

LESSON 12 - Ezra and Nehemiah

LOGOS

A General and Light Survey of the Bible

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(REVISED) TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Lesson 1:	Overview
Lesson 2:	Genesis
Lesson 3:	Exodus
Lesson 4:	Leviticus
Lesson 5:	Numbers
Lesson 6:	Deuteronomy
Lesson 7:	Joshua
Lesson 8:	Judges, Ruth
Lesson 9:	1st & 2nd Samuel
Lesson 10:	1st & 2nd Kings
Lesson 11:	1st & 2nd Chronicles
Lesson 12:	Ezra, Nehemiah
April 24, 2023:	Esther
May 1, 2024:	Job
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May 22, 2024:	Isaiah
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--- SUMMER ---

September 4, 2024:	Ezekiel
September 11, 2024:	Daniel
September 18, 2024:	Hosea, Joel, Amos
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October 2, 2024:	Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah
October 9, 2024:	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
October 16, 2024:	INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT
October 23, 2024:	The Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke)
October 30, 2024:	John
November 6, 2024:	Acts
November 13, 2024:	Romans
November 20, 2024:	1st & 2nd Corinthians
November 27, 2024:	Galatians

--- ADVENT / CHRISTMAS ---

January 8, 2025:	Ephesians
January 15, 2025:	Colossians
January 22, 2025:	1st & 2nd Thessalonians
January 29, 2025:	1st & 2nd Timothy
February 5, 2025:	Titus, Philemon
February 12, 2025:	Hebrews
February 19, 2025:	James
February 26, 2025:	1st & 2nd Peter, Jude
March 5, 2025:	<i>Ash Wednesday</i>
March 12, 2025:	1st, 2nd, 3rd John
March 19, 2025:	Revelation

Lesson 12

EZRA

- Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the return of the “remnant” which returned to Jerusalem.
- Important dates (approximate):
 - 605-586 BC: King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem, including the Temple.
 - Some Jews were left in and around Jerusalem, while some fled to other nations including Egypt.
 - The Babylonians took roughly 50,000 Jewish captives in at least three waves. They were not slaves, but enjoyed a fair amount of freedom so long as they did not leave or rebel.
 - There were changes made to the practice of Jewish religion during the captivity:
 - The synagogue replaced the Temple as a place of worship and remained even after the Temple was rebuilt.
 - Their religious practices were simplified out of necessity.
 - They collected their historical and religious literature.
 - 539-536 BC: King Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon and Cyrus issued a decree releasing any Jews who chose to leave.
 - 536 BC: Led by Zerubbabel, the first wave of about 50,000 people returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.
 - 458 BC: Led by Ezra, a second group of about 7,000 people returned to Jerusalem to reestablish Mosaic religious and civil practices.
 - 444 BC: Nehemiah led an unspecified group of people with a military escort back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls.
- The events of Ezra and Nehemiah are fulfillment of the hopeful prophecies of Jeremiah. *Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.' The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust — there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him and let him be filled with disgrace. For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone. God judges as necessary but He is very gracious.* (Lamentations 22-33)

OUTLINE

- The First Wave and Rebuilding under Zerubbabel (chaps. 1–6)
 - The proclamation of Cyrus.
“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem” (1:2-4).
 - Gathering supplies.
 - *...the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites... prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.*
 - *All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.*
 - *King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem...*
 - The list of people who returned.
The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 200 male and female singers (2:64-65).
 - The rebuilding of the temple (chaps. 3:1–6:15).
 - The altar and foundation rebuilt (chap. 3).
In the seventh month, before starting on the Temple, Joshua (a priest) ... and Zerubbabel... began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses... they built the altar.. and sacrificed burnt offerings on it... Then... they celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles... presented the regular burnt offerings... the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred festivals of the LORD, as well as those brought as freewill offerings... (3:1-6)
 - *In the second month of the second year... Zerubbabel... Joshua... and the rest of the people... began the work... They appointed Levites... to supervise the building... When the builders laid the foundation... the priests... and the Levites... took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel... But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid... (3:8-13)*

- The rebuilding opposed (4:1–6:12)
 - When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD... they came to Zerubbabel... and said, “Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God...” But Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God...”
 - Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah...
 - *They bribed officials to work against them...*
 - *At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation...*
 - *...in the days of Artaxerxes, [they] ...wrote a letter against Jerusalem... they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop...*
 - *14 years later Zerubbabel ...set to work to rebuild the house of God... Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates... asked, “Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?” They wrote a letter to King Darius ... Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild this house of God in Jerusalem... In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree... Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices... Now then, Tattenai... and Shethar-Bozenai and you other officials of that province, stay away from there. Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God... Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates...*
 - The temple completed (6:13–15)
They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. The temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.
*21 years after it was started.
- The dedication of the temple and the celebration of the Passover (6:16–22)
 - The new Temple was dedicated according to the *Book of Moses*.
 - The Passover celebration was reinstated.

