



The Historical Books

Session 7 – Ezra & Nehemiah

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St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church

Autumn 2021

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So What do you Think?

- Read the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah
 - Ezra begins with the royal proclamation to rebuild the temple. What do you think this meant to King Cyrus of Persia and to the people of Israel?
 - When the foundation of the temple is constructed, the elders who saw the first temple wept, why?
 - What argument do opponents raise to stop the building program (Ezra 4)
 - What does Darius I do and why? (Ezra 6)
 - What does Ezra ask God for? (Ezra 9:5-15)

So What do you Think?

- Read the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah
 - How much stronger are the walls of Jerusalem versus those in the time of David? (Nehemiah 1-7)
 - What themes of Nehemiah 8:2-10 make it a companion for Jesus' visit to Nazareth in Luke 4:14-21
 - What does Ezra ask God in Nehemiah 9:6-37?
 - Is there more to be done at the end of Nehemiah or has it all been finished?

Ezra & Nehemiah

- How does one rebuild a nation
- Ezra and Nehemiah have an answer to that question
- We join these two leaders together because their story is contained on one scroll and is considered to be one book in the Hebrew Bible
- The same is true of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles and the minor prophets – the books were separated on a later date

Ezra & Nehemiah

- Ezra and Nehemiah are not up there with the big names like Moses, David, Elijah, Elisha Jeremiah, etc.
- Just the same, their story fits right in with the message of the rest of the Bible – it provides one more piece forming the Word of God
- How do you rebuild a kingdom?
- With the help of God – there is no other way

Ezra & Nehemiah

- The books are consumed with rebuilding
- First is the rebuilding of the altar and temple in Jerusalem
- Then there is the reestablishment of religious traditions overseen by Ezra the scribe
- Next comes the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah, the governor
- All this rebuilding is great, but it is not enough – something is missing

Ezra & Nehemiah

- The rebuilding relates to externals only – they do not touch the soul
- The city can be restored but can the people?
- For the people to be restored there must be an internal rebuilding
- That is why there is a very prominent scene when Ezra makes a public proclamation of the law (Nehemiah 8)

Ezra & Nehemiah

- It is so important that Nehemiah is present too
- It is the only time the two appear together in the two books
- There are two elaborate prayers
 - Ezra asking for God to preserve the remnant of the people as they try to be loyal to the covenant (Ezra 9:6-15)
 - Ezra asking God to forgive the people and allow them to enjoy a bountiful harvest (Nehemiah 9:6-37)

Ezra & Nehemiah

- Ezra has 10 chapters
 - 1 – 6 Rebuilding the temple
 - 7 – 10 Rebuilding the tradition
- Nehemiah has 13 chapters
 - 1 – 7 Rebuilding the walls
 - 8 – 13 Rebuilding the community

Ezra & Nehemiah

- When does it take place
 - Return from exile c. 537 BC
 - Ezra after c. 458 BC
 - Nehemiah after c. 445 BC
- When were they written
 - The books record the events from the return of the exiles from Babylon to the mid 5th century BC
 - Some material – decrees from Persian court – go back to those times
 - Ezra 7:7 tells of a famous scribe arriving in the 7th year of Artaxerxes I

Ezra & Nehemiah

- When were they written (con't)
 - If it is Artaxerxes I then 458 BC is likely Nehemiah arrives in the 20th year of his reign which makes 445 BC likely too.
 - In its present form the books come from a later period – most likely in the 200s BC

Ezra & Nehemiah

- Interesting points
 - **Ezra** – Is “the Scribe.” He is well versed in matters of the Law of Moses but is deeply committed to the spiritual welfare of the people. In rabbinic tradition he is considered to be the founder of Judaism.
 - **Nehemiah** - Is the governor that oversees the reconstruction of the walls around the city of Jerusalem. He served as a butler to the kings of Persia. He might have been a eunuch but that is speculation. When his distress over the conditions in Jerusalem became know to the Persian court, he was appointed governor of Judah.

Ezra & Nehemiah

- Interesting points
 - **Kings of Persia** – Three kings are mentioned: Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes. With their various decrees they aided in the restoration of Jerusalem and Judah. From the point of view of Ezra and Nehemiah they were at the service of the God of Israel.
 - **Zerubbabel** – Is the governor of the restored Judah. He was the one overseeing the reconstruction of the temple. More importantly he was a descendant of David. He is included in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27.

Lessons from Ezra & Nehemiah

- The most certain foundation for any nation is service to God
- When we recognize our need for God, we take the first step toward being restored and built up
- Prayer is right, anytime and any place

For Next Week

- Read the Book of Tobit
 - What would it be like to live away from home like Tobit?
 - What kind of person is Anna?
 - Have you felt like Tobit when he prays to be set free of his problems?
 - Does God's response to Tobit's prayer show how God works in our lives?
 - Chapter 6 mentions a "fish" story – what others are in the Bible?
 - The prayer of Tobias and Sarah is often used at weddings – why is this so appealing at that Sacrament?

For Next Week

- Read the Book of Esther
 - What does Mordecai's dream mean?
 - What are your impressions of Mordecai and Haman?
 - What motivates Haman to issue a decree against the Jews?
 - What do the prayers of Mordecai and Esther show about their relationship with God?
 - Some rabbis wondered if Esther should be in the Bible since God was so hidden. Do you agree with them?