

**Ezra--- God is faithful even when we are not**

Author: Likely Ezra, as he is the main character (ch 7 forward)

Setting: Jerusalem, action covering 80 years as exiles return to Jerusalem in three waves, beginning in 538 BC.

God moves King Cyrus of Persia, ruler of Babylon, to allow willing Jews to go 'home' to Jerusalem in 538BC. The first wave departs for home, and temple reconstruction begins under Zerubbabel (ch 1-6).

The Jews are harassed in their work, but God keeps raising up prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) to keep the work going.

The second wave of returnees is ok'd by the next Persian king, Ataxerxes in 458 BC. It is led by Ezra, a priest/scribe who calls the people to repent so the temple will actually mean something (ch 9-10). He is as knowledgeable in the Law as any man alive. God purposely picks him to remind them of the Covenant.

This was originally part of one book in the Hebrew Bible, as Ezra and Nehemiah were considered one work written by 2 authors.

Ezra's burden to see the temple worship restored as people came home was transferred to Nehemiah, who took up the task of seeing the city walls rebuilt.

*Bottom Line: do what God tells you to do. He will remain faithful, even though you may not.*

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**Nehemiah—What good's a city without walls?**

Nehemiah picks up where Ezra left off, with the action approximately 423 BC, though there is some 'overlap'—see chapter 8.

Author: Nehemiah, 'comforter', cupbearer (advisor, anti-poisoning guy) to King Artaxerxes. Though Jewish, he is loyal to the king, and has his favor.

## (Nehemiah cont'd)

**(Note: Ezra and Nehemiah reap the fruit of obedience from when Jeremiah prophesied that there would be 70 years of captivity, so live and serve in Babylon with integrity. Nehemiah is a prime example of what happens when you serve God by serving people and be consistent—see Jer. 29:4-10, II —“for I know the plans I have for you...”)**

*“You can take the boy out of the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the boy.”*

**Nehemiah's heart is in Jerusalem, and he is heartbroken that it has no walls of defense, making it a matter of time before it falls (again).**

**God puts it in Nehemiah's heart to go back and secretly survey the walls, and strategize how to repair them. He is granted permission to go and do just that.**

**The book is a recounting of the wall-rebuilding project, including how he dealt with enemies of the project who try to bring discouragement on them so that they will lose heart and stop. Satan is disguised as Sanballat who discourages, bullies, and then tries to 'negotiate'. This parallels the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra.**

**Stuff to remember in Nehemiah:**

**1) Remember that his name is 'Yahweh Comforts', and is a 'type' of the Holy Spirit and His work in the lives of humans who need to be 'rebuilt' and healed. Read it once with just that in mind.**

**2) Pay attention to the rebuilding of the gates, each of which represents ministries of God through the Church, ie., the Sheep Gate (pastoring the sheep), the Fish Gate (evangelism), etc...**

**3) This is the other book end to Ezra, who led a spiritual renewal. Nehemiah was more like James in the NT, challenging people to give attention to works and the way they live. The book parallels our Christian walk.**

**4) One last thought. 4 times the enemy tries to distract Nehemiah, and 4 times he replies “I cannot come down off the wall to talk to you, for I am doing a great work” as in 6:3...**

## **Esther--- Integrity preserves a nation**

**Author:** Unknown, possibly Ezra or Mordecai, around 465 BC.

**Setting:** 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Persia, after the 3 'waves' of exiles go back to Jerusalem (see Ezra notes), a number of Jews stay voluntarily in Babylon under Persian rule. King Ahasuerus (likely Xerxes I) dethrones his wife the queen after she publicly 'disses' him, and there is suddenly a vacancy for the job, with a BUNCH of applicants.

Mordecai, a well respected leader of the captive Jews, brought his cousin Esther (whom he adopted) to be seen by the king as a possible candidate. She is an orphaned Jewess and is admired by all she meets.

She prepares for a year (12 months of putting on makeup, not kidding), but prepares spiritually as well, realizing she will represent the Jewish nation in a foreign land if selected. She sees it as a ministry. She does not reveal the identity of her family at Mordecai's request.

The king's #2 man Haman falls totally in love with himself, and when Mordecai refuses to bow down to him, Haman determines to destroy all the Persian Jews. The king authorizes him to deal with the Jews any way he wants, but still doesn't realize all his queen's ancestral ties.

Esther risks her own safety in approaching the king without his summon. This results in Esther hosting a banquet and revealing Haman's plot to wipe out her people, the Jews. Haman is hanged on the same gallows he had made for Mordecai, Yuk yuk.

Epilogue: The king secures the Jews' future by a protective decree, and they are allowed to retaliate against all their enemies, winning every time. The feast of Purim was instituted to commemorate this, which is celebrated annually the month before Passover as Esther is read.

Mordecai is elevated to the #2 man in Persia, respected more than almost anyone in Jewish history. *Integrity always has the last word.*

## **Malachi—the last word on why we need a Savior**

Author: Malachi ('My messenger'), approximately 450 BC. He is the last of the minor prophets, the last O.T. voice before the 'silent 400 years', and the last guy over a 1,000 period to prophesy the coming of Christ. *Fittingly, it was placed at the end of the Old Testament.*

This book is a 4 chapter 'Question and Answer' prophetic word that brings serious charges against God's people Israel for their unfaithfulness, and points out their need for a Savior.

After the exile, the Jews lived in Palestine in a restored community. Ezra and Nehemiah's leadership had not stopped the moral decline of the Jews, and things were once again falling apart.

*Malachi 1:1—The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.*

2: "I have loved you", says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have you loved us?' In a nutshell, this explains how callous Israel has gotten to blessing and how they are not responding to God's love appropriately.

Malachi proceeds to tell the ways God has loved them, and how they have not loved Him back. He is especially harsh with the priests who have not represented the God of the Covenant to the people.

He addresses not only their lack of affection and obedience, but the fact that they have 'robbed' him of tithes and offerings (3:16), and then challenges them to give without reservation. God will respond in kind, proving His great generosity to those that trust Him, even promising that *"their vines would not fail to bear fruit"*.

He not only prophesies the coming of Christ (4:2 the 'Sun of righteousness') and his forerunner, John the Baptist, 'My messenger' in 3:1, who will prepare the way before the Lord.

*Bottom line: Remember the laws Moses laid down. Observe them and prepare (repent) because the great Redeemer and Judge is coming.*

*The Jews looked for a national liberator Messiah, but He was coming as a personal liberator as well, a concept they had a hard time grasping.*

*John 1:11 "He came unto His own (people), and His own (people) received Him not."*