

Ezra-Nehemiah Study

Introduction: These books are considered as two books in English Bibles but are viewed as one in Hebrew Bibles. For our study, we will view them as one, but not as a unified whole. The book of Esther also takes place during this time (483-473 BC). In the Septuagint, Ezra is called Second Esdras. In the Latin Vulgate, Ezra is called First Esdras.

There are three primary people, but their related accounts have different emphases.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Function</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
Zerubbabel	“seed of Babylon”	537-ff BC	Governor	Restore the temple
Ezra	“help”	458-ff BC	Priest/scribe	Restore proper view of marriage
Nehemiah	“comfort of Yah(weh)”	444-ff BC	Governor	Restore city defenses, justice, and compassion

The Ezra portion has two sections in Aramaic (4:9-6:18; 7:12-26). The Hebrew sections contain many Persian, Akkadian, and Aramaic words and expressions.

- Note the emphasis on prayer: Ezra 6:10; 9:5; Neh. 1:11; 2:4; 4:9; 8:6
- Note the names of God: God (178x), Yahweh (57x), and Adonai (4x)
- The prophets Daniel (1:21; 6:28; 10:1), Haggai (1:1), Zechariah (1:1), and Malachi minister during this time.

The following outline of the book(s) focused on the leaders is based on David Dorsey’s outline in *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*.

- 1) **Zerubbabel**—Ezra 1:1-6:22
 - a) Zerubbabel’s return—Ezra 1:1-2:70
 - b) Zerubbabel’s accomplishment—Ezra 3:1-6:22
- 2) **Ezra**—7:1-10:44
 - a) Ezra’s return—Ezra 7:1-8:36
 - b) Ezra’s accomplishment—Ezra 9:1-10:44
- 3) **Nehemiah**—Neh. 1:1-7:3
 - a) Nehemiah’s return—Neh. 1:1-2:20
 - b) Nehemiah’s accomplishment—Neh. 3:1-7:3
- 4) Final reforms and lists—Neh. 7:4-13:31

1) **Zerubbabel**—Ezra 1:1-6:22

- These events take place @ 80 years before Ezra returns to Judah. The temple has been rebuilt for @ 60 years.
- a) Zerubbabel's **return**—Ezra 1:1-2:70
 - i) Cyrus II's (Cyrus the Great) decree (1:1-4) (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23)
 - (1) Cyrus II becomes king of Mesopotamia (Iran) in 539 BC related to the "liberation" of Babylon in October 539 BC.
 - (a) The inscription on Cyrus' tomb reads, "Mortal! I am Cyrus, son of Cambyses, who founded the Persian Empire, and was Lord of Asia. Grudge me not, then, my monument."
 - (2) Jeremiah's prophecy likely refers to 25:11-12; 29:10 and 51:11.
 - (a) From the first captivity to Babylon to the laying of the temple foundation in Ezra 3:8 is 70 years. (605-536 BC)
 - (b) From the last captivity to the completion of the temple is 70 years. (586-516 BC)
 - (c) Even the prophet Daniel understood this. (cf. Dan. 9:1-2)
 - (3) Note God's direct work in the unbeliever's inner person.
 - (a) This fulfills an @ 150-year-old prophecy from Isa. 44:28; 45:1, 13.
 - (i) Cyrus was not a true believer in Yahweh. Cf. Is. 45:4
 - (b) This expression of God's sovereignty is observed elsewhere in 1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16; 36:22; Jer. 51:11; Hag. 1:14.
 - (c) Cf. Prov. 21:1
 - (4) Cyrus's decree is issued in 538 BC.
 - (a) The Cyrus Cylinder (rediscovered in 1879) is consistent with the Biblical text.
 - (5) The phrase "God of heaven/the heavens" was used rarely before the Exile.
 - (a) Law: Gen. 24:3, 7
 - (b) Prophets: Josh. 2:11; Jonah 1:9
 - (c) Writings: 2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2; 5:11-12; 6:9-10; 7:12, 21, 23; Neh. 1:4-5; 2:4, 20; Ps. 136:26; Dan. 2:18-19, 37, 44
 - (6) The Persians allowed captive nations to return to their homelands, unlike the Assyrians and Babylonians. Cyrus also returns all the stolen religious objects to their original temples.
 - (a) According to the Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus hoped that these various gods and goddesses would repay Cyrus by being kind to him.
 - (7) "The God of Israel" indicates Persia's tolerance of various religions.
 - (8) The gifts from their neighbors reminds us of Exod. 3:22; 11:2; 12:35. The neighbors may have been Jews who refused to return, or they may have been Persian Gentiles.

- This is one of the great fulfillments of Bible prophecy. God's Word can be trusted.
- God uses all nations to accomplish His will. He is sovereign. God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick.

- ii) Valuables and gifts for the temple (1:5-11)
- This documents the immediate response that Cyrus' decree triggered. (Loken)
 - This documents how Yahweh fulfills His promises. (cf. Jer. 29:10)
- (1) Note how God stirs the people just as He has stirred Cyrus. (cf. 1:1, 5)
- (a) God did not stir up all the Jews to return.
 - (b) The stirring seems to be limited to three groups of people: regular folks from specific tribes, priests, and Levites. (1:5)
 - (i) The southern tribes were those carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar.
 - (c) This return trip will take four months to complete. (cf. 7:8-9)
- (2) The list of valuables is impressive. (1:6)
- (3) Cyrus is very careful to return exactly what was stolen. (1:7-8)
- (a) Remember the deportations:
 - 605 BC: Dan. 1:2
 - 597 BC: 2 Kings 24:13
 - July 586 BC: 2 Kings 25:14-15
 - (b) Taking religious items/trophies from a temple demonstrated that the god/God was not able/willing to protect them. (cf. 1 Sam. 5:2)
 - (c) Mithredath is Persian official named after Mithras, the Persian sun god.
 - (d) Sheshbazzar appears to be an otherwise obscure Babylonian-Jewish leader named after Shamash, the Babylonian sun god. He functions as a deputy governor.
- (4) The inventory of stolen items is precise. (1:9-11)
- (a) The items listed add up to 2,499. The total 5,400 must include other items not detailed in this list.
 - (b) Note how the Ark of the Covenant is not listed.
 - (c) The phrase "who went up" is actually a passive concept ("who were brought up [by God]"). (1:11)

Israel Loken makes four observations about Israel's return and the promise of Yahweh in Deut. 30:1-10.

- The Jews have never been completely regathered to the land. (Deut. 30:4)
- The Jews have never truly "possessed" the land. (Deut. 30:5)
- The Jews have never prospered as they did under the reigns of David and Solomon. (Deut. 30:5, 9)
- The Jews have never had their hearts "circumcised" to be able to love the Lord their God with all their hearts and with all their souls. (Deut. 30:6)

- iii) List of the uprooted/returnees/pilgrims (2:1-70)
- This list is to be compared with Neh. 7:6-73. There are minor differences and discrepancies.
- (1) Summary (2:1)
 - (a) Note their intended destinations of Jerusalem and Judah. (cf. 2:21-35, 70)
 - (2) Eleven significant leaders (**leadership** matters to God) (2:2a)
 - (a) Zerubbabel is the grandson of King Jehoiachin. (cf. 2 Kings 24:8-17)
 - (i) Remember Jer. 22:30 about Jehoiachin's descendants.
 - (ii) Jesus' ancestry is trace to Zerubbabel. (cf. Matt. 1:12; Lk. 3:27)
 - (3) Eighteen specific families and clans (**families** matter to God) (2:2b-20)
 - (a) See Edwin Yamauchi's explanation of names and nicknames in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.
 - (4) Twenty-one specific locations (**places** matter to God) (2:21-35)
 - (a) Most of these locations are within 15 miles of Jerusalem, specifically in territory of the tribe of Benjamin.
 - (b) "Senaah" ("the hated one") may infer people of lower class. (2:35)
 - (5) Those associated with the temple (**worship** matters to God) (2:36-63)
 - (a) Specific priests (2:36-39)
 - (i) About 1/10 of the total
 - (b) Specific Levites and temple servants (2:40-54)
 - (i) Singers and gatekeepers (janitors) are especially noted.
 - (ii) While all priests are Levites, not all Levites are priests.
 - (c) Solomon's servants (2:55-58)
 - (d) Disqualified servants and priests (**qualifications** matter to God) (2:59-63)
 - (6) Summary totals (2:64-70)
 - (a) The numbers in the list total only 29,818. (**numbers** matter to God) (2:64)
 - (i) Most likely some families were not in the original list, as well as possibly women and children.
 - (ii) While many returned, the vast majority stayed in Persia.
 - (b) The presence of slaves (@ 1/7-1/6 of the total returnees) indicates that many Jews had prospered in Babylon. (2:65)
 - (c) The number of livestock (**creatures** matter to God) (2:66-67)
 - (d) The value of their gifts (**giving** matters to God) (2:69)

