

# EZRA-NEHEMIAH



## Building for God's Kingdom When It Seems Futile

# PROSPECTUS

Israel and Judah had rebelled against the Lord, so he exiled them to slavery in Babylon. But the prophets had promised that one day their slavery among the nations would end. God would cause a new exodus and gather his people from the nations to rebuild Jerusalem. God would give his people new hearts and restore Israel under the Davidic king God had always promised.

The time had now come for God to fulfill his promises. Sort of. The exodus God accomplished at Egypt was a monumental event that sent tremors throughout the ancient world. But the LORD promised that one day he would accomplish a new exodus that would be even more grand than the first. God would set free and unite scattered slaves to rebuild a city on their own land. *The book of Ezra-Nehemiah was crafted to show how God stirred up many people's hearts to bring about the first installment of this new exodus. But troubles abounded and sin still lurked nearby.*

Many clues throughout Ezra-Nehemiah show us that this is **not** the final installment of the new age God had planned for his people. It was only the first step. We find ourselves in a similar situation to these people. God has accomplished the next installment of this exodus in releasing us from our bondage to sin. And yet, like these redeemed Israelites, we are still slaves needing a final exodus, a final temple, a final transformation, and a final city. *The first installment of this exodus in Ezra-Nehemiah is meant to give us hope that God will overcome all odds and use many people to build his new temple in the New Jerusalem. This hope is meant to motivate God's people to unparalleled holiness and to work harder than ever before at rebuilding God's temple and God's city - even when it all seems futile.*

In Ezra-Nehemiah, God's people let persecutions instill fear in their hearts and let the unholiness around them influence and defile them. As we labor towards the time when God will accomplish the final installment of his plan, it is easy to let persecutions and unholiness cause the same in us. We can tend to fear people, become distracted, or accept unholiness. We will let the intense zeal of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah show us the holiness God desires and what it means to put the Lord's work first. But the fact that their work was anticlimactic is meant to build our hope in God's Spirit to change our hearts and in God's Messiah to lead us into the new age - something Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah couldn't do.

\*Some of these dates are contestable. My chief concern in this chart is *sequence* of events and *relationships* between biblical passages.

Date*	Passage	Empire	Foreign King	Events	
586	2 Kings 25 Jeremiah 52 [2 Chr 36:11-21] Daniel 1-8	Babylon	Nebuchad- nezzar Belshazzar	Destruction of Jerusalem; ongoing ministry of <b>Ezekiel</b> <b>Daniel</b>	
539	Ezra 1:1-4 2 Chr. 36:22-23 [Ezra 6:3-5]	← P →	Cyrus	Cyrus' edict	
c. 538-535	Ezra 1-2 [Neh 7:6-8:1]			Return under <b>Zerubbabel</b> & <b>Jeshua</b>	
	Ezra 3:1-7			Altar built, sacrifices begun	
	Ezra 3:8 – 4:23			Temple foundations laid, then temple rebuilding stopped	
521	[Daniel 9 – 12] Ezra 6:3-12	E	Darius 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr	[Daniel's visions] Darius' decree <b>Haggai &amp; Zechariah</b> prophecy, Temple construction resumed	
520	Haggai Zechariah 1-6 Ezra 5:1 6:13-14a		4 <sup>th</sup> yr	Zechariah's Further Prophecies	
518	Zechariah 7-14	R	Darius 6 <sup>th</sup> yr	Temple completed & dedicated	
516	Ezra 6:14b-22	I	Xerxes (Ahasuerus)	<b>Esther</b> marries Xerxes	
c. 483-73	Esther		A	Artaxer- xes 7 <sup>th</sup> yr	<b>Ezra</b> arrives, more returnees, Ezra's reforms
458	Ezra 7-10			Artaxer- xes 20 <sup>th</sup> yr	<b>Nehemiah</b> returns to Jerusalem, rebuilds wall
444	Nehemiah	→		<b>Malachi</b> Corruption of Temple; covenant unfaithfulness	
420	Malachi			<b>Chronicles</b> written: at least 5 generations beyond <b>Zerubbabel</b>	
?	1 Chronicles 3:17-24				

