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# EZRA; NEHEMIAH

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Lesson 19, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 17 January 2012

## Study Guide

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### OUTLINE: EZRA

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- I. The Return of the Jews (1-6)
  - a. Cyrus' decree to return (1)
  - b. List of those who returned (2)
  - c. Building of the temple begins (3)
  - d. Opposition present and future (4:1-23)
  - e. Construction renewed (4:24 – 5:2)
- f. Opposition renewed (5:3 – 6:12)
- g. Temple completed and dedicated (6:13-22)
- II. Ezra the Scribe (7-10)
  - a. Ezra arrives (7-8)
  - b. Ezra leads the revival (9-10)

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### OUTLINE: NEHEMIAH

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- I. Rebuilding the Walls
  - a. Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem (1-2)
  - b. Nehemiah leads the rebuilding of the walls (3:1 – 7:4)
- II. Rebuilding the People (7:5 – 13:31)
  - a. Remembering the first return (7:5 -73a)
  - b. Ezra expounds the law (7:73b – 8:12)
  - c. The people worship and repent (8:13 – 9:37)
  - d. Ezra and the priests renew the covenants (9:38 – 10:39)
  - e. Jerusalem is resettled (11:1 – 12:26)
  - f. The walls are dedicated (12:27-43; 13:1-3)
  - g. Various temple responsibilities (12:44-47)
  - h. Nehemiah's second term as governor (13)

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### INTRODUCTION

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Here is a timetable of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (*works from the same period indicated in italics*):

Year	Chapters	Location	Persian ruler
<b>538-417</b>	Ezra 1:1-6:14	Babylon; Jerusalem	Cyrus; Darius I; Ahasuerus (Xerxes); Artaxerxes; Darius II
<b>520</b>	<i>Haggai 1-2</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>Darius I</i>
<b>520-518</b>	<i>Zechariah 1-14</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>Darius I</i>
<b>516</b>	Ezra 6:15-22	Jerusalem	Darius I
<b>483</b>	<i>Esther 1</i>	<i>Susa</i>	<i>Ahasuerus (Xerxes)</i>
<b>479-478</b>	<i>Esther 2-10</i>	<i>Susa</i>	<i>Ahasuerus (Xerxes)</i>
<b>458</b>	Ezra 7-8	Babylon; Jerusalem	Artaxerxes
<b>446-445</b>	Nehemiah 1-7	Susa	Artaxerxes
<b>445</b>	Nehemiah 8-12	Jerusalem	Artaxerxes
<b>445</b>	Ezra 9-10	Jerusalem	Artaxerxes
<b>424-?</b>	Nehemiah 13	Jerusalem	Darius II
<b>433-424</b>	<i>Malachi 1-4</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>Artaxerxes; Darius II</i>

The two books of Ezra and Nehemiah overlap their stories and are interlaced chronologically. Anciently, they were one book and a continuation of Chronicles. They are also the last of the historical books (in terms of the chronology of the story). Their current content order came at the hands of later editors who sometimes told the story and sometimes quoted directly from the records of these times (there are several passages in the first person). Together they tell the story of not one but two returns to Jerusalem—the first to rebuild the temple under Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the second to secure that temple and the city from enemies by fortifying the broken-down walls under Nehemiah

and Ezra. They are also stories of fortifying a people who had lost their tie to the Lord and needed to recommit themselves to God's laws and purposes.

Though Ezra and Nehemiah were not prophets, as the timetable shows, they were assisted by prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and perhaps Malachi in the latter part of Nehemiah. Humility, trust in the Lord, patience, and hard work served them all well in establishing a culture of obedience that helped unify the scattered people again, creating a people that endured additional struggles and persecutions down to the Roman destruction in A.D. 70 that finally scattered them across the world.