- The Second Wave and Reforms under Ezra (chaps. 7–10).
 - *Much of this section is written in first person.
 - About 57 years after the dedication of the Temple, *Ezra*, a direct descendent of *Aaron*... *came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses*...
 - *For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel (7:10).*
 - He recruited Levites for the trip.
 - He came bearing a letter from King Artaxerxes which gave him finances, and resources.
 - Reforms.
 - *A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property... and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.*
 - *Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem... Ezra... said to them, “You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel’s guilt... Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.”*
 - *The whole assembly responded... “You are right! We must do as you say... Let our officials act for the whole assembly... let everyone... who has married a foreign woman come at a set time... “*
 - *Only Jonathan... and Jahzeiah... supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this.*
 - *Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads... On the first day of the tenth month, they sat down to investigate the cases, and by the first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women. (10)*
- The book ends abruptly perhaps because Ezra intended to come back to it later, or because he was simply too busy with his obligations as a reformer.

NEHEMIAH

- Most scholars believe this book was written by Nehemiah.
- Nehemiah led a third wave of returning Jews about 13 years after Ezra.
- Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city.

OUTLINE

- The Rebuilding of the Walls (chaps. 1–6).
 - *The book is written in first person.
 - A group of men *from Judah* told Nehemiah, “*Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire*” (1:3).
 - *For some days* Nehemiah mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven (1:4). He decided to ask King Artaxerxes for permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall.
 - In his duties as *cupbearer to the king* (1:11) Nehemiah was able to speak directly to Artaxerxes, “*If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it*” (2:4-5).
 - Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah letters to secure his safety and the materials needed to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.
 - When Nehemiah informed the people in Jerusalem of his plans they joined him in the work. However, *Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab* mocked and ridiculed the project.
 - Nehemiah organized the workers and delegated rebuilding the seven gates of the city, as well as the wall and towers (3). The gates and towers were completed, and the wall *reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart* (4:6).
 - *But when Sanballat* (some historical documents called him, ‘governor of Samaria’), *Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod* heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it (4:7-8).
 - Nehemiah organized the people to pray and posted guards at night.
 - *Meanwhile, the people in Judah* said, “*The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.*” Also, *our enemies* said, “*Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.*” Then the *Jews who lived near them* came and told us ten times over, “*Wherever you turn, they will attack us.*” Therefore, I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the

wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears, and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives, and your homes.” When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work. (4:10-15)

- *From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows, and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. Then I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” (4:16-20)*
- The people in Jerusalem became very concerned about having enough food and became angry with one another, especially those who seemed to have more resources.
 - Nehemiah’s became angry with those who were lending money because they were charging their own people interest during a very difficult time.
 - He challenged those who were getting wealthy by taking advantage of the others to *“Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.” (5:11)* They took a sacred vow to do as he said.
 - Nehemiah temporarily eliminated the governor’s taxes, worked alongside the people, and fed *a hundred and fifty Jews and officials... as well as, those who came to us from the surrounding nations* at his own table.
- As the project came closer to completion, *Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies* intensified their efforts to stop it and schemed to harm Nehemiah.
 - They made several attempts to lure Nehemiah into an ambush.
 - Sanballat sent Nehemiah a message, *“It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king and have even appointed proph-*

ets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so, come, let us meet together." (6:6-7) Nehemiah did not go.

- *So, the wall was completed... in fifty-two days. (6:15)*
 - *When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. (6:16)*
 - *Once the wall was rebuilt, Nehemiah organized the gatekeepers, the musicians, and the Levites... as well as, defenses to protect the city. (7:1-3)*
- **The Restoration of the People (chaps. 7–13)**
 - Nehemiah listed those who had returned from Babylon in all three waves, as well as some who had come in from Samaria.
 - **The ministry of Ezra. (8-10).**
 - *The people came together and Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Moses... aloud from daybreak till noon... and all the people listened attentively...*
 - *Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve." Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them. (8:9-12)*
 - *When the people heard the instructions regarding the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:37-43) they observed it.*
 - *After the Feast of Tabernacles the people came together in repentance and vowed to keep The Law, as well as, "We will not neglect the house of our God" (10:39)*
 - *The residents of Jerusalem, as well as the priests were listed. (11-12)*
 - *The wall of Jerusalem was dedicated in a huge ceremony (12:27-47).*
 - **Final reforms under Nehemiah (13).**

NOTE: Nehemiah served as governor for 12 years while rebuilding the wall, reestablishing The Law, and organizing the work of the priests and Levites in the temple. After this, he returned to Susa (1:1) and the service of King Artaxerxes as he had agreed (2:6).

During this time, he probably wrote most of the Book of Nehemiah.

- While Nehemiah was away *Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room in the Temple. (13:4-5)*
 - When Nehemiah returned, he *...threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room... gave orders to purify the rooms, and then... put back into them the equipment of the house of God...*
 - Additionally, he *learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and musicians responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields... He rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" (13:8-11)*
 - *All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine, and olive oil into the storerooms. I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zakkur, the son of Mataniah, their assistant, because they were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their fellow Levites. (13:12-13)*
 - Nehemiah confronted the people for neglecting the Sabbath and even locked the gates and posted guards *until the Sabbath was over...*
 - He violently confronted *men of Judah who married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab... and neglected their responsibility to teach their children how to speak the language of Judah... He found one of the high priest's sons who had married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite and drove him away...*
 - He reorganized the *priests and the Levites...*
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- **NEXT WEEK: Read the Book of Esther.**