

EZRA & NEHEMIAH

GOD STATEMENT: THE GOD WHO

_____ (a) THE _____ (b) TO THE
 _____ (c)

There were two _____ (d) in the history of Israel. The first involved the ten tribes in the north, known as the kingdom of Israel. In 722 B.C. Assyria conquered and deported them. The second exile involved the two tribes in the south, known as the kingdom of Judah. This time Babylon was the conqueror in 586 B.C. (although the deportation of Jews to Babylon actually began around _____ (e) B.C.; _____ (f) was among those first hostages). It is this second exile that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with. In the Hebrew Bible Ezra and Nehemiah were considered one book. It was not until the Christian era that the two were ever separated.

The exile of Judah in Babylon lasted for _____ (g) years just as Jeremiah the prophet had prophesied (Jer 25:8-13). When the exile ended finally ended, just as God promised, the first of _____ (h) waves of Israelites returned to the Promised Land. The book of Ezra records the accounts of _____ (i) groups of returnees and Nehemiah provides a sequel to the book of Ezra. Let's summarize each book.

THE BOOK OF EZRA

The material of Ezra can be divided into two major division: the first group's return under the leadership of _____ (j) (chaps 1-6) and the second group's return under _____ (k) (chaps 7-10). The first division focuses on the _____ (l) of the Temple, and the second division focuses on the _____ (m) of the Law.

Chapters 1-6: The First Return Under Zerubbabel (Reconstruction of the Temple)

The book of Ezra opens with the royal decree repeated at the end of 2 Chronicles (2 Chr 36:22-23). The decree is from _____ (n) (539 B.C.), king of Persia, and it allowed the people of Israel to return to their homeland. This section highlights the _____ (o) the Jews faced coming back to their land from exile. But it also stresses the notion that it is

the _____(p) who restores the remnant to the land of promise. This section makes repeated reference to the fact that it is the _____(q) who oversees this entire episode in Israelite history. In the opening verse, the author states that the _____(r) places it in Cyrus' heart to allow the people to return and that the decree was issued to fulfill Jeremiah's prediction that the exile would end after seventy years.

Ezra lists the families who volunteered to return. Zerubbabel, a direct descendant of King _____(s), heads the list as the leader of those returning. Once the exiles arrive in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel makes the restoration of the _____(t) and the religious _____(u) his first priority. Next, he oversees the laying of the foundation of the Temple. But soon _____(v) arises, and the work is stopped for 14 years. Even in the midst of opposition, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhort the people to get back to the work of rebuilding the Temple. Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, lead the work, and the second Temple is finally completed _____(w) years later. In a great celebration the Temple is dedicated, the sacrificial offerings are reinstated, the people and priests purify themselves, and the Passover is once again observed.

Chapters 7-10: The Second Return Under Ezra (Restoration of the Law)

Approximately _____(x) years after the Temple is rebuilt, another king in Persia, Artaxerxes, issues a decree for yet another return of the Jewish people to their homeland. The king authorizes Ezra, a priest and teacher, to lead this group back.

Haggai and Malachi have already divulged how difficult it is for the returnees to act like the people of God. By comparison, building the Temple was easy. A structure can remain in place virtually unmoved for years by the forces of time, but people are constantly changing. The _____(y) must be continually _____(z). Purity can be lost in a _____(aa) generation, and once it's lost, it can only be regained through difficult _____(bb).

Ezra is committed to rebuilding the people _____(cc) and _____(dd). The center of spiritual and moral reformation is the _____(ee) of God. Promoting obedience to God's Law is Ezra's main concern. The text says, "For Ezra set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). When Ezra discovers that many of the people have _____(ff) with foreign women, he prays to God, confesses the nations' sins, and states that such activities are the reason the people have fared so poorly in the past two centuries (Ezra

9:5-15). To remedy the situation, he orders the non-Jewish wives to be divorced (Ezra 10:1-44). No doubt such a solution was painful. But such pain would not have been unnecessary if the people had lived according to God's Law. Ezra ends with a great revival and changed lifestyles.

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

As was said earlier, Nehemiah provides a sequel to Ezra. First, Ezra arrives on the scene and brings about reforms through the _____ (gg) of God's Word. Now, about _____ (hh) years after Ezra's first journey to Jerusalem, Nehemiah, a trusted _____ (ii) of the king of Persia, arrives in Jerusalem with a burden to _____ (jj) the _____ (kk). The city of Jerusalem has been lying defenseless before any potential enemy (Neh 1:2-3). Nehemiah's ministry is first devoted to alleviating this problem.

But rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem (which had been destroyed by the Babylonians long ago) wasn't the only problem that Nehemiah was concerned about. Like Ezra, he was also very concerned about the _____ (ll) reform of God's people.

From a literary standpoint, like the book of Ezra the book of Nehemiah has two divisions: the _____ (mm) of Jerusalem's walls and the _____ (nn) of Jerusalem's people. The first division focuses on _____ (oo) security, and the second focuses on _____ (pp) holiness.

Chapters 1-7: Rebuilding Jerusalem's Walls

The book opens with Nehemiah living in Susa (in modern Iran), the winter capital of the Persian king. He not only lived in Susa, but he served the king of Persia as a trusted, high-ranking official (cupbearer). News came from Judea that the walls of Jerusalem were still a pile of ruins. Burdened by these reports, Nehemiah prays and, in the process, realizes he is the best one to help. Therefore, he asks for a leave of absence from his duties as the king's trusted cupbearer. Because of his personal relationship with the king, in 445 B.C. he is given permission to go to Jerusalem as _____ (qq) of the city.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah inspects the damaged walls and enlists the support of the people, who eagerly begin to help rebuild the walls. Soon, however, _____ (rr) rises to thwart their work. But Nehemiah doesn't take his foot off the gas. He prays to the Lord, and he keeps half the workers, armed with weapons, standing ready against the threat of attack. While those half are standing guard, the

other half, armed with tools, keeps rebuilding the wall. Through Nehemiah's leadership, a project that had faltered for _____(ss) years was completed in just _____(tt) days!

