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The Gospel According to Ezra and Nehemiah



Ezra and Nehemiah were exceptional, God-centered, Word-oriented, and Spirit-led leaders who deeply desired that God’s people prosper and that His name be uplifted and proclaimed worldwide. Their lives modeled what God can do through dedicated, faithful servant leaders.

Because of our sinful natures, cultivated habits, and hereditary traits, we can experience lasting changes only through the study of God’s transforming Word and the Holy Spirit’s assistance. Believers live “not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit” (*Zech. 4:6, NKJV*) and by embracing God’s promises by faith (*Hab. 2:4*), resulting in a vibrant spiritual life.

This quarter’s lessons illustrate that life is complicated. As soon as we try to do good things, obstacles appear and opposition arises. Even friends may openly or secretly oppose us and, perhaps, become our enemies. Hurdles and resistance to good demonstrate that Satan is alive and that sin is real. Fighting Satan is humanly impossible because evil is stronger than we are. Only God can secure victory, revolutionize thinking, and give us power to live balanced lives. Life’s discouragements are opportunities for change. Disappointments may help us focus on essentials and accelerate our spiritual growth, as we obtain victory in each crisis through God’s empowerment.

Neither of the books of Ezra nor Nehemiah ends with optimism. Sin is a serious matter, spreading easily and quickly. The biggest challenge does not come from outside—but from infidelity to God with His own people not following His revealed will. To be faithful to the Lord and persevere in following His instruction is the strongest test for God’s church. As Ezra correctly understood, the only power to change comes through diligently searching,

comprehending, and internalizing the Scriptures.

In order to fulfill the starting point of the prophecies of the 70 weeks and the 2,300 evenings and mornings (which both began in 457 B.C.), God graciously intervened and influenced King Artaxerxes I to allow Ezra along with a group of Israelites to return to Jerusalem, to ensure the safety of their journey, and even to supply needed physical and financial provisions for the temple services (*Ezra 7:11–28*).

The key theological themes of these two books are God’s providence, faithfulness, and covenant. God fulfilled His promises, even though His people were narrow-minded, disoriented, distracted, and stubborn. Through His servants, He called them from their state of lethargy to revival and reformation.

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“The work of restoration and reform carried on by the returned exiles, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, presents a picture of a work of spiritual restoration that is to be wrought in the closing days of this earth’s history. The remnant of Israel were a feeble people, exposed to the ravages of their enemies; but through them God purposed to preserve in the earth a knowledge of Himself and of His law. They were the guardians of the true worship, the keepers of the holy oracles.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 677.

Ezra and Nehemiah are historically linked, and they cover a crucial transition in the life of God’s people. These 23 chapters form one big story—but with subunits; they are complementary and cover similar theological issues. By carefully studying the pattern revealed in the composition of these two books, we can discern God’s great historical actions and gracious leadership.

Keep in mind that not everything presented in these books is written in *chronological* order, and that some parts are composed in a *thematic* manner.

As we will see, the challenge for Ezra and Nehemiah was not to reconstruct the temple (it was finished and dedicated in 515 B.C., more than 50 years before Ezra’s arrival) but to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, its administration, and the national autonomy—all eventually paving the way for the coming of the Messiah.

As we study God’s Word this quarter, may the Lord bless us by inspiring us, touching our hearts, transforming our thinking, and enabling us daily to follow Him faithfully and enthusiastically.

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