Timeline of Captivity

# EZRA-NEHEMIAH: Literary Design & Main Themes

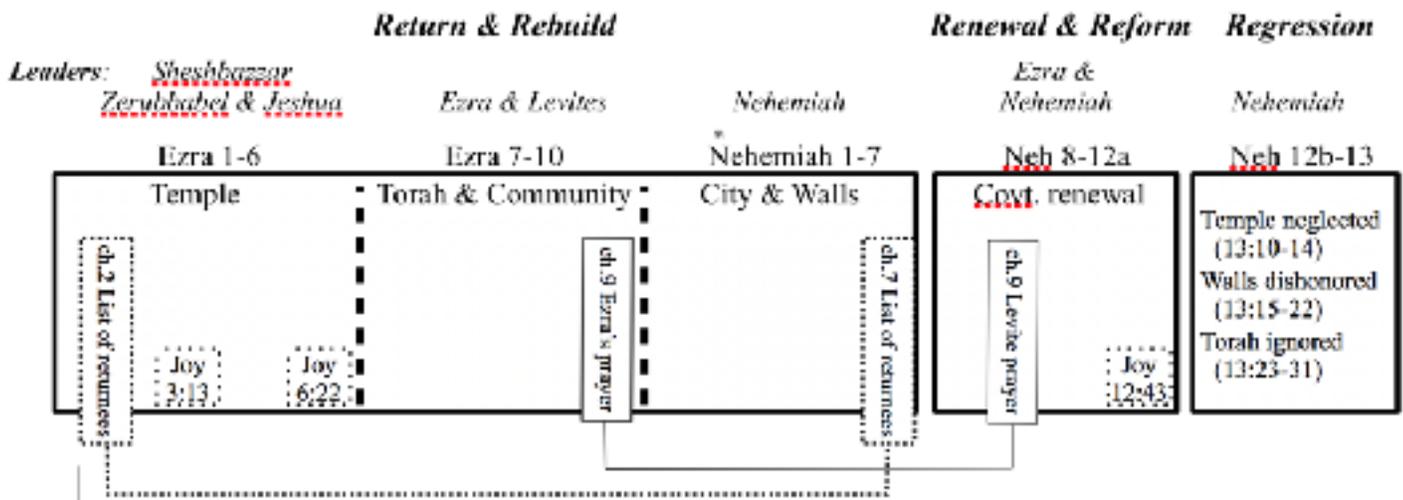
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## Macro-Design in Ezra-Nehemiah

Ezra 1-Nehemiah 7: *Three movements of Return and Rebuilding*

- Ezra 1-6 Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Jeshua lead the **return** and rebuilding of the temple
- Ezra 7-10 Ezra leads a **return** and restoration of Torah and temple
- Neh 1-7 Nehemiah leads a **return** and rebuilding of the city walls

- Nehemiah 8-12a Covenant Renewal and Recommitment
- Nehemiah 12b-13 Regression into Covenant Failure



## General Chronology of the Exile and Post-Exile Periods

## Persian Kings

- 605 Nebuchadnezzar invades Jerusalem for the 1st time -
- 597 Nebuchadnezzar invades 2nd wave of exiles to Babylon
- 587-86 Nebuchadnezzar invades Jerusalem for the 2nd time
- 539 Cyrus overtakes Babylon

Cambyes I 585-559  
Cyrus II 559-529

- Edict of Cyrus that Judean can return from exile
- 538 Sheshbazzar leads 1st wave of returned exiles
- 530s Zerubbabel & Jeshua lead 2nd wave of returned exiles
- 530s Altar & Temple foundations rebuilt
- 520 Haggai and Zechariah support Zerubbabel and Jeshua
- 515 Temple rebuilding finished
- 458 Ezra sent to Jerusalem
- 446 Nehemiah sent to Jerusalem
- 446-433 Nehemiah's term as governor of Judah

