

Nehemiah:

Some Questions for the Parish Groups

In anticipation of

Pastor Nate Hitchcock's Sermons

Fall 2011 – Winter 2012

The following pages will have portions of
The text of Nehemiah (English Standard Version - ESV)

along with some stimulating questions and background information
prepared by Barry McWilliams.

They are not intended for a detailed study of the texts,
but to introduce the texts in anticipation of
hearing the Word proclaimed at Ascension Presbyterian Church.

Following these pages are some additional materials, being prepared :

A Chart of the Historical Background of Ezra-Nehemiah which is hot linked to numerous
Wikipedia pages on the Kings, Kingdoms, books, etc.

A Diagram of the Themes of Ezra-Nehemiah:
God's good hand restores His Covenant People

A Bibliography of further reading, including popular studies, commentaries, and web study
resources found on the internet, also hotlinked

This material is currently under preparation so pages will be added as they become available.

Nehemiah is a book with insights for us into restoration, renewal, leadership, and God's faithfulness.

Read Nehemiah 1:1-11
(Questions for later personal reflection)

1. How many insights can you get into Nehemiah and his character from this chapter?
2. What are the dimensions of the situation that has come to his attention? And how has it affected him?
3. What has gone into this prayer he makes? Why does he address the Lord as “God of heaven”? In what ways is the word “servant” significant?

Background notes: Vs. 1 Susa, the Capital of Persia was located in Iran, about 160 miles East of the Tigris River. As Cup bearer, Nehemiah had a trusted and influential access to the King and probably filled other offices as well.

Vs.2 The Exile came about as the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, overwhelmed the little Kingdom of Judah and in a series of deportations between 597 and 586 B.C. carried off its treasure, its leading citizens and crafts-people, finally destroying Solomon's Temple and the city of Jerusalem. There was much destruction of surrounding cities as well, many fled to Egypt and elsewhere, and only the “poor of the land” were left. (II Kings 23). For seventy years, through a series of Babylonian monarchs, they remained scattered, some given the tasks of rebuilding cities in Mesopotamia. Life was not harsh, there was some continuity of elders and prophets and priests, there was fertile land to farm. Some would rise to prominence like Daniel. With the fall of the Neo-Babylonian empire to Cyrus II the Great of Persia in 538 B.C. came the opportunity for a remnant to return. (2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

The first return permitted by Royal Edict was led by Sheshbazzar. 42,360 people and 7,337 servants made the journey back. (Ezra 2:64) Work was begun on

rebuilding the Temple by Jeshua and Zerubbabel, but it would take 23 years, in the face of significant opposition (Ezra 4:4-5ff), with the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah to complete that task. (Ezra 6:14).

Between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7 is a gap of about 60 years, of which we know little of Jewish life. Meanwhile Persian monarchs fought wars in Egypt and the Greek city states. Esther became Xerxes' queen and providentially delivered many thousands of Jews who had remained in Persian provinces from Haman's genocidal plot.

Then Ezra, a scholar and priest, led a second return of about 1,500 men that was authorized by Artaxerxes I in 458 B.C. (Ezra 7-8). He came to Jerusalem with the intention to teach and restore worship and Mosaic law. He arrived to find Jerusalem still remained mostly in ruins and Mosaic law neglected, while comfortable homes had been established, and there was much interaction and intermarriage with surrounding pagan peoples. (Ezra 9:1-3).

Nehemiah enters the story in 444 B.C. now 14 years later. What we have is material from his personal Journal, which was originally included in the book of Ezra.

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Read Nehemiah 2:1-9
(Questions for later personal reflection)

4. What risks did Nehemiah take in making his requests from the King? How did he know when to summon the courage to make them?
5. What were his intentions, given these specific requests? What didn't he ask? Are there connections between his prayer in Chapter 1 and his requests of Artaxerxes in Chapter 2?

Note: The month of Nisan is four months after the month of Kislev (1:1) A sad face is a serious liability in the presence of the Persian King. Given that in Hebrew narrative little details are important, there is likely some significance in the mention in vs 6 of Artaxerxes' queen, Damaspia being present. It would have been an intimate private occasion as Nehemiah, the cupbearer, was serving the wine.

(Nehemiah 2:3, 5) Nehemiah refers to "the city where my fathers are buried." Compare the parenthesis in Ezra 4:7-23 where we were told that previously in the days of King

Artaxerxes letters regarding Jerusalem, "*a rebellious and wicked city*" were sent by Rehum, Governor of the Trans-Euphrates Satrapy resulting in the stopping by force of any repair work underway "*until I so order.*"

Ezra mentioned his shame in asking the King for protection on his journey (Ezra 8:21-23); but Nehemiah doesn't see any problem in accepting what was offered to him. Nehemiah 1 & 2 is a model of balancing the total sovereignty of God with prayer as its proper response, and human responsibility with its counter part in wise and thoughtful activity.

Read Nehemiah 2:10-20
(Questions for later personal reflection)

6. What challenges was Nehemiah facing when he arrived at Jerusalem?
7. Why was he so secretive in surveying the needs of the city? How did he approach the city leaders?

Vs 11 – Apparently Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem was uneventful - summarized in just four words – through his small party took several months as Susa is much farther East than Babylon. His arrival and initial activity were equally low key, though there are valuable lessons in his approaches to the problem. Compare Ezra's journey 12 years earlier which took four months. Ezra came with 1,500 people and a lot of treasure. Arriving with fanfare Ezra's contact with the leaders quickly took a discouraging turn. Ezra 8:32-9:3.

