

Ezra & Nehemiah

Persian Perspectives

Dry Gulch is a typical ghost town. It stands on the landscape of the American West as a monument of boom times gone sour. If you drive through the desert of that region, you can still see the main street of Dry Gulch. Jerusalem was the ghost town of ancient Palestine.

Israel enjoyed God's blessing in the Promised Land as they honoured God and obeyed Him. Moses, however, predicted that if they ever neglected obedience to the Lord, the curse of God would fall on them and they would be expelled from their land (Deuteronomy 28: 15-68). Later prophets were more explicit about the details surrounding that expulsion. Jeremiah, for example, made their immediate future plain, saying that they would go into captivity in Babylon, but they would return again in seventy years (Jeremiah 25: 1-14).

Israel and Judah neglected to heed the warning of their prophets and continued in disobedience. Israel was expelled to Assyria in 722 BC. Judah was deported in three stages beginning in 605 BC. The last stage in 586 BC involved the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple. The city so central to worship for the Jews lay in ruins, a ghost town on the plains of Palestine.

After this had happened, God continued to work to restore his people once again. The Babylonian Empire ended as Daniel had predicted in Daniel 5:17-30. It was replaced by the Kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Cyrus founded the Kingdom of Persia in 559 BC and took over Babylon in 538 BC. As Daniel states, Darius the Mede was given responsibility to rule Babylon under Cyrus.

Cyrus, at the beginning of his reign over Babylon, reversed the policy of the government toward captive peoples. He decreed that they should be encouraged to return to their native lands and encouraged the re-establishment of their own religious practices. This effort by Cyrus was predicted by God through Isaiah (Isaiah 44:24-45:7) approximately 150 years before Cyrus came on the scene.

The return from exile occurred in three stages. The first stage involved Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Zerubbabel would be the first governor, Jeshua, the high priest. Their experience is detailed in Ezra 1-6. The temple was rebuilt in this period. About 40,000 men, women and children returned from Babylon under Zerubbabel's leadership.

The second stage occurred about 80 years later and is recorded in Ezra 7-10. Ezra, a descendent of Aaron, was the leader. When he arrived back in the land, he found the temple rebuilt, but the spiritual lives of the people in disarray. Revival was his key responsibility.

The final stage is recorded in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is commissioned by King Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 445 BC. Nehemiah accomplished this task, and in partnership with Ezra, confirmed the restoration of the people spiritually.

Jerusalem was no longer a ghost town, physically or spiritually. A town that once stood as a

pile of rubble now had walls, houses and the temple for worship. A people who faced the wrath of God because of disobedience were now rejoicing as they worshiped and committed to never neglect obedience to God again. The ghost town of Jerusalem was now seeing the renewal and revival of its people and property.

The 21st Century Renewal

At their core, Ezra and Nehemiah deal with renewal, revival and revitalization.

- Renewal of the people's understanding of God's faithfulness, generosity and patience.
- Revival of the Word of God, prayer and worship.
- Revitalization of leadership, personal obedience and spiritual success.

In these days Christians are in dire need of renewal. The North American Church desperately needs to see revival. The narrative account of renewal in Israel will serve to stimulate and encourage that revitalization if we allow God's Spirit to teach us the truth of God and then proceed to follow in obedience.

Genealogical Monotony

While studying Ezra and Nehemiah, you will discover many lists of names. These records, like others in the Bible are important because they establish the tribal relationships that are so important in Israel. Always remember that Israel, though God's Kingdom, is also a family. The promises, positions and privileges of that family are tied to the relationships that exist -first to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob -then to Levi and Judah. Focusing on the names in Ezra and Nehemiah will provide each of us with historic links with the past and may help tie events together. They will also serve to challenge our phonics!

FIRST RETURN

Reference: Ezra 1-6

Date: 538 B.C.

Leaders: Sheshbazzar, Zerubba, Jeshua

Persian King: Cyrus

Elements of the Decree: As many as wished to could return. Temple could be rebuilt, partially financed by royal treasury. Vessels returned.