Throughout Ezra and Nehemiah, the Persian kings are pictured as the mediating agents through whom God accomplishes His purposes regarding the remnant. It is the Persian kings who allow the return to the land (Cyrus), the initial rebuilding of the temple (Cyrus), the subsequent continuation of the temple project after a hiatus (Darius), the establishment of worship (Cyrus), and the rebuilding of the walls of the city (Artaxerxes). (Loken)

- b) Zerubbabel's **accomplishment** (rebuilding the temple)—Ezra 3:1-6:22
- i) **religious celebration** *before* temple is built: *Feast of Booths* (3:1–6)
- *priests and Levites* involved in proper sacrifices (with altar properly built)
 - (1) About 3-6 months after their arrival. (autumn of 537 BC)
 - (2) Religious (Jeshua) and civil (Zerubbabel) cooperation. (3:2)
 - **Holy places**
 - (a) Jeshua is the grandson of Seraiah, the high priest during the destruction of Jerusalem. (cf. 2 Kings 25:18)
 - (b) Zerubbabel has apparently taken over for Sheshbazzar.
 - (3) Worshipping God correctly can lead to experiencing hostility. (3:3)
 - **Holy actions**
 - (a) These are the first sacrifices to be offered here in @ 50 years, since 586 BC.
 - (b) This is a healthy sort of fear. It is a fear that drives the one who is afraid to be obedient to the will of God regardless of the circumstances, trusting in the Lord for help and protection. (Loken)
 - (c) This hostility eventually stops the reconstruction of the temple. (cf. 4:4)
 - (4) Note the special days to be observed. (3:4-5)
 - **Holy days**
 - (5) The first day of the seventh month would be Sept. 17, 583 BC. (3:6)
 - (a) This is the Feast of Trumpets, the New Year (Rosh Hashanah).
- ii) **building of the temple begins** (3:7–13)
- (1) Joppa is the port city of Jerusalem, 30 miles to the NW. (3:7)
 - (2) About seven months after 3:1-6. (spring of 537 or 536 BC) (3:8)
 - (a) This was the same time Solomon began his temple. (cf. 1 Kings 6:1)
 - (b) Harvests are completed, people are available to work, etc.
 - (3) The religious leaders oversee the reconstruction. (3:9)
 - (4) Laying the foundation, perhaps upon Solomon's original foundation. (3:10a)
 - (5) Musical accompaniment to the praise of Yahweh. (3:10b-11)
 - (a) They sing words similar to: Pss. 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; & 136:1.
 - (b) The singing may have been done by two groups singing responsively.
 - (c) The trumpets were the 18"-long, straight, metal trumpets, not the ram's horn shofar.
 - (6) Distinctive emotional response. (3:12-13)
 - (a) The majority rejoiced in celebration.
 - (b) The older men wept in disappointment.
 - (7) The rest of the reconstruction will be completed 16 years later in 520 BC. (cf. 6:15; Hag. 2:3; Zech. 4:8-10)

Upon completion of a task, Godward celebration is appropriate.
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- iii) **opposition**: hostile correspondence, and work stops (4:1–24)
- Contains copies of the enemies’ letter to king and king’s negative reply
 - This section covers over 100 years of opposition. The delay is not due to loss of interest on their part but rather persistent opposition.
- (1) Opposition during the reign of **Cyrus** (539-530 BC) is described. (4:1-5)
- This opposition covers the period of 536-530 BC.
 - (a) Persian rulers not recorded in Ezra
 - Cambyses II, Cyrus’ son, reigns 530-522 BC.
 - Bardiya, Cyrus’ son, reigns in 522 BC, only to be assassinated by Darius I.
 - Darius I reigns 522-486 BC. He is followed by his son Xerxes.
 - (b) The opportunity to compromise with Samaritans. (4:1-3)
 - (i) The subtle proposal for interfaith compromise. (4:1-2)
 1. Judah and Benjamin are combined with Levites also.
 2. The attempt to infiltrate with syncretism. Cf. Jer. 41:5
 3. Remember 2 Kings 17:29, 32-34, 41.
 - (ii) The righteous rejection of interfaith compromise. (4:3)
 1. Note the unified front of civil and religious leaders.
 2. Based on religious purity and civil obedience
 3. “You have nothing in common with us” is literally “It is not to you and to us.”
 - (c) The attempts of the Samaritans at discouragement (“making feeble the hands”), fear, and frustration. (4:4-5)
 - (i) Work on the temple does stop in 530 BC (4:24) and does not restart until 520 BC (5:2) and is completed in 516 BC (6:15).
 - (ii) Ezra focuses on *external* pressures while Haggai focuses on *internal* attitudes.
- (2) Opposition during the reign of **Ahasuerus/Xerxes** (486-465 BC) is described. (4:6)
- (a) The book of Esther takes place during his reign.
 - (b) Xerxes is distracted not only by having to deal with rebellion by Egypt and Babylon but also wars with Greece during this time.
 - (c) Xerxes is eventually murdered by his son, Artaxerxes.
- (3) Opposition during the reign of **Artaxerxes** (465-424 BC) and **Darius I** (522-486 BC) is described. (4:7-24)
- The section of 4:8-6:18 are written in Aramaic.
 - This is the timeframe in which Ezra and Nehemiah live.
 - (a) Letter # 1. (4:7)
 - (b) Letter # 2. (4:8-16)
 - (c) The king’s response. (4:17-22)
 - (d) The forced work stoppage until 520 BC. (4:23-24)

The danger to compromise must be met courageously by faithful men.

- iv) **TURNING POINT: prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the people** to continue the work (5:1–2)
- (1) Two prophets speak God’s word to God’s people in God’s time. (5:1)
- (a) The theme of each prophet: (*Moody Bible Commentary*)
- (i) **Haggai** [older man] (ministered Aug. 29 to Dec. 18, 520 BC)
1. Obedience in rebuilding the temple would bless them. (1:10; 2:18-19)
 2. Though the second temple was smaller, God’s glory would still fill it. (2:3, 7-9)
 3. Obedience by the leaders encourages the people.
- (ii) **Zechariah** [younger man] (ministered Oct. 520-Nov. 518 BC)
1. Yahweh will fulfill His promises to Abraham. (2:11)
 2. Yahweh will forgive their sins. (3:9)
 3. Yahweh will ultimately send Messiah. (3:8)
- (b) See the results of their ministry. (cf. 6:14)
- (2) God’s people respond to God’s Word in God’s time while God’s spokesmen support them. (5:2)
- v) **opposition: hostile correspondence, and work begins again!** (5:3–6:12)
- (1) The interruption (5:3-5)
- (a) This is rooted in legitimate concern by proper authority about potential rebellion. There have been numerous revolts since Cyrus died. (5:3)
- (i) Loken notes that it took 19 different battles and a little more than a year for Darius to solidify his throne.
- (b) Asking for or producing proper credentials is not wrong. (5:4)
- (i) Apparently, the Jews could not produce the proper paperwork.
- (c) God is still at work providentially on behalf of His people. (5:5)
- (i) The Persian authority gives them the benefit of the doubt.
- (2) The letter and request (5:6-17)
- (a) Note the quote of Israel’s current leaders. (5:11-12)
- (b) It has been 466 years since Solomon completed his temple.
- (3) The investigation and the decree of Darius. (6:1-12)
- (a) The record is found in Ecbatana, 300 miles NNE of Babylon. (6:1-2)
- (b) The quote from the archives. (6:3-5)
- (i) These dimensions appear larger in height and width than Solomon’s temple. Cf. 1 Kings 6:2
- (ii) Perhaps they are exterior dimension of the entire complex?
- (c) The orders. (6:6-12)
- The threat is not an idle threat. (6:11-12)
 - The curse (6:12) is partially fulfilled in 167 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated it and died insane three years later.
 - “God who has caused His name to dwell there” (cf. Deut. 12:5)