Given the ruin of Jerusalem, the government of the province of Yehud had been relocated in Mizpah in the days of Jeremiah. The Assyrians had deported most the people

of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, bringing in pagan peoples to replace them -- inter-marriage with the remaining Israelites had resulting in the Samaritans. Offers to help rebuilding the temple had been refused by Zerubbabel in Ezra 4:2-3, resulting in a long history of troubles. (Cf Neh 2:20). Sanballat the Horonite was an official in Samaria. Several generations bearing that name appear – papyri written by the Jews at Elephantine in Egypt mention him and his sons regarding their temple there, and Josephus thought he had something to do with the Samaritan temple built on Mt Gerazim. Tobiah, an Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian are other enemies of Judah who will figure prominently in following chapters.

Nehemiah 3:1-32 (ESV)

And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. Nehemiah 2:18 (ESV)

¹ Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the **Sheep Gate**. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the **Tower of the Hundred**, as far as the **Tower of Hananel**. ² And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. ³ The sons of Hassenaah built the **Fish Gate**. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

⁴ And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired.

⁵ And next to them the **Tekoites** repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord. ⁶ Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the **Gate of Yeshanah**. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁷ And next to them repaired Melatiah the

Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. ⁸ Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the **Broad Wall**.

⁹ Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. ¹⁰ Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. ¹¹ Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son

of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the **Tower of the Ovens**. ¹² Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters. ¹³ Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the **Valley Gate**. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the **Dung Gate**.

¹⁴ Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the **Dung Gate**. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ¹⁵ And Shallum the son of Colhozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the **Fountain Gate**. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David.

(Map from ESV Study Bible)

¹⁶ After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men. ¹⁷ After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district.

¹⁸ After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah.

¹⁹ Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. ²⁰ After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹ After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. ²² After him the priests, the men of the

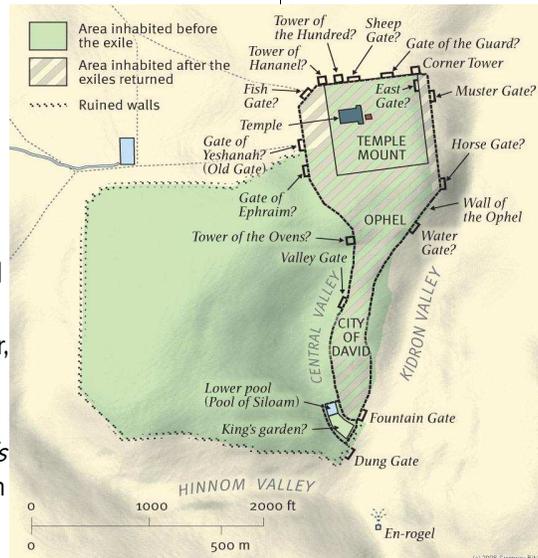
surrounding area, repaired. ²³ After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. ²⁴ After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress ²⁵ and to the corner. Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh ²⁶ and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the **Water Gate** on the east and the projecting

tower. ²⁷ After him the **Tekoites** repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ Above the **Horse Gate** the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. ²⁹ After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the **East Gate**, repaired.

³⁰ After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber.

³¹ After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the **Muster Gate**, and to the upper chamber of the corner. ³² And between the upper chamber of the corner and the **Sheep Gate** the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.



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Read Nehemiah 2:18; 3:1-32
(Questions for later personal reflection)

8. Reviewing Nehemiah 3, what observations can you make concerning who was involved in building the wall and how they were organized?

9. Taking note of the italicized portions of the text, what other observations can you make?

This passage is one of a number of "lists" in Ezra-Nehemiah and is probably not part of Nehemiah's personal journal. These were likely official documents incorporated into the text.

Nehemiah's wall system apparently incorporated walls from previous ages. It was not strongly built, and it reflects Jerusalem's diminutive size at the time. An ambitious project nonetheless, it was completed in only 52 days, providing Jerusalem with some measure of protection from its enemies. There is ample archaeological evidence, both positive and negative, to show that only the Eastern Hill of Jerusalem was fortified at that time and that the eastern wall of the city was built higher up the slope of the Kidron Valley than the previous wall, so that the city was smaller than that of Solomon.

The precise line of the walls followed by Nehemiah cannot be completely reconstructed. Regarding many of the features mentioned, little is known. Excavations on the Ophel hill of Jerusalem have uncovered some remains of Nehemiah's wall system. Most evidence has been obliterated by later construction, especially by the Hasmoneans and Herod, or the destruction by the Romans, or is inaccessible due to the currently occupied city.

Each section was denoted by specific public landmarks such as existing gates and other known structures, however, On the eastern side of the city, Nehemiah had to build a new line of wall, rather than simply repair the old one, because the pre-exilic wall was so badly destroyed here. The line of the new wall is described in relation to a variety of features of the city, most of which can no longer be certainly located.

Many of The landmarks in the eastern wall were private homes. True, the city became smaller this way (some of the old residential areas were now outside the city wall), but there were also fewer people living in the city, so there was no need for a big city.

The work is sometimes "building" and sometimes "repairing," suggesting that the parts of the walls were in various states of dilapidation. "Build" is a generic word. The word "repair" in the original language means "to make firm, strong, or strengthen."

Nehemiah was able to accomplish this feat by assigning different sections of the wall's rebuilding to various groups such as families, people from specific settlements, craftsman's guilds and having them work on portions close to their homes, or employments. Seventy-five individuals are mentioned by name, as well as numerous groups. A cooperative effort, everyone worked side by side and together with a few exceptions.

"The rulers" mentioned were probably administrators of smaller districts within the Province of Yehud – the current Provincial administration had been re-located at Mizpah – where the Persian Governor of Beyond the River (which included everything west of the Euphrates including Syria and Samaria. Etc.) would reside when visiting Yehud.

Some notes from The ESV Study Bible and the Biblical
Archaeological Review

Nehemiah is a book with insights for us into restoration, renewal, leadership, and God's faithfulness.

Read Nehemiah 4:1-23
(Questions for later personal reflection)

10. What tactics were the opposition attempting to use to undermine the work on the wall? How did they respond when the work went on?
11. How does Nehemiah respond? What measures did he take to counter them?
12. Why are vs 6 and vs 14 – 15 key verses?

