

St. Matthew Bible Study October 27th, 2020

The Book of Ezra

“The Word of the Lord”

Presented by Rev. Teresa Lynn Rushdan

Ezra Total Chapters: 10

Ezra Total Verses: 280

Total Words: 7,441

Date Written: Although the actual date is debated and difficult to pinpoint but most scholars suggest Ezra was written around BC 450-400 BC. Written to the Israelites in Jerusalem after returning from exile and to all future readers of Scripture.

Author: The Book of Ezra does not specifically name its author. The tradition is that the prophet Ezra wrote the Book of Ezra. It is interesting to note that once Ezra appears on the scene in chapter 7, the author of the Book of Ezra switches from writing in the third person to first person. This would also lend credibility to Ezra being the author.

Ezra Theme: Struggle, Success, and Restoration

“Beginning of Jerusalem’s Restoration”

Major Characters:

Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Arataxerses , Zechariah, Haggai, Darius I, and Sanballat.

Purpose of Writing: The Book of Ezra is devoted to events occurring in the land of Israel at the time of the return from the Babylonian captivity and subsequent years. Ultimately King Cyrus of Persia arose to power, and he decided to aid the Jews to return to Jerusalem. The Jews are counted and are permitted to return to Judah to rebuild the Temple.

The emphasis in Ezra is on the rebuilding of the Temple. The book contains extensive genealogical records, principally for the purpose of establishing the claims to the priesthood on the part of the descendants of Aaron.

Brief Summary: The book may be divided as follows: Chapters 1-6—The First Return under Zerubbabel, and the Building of the Second Temple. Chapters 7-10—The Ministry of Ezra. Since well over half a century elapsed between chapters 6 and 7, the characters of the first part of the book had died by the time Ezra began his ministry in Jerusalem. Ezra is the one person who is

prominent in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Both books end with prayers of confession (Ezra 9; Nehemiah 9) and a subsequent separation of the people from the sinful practices into which they

had fallen. Some concept of the nature of the encouraging messages of Haggai and Zechariah, who are introduced in this narrative, and may be seen in the prophetic books that bear their names.

Ezra dedicated the temple but was not happy with the Jews marrying pagan foreign wives. Despite the delays because of opposition and enemies of Jews, the Temple is completed and dedicated to God during this period.

In the Book of Ezra there are two major divisions. There is the return of the captives from Babylon led by Zerubbabel in the first six chapters. About fifty thousand returned. Then there is the return led by Ezra in chapters 7–10, and about two thousand people followed Ezra.

Who was Ezra? Ezra, was a priest, unable to serve during the Captivity. There was no temple. It had been destroyed. He did, however, give his time to a study of the Word of God. Ezra 7:6 tells us that he was “a ready scribe in the law of Moses.”

Ezra was also a great revivalist and reformer. The revival began with the reading of the Word of God by Ezra. We will see that in Nehemiah 8. Also, Ezra was probably the writer of 1 and 2 Chronicles and Psalm 119 (the longest chapter in the Bible).

Ezra organized the synagogue. He was the founder of the order of scribes. He helped settle the canon of Scripture and arranged the Psalms. Let us pay tribute to Ezra who was the first to begin a revival of Bible study. Is this not God’s program for revival?

The theme of the Book of Ezra is The Word of the Lord. There are ten direct references to God’s Word in this little book: Ezra 1:1; 3:2; 6:14, 18; 7:6, 10, 14; 9:4; 10:3, 5. The place of the Word of God is seen in the total lives of these people: religious, social, business, and political.

The key to this book is found in Ezra 9:4 and 10:3: they “trembled at the words of the God of Israel.”

The reading of Ezra will disclose, when Cyrus, King of Persia, gave permission to the captives to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, scarcely fifty thousand Jews

availed themselves of the privilege, a considerable portion of whom were priests and Levites of the humbler and poorer class.”

Ezra was a priest and Nehemiah was a layman. They worked together in such a way that God’s will was accomplished in Jerusalem. Together they were instrumental in seeing that the walls, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple were rebuilt.