Cambyes II 530-522  
Darius 522-486

Xerxes (= Ahasuerus) 486-465  
Artaxerxes 464-424

Darius II 425-405

## **EZRA 1-2 (538-535 BC)**

1. Read **Isaiah 44:24-45:7**. What does God say of Jerusalem and of Cyrus?
2. Read **Jeremiah 25:11-12; 27:19-22**. What does Jeremiah prophesy of in these texts?
3. Read **Ezra 1:1-4**. Describe Cyrus' decree and the author's editorial on it.
4. Read **Ezra 1:5-11**. How did Judah, etc. and the people near them respond to the decree?
5. What names and numbers are listed in **Ezra 2:1-58**? Why list these?
6. Read **Ezra 2:59-63**. What does this paragraph teach you about the returning remnant?

## **EZRA 1-2 (538-535 BC)**

7. Consider a few of the prophecies that speak about God's rescue of Israel from captivity. Note the imagery that reminds of the original exodus from Egypt. Summarize each text.

**Jeremiah 16:14-15**

**Isaiah 43:14-21**

**Isaiah 48:20-21**

**Isaiah 49:24-26**

**Isaiah 51:9-11**

**Isaiah 52:11-12**

8. Compare and contrast what happens in Ezra 1-2 with the original exodus from Egypt.

9. Why would God work like this and why tell this event in this way?

10. Describe parallels between this event and our experience with Jesus today.

## **EZRA 3-4** (538-535, 450s? BC)

1. Consider the beginning in **Ezra 3:1-11** alongside the beginnings of the first temple in **1 Chronicles 21:24-22:4**, **2 Chronicles 3:1-2**, **5:11-14**. What similarities/dissimilarities do you see? What significance do these similarities/dissimilarities have?
2. Notice **Ezra 3:3** in comparison with everything the remnant does in chapter 3. What do you think of their response to their circumstances? What can we learn from this?
3. How does **Ezra 3:11-13** strike you? Why is there such a contrast of emotion?
4. Explain who these “enemies” from **Ezra 4**. Consider **2 Kings 17:22-34** to help.
5. Consider what happens in **Ezra 4** alongside the prophecy in **Zechariah 6:12-15**. Is this the restoration and rebuilding Israel was looking for?
6. The remnants definitely needed all the help they could get to finish this project. Should they have rejected this help? Explain. What modern significance does this have to us?
7. Do you think the remnant expected this kind of opposition in **Ezra 4**? What can we learn from this as we build for God’s kingdom? Consider **John 16:33** and **Acts 14:22**.

## **EZRA 5-6 (520-516 BC)**

1. How did the Jews respond to the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah? What do you learn from this?
2. How did God respond to the work of the Jews? What do you learn from this?
3. What stands out to you and what do you learn from Jews' response to this opposition?
4. What stands out to you and what do you learn from God's work in Darius' decree?
5. Compare and contrast **2 Chronicles 7:1-6** with **Ezra 6:13-18**. What stands out to you?
6. What stands out to you as interesting from the celebration of the Passover in **Ezra 6:19-22**? Consider the original significance of the Passover (Exodus 12:24-27) along with potential new significance (Jeremiah 16:14-15). Consider also **Zechariah 8:18-23**.
7. Considering the fact that this temple will later be come corrupted and eventually destroyed, did God command them to do this work for his kingdom in vain? Explain your answer and its relevance to us today. Consider also **1 Corinthians 15:58**.

## EZRA 7-8 (458 BC)

*Isaiah 11:11–12:2 (ESV), “11:11 In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. 12 He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. 13 The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. 14 But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. 15 And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. 16 And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt. 12:1 You will say in that day: ‘I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. 2 Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.’”*

1. What stands out to you as significant from Ezra’s identity, focus, and trip in **7:1-11**?

2. Briefly skim **Deuteronomy 29:16-30:10**. Ezra would have been familiar with this passage. What messages in this passage would have motivated Ezra?

