

Ezra-Nehemiah

Authors:

- Ezra – a priest and scribe, he most likely had a hand in editing Chronicles and Nehemiah
- Nehemiah, a Jewish servant of the King of Persia. He gives a first-hand account.

Date:

- Ezra – He came to Jerusalem around 458 BC, during the reign of Artexerxes (464-424 BC). The book was written after the return from captivity. During Ezra's life, Greece was on the rise, in its Golden Age, during the lifetime of Socrates.
 - 586 BC - Destruction of the Temple & Exile to Babylon
 - 538 BC – Cyrus decrees the return of the people to Jerusalem
 - 521 BC – Darius becomes king of Persia
 - 515 BC – Temple completed
 - 486 BC – Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) becomes King of Persia
 - 464 BC – Artaxerxes I becomes King
 - 458 BC – Ezra returns to Jerusalem
- Nehemiah – He came to Jerusalem in 445 BC
 - 443 BC – the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt

Form/Structure of Ezra

Two main divisions:

1:1-6:22 – Restoring the Place of the Covenant
 7:1-10:44 – Restoring the Practice of the Covenant

Three decrees create the structure of the book:

Cyrus (1:1)
 Darius (6:8)
 Artaxerxes (7:11)

Two returns are recorded by the book:

One under Sheshbazzar (with or same as Zerubbabel) (family of David – 1 Chr. 3:18-19)
 One under Ezra the priest

Two tasks:

Rebuild the temple (6:15)
 Rebuild Covenant purity in worship of Yahweh and obeying Torah (7:10)

The works of Sheshbazzar & Ezra

| Event | Sheshbazzar | Ezra |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Release and Travel | 1:1-2:70 | 7:1-8:34 |
| Return and worship | 3:1-7 | 8:35-36 |
| Task of rebuilding | 3:8-6:22 | 9:1-10:44 |
| | Davidic Line | Aaronic Line |
| | Builder of the Temple | Teacher of the People |

Form/Structure of Nehemiah

Jerusalem and the removal of sin's reproach: "the city's destruction had conformed to the people's sinfulness, the city's restoration would reflect the people's repentance and God's restored blessing" – Carl Laney

1:1-2:8 – The Return

- 1:1-3 – Shame remains on the remnant
- 1:4-11 – Asking God to remember His covenant
- 2:1-8 – God answers prayer and moves the heart of the king

2:9-6:19 – The Removal of Shame Despite Opposition

- 2:9-16 – Nehemiah makes a secret survey in a time of opposition
- 2:17-3:32 – Nehemiah begins work on the walls and gates
- 4:1-23 – Opposition: working through mockery, conspiracy and attack
- 5:1-19 – Opposition: working through internal strife, hardship and injustice
- 6:1-14 – Opposition: working through compromise, slander and fear
- 6:15-19 – The wall is completed.

7:1-13:31 – The Restoration of Covenant Relationship/Purity

- 7:1-73 – The Population of Jerusalem recorded
- 8:1-10:39 – The covenant renewed, observances rediscovered, people repent
- 11:1-12:26 – The people increase
- 12:27-13:31 – The wall is dedicated.

Main Themes of Ezra Nehemiah

(These two books have traditionally been regarded as one book.)

1. The People need to return to the land after their captivity (compare to Ruth)
2. The need for rebuilding is emphasized (new temple, new walls, new community)
3. Both Ezra and Nehemiah lead in social/spiritual reforms:
 - a. Prayer (Ezra 6:10; 8:23; 9:6-10:1; Neh. 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:9; 9:5-37; 11:17)
 - b. Commitment to Torah
 - c. Priesthood
 - d. Covenant renewal
 - e. Racial purity (no intermarriage—as prevention of idolatry)
 - f. Remembrance of & thanks for God's promises to their forefathers
4. Ezra-Nehemiah's reforms fail to effect any lasting change (Neh. 13)

Background Reading – Haggai 2:1-10, Zechariah 6-13