



Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"

Session 1: Context

Introduction

Context is everything. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah come alive when we can understand the history and relationship of God and the Israelites. This week, we will look back to remember where the Israelites have been, where they are in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and where God is leading them.

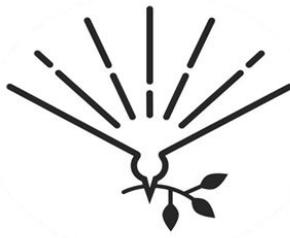
A covenant is a contract between God and his people. God is a covenant keeping God, and the Israelites, like us, tend to be a covenant breaking people. We will see a God whose love for his people is so great that despite repeated disobedience, won't give up on His promises.

On Day Four, we will look into Ezra and Nehemiah. The Hebrew bible considered these books as one, and it wasn't until the third century A.D that Origen suggested it be considered two separate books. Together, Ezra and Nehemiah expose the final chapter in the historic narrative of the Hebrew Bible.

Questions:

Why is context important?

R.C. Sproul said, "We are secure not because we hold tightly to Jesus, but because He holds tightly to us." What does this statement have to do with Old Testament covenant? Does this seem like a 'equal' agreement between the two parties? Why, why not?



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Day One: God's promises and the Israelite people

See Genesis 12:1-2 and 15:5. What promises does God make Abram?

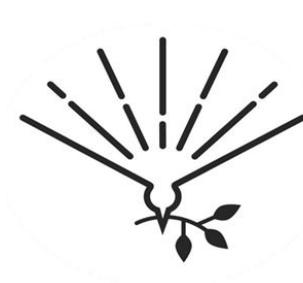
Read Genesis 35:10-13. God chose to give Abraham's descendant, Jacob, a new name. What new name does God choose, and what implications does it have for his descendants who will follow?

See Genesis 15:13. What does God tell Abraham about the future of his descendants?

Roughly 400 years after Abraham, God chose to raise Moses as a leader of the Israelites. What can we learn about the relationship between God and the Israelites in Exodus 6: 2-8?

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, and for forty years they wandered in the desert, before they reached the promise land. During this time, God gave them the Mosaic law. See Deuteronomy 4:1-8. What instructions does God give the Israelites through Moses?

The Israelites seem to waffle between periods of obedience and disobedience. When times are good, because they have obeyed God, they seem to forget all about God's rule and turn to living according to their own. Their disobedience then leads to an understanding that they need God, and hearts that turn back toward Him. How is this cycle familiar to you? What promises of God can you remember in times of disobedience?



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Day Two: Exile

What happened to Jerusalem in 605 BC (Daniel 1:1-2)? Based on Daniel 1:6, what is Daniel's connection to this event (Daniel 1:6)?

Again, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, and the city fell to Babylon in 586 BC. What do we learn about this event from 2 Kings 25: 8-12?

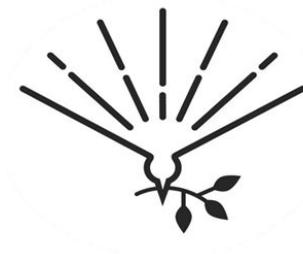
The prophet Jeremiah witnessed the fall of Jerusalem. What message does God provide through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 27:6-7)?

What explanation does Ezra provide for the cause of the fall of Jerusalem? See Ezra 5:12.

Day Three: Persians conquer Babylon

Belshazzar succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as the ruler of Babylon. However, in 539 BC something happened. See Daniel. What happened?

The captivity of the Israelites was ended during the reign of the Persian ruler, Cyrus. One hundred years before his birth, Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus. What can we learn about God's character through his prophesy in Isaiah 44:28?



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Day Four: Return

Cyrus and Persia have new control over Babylon and the Israelite exiles. See Ezra 1:1. What does Cyrus decide to do?

This proclamation is followed by three returns to Jerusalem. We will explore them in depth in the weeks to come. In the meantime, familiarize yourself with the timeline below, and fill in the missing information.

605--Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem, takes elite captives to _____

597--Nebuchadnezzar again attacks Jerusalem, 10,000 sent to Babylon (2Kings 24:14)

596--Babylon conquers Judah, _____ is destroyed

539--_____ conquer Babylon (Daniel 5), become world power

536-- Zerabbabel leads first return (Ezra 1-6)

535--construction on the Second Temple Begins

516--Second Temple is Finished and Dedicated

458--Ezra leads second return (Ezra 7-10)

445--Nehemiah leads the third return (Nehemiah 1-3)

445--Wall surrounding Jerusalem is completed in 52 days

In your opinion, what effect could a physical scattering of the Israelites have on their relationship with God?



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Day Five: Ezra and Nehemiah

What do we know about Ezra (Ezra 7:6)?

See Ezra 7:5. Which high priest is Ezra a descendant of? Why is this mentioned and significant?

Who was Nehemiah and what roles does he fulfill? See Nehemiah 1:11, 4:1, 5:14. What kind of leadership does it take to fulfill these roles?

Read Ezra 7:10 and Nehemiah 2:5. How are their purposes similar and how do they differ?

Day Six:

Prayerfully consider and make a timeline of your life on the line below. Mark the physical (birth, graduations, marriage, etc.) and the spiritual milestones using the following questions:

How have you seen the movement of God? Where are the hills and valleys of your story? Where were times of spiritual exile and doubt? Where have you seen redemption and restoration? Where have you been and where are you going?

[_____]

Where are you at right now in your journey (exile, running away from God, returning to God, spiritual growth, etc)? Wherever you may be, what steps do you need to take to pursue your relationship with God?