



# **GREAT THEMES OF THE REMNANT**

**A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study by Jeff S. Smith**



# INTRODUCTION

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther occupy the final piece of the historical section of the Hebrew Old Testament library. The events they describe occurred after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and focus upon life after the exile was eased and the Jews were permitted to return and rebuild. Ezra and Nehemiah are devoted to events in Israel, while Esther recounts God’s providential preservation of the race in Persian captivity. Ezra emphasizes the reconstruction of a temple, Nehemiah, the rebuilding of the city walls and Esther, the events that gave rise to Purim.

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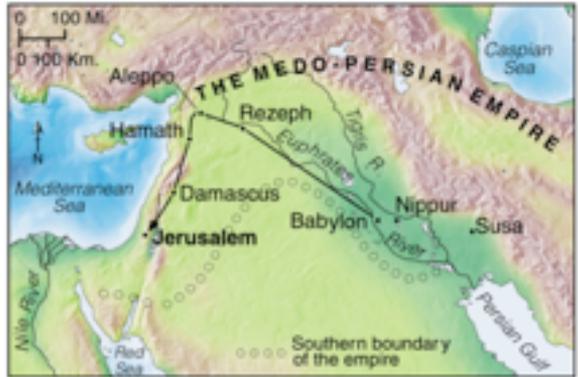
# LESSON ONE

## ZERUBBABEL'S RETURN

### EZRA CHAPTERS 1-2

*Cyrus issues a decree that the Israelites should prepare themselves to return and rebuild Jerusalem.*

1. Writing of 538 B.C., Ezra alludes to a prophecy of Jeremiah, which Cyrus would fulfill (Ezra 1:1-4). What had the weeping prophet predicted in approximately 605 B.C. (Jeremiah 25:1-12, 29:10, 33:7-13)?



2. The strategy of Judah's Babylonian conquerors had been to wipe out other religions, including Judaism, but Persia takes a different path. What is the major difference between Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar (compare the decree of Cyrus with the condemnation of the Babylonian monarchs in Daniel 4:28-30, 5:18-23)?

3. Who went up to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:5-11)? Describe two similarities between this journey and the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:36, Numbers 14:26-29).

4. With what would they hope to furnish the new temple? How had they been used in the days of Belshazzar the Babylonian regent (Daniel 5:1-4)?

5. What might the modern church (1800s to present) undertake that would be similar to what Israel was about to attempt? (Answers should vary.)

6. This new generation of pilgrims was returning to Israel because God had moved (NKJV), or stirred up (ESV), their spirits. What might this mean, and is something like it possible today?

7. What stirring is recommended by the New Testament?

a. Second Timothy 1:6-14:

b. Second Peter 1:12-15:

c. Second Peter 3:1-2:

8. What so often prevents a disciple from being stirred up or motivated to strive and progress in the faith (First Thessalonians 5:19-22, Second Peter 3:17-18, First Timothy 4:13-16)?

9. To where did each exile return (Ezra 2:1-60, 70)?

10. Why were certain priestly sons prevented from serving (Ezra 2:61-63)?

11. What kind of offerings did they make toward the effort (Ezra 2:64-69)? Why is this preferable to a compulsory contribution (Second Corinthians 8:1-15)?

L E S S O N   T W O  
R E B U I L D I N G   T H E   T E M P L E  
E Z R A   C H A P T E R S   3 - 6

*Two leaders emerge in the drive to rebuild the Jerusalem temple, but in spite of Cyrus's decree, opposition arises as well.*

1. Name the two leaders who emerge. Why did they set the altar in place when they did (Ezra 3:1-7)?

2. How would you characterize their attention to worship details thus far? Explain.

3. Is it legalism to observe the work and worship of the church today with as much circumspection and insistence upon strict obedience (Colossians 3:17, Ephesians 5:8-17, First John 2:1-6)? Explain.

4. When might strictness become a religious problem (Matthew 23:23-28, Mark 7:1-7, Acts 15:4-5, Romans 14:10-12)?

5. How did they sing as the foundation was laid (Ezra 3:8-11; First Chronicles 6:31, 25:1)? What is "responsive singing"? Is it still scriptural?

