

Studying To Show
Ourselves Approved

EZRA
THE SCRIBE

and

NEHEMIAH
THE GOVERNOR

By Charles Willis

EZRA

THE SCRIBE

and

NEHEMIAH

THE GOVERNOR

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TIMELINE

HISTORICAL EVENTS

460–429 B.C.

Herodius, Socrates, Plato

336–323 B.C.

Alexander The Great died in
Babylon in 323 B.C.

PROPHETS

Haggai & Zechariah
519 B.C.
Ezra 5:1

Period of Exile in Babylon Begins

586 B.C.

Persian Kings

CYRUS

559–530 B.C.

First Return from Exile led by Zerubbabel

536 B.C.

Temple Foundation Rebuilt (Ezra 3)

534 B.C.

Foundation Complete (4:6 letter to Ahasuerus “beginning of his reign”)

530 B.C.

CAMBYSES

530–522 B.C.

SMERDIS

522 B.C.

Construction Stopped (4:7 letter to Artaxerxes)

522 B.C.

Construction Resumed (4:24)

519 B.C.

Temple Completed & Dedicated (Ezra 6:13-18)
Passover Celebration (Ezra 6:19)

515 B.C.

Darius 1st

521–486 B.C.

Book of Esther

483–473 B.C.

AHASUERUS

486–464 B.C.

Ezra in Babylon given authority over Judea for a time
He and 1800 men and their families are the **Second Return**
Ezra reinstates religious law especially over matter of intermarrying (Ezra 9-10)

458 B.C.

Third Return

Nehemiah given permission to rebuild walls. Political authority given to Nehemiah.

444 B.C.

ARTAXERXES

464–423 B.C.

The Prophet Malachi

432 B.C.

Restorations under Nehemiah (chapter 13)

425 B.C.

FROM THE TEXT

1. Why did Cyrus build a house at Jerusalem?
2. What was the decree of Cyrus?
3. What did Cyrus return to the people?
4. How many returned from the Babylonian captivity? Did any remain in captivity?
5. What other Old Testament stories might overlap with the return in Ezra 1-3?
6. What was the problem with those recorded in 2:61?
7. Chapter 2 verse 70 lists “singers” as some sort of important group (which will also occur later in the study). Who were they, what was their function, and where do we find the authorization for them?
8. Prior to the events at the outset of chapter 3, where had the people been offering sacrifices?
9. How many offerings were made on this occasion? Why so many?
10. What was the reaction of the people once the foundation had been built?

*Lesson 1****The Return***
*Ezra 1-3***THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. Was Cyrus a Jewish convert? Why did God speak to him? Why was he the one to rebuild? (1:1-4)
2. What was the attitude of the Babylonian people about the captives leaving? What influence had the captives apparently had on the nation? What other Old Testament reference would substantiate this concept?
3. What condition was Jerusalem in when they arrived? (refer to 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39:1-10)
4. Were the captives allowed to take the written law into captivity with them?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Who were the “people of the land” (4:4) the remnant found when they returned?
2. How did those people “discourage” and “frighten” the people of Judah (4:4)?
3. From the time line at the start of the booklet, trace the reigns of the Kings of Persia listed in chapter 4. From the reading for this lesson, what sense can be made of the timing of events? Do I correctly list the work on the temple resuming at the appropriate time? (5:2)
4. In your own words relate what the governor “beyond the river” wrote to the King in chapter 5. Why did he write this?
5. Again, in your own words, what was the reply from Darius?
6. How was the temple dedicated?
7. What differences in attitude toward the people of Judah are displayed between the people of Babylon and the people of the outlying region of the empire? Why the difference?
8. In Ezra 5:16 it says “Sheshbazzar...laid the foundation”. Who was he and what did he do? This seems to conflict with the reading of chapter 3.
9. As best you can, try to determine how long did it take to build the foundation and temple?
10. From Ezra 6:18, what were the “divisions” and “orders” of the priests and Levites?

