

Session 5: Return

Scripture questions:

Ezra 1:1-4

Ezra 2:64-70

How does God use a king who does not worship Him to accomplish His will?

What do the people take up an offering for? What do the people give?

Ezra 4:1-23

Ezra 6:1-12

What kind of opposition do the Jews encounter as they seek to rebuild the temple?

Why do you think they were opposed?

Did the opponents succeed in their attempts?

Ezra 6:13-18

How do you think the Jews felt when the temple was finally completed? Why?

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Why is Nehemiah so sad?

Why do you think Nehemiah prays after hearing the news?

Nehemiah 2:1-9

How does the king support Nehemiah's efforts?

Nehemiah 2:10-20

Nehemiah 4:1-3

Who opposes Nehemiah's plan? Why are these people opposed to rebuilding the wall?

How do they mock the work of the Israelites? What do they accuse the people of?

Nehemiah 6:1-19

What is the response of Israel's opponents once the Jews rebuild the walls?

What is the attitude of Nehemiah throughout these circumstances?

What happened as a result of the walls being rebuilt?

The Babylonian Empire, who forced the Israelites into exile, was overthrown by the Persian Empire. The Persians declared that Jews could return to Jerusalem 70 years after they went into captivity. The Persians helped the Israelites, and other people, return from exile.

- **The Southern Kingdom**, or Judah, returned and started to spread outside of the land of Israel while a number of Jews stayed in Babylon and other areas.
- **The Northern Kingdom**, or Israel, was taken away by the Assyrians and never returned.

The Book of Ezra

In Ezra, the king supported the efforts of the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, the centerpoint of their worship. Their opponents viewed the reestablishment of the Temple as a threat to their power. The Temple was completed, but required the involvement of the entire community, encountered serious opposition, and took several years.

The Book of Nehemiah

With prayer, and with the support of the king of Persia, Nehemiah was able to return to Jerusalem to oversee the construction of the walls. Rebuilding these walls signified the people's freedom from their opponent's threats and the return of Jerusalem as an important city.

Application Questions:

The historical books record the activities of God in the lives of the Israelites and the history of their faithfulness to God. How would you describe the history of God in your life?

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, God used kings who worshipped other gods to accomplish His will. How does that shape your thinking about who and what God can use to accomplish His will?

Ezra and Nehemiah faced great opposition when they sought the will of God. How do we encourage God's will and accomplishments in the lives of others?

The people who opposed the rebuilding of the Temple and the walls viewed the projects through a selfish lens, thinking only of what it would cost them. In what ways do we oppose God's activity in other's lives because of our selfish desires?

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