6. Explain the different reactions to the temple foundation (Ezra 3:12-13; Haggai 2:1-5).

7. How did the Jews' adversaries try to discourage the reconstruction (Ezra 4:1-5)?

8. One such accusation is detailed in Ezra 4:6-23. What was the accusation? Did it succeed?

9. What did the remnant do while temple reconstruction was outlawed (Haggai 1:1-6)?

10. How did Haggai and Zechariah inspire the people to resume the work (Ezra 5:1-17, Haggai 1:12-15)?

11. The decree of Darius extended assistance to the Jews in terms of money and materials, but one other command was probably just as helpful. What was it (Ezra 6:1-22)? What is to be our prayer regarding our governments (First Timothy 2:1-2)?

*More than 50 years elapse between the events of chapters 6 and 7, during which the rise and reign of Esther in Persia occurs.*

L E S S O N   T H R E E  
H I S T O R I C A L   S E T T I N G   O F   E S T H E R  
E S T H E R   C H A P T E R S   1 - 2

*A party in the palace results in a new queen being providentially chosen for Persia, setting in motion events that would reshape the world.*

1. What was the purpose of the six-month feast that Ahasuerus threw (Esther 1:1-9)? What attitude moves people to show off in front of the less blessed?

2. What sinful attitude does arrogance tend to incite (Galatians 5:24-26)? How would it be possible to have nice things, allow others to know that, but do so without provoking them to envy?

3. The king's open-minded attitude toward others' convictions is evidenced in his optional position on the consumption of alcohol. He seems to be nonjudgmental, although drinking alcohol was considered a pleasant virtue in such heathen kingdoms. Open-mindedness sounds good, but should we treat alcohol likewise in our own homes today (Proverbs 23:29-35)?

4. In what condition was the king when he finally called for his wife to come on the seventh day (Esther 1:10-22)? Why did he want Vashti to enter?

5. What was Memucan's worry about the queen's behavior? What kind of influence can one have by the way she treats her husband (Titus 2:3-5)?

6. From what tribe of Israel did Mordecai hail (Esther 2:1-14)? How had Mordecai's family arrived in Shushan?

7. What was Mordecai's relationship to Hadassah, that is, Esther? What advantage did she have in Persia in going by a name that was not Jewish?

8. Why had Esther not revealed her people or family? How could God's providence have played a role in the fact that Esther seems to have found favor in the eyes of all those who could assist her?

9. It is now 479 B.C., four years since Vashti's stand as Esther gets her chance to meet the king (Esther 2:15-20). How impressed was Ahasuerus with her? Where does Mordecai go once Esther is crowned (2:21-23)?

10. The event that closes chapter two seems insignificant at first reading, but its inclusion in this record hints at its later importance. What did Mordecai do in service of King Ahasuerus?

**L E S S O N   F O U R**  
**HAMAN PLOTS REVENGE**  
**ESTHER CHAPTERS 3-4**

*Haman plots revenge against a single enemy, but finds an entire nation to be disposable until the queen is summoned to respond.*

1. Jewish tradition holds that Haman was a descendant of King Agag (Esther 3:1-15; 1 Samuel 15:8), but his name and those of his family are all Persian. What honor did King Ahasuerus bestow upon Haman as this chapter opens?

2. What is entailed in paying homage and why did Mordecai refuse to do so?

3. What happens to our faith and discipleship when we overcome threats against our lives, our livelihoods or our relationships and heed the demands of God rather than men (Matthew 10:34-39, 10:27-31; Revelation 2:10)?

4. When Haman learned of Mordecai's apparent insult, he was filled with wrath. Why (Proverbs 29:23, 16:18)?

5. What response did Haman begin to plan because of this Jew's insult? How has spiritual Israel—the church—inherited the peculiar characterization today (First Peter 2:9, 4:1-5)?

6. How could King Ahasuerus consent to such a plan with his own wife being a Jew? How is the scheme of salvation threatened in these events?
7. What did Mordecai do when he learned of Haman's plotting (Esther 4:1-8)? What else did the Jews do when they learned of the news in their own provinces?
8. What message did Mordecai send to Esther through Hathach? On what basis did Esther argue against going in to speak to her husband?
9. Mordecai's reply to Esther dealt with any illusions she might have possessed about her own security as the Jews faced slaughter (Esther 4:9-17). How much faith did he have that God would preserve his remnant and the blood line toward the son of David?
10. Mordecai makes one other suggestion about the real reason that Esther had ascended to this position. What is it?
11. What did Esther announce to Mordecai as she prepare to approach the king? How is this spirit required in our lives today when called to face tough challenges (Second Timothy 1:7, Romans 8:31-39)?



