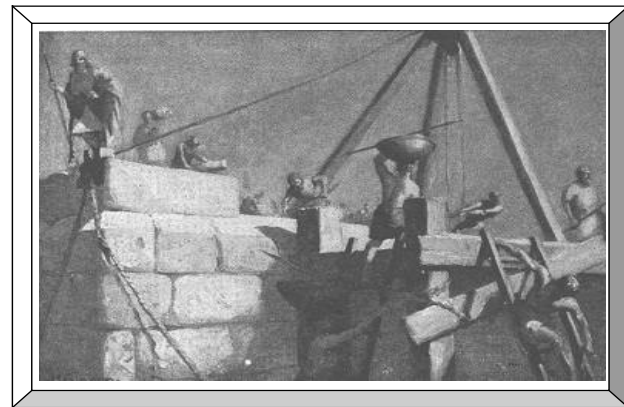


"Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel."

Ezra 7:10

"You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach."

Nehemiah 2:17



A Renewed Remnant

**Biblical Studies In
Ezra & Nehemiah**

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A Renewed Remnant

— Biblical Studies From Ezra & Nehemiah —

Lesson 1 – General Introduction

Introduction

Defined, a “remnant” is a small part remaining from something larger. One might have a remaining piece of cloth or carpet and refer to it as a “remnant.” This same word can also refer to people, and it is this use that provides the backdrop for our studies in **Ezra & Nehemiah**.

The Scripture describes God’s people as a “remnant.”

- ♦ A *“spiritual”* remnant would belong to the Messiah (**Jer. 23:1-8; Rom. 11:1-5**).
 - Jesus always indicated there would only be a small number who would eventually gain eternal life (**Mt. 7:13-14; 22:14**).
- ♦ A *“physical”* remnant was found among O.T. Israel (**Isa. 10:20-23**)
 - Guilty of idolatry, both the kingdoms of Israel [**721 B.C.**] & Judah [**586 B.C.**] were carried away into captivity.
 - Israel was absorbed into the other nations also conquered by Assyria...they would never be a kingdom again.
 - Judah was in Babylonian captivity 70 years (**2 Chron. 36:21-23; Jer. 25:11-12; 27:21-22; 29:10; Dan. 9:2**).
 - God’s people were promised “..a remnant would return.”
 - The number of exiles returning was slightly less than 50,000 (**Ezra 1:64-65**).

Ezra & Nehemiah are 2 of the 12 O.T. historical books. They bring Israel’s history to a close, providing the record of the Jews’ return from captivity. **Ezra** begins where the narrative of **2 Chron. 36:20-23** ended. While they focus on the efforts to rebuild Jerusalem, another book tells the story of a situation affecting Jews who remained behind in the Persian capital of Susa...a situation that threatened their future. Chronologically, the book of **Esther** can be inserted between **Ezra 6-7**. To further complete the inspired books dealing with this time period, one could also read the prophecies of **Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi**. God sent these servants during this time period to reveal His will for the exiles who returned to post-captivity Jerusalem.

What these studies will emphasize is that this remnant was “renewed.” Those who returned did so because they cared about restoring the land promised by God and rebuilding the city that He had chosen. Not everyone went back when the Jews were given permission (**Ezra 1:4**). When they were carried off into captivity in Babylon, Jeremiah wrote a letter and told them to make the best of a bad situation. They were to prosper where they could and “...seek the welfare of the city” (**Jer. 29:1-7**).

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After the Persians started ruling following their defeat of the Babylonians, the Jews, for the most part, were faring well. When the decree was given to return to Jerusalem, some chose to stay where they were. More than likely, it was the more spiritually-minded exiles who left behind good conditions in Persia to travel back to devastated Judea and bring Jerusalem back from the ashes. It is those people of God who will undertake such an assignment. They are the ones who are concerned with “renewing their commitment” with the Lord instead of gaining or keeping any material prosperity (cp. Mt. 6:19-21; Col. 3:1-2).

