was effective. The people brought the transgression to his attention. This indicates they knew the Law, respected the Law, saw the sin, and were willing to act; things about which any teacher would be thrilled.

Ezra Prayed To God About The Sin **Ezra 9:5-15**

Ezra was in deep grief and struck with fear. Thus, he humbled himself before God. He began by saying he was ashamed and goes on to describe the sin as "our iniquities" and the burden as "our guilt" (Ezra 9:6). It was not that Ezra was personally guilty, but the stain of the sin touched more than those personally involved. As a leader, Ezra felt responsible that this was going on. Also, the nation was tainted (cf. Josh. 7:10-26).

In his prayer, Ezra notes several key factors of Israel's history and relationship to God.

- Captivity because of past sins (Ezra 9:7).
- God's grace in leaving a remnant (Ezra 9:8).
- Israel's punishment did not reach the level of their sins (Ezra 9:13).

Ezra Was Encouraged To Take Action **Ezra 10:1-4**

A large group encouraged Ezra to take action. The representative said, "Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it" (Ezra 10:4). Leaders need the support and encouragement of the people.

The People Determine To Make Correction **Ezra 10:5-44**

At a large assembly on a cold, rainy day, the people consent to put away their pagan wives. The problem existent among a small minority, but the community took responsibility to see that corrective action was taken. Thus, men determined to put away their wives, by which some had children.

Assignment

1. Read Ezra 9 & 10
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 7
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Ezra 9 & 10

1. How does a teacher know when his labor is effective?
2. What did the Law teach regarding intermarriage of Israelites with idolaters? Were they forbidden to marry non-Israelites?
3. What does the New Testament teach about the choice of a spouse? Are Christians forbidden from marrying non-Christians?
4. Sin among some Israelites affected the nation. What is the parallel in the New Testament? Cite passages.
5. Reflect on Ezra 9:13. How is this true for us?
6. What is/are the principle/s at work in Ezra 10. (Hint: love of family)

Nehemiah

Chapter 1

Introduction

Nehemiah is mostly written in the first person and therefore believed to be chiefly the work of Nehemiah. The other parts are thought to be either written or compiled by Ezra. Hence, it is easy to see the two books have some overlap and similarities.

Nehemiah was written around 430 BC covering events that took place 444-432 BC. The book focuses on two main events: (1) rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem; (2) reestablishment of the covenant with God. In both endeavors resistance is faced from without and within. However, under Nehemiah's leadership and with God's help, the people accomplish their noble goals.

Nehemiah Learned of The State of Jerusalem Nehemiah 1:1-3

The book opens with Nehemiah in Shushan (Susa) the winter capital of the Persian kings. Here he received news the walls of Jerusalem were in disrepair and the people suffered "in great distress and reproach." The condition of the walls may be traced back to Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the city and/or subsequent events.

Nehemiah Appealed To God For Help Nehemiah 1:4-11

On hearing of Jerusalem's condition, Nehemiah went into mourning and spent many days fasting and praying (1:4). One of his prayers or a compilation of his prayers over this time is recorded in 1:5-11.

His prayer opens with praise to the "great and awesome God" who is merciful and faithful. He asked for the Lord to give attention to his prayer. He confessed not only his personal sinfulness, but that of his family and the nation. This shows us that to a degree we are identified with the larger group of God's people, but still personally responsible.

Nehemiah recalls God's promises from the Law regarding unfaithfulness and restoration of Israel. It is the latter that Nehemiah is especially interested in and seeks God to fulfill – seeing that though captives had returned to the land, they were not "restored."

The *New American Commentary* notes: "Nehemiah was a man of faith, and we can find two sources of his steadfast trust in God. The first... his deep understanding of who God is. The second... his thorough knowledge of God's word" (170).

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 1
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 8
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 1

1. Find the meaning of the name Nehemiah.
2. What does it mean “the people were in great distress and reproach” and why were they this way?
3. What, if anything, does Nehemiah’s reaction to the news of Jerusalem & the survivors teach us about tragedy among God’s people (Neh. 1:4)?
4. Who is “this man” in 1:11 and why is it interesting that Nehemiah describes him as such?
5. Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer. What does this mean? What was his job?

