

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

2

Read Ezra 3:1–5:1.

Note: Although this lesson will focus on 3:1–4:5 and 4:24–5:1 (leaving the later events of 4:6–4:23 for a future lesson), please read the entire two chapters.

1. Reread 3:2, 4, 10.
 - a. What is the writer trying to emphasize in telling us about the events in chapter 3? (Look for words and ideas that occur in all three verses.)
 - b. Why do you think the author wants to emphasize this? (Consider the fact that these events follow the people's 70-year exile in a pagan land.)

THE SEVENTH MONTH (3:1)

This month was—and still is—“one of the most sacred months of the Jewish year.”¹ Leviticus 23 contains God's instructions for the three religious observances to be held that month: The Feast of Trumpets (now known as Rosh Hashanah), the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot).

2. What do you imagine the emotional state of the people is at the time described in 3:1–6?

Why?

TWO TEMPLES

Certain language and details the author uses in chapter 3 highlight similarities between the construction of this second temple and the construction of the original temple under Solomon.

If you'd like to dig deeper, note the similarities between the following pairs of passages.

3:7 and 2 Chronicles 2:3, 10, 15–16

3:8a and 1 Kings 6:1

3:8–9 and 1 Chronicles 23:2–6

3:10–11 and 2 Chronicles 5:1, 12–13

3. In 3:8–9 we are told that the Levites—members of the tribe of Levi—supervised the work on the temple. What kinds of responsibilities did the Law give the Levites that make it appropriate for them to supervise the present work on the temple? (Num. 1:50–53)

4. As the people look on the newly built foundations of the temple, some shout joyfully while others weep (3:11–13). Why do you think there were such different emotions among those there? (📖* Hag. 2:3)

5. As God brings his people from captivity into their own land, worship is their first and highest priority.
 - a. What does their worship look like? (3:10–13)

 - b. Look carefully at the words of praise the people use in 3:11. Why do you think they highlight these attributes of God?

 - c. What does it demonstrate that worship was their first priority?

 - d. Think about when you prioritize worship, whether individual or corporate. How, when, why, and where do you worship God?

6. In 4:1 the returned exiles receive an offer of help from “the enemies of Judah and Benjamin,” who tell them, “like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him” (4:2).
 - a. What reason do the leaders of the Jews give for refusing this offer of help? (4:3)

 - b. What other reason might they have had to refuse help from their neighbors? (2 Ki. 17:24, 27–34) (Note: You may also wish to review the sin for which God sent Judah into exile in Babylon; see Is. 2:6–9 and Jer. 25:2–9.)

7. Perhaps revealing what had been their intent all along, what do the people who initially offered help do now? (4:4–5)

WHAT'S THIS DOING HERE?


In Ezra 4:4–23 the author gives us a few examples of opposition the returned exiles faced from their neighbors. The episodes in 4:6–23 actually took place decades after the other events in chapter 4. Chronologically, these episodes follow the rest of the events narrated in the book of Ezra. Commentator Derek Kidner remarks, “From this point onwards right to the end of Nehemiah there is conflict. Nothing that is attempted for God will now go unchallenged, and scarcely a tactic be unexplored by the opposition.”²

8. Ezra 4:24 picks up where 4:5 left off. In between, in part because of the opposition from their neighbors, the Jews stopped all work on the temple. By 4:24, about sixteen years have passed, and Cyrus has been succeeded by Darius.³
 - a. What might the returned exiles be thinking and feeling about this long interruption in the work God had “moved” them to do (1:5)?
 - b. How does God speak to his people during this time? (5:1)
9. Rebuilding the temple was the work God had called his people to do, yet opposition from their enemies discouraged them from continuing that work.
 - a. When has opposition discouraged you from continuing the work God gave you—or even caused you to doubt whether it was in fact God’s plan?
 - b. What attitude towards God, yourself, and your work does God call you to have in situations like this? (Here are a few verses to consider: 2 Cor. 4:8–9; Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 5:7.)

What other verses come to mind?

11. Reread 3:11. As you consider how the Lord has encouraged you, take time to respond in worship.

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

* For further study

¹ Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra, Nehemiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 Kings–Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 621.

² Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 48.

³ Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 335.