It is a literary pattern in Nehemiah's account, beginning in Chapter 2 that each step forwards in the narrative is marked by a reference to the opposition of Sanballat and his colleagues. As the enemies hear of progress being made, they amplify their efforts to disrupt the work being undertaken. Then Nehemiah responds to their tactics and threats and encourages his people. (note 2:10; 19; 4:1-3; 7-8; 15, and the further conflicts in chapter 6.) There is a growing intensity in the struggle. The nature of the opposition was intimidation. How much of it was real and how much psychological – aimed at discouraging and demoralizing the workers. Note Vs 15 – but they did not let down their guard.

It can be noted that the workers in Jerusalem felt very vulnerable and insecure. They were surrounded by a coalition of foes – Sanballat and the Samaritan forces to the North, Geshem and the Arabs to the South,

Tobiah and the Ammonites to the East and the Philistines of Ashdod to the West. At verse 6, they have reached the halfway mark. As the work progressed they were fatigued, doing double duty as watchmen, and dealing with a lot of fear and uncertainty. Vss 11,12 And some of the workers had homes and families in the surrounding villages.

Again we see Nehemiah's balance between trusting a Sovereign God and taking responsible measures as well. Vs 9; 14; 15; 20.

Nehemiah's prayer in vss 4-5 has been compared to both the laments and the imprecatory psalms. Harse, but God's will towards those opposing Him is clear. Nehemiah's prayers stand out, but it is significant in vs. 9 that now "we prayed...." Corporate threats are met with corporate prayer!

Read Nehemiah 5:1-19
(Questions for later personal reflection)

13. Just when external threats are at their strongest, internal problems erupted as well. What were these and how did they come about?
14. Whom did Nehemiah confront and what was his solution to the problem? What kind of personal example did he maintain?
15. Does this passage speak to any modern social concerns and how?

Social issues were a significant part of Nehemiah's concerns. There were tensions between those who remained in Judah, and those who returned and resettled in the days of Zerubbabel, and those who came more recently with Ezra, along with the issues of those who had inter-married with the local pagan population. There were those who were wealthy and many who were poor. The book of Nehemiah is a book about God renewing a city and a community. In this situation the problem was an exploitation of Jews by fellow Jews. On top of a famine and hunger were exploitative interest demands, foreclosed mortgages and enslavement. While so many were volunteering to help in the work, this issue could bring the entire project to a standstill at a moment when unity is so needed. A similar crisis would threaten the early church in Acts 6:1ff.

At the heart of this chapter is Nehemiah and his character. His reaction to the great outcry of the poor is anger (vs 6), but he responds with self counsel (Vs 7) before confronting the officials responsible - first face to

face, and then in a public assembly (because it is a public matter). He follows the biblical pattern of conflict resolution: Eph 4:25-32; Matt 18:15-17. Internal problems usually go beyond the immediate matter and other emotional and relational issues erupt as well.

Mosaic law was being disregarded in this situation – Exo 22:25; Lev 25:35-4. God's law is intended to help the needy and provide equity. Note that lending money is not condemned here (vs 10)– but excessive interest charges which were harming not just individuals, but the whole community.

Vs 9 sets an important principle – God's honor before the world is at stake here. Nehemiah sets himself up in contrast to his predecessors, in solidarity with his people. Despite having a large group of officials to support (Vss 17-18 is interesting), he refused the allocation (vs 14), while devoting himself to the work on the wall, working alongside the rest (4:21, 23), and avoiding any potential conflicts of interest (vs 16).

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Read Nehemiah 6:1-19
(Questions for later personal reflection)

16. Why is the work on the wall at a crucial stage? How does the opposition react to apparent success?

17. In Chapter 6, a number of traps were laid for Nehemiah. How did they appear on the outside, and what were the snares laid within?

18. What could have happened to Nehemiah's effectiveness as a leader, if he hadn't responded as he did? How did God answer his prayer in vs. 9, 10?

19. At the beginning of chapter 7 is an indication that walls are not enough. Why? What does Jerusalem still need?

The opposition to the work in Jerusalem increases as it progresses both in the number of foes, and in the intensity of their attacks. Chapters four through six are illustrative of the ways Satan attacks the Church. Fear, intimidation and threats in Four. Internal problems and damaged relationships in Five. Attacks upon the leadership in Chapter 6.

Sanballat and his cronies are minor league compared to the one whose tactics are described in 1 Peter 5:8, 9; Eph 4:26ff, and Eph 6:11. Psalms 140 and 141 warn about their snares and traps. Nehemiah had served as cupbearer to the king, and probably had observed all the byzantine power politics of Persia. The same kind of character assassinations and other tricks that dominate our own modern world and media. Things are seldom what they seem. Here in Chapter Six tactics change in a intricate series of intimidating attacks upon Nehemiah and his leadership. At the end of Chapter 5, it has been made clear that Nehemiah has been now been appointed Governor – this may have been a promotion beyond his initial mission to rebuild the walls. He has a government to deal with as well as an official role as a leader over the people.

The first series of attacks (6:2-4) came as “peace conference” overtures – requesting a meeting in an obscure border town. A perfect place for an ambush, but Nehemiah's refusal to meet could make it look like he is the one being unreasonable and unfriendly. Motives aren't clear, Nehemiah waits them out.

Then an “open letter” is sent to him (6:4-9) – spreading false but believable rumors about Nehemiah's intentions publicly along the way - a version of modern day “media assassination.” While implying that they have Nehemiah's welfare at heart, in reality, they are threatening his relationship with Artaxerxes, questioning his motives publicly, and trying to provoke him to over-react out of fear.

