

Lesson 1 The Book of Ezra Background to the Book of Ezra and Nehemiah

Originally the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah were written as one book with one coherent story. They belong to a genre called narrative. A biblical narrative is a purposeful story retelling the historical events of the past that are intended to give meaning and direction to a given people in the present. Ezra and Nehemiah are two of many books in the Bible which relate the history of Israel. The history of Israel fits into "God's Big Story" as part of His redemptive plan. From the nation of Israel comes God's chosen Savior and the only hope for redemption, Jesus Christ.

Background

The Book of Ezra opens in the year 538 BC with a decree made by Cyrus the king of Persia. Cyrus had recently conquered Babylon where the majority of Jews were living in exile. How had the Jews ended up in Babylon, far from Jerusalem and the land that God had promised to Abraham and his seed? We can find the answer in several Old Testament scriptures.

In this lesson you will be directed to many Old Testament passages. It is recommended that you read them in "The Message" translation if possible.

Read Deuteronomy 29:1-29

In chapters 29 and 30 Moses was speaking to the Israelites who were about to enter the land that God has promised them. Moses reminded them of the covenant that God has made with the nation. Moses then charged the Israelites who are formally standing in the presence of Yahweh, the initiator of the covenant, to carefully fulfill their duties and obligations under the terms of the covenant.

1. What is God's command to the Israelites in 29:9? What is God's intention for His people in 29:13? What are the consequences of not obeying the covenant? See 29:16-28 and in particular 29:24-28.

Read Jeremiah 32: 26-44 and Lamentations 3:17-33

Jeremiah was called to prophesy to Judah and Jerusalem of God's coming judgment on them. Lamentations is an ancient poem called a dirge. It was written in the midst of a ruined Jerusalem after God's judgment had occurred.

2. The Lord was being true to His warning in Deuteronomy 29 and punishing Judah and Jerusalem for their rebellion. According to Jeremiah 32:26-35 who was God going to allow to capture the city and why?

3. According to Jeremiah 32:36- 44 what did God promise to His people who were about to be punished for being unfaithful and not keeping His covenant? What attributes of God does this reveal and how does this demonstrate God's faithfulness to His covenant? See also Lamentations 3:21-33.

Read Jeremiah 25:11-14 and Daniel 9

The 70 years of desolation described in Jeremiah 25:11-12 have passed. Daniel, who was one of the exiles in Babylon was reading the words of Jeremiah.

4. According to Daniel 9, Daniel was led to pray in response to what He read. What impresses you about his prayer? What can you learn about Daniel as a result of reading through his prayer? What can you learn about God from Daniel's prayer?

Application: What stood out to you overall about the relationship between God and His people? How can you apply what you learned to your own personal relationship with the Lord.

