

# Ezra

Rebuilding the Temple and Hearts of the People: Returning to God

# Nehemiah

Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem: An Example of Leadership

# Esther

God's Faithfulness Through Providence

*A Self-Study Guide*

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**INTRODUCTION:** Jeremiah prophesied that the captivity of Judah would last 70 years (**Jeremiah 25:11**). At that time God promised to punish the nation of Babylon for her wickedness which would result in releasing the captives. In 539 BC a coalition of Medes and Persians conquered Babylon (**Daniel 5**), and Cyrus gave a decree to allow all captives to return to their homeland. Therefore, just as Judah had been taken into captivity in three sieges, so now there would be three returns from captivity. The book of Ezra will tell us of the returns under Zerubbabel and Ezra, and the book of Nehemiah will record his return.

Concerning the northern kingdom of Israel, we must remember that they had gone into captivity in 721 BC and that God through Hosea had also promised them an opportunity to return to Him. As Cyrus gives his decree these captives would be invited to return as well.

**OVERVIEW:**

1. Skim through the book and you will notice that the book is divided into two parts. What are the main events of these two sections?
  
2. The book of Ezra covers a lengthy time period. What is the beginning date of the book? What is the ending date of the book?
  
3. There is a large gap of time between chapters six and seven. The events of what book take place between these chapters?
  
4. In what year was the temple completed? What year had the temple been destroyed? Therefore, how many years was the temple desolate?

**Language of the book:** For the most part the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, but there are two sections written in Aramaic. Just as Daniel has a large Aramaic section, so Ezra has sections written in Aramaic. These sections are: **4:8--6:18 and 7:12-26**. What do these sections have in common?

**Chapter one:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

Verses 1-4:

5. Read **Isaiah 44:24--45:7**. Isaiah wrote nearly 200 years prior to the events of chapter one of Ezra. Jot down your observations:
6. Consider the implications of Israel and Judah returning from captivity. Who caused this to happen and why? Compare **Daniel 4:17**. Think of how biblical history (not to mention secular history) would have changed if Israel had not returned from captivity.

*Verses 5-11:*

7. According to **1:5-6**, who specifically went up to Jerusalem?

**Chapter two: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

8. Notice how many Levites returned. How does this compare with the total number who returned?
9. In considering the total number who returned from captivity, how does this compare with the number who had gone into captivity originally? Why do you believe so many remained in foreign lands?

10. From **Romans 11** what word did Paul use to describe those who returned from captivity?
11. Notice **2:59-63**. Though this text mentions some who had not kept their genealogy, isn't it interesting that most did keep careful records. What does this tell you about these people?
12. Who are the Nethinims?

### Chapters 3-6

### EZRA

**Chapter three:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

1. In 3:12, why did the ancient men weep when they saw the foundation of the temple? See **Zechariah 4:9-10**.

**Chapter Four:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

2. Why did the Jews refuse to allow the people of the land help them rebuild the temple? What lesson could we learn from this today?

3. What is the historical background of these adversaries as described in **4:9-10**?

**Chapter Five: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

4. Read **Haggai 1** and **Zechariah 4** and record at least two reasons it was difficult to get the people involved in rebuilding the temple at this time:

Do you see a difference in the attitude of the people since the time they first returned?

5. What year did the Jews resume the rebuilding of the temple?  
What year was the temple completed?  
These dates should be memorized!

6. Look up **1 Chronicles 3:16-19** and discover what famous man Zerubbabel was related to:

**Chapter Six: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-12:*

*Verses 13-22:*

7. What in chapter six tell us that those who returned out of captivity represented all twelve tribes of Israel, not just Judah, Benjamin and Levi? Mark this in your Bible.

## Chapters 7-10

## EZRA

Chapter Seven: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

This chapter begins in what year?