Chapters 8-13: Re-teaching the People

Just as Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi stress that a rebuilt _____(uu) and restored _____(vv) are irrelevant unless the _____(ww) are reformed, so Nehemiah 8-13 insists upon a return to covenant obedience as the most significant aspect of national revival. This spiritual reformation must be grounded in and guided by God's revealed _____(xx). God's Law must serve as the basis for confession, repentance, praise, and subsequent work. In this phase of his ministry Nehemiah receives help from Ezra.

With the walls rebuilt and with a measure of protection now in place, the people gather in a great assembly and ask that the _____(yy) of Moses be brought out and _____(zz) to them. Ezra publicly reads the Law, and the priests and Levites explain the meaning of what's read. The fact that the Levites help Ezra in reading and explaining the word to the crowd indicates that the Levites have also undergone significant spiritual reform. They have returned to the conviction that teaching the Law, preaching God's word, and leading Israel in praise is the essence of their _____(aaa).

In response to the reading and teaching of the Law, the people express profound _____(bbb) over what they've heard. They recognize that their _____(ccc) hasn't conformed to the standards of the Law. They are determined to once again be _____(ddd) to what they've been taught when they celebrate the Feast of Booths (Neh 8:13-18).

As a further response to God's Word the people fast, put on sackcloth and ashes to demonstrate their _____(eee), separate themselves from the Gentiles around them, confess their sins, and enter into a solemn covenant to _____(fff) the ordinances of the Law. All of this confession, repentance, petition, and praise merge in Nehemiah 9:1-38.

Unfortunately, reforms are not automatically _____(ggg). They must be maintained vigilantly. Nehemiah leaves Jerusalem for a time, only to discover a good bit of spiritual _____(hhh) upon his return. He discovers that the high priest has allowed an outsider, a Gentile leader, to have a room in the Temple—a flagrant abuse of the "house of God." Nehemiah deals decisively with it. He throws out the man's furniture and cleanses the storage chamber. The book ends with Nehemiah continuing to exhort the _____(iii) to fulfill their earlier _____(jjj) with God.

LESSONS FROM EZRA & NEHEMIAH

- God keeps His _____(kkk). God promised to restore His people to their homeland after 70 years, and He did.
- God is in total _____(lll) of all things. God can direct the hearts and behavior of the world's most powerful people. He can raise and destroy empires.
- This world is not our _____(mmm). Many of the Jews had become quite comfortable in Babylon and never wanted to return home.
- God makes _____(nnn) things happen. It was "impossible" that the king would let them return to their land AND that he would pay to rebuild the Jewish Temple (Ezra 1:4,6)
- A relationship with God must be our greatest _____(ooo). Before the people rebuilt the Temple or the city walls, they rebuilt the altar. This shows their first priority was repenting and taking care of their sins. True safety is found in a right relationship with God (Ezra 3).
- It's more important to please _____(ppp) than _____(qqq). Others offer to "help" them rebuild the Temple, but these others had no interest in God's agenda though. So, Israel risked alienating these people in order to be faithful to God (Ezra 4).
- The faith of believers will be constantly _____(rrr). The returnees faced constant obstacles when they returned to their homeland and began to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (Ezra 4).
- We must have faithful _____(sss) to remain faithful. God raised up prophets for His people (Ezra 5:1-6:14). If you want to build a better life, you need God's blueprint.
- The Word of God is the very _____(ttt) of spiritual flourishing (Ezra 7:10; Neh 8:13-18). Spiritual flourishing can only happen when we seek to _____(uuu) God's will and _____(vvv) it.
- Strong spiritual _____(www) is necessary to give people spiritual guidance.
- Spiritual reform is not always _____(xxx). Spiritual reform must be pursued every day.

KEY PASSAGES FROM EZRA & NEHEMIAH

- Ezra 7:10
- Nehemiah 4:6
- Nehemiah 8:8
- Nehemiah 8:10

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] RESTORES	[rr] opposition
[b] REMNANT	[ss] 70
[c] LAND	[tt] 52
[d] exiles	[uu] Temple
[e] 605	[vv] Jerusalem
[f] Daniel	[ww] people
[g] 70	[xx] Law
[h] three	[yy] Law
[i] two	[zz] read
[j] Zerubbabel	[aaa] calling
[k] Ezra	[bbb] sorrow
[l] reconstruction	[ccc] conduct
[m] restoration	[ddd] obedient
[n] Cyrus	[eee] humility
[o] problems	[fff] obey
[p] Lord	[ggg] permanent
[q] Lord	[hhh] decline
[r] Lord	[iii] leaders
[s] David	[jjj] covenant
[t] alter	[kkk] promises
[u] feasts	[lll] control
[v] opposition	[mmm] home
[w] five	[nnn] impossible
[x] 60	[ooo] priority
[y] remnant	[ppp] God
[z] renewed	[qqq] people
[aa] single	[rrr] tested
[bb] reformation	[sss] preaching
[cc] spiritually	[ttt] foundation
[dd] morally	[uuu] know
[ee] Law	[vvv] obey
[ff] intermarried	[www] leadership
[gg] teaching	[xxx] permanent
[hh] thirteen	
[ii] cupbearer	
[jj] rebuild	
[kk] wall	
[ll] spiritual	
[mm] rebuilding	
[nn] re-teaching	
[oo] physical	
[pp] spiritual	
[qq] governor	