*Lesson 2****Opposition & Construction****Ezra 4-6***THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. In a few words (if possible) relate what Haggai and Zechariah were prophesying during this period. How might that relate to the reading?
2. Chapter one does not give as much detail about the decree of Cyrus as does chapter 6. What did the King authorize to be built? Convert the dimensions into modern measurements.
3. From Ezra 1-6 how do we see God’s involvement in keeping His promise that a remnant shall remain? What demonstrates that God has not forgotten His people?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Who was Ezra? What was his occupation?
2. Approximately when did he lead the second return? Who went with him?
3. Verse 10 says Ezra “set his heart” to do what?
 - A. Should we prepare our heart to do these things? How?
 - B. What New Testament passages indicate Christians should exhibit these same qualities?
4. What did Artaxerxes give Ezra as a “mission” to accomplish?
5. We’ve discussed the attitude of the Babylonians already. What seems to have been the attitude of King Artaxerxes toward the people of God? Does verse 26 indicate the Babylonians were worshipping Jehovah?
6. Of what significance were the King’s remarks in verse 21-26? Who would these have been directed toward?
7. How much were these people expected to help Ezra?
8. What did the King recognize in Ezra (v.25)? What does Ezra say of himself (v.28)? Compare with verse 6.
9. Though Ezra may have worked hard to bring about these events, and may have been a very wise man, what was his attitude after receiving the letter?

*Lesson 3****Ezra Revealed****Ezra 7***THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. Verse 7 lists the duties of some who returned. Name the position and give the Old Testament passage that authorizes the office.
2. How much of this was a result of Ezra’s doings and how much was a result of God intervening?
3. What might we call Ezra’s position which was given to him by the King?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Why did Ezra gather “leading men” to go with him (8:16)?
2. How was the problem of no priests solved? Who was sent to Ezra?
3. Why does the text make a point of recording the “temple servants” (NASB) or “Nethinims” (KJ verse 17, 20) as being sent? Who were they?
4. Of what was Ezra ashamed to ask (8:22)? Why?
5. Why was fasting important (8:21–23)?
6. How much precious metals were given to the priests to take charge of (8:24–27)? Put it in weights we use today.
7. Why was Ezra the one to declare these things holy? (v.28)
What authority did he have to say the priests are holy?
8. To whom did Ezra deliver the King’s letter (8:36)?
9. What sin had the people of God committed? What was Ezra’s immediate reaction?

*Lesson 4****Ezra Laments******Ezra 8-9*****THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. What was Ezra’s attitude toward sin?
What does the New Testament say should be our attitude toward sin?
2. Which of Ezra’s phrases in chapter 9 indicate his understanding of God’s grace and mercy?
3. What does Ezra mean in verse 15 of chapter 9 that God is “righteous” and “no one can stand before you because of this”? How does this compare with our attitude when we have sinned?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Who witnessed the prayer of Ezra in chapter 8 and what was their response in 10:1?
2. Why did Shechaniah say there was now hope (seeming to imply there had not been any prior to this)?
3. What encouragement did these people give Ezra?
4. What oath did Israel take?
5. What did Ezra do in the house of Johana?
6. What was the penalty for not obeying the proclamation issued in verse 7?
7. Relate the scene of Ezra addressing all of Israel making confession.
8. When presented with the truth, what was the response of Israel?
9. How great was the number who participated in this sin? How was the matter handled that each could confess? How long did this process take before it was completed?
10. What did the men do that had taken “foreign wives”? (10:19)

*Lesson 5****Israel Laments******Ezra 10*****THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. I thought God hates divorce? Is God demanding divorce?
2. How had sin “invaded the camp”? 10:18 indicates to what degree?
3. The actions taken in chapter 10 could easily be seen as repentance. How should we repent of our sin? To what degree should we go to again be right in God’s sight?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Why had the men of Judah come to Nehemiah? What was the problem, and why did they present it to him?
2. How did Nehemiah respond to these things?
3. For what did Nehemiah pray (1:11)?
4. Why does 2:2 record that Nehemiah was “afraid”?
5. How long was Nehemiah’s prayer in 2:4? How does this relate to our concept of prayer?
6. What request did Nehemiah make of the King?
7. When he saw the King react favorably to his request, what more did Nehemiah ask for?