3. What decrees are made by Artaxerxes in **7:12-26**?

4. Notice **7:6, 9-10, 27-28**. How/why did all this happen? What do you learn from this?

## EZRA 7-8 (458 BC)

5. Who is counted separately in **8:2**? How many families are listed in **8:3-14**? What significances could this separate listing and family grouping represent?

**6a.** Who does Ezra find to be lacking in **8:15-20**?

**6b.** How did Ezra seek to remedy this?

**6c.** Note the time markers in **7:9; 8:15, 31**. How fast did these 260 extra people leave?

**6d.** What do you learn about God from this paragraph? About commitment to his kingdom?

7. Their journey was long (~800-900 miles) and dangerous. How did they handle the great dangers in **8:21-30**? How does their approach strike you today? When could this have significance for you/us?

8. What was the result of the trip in **8:31-36**?

“All this looks great. But if we back up from it, there are maybe 3,000 people who have returned with Ezra in chapter 8. And back in Ezra 1 there were about 49,000 people who returned to the land. Let’s round up and let’s say it’s 55,000 people. That’s it! That’s the kingdom of God on earth? But here this chapter is in the Bible, and here we are talking about it 2,500 years later. This chapter is a great encouragement to us. We look at our lives, and we say, rightly, “I am nothing in the eyes of the world. I have no power. I have no status. I have no influence.” And Ezra 8 says to us that God is advancing His kingdom in the world with nobodies who are nothing, and there aren’t very many of them, either. What a God! This God uses people like us. This is a God to know. This is a God whose hand is for good on all who seek Him.” (Hamilton, 79)

## **EZRA 9-10 (458 BC)**

1. What problem do the officials bring before Ezra in **9:1-2**? (cf. Deuteronomy 7:1-6ff)
2. What strikes you as important about the response and prayer of Ezra in **9:3-15**?
3. What do Shecaniah, Ezra, and the people who tremble at God's command propose and do to handle the situation in **10:1-8**?
4. How did Israel respond to the proclamation? What was the result? (**10:9-17**)
5. Why would the Holy Spirit see fit to include **10:18-44**? What strikes you as you read this?
6. Consider **Deuteronomy 7:1-6ff** and the sheer gravity of the response here. Why would they react in this way? How does their response strike you? Explain your answer. How should you handle sin revealed to you? Do you handle your own sin in this way?

## NEHEMIAH 1-2 (446 BC)

“When it looks like the kingdom of the world will overcome the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, on what shall we depend? On whom shall we call in the dire hour of need?” (Hamilton, 98)

**1. Consider Nehemiah 1.** How does Nehemiah react and respond to the report of Jerusalem?

**2.** Pay attention to Nehemiah’s words. Get into his head/heart. Why does he react like this?

**3.** Note this statement. “Today, God’s name is no longer at stake in a city with walls and gates. God’s name is now at stake in the lives of His people, who are the new temple of the Holy Spirit.” (Hamilton, 107) Consider your life, family, and church. Give examples of when you should have similar reactions to Nehemiah.

**4.** Do you care about God’s name like Nehemiah? How can we become people who care?

## NEHEMIAH 1-2 (446 BC)

**5. Consider Nehemiah 2.** How all does Nehemiah handle the need in Jerusalem and the resistance against him?

**6.** Consider the text in **Nehemiah 2**. Why were Nehemiah's efforts initially successful?

**7.** Considering **Nehemiah 1-2**, give examples of how Nehemiah could have reacted and handled this report regarding Jerusalem that would have been *disappointing* to read about.

**8.** Consider for yourself in private - how do you react and respond when it looks like the kingdoms of the world will overcome the kingdom of God? Or do you even notice seeming inconsistencies with God's promises and reality?

## NEHEMIAH 3-4 (446 BC)

1. Consider the contents of **Nehemiah 3**. What is the purpose of preserving this detailed record for people to reference and read? What does it teach us?