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## EZRA

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### THE RETURN OF THE JEWS (1-6)

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#### INTRODUCTION

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The Persians conquered just like anyone else in previous kingdoms. But they treated conquered people differently, giving them a high degree of self-rule, letting them rebuild their cities and temples, and return to the lands where they lived before the Assyrians or Babylonians or other nations had taken them. This change in attitude gave the Jews in Babylon and other parts of the Persian empire the opportunity to return to their native land of Judah and rebuild their precious temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Of course, most of the Jews that returned had been born and raised in the eastern cities of the Babylonian and Persian empires and had never visited Judah. But the desire to worship the Lord again in his ancient house and place was a powerful force that moved many to give up their comfortable lives and sacrifice to rebuild the city.

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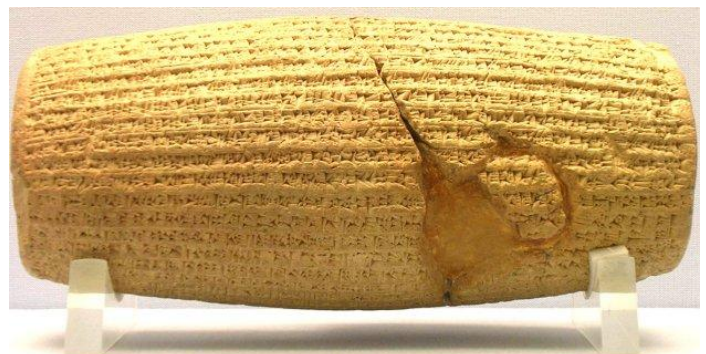
#### CYRUS' DECREE TO RETURN (1)

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1:1 *the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia.* Cyrus was the conqueror of Babylon, also called "Darius" (as a title) in Daniel. This was 539/538 B.C. and is a deliberate overlap with 2 Chronicles—Ezra begins

right where that book left off, alerting us that it is a continuation of that history.

1:1-4 *thus saith Cyrus.* Isaiah 44:28 – 45:1 prophesied of this event more than 100 years before Cyrus was even born. It is interesting to note that the Cyrus cylinder, dated to 539 B.C. and found in Babylon (below), shows that the Jews were not



alone in this privilege. As gestures of goodwill, he let many people return to their home cities, take their gods back, and rebuild their temples. This helped him gain favor with the people he had just conquered, reversing the pattern of relocation followed by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

1:8 *Sheshbazzar.* Sheshbazzar was a descendent of Jehoiachin, the last surviving king of Judah, and was given charge to take all the vessels back to the

temple. Though not highlighted here, it is remarkable and even miraculous that they returned without incident—no robberies or attacks of any kind—given the time and distance they traveled and the wealth they carried.

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## LIST OF THOSE WHO RETURNED (2)

2:2 **Zerubbabel**. His name means “seed of Babylon.” He is another descendent of Jehoiachin, mentioned in Matthew 1:12 as a progenitor of Joseph. He is the political ruler.

2:2 **Jeshua**. A form of the same name written elsewhere as Joshua or, in the New Testament, Jesus, which means “salvation.” He is the priestly ruler, even called the High Priest in Haggai.

2:3-60 **The children of**. A recitation of those who came out of Persia to return to Jerusalem. Compare to Nehemiah 7.

2:43 **Nethinim**. A word that comes up eighteen times in Ezra and Nehemiah. It means ‘temple servants.’ They were perhaps descendants of the Gibeonites whose role it was to perform menial tasks in the temple (Joshua 9:23-27). In this day, they seem to have been a privileged class, just below Priests and Levites. After this time however, they were no longer mentioned, leading many to conclude that they simply became part of the Levite class.

2:62 **put from the priesthood**. Because they couldn’t trace their genealogy and confirm they were of the tribe of Levi, these men could not be allowed to officiate in the temple ceremonies.

2:63 **Tirshatha**. This word will come up five times in these books (here; Nehemiah 7:65, 70; 8:9; 10:1). It is the Persian title for ‘governor.’

2:63 **Urim and Thummim**. They no longer had it, but had faith that God would restore all things one day, including the sacred stones used to discern God’s will.