*Verses 1-10:*

1. Why are verses 1-5 so important?
2. Study 7:10 carefully and make as many observations as you can about the importance of these things for our lives:
3. Estimating the journey to be about 900 miles, calculate how many miles the Jews averaged each day:

*Verses 11-28:*

4. What can we learn about Artaxerxes from the letter he sent with Ezra?

**Chapter Eight: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-14: How many people returned with Ezra?*

*Verses 15-23:*

(Note: "*Ahava*" is apparently a city next to a small stream flowing into the Euphrates, about eight days journey from Babylon. --*Pulpit Commentary, volume 7, page 122*)

*Verses 24-36:*

**Chapter Nine: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

5. What are some of the specific elements of Ezra's prayer that you see as a good example for our prayers?
6. Notice in **verse 12** of Ezra's prayer that he quotes God's commandment against intermarrying with the idolatrous people around them. Since the Law never commanded that couples separate if they sinned by marrying the people of the land, why do Ezra and the people conclude in chapter 10 that they must separate from their foreign wives?

**Chapter Ten: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-8:*

*Verses 9-17:*

*Verses 18-44:*

7. What lessons can we learn today from how the sin of mixed marriages was dealt with and corrected?



**Introduction:** In 445 BC, Nehemiah, cupbearer to king Artaxerxes I (464-423 BC), received word from his brother that the people of Jerusalem were in great distress and reproach. Also, the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the gates were burned with fire. With these words Nehemiah decided he would meet the challenge of restoring Jerusalem to its former glory. There are many lessons we want to look for in this great book:

**Leadership:** No other book in the Bible gives such exemplary insights into the character of a true leader. We learn the emotions of a leader, the hardships of a leader, the determination and perseverance of a leader, the defeats of a leader, and the victories of a leader. Every man and woman can learn from the leadership qualities of Nehemiah.

**Doing A Great Work:** We are also given insights into how a great work is to be accomplished. We learn how common people gave themselves to uncommon service. We learn how to deal with obstacles and how to do great things in spite of great opposition.

**Dealing With The Critic:** No great work is done without opposition. The book of Nehemiah not only teaches us how to deal with opposition, but portrays for us the very character of the critic. When we realize that character we will clearly see a picture of the kind of people who bring about splits in homes and churches today.

**Preparing For Your Study:**

1. How many years has it been since Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians? How long has it been since the first captives returned to Jerusalem?
2. Can you give some possible explanations for why the walls of Jerusalem have been left in ruins this long?
3. What literary prophet was contemporary with Nehemiah?

**Surveying the Book:**

3. Where is the main division of the book?  
What is the main topic of the first half of the book?  
The second half of the book?

**Chapter One:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

(List especially the things that impress you about Nehemiah's prayer.)

1. What is a "cupbearer?"
2. Since Nehemiah is an example of a great leader, what qualities of leadership does Nehemiah display in this chapter?

**Chapter Two: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-10:*

3. In chapter one we learned that Nehemiah received the report on the condition of Jerusalem in the month of Chislev (December). Chapter two opens in the month of Nisan (April). Why has Nehemiah allowed this much time to go by before he approached the king? (What was Nehemiah doing during these months?)
4. What are some of the reasons Nehemiah found favor in the sight of this king?
5. List more examples of great leadership qualities from this section:

Verses 11-20:

6. Though Nehemiah is entering the city of Jerusalem as a stranger to the citizens dwelling there, he is able to stir them up to work. As a wise leader, what are the things that Nehemiah did in order to get the people on his side and willing to labor?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. **Verse 19** gives us the first example of how opposition to a good work operates. How is this incident similar to the way a good work is opposed today?

### Chapters 3-5

### NEHEMIAH

**Chapter Three: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

**(Warning:** Your tendency will be to skip over this chapter because of the long list of names. Please do not do this. Instead, look carefully at *who* did or did not go to the work. Make a notation of these people, because they teach us a lesson about how we work together in the church.)

1. Why would God use so much space in the Bible listing people that no one would ever know?

**Chapter Four: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

2. How would you describe the method of opposition by Tobiah and his gang in **verses 2-3**?

--What is the wisdom of Nehemiah's response?