2. Consider the contrast in **Nehemiah 3:5**. Speculate - what might these Tekoite nobles have said to excuse themselves from service?

3. Read **Nehemiah 4**. List the various forms of opposition and obstacles the builders of the wall faced. What kinds of opposition do we face in working for God's kingdom today?

4. Considering **Nehemiah 4**, how all did Nehemiah and the builders of the wall respond to these obstacles? How were their efforts successful? What principles can we gain from this as we handle opposition today?

5. What do you think of Nehemiah's prayer in **Nehemiah 4:4-5**? Is it appropriate? Explain.

# NEHEMIAH 5 (446-433 BC)

**1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-13.** There are multiple complaints/injustices here. What are they?  
*(remember sources of economic difficulty here: wall-rebuilding in Jerusalem and famine)*

**2. Consider Deuteronomy 23:19-20; 24:10-13, 17-18; Proverbs 22:7.** According to these texts/  
Nehemiah's words, what was so wrong with what the nobles and officials were doing?

**3.** This example teaches us how to love our neighbors. As we labor for God's kingdom today, we may uncover injustices among us. What principles can we glean from what happens here? How could we today fall prey to the same sins? What principles guide your behavior/dealings: capitalism, legality, or God's laws?

**4. Read Nehemiah 5:14-19.** How did former governors behave in their dealings with the people? Nehemiah? Why? In what ways could we apply Nehemiah's example today?

# NEHEMIAH 6-7 (446-433 BC)

**Psalms 2:1–4** (ESV), “*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.*”

**1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-7:4.** What schemes did Jerusalem’s enemies carry out to attempt to stop the work on the walls?

**2.** Carefully consider these various forms of resistance. In what ways could we face similar resistance as we labor for God’s kingdom today?

**3.** How all did Nehemiah handle these schemes? Apply to our situations today.

**4.** How did the enemies and nations react when they heard the walls had been completed? Why? What kind of attitude did the enemies and nations have before this? What can we learn from this as we labor for God’s kingdom today?

# NEHEMIAH 6-7 (446-433 BC)

## NOTE ON NEHEMIAH 6:17-7:3

**Nehemiah 6:17-7:3** shows the work for God's "New Jerusalem" is not complete. The structure is there. The Levites, singers, and gatekeepers are there. But the people in the city are few. Few are as faithful as Nehemiah, Hanani, and Hananiah. Furthermore, many in Judah actually spoke highly of Tobiah. Why? Intermarriage was still a problem. **Ezra 10:15** says Meshullam resisted the original separation from foreign women. Now we find that he had given his daughter to the son of Tobiah, Jehohanan. Tobiah ("Yahweh is good") and Jehohanan ("Yahweh has been gracious") were God-fearers in name, but their evil influence was insidious. Meshullam worked on the wall (3:4), but he ignored the purpose of the wall when he gave his daughter to these wolves in sheep's clothing. The application is apparent. We can build structures, appoint leaders, name our kids by God's name, and do work for the Lord, but it will all be in vain if we allow the influence of posers to creep in. We must test the spirits. We must guard our hearts and our people from the insidious influence of people who act like they are of us, but are not. *Jot down any other notes you have on this section below.*

## NOTE ON NEHEMIAH 7:1-73

**Nehemiah 7:5-73** shows Nehemiah pulling out the original list of returnees from Ezra 2. This was apart of what God had put in Nehemiah's heart: to enroll all the people by genealogy. Why? What's the purpose of recounting this genealogy and continuing it in Nehemiah's day? **Nehemiah 7:61-65** gives us a hint. The people had been scattered among the nations, but God was now reconstituting a new Israel from his previous people. It was essential that these people really be the people of God - not some Tobiah or Jehohanan who claimed the name of Yahweh, but didn't really love Yahweh or his people. God puts this in Nehemiah's heart so they can validate that all who claim to be of Israel really are of Israel. Today, our inclusion into God's people is not by decent but by faith. Nevertheless, we must not be any less vigilant to ensure all who claim to be of the faith really are. This is a protection for us, since a little leaven can leaven the whole lump. Wise as serpents, harmless as doves. *Jot down any other notes you have on this section below.*