2:64 **forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore** (42,360). Shows how relatively small the number of returning Jews is. The majority of Jews stayed in their new homes in the east.

2:70 **dwelt in their cities**. Not everyone settled in Jerusalem; many went back to their ancestral lands. This was a problem because it left Jerusalem fairly small and undefended, which later became a big issue.

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## BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE BEGINS (3)

3:2 **builed the altar**. Before they even built the temple, they built the altar and began to offer sacrifices again, to obey the Law of Moses as much as they could. The city was not even rebuilt yet.

3:4-5 **set feasts**. They started keeping the feasts prescribed in the Law of Moses.

3:9 **set forward the workmen**. In the second year, the second month (3:8), they laid the foundation of the second temple with great ceremony and celebration. This was 538/537.

3:12 **ancient men**. There were some among there who had been children when the first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Now these old men wept aloud because they were seeing the foundations of the second temple laid. Josephus (Jewish historian) wrote that they wept because the new temple wasn’t nearly as grand as Solomon’s.

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## OPPOSITION CURRENT AND FUTURE (4:1-23)

4:4 **the people of the land**. The Samaritans had been coming to Jerusalem to worship for many years during the Babylonian captivity. (Jeremiah 40-41 also hints that these people were coming to the destroyed Jerusalem to offer sacrifice right after the fall of the city.) Now the Jews from the east had come with a permanent presence. When the Samaritans offered to help in the work, they are told ‘no thanks’ and thus ended up as the enemies of the returning Jews. This relationship of tension continued for over 400 years, well past the time of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament.

4:6 **in the reign of Ahasuerus**. This is the same king mentioned in Esther, otherwise called Xerxes in Greek history. The mention of four quick kings in rapid succession is to convey that the Samaritan

antagonism toward the returning Jews lasted for many years. The events of this chapter are in the time of Cyrus and Darius, though Ezra himself is during the time of Artaxerxes (7:7).

**CONSTRUCTION RENEWED (4:24 – 5:2)**

5:1 **the prophets Haggai...and Zechariah.** Here we are introduced to two prophets who were contemporary with this time but whose writings will be discussed in a future lesson.

5:2 **to build the house of God.** This ties into Haggai 1, where they began again to rebuild temple.

**OPPOSITION RENEWED (5:3 – 6:12)**

5:3 **Tatnai, governor on this side the river.** Tatnai, the governor of the Persian lands on the west of the Euphrates, at the prompting of the Samaritan people, sent a letter to ‘headquarters’ asking if the royal records could be checked to see if the story of these Jews having permission to build their temple was accurate. Most of this chapter records the letter, which substantiates Cyrus’ decree.

6:1 **Darius the king made a decree.** Darius came to power in 522 B.C., so it had been about fifteen years since the Jews first returned. The temple still wasn’t done because of the persecutions of the Samaritans. To settle the Samaritan complaint, Darius had the records of his father searched, and found the decree giving the Jews permission and support to build the temple. He even decreed that the former enemies of the work help provide financial support from their royal allowance. That allowed the work to finally be completed.

**TEMPLE COMPLETED AND DEDICATED (6:13-22)**

6:15 **this house was finished.** The temple was finished in 515 B.C., on the third day of Adar (the twelfth month, or Feb/Mar).

6:19 **kept the passover.** The temple was finished just in time to celebrate the dedication by keeping the Passover at the required time.

*Why were the Jews so adamant that the Samaritans could not help with the temple construction? Wouldn’t that have helped it get done much faster and avoided conflicts?*

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*The building of the temple was very important to the Jews. How has the temple made a difference in your life?*

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**II. EZRA THE SCRIBE (7-10)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Ezra is an amazing person, the first scribe in the scriptures, which became an important office in

post-exilic Judaism. In the Old Testament, he is a priest and a scribe but never a prophet. But in apocryphal works such as Fourth Ezra and the Apocalypse of Ezra, he has many visions and miraculous experiences. One of the most fascinating

is the story of how Ezra restored the scriptures as Moses which were completely lost in his day (Charlesworth 1:553-555):

On the third day, while I was sitting under an oak, behold, a voice came out of a bush opposite me and said, “Ezra, Ezra.” And I said, “Here I am, Lord,” and I rose to my feet.