3. How would you describe their method of opposition in **verses 7-8, 11**?

--What is the wisdom of Nehemiah's response?

4. How would you describe the problem in **verse 10**?

--How did Nehemiah solve the problem?

5. What principles of leadership has Nehemiah taught us in this chapter?

**Chapter Five: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-5: (Note three reasons these Jews had found themselves in need)*

*Verses 6-13:*

5. What two things had the Jewish lenders done wrong?
6. How much interest were the lenders charging?
7. How would we make application of this text today?

*Verses 14-19:*

8. How were the problems dealt with in this chapter different from the problems Nehemiah has had to deal with before?
9. What principle of leadership has Nehemiah taught us in this chapter?

**Chapter Six:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

*Verses 1-4:*

1. How would you describe the method of opposition by Tobiah and his gang in these verses?

--What wisdom do you see in Nehemiah's response?

*Verses 5-9:*

2. How would you describe the method of opposition in these verses?

--What is the wisdom of Nehemiah's response?

*Verses 10-14:*

3. How would you describe the method of opposition in these verses?

--What is the wisdom of Nehemiah's response?

Verses 15-19:

4. How would you characterize the nature of the problem in **verses 17-19**?

**Chapter Seven: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

(To understand the purpose of this chapter, consider especially **verse 4** and then make the connection to chapter eleven.)

**Chapter Eight: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

Verses 1-8:

5. Seventh Day Adventists believe that when the Bible refers to the *Law of Moses*, it is speaking of everything in the Law *except* the ten commandments. But, they believe, when the Bible refers to the *Law of God* it is referring *only* to the ten commandments. They then draw the conclusion that when the New Testament states that the Law of Moses has been abolished, the ten commandments are not included in that which is done away. Do you notice anything in these verses that would disprove their premise?

*Verses 9-12:*

*Verses 13-18:*

6. How many years had it been since Israel had celebrated the feast of Tabernacles by living in tents?

--When was the feast of Tabernacles?

--What was its purpose?

## Chapters 9-13

## NEHEMIAH

**Chapter Nine:** The prayer of the Levites recorded in this chapter can be divided into four parts. Give a summary title to each part and jot down other points of interest. Notice especially those things that make a good prayer before God. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

*Verses 1-4:*

*Verses 5-6 --Summary Title:*

*Verses 7-31 --Summary Title:*



*Verses 32-37 --Summary Title:*

*Verse 38 --Summary Title:*

**Chapter Ten: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-27:*

*Verses 28-39:*

1. Why do you think it was important for these people to enter into a covenant and a curse concerning the service of the Lord?
  
2. Would there be a time today when it would be appropriate for us to do something similar?

**Chapter Eleven: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

**Chapter Twelve: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-26:*

*Verses 27-43:*

*Verses 44-47:*

**Chapter Thirteen: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

(Look for parallel lessons for the church today from each of the sections below.)

*Verses 1-9:*

3. What application can you make from the people sinning in Nehemiah's absence?
  
4. What application can you make from the sin of allowing the Ammonite and Moabite into the congregation?

*Verses 10-14:*

5. Application for today:

*Verses 15-22:*

6. Application for today:

*Verses 23-31:*

6. Application for today:

7. What can we learn from the leadership example of Nehemiah in this chapter?

**Introduction:** Even though the book of Esther does not chronologically follow Nehemiah, it is placed at the end of the historical books because its message is not necessary to the recorded history of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah cover the three returns from Babylonian captivity and the strides the Jews made in rebuilding their city and their nation. Esther's importance is not so much where it is placed chronologically in history, but its message of a God-controlled world even in the midst of godlessness.