Number Returning: 42,360 + 7,337 (servants) = 49,697

Events, Accomplishments and Problems: Temple begun; sacrifices made and Feast of Tabernacles celebrated. Samaritans made trouble, and work ceased until 520. Temple completed in 516.

SECOND RETURN

Reference: Ezra 7-10

Date: 458 B.C.

Leaders: Ezra

Persian King: Artaxerxes Longimanus

Elements of the Decree: As many as wished to could return. Finances provided by royal treasury. Allowed to have own civil magistrates.

Number Returning: 1,500 men + 38 Levites+ 220 helpers = 1,758

Events, Accomplishments and Problems: Problems with inter-marriage.

THIRD RETURN

Reference: Nehemiah 1-13

Date: 444 B.C.

Leaders: Nehemiah

Persian King: Artaxerxes Longimanus

Elements of the Decree: Allowed to rebuild the wall

Number Returning: Unknown

Events, Accomplishments and Problems: Wall rebuilt in 52 days, despite opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Walls dedicated and Law read.

Study #1 - Operation Restoration

Read Ezra 1

Ezra could be labeled, "*Exodus: The Sequel*". It details a massive return to the promised land by the people of God. It is, however, much more than a physical return. It marks a return to the right worship of God and obedience to Him. God worked in people's hearts and renewal came. We often go through times when we fail to feel the moving of God in our hearts. Looking at how God works through other individuals will show us what we need to do in order to sense the Lord's working once again.

- Why was Judah (and Israel) exiled to Babylon? (see Jeremiah 35:3-11). What consequences are there for today's people of God who persist in idolatry and disobedience?
- What were the circumstances surrounding their return? (see Jeremiah 24:5-7, 29:10-14)
- Cyrus was not necessarily a worshiper of the God of Israel. He tried to resettle people in their own land and have them ask their gods to preserve his life. He was, most likely, motivated by selfish interests and yet was used by God. How is it possible that God can "move the hearts" of those who aren't committed to Him?
- Compare verses two and five. Is there a difference in the way God intervenes in order to move people's hearts?

- The "God of heaven" is an expression used nine times in Ezra and only four other times in the whole Old Testament. What does the frequency of that reference say about Ezra's theme? (see Ezra 1:1-5)
- Is Cyrus' decree mandatory or optional for Israelites? Is contributing to the temple optional for inhabitants of Babylon? What would motivate the remnant who returned?
- Verses 4-6 seem to indicate that there were many Jews who were not willing to return to Jerusalem, but who were willing to "*donate to the cause*". Were they less committed than those who went? Can you think of any contemporary examples?
- In order for worship to be restored in Israel, it first required a willingness to return according to the promises of God. How do we often display our unwillingness to return to our first love with God?
- Why is it significant that the first exiles were commissioned to rebuild the temple?
- Who led this first return to Jerusalem? (Ezra 2:2)
- Why was it significant that the Levites (comprising Priests, Gatekeepers, and singers) were prominent in the return?
- What qualities marked the donation of gold and silver by the returnees?
- What areas of North American Christianity need to see restoration?

Study #2 - Worship and Remembrance

Read Ezra 3

Think about your most moving time of worship. After the foundation of the temple was laid, the people of God joined together to worship God. They were rejoicing over recent progress. They were lamenting over past failure. They were anticipating future victory. In it all, they were worshiping God and proclaiming His goodness. This study will reveal our need to adore God in all the circumstances of life.

- What does "*the people gathered together as one man*", suggest?
- Why was the altar rebuilt? (Ezra 3:2)
- What was signified when Israel began presenting burnt offerings and celebrating feasts?
- The people feared those around them in their return to God. How does this parallel our own experience when we want to live to please God?
- Why do you think so much planning and preparation accompanied the building of the temple? (Ezra 3:6-9)? What does it say about their commitment to excellence?
- Rather than focus on the process of laying the temple foundation, or even the length of time it required, (Ezra 3:10) simply mentions it was built (other passages talk about details). What is emphasized in this verse?
- What was the reaction after the foundation was laid? (Ezra 3:11 & Haggai 2:1-3)
- Why do you suppose the older men wept? (Ezra 3:12)
- Why does restoration have a kind of dual response? (Ezra 3:13) Why is joy more prominent?
- Why do we shy away from emotional responses to past failures or present victory when in public? Are such responses appropriate when in a time of worship?