Then he is summoned by a prophet, Shemaiah. (6:10-14) who “knows” of an assassination plot. His suggestion that Nehemiah, a layman, enter the holy place where God has said only priests may go, proved he was a false prophet hired by the enemy. Apparently there were other false prophets in town also undermining Nehemiah. (6:14)

We learn something more in this chapter about the opponents (6:17-19). Tobiah (whose Hebrew name means “God is Good”) had marriage connections within Judah, including a son in law, Meshullam, who was a leader in Judah, and strong supporter of the wall (see Ezra 8:16, 10:15, Neh 3:6, 10, 8:4, and possibly 12:25 cf 13:4). Tobiah maintained correspondence with a number of nobles in Judah, and probably used this to gather intelligence about the work and to intimidate. Sanballat also had connections by marriage as one of the sons of Eliashib the high priest was Sanballat's son-in-law (Neh 13:28). This chapter reveals there are enemies and traitors within (cf 2 Cor 11:13-14) and even friends may have mixed motives. One wrong move and Nehemiah could easily lose the support of his people.

Gene Getz suggests that this account illustrates six principles for dealing with false accusations: 1. When criticized we must not counter attack by questioning the other person's motives. 2. We must be patient and wait for motives to be revealed. 3. Criticized by unbelievers, we should follow Peter's advice: 1 Peter 2:12, 15; 3:14-16). 4. When criticized unjustly, we must be bold and honest in our responses to rumors, but never take revenge. 5. When falsely accused we must not allow fear to cloud our perceptions and cause us to act impulsively and do something foolish. 6. when we follow God's principles for handling false accusations, He will ultimately defend us. (Getz, Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader)

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Read Nehemiah 7:1-73 (Questions for later personal reflection)

30. At the beginning and end of chapter 7 is an indication that walls are not enough. Why? What does Jerusalem still need?

31. Why was a list of those who returned with Zerubbabel useful to Nehemiah and the Leadership?

Read Nehemiah 11:1—36

32. What was agreed upon as a solution to re-populating the city? What kind of sacrifices did those who moved into the city make?

33. Nehemiah 7:1 and 73 indicate a number of “classes” of people, which are also delineated in the lists of chapter 11. What were these, and what would their roles be in the city?

Nehemiah 7:4 and 6 describes the problem that Jerusalem now faced. The city had lain in ruins for many years – but needed to be revitalized. Demographic studies by Nehemiah (7:5, 6-73; 1 Chronicles 9:2-34 has a parallel list, with some differences.) found most of those who had returned had settled in surrounding towns. (vs 6, 73; 11:3).

The solution in Nehemiah 11:1-2 was for the leaders to live in Jerusalem, along with a “tithing” of the regional population relocating into Jerusalem – this made up both of volunteers and those chosen by lot. This resulted in an influx of several thousand families into the city.

It is notable that a number of Christians involved in urban revitalization have drawn many principles from Nehemiah in engaging in successful projects. In particular, one need is to “re-neighbor” people back into blighted and distressed communities. Robert Lupton in his book: Renewing the City says of Nehemiah's Jerusalem: *“Nehemiah was painfully aware that a vital urban center had to be filled with permanent, vested residents engaged with self interest in every facet of city life. Abandoned real estate shouts out disinvestment and devaluation. The city, in order to be a desirable place to live had to be rich with educational and cultural interest and alive with vigorous commerce.”*

John M. Perkins also talks of this need of re-neighborhooding in his books, in particular – Restoring At-Risk Communities: *“Of the three Rs that anchor the guiding philosophy of the Christian community development movement, relocation is clearly the most distinctive and troublesome. . . there is a growing consensus among committed urban practitioners that being a vested member of the community one is called is an important key to effectiveness.”*

A comment on these ponderous lists of names. The books of Ezra-Nehemiah lists hundreds of people by name. Most we know almost nothing about. But that their names are recorded is an indication that no one is insignificant in the people of God. The Lord has a book with all the names of His own listed!

Buried in that mass of names are various roles and tasks: Oversight and leadership roles, doing work within and outside of the Temple; military and police functions, worship leaders and musicians, lots of service people, perhaps even a lawyer! (vs. 24).

Nehemiah mentions the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers and temple servants. Priests were able men responsible for ministering in the house of God. Gatekeepers obviously maintained order and security, Levites and singers often had cultural tasks, and lots of servants supported the work in numerous ways.

One of the obvious needs the city had was for guards and gatekeepers. Sufficient forces needed to be within to hold the city in case of assault or siege, and to maintain security within were essential. The references to gatekeepers and to “valiant men” (11:6; 14) underline this need.

Mentions of the Levites stand out. When Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan, the Levites were the only tribe that received cities but were not allowed to be landowners “because the Lord the God of Israel himself is their inheritance” (Deuteronomy 18:2). The Tribe of Levi served particular religious duties for the Israelites, The priests were drawn from them, they were often worship officiants and teachers (as we see elsewhere in Nehemiah), and had political responsibilities as well. Only a small number returned with Zerubbabel - Ezra had to deal with a shortage of Levites when he came as well. (Ezra 8:15ff) That Nehemiah plugged them into a variety of positions both in the city and the region is interesting. Nehemiah 12:1-26 is a genealogical list of the priests and levites from the days to Zerubbabel to those of Nehemiah.

The needs of the region were not neglected – as the curious list in 11:25ff indicates. The references to “camping” may be in part an allusion to the wilderness, but also to the vision of God's future who has prepared a city for them. (cf Hebrew 11:13-16).

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Read Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18
(Questions for later personal reflection)

20. Who initiated the assembly at the Water Gate, and why? What series of events have set the stage for this in previous chapters?
21. How was the Word presented to the people? How did they respond?
22. Why should weeping give way to rejoicing? How is the joy of the Lord our strength?
23. What were the purposes in celebrating the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles? What does Nehemiah 8 teach us about worship? About Holi-days?

Chapter Seven of Nehemiah is a repeat of the List of Exiles who returned that is also in Ezra chapter two. Apparently this list was useful as efforts to repopulate the city were underway – establishing who had legitimate interests within. This matter will be returned to in Chapter eleven. We are reminded that Ezra-Nehemiah was one book until later in the Christian Era. This is also important for us as there is a major shift in Chapters eight through ten of Nehemiah, where the story of Ezra and his work restoring God's Law is continued.

