

I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah was originally one scroll – all of it was probably written by Ezra, except for Nehemiah 1-7 – written between 450-400 BC – one of the last books in OT to be written

Sections of Ezra written in Aramaic (4:8-6:18; 7:12-26)

Timeline:

722 BC Assyrian empire defeats Israel (10 Northern Tribes) – lost tribes

606 BC Babylonian empire transfers first wave of Judean exiles to captivity (Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego)

586 BC Babylonian empire defeats Judah (2 Southern Tribes); destroys Jerusalem and the Temple; King Nebuchadnezzar

539 BC Persian empire defeats Babylon; King Cyrus defeats Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar

538 BC Edict of Cyrus, ruler of Persia, allowing 50,000 Jews under Zerubbabel to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple

521 BC Darius the Mede became ruler of Persia

516 BC Dedication of the Temple; it was shabby compared to Solomon's Temple

486 BC Xerxes, ruler of Persian empire; he chose Esther to be his queen

465 BC Artaxerxes becomes ruler of Persia

458 Second wave of Jews return to Jerusalem; Ezra is part of this group; Ezra and Nehemiah overlap historically

445 BC Nehemiah, Governor of Jerusalem, returns to Jerusalem

#### 1. First Colony of Returning Remnants Arrive (Ezra 1-6)

1:1-11 Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia – those who say God does not hear the prayers of pagans have never read the Bible! Issued edict saying the Jewish slaves were free to return to Jerusalem (Is. 44:28; 45:1) – this may have been due to the influence of David, who was a prime minister in Cyrus' court – tradition says that a Hebrew slave had raised him – return to Jerusalem was optional – those who did not return were to make a free-will offering (1:4) – most had grown comfortable, successful and did not return (1:6) – only 10% of Jews in the NT era were homelander; 90% were scattered around the world – only the humble, religious returned (1:5) – took with them “the vessels of the house of the Lord” that Belshazzar had desecrated during a drunken feast (1:7; Daniel 5:2-4)

2:1-70 Census of returnees – 49,897 returned (2:64-65)

3:1-13 Time lapse between Chapters 2 and 3 – during this lapse the returnees built homes for themselves – Chapter 3, altar rebuilt, Temple foundation laid, worship restored – dedicated service for completion of phase one – people sang Psalm 136 (3:11) – joy (3:12-13)

4:1-23 Local resident wrote a series of complaints to the Persian kings for the next 15 years – Samaritans wanted to help to build the Temple, Zerubbabel said “No” (4:1-3) – intermarried with Assyrian who conquered Israel in 722 BC – they frustrated the construction efforts and wrote critical letters to the Persian kings (4:4-16)

#### 1. Second Major Colony of Exiles Return (Ezra 5-6)

5:1-6:22 Haggai and Zechariah called on the people to resume building the Temple (5:1) – local opposition resumed, but King Darius decreed that the work go on – Darius waived taxes and threatened a severe penalty to anyone who hindered the work (6:6-11) – Temple completed 20 years after the first returnees arrived (6:15) – Temple dedication (6:16) and Passover (6:19)

#### 2. Third Major Colony of Exiles Return (Ezra 7:10)

7:1-28 Under decree of Xerxes, Ezra led 2000 exiles home – it had been 80 years since the return of Zerubbabel – Ezra was given whatever he needed: tax exemption, authority to appoint magistrates who could carry out punishments

8:1-14 Census of returnees

8:15-36 Beginning of first person – “the hand of the Lord was upon us” (7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31)

9:1-15 Problem of interracial marriage – Ezra’s response: tearing garment, pulled hair out, fasted, prayer – Ezra was a long-winded prayer

10:1-44 Solution to interracial marriage was divorce (Deut. 24:1-4) – separation from foreign wives and Children, gives them a guilt offering – considered that God never recognized the marriage – basis of Roman Catholic Church’s view of annulment

3. Fourth Colony of Exiles Return (Nehemiah 1:1-7:43) – Leadership of Nehemiah

1:1 “Month of Chislev” (December)

1:2 Visitors from Judah “I asked them – LEADERS ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

1:3 “They said to me” – LEADERS LISTEN

“Survivors...in great distress (misery) and reproach (disgrace)”