6. How do you think Haman felt as he was forced to reward his enemy and parade him through the streets in celebration of the king's honoring him (Esther 6:4-14; Proverbs 3:31-35)?

7. Why did Haman's friends suddenly become so pessimistic?

8. What did King Ahasuerus stand to lose if Haman's enemies were all destroyed (Esther 7:1-6)?

9. How shocked do you think Haman was when he realized that Esther was a Jew? What would he have done things differently had he known earlier?

10. What can we learn from Haman's example?

11. What was Haman doing when he fell across the queen's couch (Esther 7:7-10)? How did the king view it?

12. Eventually, it becomes too late to seek mercy. When will it be too late for man to seek mercy from God? How do we learn the same lesson from Esau (Hebrews 11:14-17) and the Holy Spirit (Romans 2:4-6)?

13. How did Haman die?

L E S S O N   S I X  
**THE KING'S COUNTERMAND**  
**ESTHER CHAPTERS 8-10**

*Ahasuerus issues a countermand that allows the Jews to save themselves from Haman's scheme, establishing the feast of Purim as a result.*

1. How did the king give Esther the house of Haman (Esther 8:1-2)? What did Esther do with the house of Haman?

2. What did the king give to Mordecai, once he was told that he was related to the king's wife? How did Haman's pride and prejudice outlast him? How can our own sins "outlast" us?

3. What lessons can we learn from Esther's newfound courage to approach her husband without the reservations she had before (Esther 8:3-17; Hebrews 4:14-16, Second Timothy 1:7, Romans 8:31-39)?

4. The king seems very noble and moral now, but if the targeted people had been unrelated to his wife, what would have happened to them?

5. How did the king hope to reverse the effect of Haman's scheme?

6. Were the Persians still allowed to kill Jews (Esther 9:1-19)? What could the Jews do now, by Mordecai's decree?

7. Do Christians have a right to defend themselves if physically attacked, considering Matthew 5:38-42?

8. What was the religious effect on Persia of all these events (Esther 9:20-10:3)?

9. Explain how these events illustrate Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose."

10. Summarize the role of divine providence in this book.

11. How does divine providence play a role in our lives today?

L E S S O N   S E V E N  
T H E   R E T U R N   O F   E Z R A  
E Z R A   C H A P T E R S   7 - 8

*Ezra's story continues years later and after the events surrounding Queen Esther of Persia, approximately 458 B.C.*

1. List three important things we learn about Ezra regarding this new journey (Ezra 7:1-6).

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2. List his three objectives regarding God's law (Ezra 7:7-10). What instructions did James (3:1) and Paul (Second Timothy 2:15) give regarding those who wanted to teach the law of Christ?

3. Where did the Pharisees fall short according to Ezra's example (Matthew 23:1-4)? Where did others fall short (First Timothy 1:5-7)?

4. According to the decree of Artaxerxes, what was Ezra's mission in returning now to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11-26)?

5. Explain the source of Ezra's courage and how modern disciples might appropriate it for themselves (Ezra 7:27-28; Philippians 4:1-7, Acts 12:11, Second Timothy 3:11, 4:17).

6. What group was notably absent from the company returning to Jerusalem from Babylonia (Ezra 8:1-20)?
7. Some surmise that the Levites were simply too comfortable in Babylon by this time to leave and that might or might not be true. What can happen to a person's faith and commitment to sacrifice and take risks when he gets too comfortable in the world (Second Timothy 4:10, First Corinthians 5:1-8, Hebrews 6:11-12, Revelation 3:14-15)?
8. Why didn't Ezra ask for an armed escort (Ezra 8:21-30)? What did he do instead? On what occasion did the disciples follow suit (Acts 14:23)?
9. In what sense, if any, are funds and objects committed to the Lord "holy"?
10. What kept the journey from being uneventful (Ezra 8:31-36)? How did it conclude?
11. What assurance does the Lord offer us that we will reach our destinations (James 4:13-17, First Peter 2:11-12)?



6. There does not appear to be any evidence at all that the remnant is relearning idolatry from these heathen mates. Why doesn't that mute Ezra's anguish or render it an overreaction?

7. In what role did Ezra view Israel, even as she was rebuilding the nation (Ezra 9:5-9)? Why wouldn't the Lord's audience accept that truth (John 8:28-48)? What makes one a slave (Romans 6:16-22)?

