

Read the Bible in a Year

Week 31 – January 2nd, 2022

Read on Your Own this Week:

Psalms 91-93

Matthew 1-4

Readings in Class:

Colossians 1-4

Ezra 1-10

Nehemiah 1-4

Introduction to Ezra/Nehemiah

Ezra and Nehemiah are a sort of epilogue to the historical events in the Old Testament. The people of the southern kingdom of Judah are allowed to return to the promised land and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple as promised by God (Jeremiah 25). Ezra focuses on the temple, Nehemiah on the walls of the city.

There is some debate over who wrote these books. Some believe Ezra wrote the Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Some think Ezra wrote Ezra and Nehemiah wrote Nehemiah. It's also possible that a later writer used source material from Ezra and Nehemiah to compile these three books.

The events take place starting in 538 BC with the edict to return. Ezra probably didn't arrive until 458 BC and Nehemiah until 445 BC.

A Brief Overview of Ezra and Nehemiah

1. Return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-2)
2. Construction of the temple (Ezra 3-6)
 - A. Revival of temple worship (3)
 - B. Opposition to rebuilding (4)
 - C. Completion of temple (4-6)
3. Ezra is sent to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1 – 8:32)
4. Ezra implements his mission (Ezra 8:33-10:44)
5. Rebuilding Jerusalem's Wall (Nehemiah 1-6)
 - A. Nehemiah hears of Jerusalem's plight (1)
 - B. Nehemiah journeys to Jerusalem (2)
 - C. List of the Builders (3)
 - D. Opposition to the rebuilding (4)
 - E. Social and Economic Problems (5)
 - F. Wall rebuilt (6)
6. Providing for Jerusalem and the reading of the Torah (Nehemiah 7-13)
 - A. List of Exiles (7)
 - B. Ezra's Preaching (8-10)
 - C. New residents of Jerusalem (11)
 - D. List of Priests and the dedication of the wall (12)
 - E. Nehemiah's second administration (13)

Worship

A major focus of these books is the worship life of the people. The majority of Ezra is about the building of the temple. The people had not been able to properly worship God with the required sacrifices and festivals while in exile. The life of the people once again is focused on the Temple and the Holy City. Since the people had gone into exile because they had forsaken God and proper worship, much of what Ezra and Nehemiah are trying to do is reorient the people back towards a life devoted to God as they continually remind the people that it was their straying from God's commands that caused their exile.

Marriage

In both Ezra and Nehemiah we get accounts regarding the people of Israel marrying foreign women. The people choose to send away their foreign wives and children. This can be confusing to us when we are told by Jesus that divorce is not supposed to happen. The important point to note here is not that the people divorced their wives but the reason why they did it. They had just returned from exile, an exile that was caused by their unfaithfulness towards God. At least some of this unfaithfulness came from marrying outside of the Israelites. Think of Solomon, who was led astray by his many pagan wives. This is why Ezra laments in 9:14: "Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?" The fear is that the people would be led astray to commit the same sins that got them into trouble in the first place. Their foreign wives were still worshipping their pagan gods and their children were not being brought up in the fear of the LORD. It is also interesting to note that it is not always wrong to marry a foreign woman. Both Ruth and Rahab were foreigners that were brought into the people of Israel and are part of Jesus' family tree.