God uses both believers and unbelievers to accomplish His purpose.

vi) **building of the temple is completed** (6:13–15)

- (1) The work of the unbelievers. (6:13)
- (2) The work of God's people in vertical and horizontal obedience. (6:14)
- (3) The completion of the second temple occurred on March 12, 516/515 BC. (6:15)
 - (a) It had been destroyed 70 years earlier in July/Aug. 586 BC. Cf. Zech. 1:12-17
 - (b) This is 4-½ years after they started, and 20-21 years after laying the foundation.
 - (c) It will stand, with significant remodeling by Herod, for @ 600 years until the Romans destroy it in 70 AD.
- (4) Haggai 2:3 records the response of some observers.
- (5) Remember that the Holy of Holies is, and will remain, empty due to the Ark of the Covenant being lost during the Babylonian invasion.
- (6) There is no record of God's glory filling this temple. (cf. Exod. 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:6-14).

vii) **religious celebration** after temple is built: *Feast of Passover* (6:16–22)

- (1) The dedication of the second temple. (6:16-18)
 - (a) All the Jews gathered for the dedication. (6:16)
 - (b) Compare the number of sacrifices with Solomon's. (6:17)
 - (i) cf. 1 Kings 8:63
 - (ii) The goats for a sin offering are based on Lev. 4:22-24.
 1. The number 12 indicates the Jews still viewed their nation as a unity, not just the three tribes present on this day.
 - (c) They appeared to learn something during the Exile. (6:18)
- (2) The Passover. (6:19-22) [April 516/515 BC]
 - The text reverts to Hebrew at this point. Aramaic will return at 7:12-26.
 - This takes place a few weeks after the dedication.
 - (a) This Passover included a mixture of people. (6:21)
 - Those "*who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations*" may include:
 - Some see both Jews and Gentile proselytes from Babylon.
 - Repentant northern Jews who had been living in the Land.
 - Repentant southern Jews who had been living in the Land.
 - This is @ 900 years after the first Passover.
 - (b) The phrase "*the king of Assyria*" points us back to the beginning of the exile of the ten northern tribes. (6:22)

While the present may not be exactly like "the good old days," we can still rejoice in what God is doing.

- 2) **Ezra**—7:1-10:44 (the second wave of return)
- a) **Ezra's return**—Ezra 7:1-8:36
- i) **Ezra's return** to Jerusalem with Jews from Babylon (7:1–10)
- (1) Ezra's time stamp is the reign of King *Artaxerxes I Longimanus* [464-424 BC] (7:1)
- (a) This shows a gap between 6:19-22 and 7:1 of 57-58 years.
- The book of Esther occurs in this gap.
- (b) Nehemiah is Artaxerxes I's cupbearer in Susa. (Neh. 1:11-2:1)
- (2) Ezra's shortened genealogy/heritage is traced back to Aaron, the first high priest. (7:1-5) (cf. 1 Chron. 6:1-15)
- (a) "Ezra" is a shortened form of Azariah ["Yahweh has helped"] (cf. 7:1, 3)
- His credentials and his mission are legitimate and provides continuity with the time before the Exile.
 - He is considered a sort of "second Moses" by some aspects of Judaism.
- (b) Seraiah, which means "Yahweh is Prince," was high priest at the time of the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC.
- (c) Phineas means "the black one, the Nubian." Remember that Moses had married Zipporah from the Sudan (Num. 12:1).
- (3) Ezra's return to Jerusalem (7:6-7)
- (a) He was well-trained, knowledgeable, and skillful in God's revelation.
- He was able to copy, understand, interpret, and apply the Word.
 - Some argue that Ezra composed both Ps. 1 and 119.
- (b) He was providentially used by God and by King Artaxerxes I.
- Cf. God's hand on Ezra (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31) and on Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 2:8, 18).
- (4) Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem (7:8-10)
- These verses summarize what is detailed in the rest of Ezra 7-8.
- (a) Ezra departs Babylon in Mar./Apr. of 458 and arrives in Jerusalem in Aug. 458 BC. (7:8-9)
- These verses summarize the details in chapters 7-8.
 - Note the four-month journey of normally @ 900 miles over the northern route. A goal of 10 miles per day was normal.
 - There is a shorter, southern route across the Arabian desert that is @ 500 miles, but this was not normally taken during the warmer months.
 - There will be an 11-day delay. (cf. 8:31)
- (b) Ezra uses his knowledge and skill to teach those who have returned to the Land from Babylon. (7:10)
- The reason for 7:9 is 7:10.
 - "Set his heart" (cf. 2 Chron. 19:3; 30:19)

- ii) **Artaxerxes I's blessing on the trip:** gifts of gold, silver, etc., for the temple (7:11–26)
 - Most of this section (7:12-26) is in Aramaic.
 - (1) Authorization for Ezra. (7:11-20)
 - (a) Note the use of “people of Israel” and not just “Judah.” (7:13)
 - (2) Responsibilities toward Ezra of each lesser ruler. (7:21-24)
 - But the “generosity” does have set limits.
 - (a) Up to 100 talents of silver (@ 7,500 lbs.)
 - (b) Up to 100 kors of wheat (@ 650 bushels or @ 39,000 lbs.)
 - (c) Up to 100 baths each of wine and oil (@ 607 gallons or @ 5,000 lbs.)
 - (d) Note the motive of self-preservation. (7:23)
 - (e) Exemptions for Temple workers. (7:24)
 - (3) Confidence in Ezra's God-given abilities. (7:25-26)
 - (a) His promise of wrath (7:26) is the negative flip side of Darius' decree in 6:10.
 - (b) Note the use of Yahweh's Law and the Persian King's. (7:26)
 - (i) He does not see the Law of Yahweh as a threat to his kingdom.
- iii) **Ezra gathers the people** to return (7:27–28)
 - At this point the book reverts from Aramaic to Hebrew
 - (1) His doxology reveals at least four things about his God-dependence.
 - (a) National
 - (i) Yahweh is the God of our fathers.
 - (ii) Yahweh puts this “beautification decree” in the king's heart. Cf. Prov. 21:1
 - (b) Personal
 - (i) Yahweh extends loyal love to Ezra as he appeared before all the rulers.
 - (ii) Yahweh strengthens Ezra. (cf. 7:6, 9; 8:18, 22, 31)
 - (2) Perhaps Ezra sees initial/partial fulfillments:
 - (a) Of beautifying the Temple. (cf. Is. 60:7, 13)
 - (b) Of regathering His people. (cf. Mic. 2:12; Zeph. 3:20; Zech. 10:10)
- iv) **CENTER: the list of returnees** (8:1–14)
 - (1) Jews are still returning to Israel decades after Cyrus's decree.
 - (a) While both Isaiah (48:20) and Jeremiah (31:16-21) call the exiled Jews to return, remaining in exile was not always viewed as a negative. (cf. Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai, Esther, etc.)
 - (2) Twelve leading families (descendants of 15 individuals) are listed. These total @ 1,500 people.
 - (a) Ezra lists the priests' lines (Phinehas [“the black man”] and Ithamar) before the royal line (David). (8:2)
 - (i) Ezra's line was through Phinehas. (cf. 7:5)
 - (b) Except for Shecaniah (8:3) and Shelomith (8:10), all these names appeared in 2:2-15 roughly 80 years earlier.