“Walls...broken down, gates...burned with fire”

1:4 LEADERS CARE – “Sat down...wept...mourned...fasting...praying”

1:5-11a LEADERS PRAY – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession – some scholars say King Artaxerxes had already issued an edict forbidding the reconstruction of Jerusalem’s walls

1:11b LEADERS ARE TRUSTWORTHY – “King’s cupbearer” – doesn’t sound like an important job – tasted food and drink before King; proven loyalty and confidentiality

2:1 “Month of Nisan” (April) – LEADERS ARE PATIENT, HAVE A SENSE OF TIMING

“I had never been sad in his presence” – LEADERS ARE POSITIVE AND ENCOURAGING

2:2 King asked “Why is your face sad? ...sorrow of heart”

Nehemiah was “afraid” – honest feeling

2:3 LEADERS ARE RESPECTFUL AND TACTFUL – “May the King live forever!” – Nehemiah tells King Artaxerxes what had been reported to him (1:3)

2:4 “What do you request?” – Nehemiah offers a “flash prayer” before answering

2:5 LEADERS THINK BIG – requests to “rebuild” Jerusalem

2:6 The King and Queen want to know how long it would take – “I set him a time” – LEADERS HAVE MEASURABLE GOALS

2:7-8 “Let letters be given to me...timber” – LEADERS ARE ORGANIZED

2:9 Nehemiah goes to visit the regional governors to show the King’s papers – the King sent military officers and horsemen with him

2:10 The non-Jewish Palestinian power brokers were disturbed to hear Nehemiah was coming – they were unsure what he would be doing there

2:11 Nehemiah did not do anything after he arrived in Jerusalem for 3 days – 800 mile journey, took 2½ months

2:12-16 Nehemiah went by night on horseback, to inspect the city and its walls – LEADERS GATHER INFORMATION BEFORE THEY MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS – there is no reason to believe that before this time Nehemiah had selected his work project – he would not be able to rebuild the entire city in the time frame he had agreed to (2:5-6)

2:17-18 LEADERS COMMUNICATE THE MISSION CLEARLY – “Let us build the wall of Jerusalem that we may no longer be a reproach” (1.3) – LEADERS ARE PLAYER – COACHES – “let us”

2:19 LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT – Pragmatism – “They laughed at us, scorned and despised us” – Criticism, humiliation

- Sanballat the Samaritan (North) – names means “thorn”

- Tobiah the Ammorite (East)

- Geshem the Arab (South)

2:20 LEADERS DO NOT ANSWER ALL THEIR CRITICS; INSTEAD THEY FOCUS ON THE MISSION – “The God of heaven will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build” – “You have no heritage, or right or memorial in Jerusalem” – non-Jews did not have property rights

3:1-32 LEADERS PRACTICE ORGANIZATION, DELEGATION, AND RECOGNITION – list of leaders involved

4:1-3 LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT – criticism, exaggeration, ridicule – the

implication of their accusations indicate that the Jews were not experienced in construction – “If even a fox goes up on it, he will break down the stone wall” (4:3)

4:4-5 LEADERS PRAY

4:6 Wall was half built – “The people had a mind to work”

4:7-8 LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT – create threat of attack and attempt to create confusion

4:9 LEADERS PRAY – LEADERS PREPARE FOR THE WORST – “Set a watch against them day and night”

4:10-12 LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN – the wall builders become discouraged: exhaustion, loss of vision, loss of confidence, fear – LEADERS ARE POSITIVE AND ENCOURAGING – they do not give in to pessimism and cynicism

4:13-23 LEADERS ADDRESS PROBLEMS STRATEGICALLY AND IMMEDIATELY, AND LEADERS ARE ENCOURAGERS

vs. 13, 16-18 increased security at the city wall

v. 14 reminded them not to be afraid because God was with them and they were fighting for their families

vs. 19-20 trumpet to rally in case the enemy attacked

vs. 21-23 stopped returning to homes at night; stayed at the wall in family groups working 24 hours a day

5:1-5 LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN – economic crisis due to exploitation – 3 groups: the hungry, those who had had to borrow money to pay their taxes, those who had sold their children into slavery to survive –

5:6-7 The source of the problem was usury – forbidden by the Jewish law (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 23:19-20)