*Lesson 6****Nehemiah Prays***
Nehemiah 1:1-2:8**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. Both Ezra and Nehemiah are presented as men who actively prayed to God. What should be the Christian’s attitude toward prayer? (give scriptures)
2. Though in captivity, how familiar was Nehemiah with scripture? What lessons can we gain from this thought?
3. Do you think Nehemiah had planned on requesting this of the king? Was his “sad face” a planned thing?
4. What indications do we have that Ezra and Nehemiah both recognized authority could be found in written form? (Both religious and temporal)
5. How did knowledge or information effect the life of Nehemiah? When presented with the truth, knowledge, information about God’s law, how should it effect us?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Who went with Nehemiah on this third return of God's people?
2. What kind of reception did they receive from the governors beyond the river?
3. How did Nehemiah inspect the city (2:11-16)? Why?
4. What was the response of the rulers of the city when they heard of Nehemiah's plan? What was the response of the local governors?
5. Which part of 2:20 would have caused the most animosity between Nehemiah and the governors?
6. Pick three of the people who built the wall (3:1-32) and do some detailed study about them. Be prepared to relate to the class why you chose those characters, what was significant about what they rebuilt, or some detail that may have been easily overlooked. Do more than three if you like!
7. Compare the different builders of the wall. Why is this seen as a unique event in the history of Israel?
8. How large a project had they undertaken? Look at some maps to try and determine the extent of the wall around Jerusalem, and determine if history records how much was repaired at this time.
9. Who in chapter 3 is recorded for NOT working on the wall?

*Lesson 7****The Builders***
Nehemiah 2:9-3:32**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss how the attitude of the governors beyond the river is comparable with the attitude of those in the world today about the work of the Lord and how it should be accomplished.
2. This is a great example of unity and working together. How can this be compared with the way the Bible presents the church?

FROM THE TEXT

1. What did the neighbors think of the Israelites efforts at repairing the wall?
2. “The people had a mind ____ _____” (4:6). What does this reveal of the attitude of the Israelites, and how did they respond to the remarks of the neighbors?
3. What was the conspiracy against Jerusalem (4:8)? How did Nehemiah respond in preparing the people?
4. What statement(s) of faith are used by Nehemiah in chapter 4?
5. What did Nehemiah become angry about in chapter 5? Why was this something to get angry about?
6. What does the later portion of chapter 5 disclose about Nehemiah’s wealth/position, and personal attitude?
7. What tactics did Sanbalat and his friends resort to in chapter 6? What is Nehemiah’s response?
8. How many days was the wall completed in (6:15)? Why did this discourage their enemies?
9. How did the nobles of Judah respond?

*Lesson 8***Opposition**
*Nehemiah 4-6***THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. How do we as Christians demonstrate we have a mind to work?
2. What other New Testament passages describe righteous anger such as Nehemiah displayed? For what type of things should we get angry?
3. In general what can we learn about man’s opposition to God’s plans? And what should be our attitude about God’s plans as His servants?
4. How does Nehemiah’s generosity and hospitality in chapter 5 compare with the generosity and hospitality we ought to have as Christians?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Who was appointed as rulers of Jerusalem? Who gave Nehemiah the authority to appoint?
2. What was the point of everyone getting a “watch” in verse 3?
3. What was a “book of genealogy” (verse 5)? Who kept this register?
4. What was the total number of people that came out of the exile? (the total number that returned)
5. What problem did some of the priests have? (v.63-65) How does this relate to the Jews of the New Testament era? (see 1 Tim. 1:4; Titus 3:9)
6. Chapter 7 verses 70-73 records gifts being given. For what work?
7. What was read to the people, and who read it? Where did he get it from? Was Ezra a priest or a scribe? (8:1-2)
8. Describe the scene while Ezra was reading.
9. What does 8:7 mean that these men “explained the Law to the people”?
10. Why was reading the Law necessary? Why was causing them to understand (8:8) necessary?

*Lesson 9****Reading The Law***
Nehemiah 7:1-8:8**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. How many generations does it take to not know God’s Law? What importance does that impose on us to teach others?
2. Compare and contrast our attitude about God’s Law to the people hearing it in Nehemiah 8.
3. What prompted this reading? What should prompt our reading?

FROM THE TEXT

1. Why were the people crying when they heard the word of the Lord?
2. Why did the Levites keep telling them to stop because the day was holy?
3. How many days did the people assemble to hear the word of God read?
4. What observance did the people keep? How long since it had last been kept? Please describe in some detail what this observance detailed.
5. On the eighth day there was a “solemn assembly according to the ordinance” (v.18). What ordinance? What was this assembly like?
6. Knowing the history of the Israelites that led to the captivity in Babylon, do you see anything surprising in this reading?
7. The people were instructed to not be sorrowed for the “joy of the Lord is your strength” (8:10). What is meant by this phrase? Is that true for Christians today?