Study #3 - Reaction Against Renewal

Read Ezra 4

It is often true that when we get serious with God, we come under attack more than ever before. This is true when the returned captives began restoration of the temple. Opposition always seems tailor-made, taking on a variety of forms. This study will highlight four different kinds of opposition that are examples of the kinds of opposition we face. It will also give us a chance to think about how we can overcome opposition to renewing our spiritual life.

- How do different people react to opposition?
- Identify the four kinds of opposition in this passage? What are they opposing?

Ezra 4:1-3

Ezra 4:4 & 5

Ezra 4:7, 12-16

Ezra 4:23

- How does each kind of opposition display itself when a local church seeks restoration? An individual?
- How do Zerubbabel and Jeshua respond to the enemies of Judah? What is their twofold reason for building on their own?

Time Line

<u>Cyrus</u> 559-530 BC	<u>Cambyses</u> 530-522 BC	<u>Darius 1</u> 522-486 BC	<u>Xerxes</u> 486-464 BC	<u>Artaxerxes 1</u> 465-423 BC	<u>Darius 2</u> 423-405 BC
<i>538 BC</i> <i>Zerubbabel's</i> <i>Return</i>				<i>458 BC</i> <i>Ezra's</i> <i>Return</i>	<i>445 BC</i> <i>Nehemiah's</i> <i>Return</i>

- Notice that the opposition lasted for nearly seventy years (although this specific effort was somewhat shorter). What was the result of this sustained opposition?
- How accurate is the letter written to Artaxerxes? What is the motive behind it? How can

our motives color our approach to ministries in the church?

- What is Artaxerxes' response to the letter? What could the Jews have done differently?
- How can we as individuals and the church overcome the opposition we will face?
- Notice that the people returning were captive to their own history (Ezra 4:18). How will the state of the Church now affect future generations? What does understanding this say to us now?

Study #4 - Getting Back on Track

Read Ezra 5:1 - 6:12

Derailing a train takes a whole lot less work than repairing all the damage caused when it happens. Work on the temple and spiritual restoration in Israel has been derailed for a number of years when Ezra 5 begins. Ezra highlights the power of God to help his people get back on track. Part of that help comes from the effective preaching of the will of God and encouragement to keep forging ahead, even though the path is not smooth.

- The work on the temple had stalled when Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews. Why did preaching prove effective in the middle of opposition, when other things apparently failed?
- How is preaching important to encourage change in people's lives? Has the Church lost its commitment to the pulpit? Why or how? (Check Haggai 1:12)
- According to Haggai, what was the real reason work on the temple had quit. (See Haggai 1:3-6)
- Why do you suppose Tattenai was concerned about the building of the temple? (Check the following verses in Ezra 5:3 & 8-10). Is there still a concern in the world about the development and growth of the Church? Why?
- How do you think God's eye preserved their opportunity to work? (Ezra 5:5)

- How does the statement by the servants of God (Ezra 5:11-16) illustrate their desire to get their lives in order? What were they acknowledging?
- In order to avoid a misunderstanding in this account, letters are sent to make sure all actions are understood. How does failure to communicate often cause problems?
- How does King Darius' response illustrate the sovereignty of God? What is the irony here?
- There are times when we find ourselves like the Jews: worn out, preoccupied and unwilling to do what God has called us to do. How can we get out of the tendency to procrastinate and begin getting our spiritual lives back on track?

Study #5 - Completion & Celebration

Read Ezra 6:13-22

Completion of a task is often a good reason to celebrate (remember when everything was ready for Christmas or you got rid of that habit). Meeting spiritual goals gives us even more reason to rejoice. When spiritual goals are met, they should lead us to even greater commitment, as Ezra 6 will teach us.

- Describe one of the most enjoyable times of celebration you have experienced.
- What attitude marked the completion of the temple? (Ezra 6:13)
- Ezra says that the people prospered under Haggai and Zechariah's preaching and consequently obeyed the command of God (Ezra 6:14). What can we do to encourage those who preach? What can we do to make preaching more effective in our lives?