## NEHEMIAH 8-10 (446-433 BC)

**Deuteronomy 31:10–13** (ESV), *“And Moses commanded them, ‘At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.’”*

**1. Read Nehemiah 8:1-12.** Paul told Timothy to *“be devoted to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”* What details stand out to you as important or practically significant from this public reading of Scripture? (Consider also Deuteronomy 31:10-13 above)

**2.** What explanations did Nehemiah, etc. give when they told the people to stop weeping? (Note Leviticus 23:23-25 — this was probably the first day of the seventh month) Why did the people end up rejoicing? What do you learn from this?

**3. Read Nehemiah 8:12-18.** Israel had celebrated the Feast of Booths many times before, so what reformation comes about here? How did it come about? What do you learn from this account?

## NEHEMIAH 8-10 (446-433 BC)

**Understanding the timing of the people's repentance in Nehemiah 8-10.** Nehemiah 8:9-10 tells us that the people wept as they heard the words of the law read. But the people were told to stop weeping - this was a day for rejoicing. So why did they wait until the 24th day of the month to start dealing with the sins uncovered in the reading of the law? Leviticus 23:24-36 tells of how the 7th month was filled with a number of significant days and festivals that would not finish until the end of the 23rd day of the 7th month. When Nehemiah 9:1 says the people of Israel assembled on the 24th day to confess their sins, they were doing this at their first available opportunity.

**4. Read Nehemiah 9.** Summarize the focus and theme of this prayer. What is the purpose of a prayer like this? When could prayers like this be helpful for our relationship with God?

**5. Read Nehemiah 10:28-39.** What all did the people re-devote themselves to doing/not doing in this text? Pay careful attention here - this will become important in Nehemiah 13.

**STILL SLAVES: an incomplete, ongoing new exodus.** The scattered people of Israel had been looking forward to a day when God would free his people from captivity in the east just as he had freed them from slavery to Egypt in the past. These days of God's new exodus for Israel seem to be taking place throughout Ezra-Nehemiah. But in the prayers of Ezra 9:8-9 and Nehemiah 9:36-37 the people state **four times** that they are still slaves. Israel has not been fully restored. The prophecies sounded like Israel's restoration would happen in a single day, but here they were - still slaves - 100 years after leaving Babylon. Despite this seeming disparity between God's promises and reality, the people didn't stop hoping in and praying for the restoration God promised. We see so many encouraging images in the New Testament: Satan thrown from heaven, God raising Jesus from death, Jesus reigning as king from heaven, the Holy Spirit residing in us, Satan bound for a thousand years, and much more. Yet, at times we feel like we are still slaves to sin. Satan still tempts, death still stings, and people still reject God's kingship. Futility abounds today as it did in Israel in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. However, we, like the returned remnant, can still pray to God and rehearse his past salvation as we hope in him to repeat and complete his past works in the final day when Christ comes and God is all in all.

# NEHEMIAH 11-13 (446-433+ BC)

**Note on Nehemiah 11-12.** The city has been rebuilt and the remnant has committed to be obedient to the Law, it is time to repopulate Jerusalem — the city where God chose to put his name. Nehemiah 11-12 records many of the people who moved into Jerusalem, the dedication of the wall, and the restoration of many practices in the temple - including tithing and worship. The goal: restore Jerusalem - the walls, the temple, the law, the people, and the worship - to what it was like when David and Solomon reigned. The result was not perfect (cf. Nehemiah 13), but the pursuit to restore God's city to its ideal is certainly noble.