Nehemiah

Chapters 2 & 3

Nehemiah Spoke To The King **Neh. 2:1-10**

After four months of prayer and planning, Nehemiah seized an opportunity to speak to the king about Jerusalem. One day while serving the king, he did not hide his sadness and the king noticed it (a potential death sentence). Thus, the king inquired about what was troubling him.

Nehemiah said a quick prayer; an indication of his habitual communication with God. He then requested a leave of absence, royal authority, and resources to get the job done. The king granted him permission and Nehemiah set off to accomplish his task.

His actions show us that prayer, planning, preparation, and God's providence work together.

Nehemiah Surveyed The Damage & Rallied The Men To Take Action **Neh. 2:11-18**

After arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah assessed the condition of the walls to formulate a plan of repair. He went out at night likely to not be interrupted in his labor and planning.

Nehemiah gathered the leaders and gave them a frank assessment of the situation (2:17). He then motivated them by revealing God's care for him and the king's authority. Their response was, "Let us rise up and build" and went to work (2:18).

The church needs men who are not afraid to face the reality of poor conditions, want to do something about it, and have faith in God to get it done. It also needs people who are willing to follow such a leader and be committed to doing the work.

The Enemies of God's People Were Angry **Neh. 2:19, 20**

The Jew's enemies did not want to see them prosper. However, since Nehemiah had royal authority, the only thing they were willing to do at this point was to ridicule them. Still, ridicule can be a powerful tool of the enemy to demoralize those engaged in the work.

Nehemiah kept his faith in God and essentially ignored the enemies at this point.

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 2 & 3
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 9
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 2 & 3

1. What was Nehemiah's attitude toward the work needed at Jerusalem? What did he do about it and what does this teach us?
2. What can we learn from Nehemiah's short prayer in 2:4?
3. Nehemiah surveyed the walls. What do we need to survey?
4. Today, who can inspire others like Nehemiah?
5. What do 2:18 and chapter 3 teach us about the people in regard to the work?

Nehemiah

Chapter 4

The Enemies Mock The Jews **Neh. 4:1-6**

Sanballat was “furious” over the building of the wall. He was not angry over an attack or any threats from the Jews. Rather, he did not like the fact they were working – doing God’s work. So, he set out to discourage the Jews by mocking them.

The Jews appealed to God for help and remained diligent in their work. Thus, the insults did not work and may have provoked the Jews to work even harder.

The Enemies Planned An Attack **Neh. 4:7-14**

A confederation of enemies planned to attack the Jews to stop the work. As part of the psychological warfare, they kept hearing that the attack was coming (as indicated by the “ten times” in 4:12). Word reached the Jews of the pending attack and they again prayed to God. It is also interesting that the *New American Commentary* notes 4:10 is likely a type of “spiritual” song by the workers as they labored.

Nehemiah took action to thwart any attack by putting teams of guards at the most vulnerable parts of the wall. He organized them by families and armed them for the fight. He motivated them to fight with two basic thoughts: (1) The Lord is great and awesome; (2) there are things worth fighting for – brethren, family, property.

The Jews Remained On A War-Footing **Neh. 4:15-23**

After the immediate threat of an attack passed, Nehemiah put the Jews on a ready-for-war footing. His men were divided into those heavily armed and ready to fight and those who continued to work. The workers in general continued in the work while also having their weapons readily available to fight if need be. They also set it up to rally to any spot where fighting might break out.

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 4
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 9
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 4

1. What can prayer do for us when we are insulted and intimidated (Neh. 4:1-6)?
2. What does 4:6 teach us about the relationship between mindset and a task?
Find a related New Testament passage and be prepared to discuss it.
3. Name two things the Jews did in 4:9 and note which one is more important.
4. When are Christians afraid and how can we control or overcome that fear (cf. 4:14)?
5. What lessons can we draw from Nehemiah 4:15-20?

Nehemiah

Chapter 5

The Problem: Oppression of the Brethren Neh. 5:1-5

There was a “great outcry” among the Jews because of oppression. It affected a large number of them and was devastating to their everyday lives. They lacked food in general, with some going into debt or selling their family members into slavery. This type of slavery was common in ancient times – laboring for a creditor until the debt was paid off with interest. Others had to go into debt to pay taxes.

