

Park Street Church Christian Formation – Fall 2017
Reformation—An Ongoing Task
Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 8-13

Review Chronology

- **Edict of Cyrus the Great** (exiles return; beginning of “diaspora”) 539 BC
- **Second Temple Completed** (Darius I) 516 BC
- **(Haggai and Zechariah)**
- **Esther in a Foreign Court** (Xerxes I – 486-465) 483-470’s BC
- **Ministries of Ezra/Nehemiah/Malachi** (Artaxerxes I – 465-424) 457-445 BC
[just note: there are differences of opinion in terms of how to position Ezra and Nehemiah in the chronological picture]

Ethnic Groups “Beyond the River”

- “People of the land”
- Edomites (Idumeans) moved into Negev and southern Judah
- Samaritans (Samaritans)
- Ammonites (Tobiads)
- Moabites
- Philistines / Arabians
- **Judah was small**

Reminders and Preview

- **Ezra 1-6** – a reprise of the prior history from the decree of Cyrus (539) to the time that the Temple was completed and the people celebrated Passover (516)
- **Ezra 4** – summary of ongoing opposition from reign of Cyrus until Artaxerxes I (time of Ezra and Nehemiah)
- **Nehemiah 1-7** – from Cupbearer to Governor (ca. 445 BC) – prayer, fasting, sacrificial leadership to rebuild Jerusalem—in every way
- **Now, circling back to pick up Ezra 7-10 (with Neh 8-13), starting with Ezra’s arrival in 457 BC (7th year of Artaxerxes - Ezra 7:7)**

Ezra’s Return to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1-10)

- **Ezra’s identity**
 - **Priest** - line of Aaron
 - **Teacher** who knew the Torah of Moses
- **Sent by the king – with God’s good hand on him** - a four-month journey

What Was Ezra’s Mission (Ezra 7:11-28) as articulated in Artaxerxes’ letter?

- In a nutshell, take charge of every aspect of Temple offerings and upkeep
- Appoint judges who know the Laws of God in the province “Beyond the River”
- Note consequences for lack of compliance!

Ezra’s Arrival in Jerusalem – Feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 8; Nehemiah 8)

- Fasting to seek safe journey
- Priests commissioned to guard the gold and silver offerings for the Temple
- What details give us insight into their celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles?
- In keeping with the Lord’s command, they read Torah (Deut 31:10-13)

Covenant Based Reform (Nehemiah 9)

- Reading God's covenant instructions convicted the people
- They mourned over disobedience
- And continued to read Torah and confess sins
- What patterns do we see for worship and confession in the corporate prayer?

The Intermarriage Problem (Ezra 9)

- The lack of national boundaries placed more emphasis on social boundaries
 - Suggestion: those who had remained in the land after the exile gained stability and wealth; thus, these were attempts to “marry up” and improve socio-economic position
 - List of people groups echoes Deuteronomy 7 – adding in Ammonites and Moabites
- Priests, leaders, officials “led the way in this unfaithfulness” (Ezra 9:1-2)
- Ezra's mourning and prayer
 - Shame because of great guilt in disobeying God's covenant command not to intermarry
 - The punishment (exile) had been less than their sins deserved
 - Gratitude for return of the remnant, the Temple, and the restored walls (see Neh 1-6)

Reforming Efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah

- Consequences (Ezra 10) – sent away all the foreign women and their children
 - Note implications for those vulnerable persons
 - What lesson might be embedded in this?
- The intent of the reform
 - Prevent another exile from occurring
 - Intermarriage with foreigners would lead to idolatry
- Next step – renewed the covenant (Neh 9:38-10:39)
- What did they promise on oath to do?
 - Obey Torah
 - Not intermarry
 - Keep the Sabbath – why was this so important?
 - Tithes and offerings for Temple – “not neglect the house of God”

Nehemiah's Additional Work (Nehemiah 11-13)

- **Development of Jerusalem**
 - People moved into Jerusalem
 - Walls of Jerusalem dedicated
- **Stagnation and slippage in Nehemiah's absence**
 - Tobiah the Ammonite's residence in the Temple
 - Neglect of the Levites – lapses in tithe payment
 - Desecrating the Sabbath
 - Recurring problem of intermarriage – what were they supposed to learn from the example of Solomon?
- **Plea that God would remember him**

What Lessons Should We Take Away?