Historical Perspective

When studying this part of the Bible story, it is helpful if one remembers the chronological order of how these events unfolded. Consider the selected events in the following chart:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
605 B.C.	Babylon defeats Egypt at Carchemish under the leadership of Babylon's crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar. Upon learning of the death of his father Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar races back to Babylon to claim the throne. His forces follow behind, taking with them captives from all the lands conquered in the region...among them were Daniel & his 3 friends (Dan. 1:1).
586 B.C.	Judah finally falls to Babylon; Jerusalem is destroyed; the Jews are taken away into captivity.
539 B.C.	Under Cyrus the Great, the Medo-Persian coalition defeats Babylon. Being a “tolerant polytheist,” Cyrus orders all the captives to return to their homelands and petition their gods on his behalf. Flavius Josephus (<i>ancient Jewish historian</i>) records that after his conquest of Babylon, the Persian ruler was shown Isaiah's prophecy from some 200 years earlier (Isa. 44:24 – 25:17) [<i>Antiquities, XI.1.1.2</i>]. Being “stirred,” he ordered the Jews to return (Ezra 1:1-4).
538 B.C.	The 1st return to Jerusalem was led by Zerubbabel – its objective was to rebuild the temple. This return ended the 70 years of captivity, thus fulfilling prophecy.
516 B.C.	The temple work was completed in the 6th year of Darius I (Ezra 6:15). The work had lain dormant for 16 years due to opposition. God sent the prophets Haggai & Zechariah in 520 B.C. to encourage the exiles to complete the construction.

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458 B.C.	The 2nd return to Jerusalem was led by Ezra – its objective was to rebuild the “spiritual infrastructure” (Ezra 7:10). This occurred in the 7th year of Artaxerxes I.
445 B.C.	The 3rd return to Jerusalem was led by Nehemiah – its objective was to rebuild the city walls (Neh. 1:1 – 2:5). This occurred in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I.

It would also be helpful if one is aware of the order of Persian kings who ruled during the events described in these two books.

<u>King</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Other Information</u>
Cyrus	539 – 530 B.C.	First attempt to build the temple in 536 B.C.
Cambyses	530 – 522 B.C.	
Darius I	522 – 486 B.C.	Temple completed in 516 B.C.
Xerxes I	486 – 465 B.C.	Same as Ahasuerus of Esther
Artaxerxes I	465 – 424 B.C.	Ezra sent in 458 B.C. Walls built by Nehemiah in 445 B.C.

Ezra

A book that emphasizes the value of preparing one's self to teach the word of God to help correct spiritual indifference & ignorance (**Ezra 7:25**).

- By the time Ezra comes to Jerusalem, the Jews had been back nearly 80 years.
- They had already shown a tendency to be indifferent toward their God-given work.
 - God had sent 2 prophets some 62 years earlier to encourage them to do what they had gone back to Jerusalem for...build the temple.

The book chronicles the first 2 returns from captivity.

- Return #1 → Led by Zerubbabel (**Ezra 1-6**)
- Return #2 → Led by Ezra (**Ezra 7-10**)

The book also illustrates the demands of repentance from a sinful situation...even when it is “emotional.”

- Even after all they had been through re: their 70 years in captivity because of their idolatry, the post-exilic Jews once again committed sin.
- They married foreign women from among the surrounding pagans (**Ezra 9:1-2**).
- This was a clear violation of the Law (**Deut. 7:1-5**).
- It could lead them right back into idolatry.

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Nehemiah

A book that serves as a classic Biblical essay on leadership. Even though the remnant had been back in Jerusalem for over 90 years, conditions were still very disheartening. It was reported to Nehemiah just how much the exiles were in “distress” (1:3; 5:1-5). There is also the indication the remnant had not been as faithful as they should in observing feasts commanded by the Lord (8:13-18).

If ever a crisis was met by a man, it was Nehemiah in post-exilic Jerusalem! Nehemiah provides great examples to follow. We are sure to face the same obstacles he faced when he decided to return to Jerusalem in **445 B.C.** to rebuild the city walls.

- He put his priorities in proper order...he left a prestigious position to focus on duties for God's people (1:11; 2:5).
- Throughout all he did or faced, he shows us the value and power of prayer (1:5-11; 2:4; 4:4-5, 9; 5:19; 6:14; 13:29).
- He illustrates how to effectively handle opposition from without (2:19-20; 4:1-8; 6:1-13) as well as how to conquer discouragement from within (3:5; 4:5, 9-23; 5:1-19).

This book not only declares the man who made the story, it also presents the story who made the man. All that Nehemiah faced brought out the finest character within him. And he did this no matter what “role” he was fulfilling.

- We see him as “cupbearer” (1:1 – 2:10)
- We see him as “wall builder” (2:11 – 6:19)
- We see him as “governor” (7:1 – 13:31)

Through all he did for God's people and His cause in post-exilic Jerusalem, Nehemiah displayed constant and steady faithfulness and devotion to God.

Application

The applications to make from these studies will not be hard for us to see. The only “challenge” will be whether or not we have the courage to make them. Just like the post-exilic Jews,...

- ...we, too, are a “remnant” (Mt. 7:13-14; 22:14).
- ...we, too, must return from our captivity to serve God (Jn. 8:31-34; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).
- ...we, too, must “set our hearts” to study, know, practice, & teach the word of God (Psa. 119:10-11; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:2).
- ...we, too must engage ourselves in a great building project (1 Pet. 2:4-5).