This is a picture of hard economic times. The cause might have been:

1. A famine as punishment for unfaithfulness.
2. Inability to labor in the fields & harvest crops because of work on the wall.
3. A combination of both.

Whatever reason for the problem, the remedy was sinful. The Law regulated servitude among the Jews (Ex. 21:1-11; Lev. 25:39-43). They could be a “slave” to one another, but were to be released in the Year of Jubilee (every 7th year).

The Solution: Reverse Course Neh. 5:6-13

Nehemiah was angry over the mistreatment of brethren. He confronted the nobles and rulers, but only after “serious thought.” He rebuked them for taking advantage of those who had fallen on hard times. This included the practice of “usury,” which is essentially interest charged on the debt. It was forbidden among the Jews (Lev. 25:25-38).

The wealthy had previously redeemed their brethren from slavery to Gentiles, but now made them their slaves – the very people who were working to build a wall for their protection. It was an abuse with the potential to destroy the community and stop the work on the wall. Too, it was ultimately a sign of disrespect toward God.

Nehemiah made them swear an oath to return the property and at least some, if not all, of the interest charged. He pronounced a curse on anyone who failed to keep the oath.

Nehemiah’s Example Neh. 5:14-19

Nehemiah detailed his practice of self-support. He did not take taxes from the people, as was his right, but supported himself, his servants, and many others. He appealed to God to remember him for this service to His people.

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 5
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 9
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 5

1. Search Proverbs for passages that deal with treatment of the poor & be prepared to briefly discuss them in class.
2. What does the New Testament teach about treatment of the poor?
3. How can problems similar to those in Nehemiah 5 affect the work of the church?

Nehemiah

Chapters 6 & 7

Enemies Sought To Assassinate Nehemiah **Neh. 6:1-4**

As the wall was drawing near completion, Nehemiah's (and the Jews') enemies became desperate. They went from merely mocking the Jews and planning a general attack to disrupt the work, to a specific ruse to lure Nehemiah into a trap. They did this by offering a meeting implying they wanted to talk things out. Nehemiah perceived his life was in danger and refused to go.

The Enemies Tried To Blackmail Nehemiah Into A Meeting **Neh. 6:5-9**

Unsuccessful in getting Nehemiah to a private meeting, the enemies tried to intimidate him and the Jews by spreading lies. They threatened to tell the king that the Jews planned to rebel and appoint Nehemiah as king over them. The letter indicated that if he would just meet with them, they would let the matter go. However, Nehemiah was not intimidated.

Jews Were Enlisted To Stop Nehemiah **Neh. 6:10-14**

A traitor named Shemaiah told Nehemiah his life was in danger and the place of safety was in the temple. Nehemiah's response shows two things. First, he was not going to be intimidated or cower. Second, he would not violate God's Law by entering the temple. He would rather be murdered than transgress the Law.

Nehemiah somehow found out Shemaiah was not speaking out of concern for him, but had been hired by his enemies to thwart his influence and the work.

Nehemiah Faced Opposition Due To Family Ties **Neh. 6:15-19**

The wall was finished in a short time. When completed, the enemies were distraught. It angered them that the Jews were getting stronger.

Now a bigger problem surfaced. Jews were working with the enemy against Nehemiah. At least one of the families had family ties with Tobiah, an enemy, which brought them and others into an alliance with him. Through these connections, Tobiah attempted to intimidate Nehemiah.

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 6
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 10
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 6

1. What reason did Nehemiah give for not meeting with his enemies and how might a similar issue arise today (Neh. 6:1-3)?
2. What was the goal of the enemies as stated in Nehemiah 6:9 and how were they trying to accomplish it?
3. Nehemiah faced a great challenge with Shemaiah's traitorous act (Neh. 6:10-13). How might brethren betray us (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10, 11)?
4. How could Nehemiah have known that Shemaiah was not a true prophet?
5. What lesson can we learn from Nehemiah 6:15, 16 regarding progress?
6. What were the nobles saying about Nehemiah? Tobiah (Neh. 6:19)?

Nehemiah

Chapter 8

Reading From The Law Neh. 8:1-8

The people tell Ezra to bring the “Book of the Law of Moses” and read it to them. The crowd was tens of thousands, including men, women, and children (cf. Deut. 6:4-9). He did not read from Genesis through Deuteronomy, but “he read from it” (8:3, NKJV). Still, the reading lasted up to 6 hours; a very long time. Keep in mind this was a special occasion, not a regular occurrence.