- (c) No one from the family of Adonikam remained in Persia. These were “the last ones.” (8:13) Everyone of this line has now migrated.
- v) **Ezra gathers the people** to return (8:15–21)
- (1) Ezra evaluates the migrants. (8:15)
 - (2) Ezra delegates a request for Levites to return to Jerusalem. (8:16-17)
 - (a) Meshullam (8:16) may be the same person who later opposes the marriage reforms. (cf. 10:15)
 - (3) Ezra recognizes God’s hand in the matter. (8:18-20)
 - (a) Nearly 40 Levites and over 200 temple servants (Nethinim) respond to Ezra’s request.
- vi) **The Jews ask God’s blessing on the trip:** care of king’s gifts of gold, silver, etc., for the temple (8:22–30)
- (1) **Spiritually**, Ezra calls for a significant fast. (8:21-23)
 - (a) Purposes (8:21-22)
 - (i) Positive: to seek from God “a straight way”
 - Ps. 107:7; Prov. 14:12; 16:25; Jer. 31:9
 - Prayer before traveling is an old custom
 - This verse was the last sermon of pastor John Robinson before Pilgrims sailed to America.
 - (ii) Negative: because Ezra had refused a military escort
 - But see Nehemiah @ 13 years later (Neh. 2:9)
 - (b) Result (8:23)
 - (i) Fasting and prayer often walk together (Neh. 1:4; Dan. 9:3; Luke 2:37; 5:33; Acts 13:3; 14:23)
 - (2) **Financially**, Ezra delegates responsibilities and materials. (8:24-30)
 - (a) The stewards are **selected**. (8:24)
 - (i) This includes (probably) two groups: 12 priests and 12 Levites.
 1. Sherebiah and Hashabiah are Levites. (cf. 8:18-19)
 - (b) The stewardship is **needed**. (8:25-27) [@ \$175 million]
 - 48,750 lbs. of silver; 7,500 lbs. of silver utensils; 7,500 lbs. of gold; plus other items
 - This will provide a detailed balance sheet for when they get to Jerusalem and see if anything was lost or stolen.
 - (c) The stewardship is **stated**. (8:28-29)
 - (i) This stewardship is limited to holy people and holy things.
 - (ii) This stewardship is limited in time, i.e. until they arrive in Jerusalem.
 - (d) The stewardship is **accepted**. (8:30)
- vii) **Ezra’s return** to Jerusalem with Jews; sacrifices [of gratitude] (8:31–36)
- (1) A summary of the journey. (8:31-32)
 - (a) They departed on April 20, 458 BC (two days before Passover) and arrived on Aug. 4, 458 BC. (cf. 7:8-9)
 - (i) They had averaged @ 9 miles per day.

- (b) It appears that God providentially protected them from being attacked.
 - (2) A verification of the stewardship. (8:33-34)
 - (a) The fourth day would have been Aug. 7, 458 BC.
 - (b) Earlier, Meremoth had been one of those whose ancestry could not be proven. (cf. 2:61-63) Apparently, things have been resolved.
 - (3) Obligations are fulfilled. (8:35-36)
 - (a) A Godward expression of gratitude and devotion. (8:35)
 - (i) This was partially in obedience to the king's command. (cf. 7:17)
 - (b) A political expression. (8:36)
- b) Ezra's **accomplishment** (restoring proper view of marriage)—Ezra 9:1-10:44
- i) **The problem of intermarriage introduced** (9:1–2)
 - (1) The awareness of this problem came through others, not through Ezra's own investigation.
 - (a) Is this a result of the impact of Ezra teaching of God's Word?
 - (2) The intermingling (9:2) is a symptom of having not separated from the surrounding nations. (9:1)
 - (3) The holy seed (not "race") of Israel has intermingled with the surrounding nations.
 - (a) Most of these nations are descendants of Noah's son Ham.
 - Cf. Deut. 7:1-4
 - (b) This is not so much about *ethnic* purity as it is *spiritual* purity.
 - Note the use of "unfaithfulness" at the end of 9:2.
 - The Lord's prohibition had nothing to do with a hatred for foreign peoples. The command was designed to keep the worship of Israel pure. (Loken)
 - (c) The intermarrying is a symptom of a much greater problem.
 - They are participating with Gentile abominations.
 - They are divorcing their Jewish wives to marry Gentile wives. (cf. Mal. 2:10-16).
 - (4) This disobedience is observed through their culture: in the regular people, the priests, and Levites, and especially the political leaders.
 - (a) The leaders led or were "first," but in the wrong direction. (Yamauchi, EBC)
 - ii) **The people gather about Ezra**, who *sits in distress* over problem (9:3–4)
 - (1) Ezra's spiritual reaction is noted by three things: tearing his clothes, pulling some of his hair, and sitting dumbfounded. (9:3) (cf. 9:7)
 - (a) Cf. Nehemiah's response in 13:25
 - (2) Ezra's companions were those who trembled at (were in awe of) God's Word. (9:4) (cf. Is. 66:2, 5)
 - iii) **Ezra kneels in prayer** at temple in self-abasement (9:5–15)
 - (1) The posture of his prayer (kneeling with palms up). (9:5) (cf. 10:1)
 - (2) The content of his prayer. (9:6-15) (cf. Neh. 9:5-38; Dan. 9:4-19)

- Note that there is no specific request.
 - (a) Yahweh's perfect omniscience. (9:6-7)
 - (b) Yahweh's present grace. (9:8-9)
 - (i) "Brief moment" is the 80 years since Cyrus' decree.
 - (ii) Emphasis on "grace" and "loyal love."
 - (c) Yahweh's clearly revealed will regarding marriage has been violated. (9:10-12)
 - (i) The "quote" in vv. 11-12 is not from one specific passage, but is rather a combination. (Cf. Deut. 11:8-9; Prov. 10:27; Is. 1:19; Ezek. 37:25).
 - (ii) Israel is without excuse.
 - (d) Yahweh's righteous anger. (9:13-14)
 - (e) Yahweh's inescapable righteousness. (9:15)
 - (i) "Stand" means "to be acquitted before God." (cf. Ps. 1:5; 130:3)
- iv) **CLIMAX: The people agree to resolve the problem!** (10:1-4)
 - Ezra shifts to writing in the third person.
 - (1) Ezra's four-fold public behavior. (10:1) (cf. 9:4-5)
 - (2) Recognition of sin (violation of an oath). (10:2a)
 - (a) The power of the public confession of sin.
 - Instead of whipping a reluctant people into action, Ezra has pricked their conscience to the point at which they now urge *him* to act. (Kidner)
 - (b) Six members of the clan of Elam were guilty. (cf. 10:26)
 - (c) Nehemiah refers to this sin as a great evil. (Neh. 13:27)
 - (3) Awareness of confident expectation. (10:2b)
 - (a) This hope rests, not in Israel, but in Israel's God.
 - (4) Proposed solution. (10:3)
 - (a) In most Gentile cultures, children of divorced parents stayed with the mother. One exception is that of the Greeks.
 - (5) Ezra's need for courage. (10:4)
 - (a) Weeping is not enough. Courageous and painful decisions need to be made. (Yamauchi, EBC)
- v) **Ezra arises from prayer** at the temple (still) in self-abasement (10:5-6)
 - (1) Ezra ensures the oath is taken. (10:5)
 - (2) Ezra isolates himself in a temple chamber and fasts in mourning over their sin. (10:6)
 - (a) Ezra's behavior reveals not only his love for his people, but also his hatred for sin. It should be remembered that Ezra has not even personally committed the sin over which he is in such extreme anguish. (Loken)
- vi) **Ezra gathers the people**; they *sit in distress*; representatives sit and deal with the problem (10:7-15)
 - This takes place less than five months after Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem. (cf. 7:9 & 10:9)

- (1) The proclamation of both the meeting and the potential consequences for not attending. (10:7-8)
 - (a) The people are always relatively close to Jerusalem.
 - (b) The loss of all legal rights is a huge threat.
- (2) Obedience is not always comfortable. (10:9)
 - (a) This takes place during the middle of the cool rainy season. (Nov./Dec. 458 BC)
 - (b) Sometimes physical trembling has an internal cause, sometimes an external cause, and sometimes both. (10:9)
- (3) Ezra publicly confronts their sin and gives precise instructions of what is needed from them. (10:10-11)
 - (a) He is exercising the authority given to him by God and the Persian king.
- (4) The people respond positively. (10:12-14)
 - (a) Due to the large number who sinned in this manner, it will take time to set things right. (@ three months, cf. 10:16-17)
 - (b) They recognized their intermarrying with Gentiles as rebellion. (10:13)
 - (c) They wanted the matter addressed at the local level. (10:14)
- (5) Some disagreement is noted. (10:15)
 - (a) Did they disagree with the divorce itself?
 - (b) Did they disagree with the delayed obedience?
- vii) **The problem of intermarriage resolved;** a list of those guilty (10:16–44) (the Hall of Shame)
 - (1) The appropriate investigation takes time. (10:16-17)
 - (a) The investigation began 10 days after their meeting.
 - (b) The investigation ran @ 75 days or three months, from Dec. 458 BC to Mar. 457 BC.
 - (c) The investigation ends @ eight months after Ezra's arrival.
 - (2) The sinning priests. (10:18-22)
 - (3) The sinning Levites. (10:23)
 - (4) The sinning musicians. (10:24a)
 - (5) The sinning janitors/maintenance men. (10:24b)
 - (6) The sinning people. (10:25-43).
 - (7) The summary. (10:44)
 - (a) Over 110 Jewish men had married foreign women.
 - (b) Nine of the 33 families (@ ¼ of the total) from 2:3-35 are listed here.

