

**THE BOOKS OF EZRA AND NEHEMIA**

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the return of the remnant which came back to Jerusalem. Next week we will cover the Book of Esther dealing with those who stayed behind in the land of their captivity.

The central message of the Books can best be expressed in the words of Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:31-32:

For the Lord will not cast off forever:  
 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion  
 according to the multitude of his mercies.  
 God judges as necessary but He is very gracious.

**The Structure of the Book of Ezra**

1. The return under Zerubbabel - Chapters 1-6
2. The return under Ezra - Chapters 7-10

**The Return of the Remnant**

1. This is one of the most important subjects in Jewish history. The return of the elect of God to their own land after their captivity in Babylon.

This was predicted by the prophet Isaiah 200 years before Cyrus was born.

Read Isaiah 44:28-45:1-4 and 45:13. Also read Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10-11. Then read Ezra 1:1-3.

2. Chapter 2 gives the size of the remnant broken down by groups:
  - a. The people - 2:1-35.
  - b. The priests - 2:36-39.
  - c. The Levites - 2:40-54.
  - d. Others - 2:55-63.

The total of the people is given in VS 64-65. A round figure of about 50,000. Compared to the total of the nation, this was indeed a "remnant. Many of those who had grown up in Babylon did not want to leave the only life they had ever known.

This was under Zerubbabel around 536 B.C.

3. A further return happened about 80 years later under the leadership of Ezra (456 B.C.). This number was about 2,000, but only the males were numbered. This number included the **Nethinims** (8:20). These were servants of the Temple.
4. Between these two expeditions, the narrative of the Book of Esther took place.

**Parallels Between the Two Main Parts of Ezra**

THE RETURN UNDER ZERUBBABEL Chapters 1-6	THE RETURN UNDER EZRA Chapters 7-10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decree of Cyrus — 1:1-4</li> <li>• The leader Zerubbabel — 1:8; 2:2</li> <li>• Names and number of the remnant — 2:3-65</li> <li>• Sacred vessels and gifts — 1:6-11 &amp; 2:68-70</li> <li>• The coming to Jerusalem — 3:1</li> <li>• Prophet Ministry: Haggai &amp; Zechariah — 5:1-6:14</li> <li>• Main outcome — Temple is rebuilt — 6:15-22</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decree of Artaxerxes — 7:1, 11-26</li> <li>• The leader Ezra — 7:1-10</li> <li>• Names and number of the company — 8:1-20</li> <li>• Sacred vessels and gifts — 7:15-22 &amp; 8:24-35</li> <li>• The coming to Jerusalem — 8:32</li> <li>• Intercessory Ministry of Ezra — 9:1-15</li> <li>• Main outcome — separation of the people — 10:1-44</li> </ul>

### The Two Leaders

ZERUBBABEL means "descended from Babylon" which is an indication that he was born in Babylonia. Going to Jerusalem was probably a "first" for him for there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that he had ever seen the land of promise before. His full lineage is given in Matthew 1:12-17 where we find the lineage of Christ.

EZRA was, in Jewish tradition (Talmud) one of the great leaders of his day. He is recognized as the founder of the "Great Synagogue": a group of Jewish scholars who recognized the Canon of Scripture and settled it as the Word of God. He was descendant of Israel's high priest, Aaron (7:1-5) and he was also a Scribe, which means he was an expert instructor in Scripture.

### What About the Ten Tribes?

There are some interesting verses in the Book of Ezra that seem to indicate the Judah and Benjamin were not the only tribes that returned to the land of promise. It must be remembered that Assyria (which took the ten tribed kingdom into captivity) had become absorbed by the Babylonian empire which then became a part of Cyrus' dominion. Read the following verses: Ezra 1:3-5 "all his people"; 2:70 not just Jerusalem but "all the cities in Judea"; 6:17 "twelve he goats (were offered) according to the number of the tribes of Israel"; 8:29 "the chief of the fathers of Israel"

### Spiritual Applications For Us

1. Return to the Land, Chapters 1-2 - back to a right relationship with Christ.
2. Altar re-erected, 3:16 - Our dedication renewed.
3. New Temple begun, 3:8-13 - We are to daily renew our service and witness.
4. Adversaries obstruct, Chapter 4 - Our faith under testing.
5. Prophets exhort, 5:1-6 - 6:14 - Know what God says and tell it.
6. Temple finished, 6:15-22 - Faith always wins.
7. Ezra prepared his heart to seek, do and teach, 7:10 - So should we.
8. Ezra depended on God, 8:21; to seek the right way - So should we.
9. No compromise, 9:5 - Pray instead of yielding.
10. Confession and Separation, 10:11 - Exactly what we are to do.

### THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah was a spiritual leader with a heart to serve God with complete dependence on Him. Nehemiah is certainly the composer of the Book; some say he either wrote or compiled all the Book. It was written about 432 B.C.

In Chapters 1-6 we see construction, and in Chapters 7-13 we see "re-structuring" of the people.

The central message of the Book seems to be that there is no opportunity without opposition. You will find this idea repeated by Paul in **1 Corinthians 16:9**.

1. Nehemiah was raised in exile and became prominent in the Persian Court. As the royal cupbearer he had a position of great influence. His brother told him of the condition of Jerusalem and Judea and Nehemiah gave himself to fasting and prayer. Seeing the change in Nehemiah, the King commissioned him to do what God had led him to undertake.
2. In Chapters 2:11 - 6:19 we see Nehemiah reaching Jerusalem and surveying the ruins and then encouraging the people to build. By practical organization and spirit led leadership, the wall was completed in just over seven weeks.
  - a. Setbacks and opposition from without:
    1. Scorn - 4:16
    2. Force - 4:7-23
    3. Craft (pretense, bluff and treachery) 6:1-19

b. Hindrances from within:

1. Debris - 4:10
2. Fear - 4:11-14 (note 14)
3. Greed - 5:1-13

**The Reconstructing of the People Chapters 7-13**

1. There were too many people living outside the city walls & a census was taken and every 10th man moved into the city (11).
2. In Chapters 8-10 I see what can only be explained as revival as the people began to have a hunger for the Word of God. Confession is made and they enter into a self-imposed covenant according to will of God in Scripture.
3. In Chapters 11-12 we see the people who willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem are blessed. The Walls are dedicated.
4. In Chapter 13 we find something of the humor that we don't think about when we are talking about a man consumed by doing God's will. He throws Tobiah's furniture out (vs 8), plucked out the hair of those who had married wives not of Israel (vs 25) and chasing the young Jew who had become Sanballat's son-in-law (vs 28).

Through it all, Nehemiah stayed faithful and kept praying. God help us to be Nehemiahs in the world we live in today.

FOR NEXT WEEK:

READ THE BOOK OF ESTHER  
less than two chapters each day