The Lord explained how he revealed his word through Moses, then took Moses up to “live with my Son and with those who are like [Moses].” But evil had come upon the people and they had lost Moses’ words, “so no one knows the things which have been done or will be done by you.” Ezra was told to get prepared, to repent and fast and overcome his sins. Then he was told to get the five best scribes around and plenty of writing tablets. Ezra called the people together and called them to repent as well while he prepared. Forty days later he sat in a field with the scribes. Ezra was told to open his mouth and drink a cup of something he did not recognize but which gave him understanding and wisdom.

As for me, I spoke in the daytime and was no silent at night. So during the forty days nine-four books were written. And when the forty days were ended, the Most High spoke to me, saying, “Make public the twenty-four books [the number of books in the Hebrew Old Testament] that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge. And I did so.”

So according to this, Ezra was the restorer of all scripture, lost in the captivity and miraculously returned to Judah through the revelation of heaven.

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### EZRA ARRIVES (7-8)

7:1 **Now after these things.** A standard phrase signifying the passage of time. In this case, it was now sometime after 465 B.C., which is the year Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes (husband of Esther), came to power. Thus it had been about fifty years since the temple was built and dedicated.

7:8 **he came to Jerusalem.** Ezra was from Babylon, but went up to Jerusalem in the first month, arriving there in the fifth month on the seventh year of Artaxerxes, which would be 458/457 B.C. Normally, the trip would only take a few weeks at most. Why the trip took so long becomes clear in the subsequent verses—he was recruiting people to come to Jerusalem with and otherwise support him along the way.

7:10 **Ezra had prepared his heart.** A beautiful statement about Ezra’s preparation and attitude. He studied hard, lived faithfully, and strove to teach the same to others.

7:11 **Ezra the priest, the scribe.** This was the first mention of a scribe in Judaism. No doubt Ezra was a scribe for the king in Babylon, but he was also well trained in Hebrew.

7:13 **go with thee.** Ezra’s journey is sometimes called the second return because he gathered people to him and took a large group back to the land of Israel, as Zerubbabel had done decades earlier.

7:15 **the king and his counsellors have freely offered.** Ezra’s efforts are fully supported by the royal treasury—quite a privilege.

7:24 **it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.** This law became significant to the Jews all the way down to Roman times. It set a precedent for the Jews to be treated differently than other people, which they exploited on many occasions.

7:25 **set magistrates and judges.** Ezra was not only a religious leader, but was granted political authority for the whole region west of the Euphrates River, at least for the Jews.

8:1 **the genealogy of them.** Much of chapter 8 is the genealogy of those who went with Ezra.

8:21 **I proclaimed a fast.** Ezra had already told the king that God was supporting them, so they fasted and prayed that they could travel safely without soldier escorts, which was what happened—a fairly miraculous thing, especially given their wealth.

8:33 **weighed in the house of our God.** Ezra was careful about the records of the things entrusted to



him. They carefully counted everything before they left (8:24-30), then counted everything again when they arrived to verify it was all there.

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### EZRA LEADS THE REVIVAL (9-10)

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9:1 **have not separated themselves.** Ezra was astonished at how many of them had married foreign wives, contrary to Moses' Law (see Exodus 34:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4). This discussion resulted in many marriages and families being broken up (chapter 10) in order to cleanse the people. Malachi talked about this in his book, too (Malachi 2:11-13).

9:5 **I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands.** Ezra's prayer (5-15) seeking forgiveness for the people puts it in the first person; he says "I" and "we" even though he was not guilty of this sin.

10:1 **the people wept very sore.** The people hearing Ezra's prayer also felt sorrow for that they had done.