Ezra now disappears from the scene but will re-appear @ 13 years later in Neh. 8-10.

3) **Nehemiah**—Neh. 1:1-7:3

- Nehemiah is the only OT historical book written primarily in the first person.

a) Nehemiah's return—Neh. 1:1-2:20

i) **Nehemiah hears a report** of the problem (1:1–3)

- (1) topics: *trouble* (*rā'ā*), *disgrace* (*herpâ*), *gates* burned with fire, *walls* broken down
- (2) Nehemiah means “Yahweh comforts.” Related to the names Nahum & Menahem.
- (3) The 20th year of Artaxerxes (1:1; 2:1) takes place during Nov.-Dec. 445 BC, more than 90 years after Cyrus' decree for Jews to return to Jerusalem in 538 BC.
 - (a) Nehemiah uses both a Jewish (Chislev) and Persian (twentieth year) method of dating.
- (4) Susa is the Persian winter palace, located @ 225 miles east-southeast of Babylon. It is where the book of Esther takes place.
- (5) The term “Jews” is used @ 80 x in the OT, primarily in Ezra (8x), Nehemiah (9x), and Esther (53x). It is used to describe the people of Israel during and after the Exile.

ii) **Nehemiah sits down** and mourns *some days* (1:4–11)

- This is the first of several prayers in the book. (1:4; 2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14)
 - Nehemiah's mourning probably lasted @ four months (cf. 2:1)
- (1) Nehemiah's adoration of Yahweh's greatness (1:5)
 - (a) Yahweh is “great and awesome.” (Cf. 4:14; 9:32; Deut. 7:21)
 - (b) Yahweh “keeps the covenant” (cf. Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10)
 - (i) The Exile does not prove Yahweh abandoned His people.
 - (2) Nehemiah's confession of Israel's guilt, including his own. (1:6-7)
 - (a) Cf. Daniel @ 100 years earlier (Dan. 9:4-6)
 - (b) Cf. Ezra @ 15 years earlier (Ezra 9:6-15)
 - (3) Nehemiah's confidence in Yahweh. (1:8-10)
 - (a) In Yahweh's revealed Word in the whole Law, promises both negative and positive. (1:8-9) (cf. Deut. 30:1-4)
 - (b) In Yahweh's redemptive work in the Exodus. (1:10)
 - (c) “He is empty-handed, but not uninvited.” (Derek Kidner)
 - (4) Nehemiah's two requests of Yahweh. (1:11)
 - (a) Make your slave successful.
 - (b) Grant him compassion before King Artaxerxes.
 - (5) Nehemiah's influential and indispensable position of cupbearer is like a trusted Secret Service agent of our day. (1:11)

- iii) **Nehemiah's request** to king Artaxerxes I to let him go to Jerusalem (2:1-5)
- (1) This is @ late-Mar. to early-Apr. 444 BC, 3-4 months after chapter one. (2:1)
 - (a) "Nisan" is a month name borrowed from Babylon. The original name was "Abib."
 - (2) Four months of grief, fasting, and intense prayer has taken its toll visibly. (2:2)
 - (a) The king's keenly observant question appears to be rooted in sympathy rather than suspicion.
 - (b) One normally kept one's private feelings hidden in the presence of the king. (cf. Esther 4:2)
 - (i) The word "sad" is also translated "bad", "evil", or "unpleasant" in other contexts.
 - (ii) "You will enjoy my presence!"
 - (c) Archeology indicates that people covered their mouth with the right palm so as not to offend the Persian king with one's breath.
 - (3) Nehemiah explains his struggles. (2:3)
 - (a) The Temple had been rebuilt 71 years earlier.
 - (b) Nehemiah carefully avoids the use of the name "Jerusalem."
 - (4) Nehemiah petitions both God and the king. (2:4-5)
 - (a) This spontaneous prayer is based on the longer prayer of 1:4-11.
 - (b) Nehemiah's request of the king contradicts the king's order in Ezra 4:21.
 - (i) He desires two things to be pleasing to the king: Nehemiah's plan and Nehemiah's person.
 - (ii) He asks for time off from his duties as cupbearer to do two things: return to Judah, rebuild the city.
 1. Nehemiah ends up being gone for 12 years. (cf. 5:14; 13:6)
- iv) **TURNING POINT: his request is granted!** (2:6)
- (1) The queen may have been either Artaxerxes' wife Damaspia or the queen-mother Amestris.
 - (2) This decree, issued on March 5, 444 BC, fulfills Dan. 9:25 which was prophesied 95 years earlier in 539 BC.
 - (a) If one sees the decree as having been given on the first day of the month Nisan in Artaxerxes' twentieth year, the date can be calculated as falling on 5 March 444 B.C. Thus, using a prophetic year of 360 days (cf. Rev 11:2-3), sixty-nine groups of seven years would total 173,880 days. Exactly 173,880 days after 1 Nisan 444 B.C., the Messiah Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on 10 Nisan A.D. 33 (30 March). Only four days later, on 14 Nisan A.D. 33 (3 April), He was crucified. The seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy still awaits future fulfillment (cf. Matt 24; Rev 6-19). (Israel Loken, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*)

- v) **Nehemiah's request** to king to give him letters for governors (2:7–10)
- (1) Letters for safe passage. (2:7)
 - (2) Letters for supplies. (2:8)
 - (a) The word “forest” is a Persian word from which we get the English word “paradise.”
 - (b) Nehemiah's plan for these supplies includes: rebuild the gates of the citadel, rebuild the wall of the city, and build Nehemiah's private residence.
 - (i) This shows Nehemiah's prayers also involved planning.
 - (3) Military escort, not mere military protection. (2:9)
 - (a) Compare with Ezra 8:21-23.
 - (b) Nehemiah travels with the king's credentials.
 - (4) Callous opposition. (2:10)
 - (a) Sanballat was governor over Samaria, north of Jerusalem.
 - (b) Tobiah was governor over Ammon, east of the Jordan River.
- vi) **Nehemiah arises**, goes to Jerusalem, and remains there *three days* (2:11–16)
- (1) Nehemiah rests for three days as did Ezra. (2:11; cf. Ezra 8:32)
 - (a) Probably involves prayer, thinking, and getting acquainted.
 - (2) Nehemiah takes a minimal number of people with him. (2:12, 16)
 - (3) The first portion covers the west and southwest corner and travels @ 1,500 feet. (2:13)
 - (4) The second portion covers the southeast corner. (2:14)
 - (5) The third portion covers the eastern wall (Kidron valley), before being forced to turn around due to the impassable rubble. (2:15)
 - (6) After nearly 100 years, they had apparently accepted the state of disrepair as normal.
 - (7) It is estimated that the circumference of the city at this time was about one and a half miles, enclosing perhaps eighty or ninety acres. (IVP Bible Background Commentary)
- vii) **Nehemiah gives his own report** of the problem; responses from Jews and enemies (2:17–20)
- topics: *trouble* (*rā'ā*), *disgrace* (*herpâ*), *gates* burned with fire, *walls* broken down
 - probably takes place the next morning
- (1) To the people of Israel. (2:17-18)
 - (a) Assessment of the situation and proposal of the solution
 - (b) Credentials from the approval of God and the king
 - (2) To the enemies of Israel. (2:19-20)
 - (a) The enemies include a descendent of both Lot (Ammon) and Ishmael (Arabs)
 - (b) Intimidation and false accusations from the enemies
 - (c) Approval from God, rejecting the legal rights of the mockers

