



EZRA & NEHEMIAH

NOVEMBER 2020

Read on your own or with others,
which ever you prefer.

This leaflet is just a brief overview of the 'big picture' of this book. If you have been reading the Bible for some time you will be aware there is much more to them than you'll find here.

If you are new to reading the Bible don't worry too much if there are details you do not quite get at the moment - focus on the 'big picture'.

INTRODUCTION

Ezra and Nehemiah sit at the end of the Old Testament timeline. Years before, Nebuchadnezzar had attacked Judah. He took many people away from their homes into exile and ended up destroying Jerusalem. The future of God's people must have looked grim and it would have seemed like God's promises and plans lay in tatters.

Yet, that wasn't the end. God had promised the desolation of Jerusalem would last for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12, Daniel 9:2), then he would do something.

The book of Ezra and Nehemiah tell us what happened as God kept that promise. They give an account of the return from exile and re-establishing the nation.

EZRA

In 539 BC, the city of Babylon was captured by the Medes & Persians (see Daniel 5). The beginning of Ezra takes place just a few months afterwards in the first year of the reign of King Cyrus.

THE FIRST EXILES RETURN: EZRA 1-6

Chapters 1-6 give us an account of the first group of exiles to return to Jerusalem. There are some important points to note:

- It is God who instigates the return. Remarkably, King Cyrus is moved to send Jews back to Jerusalem to build the temple. The king even gives them the materials they'll need. Why does he do this? See Ezra 1:1.
- The first job for the returning exiles was to build the temple. There is a lesson here. The Jews had found themselves in exile because they had turned away from God. Now, as they return, they recognised the most important aspect of life was to have God at the centre.
- If we serve God, we will face opposition. Not everyone wanted the temple rebuilt and the returning exiles faced plenty of opposition. By the end of chapter 5 the work on the temple has ceased. It is not until several years later that it was restarted, and the building completed.

EZRA COME TO JERUSALEM: EZRA 7-10

There is a gap of about 50-60 years between the end of chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7. Here, Ezra, who is a priest, and another group of returning exiles arrive in Jerusalem.

When Ezra arrives, he discovers that the people are not following God as they should. Specifically, they are intermarrying with people from other nations. Why was that wrong? These were people who didn't believe in God and they would cause the Jews to go astray and turn away from God. As Ezra challenges the people, God brings about a change in their hearts and they repent of their sin.

NEHEMIAH

About 14 years after Ezra gets to Jerusalem, Nehemiah arrives.

A BUILDING PROJECT: NEHEMIAH 1-7

Nehemiah's return is clearly the work of God. Nehemiah is moved by the state of Jerusalem and prays for the opportunity to go and do something about it. God opens the door for a conversation with the king that leads to Nehemiah travelling to Jerusalem.

As with the first group to return, Nehemiah comes with a plan for a building project. It's time to build the walls of Jerusalem. As with the first builders, there is dangerous opposition, but in God's goodness the work is completed.

LISTENING AND CONFESSING NEHEMIAH 8-13

At the heart of these chapters is a remarkable period where the people gathered day after day to hear the book of the law, probably the first 5 books of the Old Testament, being read. This went on for 23 days and culminated in a day of repentance and confession.

The book ends with the people re-established as God's people in the land. Yet, we haven't yet reached the fulfilment of the amazing pictures of God's kingdom that the prophets spoke of before and during the exile.

When would that happen? We have to wait for another man to come to Jerusalem, face opposition and build the New Jerusalem.

ASKING THE QUESTIONS THE BIBLE WANTS YOU TO ASK

What does this book teach you about Jesus? (Luke 24:45-47)

What does this book teach you about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you encouraged? (2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you corrected? (Romans 15:4)

What difference do the truths of this book make in your life (Matthew 7:24-27)