Consulting the chart of the development of the themes in Ezra-Nehemiah, it appears that three successive returns are narrated. Each begins with Royal help, involves a journey to Jerusalem, undergoes opposition before their “missions” are completed, and end in feast and celebration. Together they develop the theme that God's Good Hand restores His Covenant Community.

The first journey back under Zerubbabel was concerned with rebuilding the temple and restoring Worship. - it climaxed in the observance of Passover. (Ezra 1-6).

The second journey back under Ezra was concerned with restoring the Mosaic Law and renewing of the Covenant. Ezra found to his dismay when he arrived in Jerusalem that their identity had been seriously compromised through intermarriage with the neighboring peoples, resulting in weeping, confession and establishing the guilty. (Ezra 9-10)

There is then a break in the Ezra narrative as the Walls are rebuilt. It picks up again in Nehemiah eight - it climaxes with a great revival at the Water Gate, with celebration anew of the Feast of Booths and restoration of Sabbath observance. (Ezra 6-9 and Nehemiah 8-10)

The third journey began with Nehemiah's arrival and was concerned with rebuilding the Walls and restoring community, providing both separation and security for God's people. It climaxed in a special dedication Service of the Walls. (Nehemiah 1-7; 11-12) Chapter 13 then looks back at the state of Jerusalem several years later from the perspective of Nehemiah when he returned from Susa.

Nehemiah 8 -10 thus picks up Ezra's narrative from Ezra 10 with an account of a revived community proclaiming the Word (8), confession of Sin (9) and a covenantal recommitment (10).

Ezra was a teacher well versed in the study of Law of Moses. (Ezra 7:6) He had wept in prayer before God for this people for fourteen years, setting an example by his own practices, and taught the Word patiently, exercising discipline. It is possible that he had something to do with preserving the books of the OT we cherish.

There was a revival at the Water Gate, initiated by God's Spirit within the people. Seemingly spontaneous – certainly the Spirit prepared for it through Ezra's years of persevering prayer and teaching ministry (Ezra 9:3-10:3), exercising discipline (Ezra 10), working together on the Wall, (Neh 3-6) and Nehemiah's stand for social justice (Neh 5).

The setting is in a large open area near the Water Gate. It may have been outside the walls, a wooden platform has been built.

Ezra read the the Law to a crowd of at least 30,000 people, maybe many more. It is interesting to speculate the role of the thirteen men beside him – were they amplifying his reading aloud? They seem to have included some leaders from the people, and repentant men from the list in Ezra 10. Thirteen Levites circulated – instructing and translating (since many were not familiar with Mosaic Hebrew), giving clear meaning so people could understand. “Understanding” is a key word in this chapter. (Neh 8:2, 3, 7-8, 12, Ezra probably paused at appropriate points in his reading to allow this – it is unlikely he read continuously for eight hours. It is on the basis of this understanding they could go from weeping to feasting. (Neh 8:12). Nehemiah, ever the practical man, called for providing for those who have nothing prepared. (Neh 8:9-10).

It is interesting to see how all the senses and emotions are involved in this worship: hearing (vss 2, 3) , seeing (vs 5), taste and smell (vss 10, 12), physical movements (vss 5, 6); weeping and rejoicing (vss 9, 12, 17).

The Feast of booths (Tabernacles) was revived with enthusiasm – a time for the proclaiming and hearing of God's Word of reconnecting with their heritage – a reminder of Israel's time in the Wilderness. (Lev 23:33-44; Deut 16:13-15; 31:9-13) Joy and celebration pervades this chapter. (Neh 8:6, 9-10,, 12, 17-18).

Nehemiah is a book with insights for us into restoration, renewal, leadership, and God's faithfulness.

Read Nehemiah 9:1-37
(Questions for later personal reflection)

24. What is the setting of this chapter, and who were its participants.
25. What aspects of the character of God are focused on in the confession?
26. What has God given? How have His gifts been misused? What are the worshipers' requests?
27. A key verse: Nehemiah 9:17b How is this verse relevant to Nehemiah's Jerusalem? To us?

The events of Chapter Nine take place two days after the time of feasting ended, and is a time of fasting – sackcloth and ashes. A service takes place lasting six hours – the first half devoted to reading from the Book of the Law of their God, and second half was spent in confession and worshipping the Lord.

The stairs may have been the stairs of the temple, or possibly the platform mentioned in chapter 8. Two groups of eight levites are mentioned, with five names common to both lists. Apparently they were leading in the liturgy with loud voices. If Ezra or Nehemiah were involved in this service, it is not in the text. Notable is their separation from all foreigners.

There is a lengthy confession running from Vs 5-37. It is as much a confession of God's glory and grace, as it is one of confessing man's ingratitude for what God has given and done. Its context is a call to praise. A hymnic form stands out, though it lies somewhere between narrative and poetry in actual form.

This confession is a look back at God's history with his chosen people, (Compare Psalms 105 and 106; 135 and 136.) There are many rich allusions to events in the Pentateuch: Creation, the Covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, the Wilderness Wanderings, and the possessing of the Land. It is commented that even critics accept the author must have known the Pentateuch in substantially its present form.

There is also a cycle here, similar to that in Judges. In response to their sin, God gives His people over to foreign powers, they cry for help, and He responds with deliverance.

The stress is on God's faithfulness to His covenant, His mercy and grace, despite their sin. (Neh 9:7, 17b, 19ff, 27, 30-33) Its not about what the people have done, it is about what God has done again and again!

It ends with a cry to the Lord - "we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers . . . its' abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us."

Read Nehemiah 9:38 - 10:39
(Questions for later personal reflection)

28. Who bound themselves to this renewed covenant?
29. What specific practices are they committing themselves to? To what extent are these personal or communal responsibilities? How do these relate to current issues within the community?