*Lesson 10****The People Understand***
Nehemiah 8:9-18**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. Relate how the returned people responded to laws they were unaware of. Compare that with people today who are not aware of God’s Law. What range of attitudes could have been exhibited on this occasion?
2. How might men today view God’s command to sit under a booth? Compare with men’s attitudes toward acapella singing, baptism, and the work of the church. What was the attitude of the returned captives?
3. What implication is apparent from the statement in verse 14 “they found”? Who found? Who was aware of this law? What can we learn from this about teaching the entire law of God?

FROM THE TEXT

1. The “solemn assembly” (8:18) is what is presented in chapter 9. Why were the people dressed in sackclothes with “dirt upon them” (9:1)?
2. What did they do for half a day? (9:4)? Who stood up?
3. Describe the attitude of the people toward God and what He had done for them. List phrases used in chapter 9 that relate this attitude. (for example: “You alone are the Lord” 9:6)
4. List some descriptive words or phrases used in chapter 9 to describe what the people did that displeased God. (for example: “our fathers, acted arrogantly” 9:16)
5. What was the “agreement” (NASB) or “sure covenant” (KJ) made between the returned people and God (9:38)?
6. What “obligations” did the people agree to (10:32ff)?
7. Of what significance is the statement at the end of chapter 10 “we will not neglect the house of our God”?
8. What understanding of God’s Law do the people demonstrate in chapter 10?

*Lesson 11****Renewing The Covenant***
Nehemiah 9-10**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. What is a “covenant” (9:38, King James), and how important was it to the people? (consider 10:29 with your answer) Do we make a covenant with God today? (explain your answer)
2. Cite examples from the “historical review” that demonstrate the long-suffering and forgiveness of God. List New Testament passages that indicate this aspect of God’s nature has not changed.
3. When is God forgiving (as stated in this reading and today)?
4. A significant part of the “covenant” was “separating themselves from the people of the lands” (10:28). How important is that for us today?

FROM THE TEXT

1. How did the people decide who would occupy the city of Jerusalem?
2. What does 11:20 mean “each on his own inheritance”?
3. Chapter 12 verse 26 accurately tells us the separate duties of both Ezra and Nehemiah. What are they?
4. What was the “dedication of the wall” (12:27)?
5. How would the priests have “purified” themselves and the people, gates, and walls (10:30)?
6. Where did the two great companies “take their tand” after traversing the wall (12:40)? Where did they give thanks?
7. Chapter 12:44 again emphasizes the attitude of the people to return to God’s way. From what tribe would the person have been appointed from? Who would have done the appointing?
8. Where do we see God instituting the “singers and porters” (12:45)? Did God commands the group or did David (12:46)? What was the “command” they kept from God (12:45)?

*Lesson 12****Dedication of the Wall***
Nehemiah 11-12**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. The returned exiles, and the Israelite people in general seemed to place a lot of importance on dedication and sanctification. How have these ideas been carried over into the New Law?
2. There is a lot in this reading about supporting the priests and the giving of tithes. In the New Testament we are all priests. What is taught in the New Law about supporting those who are preaching the gospel?
3. How do we “purify” ourselves today?

FROM THE TEXT

1. What sin had the people committed that required correction? From which countries had they come?
2. Considering what is taught in Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 10:29–30, do you find this peculiar? Why or why not?
3. When did Nehemiah return to the king of Persia? Why? Why was he allowed to return to Jerusalem again?
4. Who was Eliashib? (study Neh. 12:10, 22, 44, 13:28)
5. What were Eliashib and Tobiah guilty of? (13:29) Why did no one else correct this problem before Nehemiah returned?
6. Nehemiah asked, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” (13:11). What was said in the covenant just a few chapters back?
7. How long had Nehemiah been gone that things seemed to fall apart so quickly? What warning should we see in this?

*Lesson 13****Restoration & Purification***
Nehemiah 13**THOUGHT QUESTIONS**

1. What do Ezra and Nehemiah both illustrate about the faith of one man?
2. What is said about how Nehemiah wielded his influence on the people?
3. Much is made in both of these books about marrying foreign wives. Nehemiah 13:26 even references the evil wives of Solomon. Is there a requirement in the New Law that Christians marry Christians?
4. Try to relate what you think is the importance of Ezra and Nehemiah (the books), what do they reveal about God’s people that we would not have otherwise known?