5:8-13 LEADERS ADDRESS PROBLEMS STRATEGICALLY AND IMMEDIATELY – justice

5:9-19 LEADERS PRACTICE SERVANTHOOD, AND LEADERS DO NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE ENTITLED TO THE WEALTH AROUND THEM – Nehemiah did not take advantage of his position as governor of Judea (5:14) – he set a good example by choosing not to use his position to become wealthy – instead he practiced incredible generosity

6:1-9 LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHOUT – The walls were built but the gates had not yet been hung – the non-Jewish Palestinian leaders invited Nehemiah 4 times to a peace conference – LEADERS STAY FOCUSED ON THE MISSION AND DO NOT ATTEND UNNECESSARY MEETINGS – “I am doing a great work, so I cannot come down” (6:3) – Matt. 27:42 “...come down from the cross, and we will believe” – These men then made a fifth attempt via an “open letter” (6:5) – unsealed, non-confidential letter because he wanted everybody to know – accusations: Nehemiah is planning a rebellion against Artaxerxes and to proclaim himself King – LEADERS DO NOT ANSWER ALL THEIR CRITICS – said only “you have invented all this” – LEADERS PRAY – “O God, strengthen my hands”

6:10-13 LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN – Priest conspired with Tobiah and Sanballat (6:12) – spread rumor “They are going to kill you” – told him to run away to the Holy Place in the Temple – since he was not a priest, he was not allowed in this space – LEADERS HAVE DISCERNMENT

6:14 LEADERS PRAY

6:15-19 The wall was completed in 52 days – LEADERS FINISH THE JOB

7:1-3 LEADERS PRACTICE ORGANIZATION, DELEGATION, AND RECOGNITION

7:4-73 Census

4. Nehemiah As Governor and Ezra as Priest/Scribe (8:1-13:31)

8:1-12 LEADERS KNOW WHEN IT IS TIME TO TURN OVER THE REIGNS OF LEADERSHIP TO SOMEONE ELSE, AND THEY HAVE THE COURAGE TO DO IT – Chapter 1 through 7 are about Nehemiah’s leadership and it is written in the first person – Chapters 8-13 are about Ezra’s leadership

and it is written in the third person – Nehemiah’s leadership was needed to build the wall; Ezra’s leadership was needed to rebuild the people of God – Ezra had arrived 13 years before Nehemiah, but he stepped aside for him until the wall was built

- people gathered at the water gate, the central marketplace (8:1)
- prayer of invocation – people’s response: “Amen! Amen!”; hands lifted, faces bowed to ground (8:6)
- reading of the law from 6:00 AM to 12:00 noon; wooden platform; Ezra and 13 other readers; people standing (8:2-5)
- 13 translators, from Hebrew to Babylonian and Aramaic (8:7-8)
- Day of celebration not mourning (8:9-12) – “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (8:10) – chorus

8:13-18 Celebration of Feast of Tabernacles, pitched tents all over Jerusalem – nation Boy Scout Jamboree

9:1-38 People fasted and prayed – Ezra was a long-winded prayer

10:1-39 The leaders signed their names to a covenant promising to keep the Mosaic Law – promised to: separate from foreign wives and children, keep the Sabbath, avoid usury, attend to the Temple

11:1-12:26 People cast lots to see where they would live in Jerusalem – not a privilege but they had to be ready to defend their part of the city wall – census

11:27-43 Dedication of the walls and gates

Vision of My Life: Building a section of the wall of the Kingdom of God

13:1-30 Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem as he had promised (1:6) – during his absence an opposition party developed – LEADERS EXPECT OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN – high priest, his family, influential people in Jerusalem reversed his spiritual reforms – compromise about the tithe, the Sabbath, marrying foreign wives – LEADERS PRACTICE TOUGH LOVE

Next week: Ruth and Esther

<u>Schedule of Daily Readings</u>	<u>Option One</u>	<u>Option Two</u>
Monday	Ruth 1-2 -----	1
Tuesday	Ruth 3-4 -----	4
Wednesday	Esther 1-2 -----	2
Thursday	Esther 3-4 -----	4
Friday	Esther 5-6 -----	6
Saturday	Esther 7-8 -----	8
Sunday	Esther 9-10 -----	9