10:3 **put away all the wives.** Shechaniah proposed a solution, though a painful one. They were to "put away" their foreign wives and any children born to them. All the people agreed they would do this if Ezra said it should be done.

10:6 **he did eat no bread, nor drink water.** Ezra fasted (and prayer is implied) about this, and determined to do it.

10:7 **gather themselves together.** A mandatory meeting was called—the penalty for not coming was loss of property.

10:9 **ninth month, on the twentieth day.** This was the first part of January, a cold and rainy time.

10:10 **Ezra the priest stood up.** Ezra told them his decision, and the men agreed. But they told him this was a big job and would take some time. Indeed, it took three months to go through all the situations and make the individual decisions. They finished just in time for the next Passover in the first month.

10:18 **that had taken strange wives.** The rest of the chapter records the list of those who divorced their gentile wives. The list is certainly only the leaders of the people. This whole thing must have been incredibly painful, and we can be sure that the women and children were cared for financially, but it signifies the deep repentance the people felt.

*Imagine that you had been asked to give up your spouse and family because you had married outside of the covenant, like these people. How hard would that be? Could you do it?*

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## NEHEMIAH

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### REBUILDING THE WALLS

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#### INTRODUCTION

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Much of Nehemiah's story is written in the first person, but other parts recount the efforts of Ezra and overlap with that book. Nehemiah left a comfortable position in the palace of the king to

confront many challenges and difficulties, even risking his life, so he could build up a city he had never seen. He felt compelled by what he knew to help his people and sacrificed much to do so.

## NEHEMIAH GOES TO JERUSALEM (1-2)

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1:1 **twentieth year**. 2:1 shows that this means the 20th years of Artaxerxes, which was 446/445 B.C. “Chisleu” is Chislev, or Nov/Dec in our calendar. Nehemiah lived in Susa (“Shushan”), as did Esther, though Nehemiah was almost 40 years later.

1:2 **I asked them concerning the Jews**. Some people from Jerusalem (including Nehemiah’s own brother, Hanani; see Nehemiah 7:2) came and Nehemiah asked for news. What they told him was not good. Jerusalem was still in disrepair and an undefended city, which meant the temple itself was also undefended.

1:4 **I sat down and wept**. Upon hearing of this condition, Nehemiah offered a prayer to the Lord in behalf of his fellow Jews. But like all good prayers, he didn’t stop there but determined to act to help solve the problem.

2:1 **I took up wine...I had not been beforetime sad in his presence**. Nehemiah was the king’s cupbearer, his food and wine taster, thus a very trusted person. He knew the king well. At this time, his sadness at the news about Jerusalem was evident in his face and the king asked about it.

2:4 **For what dost thou make request?** Nehemiah requested a leave of absence from the court to go help in Jerusalem. He also asked for royal support and protection. Artaxerxes and the queen granted him all this.

2:11 **was there three days**. When Nehemiah first arrived in Jerusalem, he didn’t come in with great fanfare and announcement, ‘Here am I to rebuild the city.’ Instead he quietly found a place to stay for the first three days and just looked around, assessing what was going on.

2:13 **I went out by night**. This is the famous ‘night ride’ of Nehemiah, where he got on a donkey and went around the city to inspect the walls and conditions of the city. He did it by night so as not to draw attention to himself. He came from the north end, went west and around to the south end, then back up. He wanted to understand the needs before he said anything.

2:17 **come, and let us build up the wall**. After his thorough inspection and three-day observation, Nehemiah revealed himself and his mission.

2:19 **they laughed us to scorn**. Sanballat was a regional governor, based in Samaria. Tobiah was another leader over the Ammonites (not a servant, per se, but a servant of the king), the area east of the Jordan river. Geshem was another leader. They all mocked Nehemiah and became his adversaries in this effort.