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In Chapters 1-6, a relatively small number of Jews return to the city of Jerusalem and immediately prepare to construct the new temple. They began the planning, the gathering of materials, and the beginning of construction. The building drags on because the surrounding enemies begin oppressing and frightening them. Twenty years later, it is completed. "The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the Lord God of Israel, ate the Passover. And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the Lord had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the House of God, the God of Israel" (6:21-22).

What is the Feast of Unleavened Bread? The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a 7-day feast that begins the first evening of Passover. This is a Biblically commanded Feast of the Lord. But even though this feast first appears in the Old Testament to the Israelites, did you know that it's actually a feast that was foreshadowing and celebrating Jesus as Messiah?

What is Passover? Passover, or Pesach in Hebrew, is one of the Jewish religion's most sacred and widely observed holidays. In Judaism, Passover commemorates the story of the Israelites' departure from ancient Egypt, which appears in the Hebrew Bible's books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, among other texts. Jews observe the weeklong festival with a number of important rituals, including a traditional Passover meal known as a seder, the removal of leavened products from their home, the substitution of matzo for bread and the retelling of the exodus tale

Instead of bread, religious Jews eat a type of flatbread called matzo. According to tradition, this is because the Hebrews fled Egypt in such haste that there was no time for their bread to rise, or perhaps because matzo was lighter and easier to carry through the desert than regular bread.

From chapters 7-10, the second group of Jews returns to Israel. Ezra is included in this return. He teaches the law, but has problems with intermarriage and addresses the pagan women who brought their religious practices with them.

“For 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” (7:10), a great example to follow!

We see in the Book of Ezra a continuation of the biblical theme of the remnant. Whenever disaster or judgment falls, God always saves a tiny remnant for Himself—Noah and his family from the destruction of the flood; Lot’s family from Sodom and Gomorrah; the 7,000 prophets reserved in Israel despite the persecution of Ahab and Jezebel. When the Israelites were taken into captivity in Egypt, God delivered His remnant and took them to the Promised Land. Some fifty thousand people return to the land of Judea in Ezra 2:64-67, and yet, as they compare themselves with the numbers in Israel during its prosperous days under King David, their comment is, “We are left this day as a remnant.”

The remnant theme is carried into the New Testament where Paul tells us that “at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (Romans 11:5).

Although most people of Jesus’ day rejected Him, there remained a set of people whom God had reserved and preserved in his Son, and in the covenant of His grace. Throughout all generations since Christ, there is the remnant of the faithful whose feet are on the narrow road that leads to eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14). This remnant will be preserved through the power of the Holy Spirit who has sealed them and who will deliver them safely at the last day (2Corinthians1:22; Ephesians4:30).

What is a Remnant? Those that are faithful, that remain When Israel was in captivity, Ezra wrote that “now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery” (*Ezra 9:8*) and why he prayed, “O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this” (*Ezra 9:15*).

Ezra was a priest and Nehemiah was a layman. They worked together in such a way that God’s will was accomplished in Jerusalem. Together they were instrumental in seeing that the walls, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple were rebuilt.

The Book of Nehemiah

“Rebuilding and Remembering”

Nehemiah Total Chapters: 13

Nehemiah Total Verses: 406

Total Words: 10,483

Date Written: 445 – 425 BC

Author: Nehemiah

Nehemiah Theme: Struggle, Success and Restoration.

Completion of Jerusalem’s Restoration

Major Characters: Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, Zechariah, Darius 1, and Sanballat.

Nehemiah Summary

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah cover the events of the Jews returning from the Babylonian captivity. Near 520 BC after the takeover by Nebuchadnezzar, ultimately King Cyrus of Persia arose to power, and he decided to aid the Jews to return to Jerusalem. The Jews are counted and are permitted to return to Judah to rebuild the Temple. Nehemiah heard about Ezra and rebuilding of Temple. He got uneasy knowing there was no wall to protect the city. Nehemiah prayed God to use him to save the city.

