

AP 50 Ezra-Nehemiah

These two books were initially one book written by a single author. The book(s) recounts the long story of the Jewish people's return to Jerusalem¹, a journey of almost 1000 miles. The events described in this book run from the mid 6th century (538) to the mid 5th century (445) BCE. It reads like it is meant to be a continuation of 2 Chronicles². It makes me wonder if Ezra was the author of Chronicles.

The book follows the lives of 3 waves of returnees, and their leaders, and the opposition they experienced:

1st group of returnees who began to rebuild the temple³ - Chapters 1-6

led by Zerubbabel/Jeshua/Sheshbazzar.

Zerubbabel (seed of Babylon) was of the Davidic Line / Administrator of the building of the Second Temple

Opposition: the people of the land (4:4); Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel (4:7); and Rehum (4:9 Persian Official)

Support: and Cyrus King of Persia; Prophets: Haggai & Zachariah (5:1- next week's focus); and Tattenai, a sympathetic Persian Governor of Judah (5:3).

2nd Group of returnees – Chapters 7-10

led by Ezra – High-priestly family, skilled in the law. Whose purpose was to build a Biblical Community among the returnees. To build a national identity and culture.

Opposition – Foreign influence through marriage

Support: Artaxerxes, King of Persia

3rd group of returnees – Nehemiah 1 – 13

Led by Nehemiah – Steward to the King of Persia / builder of the wall of Jerusalem

Opposition: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem

Support: Artaxerxes

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¹ There were at least three major waves that came back over a period of about 100 years. It was not at all like the return from Egypt that happened in one huge wave. If you are looking for a parallel wilderness experience in this return from exile – you might say the wilderness was the Jerusalem to which they were returning. The promised land had been transformed into a wilderness over the period of a couple hundred years of their exile in Babylon.

² Compare 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 w/ Ezra 1:1

³ The temple work is delayed from chapter 4:21 until 5:3-5, and 6:14. Lawyers and IRS auditors might use chapters 4 & 5 to encourage good record keeping. Notice 7:11

The law is interpreted with elevated strictness in two different OT times. The return from Egypt, and the return from Babylon. Both instances are post-exilic and times in which identity had been lost or was super fragile. Both were times when Israel was hanging on by a thin thread.

Sunday, Dec 4

Ezra 1

For Reflection: Cyrus conquered the Babylonian empire. He was Persian and powerful and had some kind of relationship w/ God.⁴ (consider Isaiah 44/45) *When has God helped you through surprising means?*

Lagniappe: Isaiah 45:13

Monday, Dec 5

Ezra 3/4

For Reflection: Accomplishment and opposition. The kings mentioned in chp 4 include: Cyrus (who sent the first wave back in 538), Darius (522-486), Xerxes (485-465). Ezra 4:5 suggests 45 years of opposition. *How do you react When have you experienced sustained opposition? How did you react to it? What resources does your faith offer anyone during times of opposition?*

Lagniappe: John 15:19-20

Tuesday, Dec 6

Ezra 7

For Reflection: Again, we see the providence of God extended through surprising means: the King of Persia – now Artaxerxes. *Who is your teacher of the Way of Christ? To whom do you teach the Way of Christ? What would you need to do to become a teacher/influencer of others?*

Lagniappe: Hebrews 8:1-8

Wednesday, Dec 7

Nehemiah 1

For Reflection: *What do you care enough about to grieve, fast, and pray? Do you tend to accept what is, or do you tend to change what is? When you want to fix something big, do you dive right in and get after it, or do you confess and seek God's favor?*

Lagniappe: Luke 14:28-30

Thursday, Dec 8

Nehemiah 2

For Reflection: *If you were to consider your spiritual life, like a Jerusalem, what would an inspection reveal? Verses It is exclusionary, but why is it important to vet leadership?*

⁴ Though many cultures share words for god, LORD (*Yahweh*) as we see in verse 2, 3, 5 and 7 is a unique Hebrew name for God.

Lagniappe: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Friday, Dec 9

Nehemiah 3

For Reflection: Building of the wall counterclockwise starting with the Northern wall and continuing to the western, southern, and Eastern walls. *When are walls desirable and when are walls less desirable? What walls do you need to build? What walls need to come down?*

Lagniappe: Ephesians 2:14

Saturday, Nov 20

Nehemiah 4, 6:15 – 7:3

For Reflection: *What difficulties does Nehemiah experience? What is more difficult for you: external threats or internal frustrations? How is God a wall of protection for you, a refuge, and a stronghold?*

Lagniappe: Psalm 18:2