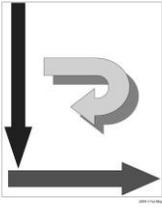


## Week Thirty-eight: A Kingdom Rebuilt - Nehemiah 8-9



### Overview

As he prepares Israel to enter the land of promise, Moses speaks about the importance of Bible literacy: “At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time . . . you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing . . . that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land” (Deut. 31:9-13). He completes the writing of the words of the law in a

book and commands

that the book be placed prominently beside the ark of the covenant (31:24-26). He regards Bible literacy as the very heart of Israel, “For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess” (32:47).

Moses also speaks about the time that their disobedience will take them into captivity, but that the LORD will bring them back to the land of promise—“that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you . . . from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you” (Deut. 30:3-4).

Throughout Israel’s history they ignore Moses’ urgent warning regarding Bible literacy. Nearly 1,000 years pass, and they are taken captive by the Babylonians. Seventy years later the LORD gathers a remnant and brings them back to the land of promise. Ezra understands that central to rebuilding and re-inhabiting the land is a return to Bible literacy.

This lesson focuses on Ezra’s teaching the people the Book of the Law and their story.

### Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will appreciate the role Bible literacy plays in Judah’s return from captivity and their spiritual health as they rebuild Jerusalem and inhabit the land.

### Key Truths

*Without Bible literacy people live without regard to God and His redemptive activity on their behalf. Revival and renewal begin with a return to God’s Word.*

## Lesson Outline

A remnant of the Jews returns from the seventy years of captivity promised by Jeremiah (Jer. 25) in three waves, over a nearly one-hundred year period. King Cyrus issues an edict regarding the Jews and the rebuilding of their temple in Jerusalem in the first year of his reign. He commissions Zerubbabel and about 50,000 people to return to

Jerusalem along with the 'temple wares' taken by the Babylonians seventy years earlier.

### 1. Zerubbabel the Beginner - Ezra 3:1-2

Zerubbabel builds an altar on the temple site (Ezra 3:1-2) and then begins rebuilding the temple. The Jews quit rebuilding when they face opposition from the inhabitants of the former Northern Kingdom (these people become the Samaritans of Jesus' day). Sixteen years pass (Darius is now king), and God raises up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1) to urge them to finish building the temple, which they do in 515 BC. They celebrate the completion of the temple with joy and reinstitute the Passover feast (Ezra 6:13-22).

### 2. Nehemiah the Builder - Nehemiah 1-6

Nehemiah, the cup bearer to King Artaxerxes, hears of Jerusalem's condition, and he is moved to prayer by a burden for his people. Eventually his prayers attract the attention of the king, who commissions him to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. Nehemiah embraces this God-sized assignment and leads the remnant in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Even though Nehemiah experiences taunts (4:1-4) and even threats (6:2-13) from the enemies of the people, he and the people finish the rebuilding of the walls in 52 days (6:15)—an amazing feat for any century, but especially for a time when all rubble had to be carried away by hand, and all bricks had to be brought in by hand.

### 3. Ezra the Bible Teacher - Nehemiah 8-9

King Artaxerxes permits Ezra, a Levite who is both a prophet and a scribe, to visit Jerusalem and teach the people the Book of the Law. The people have intermarried with the peoples around them, and they repent at the preaching of God's Word.

- Ezra Reads the Book of the Law - Nehemiah 8
  - The people respond in worship. Ezra stands before all the people who've gathered and reads the Book of the Law (1-6).
  - The people respond in weeping. Thirteen teachers and the Levites help the people to understand the word they have heard. Great joy breaks out as they understand the words declared to them (7-12).
  - The people work. On the second day of reading, they read Leviticus 23:39-43, where Moses instructs the people to construct and live in shelters made out of brush for seven days to commemorate their temporary stay in booths in the

wilderness. Sadly, this is the first time since the days of Joshua that Israel keeps a feast that should have been celebrated annually (Neh. 8:13-18).

- The people respond to the reading of God's Word - Nehemiah 9:1-4
  - They humble themselves before the Lord with fasting, sackcloth, and dust on their heads (1).
  - They confess their sins and the sins of their fathers (2).
  - They put away foreign wives - 7 priests, 10 Levites, 1 singer, 3 gatekeepers, and 84 others (Ezra 9:10-11; 10:1-3).
  - They put away the foreigners in their midst (Nehemiah 13:1-3).
- The priests summarize and rehearse Israel's history before the people, demonstrating the need for Bible literacy - Nehemiah 9:5-38
  - Creation - Nehemiah 9:5-6
  - Patriarchs - Nehemiah 9:7-8
  - Exodus - Nehemiah 9:9-21
  - Conquest - Nehemiah 9:22-25
  - Judges - Nehemiah 9:26-31
  - Kingdom & Captivity - Nehemiah 9:32-35
  - Return - Nehemiah 9:36-38

Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Ezra faithfully lead Judah to rebuild the altar, the temple, the walls; but they cannot rebuild their hearts.

#### **4. Malachi the Bridger - Malachi**

Though Judah returns to the land of promise, they only return to the LORD in part. Captivity finally cures Israel of worshiping the idols of the people around them. It has not, however, dealt with Israel's other sin problems. Israel's final prophet, Malachi, addresses disrespect toward God demonstrated by the contempt they show toward God and the sacrificial system, the corruption among the priests, and their mistreatment of one another. Malachi refers to the coming of the Messiah, His messenger, and the great and terrible day of the LORD, when He turns the hearts to the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (4:6). Though they've returned to the land of promise, they've yet to turn to the Lord of the promise with all of their heart. Malachi serves as Israel's final Old Testament prophet.

**Application** - What does this lesson teach about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?  
*Revived people center their lives around God's Word. Bible literacy drives the spiritual health of God's people.*

*The story of the Bible teaches God's ways, character, and promises as He interacts with unbelieving and rebellious people from one generation to the next; its promise of redemption and God's steady activity toward that end comfort every generation who*

*dares to believe God and walk in faith; and its story keeps hope alive while facing the challenges of living in a world dominated by sin (Rom. 15:4).*

*Knowing God's story drives purposeful kingdom living.*

## **Summary**

*God speaks* through leaders whom He raises up and prophets whom He sends

*God acts* by raising up men to lead His people back to Himself through dedication to tasks He has assigned to them.

*God reveals* the importance of theological education and the power of the Word to bring conviction and repentance.

## **Discussion Questions**

God uses different men to accomplish different tasks; what tasks (assignments) has God given to you that no other can do?

Why is the rebuilding of the city and the temple important? Why does God command the rebuilding of the temple before the people rebuilt the walls?

Haggai rebukes the people for caring for themselves rather than for God's house?

Does this rebuke fit American Christians today?