- The temple was completed in February, 515 B.C. —> 21 years after it began and years after Haggai began preaching. How do you think they felt? How have you felt after a renovation project was finished or a debt paid out?
- What mood characterized this celebration time? (Ezra 6:16 & 22). What else characterized this time?
- Why do we lose that joy of celebration when we meet to worship?
- How would this Passover celebration have a kind of double significance in light of Israel's past history? (hint: What does the Passover feast remember?)
- Often Ezra mentions that things were done "according to what was written." (Ezra 6:18). Why is a renewed sense of God's Word a part of restoration?
- What is the significance of the fact that the priests and Levites purified themselves? (Ezra 6:20)
- Separation from the people surrounding Israel was an important part of their covenant with God. (see Ezra 6:21 & Deuteronomy 6:14 & 15). In what areas do we neglect separation from our society?
- Discuss the following in relation to the issues of separation and purity?
 - Movies, music and Television
 - Secular models of leadership and organization
 - Money
 - Pleasure pursuits and comfort

Study #6 - Read it and Reap

Read Ezra 7 & 8

The events of Ezra 7-10 mark the second return of a group of exiles under Ezra. The first group returned under in 538 and set about building the temple of God. Eighty years later, Ezra leads a second group back and seeks to beautify the temple and reform the people of God. Nehemiah would lead the third return some 14 years later and would be on a mission to rebuild the walls surrounding Jerusalem. Ezra concentrates his attention on the Word of God and we see the tremendous response as a result.

- As a priest, Ezra had the authority to teach the Word of God. The Bible also mentions that the *"hand of the Lord his God was on him."* What does it mean to have God's hand on us? How do we know if God has his hand on us?

- What four things marked Ezra's life in relation to the Word of God? (Ezra 7:6,10). How can we foster a deeper knowledge of God's Word? What things can we do?

- How is studying Word different than reading or memorizing it? Is this a priority for preachers and teachers only? How can we encourage each other to study the Word?

- What evidence does this chapter give that Ezra practiced what he understood?

- How can we improve our ability to teach God's Word more effectively in the following situations:
 - To our children
 - Mutually with our spouses
 - With friends
 - In the life of the Church

- How would Ezra answer someone who lacked the courage to bring about the plan of God in a given situation?

- Why was it so important that some Levites be found for the journey? (Ezra 8:15-20)
- What role did the fast play in Ezra's preparation? (Ezra 8:21-23). To what extent should we use fasting in our own lives?
- What did Ezra mean when he said that the people and the resources were consecrated to the Lord? (Ezra 8:28) How can we consecrate our gifts to the Lord?

Study #7 - Spiritual Infidelity

Read Ezra 9 & 10

We are shocked to realize that about 30 percent of Americans admit to having been unfaithful to their current spouse. A far greater percentage of believers have been unfaithful in response to the will of God. Ezra shows us how easy it is to commit spiritual infidelity and how we should respond when we know it has occurred.

- What distressed Ezra about the people of Israel and its leaders? (Ezra 9 1&2, & Exodus 34:16)
- Why does Ezra react so strongly to this sin among the people? How do we restore a fear of God? Should we feel appalled at the sin around us? What destroys that reaction?
- How can we have the kind of response Ezra had to sin in our families or Church? What part does public confession play in Ezra's prayer and ours?
- How is blessing realized in the midst of bondage? (Ezra 9:8&9)
- How much do God's commands to Israel relate to believers today? (Ezra 9:10-12)
- In what way did Ezra see the grace and mercy of God? (Ezra 9: 8 & 13)

- How did the people react? Is weeping or remorse over sin a necessary part of repentance? (Ezra 10:1) What is the result of that reaction?
- Ezra and the leaders of the exiles developed a specific strategy to attack the sin in their midst? (Ezra 10:5-17). What can we learn from them about creating strategies to overcome sin?
- Why do you think the people who were guilty of intermarriage are named in scripture?
- In what areas are we guilty of spiritual infidelity? (see James 4:4)
- How would we react if those who lead us investigated our lives for sin they suspected was there? How should we respond?

