

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

Chapters 7 and 8 represent a shift in the book of Nehemiah. The wall and the gates have been rebuilt, but Nehemiah's work is not done: "Nehemiah had indeed come to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall... but beyond that objective he had the far more significant objective of rebuilding the nation."¹

Read Nehemiah 7.

1. Nehemiah appoints Hanani and Hananiah to oversee Jerusalem. What do we know about these men? (1:2-3; 7:2)

2. Although the walls and gates are now up, Nehemiah is still taking precautions against Israel's enemies, posting gatekeepers (men who ordinarily guarded the gates of the temple²), singers, and Levites at the gates of the city. What other precautionary measures does Nehemiah take? (7:3)

Why do you think Nehemiah specifies that those guarding the city be "residents of Jerusalem" (7:3)?

3. The construction of the new temple and the rebuilding of the city walls and gates are tremendous accomplishments.
 - a. However, what do we learn in verse 4 about the condition of Jerusalem?

 - b. Why is this true of Jerusalem? (7:73; Ezra 2:70)

 - c. Why does Nehemiah begin to take stock of returned exiles? (7:5a)

 - d. What project will this taking stock help him tackle? (7:4; 11:1-2)

4. Why do you think it is so important for the Israelites in Nehemiah’s day to maintain these genealogical records?

Look ahead at Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38. Why else are these records so important?

Read Nehemiah 8.

The completed wall will be dedicated in chapter 12, but before the people and their leaders celebrate the dedication, there are other matters for them to attend to.

5. “The strict keeping of the great Jerusalem feasts was expected of men only”⁴—but what aspect of the assembly in chapter 8 is stressed in verses 2, 3, and 5?

Why is it so important for everyone to be present on this occasion? (Consider Deut. 4:5-9; 6:4-9; 31:9-13; * Hosea 4:6a)

6. Besides reading the Law, what extra measure do the leaders of Israel take to ensure that all the people truly understand it? (8:7–8)

7. How do the people respond to the reading of the Law?

8:3

8:5

8:6

8:9

8:12

The list of people we see here in Nehemiah 7 is essentially the same list we saw in Ezra 2—that is, the list of the first group of exiles who arrived back in the Promised Land over 90 years before Nehemiah’s own arrival. There are several possible reasons for the slight differences between the two lists: “Since Nehemiah was reading from a copy of an older list... , the list may have been updated and corrected to allow for a number of births and deaths that occurred shortly after the exiles returned, and perhaps in some cases people were counted or grouped differently or in different categories. Either or both lists may also have been corrected and supplemented by a number of relatives who had been delayed on the journey by illness or for other reasons, and were added later. Some of the differences may also be due to copying errors.”³

“The Book of the Law of Moses” (8:1)

This phrase may refer to one of a few things: “(1) the laws of Exodus and Leviticus, (2) the laws of Deuteronomy, (3) the Pentateuch”⁵ (that is, the first five books of the Old Testament—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

8. What do you think caused the people to weep at the reading of the Law?
9. Why do you think Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites urged the people to celebrate rather than mourn?
10. In 8:14–15 the people hear about the Festival of Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths (Sukkot) which was held in the seventh month. Read about this feast in Leviticus 23:33–36, 39–43.
Use this chart to list what the people are commanded to do during the eight days of the festival.

Day 1	Days 1-7	Day 8

11. What else do the Israelites of Nehemiah’s time do as part of celebrating the feast? (8:18a;  Deut. 31:10–13)
12. The Festival of Tabernacles is “a joyous agricultural festival that celebrated the completion of the harvest,”⁶ but that is not its only significance. What does the feast commemorate? (Lev. 23:43)
13. Why do you think the Israelites of Nehemiah’s time celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles with such joy and enthusiasm?

Verse 17 tells us that “From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated [the feast] like this.” Commentator Edwin Yamauchi points out that this verse “hardly means that no celebration of the Feast of Booths had taken place since then, as such celebrations are mentioned after the dedication of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:65; 2 Chron. 7:9) and after the return of the exiles (Ezra 3:4).”⁷ However, “it had apparently not been celebrated in this way (with such overwhelming joy, or in such unsettled conditions, or with all the people participating).”⁸ Yamauchi compares the joy in this celebration to the people’s joy “at the renewal of the Passover under Hezekiah (2 Chron 30:26) and at the revival under Josiah (2 Kings 23:22; 2 Chron 35:18).”⁹

14. How did you feel when you read about the Israelites' response to the reading of the law—standing to listen “for about five hours” (Yamauchi 723), worshipping, weeping, and rejoicing?

Consider your relationship with the Word of God. Not every encounter with God's Word is this dramatic, but ask God to use his Word—including our study of Nehemiah—to develop in you a reverent spirit, a worshipful heart, conviction of sin, and joy in his presence.

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 James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 89.

² Edwin Yamauchi, “Ezra, Nehemiah” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 Kings–Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 716.

³ *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 835, note on 7:6-73.

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, 836, note on 8:2.

⁵ *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 703, note on 8:1.

⁶ Yamauchi, 727.

⁷ Yamauchi, 728.

⁸ *ESV Study Bible*, 837–38, note on 8:17.

⁹ Yamauchi, 728.