The List of those who sealed the Covenant or binding agreement are broken into three groups: and many of the names represent families: first the Priests, then the Levites, finally the leaders of the people. The rest of the people are lumped together in verses 28.

The commitment they make here addresses the specific problems of their community: mixed marriages, sabbath observance, specific offerings and tithes that neglected have lead to neglect of the temple. Similar issues were also addressed by the Prophet Malachi.

In these the whole community has an involvement, but the individual involvement of its members is also stressed. The balance between personal and community responsibility is difficult to maintain, but such a balance is clearly suggested.

And in responding to the Word of God, declarations of intent are not enough, they need to touch both our lifestyles and our practice.

Nehemiah is a book with insights for us into restoration, renewal, leadership, and God's faithfulness.

Read Nehemiah 12:1—13:3

32. Who were the Levites and what roles did they perform within the community?

33. This is a “dedication” of the Wall (vs 27) – what “elements” went into preparing and staging this ceremony? What is purification (vs 30) and why? Visualize the ceremonies in your mind – the sights and sounds – what should be the role of music in worship? How great was the joy?

34. Tithing is the subject of Vss 44-47. How does it answer the three basic questions concerning tithing: “What” is to be given? “To whom?” and “where”?

Nehemiah 12:1-26 is another of those long lists of Names found in Ezra-Nehemiah – This time a list of 22 households of Priests from the days of Jeshua, the High Priest when the first return in 538 BC, narrated in Ezra 1-6, took place (vss 1-11) A corresponding list of households of the “next” generation (Joiakim's) follows in verse 12-21. Some have kept their household names, some did not. Fifteen of these are mentioned in Nehemiah's list in Neh 10:2-8. Vss 22-26 lists the heads of the Levitical families. Vs 26 is a summary. The list is relevant to the prominent appearance of the Levites in chapter 11, and even more so, their role in the Service for Dedicating the Wall to follow in Nehemiah 12. The list indicates continuity of the God's work and people.

When Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan, the Levites were the only tribe that received cities but were not allowed to be landowners “because the Lord the God of Israel himself is their inheritance” (Deuteronomy 18:2). Thus they were scattered among the tribes to keep alive the knowledge and service of God. The Tribe of Levi served particular religious duties for the Israelites both in the Tabernacle and, later, the Temple. Only a small number had returned with Zerubbabel - Ezra had to deal with a shortage of Levites when he came as well. (Ezra 8:15ff) That Nehemiah plugged them into a variety of positions both in the city and the region is interesting. The priests were drawn from the sons of Aaron, whose father was one of Levi's three sons. The rest of the Levites were servants of the priesthood and often worship officiants and teachers (as we see elsewhere in Nehemiah), and had political responsibilities as well. The gatekeepers were drawn from the Levites and had charge over the storerooms (vs 25).

The Levites were the “professional” musicians of returned Judah. They were musicians and singers – leading in songs of thanksgiving – Vss 8-9 and 24 indicate an antiphonal style of worship dating back to David and Solomon (cf vss 43-46). Many lived outside of Jerusalem, they needed to be sought out and brought to Jerusalem for the dedication of the Wall, as they were scattered among the people. (12:27-29)

The completion of a project was observed with an inauguration of the structure, an event appropriately accompanied by sacrifice and joy. Rites of inauguration have their place. The spectacle of the Dedication Service for the Wall could easily have been staged by Cecil B. DeMille. More than anything else – Joyful rejoicing is the theme of this chapter.

Two processions were formed, one with Ezra and Hoshai (a prominent layman) proceeded around the East Wall to the Watergate, the other with Nehemiah around the West to the Sheep Gate. The processions included a choir, half the leaders, seven priests with trumpets, and nine instrumentalists playing cymbals, harps and lyres, and singers. Starting perhaps at the Valley gate, the two groups marched on top of the wall in opposite directions, singing songs of thanks giving, accompanied by the instruments and trumpets, then joining together at the Temple for an elaborate ceremony. There were great sacrifices offered, and offerings for the Levites. Vs 47 summarizes again the continuity between the days of Zerubbabel and those of Nehemiah.

In marching around the city, on the walls – we see allusions to Joshua marching around Jericho, and Nehemiah's late night survey of the fallen walls condition in Neh. 2. For those marching on the walls were also many personal memories of the work they had put into them as they were rebuilt. Much more so, the providential Good Hand of God that had restored His Holy City. Psalm 48:12-14

The chapter ends with discussion of the organization and administration of the contributions and tithes given to support the ministry of the priests and Levites. The Mosaic Law answers three basic questions concerning tithing ... What is to be given? Lev 17:30-34, To whom? Num 18:21-32 and Where? Deut 12:1-14 and 14:22-29. These offerings were meant to come out of joyful worship and to serve the community - both those in service to God and the poor and the needy (Deut 14:29).

Nehemiah is a book with insights for us into restoration, renewal, leadership, and God's faithfulness.

Read Nehemiah 12:44 -13:31
(Questions for later personal reflection)

35. While Nehemiah was away, what kind of compromises had crept into Jerusalem? What were the negative consequences of these?

36. What actions did Nehemiah take to redraw these lines of separation?

37. What are some of the compromises Christians make today that also threaten their identity and witness?

37. What does Nehemiah ask God to remember him for?

Nehemiah served as Governor of Judah for 12 years (445-433) after which he returned to the King. "after some time" (vs 13:6 – it was probably a number of years) he returned to Jerusalem with the King's permission and apparently some authority as well to undertake a number of reforms. For Jerusalem had settled down in his absence to a comfortable compromise with the gentile world.

The concept of being separate is introduced in 13:1-4. "On that day" (vs 1) links this to the events in the preceding verses. Nehemiah's wall and Ezra's revival were intended to set God's people apart. This was essential in God's plan to prepare for the coming of His Son.