As Ezra read from the Law, the attitude of the people was on display.

- Their ears were attentive (8:3)
- They stood when he opened the book (8:5)
- They said, “Amen, Amen” (8:6)
- They lifted their hands & bowed their heads (8:6)

As Ezra read from the Law, Levites assisted in teaching the people. They not only “read distinctly from the book,” but also “gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading” (8:7, 8). In other words, they made clear application of the Law.

Weeping Turned To Joy Neh. 8:9-12

As the people learned from the Law, they realized their past failure to keep it and began to weep. However, they were told to go feast, and provide for others to feast, because it was actually an occasion for joy – they were now on the right path.

The Feast of Tabernacles Neh. 8:13-18

On the next day, the heads of the families, priests, and Levites continued in their study of the Law. One section they came across was the command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a two-fold celebration and memorial. First, it reminded them of the wilderness wandering as they dwelt in tents for the duration of the feast. It helped them connect with their history and God’s care for them as Israel wandered in the desert. Second, it was the time of ingathering; a time to thank God for the provisions of life. They promptly obeyed as it was upon them and continued to study the Law for the duration of the feast.

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 8
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 11
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 8

1. How many times does the term “people” appear in Nehemiah 8 and what does this indicate?
2. Why is it significant that they read from the “Book of the Law of Moses”? Hint: How long had it been since the Law was given?
3. Why did the people listen attentively?
4. What lesson can we draw from Nehemiah 8:7, 8 regarding study of God’s word?
5. Who continued to study the Law and why did they do it? Where is this principle taught in the New Testament (Neh. 8:13)?

Nehemiah

Chapter 9

Overview of Activities

Neh. 9:1-4

Not long after the Feast of Tabernacles, the people focused again on their failings before God. This time of repentance included fasting, reading the Law, and confessing their sins, all leading up to a renewed commitment to keep the covenant as shown in chapter 10.

Israel's History of Rebellion & God's Mercy

Neh. 9:5-31

This prayer highlights Israel's transgressions and God's patience. It begins with praise for God as the Creator and Sovereign of the universe (9:5, 6). The prayer goes on to note:

- God's selection & fulfilled promise to Abraham (9:7, 8)
- God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (9:9-12)
- God's gift of the Law at Sinai (9:13, 14)
- God's daily care for their needs while in the desert (9:15)
- God's mercy in spite of Israel's rebellion (9:16-21)
- God's gift of the land of Canaan (9:22-25)
- God's mercy in spite of Israel's rebellion (9:26-31)

Note that the prayer acknowledges two of the three promises God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. The nation promise was fulfilled in the exodus and giving of the Law. The land promise was fulfilled in Israel's conquering of Canaan.

Personal Appeal

Neh. 9:32-37

The last section of the prayer shifts away from Israel's history to the present generation. They note God was just and faithful in His dealings with them though they suffered the consequences of sin to that day—saying they were in “great distress.” This is an appeal to God for mercy and help in their time of need.

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 9
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 12
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 9

1. Reading of the Law was a major factor in bringing the people to repentance (Neh. 8:1-9; 9:1-3). Find 2 or 3 New Testament passages that show the word of God convicts men & be prepared to discuss.
2. What lesson can we learn from the language in 9:13 that the Lord “gave them just ordinances and true laws”?
3. When did God make known the Sabbath and why is that important (9:14)?
4. What are some specific things God did for the Israelites in their rebellion in the desert and what lesson can we learn from this (9:16-21)?
5. Israel acknowledges their servitude to Persian kings (9:36, 37). What was it they longed for and when was it fulfilled?

Nehemiah

Chapters 10-12

The People Sign The Covenant **Neh. 10:1-39**

The first section of chapter 10 is a list of those who “placed their seal” on the covenant (10:1-27). This reflects the community commitment to live by God’s word, including their children. One essential step they took was separating themselves from the people around them (10:28). This minimized the influences and potential corruption of their beliefs and behaviors.

The text notes they entered into this covenant with a curse and an oath (10:29). This is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 27:11-26 and all of Deuteronomy 28. The idea is that when any man enters a covenant with God, he is taking an oath (pledging allegiance) and accepts that there are negative consequences for not keeping that oath (a curse).