8. What did Ezra say about the severity of God's punishment (9:10-15)? The same principle and effect is described for Gentile Christians in Romans 11:19-22. What should be the effect of this realization?

9. What did the assembly of men, women and children ask Ezra to do in response to their sin (Ezra 10:1-5)?

10. Describe the setting as the people came together to discuss their marriages (Ezra 10:6-9).

11. What do you think people today would recommend upon finding an unscriptural marriage (Ezra 10:10-17; Mark 6:17-20)?

12. How does this whole nightmare become even more wrenching (Ezra 10:18-44)



7. What did he ask of God?

8. So often, people complain about problems and even identify their causes, but get no further. What ultimate value is complaining and analysis, if it does not translate into personal effort (James 1:27, 2:15-18; First John 3:16-19)?

9. What was Nehemiah's occupation? Explain.

10. How did Nehemiah surprise the king (2:1-8)? To what lengths should a Christian go to appear happy (Philippians 4:4-7)? What image of the faith do miserable disciples present?

11. What did Nehemiah do before answering the king? Why do you think he did this?

12. What kind of person were Sanballat and Tobiah (Nehemiah 2:9-10)?

13. Why did Nehemiah do his inspections by night (2:11-16)? How did he overcome the opposition of Sanballat and Tobiah (2:17-20)?

# LESSON TEN

## REBUILDING THE WALLS NEHEMIAH CHAPTERS 3-6

*Nehemiah leads a band of armed handymen in the reconstruction of Jerusalem's signature walls and gates.*

1. Have you ever built or repaired a fence? How much stooping is involved? How much stooping did the Tekoite noblemen do (Nehemiah 3:1-5)?

2. Can you think of some ways that some modern Christians are just as aloof about the work of their Lord? (Romans 12:16, James 1:27, Proverbs 14:4) Name a few if you are able.

3. Whose daughters helped out (Nehemiah 3:6-14)? What might this teach our own women and young ladies today (Romans 16:1-6)?

4. Many subdivision houses today are built in a manner similar to an assembly line, in which men who specialize in one aspect of the construction do their small part and then move on to the next unfinished house. What benefit can you see in the very different method employed by Nehemiah and his crews (Nehemiah 3:15-32)?



5. What did Sanballat and Tobiah do to stall the work (Nehemiah 4:1-14)? Why didn't it work?
  
6. How might the enemies of the gospel attempt to distract believers and frustrate their efforts to build up the kingdom (Philippians 3:17-21)?
  
7. Compare the image of Nehemiah's workforce to that of the Christian soldier (Nehemiah 4:15-23 and Ephesians 6:10-20; cf. First Peter 3:15).
  
8. What new dangerous development is described in Nehemiah 5:1-5?
  
9. What two injustices did Nehemiah forbid (5:6-13)? How does the New Testament treat these two subjects (Colossians 4:1 and Luke 6:27-36)?
  
10. How did Nehemiah maintain his moral standing among the people he governed for 12 years (Nehemiah 5:14-19)?
  
11. What false accusation did Nehemiah's enemies plan against him (Nehemiah 6:1-14)?
  
12. How long did the project take (Nehemiah 6:15-19)?

**LESSON ELEVEN**  
**REVIVAL AND REFORMATION**  
**NEHEMIAH CHAPTERS 7-10**

*Ezra and Nehemiah try to revive the religious spirits of the people and reform their practices to something more reverent and hopeful.*

1. What made Hanani dependable (Nehemiah 7:1-4)? Explain (Second Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 9:27-28).

2. How did Nehemiah try to motivate the guards to do a good job?

3. Why were these genealogies so important (Nehemiah 7:5-65)? What was the danger of genealogies once the New Testament arrived (First Timothy 1:3-7, Titus 3:9-11)

4. Why were some priestly candidates excluded from service (Nehemiah 6:66-73)? How would Urim and Thummim help (Leviticus 8:7-8)?

5. Answer the following about Ezra's sermon (Nehemiah 8:1-8):

- a. Where did Ezra preach?
- b. What did he preach?
- c. To whom did he preach it?
- d. How was it preached?

6. Why did the people weep that day (Nehemiah 8:9-12)? How is our response sometimes similar (Romans 7:7-25, Luke 14:27-33)?

