

Building for Christ: Nehemiah Lesson 6
Finished Is Not Done!
Nehemiah 7 and 8

A Bible Study Series of The Mt. Zion Church

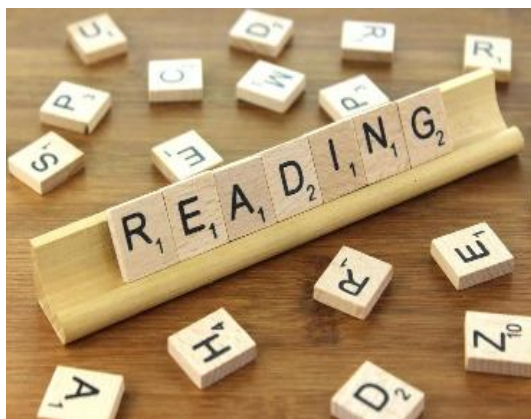
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We Have the Vision to be a LEARNING Church!
We are Rooted in Christ and Reaching the One!



Introduction: My wife and I like to cook together at the end of our workday. It seems to transition us to whatever evening activities we have in store. If we have planned well, we prep our food early in the week. This allows us to save time during cooking so we are able to efficiently utilize time. Each stage of the meal has its order, preparation, and cooking time. As we maneuver around the kitchen chopping this or that and making various entrees, the goal is more than just preparing a delicious meal. The goal is to prepare the meal and then eat the meal. Preparation is never the end of any meal. *Eating* is always the purpose of the meal so that our bodies can function with the energy needed to live. Thus, cooking is a means to an end. In many ways, the following lesson reminds us that Nehemiah's goal was not just to lead the building of a wall and gates. His goal was to rebuild so that the Israelites who returned to Jerusalem would have a protected city so they could function as God had intended. The preparation was completed, now it was time to move into the city. In this, we still see that Nehemiah organizes and systematically proceeds forward by God's direction. We learn in chapters 7-8 that *finished does not mean done!*



Reading for Lesson 5

Nehemiah 7-8

Ezra 1: 1-10

Ezra 2

Ezra 7

Ezra 9: 1-4; 10: 2, 10

Words and Pronunciations to Know!

Urim (meaning light or God's light) and **Thummim** (symbolizing God's perfection)= Yoorim and Toomim. These two items were worn on the breastplate of a priest's clothing. These were either part of the 12 stones worn on the breastplate or separate stones. Urim and Thummim are mentioned 3 times in the Bible (Exodus 28:30, 1 Samuel 28: 6, and Nehemiah 7: 65) and point to getting answers from God in some manner, but historians are unclear on this as their mentions lack clarity as to their usage. Nehemiah 7 is the last mention of Urim and Thummim.

I. Guarding the City—Nehemiah 7: 1-4



A good leader recognizes that threats do not diminish when success has been achieved. Nehemiah has led the completion of the building of the city walls and gates. Then he wisely sets about the process of protecting what has been built. Remember, opposition to the building occurred throughout the nearly two months of building. Additionally, no houses had been rebuilt. This indicates the people were still vulnerable to enemies attacking them.

1. How does Nehemiah protect the city (look carefully in verses 1 and 3)?

You will notice that the people utilized were functioning beyond their traditional duty. These gatekeepers usually functioned only at the temple. They were temple gatekeepers which is why they were identified with the musicians and the Levites (priests). They were not city gatekeepers. However, their abilities were needed for a different task at that time. To protect the city, Nehemiah employed them for something outside their usual role and for something outside of their potential comfort zone.



- What skills or abilities do you have which could be utilized in your church right now, yet you keep looking for a better time or better place to use them?

For example: Are you skilled in organizing, technology, teaching, leading, praying, writing, supporting, or helping?

Why are you sitting on the sidelines waiting for the ministry to match your giftedness versus matching your giftedness to a ministry and getting active?

2. What main quality did Nehemiah look for when utilizing people? Why was this important then and now? How does this match with Nehemiah's approach to leadership?

II. The Census—Nehemiah 7: 4-73

Nehemiah 7: 4-73 records a census of the people who returned from captivity to repopulate the city. Scholars suggests the information in this part of Nehemiah came from Nehemiah's personal memoirs which described the work he did. This accounting of people is nearly identical to Ezra's account found in Ezra 2. Minor differences in numbers seem to be related to a copying error (remember records were handwritten) or potentially to Nehemiah adding some who were proselytized Jews (Jews by conversion) or potentially the number of Levites. The minor difference is not significant enough to consider the census a major error (245 people). Overall, the number of returning people was nearly 50, 000.

The numbering represents the families who could trace their historical lineage. Some of the written records seemed to be incomplete which required a group to be incapable of serving as priests for a time see verses 64-65. The numbering would help Nehemiah assess the need for _____ (see verse 4).

- What does this meticulous accounting for information teach us about history and records?