People Dwelling In & Outside Jerusalem **Neh. 11:1-36**

There were not enough Jews dwelling in Jerusalem to sustain the city. So, the leaders developed a plan to bring more people into the city (11:1). The move from the countryside to the city would have required sacrifice on the part of those who made the move, if from nothing more than leaving friends and neighbors. Still, those selected were willing to do it for the good of the nation (11:2).

List of Priests & Levites **Neh. 12:1-26**

Chapter 12 gives another long list of people. While it might appear tedious to us, there is a purpose in having these. In part, it helps to establish the lineage of the people. It also shows us these were real people and that God’s work depends on individuals doing their part.

Dedication of the Wall & Temple Duties **Neh. 12:27-47**

The wall was dedicated with a worship service that included singing of praises to God. We might come together to sing, pray, or study God’s word at a time of thanksgiving and celebration (note: celebration in the sense of joy and praise to God according to His word, not the unbridled performances practiced by some today).

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 10
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 13
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Questions & Discussion

Nehemiah 10-12

1. Who was included in the covenant and what does this tell us about being successful at keeping God's word (Neh. 10:29)?
2. Find New Testament passages that show we pledge allegiance to the Lord as Christians and any curse attached to that oath (Neh. 10:29).
3. List 3-4 stipulations of the renewed covenant (Neh. 10:29-39), and if and where these are reflected in the New Testament (cite passages).
4. What were the leaders doing in 11:1?
5. Nehemiah 12:44 states that "Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered" (NKJV) or "Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites" (NIV). Does this mean the priests and Levites did what pleased the people or that the people were pleased with what they did? Explain.

Nehemiah

Chapter 13

The Abuse of God's House & Its Laborers **Neh. 13:4-14**

Eliashib the priest had allowed an Ammonite, Tobiah, to live in the house of the Lord. Tobiah, you will recall, was an enemy of God's people, Nehemiah especially (Neh. 2:19; 6:10-19). This shows the depth of influence Tobiah had among the Jews, that he was at the very heart of Judaism.

Eliashib's actions are described as "evil" (Neh. 13:7). This shows that corrupting the house of the Lord by abusing its use, is not a light matter. Thus, Nehemiah took radical action by throwing out Tobiah's household goods – he threw the man's furniture, kitchen ware, clothes, and more out of the room (Neh. 13:8).

Evidently in the course of correcting Eliashib's error, Nehemiah discovered that the Levites were being neglected. They were not being supported as was right and required. The abuse of the house of God necessarily led a lack of proper use. To fix this, Nehemiah had to confront the rulers and also establish faithful men to see things were done properly (Neh. 13:11-13).

Abuse of the Holy Day **Neh. 13:15-22**

The Sabbath Day was to be kept holy by the Jews (Ex. 20:8). Yet, in chapter 13 the people were engaged in common activities; they were focused on everyday life instead of reverence and worship of God. Again, this is called "evil" (Neh. 13:17). Nehemiah's solution was to have the gates shut on the Sabbath, but people still pushed the limits (Neh. 13:19, 20). So, he threatened them with physical force if they did not stop.

Personal Disobedience **Neh. 13:1-3, 23-31**

Some of the people again became entangled in mixed marriages, "evil" (Neh. 13:27). It was affecting the next generation as seen in "half their children spoke the language of Ashdod" (Neh. 13:24). If left unchecked, it would lead to the destruction of the people of God.

Nehemiah confronted this problem with ferocity (Neh. 13:25). He stated Solomon did not survive his mixed marriages without being influenced toward paganism, so how did they think they could do any better.

Assignment

1. Read Nehemiah 13
2. Go to BibleInfo.co/ezra and take the quiz for lesson 14
3. Do the question & discussion sheet

Question & Discussion

Nehemiah 13

1. What New Testament event is similar to what Nehemiah did in 13:8? Describe it: who did it, why it happened, what it means.
2. How is the “Lord’s house” abused in modern times?
3. What was the attitude of the Israelites regarding the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15, 16)?
4. How is the same type of attitude displayed today?
5. What was the great danger to the nation and what lesson can we learn from it (Neh. 13:23, 24)?