## NEHEMIAH LEADS THE REBUILDING OF THE WALLS (3:1 – 7:4)

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3:1 **they builded**. Chapter 3 lists those involved in the work rebuilding the city; it includes people from many areas around Jerusalem. Even though they didn’t live in the city, they were anxious to help because the entire region would be benefitted by a strong and economically viable Jerusalem. As each group came to help, they were assigned a portion of the wall to build. Where did all these people come from? Though it doesn’t say it here, Josephus, a Jewish historian, says it took Nehemiah five years to get to Jerusalem after he left Susa. He was probably stopping along the way to recruit people to help.

4:1 **mocked the Jews**. Nehemiah recounted how these local, neighboring leaders mocked his efforts, saying even a fox could knock down their walls (4:3).

4:4 **Hear, O our God**. But with a prayer and humility in their hearts, they continued building until they had half the wall done.

4:8 **fight against Jerusalem**. The opposition became more overt, even to the point of fighting.

4:10 **we are not able to build**. Some murmuring was recorded. The work was hard and many “bearers” had left, whose job it was to clear the rubble out of the way so the new wall could be built. Add in the opposition of their enemies, and the situation was discouraging.

4:14 **said unto the nobles**. Nehemiah’s solution was to appeal to the nobles and rulers (in everyone’s hearing) who so far had not been much involved in this project. He asked them (in Captain Moroni

fashion) to be faithful to the Lord and to contribute to the work, remembering their families and homes and become soldiers on the wall. He set the example by putting half of his servants to work on the wall, the other half becoming defenders. Then he noted that everyone working also kept a sword nearby, so that one hand was holding the trowel and one hand the sword, as it were.

4:21 **So we labored in the work.** Nehemiah describes how hard they were working—half of them working by day, half by night, someone always defending and keeping watch. They didn't even stop to change clothes at night, except when it was needed to wash them.

5:5 **bring into bondage.** People complained to Nehemiah that the burden of building the wall was so great that they were forced to neglect their crops and thus had no income, which meant they could not pay their taxes. In order to solve that, they were forced to put their children into bondage.

5:6 **I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers.** Nehemiah acted decisively, calling together the nobles and rulers (who were putting this burden on the people) and chastising them. He used himself as an example—he had the right to tax the people but didn't. They agreed to forgive the debts and quit putting the burden on the people.

5:14 **appointed to be their governor.** Nehemiah was authorized to be a governor of the province, not just a helper. He ruled there for twelve years, from 445 to 433 B.C.

5:15 **so did not I.** Not only did Nehemiah set the example and support himself without taxes, relying on his own resources, but he gave the support money he received from the king ("the bread of the governor," 5:18) to 150 people that he fed each day.

5:19 **Think upon me, my God.** Nehemiah looked to God to bless him for his sacrifice. In his role, he was much like King Benjamin in The Book of Mormon, who worked to support himself.

6:2 **Come, let us meet together.** Sanballat and the others tried to get Nehemiah to leave the city by

requesting a meeting in a different city. Nehemiah didn't buy it and stayed in the city where he was safe.

6:6 **that thou mayest be their king.** Next they tried to get Nehemiah to stop by falsely accusing him of disloyalty, but he denied their fabrications.

6:9 **Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.** There are several short prayers like this one recorded in Nehemiah. Two others are in 5:19 and 6:14.

6:10 **let us shut the doors of the temple.** Another man, who was in the hire of Sanballat and Tobiah, tried to convince Nehemiah to go into the temple for protection. But he was not a priest and thus had no right to be in the working temple.

6:15 **the wall was finished.** After an amazing fifty-two days of hard labor and dealing with enemies, they finished the walls around Jerusalem. The date was Aug/Sep 445 B.C.

7: 3 **shut the doors.** They were still worried about an attack, so they opened the gates much later than the normal practice of doing so at sunrise, and when they closed them, they posted guards at the walls and the houses.

7:4 **the people were few.** Few people lived in the city itself but looked to the city with its new walls as a gathering place in a time of trouble.