7. Why did they decide to dwell in booths (Nehemiah 8:13-18, cf. Leviticus 23:42-43)?

8. Describe the pattern of the historic relationship of Jehovah and Israel (Nehemiah 9:1-38)?

9. How did they describe God (Nehemiah 9:17)?

10. What is a stiff neck all about (cf. Proverbs 29:1, Jeremiah 7:26, 17:23, 19:15; Acts 7:51, 19:9)?

11. Summarize the pledge they made (Nehemiah 10:1-39).

**LESSON TWELVE**  
**NEHEMIAH'S REFORMS**  
**NEHEMIAH CHAPTERS 11-13**

*Nehemiah seeks to add reforms to the nation of Israel.*

1. By what two means was Jerusalem repopulated (Nehemiah 11:1-2)?

2. List the four groups of residents (Nehemiah 11:3-36):

- 3-9:
- 10-14:
- 15-18:
- 19:

3. Some of the Levites led the singers in what are called “Thanksgiving Psalms” (Nehemiah 12:1-26). In the Dead Sea Scrolls, these included Psalms 4, 5, 8 and 23. For what were the singers grateful in those songs?

- Psalm 4:
- Psalm 5:
- Psalm 8:
- Psalm 23:

4. What did the people do before dedicating the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:27-30)? Early disciples of Christ frequently did likewise (John 11:45-57, Acts 21:15-26); why isn't this binding upon Christians today?

5. How is the notion of self-purification bound upon disciples today (Titus 2:11-14, Hebrews 9:14, James 4:8)?

6. The dedication of the wall was marked by great musical worship (Nehemiah 12:31-37). Who is credited with the presence of musical instruments (cf. First Chronicles 23:1-5, Second Chronicles 29:25-27)?

7. Would similar expressions in the New Testament be sufficient to establish authority for their use in the church's worship? What musical authority is evident? Where?

8. How is our musical worship like a sacrifice (Nehemiah 12:38-47; Hebrews 13:12-15)?

9. Why were the Ammonites and Moabites suddenly shunned (Nehemiah 13:1-3, Numbers 22-25)? What happened to Tobiah (Nehemiah 13:4-9)?

10. What did Nehemiah ask when he realized that the Levites were not being cared for (13:10-14)? What similar responsibility do we as Christians have today (First Corinthians 9:1-14, First Timothy 5:17-18)?

11. How did Nehemiah end the profaning of the Sabbath (13:15-22)?

12. How did Nehemiah discourage unlawful intermarriages (13:23-31)?

# LESSON THIRTEEN

## REVIEW

1. Writing of 538 B.C., Ezra alludes to a prophecy of Jeremiah, which Cyrus would fulfill (Ezra 1:1-4). What had the weeping prophet predicted in approximately 605 B.C. (Jeremiah 25:1-12, 29:10, 33:7-13)?
2. Explain the reactions to the foundation (Ezra 3:12-13; Haggai 2:1-5).
3. Why had Esther not revealed her people or family? How could God's providence have played a role in the fact that Esther seems to have found favor in the eyes of all those who could assist her?
4. What did Mordecai do when he learned of Haman's plotting (Esther 4:1-8)? What else did the Jews do when they learned of the news?
5. Why did Haman's friends suddenly become so pessimistic (Esther 6:12-14)? What can we learn from Haman's example?
6. What lessons can we learn from Esther's newfound courage (Esther 8:3-17; Hebrews 4:14-16, Second Timothy 1:7, Romans 8:31-39)?

7. List his three objectives regarding God's law (Ezra 7:7-10). What instructions did James (3:1) and Paul (Second Timothy 2:15) give regarding those who wanted to teach the law of Christ?

8. What did the assembly of men, women and children ask Ezra to do in response to their sin (Ezra 10:1-9)? What do you think people today would recommend upon finding an unscriptural marriage (Ezra 10:10-17; Mark 6:17-20)?

9. In what condition were the survivors in Jerusalem in 445 B.C. (Nehemiah 1:1-3)? Why? How did Nehemiah respond (1:4)? Why was he so emotional?

10. What did Sanballat and Tobiah do to stall the work (Nehemiah 4:1-14)? How might the enemies of the gospel attempt to distract believers and frustrate their efforts to build up the kingdom (Philippians 3:17-21)?

11. How did they describe God (Nehemiah 9:17)?

12. What is Nehemiah's abiding hope (Nehemiah 13:30-31)?



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