**1. Read Nehemiah 13.** Record was discovered to be wrong and how Nehemiah handled each situation. *Compare with what the people vowed to do/not do in **Nehemiah 10:28-39**.*

<b>Nehemiah 13:1-3</b>
<b>Nehemiah 13:4-9</b>
<b>Nehemiah 13:10-14</b>
<b>Nehemiah 13:15-22</b> (cf. Jeremiah 17:19-27)
<b>Nehemiah 13:23-31</b>

**2. Meditate on chapter 13 as the conclusion to Ezra-Nehemiah.** Why would God end Ezra-Nehemiah in this manner? Considering this conclusion, why was this book God-breathed, written, and preserved for us at all? (see next page for some final thoughts)

# FINAL THOUGHTS

Nehemiah 13 ends in a somewhat unexpected and discouraging note. Once the walls, temple, law, people, and worship seemed to be restored, the people undid a lot of it. The walls were disregarded, the temple was inhabited by a foreign enemy, and the law was ignored. All the vows the people made in Nehemiah 10 were broken. Clearly, the message of this book is not “with good leadership, God’s people can do anything.” Much of what the remnant’s leaders worked for continually fell apart. So why did the Holy Spirit breath out this book and preserve it for us?

**1. Ezra-Nehemiah builds our messianic hopes.** Prophets spoke of how the restoration and transformation of Israel would happen through a Davidic king and the Holy Spirit. No matter how hard-working Ezra, Nehemiah, and others were, they can’t circumcise people’s hearts and cause obedience like the Spirit can. They can’t restore justice to God’s city like the Messiah can. But God still worked through the people in Ezra and Nehemiah’s days and gave them temporary tastes of what the future restoration and return back to God would look like. The faithlessness that Nehemiah has to correct at the end of this book reminds us that the restoration hasn’t been completed yet. It teaches us to rely on God’s king and Spirit to restore what humans alone cannot restore. God’s kingdom has been inaugurated on earth through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but the time for restoring all things will not come until Jesus comes from heaven. Nehemiah couldn’t restore Israel and we cannot restore God’s kingdom, but we can hope in the king.

**2. Ezra-Nehemiah motivates us to keep laboring toward the promises of God when it seems futile.** God made promises. God is sovereign. God was certainly at work, but his promises seemed to be failing. That didn’t cause Ezra, Nehemiah, or others to give up. They worked tirelessly towards the fulfillment of the promises of God. And God responded by working through them for the betterment of God’s people and city. They still hoped in the ideal God promised and labored toward it. God makes the same grand promises to us and he has certainly begun fulfilling those promises and blessed us in tremendous ways. Yet, we still long for the day when he defeats Satan, lives among us, ends injustice, and conquers death. We are still longing to be fully set free from sin and death. Some days it doesn’t feel like this is the end God is working toward. Some days it seems like the kingdoms of the world will overcome the kingdom of God. The examples in this book can motivate us to keep working while it seems in futile.

**3. Ezra-Nehemiah shows us our labor alongside God is not in vain.** The Jews in Jesus’ day weren’t perfect; yet, with all the foreigners surrounding Jerusalem, it is a wonder that the Jews remained a distinct people until the coming of Jesus. Considering all the turmoil and oppression they experienced, it is also a wonder that there were any messianic hopes left in God’s people when Jesus did come. The work of the people to rebuild a temple and wall that would later be destroyed and their recommitment to a law that would later be completed seems vain, but it wasn’t at all. Their work alongside God helped the Jews remain distinct and hopeful until the day God had set aside to send his Christ. We simply don’t know what God will do with the labor we do for his glory in generations to come. So, keep reading your Bible and doing what it says and hoping in God’s promises. Raise your kids to know the Lord. Fight sin in yourself. Seek to eliminate injustice and lawlessness around you. Tell people about Jesus. Serve. Visit the orphan and widow in their distress. Encourage souls who are faint and brokenhearted. Build buildings that will serve God’s people. And when it all seems to be undone, pray to God for strength, and keep reading, hoping, and laboring alongside the Lord. **Ezra 8:22**, *“The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.”*