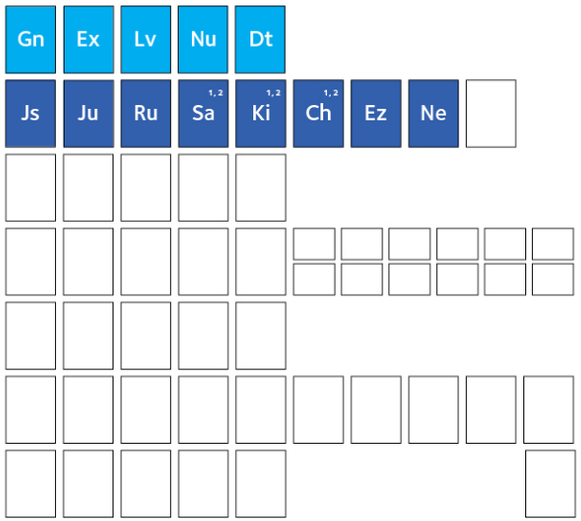
One Bible
One Year
Ezra & Nehemiah



Story line

Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the re-establishing of the nation of Israel after being in exile for 70 years.

In 538 BC the first Israelite leader, Zerubbabel, is instructed by King Cyrus to take a group of Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the Altar. Then in 458 BC, the now emperor King Artaxerxes send Ezra, with another group, to Jerusalem to enforce the laws of Moses. Finally, Nehemiah is sent, in 445 BC to govern the people of Israel, with the particular task of rebuilding the city walls. Despite much adversity the temple and the walls re completely rebuilt.

Ezra serves as the spiritual leader of the people and Nehemiah as the political leader. Through their leadership the people, turn away from their sinful ways and commit their new nation and themselves back to the service of God.

Outline

YEAR	MONTH/DAY	EVENT	REFERENCE
539 B.C.	Oct. 12	Capture of Babylon	Da 5:30
538 -537	Mar. 24-11	Cyrus's first year	Ezr 1:1-4
537(?)		Return under Sheshbazzar	Ezr 1:11
537	VII	Building of altar	Ezr 3:1
536	II	Work on temple begun	Ezr 3:8
536-530		Opposition during Cyrus's reign	Ezr 4:1-5
530-520		Work on temple ceased	Ezr 4:24
520	VI 24 = Sept. 21	Work on temple renewed under Darius	Ezr 5:2 Hag 1:14
516	XII 3 = Mar. 12	Temple completed	Ezr 6:15
458	I 1 = Apr. 8	Ezra departs from Babylon	Ezr 7:6-9
	V 1 = Aug. 4	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem	Ezr 7:8-9
	IX 20 = Dec. 19	People assemble	Ezr 10:9
	X 1 = Dec. 29	Committee begins investigation	Ezr 10:16
457	I 1 = Mar. 27	Committee ends investigation	Ezr 10:17
445	Apr. 13	20th year of Artaxerxes I	Ne 1:1
444	to Apr. 2		
445	I = Mar.-Apr.	Nehemiah approaches king	Ne 2:1
	Aug.(?)	Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem	Ne 2:11
	VI 25 = Oct. 2	Completion of wall	Ne 6:15
	VII =Oct 8 to Nov. 5	Public assembly	Ne 7:73-8:1
	VII 15-22 = Oct. 22-28	Feast of Tabernacles	Ne 8:14
	VII 24 = Oct. 30	Fast	Ne 9:1
433	Apr. 1	32nd year of Artaxerxes;	Ne 5:14; 13:6
432	to Apr. 19	Nehemiah's recall and return	

Themes

This story is about the reforming of the people of Israel. The spiritual reformation is based upon 3 practices.

Prayer

The stories of Ezra and Nehemiah are filled with prayers, of many different kinds. As Raymond Brown describes:

"The story reminds us of the great dimensions of prayer: adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition and intercession. There are prayers of anguish and prayers of joy, prayers for protection and prayers of dependence and commitment. It is a story of compassionate, persistent, personal and corporate prayer. Prayer provides Nehemiah with perspective; it widens his horizons, sharpens his vision and dwarfs his anxieties. Here is a believer who hurries to the place of prayer to share his present grief's, confess his past failures and discover his future work."

Scripture

Secondly we see scripture as central importance to the people of Israel to compliment a strong prayer life. Ezra leads the people back to the words of God as the commands for how to live their lives as God's chosen and blessed people, as Derek Kidner describes:

"Scripture is seen, then, in these two books as law to be obeyed and as revelation to be understood; to which we should add; as promises and warnings to evoke prayer and action. Its aspect as law is emphasized by the phrase 'those who tremble at the commandment' and by the sanctions, both human and divine, which reinforced it. As revelation it was read 'clearly and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read'."

Response

The third practice in this reformation is response as people renew the covenant with God. As it says in Ezra 10:

While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites – men, women and children – gathered round him. They too wept bitterly. Then Shekaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, 'We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law.

Further thinking

• In Nehemiah 1, his heart is stirred, what causes this? How does he respond? What stirs your heart? How do you respond? Are you moved to prayer and action?

• Look through the prayers in Nehemiah, can you find examples of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition and intercession? How do these different types of prayers come into your prayer life? Read the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6), where do you see these prayer types here?

• Look at Nehemiah 8 and 9. How do the people respond to the word of God? Have you ever had an experience with God's Word where you have been instantly changed? How often do you let God speak to you through his Word? What can often stop you from hearing God in this way?