Study #8 - Opportunity Knocks

Read Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:10

The call of God is not limiting, but expanding. The King's cupbearer or chief security officer is to be thrust out of the palace and into the chaos of Jewish resettlement. He must command, rebuild, coordinate and bring order. His experience has not prepared him directly for the job but his passion for Israel and his zeal for God makes everything possible. Nehemiah's great adventure of faith is a powerful lesson and encouragement to us. Our experience may be inadequate for what we face in our family or church, but our willingness to be involved and God's strength proves to be a winning combination.

- How would you describe Nehemiah from the information given in Nehemiah 1:1-4?
- Describe God as He is revealed in Nehemiah's prayer. (Nehemiah 1:5-11)
- Describe Israel as revealed in Nehemiah's prayer.
- Compare the condition of Israel at this time with the condition of the church as you know it. Are there parallels?
- List the main points in the prayer, What can we learn about prayer from this example?
- List the answers to Nehemiah's prayer found in Nehemiah 2:1-6. Try to think of some of the things God had to do to provide these answers.
- Nehemiah's condition is described by the King as "*sickness of heart*". We know what caused this condition in Nehemiah, but what things cause "*sickness of heart*" in us?
- How are prayer and fear related? (Nehemiah 2:2)
- Complete your biographical sketch of Nehemiah with the information given in Nehemiah 2:7-9.

- These introductory verses (Nehemiah 1:1- 2:10) reveal that Nehemiah believed that some things must be done by God and some things by him. How do we discover the difference?
- Read Nehemiah 2:10 again. What really disturbs Sanballat & Tobiah. Discuss the rationale behind this attitude. Do we still have to face it today? Give examples.

Study #9 - Working Together for God

Read Nehemiah 2:11-3:32

Prayer and its answer often puts God's people into situations where action is required. In our first study, Nehemiah prays -now he must follow through. In answer to prayer, he is brought to Jerusalem. Now he must challenge others to cooperate in his vision. This is not an easy job. Remember that the journey to Jerusalem has taken three or four months. He arrives about 444 BC.

- Discuss the motive behind Nehemiah's actions as described in Nehemiah 2:11-16. Why the secrecy?
- Today, everyone wants to know everything all the time. Why is this level of curiosity sometimes unprofitable and dangerous?
- What decision did Jeremiah make about the wall? What does verse 18 have to do with his statement, *"Let us rebuild the wall"*?
- Imagine that the people replied, *"We have been here for 90 years and haven't missed the wall; rebuilding it does not fit into our plans just now. Thanks for your interest."* What do you think Nehemiah would have done?
- How does Nehemiah respond to the questions of Sanballat and Tobiah? (Nehemiah 2:19-20). What can we learn from Nehemiah about facing opposition?
- Briefly describe the plan Nehemiah worked out for getting the wall rebuilt. (Nehemiah 3:1-32)

- What lessons does chapter 3 teach us that could be applied to building the church both physically and spiritually?
- Make a list of the general groups involved in the work and try to draw some specific conclusions about them. What do we learn about Nehemiah's leadership ability?
- The New Testament declaration, "*Let be done decently and in order*" (1 Corinthians 14:40), is practiced in Nehemiah's plans. Why do you think almost everyone was willing to pitch in?
- Nehemiah clearly felt that the condition of the walls of Jerusalem disgraced Israel. (Nehemiah 1:3, 2:3, 2:17) What things are signs of disgrace for the church? Suggest actions that could remove the disgrace.

Study #10 - The Enemy Without

Read Nehemiah 4:1-23 & 6:1-19

We have often heard, "*When God works, Satan wakes up and works overtime.*" This fact is very obvious in both Ezra and Nehemiah. This lesson will refresh our memories of Ezra and opposition and hopefully reinforce the lessons learned. Opposition is bound to come into the experience of ordinary Christians and into the experience of the local church. The Lord Jesus promised it. Since it is a fact of life, we have to learn to deal with it. Hopefully today's study will help us.

- In your own words, describe the emotions of Sanballat. (read 4:1-3 and review 1:10 & 2:19)
- According to Nehemiah 4:1-3, what is the first tactic of the opposition? Does it work? (Nehemiah 4:6)
- Have you ever faced ridicule? What is it designed to do? How did it make you feel?