***Unique Features of the Book of Esther:***

- Esther is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman, the other being the book of Ruth. It is interesting that Ruth is a Gentile woman who married a Jewish man, while Esther is a Jewish woman who married a Gentile man.
- Though the book of Esther is placed after Nehemiah in our Bibles, if it were not for the events of Esther, Nehemiah would not have been written.
- We know from the book of Ezra that a large group of captives have already returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. In our minds this is where the center of activity is. In Ezra and Nehemiah we are mainly concerned with what is happening in the land of Israel and especially Jerusalem. But the book of Esther reminds us that there were events taking place thousands of miles away that would affect not only the work in Jerusalem, but whether or not any Jew in Jerusalem or elsewhere would live.
- Esther is the only book in the Bible where the name of God is excluded. In fact, there are no references to prayer, worship, the law, Jerusalem or the temple. For this reason, many have questioned the canonicity of the book. Esther is the only book not represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, Esther was firmly placed in the Hebrew canon and in the Septuagint prior to the time of Christ. In Luke 24:44, Jesus placed His seal of approval on the Hebrew canon and therefore accepted Esther as inspired.

***Background of the Book:***

1. The book covers approximately a ten year period from 483-473 BC.
2. If we placed Esther chronologically in our Bibles, where would we place it?
3. Can you give a possible explanation for the name of God being absent from the book?

***Survey of the Book:***

4. Scan through the book once or twice to get an idea of the message and the main characters.
5. The main message of the book is the *providence* or *sovereignty* of God.  
--Give a dictionary definition of *providence*:

--The word *providence*, or a derivative thereof, is used only three times in the Bible and never in reference to God. Look up these three occurrences, making a brief note of how the word is used in the Bible:

**Acts 24:2--**

**Romans 13:14--**

**1 Timothy 5:8--**

--Are we justified in using the word *providence* when we speak of how God works among men?

--*Note:* We have usually taken a step further than the strict definition of the term and referred to the providence of God as the work that God does among men when He is not operating miraculously. Does God use any less of His power when He operates in a non-miraculous way?

***Other Lessons We Should Look For In The Book:***

- The power of godliness in the midst of a wicked society.
- The power and influence of a godly woman who does not leave her role in order to affect change.

**Chapter One: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

6. What is your evaluation of the character of the Persian Empire? Many believe that Ecclesiastes was written during the Persian period in which case **Ecclesiastes 10:16-19** would fit well.
7. Why did Vashti refuse to come before the king?

**Chapter Two:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

*Verses 1-18:*

8. What does **verse 1** seem to imply?

*Verses 19-23:*

## Chapters 3-5

## ESTHER

**Chapter Three:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

*Verses 1-7:*

1. Why does Mordecai refuse to bow before Haman?
2. Why would Haman want to kill every Jew and not just Mordecai?

*Verses 8-15:*

3. Where is Haman going to get ten thousand talents of silver to put into the king's treasuries?

**Chapter Four: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

4. List the three arguments Mordecai gives to convince Esther to go before the king:

--How are each one of these arguments applicable to us today when responsibility to the Lord faces us?

**Chapter Five: In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.**

*Verses 1-8:*

5. Why doesn't Esther give the king her request immediately?

*Verses 9-14:*

6. What lesson should we learn from Haman's attitude in **verses 11-12**?

***Note:** The word "hanged" in **verse 14** in the Hebrew means "to hang one on a stake, to crucify." Impalement was the common practice with the Persians, not hanging by the neck.*

## Chapters 6-10

## ESTHER

**Chapter Six:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

1. Imagine the scene described in **verse 11**. What do you think those who know Haman are thinking?



**Chapter Seven:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

2. Explain Esther's statement in **verse 4**:
  
3. Go back through the last seven chapters and list as many things as you can where God may have "providentially" intervened to have His will fulfilled:
  
4. Would Esther or Mordecai necessarily have seen the providence of God while they were in the midst of this trial? Compare **Romans 8:28** and make an application to us:

**Chapter Eight:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

**Chapter Nine:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

*Verses 1-17:*

*Verses 18-32:*

**Chapter Ten:** In the space below, make an outline of the flow of events in this text as well as points of interest. Be prepared to discuss this in class.

5. How did the trial the Jews endured at this time actually turn out to be a greater victory for them than if the trial had never occurred? What lesson can we learn from this?