*Often when we start to do good things, we face opposition. Why is that? What can we do to be prepared for it and to avoid having it slow us down?*

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## REBUILDING THE PEOPLE (7:5 – 13:31)

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### INTRODUCTION

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Besides rebuilding the walls, the other task Nehemiah faced—twice—was rebuilding the faith and commitment of the people. Together with Ezra, the two of them worked hard to institute the Law of Moses among the people. They were motivated by a desire for their efforts to succeed and not have the people carried away again as they were by Assyrian and Babylon. The things they emphasized—Sabbath observance, marrying within the covenant, keeping the feasts, and paying tithes and offerings—set the pattern for what set Jews apart down through the time of Christ.

### REMEMBERING THE FIRST RETURN (7:5 - 73A)

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7:5 **a register of the genealogy.** Like Ezra 2, this chapter recounts a list of those who had come up to Jerusalem during the first return (the time of Zerubbabel). The two lists are not the same, with many differences in numbers and some in names. In the JST, the Prophet harmonized the two lists, changing Nehemiah 7 to more closely match Ezra 2.

### EZRA EXPOUNDS THE LAW (7:73B – 8:12)

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7:73 **seventh month.** In the month of Tishri (Sep/Oct) 445 B.C., the walls were fully completed and the workers had all returned to their home cities.

8:1 **they spake unto Ezra.** Chronologically, chapters 8-10 appear to fit in the middle of Ezra's story, between Ezra 8 and 9.

8:5 **all the people stood up.** The reverence for the book of the Law which Ezra read is notable and remarkable. Consider how we treat scripture reading and the books themselves sometimes. Perhaps the abundance of scriptures in our midst, while a blessing, also leads to a casualness about how we them.

8:8 **gave the sense, and caused them to understand.** The role of a scribe, a role that figures prominently in the later New Testament, was to read the scriptures in the language in which they were written—Hebrew—then interpret them for others who didn't speak Hebrew. That interpretation is called a *targum*. This is the first recorded instance of this. During the Savior's time, this happened routinely in synagogues, with Jesus becoming the giver of the *targum* on at least one occasion (Luke 4:14-30). Paul also followed this practice as he traveled to various cities, preaching Christ through the Jewish scriptures (e.g., Acts 9:20; 13:15; 18:4).

8:9 **Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe.** Nehemiah and Ezra together were governor (the meaning of Tirshatha) and priest. The people were weeping after hearing the Law, but they told them not to weep on this holy day. Instead, they were to share what they had with the poor so that everyone could celebrate what had happened.

### THE PEOPLE WORSHIP AND REPENT (8:13 – 9:37)

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8:14 **Israel should dwell in booths.** Apparently they had reached some part in their reading that referred to the Feast of the Tabernacles (mostly likely Leviticus 23:33-44, but it could also have been Numbers 29:12-38 or Deuteronomy 16:13-17). This was supposed to be celebrated in the seventh month, which was the month they were in (see 7:73), so they immediately complied.

9:2 **confessed their sins.** This is the Day of Atonement, described in Leviticus 23:26-32 (also Leviticus 16:1-34). In 9:3, Ezra read the law for three hours and for three hours the people confessed their sins and worshipped.

9:5 **Stand up and bless the Lord your God.** This long prayer (through the end of chapter 9), like our temple dedication prayers today, appears to have been written down ahead of time by Ezra to go with the spirit of the Day of Atonement. It led to three

hours of confession and worship on the part of the people and a great promise of national obedience. The prayer took the people through their history—the Exodus, the forty years in the wilderness, the conquest of the land, God’s efforts to save them and their continued disobedience, and their final destruction and captivity. Verse 33 is a key verse, showing God’s consistent mercy and righteousness and the people’s contrasting consistent wickedness.

### EZRA AND THE PRIESTS RENEW THE COVENANTS (9:38 – 10:39)

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9:38 ***we make a sure covenant.*** After the long prayer, the people wrote a covenant, agreed to it, and sealed it up, showing their willingness to keep the contract.

10:1 ***those that sealed were.*** 10:1-27 lists the names of all those who agreed to the covenant and who signed it.