God accepted his prayer and softened the heart of Persian king Artaxerxes who not only permitted him to return but also gave him supplies for that and moreover made him Governor of that region. Nehemiah entered Jerusalem with a building project in mind mainly rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. This wall would distinguish God’s people from the surrounding groups, but was not intended to separate them from the world entirely. The wall was finished in 52 days despite opposition. Nehemiah left and returned after 12 years and found that there has been backsliding in his absence. People left God’s way and he again took new measures and reforms regarding Tithe, Sabbath and intermarriages.

Nehemiah was a layman and a businessman; Ezra was a priest. In the Book of Ezra, the emphasis is upon the rebuilding of the temple; in the Book of Nehemiah, the emphasis is upon the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. In Ezra, we have the religious aspect of the return; in Nehemiah, we have the political aspect of the return.

Ezra is a fine representative of the priest and scribe; Nehemiah is a nobleman representative of the businessman and layman, Ezra and Nehemiah helps to show us how lay and the clergy ought to work together.

Nehemiah had an important office at the court of the powerful Persian king, Artaxerxes, but his heart was with God's people and God's program in Jerusalem.

The background of the events of Nehemiah is "...the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times".

The Outline: I. Rebuilding the Walls,

Chapters 1 — 7 A. Nehemiah's prayer for remnant at Jerusalem, Chapter 1 B. Nehemiah's request of the king, return to Jerusalem, and review of ruins of Jerusalem,

Chapter 2:1-16 C. Nehemiah's encouragement to rebuild the walls, Chapter 2:17-20 D. Rebuilding the walls and gates,

Chapter 3 E. Nehemiah's response to opposition,

Chapters 4 — 6 Wall completed, 6:15 F. Nehemiah's register of people,

Chapter 7 (Only 42,360 people, 7,337 servants, and 245 singers returned. Compare this with the fact that Judah alone had 470,000 warriors [1 Chronicles 21:5].)

II. Revival and Reform

Chapters 8 — 13 A. Great Bible reading led by Ezra, Chapter 8 B. Revival — the result,

Chapters 9, 10 C. Reform — another result,

Chapters 11 — 13 The Babylonian Captivity:

God's chosen people were called to witness against idolatry, but too often they themselves gave in and became idolaters. God sent them to Babylon, the fountainhead of idolatry, to take the gold cure. They returned repudiating idolatry.

Note the scripture Job 3:25 The thing I feared the most came upon me.

Their restoration as an independent nation was incomplete. They were not free from this time on to the time of the Roman Empire. The New Testament opens with them under the rule of Rome.

Comment: This book reveals what God can do through a lay person who has a heart for the things of God.

I. REBUILDING the WALLS, Chapters 1 — 7

- A. Nehemiah's prayer for remnant at Jerusalem, Chapter 1 v. 1 — The use of the first person pronoun gives the impression that Nehemiah was the writer.

He reminds God of His promises (vv. 8, 9). Nehemiah casts himself upon the mercy and goodness of God (vv. 10, 11). "This man" refers to King Artaxerxes.

- B. Nehemiah's request of the king, return to Jerusalem, and review of ruins of Jerusalem.

- C. Chapter 2:1-16 vv. 1-3 — Nehemiah, the cupbearer of Artaxerxes, appears sad before the king — which evidently is unusual, as the king calls attention to it. Nehemiah explains that it is because of news from Jerusalem. v. 4 — The king gives him opportunity to make a request. Here begins the use of the little word "so" that occurs again and again. v. 5 — Nehemiah asks for a leave of absence that he might go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. v. 11-16 — Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem, immediately makes a secret inspection of the damage, and estimates the extent of the job.

- D. Nehemiah's encouragement to rebuild the walls, Chapter 2:17-20 vv. 17, 18 — Then Nehemiah calls together the leaders of Israel and reveals his plan to rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem. The people are encouraged to begin the undertaking. v. 19 —

- E. The 3 enemies use the weapon of ridicule to deter the people from attempting the Herculean project of rebuilding the walls and gates. v. 20 — Nehemiah's answer is brief. He would look to God and not to them.