- What are the significant points in Nehemiah's prayer? (Nehemiah 4:4-5) What can we learn about facing opposition from this prayer?
- According to Nehemiah 4:7-9, what is the second tactic of the opposition? How does it affect the people? (Nehemiah 4:10-12)
- List the actions taken against the threats? (Nehemiah 4:9 & 4:13&14)
- In your own words, describe Nehemiah's plan for the safety of the people and the finishing of the work. (Nehemiah 4: 16-23)
- Nehemiah's plan is very practical. Are we sometimes impractical and unrealistic in meeting the goals of the church? Give examples and suggest practical solutions.
- In Nehemiah 6:1-14, we discover the third tactic of the opposition. Describe it and note the object of the tactic.
- The words "*frighten, intimidate and discredit*" are used by Nehemiah to describe the purpose of the opposition. How and why is this tactic still used against Christian leaders?

Study 11 - The Enemy Within

Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 & 7:1-73

In our last study, we considered the opposition to Nehemiah's reforms from the Samaritans. This kind of opposition is to be expected, but the problems facing Nehemiah in the present study come from within the community of God's people. God's people are still people -changeable, materialistic and quarrelsome by nature (when that nature is not subject to God's control). Nehemiah wants to create and maintain a course of purity and obedience in Judah, but he is hard-pressed to do it. God's people are, too, and those who would desire purity and obedience in the church today often face the enemy within.

- Why does failure occur among God's people? Who or what is the enemy within?

- List the three major complaints brought to Nehemiah in Nehemiah 5:1-5?
- Try to describe the emotions of the people caught in this financial squeeze. Have you ever felt that way and what did you do about it?
- What is Nehemiah's reaction to the complaints? Explain the meaning of Nehemiah 5:8 in your own words.
- In Nehemiah 5:9-11, Nehemiah condemns usury. What is "usury" and what does he suggest as a remedy? Suggest New Testament examples.
- Read 5:12b. Why does Nehemiah make the priests, nobles and officials take an oath? Try to describe Nehemiah's opinion of the Jewish leadership.
- Can you think of any circumstances today that could-create division among God's people and result in the distress or humiliation of a part of the Church?
- Read 5:14-19 carefully. Why is this part of the record? Is this a record of Nehemiah's own lack of humility, or is there a place for this kind of public review of one's service for the Lord? Can you think of any other Biblical examples?
- In chapter 7, two new problems surface. The first deals with leadership and the second with population resettlement. Not all problems are spiritual. What are some of the things Nehemiah does to solve his practical problems?
- The Christian Church faces opposition from the enemy within. What resources are available for the church to discover and deal with this opposition?

Study #12 - The Bible at Work

Read Nehemiah 8

The first seven chapters of Nehemiah are taken up with many practical problems rebuilding the wall, reorienting the population and resisting opposition to name a few. Now, as we come to chapter eight, the emphasis changes and the spiritual needs of the people are made a priority. The attention of the people is directed to the Word of God, its message and meaning. Spiritual problems are solved by hearing the Word of God and responding to it. The chapter teaches us a lesson about the importance of God's Word and its affect on responsive hearers.

- What does Nehemiah 8:1 tell us about Israel at this point in time? How would you describe their condition?
- Read Nehemiah 8:2-5 and describe, in your own words, the attitude of the people to the Word of God. Why do you think they reacted in this way?
- Besides the reading of the Word, what other important things took place? (Nehemiah 8:5-8)
- Why is the reading of God's Word so important in revival?
- Describe the reaction of the people to the Word of God, (Nehemiah 8:9-12) and explain the instructions of the leaders.
- The readings of Ezra included Leviticus 23:33-43. What action reveals the seriousness of the people? What lesson can we learn from this passage?
- In Nehemiah 8:7, 10 & 11, we read, *"This day is sacred to the Lord our God."* Why was it and why was their reaction to the events of the day to be joy rather than sorrow? (see Leviticus 23)

- Explain the phrase in Nehemiah 8:10, *"For the joy of the Lord is your strength"*.
- Today we don't get together to read the Bible. Why not?
- Ezra makes sure that those who can understand do. Suggest some ways that we could make the scriptures better understood in our churches. Discuss your ideas.

