

CHRIST CHURCH, VIRGINIA WATER SUNDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER 2010

SERMON NOTES: 8.00 & 9.30 AM SERVICES

Title: “How to Read Ezra-Nehemiah: The Priority of the Scriptures”

Preacher: Ro Mody

Six Principles for Reading and Understanding Ezra-Nehemiah:

1. Look for the Historical and Literary Context

The Unity of Ezra-Nehemiah: Originally was compiled as a one book and read as one book.

Authors of Ezra-Nehemiah: Unknown editors (Ezra 1-6; Neh 11-12:26); Ezra’s memoirs (Ezra 7-10; Neh 8-10), and Nehemiah’s memoirs (Neh 1-7; 12:27-13:31)

Date: Edited around 400 BC, but Ezra 1-6 refers to the rebuilding of the Temple around 500 BC while Ezra & Nehemiah were active around 450 BC.

Type of Literature: A Historical Narrative based on letters, lists, royal edits, and memoirs

The Biblical Context: Ezra-Nehemiah continues the story of Israel under the Persian Empire after the return from exile in Babylon. 2nd to last book of the OT.

2. Look for the Structure of Ezra-Nehemiah

1. The Return from Exile and the Rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1-6)

2. The Return of Ezra and the Rebuilding of the Purity of the Community after Intermarriage (Ezra 7-10)

3. The Return of Nehemiah and the Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem (Neh 1-7)

4. *The Climax: The Teaching Leadership of Ezra and the Rebuilding of the Law in the Community (Neh 8-10)*

5. The Political Leadership of Nehemiah and the Continuing Rebuilding of the Purity of the Community (Neh 11-13)

3. Look for the Main Theme of Ezra-Nehemiah

Ezra 1:1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the **word of the LORD** spoken by Jeremiah, **the LORD moved the heart** of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to **put it in writing**.

Ezra 3:2 Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with **what is written in the Law of Moses** the man of God.

Ezra 9:10 "But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded **the commands 11 you gave through your servants the prophets** when you said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. 12 Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.'

Nehemiah 1:7 We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed **the commands, decrees and laws** you gave your servant Moses.

Nehemiah 8:9 Then Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred [**holy**] to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they **listened to the words of the Law**. 10 Ezra said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred [**holy**] to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Nehemiah 13:1 On that day **the Book of Moses was read aloud** in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God,

So, the main theme/melodic line of the book is...

After the exile, The Lord rebuilds the people of God (Israel), by the reforming leaders Ezra and Nehemiah, so that they can be a Holy people living in a Holy City through the authority and teaching of His Holy Scripture.

4. Look for the Book's Purpose and Application

The key questions: How will God rebuild the community? Will Israel survive just to repeat the sins of the past (especially the sin of intermarriage)? Will Israel hear and obey the teaching God's Written Word?

- So the book's purpose is: to encourage the people of God to be pure and holy by obeying the Scriptures in the face of attacks on their faith (both internal and external) in their own time, and to see the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah as a model for God's future building of the ideal community through Word ministry.

5. Look for the New Testament fulfilment

Ephesians 2:20 built on the **foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone**. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

6. Look for the work of Nehemiah and Ezra

Nehemiah: The Political Leader and Reformer, Governor of Judah, he was sent by the Persian King. Honest and blunt, he rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 1-7) and continues to purify the practices of the temple and to purify the people from intermarriage (Neh 12:27-13:21).

Nehemiah 13:31 I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me with favour, O my God.

Ezra: The Religious Leader and Reformer, he was a priest and Scribe. Gracious and gentle, he was seen as the 2nd Moses, who makes Judaism into a religion of teaching the Bible.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of **the Law** of the LORD, and to **teaching its decrees and laws** in Israel.

This verse is “the secret of Ezra’s lasting influence. He is the model reformer in that what he taught he had first lived, and what he lived he had first made sure of in the Scriptures. With study, conduct and teaching put deliberately in the right order, each of these was able to function properly at its best: study was saved from unreality, conduct from uncertainty, and teaching from insincerity and shallowness.” – Derek Kidner

1 Timothy 4:13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading **of Scripture**, to preaching and to teaching.

“I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote *God’s Word*; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the *Word* so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it.”–Martin Luther

What a great pattern of ministry! Teach, preach, write, have a snooze and a beer with your mates. Trust the *word of God to do the work of God*. Now there’s an idea.
–John Richardson on Luther