

Ezra And Nehemiah

Introduction. After 70 years of captivity, Cyrus issued a decree. A remnant of the Jews, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, returned to Jerusalem (536 B.C.). A second group of Jews under the leadership of Ezra came to Jerusalem in 458 B.C.

About 12 years elapsed between Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah, which is a sequel to the book Ezra, consists of two main parts. The first part deals with the reconstruction of the walls, and the second part deals with the teaching of the people.

I. ***The First Return Under Zerubbabel***

- A. The decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-3).
- B. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, 42,360 Jews, besides servants and their maids, returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5, 7; 2:64-65; 3:1).
- C. Worship resumed and offerings were made to the Lord (Ezra 3:2-7).
- D. The foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra 3:11).
- E. Opposition (Ezra 4:1-24).
- F. Resumption of building the temple (Ezra 5:1-6:22).
 1. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews (5:1; cf. Haggai 1:4-5).
 2. The temple was rebuilt (5:2-6:22).
- G. Appropriate principles.
 1. The providence of God is all-controlling.
 2. The fulfillment of God's prophecy is sure.
 3. We are to give according to our ability so that the Lord's work can be accomplished.
 4. Our service to God can be hindered by the efforts of others and by our selfishness.

II. ***The Second Return Under Ezra***

- A. The decree of Artaxerxes and Ezra's response (Ezra 7:12-28).
- B. The problem of mixed marriages and Ezra's prayer (Ezra 9:1-2, 6-15).
- C. The people confessed, separated themselves from the people of the land and put away their pagan wives (Ezra 10:1-44).
- D. Appropriate principles.
 1. We should always thank God for His blessings and for the opportunity to serve Him.
 2. God's children must be separate from the world.
 3. The faithful child of God is grieved when God's law is violated.
 4. God must be obeyed, regardless of the cost.

III. ***The Reconstruction Of The Wall***

- A. Nehemiah's intercession (Nehemiah 1:1-11).
 - 1. Nehemiah heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were burned with fire. He wept and mourned for many days (1:3-4).
 - 2. Nehemiah's prayer (1:5-11).
- B. Nehemiah's expedition (Nehemiah 2:1-16).
- C. Nehemiah's exhortation (Nehemiah 2:17-20).
 - 1. The people set their hands to do the work of rebuilding the wall (2:18).
 - 2. Nehemiah and the people were laughed to scorn and despised (2:19, 20).
- D. Rebuilding attempted (Nehemiah 3:1-32)
- E. Rebuilding obstructed (Nehemiah 4:1-6:19)
 - 1. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites were very angry upon hearing that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored. They mocked the Jews and conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion (4:1, 7-8).
 - 2. Prayer was made to God (4:9).
 - 3. The Jews worked at construction with one hand, and held a weapon with the other hand (4:17).
 - 4. Internal difficulties.
 - a) There was a great outcry (5:1).
 - b) Nehemiah rebuked the nobles and rulers (5:7, 9).
 - c) The wall was completed (6:15-19).
- F. Appropriate principles.
 - 1. God answers prayer and His children will persevere, even when ridiculed.
 - 2. We must have confidence in the Lord.
 - 3. Regardless of the circumstances, we must have a mind to work.
 - 4. United in purpose and trusting in God, the work of God will be done.

IV. ***The Teaching Of The People***

- A. Registration of the remnant (Nehemiah 7:1-73).
- B. Teaching the law (Nehemiah 8:1-18).
 - 1. The people assembled to hear Ezra read to them from the law (8:1-8).
 - 2. The people wept when they heard the words of the law (8:9).
 - 3. Reading of and observing the feast of tabernacles (8:14-18).
- C. Consecration of the people (Nehemiah 9:1-10:39).
- D. Dedication of the wall (Nehemiah 12:27-47)
- E. Separation and reform (Nehemiah 13:1-31).

F. Appropriate principles.

1. The word of God must be revered.
2. We should assist people in understanding God's word.
3. We should be moved to tears when reading God's word.
4. We must observe and do all the commandments of the Lord.

Conclusion. Ezra and Nehemiah serve as the final participants in Old Testament history. These godly men did not desert the promises made to Abraham, but remained faithful to God. Their faithfulness serves as a great example for people who would be godly now.

Questions:

1. God appealed to His people to repent. What do the following verses say about His appeals (2 Chronicles 36:15-16; Jeremiah 7:3-7; 18:1-11; Amos 5:14-15)?
2. For how many years did the work on the temple cease?
3. Give some examples of how selfishness can hinder our service to God.
4. How do we show our confidence in the Lord?