

EZRA-NEHEMIAH, part 21

Debriefing

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These notes on Ezra-Nehemiah have primarily waded through the text without trying to connect all of the material into a cohesive unity. Here I append some items that, hopefully, will pull together and summarize twenty-three chapters of study.

Overall Outline

Ezra-Nehemiah consists of *four* major units of material. In the outline below the main headings characterize each of these sections. I hope this digests the mass of material for you. I have also included sub-points to remind you of the flow of each section. Perhaps one could think of Ezra-Nehemiah as “New Opportunity under Gray Skies.”

I. The New Temple (Ezra 1-6)

- A. A future and a hope, ch 1
- B. The founders of the renewed Israel, ch 2
- C. A new beginning...and a new song, ch 3
- D. Do not wonder, brothers, that the world hates you, ch 4
- E. The King’s decree and the kings’ decrees, chs 5-6

II. The New Rule (Ezra 7-10)

- A. Enjoying the hand of God, chs 7-8
- B. Escaping the wrath of God, chs 9-10

III. The New City (Nehemiah 1-6)

- A. The good hand of my God, chs 1-2
- B. The careful record of my workers, ch 3
- C. The great opposition to my work, chs 4-6

IV. The New Society (Nehemiah 7-13)

- A new society...
- A. Under a holy covenant, chs 7-10
- B. In a holy city, chs 11-12
- C. With a holy zeal, ch 13

Purpose of the document

The following statement was originally written to summarize the purpose of Ezra, but I think it adequately summarizes the purpose of all of Ezra-Nehemiah:

“To place before the Jewish community, YHWH’s covenant people, such a review of the great events of the Restoration, that the mind of every devout and patriotic Jew, however humble, might be enlightened upon the origin of that political and religious *separateness* from all other peoples, even those nearest them, which distinguished the Jews from every other nation on earth; and at the same time, that his heart might be stirred to wonder and gratitude, in view of the gracious acts of the faithful and covenant-keeping YHWH, whose word is surely fulfilled though world-rulers have to be made the instruments of that fulfillment, and though princes and peoples rise up to defeat his plans.”¹

Major Theological Themes

1. The sovereign God who stirs history and people according to his will (e.g., Ezra 1).
2. The providence of God — an ongoing experience of the troubled and needy people of God (e.g., Ezra 5:5; 6:8ff.; 7:6,9,27-28; 8:18,31; Neh. 2:8,18; 4:15).
3. Marvel not if the world hates you, either overtly by intimidation or subtly by infiltration; don’t be surprised if you’re terrified (e.g., Ezra 4-6; Neh. 4-6).
4. The significance of service to God. We may not see massive revival, but these books lure us to be, like Ezra and Nehemiah, unrelenting reformers of the church, for the people of God were preserved from *easy* extinction by their work. The church will never be safe (totally) until Jesus comes, but we can contribute to her safety from a defiling world by keeping the church under faithful discipline. What if Ezra and Nehemiah had *not* been there? How pitch dark it would’ve been!
5. The people of God are prone to repeated unfaithfulness (e.g., Ezra 9; Neh. 1:6-9; 10; 13; see notes on Neh. 13:4-31). One must therefore, even with the church, maintain a high view of sin and low expectations of man’s best efforts. There is only one Covenant-keeper who does not disappoint.

¹ James Oscar Boyd, *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, XI (1900), 289.