Study #13 - Facing Up to Faults

Read Nehemiah 9 & 10

In chapter eight the Word of God is read and explained. The reaction of the people is very positive. They praised the Lord, they wept, they rejoiced and most importantly, they obeyed the Lord. It was a time of national solidarity. But the reading was only the first step -real revival demands real change. Hope of real change is evident in chapter nine and ten because the people confess their sins and call out to God for renewal. Then consecration is public, definite and specific. Consecration is the act of dedication which sets out the guidelines for change after sins are recognized, confessed and forsaken.

- Make a list of the significant actions of Israel recorded in Nehemiah 9:1-3. Taken together, what do these actions tell us about Israel at this point in time?
- In Nehemiah 9:5 the Levites call on the people to *"stand up and praise the Lord your God."* What is the purpose of praise for Israel? Does it have the same significance for us?
- Read Nehemiah 9:5-37. How does this hymn of praise begin and what are its main two subjects?
- Make a list of descriptive words which refer to God after reading Nehemiah 9:5-37.
- Notice that Israel's praise contains reminders of their failure and rebellion. What is the value of reviewing failure? What affect does remembering failure have on you?

- The words of Nehemiah 9:35 are an awful indictment against Israel. Is there a lack of appreciation for God's goodness in the Church? If so, what should be done about it?
- In Nehemiah 9:2 Israel *"Stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers."* Is there any value in corporate confession of sin? How should it be done? What is the significance of "confessing the wickedness of their fathers?" Is this a responsibility we have? How should it be done?
- According to Nehemiah 9:38, the leaders are the first to commit to the dedication agreement. In Nehemiah 10:28, we read about *"the rest of the people."* What two significant things are recorded about these people? Why is each significant?
- List the main items sworn to in dedication (Nehemiah 10:30-40). Explain what is important about each item listed in answer and suggest why they are given priority here.
- The closing statement of chapter 10, *"We will not neglect the house of God,"* summarizes the commitment of Israel. How is it possible to neglect the house of God in any age? What would be the result and what is the remedy?

Study #14 - Summing Up

Read Nehemiah 11 - 13

The last chapters of Nehemiah record some final organizational arrangements having to do with order in Jerusalem and the dedication of the wall. Jerusalem is important to Israel because it had been since David's time, the place where God's name had been placed. It is the centre of Israel's worship and represents God's presence with them as a nation. Chapter 13 is a sad commentary on the fickleness of people. God had spoken. Israel had responded, but we suspect from chapter 13, that the depth of commitment was not great for many. This is a disappointment but it is reality. Nehemiah, however, seems optimistic and prepared to start again. We must have this optimism about God's work too.

- Chapter 11 deals with the repopulation of Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 7:4&5). Why is this a concern to Nehemiah?
- Read Nehemiah 12:27-47. Try to visualize the scene on the day of dedication. What is the most impressive thing to you? How important is organization in our services? What should be organized and what should be left open?
- Remembering all the changes, what is the explanation for the condition of things in Jerusalem upon Nehemiah's return from Susa ?
- Separation is an important part of the restoration and revival of Israel. Why is it necessary and why was it so difficult?
- What does separation mean today? Are there standards to guide us? What are the results when we fail?
- Make a list of the signs of failure encountered by Nehemiah upon his return from Susa. (Nehemiah 13:10-27). Compare your list with Nehemiah 10-28-39. What do you discover?

- Note Nehemiah 13:1-2 & 13:17-18, & 26. Each of these references look back into history. Israel has repeated its mistakes. Why are they and ourselves so slow to learn from the experience of others?
- In chapter 13, Nehemiah offers up four short prayers. What is the concern that drives him to ask God to remember him?
- One of the prayers asks God to "*Remember them,*" the failing and sinning priesthood. Why?
- Nehemiah takes very strong action against wrong in Nehemiah 13:25. Should we be more opposed to wrong and more aggressive in dealing with wrongdoers? How does Nehemiah's actions compare with Paul's exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:24-26?