- b) Nehemiah's accomplishment (restore city defenses, justice, and compassion)—Neh. 3:1-7:3
- i) **walls begun**: list of builders (3:1–32)
- Ten gates of the city are noted: *Sheep* [NE] (3:1, 32), *Fish* [NW] (3:3), *Jeshanah* (Old) [NW] (3:6), *Valley* [W] (3:13), *Dung/Refuse* [SW] (3:14), *Fountain* [S] (3:15), *Water* [E] (3:26) *Horse* [E] (3:28), *East* [NE] (3:29), and *Inspection* (Muster) [NE] (3:31).
 - Total length of the wall was @ 2-2.5 miles long. There are @ 40 sections noted, averaging 250 feet per section. Much longer sections are noted, as in 3:13.
 - The word “build” occurs 7x; the word “repair” occurs 34x.
 - No expert contractors, builders, masons, or carpenters are noted. There are, however, various work details that are noted.
 - The wall will be completed in 52 days. (cf. 6:15)
- (1) Northeast to northwest (3:1-5)
 - (a) Eight work details
 - (2) Northwest to southwest (3:6-13)
 - (a) Ten work details
 - (3) Southwest to southeast (3:14-15)
 - (a) Two work details
 - (4) Southeast to northeast (3:16-31)
 - (a) Twenty-one work details
 - (5) Northeast (3:32)
 - (a) One work detail

- ii) **verbal opposition:** ridicule; Nehemiah's *prayer* and response (4:1–6)
- Remember Nehemiah's statement in 2:20.
 - (1) Sanballat's angry, irrational propaganda. (4:1-2)
 - (a) Worthless Jews
 - (i) But if they are feeble, why be concerned?
 - (b) Incapable Jews
 - (c) Irresolute Jews
 - (d) Incapable Jews
 - (e) Inadequate materials
 - (i) If their building materials are burned , dusty rubble, why be concerned?
 - (2) Tobiah's contemptuous response. (4:3)
 - (a) If their rebuilt wall is so frail, why be concerned?
 - (3) Nehemiah's confident imprecatory prayer. (4:4-5)
 - (a) Israel's situation—despised
 - (b) Nehemiah's request
 - (i) Reversal of the enemy's fortune
 - (ii) Just judgment for the enemy's sin (cf. Jer. 18:23)
 - (c) Thoughts on this prayer (Gene Getz, BKC)
 - Opposition to the Jews is opposition to their God.
 - God had already pronounced judgment on Israel's enemies. (Josh. 1:5)
 - Sanballat was cursing Abraham's seed. (Gen. 12:3)
 - Nehemiah recognized that vengeance belonged to God, not Nehemiah or the Jews. (Deut. 32:35)
 - (4) Progress report showing the opposition was ineffective. (4:6)
- iii) **plot to kill the workers:** (external crisis) *prayer* and solution (4:7–23)
- (1) The opposition surrounds Jerusalem (N, E, SSE, & W) (4:7-8)
 - (a) They are angry the Jews want to defend themselves.
 - (2) Nehemiah's prayer. (4:9)
 - (a) The appropriate balance of trusting God for success but taking appropriate action. (Bryan O'Neal)
 - (b) Answer noted in 4:15.
 - (3) Summary of the situation. (4:10-11)
 - (a) The Jews sing a discouragement song, perhaps brought on by weariness.
 - (b) The opposition are overconfident.
 - (4) Nehemiah's solution. (4:12-14)
 - (a) The propaganda campaign is in full swing. (4:12)
 - (b) Nehemiah re-allocates his human resources. (4:13)
 - (c) Nehemiah encourages them with three commands. (4:14)
 - (5) Situational awareness and weapons of self-defense are legitimate. (4:15-23)

- iv) **CENTER: Nehemiah helps poor** (internal crisis) (5:1–19)
- (1) The legitimate complaints. (5:1-5)
 - (a) Three groups: large landless families with no food (5:2), indebted families going into further debt to buy food (5:3) or to pay taxes (5:4)
 - (b) Two primary factors: famine (5:3) and high taxes (5:4)
 - (i) Taxes were not always returned to benefit the governing districts. Alexander the Great found 270 tons of gold and 1,200 tons of silver in Susa alone.
 - (c) Two possible negative solutions: further debt and/or slavery
 - (i) Debt slavery was addressed in the Law: Exod. 21:1-11; Lev. 25:39-43; Deut. 15:12-14.
 - (2) Nehemiah's responses. (5:6-7)
 - (a) Internally: legitimate anger (5:6) and careful consideration (5:7)
 - (b) Externally: brings legal charges against the wealthy rulers (5:7)
 - (i) "Usury" is excessive, exploitive interest (cf. Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20)
 - (ii) They were acting as predatory pawnbrokers or loan sharks.
 - (3) Nehemiah's proposed solution. (5:8-13)
 - (a) Reviews the past and present. (5:8)
 - (i) A horrible lack of compassion and mercy. (cf. Lev. 25:39-42; Prov. 14:31)
 - (b) Challenges them to Godward thinking. (5:9)
 - (c) Admits their collective ("us") guilt. (5:10)
 - (d) Proposes restoration of land, crops, residences, and taxes. (5:11)
 - (i) This is an appeal, not a demand or proposed law/legislation.
 - (e) A solemn agreement is reached. (5:12-13)
 - (i) Three-fold response: accepted the terms, praised Yahweh, and fulfilled the proposal.
 - (4) Nehemiah's faithful example of living in awe of God. (5:14-19)
 - (a) Serves as governor for 12 years (445-433 BC) with no compensation from Persia. (5:14)
 - (b) Does not dominate the poor because he lives in awe of God. (5:15)
 - (i) Nehemiah had the legal right to raise taxes for both Artaxerxes as the king and for himself as the governor.
 - (c) Engages in hands-on building. (5:16)
 - (d) Shows gracious hospitality. (5:17-18)
 - (e) Conscious of his accountability to God. (5:19)
 - (i) Prayers for God to remember **positively** (5:19; 13:14, 22, 31)
 1. Cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 28
 - (ii) Prayers for God to remember **negatively** (6:14; 13:29)

- v) **plot to kill Nehemiah:** (external crisis) solution and *prayer* (6:1–9)
- (1) The general plot to do evil to Nehemiah. (6:1-4)
 - (a) The time for effective opposition is growing short. (FSB) Once the walls are complete, the enemies cannot go where they want.
 - They attempt to eliminate the person most responsible for wall-building project.
 - (b) Ono is @ 25 miles NW of Jerusalem, about a day's journey distance. This is an attempt to isolate Nehemiah.
 - (c) Nehemiah consistently refuses to meet with them.
 - (2) The public slanderous rumor/accusation against Nehemiah. (6:5-9a)
 - (a) An “open letter” would be an unsealed scroll, etc. that would allow everyone to read the contents. This was essentially a form of political blackmail. (FSB) (6:5)
 - (i) Letters of this time were normally sealed to guard the privacy and authenticity of the letter.
 - (b) The accusations. (6:6-7)
 - A lying accusation concerning treasonous rebellion. (6:6; 2:19)
 - A lying accusation concerning “Messianic” leadership. (6:7)
 - On the surface, it appears that they have Nehemiah's welfare at heart. They appear to be trying to protect him. (Getz, BKC)
 - (c) Nehemiah refuses to meet with them. (6:8-9a)
 - (i) He charges them with lying.
 - (ii) He knows they are trying to discourage the wall-builders.
 - (3) Nehemiah prays for enablement to complete his task. (6:9b)
 - (a) Because the phrase “O God” is not in the original text, some see this as a statement. But the verb form of the word “strengthen” is a command/request.
- vi) **verbal opposition:** intimidation through false prophets; Nehemiah's response and *prayer* (6:10–14)
- (1) Urgent, but unbiblical advice from a man of influence. (6:10-11)
 - (a) Let us ask King Uzziah about going where he shouldn't. (cf. 2 Chron. 26:16-20; Num. 18:7)
 - (b) True prophets will never ask you to violate God's clear revelation.
 - (2) Nehemiah's skillful perception. (6:12-13)
 - (a) Shemaiah “the prophet” (possibly a priest or Levite) was hired by the opposition, showing his influence among the Jewish remnant. (cf. 6:17-19)
 - (b) Shemaiah “the prophet” was hired to cause Nehemiah to fear and sin to further the accusations of the opposition.
 - (3) Nehemiah prays for God to remember his attackers. (6:14)
 - (a) Even the prophetess Noadiah was for sale.