When Nehemiah returned, he found a number of problems that had resulted in serious consequences. A storeroom in the Temple had been given over to Tobiah and unsupported Levites had returned to farming (vs. 4,10). Commerce was underway in Jerusalem on the Sabbath days as merchants brought goods into the city. (vss 15-16) And, as a result of mixed marriages (including the son of the High Priest who was married to a daughter of Sanballot), many children were unable to understand or speak Hebrew.

In all three of these matters the worship life of Judah was effected. Levite ministers were neglecting their ministry to support their families. Nehemiah is very much aware that God's "ministers" are always a prime target – vs, 29 (cf Malachi 2). The work of reform includes the clergy – how often the church is attacked through their weaknesses.

It is probably not surprising that two of the foes we have already met are involved in this. Before they had conspired and attacked openly with threats and violence, now they are subtly infiltrating.

Tobiah, an Ammonite, had no business being in the temple ((13:1-3), but he had "connections" through Eliashib the priest let alone taking over one of the storerooms which was supposed to be used for grain and tithes intended for the levites.

This is likely the same Eliashib the high priest, whose son Joiada in turn, was now related to Sanballot the Horonite through the marriage of his grandson. As a result There has been considerable neglect of the needs of the house of God – a theme that Malachi forcefully preached in his oracle.

Nehemiah draws on the Scriptures regarding these matters in the references to Balaam's curses in vs. 2; Jeremiah's warnings in Jer 17:27 in vs 18; and to Solomon's foreign wives in vs, 26ff.

It is pointed out that Nehemiah put together a group of trustworthy men, including a priest, a scribe, and a layman/ levite to administer the supplies once again being connected. (Vs 13) Compare this to Acts 6, where the deacons appointed by the apostles to deal with the problems of neglected non-Jewish widows in the care of the church all had Greek names.

Commerce on the Lord's day is very much a part of our modern culture. Sports and entertainment are just as much a threat to the worship life of God's people. It has been said that Satan doesn't need drugs to corrupt suburbia, since he has soccer. It is well to remember the words of Isa 58:13-14.

Ezra dealt with mixed marriages in Ezra 9-10; it was addressed again in Neh 10:30 (and in Malachi chapter 2:10ff) – but it is still a problem in Neh 13:27. Paul has to deal with it in 2 Corinthians 6:14f-7:1. It is so easy to be lead astray in establishing compromising relationships with unbelievers. Malachi also speaks of divorce as an issue. The adverse effects upon the children of these are especially underscored.

So Nehemiah ends on an interesting and anticlimatic note. In Ezra-Nehemiah God had restored the Temple and its worship, His Law and Covenant people. Jerusalem's walls had been built to separate and protect His people. But in a short time – the Temple services were disrupted and defiled, the Law compromised and neglected, and the walls have failed to keep out the unbelieving foreigners.

Nehemiah's last chapter points to the inadequacy of these to establish God's people and to the need for His Son, who in turn would weep over this city, drive out its moneychangers and be despised and crucified by its priests – in order that God could establish the heavenly city for which Nehemiah's Jerusalem, with its temple and sacrifices, was just a shadow pointing to Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 12)

The Biblical Account of the Exile and Restoration of Judah

Ezra used a variety of sources in his writings including several accounts of the Kingdom of Judah
Lists of returning exiles, letters and documents to and from Persian Kings, and material from Nehemiah's Journal.

EZRA - NEHEMIAH

1 & 2 Chronicles

Ezra's account of the Kingdom of Judah and its fall and exile because of sin.

Jeremiah

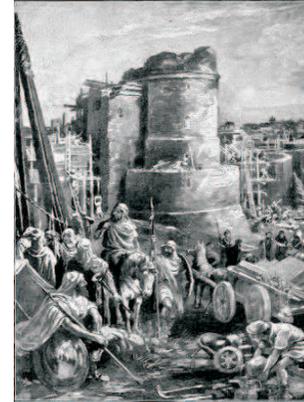
Wept over Jerusalem and was taken into exile in Egypt

Ezekiel & Daniel

Two prophets ministering to the exiles in Babylon/ Persian

Haggai & Zechariah

Two prophets that encouraged the work of completing the Temple



Chronicles ends as Ezra begins. Ezra & Nehemiah were one book in the Hebrew Bible until divided when the OT was translated into Greek.

Malachi

A prophetic voice when Nehemiah was Governor

Exile

God's people dispersed throughout Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Only remnants would return

Cyrus commands in 538

1st Return

see Ezra 1-6

Joshua and Zerubbabel start rebuilding of the Temple

Despite opposition, the Second Temple finished during Darius' reign (515)

Esther

The exiles remaining are saved with Queen Esther's help

Appointed by Artaxerxes, Nehemiah, his cupbearer,

Rebuilt Walls

in (445) Neh 1-12 and restored the population

He returned in 433 to bring more reforms Neh 13.

Opponents to Nehemiah: Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Gershem the Arab

Appointed Governor by Artaxerxes, The Scholar - Priest Ezra led a

2nd Return

in 457 See Ezra 7-10
Ezra enforced Jewish law

Nebuchadnezzar

Destroyed Jerusalem in 587 and relocated the population of Judah in a 70 year **Exile**

His successors ruled until the Fall of Babylon in 538

Cyrus II

The Great (549-530 BC)

Fall of Media (549)
Fall of Lydia (539)

Cambyses

(530-520 BC)

Fall of Egypt (525)

Darius I

The Great (521-486 BC)

Greece: defeat at Marathon (491)

Xerxes I

Ahasuerus (486-465 BC)

defeats at Thermopylae & Salamis (480)

Artaxerxes I

(465-424 BC)

Neo-Babylonian

Empire (626-539 BC)

Persian (Achaemenid Dynasty)

Empire (700-330 BC)

See <http://www.eldrbarry.net/clas/restoration.pdf>
for hot links to Wikipedia pages.

