

A WALK THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT
TIME FRAME #8– RESTORATION TO THE LAND
538 BC TO 445 BC
SELECTED CHAPTERS IN EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

CLASS NOTES

SUMMARY

As He promised, God not only preserves His people during the captivity but then restores them to the Promise Land. Their 70 years of discipline complete, the Jews begin to return in 537 BC. There will be three primary groups that return over an 80 year period. The first group under Zerubbabel rebuild the Temple. Then the second group under Ezra bring resources to improve the Temple as Ezra instructs the people more fully in the Mosaic Law. Then Nehemiah journeys to Jerusalem and rebuilds the walls. As the final doors are placed in the gates the Jews begin 500 years in the land. This period will include the life and ministry of Jesus and will end when the Roman's destroy the city in AD 70

MAJOR EVENTS

EVENT # 64 – THE DECREE OF CYRUS (EZRA 1)

The Lord had said that the Captivity would last for 70 years. After that time Babylon would be judged for what she had done to God's People and they would be restored to the Promise Land, especially Jerusalem. God used Cyrus, the king of Persia to accomplish both of these. He defeats Babylon and then gives the decree granting the Jews permission to return to the Land and to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, including the Temple. The author makes it very clear that it is God's good hand that is moving Cyrus to do this.

EVENT # 65 – FIRST GROUP RETURNS UNDER ZERUBBABEL AND REBUILD THE TEMPLE (EZRA 2-6)

The first group returns under Zerubbabel as the main leader and Jeshua as priest. They bring a number of priests and Levites with them to rebuild and serve in the Temple. There is much made about their ability to prove their family background before they can actually serve. The first thing they do upon arriving is to build the Altar on its original location on the Temple Mount. Then, for the first time in 70 years sacrifices are again offered to the Lord. The beginning of opposition from those living around Judah will continue throughout the next 80+ years. However, because God's hand is with them, the Temple is rebuilt, though through loss of focus it will take 20 years.

EVENT # 66 – THE SECOND GROUP RETURNS UNDER EZRA (EZRA 7-10)

Some 57 years after the Temple is dedicated a second group of Jews return to the Land under the leadership of Ezra. In addition to being a priest, he is the first man described as a Scribe. He was a master student and teacher of the Mosaic Law. The office of Scribe rose out of the Captivity, as the Jews determined to remain faithful to their faith and God. The Synagogue, also developed during the Captivity was a place for worship and for teaching. The Scribes were the expert teachers. Ezra's mission was to bring resources for improving the Temple and to teach the people of Jerusalem the Law more thoroughly. Upon his arrival he does so, and encounters the fact some Jewish leaders have intermarried with gentile women. This is dealt with swiftly, for this is exactly how Israel's descent into idolatry had started back in Solomon's day.

EVENT # 67 – THE THIRD GROUP RETURNS UNDER NEHEMIAH AND REBUILDS THE CITY WALLS (NEHEMIAH 1-6)

13 years after the events recorded in Ezra, Nehemiah hears about the defenseless condition of Jerusalem and prayerfully makes plans to remedy the situation. Trusting God to provide the opportunity to address this with the king, he courageously takes advantage of the opportunity when it comes. Despite determined opposition from gentile governors in the area, Nehemiah leads the people of Jerusalem in reconstructing the walls in less than 2 months. His life stands as a great example of leadership that begins with prayer and trusting God and also makes and executes plans to meet opposition and accomplish the task.

KEY CHARACTER – NEHEMIAH

SPIRITUAL LIFE LESSON – BEING A PERSON OF PRAYERFUL ACTION

NEHEMIAH WAS A MAN OF PASSIONATE PRAYER. NEHEMIAH 1

1. Nehemiah shows great personal passion for the situation in Jerusalem. The Jews have been back for some 75+ years, so he could have easily been critical and blamed them for the problem. However, he weeps, grieves, fasts and prays for the people, taking them to God. **1:1-4**

NOTE: *We are called by Jesus to be compassionate towards others and their lives. None of us are given the role of being their judge. The first act of compassion is to go before God in prayer, interceding for them.*

2. Nehemiah's prayer is balanced. **1:5-11**

- He starts with worship
- He refers to God's relationship with them as His chosen people
- He confesses his and his people's sin
- He prays Scripture, where God had promised that He would bring the Jews back into the Land if they repented
- He asks God to be with him. The context shows he had formulated a plan to appeal to the king, but needed God to provide the opportunity.

NOTE: *Nehemiah does not rush to need in his prayer, but takes the time to focus on God's greatness, his relationship with God, confesses sin and then prays Scripture to the situation. Then he asks God to intervene and meet the need.*

NEHEMIAH MADE PLANS, AND RECOGNIZES WHEN GOD OPENS THE DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY.

NEHEMIAH 2:1-8

1. It is clear that while Nehemiah was praying he was also planning. He would need the help and permission of King Artaxerxes to go rebuild the walls, and as a servant in the court, was not allowed to ask those kind of personal favors of the king. However, when the opportunity arose, he was ready and knew exactly what he wanted to say. His fear comes from having a noticeably sad countenance, an infraction punishable by death. **2:1-3**

2. Nehemiah recognized the opportunity when God provided it. He then lays out to the king exactly what he needs. **2:4-8**

3. Nehemiah is quick to recognize it is God, and not his quick thinking that has provided the king's favor! **2:8**

NOTE: *As we are praying through a situation, God wants us to use the abilities and resources He has given to us wisely. That includes the ability to prayerfully think out a plan. We also need to recognize when we need to wait on God to move.*

NEHEMIAH CONSISTENTLY POINTED OUT GOD'S PRESENCE, PROVISION AND PROTECTION.

There are numerous times when Nehemiah sought God and pointed Him out to others. This led people to look beyond themselves and their situation to see God.

1. When he tells the Jewish leaders his plan – **2:17-20**
2. When the people are intimidated by their enemies – **4:1-14**

NOTE: *Even when we need the courage to do what we know God wants us to do, we are still called to look to God for encouragement and enablement.*

NEHEMIAH KNEW HOW TO BALANCE PRAYER AND ACTION. 4:15-23

1. Nehemiah called the people to look to God for their protection – **vs.20**
2. As you read through the passage, Nehemiah also made plans for the people to defend themselves and repel any attack.

NOTE: *There is a balance we need to maintain between prayerful dependence on God and courageous action.*

NEHEMIAH KNEW HOW TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE. NEHEMIAH 5

1. Even though Nehemiah loaned people food and money properly, to set the example for those who had charged illegal interest, he forgives everyone their debt. As the others followed his example, the poor were relieved of the cycle of indebtedness they were trapped in. **vs.10-13**
2. Nehemiah practiced generosity beyond what was expected of him. Not only did he not take advantage of his position to demand food from the people, he feed others at his own expense. **vs. 14-19**

NOTE: *When we are called to lead by example, it is often necessary to go beyond what is required, even at personal cost. This can be extending help, protection, forgiveness or provision. We then ask God to see and reward us as He sees fit, rather than demand recognition from others.*