- F. Rebuilding the walls and gates, Chapter 3 This chapter is filled with great spiritual lessons ...Nehemiah's response to opposition

- G. Chapters 4 — 6 Chapter 4 vv. 1-3 — As the work progresses, the enemy continues to use the weapon of ridicule. They make light of the zeal of the workmen and laugh at their workmanship, saying that even a nimble fox could knock down the wall.

- H. Chapter 4-6 — Nehemiah ignores their sarcasm and prays to God, but continues to build. vv. 7-9 — When the enemy sees that the wall is going up in spite of their ridicule, they become angry and decide to try to destroy the wall. Nehemiah continues to pray and build. v. 10 — Opposition comes next from within their own ranks — discouragement in the presence of the huge undertaking and the threat of the enemy making a surprise attack. Nehemiah arms the workmen. v. 17 — They work with one hand and hold a weapon with

the other. v. 23 — Nehemiah injects a humorous note by adding that they did not take off their clothes during this trying experience — except, of course, when they took a bath!

- I. Chapter 5 — Opposition again rises from within their own ranks. vv. 1-5 — Some of their own brethren take advantage of the hard lot of others and give “help” by taking mortgages at excessive interest and also by buying their sons and daughters into slavery. This display of covetousness is the same as the idolatry which sent them into captivity. vv. 6-11 — Nehemiah is very angry when this is called to his attention, and he forces these greedy brothers to restore what they had taken. v. 12 — The brothers take an oath that they will restore what they had taken. v. 13 — Nehemiah threatens to deal with them severely if they do not carry through with their agreement. vv. 14-19 — Nehemiah, on a leave of absence from his position as cupbearer for King Artaxerxes, had refused to accept the salary formerly paid to the governor of Israel, which came from taxing the people. His example should have been an inspiration and example to his brethren.
- J. Chapter 6 — In spite of crafty opposition, the wall is finished. vv. 1-3 — The enemies (Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem) hear that the wall is completed, but Nehemiah honestly admits the report is a bit exaggerated (the gates are not set up). The enemy reverses the opposition. Since they could not stop the work, they now propose to get together with Nehemiah and work out a compromise. However, their intention is not to promote the welfare of Nehemiah. Nehemiah properly turns it down and for the 14th time inserts the little word “so” that tells us much. v. 4 — The enemy approaches Nehemiah 4 times. It is interesting to note (v. 2) the name of the village where they proposed to meet — Ono vv. 5-7 — On the 5th approach to . that Nehemiah is attempting to rebel against Persia and set up a separate state. Gashmu (the gossip) is spreading the report (v. 6). v. 8 — Nehemiah politely calls them liars. vv. 9-14 — The enemy then hires false prophets to make Nehemiah and the people afraid. vv. 15-19 — Without fanfare of trumpets, great ceremony or ribbon cutting, the wall is finished. The brief, expressive word “so” tells the story — “So the wall was finished” (v. 15). The enemy still persists in its opposition by circulating letters to the nobles of Judah, as Tobiah had evidently married a daughter of one of the nobles. F. Nehemiah’s register of people.
- K. Chapter 7 vv. 1-4 — Nehemiah, having finished the wall, gives Hanani and Hananiah charge of Jerusalem. He instructs them to keep the gates closed at certain times to prevent the enemy from entering. “Eternal vigilance” is the price of Christian liberty. vv. 5-73 — This is a repetition of the genealogy given in Ezra 2. Unnecessary though this may seem to us, it is repeated because it is important to God and He challenges us to read it. “The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance” (Psalm 112:6). God never forgets the faithful. This chapter comes from the book of eternity.
- L. Chapters 8 — 13 A. Great Bible reading led by Ezra, Chapter 8 Bible reading is essential to revival. vv. 1-6 — Ezra stands upon a pulpit of wood before the water gate. (The Word of God is spiritual water.) Ezra reads in the Law of Moses from morning until noon. vv. 7, 8

