

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

Ezra 4:6-23; Nehemiah 1:1-2:10

First review Ezra 4:4-5; then read Ezra 4:6-23. Ezra 4:6-23 actually takes place after the events of Ezra 10 and before the events of Nehemiah 1. Think of these verses as “Ezra 11.”

- To review where we are in time and in the history of the exiles, fill in the blanks in the chart below.

PASSAGE	APPROXIMATE YEAR(S)	KING REIGNING	WHAT IS HAPPENING?
A review of where we've been in our study of Ezra.			
Ezra 1:1, 11	538 BC		
Ezra 4:4-5	Intervening years	Cyrus/Darius	
Ezra 6:15	516 BC		
Esther 1:1; Ezra 4:6	486-465 BC		“Esther is able to avert a complete massacre of the Jewish people and, indirectly, to save the lives of Ezra and Nehemiah.” ¹
	464-423 BC	Artaxerxes	Artaxerxes' reign
Ezra 7:1-7	458 BC	Artaxerxes	
Ezra 7:12-24	458 BC	Artaxerxes	
This is where we pick up in our study this week.			
Ezra 4:7, 12, 21, 23	Exact year unknown	Artaxerxes	
Nehemiah 1:1-3	445 BC	Artaxerxes	

2. From this chart we can see the challenges that faced the exiles through the years as well as the moments of victory over their enemies. Later in the reign of Artaxerxes a letter of accusation is sent to the king.
 - a. The authors of the letter claim they do not want the king to be dishonored (4:14). What do they want Artaxerxes to know? (4:12-13, 16)
 - b. How do they characterize the city of Jerusalem? (4:12, 15)

3. The letter to King Artaxerxes is read and translated, and the matter researched.
 - a. What is discovered about the history of Jerusalem? (4:19-20)
 - b. What does the research fail to uncover? (6:1-3)
 - c. What motivates the king to issue an order to stop the work in Jerusalem? (4:21-22)
 - d. What is the result of the king's order? (4:23)

This turn of events sets us up for the opening passage of the book of Nehemiah. Though the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and gates burned 140 years before to King Nebuchadnezzar, this “would hardly occasion a new outbreak of grief and fasting on [Nehemiah’s] part, it is likely that the report referred to [in Nehemiah 1 is] a second lesser destruction that seems to be alluded to in Ezra.”² (See Ezra 4:23.)

Imagine you are living in the year 445 BC in Susa, a city about 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf, located in modern day Iran. It is winter and in these cooler months King Darius and the queen reside in the citadel before the summer heat forces them to return to Babylon. Just outside the citadel you meet Nehemiah, a Jew born in exile, a member of the king’s court who has just received a report from Jerusalem. It has been 93 years since Zerubbabel and the first wave of exiles returned to the Promised Land (Ezra 1:1) and only 13 years since Ezra and the second wave of exiles returned (Ezra 7:1). Through all these years and the reigns of multiple kings, God has remained faithful to his promises, and his gracious hand has always been on his people.

Read Nehemiah 1:1–2:10.

4. Why is Nehemiah residing in the citadel of Susa (v. 1), “the winter resort of the Persian kings”³? (Neh. 1:11c)

5. What report does Nehemiah's brother bring to him from Jerusalem? (Neh. 1:2-3)

6. How does Nehemiah respond to the report?
Nehemiah 1:4-6a

Nehemiah 1:6b-7

Nehemiah 1:8-10 (📖* Lev. 26)

Nehemiah 1:11

7. As Nehemiah turns to the LORD in his distress, what aspects of God's character does he rely upon?
(Neh. 1:5-11)

8. Think about a time when you received bad news. Was your response anything like Nehemiah's? Why or why not?

9. "Nehemiah held a responsible position at the Persian court, as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. In this he was more than merely a domestic servant, as is shown by his access to the king."⁴
 - a. It has been four months since Nehemiah received the news from Jerusalem. What is he no longer able to keep hidden from the king? (Neh. 2:1-3)

 - b. How does Nehemiah respond to the king's inquiry? (Neh. 2:2-5)

10. In spite of his fear (2:2), Nehemiah makes a bold request of the king (2:5, 7-10). Why do you think he is able to overcome his fear?

11. Recognizing that God's gracious hand is upon him (Neh. 2:8b), Nehemiah leaves his prestigious position and returns to Jerusalem. How is God answering his concerns and prayers thus far? (Neh. 2:6-9)

12. The book of Nehemiah opens with him recalling and relying on God's care and concern for the welfare of his people. How does this week's passage end? (Neh. 2:10)
13. While we don't face the same fears and concerns that Nehemiah did, we will have situations in our lives that tempt us to feel discouraged and afraid. What can you learn from Nehemiah and other believers about how to face these situations with faith? You may want to jot down some thoughts from these passages to help you formulate an answer.
- 2 Chron. 20:12b

Isaiah 41:10

Matthew 10:29-31

2 Corinthians 1:8-10

Hebrews 13:5-6

1 Peter 5:6-11

Food for thought:

You might find it challenging to think about how a book like Nehemiah points to us to Jesus. And yet consider this: what must it have been like for Jesus to know that, not the city walls, but the very people he had created, the religious community, and society as a whole were in ruins and in need of restoration? His heart must have been broken even more than Nehemiah's. And though the armies of hell were arrayed against him, Jesus came in the power and authority of the Father, to save the world (Jn. 3:17). And in the end, he will create a city for his people where enemies and corruption and death itself are banished forever. It is truly the greatest story ever told. We are participants in this story of restoration as we follow Jesus, for as Isaiah says, *"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings"* (Is. 58:12).

As we study Nehemiah this semester, look for hints of this greater restoration Jesus will accomplish.

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

📖* For further study

¹ David Alexander, *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible* (Berkhamsted, Herts: Lion Publishing, 1973), 307-308.

² James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: an Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 16.

³ Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 78.

⁴ A Survey of Israel's History, Leon Wood, p. 339. Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 339.