- vii) **walls completed**: doors put in place, guards stationed (6:15–7:3)
- This is part of Nehemiah’s duties as governor. (cf. 5:14, 18)
- (1) The completion of the wall and its effect. (6:15-16) (cf. 2:20)
 - (a) This is September/October 445/444 BC.
 - (b) Hundreds of years later, Josephus will mistakenly write (Antiquities 11.5.8) that it took two years and four months.
 - (c) The wall is dedicated and celebrated later in 12:27.
 - (2) The insidious nature and activity of Tobiah. (6:17-19)
 - (3) Nehemiah summarizes his work. (7:1-3)
 - (a) The security (walls and doors) of the city. (7:1a)
 - (b) The temple worship and activity. (7:1b)
 - (c) The administration and security of the city. (7:2-3)
 - (i) Nehemiah delegated this responsibility to two men. Note the “them” in v. 3.
 - (ii) Normally, city gates were opened at sunrise.
 - (4) Israel Loken writes: The initial task of Nehemiah has now been completed. The walls of Jerusalem have been successfully rebuilt despite a number of efforts to prevent the completion of the project. The political restoration of the remnant is ensured. However, the story of Nehemiah is not simply the story of a man rebuilding walls; the reader is only halfway through the narrative. The rest of the book will focus on the spiritual restoration of the remnant.

- 4) Final reforms and lists—Neh. 7:4-13:31
 - a) **list of returnees under Zerubbabel (7:4–73)**
 - The material in 7:5-73 is nearly identical with that in Ezra 2:1-70.
 - i) The city is large (lit. “wide as two hands and large”) in comparison to few inhabitants. (7:4)
 - ii) An awareness of God’s presence and activity. (7:5)
 - iii) The lists. (7:6-60)
 - These are the heroes who left Babylon and took the first steps toward rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. (Loken)
 - (1) Families and clans. (7:6-25)
 - (2) Towns and villages. (7:26-38)
 - (3) Priests. (7:39-42)
 - (4) Temple staff. (7:43-60)
 - iv) Maintaining proper protocol is important. (7:61-65)
 - v) Summary. (7:66-73)
 - (1) This is a summary of Ezra 2:69-69.
 - (2) There is a discrepancy of totals: Nehemiah (49,942) and Ezra (49,897). The number of singers (7:67) is the difference. (245 to 200)
 - (3) There is one donkey for every seven people. (7:69)

- b) **Ezra assembles people** before *Water Gate and Ephraim Gate*; the Law is read; celebration of Feast of Booths (Sept./Oct. 444 BC) (8:1–18)
- The events of chs. 8-9 begin about a week after the rebuilding was completed ... and take place over the span of 24 days. (FSB)
 - This is the first time in 13 years that Ezra is noted in the text.
 - The public reading of the Law was required every seventh year (Deut. 31:10-13)
- i) Ezra reads the Word of God. (8:1-8)
- (1) He reads at the east-southeast side near the Gihon spring. (8:1)
 - (2) He reads for @ 5 ½ hours (@ 6:30 am until noon). (8:2-3)
 - (a) Including children who can understand.
 - (b) Hours to read: Gen.—3.5, Exo.—@ 3, Lev.—@ 2, Num.—@ 3, Deut.—2.5 [14 hours total]
 - (3) He reads from a large platform/tower. (8:4)
 - (a) Accommodates at least 14 people, maybe as many as 27 people.
 - (4) He reads to a standing (respectful) audience. (8:5)
 - (5) He reads to a worshipful audience. (8:6)
 - (6) He reads with helpers to explain and interpret/translate (Hebrew to Aramaic?). (8:7-8)
- ii) Nehemiah and others proclaim a feast. (8:9-12)
- (1) Holy times can be times of joyful celebration. (8:9-10)
 - (a) Holiness is not a synonym for being somber.
 - (b) The Feast of Trumpets (New Year [Rosh Hashanah]) was to be a time of celebration. (Lev. 23:24) It is the beginning of the *civil* calendar. The *religious* calendar begins in Mar./Apr.
 - (c) The best meat and beverages were to be enjoyed and shared with others who might not have the means to purchase such groceries.
 - (2) Note the use of both Yahweh and Adonai. (8:10)
 - (3) We see at least two ways people can respond to hearing God's Word. (8:9, 12)
 - (a) The powerful exposition of the Word of God can bring deep conviction of sin. But repentance must not degenerate into a self-centered remorse but must issue into joy in God's forgiving goodness. (Yamauchi, EBC)
- iii) Feasts of Booths (Tabernacles, Ingathering, Regathering). (8:13-18)
- (1) The obedience is based on the Law. (cf. Lev. 23:33-44; Deut. 16:13-16)
 - (a) Remembering their time in the wilderness and the need for repentance.
 - (2) The obedience is by the entire remnant in Jerusalem. (8:17a)
 - (3) The obedience is noted as being unique. (8:17b)
 - (a) Most likely meaning that no earlier observance had followed the Law as closely as this event. (cf. 1 Kings 8:65; Ezra 3:4)

- c) **reforms:** confession of sin, sealed by list of names (9:1–10:39)
- topics of resolutions: *Sabbath; purity of priests, Levites, and temple; intermarriage*
 - There is no mention of the Day of Atonement.
 - This is the longest summary of OT history in our Bible, with numerous echoes of OT passages.
- i) Confession of sin (9:1-38)
- (1) The setting. (9:1-5a)
 - (a) Three hours of listening to God’s Word, three hours of confession and worship. (9:3)
 - (2) Two résumés of repeated grace and repeated rebellion. (9:5b-31)
 - (a) Call to worship (9:5b)
 - (i) Note God’s eternity and glory
 - (b) Creation (9:6)
 - (i) Note God’s uniqueness and creative grace
 - (c) Abraham (9:7-8)
 - (i) Note God’s faithfulness and righteousness
 - (d) The Exodus & wilderness wandering (9:9-22)
 - (i) Note God’s compassion, faithfulness, and forgiveness
 - (e) The possession of the Promised Land (9:23-25)
 - (i) Note God’s fulfillment of His promise to Abraham and His goodness
 - (f) The well-earned Exile (9:26-31)
 - (i) Note God’s patience and faithfulness
 - (3) The request concerning the present, characterized by confession and repentance. (9:32-37)
 - (a) Note the description of God in 9:32a.
 - (b) “Land” is mentioned @ 20x in Nehemiah, 13 (14) x in this prayer.
 - (c) The irony of being slaves in the Land that God had given to them.
 - (4) The oath. (9:38)
- ii) Signers (84 total) of the oath document. (10:1-27)
- (1) Governor Nehemiah. (10:1)
 - (2) Priests (21 names). (10:2-8)
 - (3) Levites (17 names). (10:9-13)
 - (4) Leaders (44 names). (10:14-27)
- iii) The people commit to follow the oath. (10:28-39)
- (1) No mixed marriages. (10:30)
 - (2) No business on the Sabbath. (10:31a)
 - (3) Observe the Sabbath year. (10:31b)
 - (4) Offerings for the temple and the staff. (10:32-39)