— Ezra evidently reads a portion and then the Levites, scattered in the crowd, explain it to the people. (Note: The method used here is still God’s method. The Word is to be read distinctly and explained so that the people can understand it.) vv. 9-12 — Many people are overcome with emotion as they had never before heard the Word of God. They weep. Nehemiah urges the people not to weep but to rejoice. Here is the source of Christian

strength, “for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (8:10). See also Philippians 4:13. v. 13 — Ezra instructs the teachers (Levites) in the law. vv. 14-18 — The Feast of Tabernacles is observed. B. Revival — the result,

- M. Chapters 9 vv. 1-3 — The ingredients and order of revival are important. Reading the Word of God (studying and understanding it) is essential and basic. Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes reveal their attitude and sincerity. Confession and worship follow. vv. 4-38 — This is a great prayer of confession — praise and adoration of God as Creator (vv. 5, 6); praise and adoration because of His providential dealings with Israel; recitation and reminder of their long history. (Stephen recited this same history in Acts 7, but it led to murder, not to revival; to his condemnation, not to their confession.) Note the confession of their sins (vv. 34-38).
- N. Chapter 10 — The people make and sign a covenant to serve God. C. Reform — another result
- O. Chapters 11 — 13 Chapter 11 — The rulers cast lots to see who is to dwell in Jerusalem and who is to live elsewhere in the land.
- P. Chapter 12 vv. 1-42 — Roster of priests and Levites who had returned with Zerubbabel. vv. 43-47 — Restoration of sacrifices and temple worship. (Notice the joy of the people.)
- Q. Chapter 13 — Nehemiah, who had returned to Persia, comes again to Jerusalem and institutes reforms. vv. 1-5 — The reading of the law leads to separation. vv. 6-9 — Nehemiah puts Tobiah out of the apartment he had been given in the temple. vv. 10-14 — The Levites had not been paid. Nehemiah forces the rulers to see that the Levites receive their portion. vv. 15-22 — The Sabbath day is observed. Men of Tyre bring fish to sell in Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. Nehemiah forces them to leave and orders the gates of Jerusalem to be closed on the Sabbath. vv. 23-31 — Nehemiah uses extreme means (v. 25) to force people not to intermarry.

Chapter Summary:

Chapter# 1 – Nehemiah’s Prayer for The People after hearing news from Jerusalem.

Chapter# 2 – The king granted the request to go. Nehemiah sent to Jerusalem. Nehemiah inspects the walls and decides to restore them

Chapter# 3 – Organization of the work. List of sections of the wall and names of those who built them

Chapter# 4 – Sanballat ridiculed and plotted to attack Jerusalem. Construction continues with workers armed. Nehemiah overcomes opposition from Sanballat.

Chapter# 5 – Nehemiah stops exploitation of some Jews who oppressed others by debts. Nehemiah stopped the rich from taking advantage of the poor leaders canceled debts.

Chapter# 6 – Sanballat and Tobiah effort to trap and kill Nehemiah. The wall was completed in 52 days. The enemies lost the game.

Chapter# 7 – City gates and gatekeepers. Nehemiah ordered to guard Jerusalem. The exiles returned.

Chapter# 8 – Ezra: The Law is read and explained to the people. The people held the Feast of Booths.

Chapter# 9 – The Israelites confessed. Israel's vow of faithfulness. Review of Israel's history from creation, Adam, Abraham, wilderness till exile.

Chapter# 10 – The leaders signed a covenant. The people made an oath We will not marry foreigners and live according to God's law. List of laws Israel promised to keep

Chapter# 11 – Jerusalem repopulated. The leaders and one in ten of the people lived in Jerusalem. Lists of people groups who stayed in Jerusalem; list of other towns throughout Israel

Chapter# 12 – The leaders and servants in Jerusalem. Inauguration of the wall and the assignment of duties in the temple.

Chapter# 13 – After 12 years Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, and found that there has been backsliding in his absence. There were new measures and reforms regarding Tithe, Sabbath and Intermarriages. Nehemiah ensures that the Levites receive their portion.

Who are the Levites? A **Levite** (or **Levi** is a Jewish male descended patrilineally from the Tribe of Levi.^[3] The Tribe of Levi descended from Levi, The daughter of a Levite is a "Bat Levi" (*Bat* being Hebrew for "daughter").