

Ezra-Nehemiah

Introduction

Together "these books record the last events of the OT period" (539-430, IOT 179).

The Ezra-Nehemiah Period			
Zerubbabel	539		430
Haggai		Esther	Ezra (from 458)
Zechariah		(to 465)	Nehemiah (from 445)
(from 520)			Malachi

1A. Literary Analysis

1B. Unity of Ezra-Nehemiah

In the Hebrew Bible up to the Middle Ages, these books formed a unit; they were counted as one in numbering the books of the OT.

What is unusual is that the two main characters overlap historically but this overlap is not indicated in the books (IOT 182). Thus, Ezra began his work in 458 B.C. and was still there when Nehemiah came in 445.

2B. Major events recorded

1C. Temple restored through opposition (Ezra 1-6)

Rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2), a governor in a district within an area called "Beyond the River" by the Persians.

The northern kingdom of Israel had been taken by Assyria. After Assyria was conquered by Babylon, and after Babylon took the southern kingdom of Judah into exile, then Babylon was subjugated by the Med-Persian Empire. So, it was under the Persian king, Cyrus (Ezra 1:2) that return from exile begins:

Assyria - exile of North

Babylon - exile of South (temple destroyed,
II Chron. 36:19), 586

Persia - return from exile, after 539

Upon the decree of Cyrus, family heads of Judah and Benjamin prepared to go and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem (1:5). They settled in their home towns (2:70). Under the leadership of Zerubbabel they built the altar for sacrifice in the face of much fear (3:2-3). The next year the temple was begun (3:8). When the foundation was completed there was a mix of joy and weeping (3:10-13).

The building of the temple itself was opposed by the people around Jerusalem who had been brought there during the Assyrian conquest (4:2,4). The rest of chapter 4 stretches down to the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and the building of the walls and city showing that this opposition was persistent. Thus, chapters 5-6 pick up where 3 left off: the temple was completed around 515 B.C. (6:14-16; IOT 183).

2C. Walls and city restored (Ezra 7-Neh. 13)

This is more than physical restoration; Ezra comes as a teacher in Israel (7:6,8-10). Opposition had prevented the building of the walls (Neh. 1:1-3). Nehemiah will be instrumental in the activity of sword and trowel (Neh. 4:17) until the wall of the city is completed (6:15-16).

Next, the city needs to be populated by a prepared people (7:4). So, Ezra reads and expounds the law and the people confess their sins (Neh. 8-9). Then Jerusalem is populated (11:1) and various reforms are put in place (12-13, regarding intermarriage and the Sabbath). This is roughly 458-430 B.C. giving us the last recorded events of the OT period.

3B. Genre

Again, we have theology, thus, *theological memoirs*. Because of the large amount of first-person narration, the history is called "Memoirs" which is different from first-person autobiography because "the memoirist writes of great events that he or she has observed or in which he or she has participated, whereas the autobiographer writes of the self who has observed and participated in the events" (IOT 184- 185). Shifts from first to third-person create a literary subtlety.

4B. Outline

IOT 185

- 1) Return and Rebuilding of the temple, Ezra 1-6
- 2) Ezra and the rebuilding of worship, Ezra 7-10
- 3) Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls, Neh. 1-6

4) Rebuilding of city life under the law, Neh. 7-13 (under Ezra & Nehemiah)

A More Detailed Outline

- 1) Return 1:1-2:70
- 2) Restoration 3:1-6:22
 - Begun 3:1-13
 - Halted 16 yrs (Opposed) 4:1-25
 - Completed 5:1-6:22
- 3) The Return under Ezra 7:1-10:44
 - He comes to improve worship in Jerusalem, 7:10, 19.
 - He calls for separation which included the building of a faithful community, 9:1-10:44.
- 4) The Return under Nehemiah Neh. 1-13 to rebuild the walls
 - Nehemiah's burden 1
 - The Kings favor 2:1-10
 - Rebuilding begun 2:11-3:32
 - The walls completed 4-6
 - Mockery and fear 4:1-23
 - Domestic squabbles 5:1-19
 - Schemes 6:1-7:4
 - Record of those who first returned 7:5-73
 - Reading of the law 8
 - National repentance 9-10
 - Lists of inhabitants 11-12
 - Final reforms 13

2A. Message

Key in the theology of the book is the fact that the house of God is not built when the temple is finished (Ezra 6:15; 515 B.C.).

The law must be taught in Israel (Ezra 7:10), the house of God in Jerusalem must be honored further (Ezra 7:27) and the remnant must confess their sins (Ezra 9:1-10:44). Further for God's covenant to be fulfilled (Neh. 1:5), the walls of the city must be rebuilt and consecrated to God (Neh. 3:1, IOT 186) and the empty city (Neh. 7:4) must be populated (Neh. 11:1,2) to constitute the holy city, the city of God (Neh. 11:1) living by God's Law.

Thus, "Ezra's law, which included a strong emphasis on the prohibition of intermarriage, constituted a people fit to live within Nehemiah's walls" (IOT 187).

Thus the OT ends with a holy people dwelling in a holy city (cf. IOT 187). There is a subtle move from temple to city as the holy place of the Lord.

God is keeping his covenant through historical means including opposition. Nehemiah 9 traces the sin of Israel in contrast to the covenant love of God. Also see Nehemiah 1:5.

God is active keeping covenant.

1) Cyrus fulfills the word of the Lord, Ezra 1:1;

2) God moved the hearts of those who returned, Ezra 1:5; The Lord changed the attitude of the king of Assyria, Ezra 6:22 for the Persian king was now king of Assyria and Assyrian conquest is being undone,

3) The good hand of God was upon Ezra, 7:9; upon the king's heart, 7:27; upon the king for Nehemiah, Neh. 2:8.

The remnant is secured by efficacious grace (Ezra 1:5; 9:8, 13; so hope, 10:2).

Yet the book ends with an "open question" on the sins of the past being repeated. Perfection has not been reached. This gives a look to the future (IOT 187).

3A. Theme

The theme of Ez-Neh is the rebuilding of Jerusalem as the holy city of God.

4A. Message for us

1) **We are the city of God**, Heb. 11:10, 39, 40; 12:22-28.

The OT ends still looking for the city Abraham looked for, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10) showing that they had not received what had been promised (Heb. 11:39) and showing further that "God had something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Heb. 11:40).

We have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, to the church of the first born, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:22-28).

The church made up of Jew and Gentile has walls that are extended to the whole earth! Thus the veil is torn down from top to bottom to open up the holy of holies to all creation and the wall of separation is demolished (Eph. 2:14-18, cf. IOT 187).

2) Give thanks

Therefore, we are to be thankful, and worship God acceptably with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28).

3) Trust and serve faithfully

Hebrews 12 and 13 give a number of resultant duties for us who are now the holy city of God, the place of his dwelling because Jesus is Jacob's ladder, the bridge between earth and heaven, the place of the presence of God.

So, we look to him (12:2-3) to struggle with sin (v. 4) and to endure hardship as a discipline (v. 7).

We are to strengthen feeble knees (v. 12) to live in peace (v. 14) without bitterness and immorality (15-16), to love (13:1) and serve (13:16) and worship the God of the eternal covenant (13:16, 20).

Notes

Prophet and priest are teachers 6:14; 7:10,12

God uses foreign rulers to accomplish his covenant.

Ezra's prayer, 9 - praise, confession, appeal to covenant

God's gracious hand - 2:8

Use of means ch. 4; 6:15

The importance of the law and its exposition 8

Sabbath Neh 10:31; 13:15-22