10:29 ***into a curse, and into an oath.*** There are few JST changes in these books, but this verse has one. The KJV explains that they “entered into a curse, and into an oath.” This matches Moses pronouncement in Deuteronomy—the people are cursed if they do not obey God, and blessed if they do. The JST changes it to them entering into “an oath, that a curse should come upon them if they did not walk in God’s law.” The meaning is fundamentally the same, but the JST’s flow makes more sense. Because the words are fundamentally interchangeable, a few other modern translations take a similar approach (e.g., Tanakh, New Jerusalem Bible, and New Living Translation).

Verses 30-39 explain that the covenant not only consisted of a desire to obey God, but committed them to: 1) not intermarrying with non-Jewish neighbors (30); 2) Obeying the Sabbath (31); 3) the Sabbath year or forgiveness of debts every seven

### THE WALLS ARE DEDICATED (12:27-43; 13:1-3)

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12:27 ***at the dedication of the wall.*** So happy were the people to have the walls done, that they held a huge celebration and dedicated the walls, as their

years (31); 4) The temple tax (32-33); and 5) The bringing of offerings (34-39). This covenant helps explain the sternness of Ezra 9-10.

### JERUSALEM IS RESETTLED (11:1 – 12:26)

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11:1 ***the people also cast lots.*** Because Jerusalem’s population was so small, they cast lots and 10% of them had to move into the city. This was a sacrifice because they gave up their farms and such, but they made it willingly for the national good.

11:4 ***at Jerusalem.*** The people who moved into Jerusalem are identified in 11:3-24.

11:25 ***the children of Judah dwelt.*** Other places people dwelt—the 90% that didn’t live in Jerusalem.

12:1 ***the priests and the Levites.*** In 1 Chronicles 24:1-20, the priests were divided into twenty-four courses, each one serving for two weeks in the temple each year. But only four of the twenty-four original courses could be found among the returning Jews (see Nehemiah 7:39-42 and Ezra 2:36-39). So they took the remaining families and divided them up again into the required number of courses.

*What role do covenants play in your life in helping you remember God and stay obedient to his commandments?*

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fathers had done with the temple. There were two choirs that marched along the tops of the walls, one coming up on the west side of the city, and one on the east. They all met near the temple for the final celebration.

13:3 ***they separated from Israel.*** Like Ezra 10, gentiles (non-covenant people) among them were separated as they read the Law.

## VARIOUS TEMPLE RESPONSIBILITIES (12:44-47)

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12:44 **some appointed.** With the courses determined, the assignments to administer in the temple were made, reminding them of the days of David and Asaph with their singers, or the time of Zerubbabel, the first return, when the people supported the priests and Levites in performing their duties.

## NEHEMIAH'S SECOND TERM AS GOVERNOR (13)

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13:6 **came I unto the king.** Nehemiah's time in Jerusalem was up, so he returned to serve the king, as he had promised (2:6). This was 433 B.C. He stayed there for nine years, until 424 B.C., at which time he returned again to Jerusalem.

13:8 **it grieved me sore.** During his nine-year absence, bad things had happened. Like Jesus later, Nehemiah was upset that the temple had lost its sacredness. In this case, Eliashib had turned it into a personal residence, so Nehemiah cast him out.

13:10 **fled every one to his field.** Nehemiah discovered that the temple was not being supported financially, so the Levites had all gone home to support themselves. He addressed this issue, too.

13:14 **Remember me, O my God.** Another Nehemiah short prayer.

13:15 **on the Sabbath.** The people were not keeping the Sabbath day, but working and letting merchants come in to the city and trading freely with them. Nehemiah closed the gates and put guards out to stop that. When the merchants still came, he threatened them, so they finally got the idea and quit coming.

13:23 **Jews that had married wives of Ashdod.** People had already forgotten their painful divorces and were still giving their children to marry foreigners. Nehemiah put a stop to that, too.

13:30 **Thus cleansed I them.** Nehemiah did his best to set things right and prayed for God's blessings on his efforts.

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