- d) **CENTER: list of names** of new residents of Jerusalem chosen (11:1–36)
- i) Casting lots was to show that the decision was Yahweh’s and not merely the decision of the governor Nehemiah. (11:1-2)
- (1) They had earlier promised 10% of their produce (10:37). Now they devote 10% of their population. Some did volunteer to move in.
- (a) Jerusalem was neither an attractive nor a safe location.
- (b) The entire infrastructure (political, economic, commercial, industrial) has yet to be rebuilt.
- (2) The name “the holy city” is used to describe Jerusalem. (cf. 11:18)
- (a) Used earlier: Is. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24
- (b) Used later: Matt. 4:5; 27:53; Rev. 11:2; 21:2, 10; 22:19
- (3) Estimates of Jerusalem’s population during this time range from 4,800-8,000. It is estimated to have been 20,000 before the Exile.
- ii) Those living **inside** Jerusalem [3,044 total]. (11:3-19)
- (1) The heading of the list. (11:3)
- (2) The tribe of Judah [468 men]. (11:4-6)
- (3) The tribe of Benjamin [928 men]. (11:7-9)
- (4) The priests [1,192 men]. (11:10-14)
- (5) The Levites [284 men] and the gatekeepers (security and maintenance) [172 men]. (11:15-19)
- iii) Those living **outside** Jerusalem. (11:20-36)
- (1) The Levites and temple servants in general. (11:20-24)
- (a) “Each on his own inheritance” indicates a return to the ancient tribal lands. (11:20)
- (b) Ophel is the name of the southern end of the ridge on which the temple stands, or the north end of the City of David. (11:21)
- (2) Walled (?) cities and unwalled villages [17 places] of Judah south of Jerusalem. (11:25-30)
- (3) Walled (?) cities and unwalled villages [14 places] of Benjamin north of Jerusalem. (11:31-35)
- (4) The Levites. (11:36)

- e) **list of priests and Levites returning under Zerubbabel** (12:1–26)
- The emphasis is on continuity.
 - i) Beginning in Zerubbabel’s time (538 BC). (12:1-9)
 - (1) Priests. (12:1-7)
 - (2) Levites. (12:8-9)
 - ii) Genealogy of the high priests (538-@ 400 BC). (12:10-11)
 - iii) Continuing to Nehemiah’s time (through 404 BC). (12:12-26)
 - (1) Priests. (12:12-21)
 - (2) Levites. (12:22-26)
 - (a) “Darius the Persian” [Parsi] is Darius II Nothus, who ruled from 424-404 BC.
- f) **Nehemiah assembles the people** before *Water Gate, Ephraim Gate*, and other city gates; new wall is dedicated (Ezra involved) (12:27–47)
- This picks up the story from 11:2. It probably takes place within 1-2 months of the completion of the wall in 6:15-19.
 - The wall was @ eight feet wide.
 - i) Preparation for the dedication. (12:27-30)
 - (1) The joyful dedication (Chanukah). (12:27)
 - (a) Cf. 1 Kings 8 and Ezra 6:16
 - (2) These unwallled villages were located with 6-7 miles of Jerusalem. (12:28-29).
 - (3) The purification process may have included: ritual bathing and shaving, putting on clean clothes, fasting, abstaining from sexual relations, and offering sacrifices. (Num. 8:5-8; Lev. 11-15)
 - ii) Thanksgiving choir # 1, led by Ezra. (12:31-37)
 - (1) They start on the west, turn south, and walk around Jerusalem in a counterclockwise direction.
 - iii) Thanksgiving choir # 2, led by Nehemiah. (12:38-39)
 - (1) They start on the west, turn north, and walk in a clockwise direction.
 - iv) The two thanksgiving choirs meet on the east side near the Temple. (12:40-43)
 - (1) Each group (would have) traveled about two-thirds of a mile on the walls. That distance on the modern ramparts is from the Jaffa Gate to Herod’s Gate, which takes about thirty minutes to walk. (IVPBBC)
 - v) The contributions for the Levites and temple workers. (12:44-47)
 - (1) This partially fulfills 10:37-39.
 - vi) Psalm 147 may have originated from this dedication.

- g) **reforms:** Nehemiah's final reforms (13:1–31)
- topics of reforms: *Sabbath; purity of priests, Levites, and temple; intermarriage*
 - Note the phrase “remember me/them” (13:14, 22, 29, 31)
- i) Purifying Temple worship. (13:1-14)
- (1) The exclusion of unbelieving foreigners in general (Ammonites and Moabites). (13:1-3)
 - (a) Based on Deut. 23:3-6; Num. 22-24.
 - (b) This was not “racial” but rather religious. Cf. Ruth the Moabitess.
 - (2) The expulsion of a specific unbelieving Ammonite (Tobiah) and the cleansing of the Temple. (13:4-9)
 - (a) A priest sinfully allows an unbelieving relative (Nehemiah's enemy) to live within a Temple storeroom. (13:4-5)
 - This is an appointed priest, not Eliashib the high priest (cf. 3:1, 20)
 - This was apparently during Nehemiah's trip to Babylon. (cf. 2:6)
 - Tobiah's personal possessions take precedence over the items used for the worship of Yahweh!
 - (b) Nehemiah had returned to Babylon/Persia in 432 BC. (13:6-7)
 - (c) Nehemiah immediately expels Tobiah's property, cleanses the Temple rooms, and restores the rooms to their proper function. (13:8-9)
 - If on his first visit he had been a whirlwind, on his second he was all fire and earthquake to a city that had settled down in his absence to a comfortable compromise with the gentile world. (Kidner)
 - (3) The restoration of the tithes. (13:10-14)
 - (a) They had violated their earlier agreement. (13:10) (cf. 10:32-39)
 - This caused the Levites to have to supply their own income.
 - (b) Nehemiah rebukes them and they obey. (13:11-13)
 - Malachi also addresses this issue. (Mal. 3:8-10)
 - Nehemiah corrects the problem and provides trustworthy men to oversee the tithes.
 - (c) Nehemiah's first prayer of remembrance. (13:14)
- ii) The restoration of the Sabbaths. (13:15-22)
- (1) Nehemiah personally observes violations of the Sabbath. (13:15-16)
 - (a) In their zeal to rebuild Jerusalem's economy, they violate the Law.
 - (2) Nehemiah rebukes the leaders. (13:17-18)
 - (3) Nehemiah stops the Gentile merchants. (13:19-21)
 - (a) The merchants apparently thought this disruption was temporary.
 - (4) Nehemiah instructs the Levites. (13:22a)
 - (5) Nehemiah's second prayer of remembrance. (13:22b)
- iii) The restoration of proper marriages. (13:23-31)

- (1) Nehemiah personally observes the sinful intermarriage and lazy parenting. (13:23-24) [threatens community solidarity]
 - (a) Marriage to unbelieving Philistines [Baal & Dagon-worshippers], Ammonites [Milcom-worshippers], and Moabites [Chemosh-worshippers] was a violation of their earlier agreement. (cf. 10:30)
 - (b) No divorces are commanded at this time. (cf. Ezra 30 years earlier)
- (2) Nehemiah rebukes them of their sinful acts. (13:25-27)
 - (a) Using King Solomon as an example of this sin.
 - (b) Contrast with Ezra pulling his own hair. (Ezra 9:3; Neh. 13:25)
- (3) Nehemiah expels the high priest's son for this sin. (13:28)
 - (a) The grandson of Eliashib the high priest had violated the Law (Lev. 21:14). He had married the daughter of Nehemiah's enemy.
- (4) Nehemiah's third prayer of remembrance. (13:29)
- (5) Nehemiah's zeal for obedience in all areas of life. (13:30-31a)
- (6) Nehemiah's fourth prayer of remembrance. (13:31b)

Overview of the book(s)

- 1) **Zerubbabel's return and list of returnees** (Ezra 1–2)
 - a) list of returnees, gold, silver, priestly garments (2:1–70)
- 2) **building of temple and opposition from enemies** (Ezra 3–6)
 - a) themes: *opposition*, the story of the Jews' success
- 3) **Ezra's return** (Ezra 7–8)
 - a) *dealings with king*
 - b) orders from king to Transeuphrates *governors to assist Jews*
 - c) recounted in *first-person*
- 4) **CENTER: purification of people** (Ezra 9–10)
- 5) **Nehemiah's return** (Neh. 1–2)
 - a) *dealings with king*
 - b) orders from king to Transeuphrates *governors to assist Jews*
 - c) recounted in *first-person*
- 6) **building of walls and opposition from enemies** (Neh. 3:1–7:3)
 - a) themes: *opposition*, the story of the Jews' success
- 7) **Zerubbabel's return and list of returnees; final reforms** (Neh. 7:4–13:31)
 - a) list of returnees, gold, silver, priestly garments (7:4–73)