A diagram of the Thematic Narratives of Ezra-Nehemiah

“God's Good Hand Restores His Covenant Community”

“Good Hand of God” Ezra 1:1ff; 5; 32:11; 5:5; 7:9; 7:27-28; 6:18; 8:22-23; 8:31; 9:8-9; Nehemiah 2:8, 18; 6:16; Nehemiah 9:6-37

	<u>1st return: Zerubbabel</u> Ezra 1- 6	<u>2nd Return: Ezra</u> Ezra 7-8 . . . Neh 8-10	<u>Nehemiah's Return</u> Neh 1-7, 11-12
<i>Royal Commission</i>	Cyrus (538 BC) Ezra 1:1-4	Artaxerxes I (457 BC) Ezra 7:11-27	Artaxerxes I (445 BC) Neh 1-2:9
<i>Provisions made</i>	Ezra 1:6-11; 2:68-69; 3:7; 6:8-10;	Ezra 7:15-20; 21-23; 24; 8:24-30; 33-34; 9:12	Neh 2:8; 5:1-13; 14-18; 12:44-47; 13:4-5, 9; 10-13; 31
<i>Journey to Jerusalem</i>	Ezra 1:5-2:70 About 50,000 people	Ezra 7:1-10; 8:15-36 About 1500 People	Neh 2:11 Nehemiah and some Cavalry
<i>Arrival</i>	Ezra 3:1	Ezra 8:32-9:4	Neh 2:12-18
<i>Mission:</i>	Rebuilding the TEMPLE (Restoring Worship) (Ezra 1:5)	Reading the LAW (renewing Covenant) (Ezra 7:25)	WALLS of Separation (Restoring Community) (Neh 2:5)
<i>Work underway</i>	Ezra 3:1-13	(Narrative interrupted for Nehemiah's building of the walls)	Neh 3-6
<i>Overcoming Opposition and difficulties</i>	Local Samaritans Ezra 4:1-2; 2:24 (later ----- Tattenai – Gov Trans-Euphrates Ezra 5:3,6; 6:6,13; 8:36 Rehum and Shemshai – Govs of Trans-Euphrates Ezra 4:8-10; 17, 23 Decree by Darius commanding completion (6:1-12)	-----> <i>Complaints to Xerxes and) Artaxerxes I</i> <i>Ezra 4:6-23 (Neh1:3?)</i> Internal Problems: Intermarriages Ezra 9:1-17	Sanballat, Tobiah & Geshem Neh 2:10; 19; 4:1-3; 4:7-8; 6:1-2; 4; 5-9; 10-13; 14; 6:16-19; 13:4-10; 13:28 Internal issues: Usury and exploitation: Neh 5:1-19
<i>Completion & Celebration “joy”</i>	Foundation Ezra 3:10-13 . . . Temple Ezra 6: 13-18 (515 BC)	Reading the Law – Confessing – Covenant Commitment Neh 7:73b-10:39	Walls finished 6:15-7:3 City re-populated 11:1-36
<i>Feasts</i>	Passover Ezra 6:19-22	Feast of Booths Neh 8:13-18	Special Dedication Service Neh 12:27-47

Nehemiah 13: Final Reforms : 12 years later: Tobiah occupying the Temple (1-9); Levitical needs neglected (10-14); Commerce on the Sabbath (15-22); Intermarriages (23-31)
“Remember me with favor O my God”

“Gifting” the Temple and Priesthood: Ezra 1:6-11; 2:68-69; 3:7; 6:8-10; 7:15-20; 21-23; 24; 8:24-30; 33-34; 9:12 Neh 2:8; 5:1-13; 14-18; 12:44-47; 13:4-5, 9; 10-13; 31

A Lot of Lists:

The people of the captivity that returned with Zerubbabel : Ezra 2 & Nehemiah 7:6-75
The family heads who returned with Ezra Ezra 8:1-14
Those guilty of marrying foreign women: Ezra 10:18-44
Those who worked on the Walls and Gates Nehemiah 3:1-32

Those who reaffirmed the Covenant Nehemiah 10:1-28
Those appointed new residents of Jerusalem Nehemiah 11:3-19 and the towns around 20-36
The Levites who returned with Zerubbabel 12:1-26

Some Long Prayers of Confession: Ezra's Sorrow Ezra 9:3-15; Nehemiah's distress Neh 1:4-11; The People: Neh 9:1-37

Popular Studies:

Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader By Gene Getz

Excellence in Leadership: Reaching Goals with Prayer, Courage and Determination by John White

Nehemiah: Experiencing the Good Hand of God by John MacArthur

Ezra and Nehemiah (LifeChange Series) The Navigators

Nehemiah: Rebuilt and Rebuilding by Kathleen Nielson – Author of **Bible Study: Following the Ways of the Word**

Hand Me Another Brick by Charles Swindoll

Theological Commentaries

Ezra and Nehemiah (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries) by Derek Kidner

Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 16, Ezra-Nehemiah by H. G. M. Williamson

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament) by Charles Fensham

Contemporary Discussions:

To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City by Eric Swanson

Renewing the City: Reflections on Community Development and Urban Renewal by Robert Lupton. Develops Nehemiah as a book about revitalizing the city – the author is engaged in similar work in Atlanta, Ga.

Some On line “Study Guides”: of interest:

Growing Christians Ministries: A Complete Study guide on Nehemiah by Dr. David R. Reid, a former faculty member of Emmaus Bible College – rather lengthy, pages of study questions. He studied at Gordon Conwell.

Study Guides on Ezra and Nehemiah by David Padfield, Church Of Christ In Zion, Illinois also on on **Israel goes Home** by Jeff Asher

Nehemiah Study Guide by Josh Reich, a young church planter starting a small church in Tucson AZ of Willow Creek Community Church background – did a recent 22 week sermon series – Groups Study guides on pages 34ff.

Class Notes on Sacred History: Nehemiah by JW McGarvey , 1894 - Rather Lengthy Study Questions