III. The Ezra Connection—Nehemiah 8: 1-5; Ezra 2, Ezra 7, Ezra 9: 1-4; 10: 2, 10

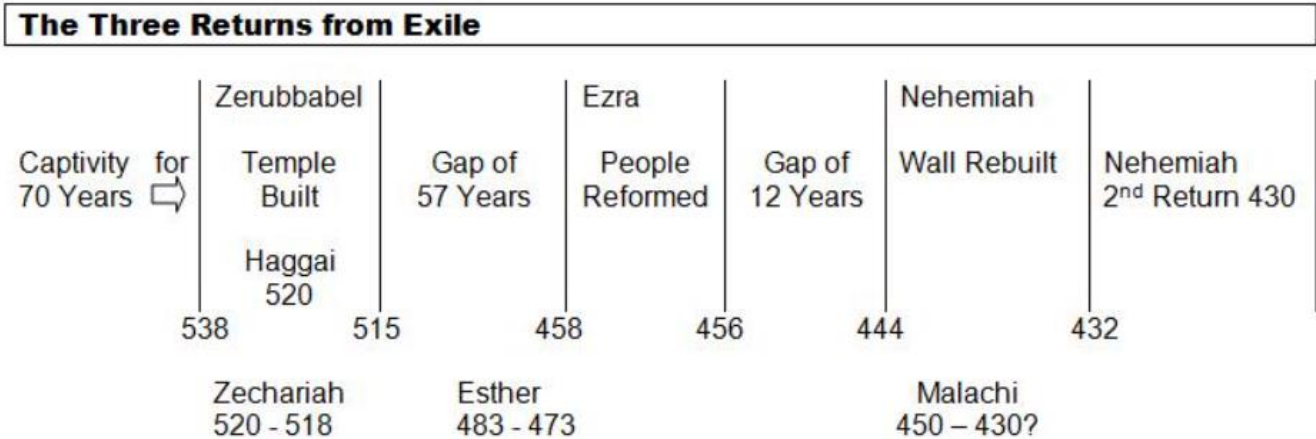
To better understand Nehemiah's work, we must also analyze portions of the book of Ezra. Often, we read the Bible and think the Bible is constructed sequentially. Some portions are in chronological order while other portions are not. For instance, Genesis is a narrative and clearly chronological. Psalms is a book of songs which would not be chronological. (Think of Psalms as a book of poetry). Other books have overlapping historical narratives such as Nehemiah and Ezra. Ezra was a teacher of God's word. His role was to begin the rebuilding of the **spiritual lives of God's people** (Ezra 9: 1-4, 10: 2, 10).

- What year did Ezra begin to work in Jerusalem? (See Ezra 2: 8)
- What year did Nehemiah begin work in Jerusalem (See Nehemiah 2:1)

Ezra began how many years before Nehemiah? _____

Ezra is identified in Ezra 7 as a Levite well versed in the Law of Moses. He was a direct descendant of Aaron which identifies his family as a priestly family. He was given permission to return to Jerusalem by King Artaxerxes (458 B.C.) along with any persons who wanted to return with him. They are given provisions, freewill offerings from Babylonian citizens, and are given all of the temple items stolen by King Nebuchadnezzar (605 B.C.). Ezra's purpose was to restore worship and to promote spiritual reform. Remember, Nehemiah was not a priest. He was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes who goes to rebuild the ruins of the city. The following chart indicates the basic timeline for Ezra and Nehemiah's work. Also included is the time of the Temple rebuilding under Zerubbabel.

Ezra and Nehemiah CHARTS



Chapter 8 of Nehemiah opens with Ezra, the priest, being requested to come and read The Law of Moses. This seems to be an odd insertion of information, but upon deeper analysis should be a cause for celebration. To understand this, we must remember that Ezra's function was to lead the people to return to obedience to God. He did this by going to Jerusalem to teach the people what the word meant and how it should influence their lives daily.

➤ Who requested Ezra to come? (Nehemiah 8: 1)

Why is there significance in the people asking for The Law of Moses to be read versus Ezra telling the people they need to listen to the Law of Moses?

When was the last time you asked your Pastor to give you more of God's word?



➤ What does the request indicate about the people?

➤ What does this indicate about how God wants His people to order their work?

Which order is God's Order? Which one is mostly your order? Why does God's order create guarantees of success while the others do not? Think about Nehemiah and Ezra's work.

1. A. Prayer, B. Study the Word, C. Work
2. A. Work B. Prayer C. Study the Word
3. A. Prayer, B. Work, C. Study the Word

When we structure our lives within God's plans and order, we find that God guarantees success. Remember, 2 Chronicles 7: 14 and Matthew 6: 33 indicate a specific order required for success!

- How do you need to reorder your approach to living so that you line up with God's desires?

IV. The People's Chain Reaction Nehemiah 8: 6-18 Group Activity!

Directions: The following activity helps you to dig into the Word of God. When The Law of Moses is read, as described in Nehemiah 8: 6-18, a number of actions occur. Read the passage and list what happens. Then discuss why this is important with your group members.

What happens	Who does it	People's Response	Found in Which Verse?

- What phrase is repeated in verses 8 and 12?
 - Why is this phrase important?
 - How are our actions connected to the repeated phrase?

What is your takeaway from this lesson?
What do you now need to do?