

READING PLAN + STUDY QUESTIONS

*Ezra +
Nehemiah*

READING PLAN OVERVIEW

- **SESSION 1:** EZRA 1-5
 - THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM + TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION
- **SESSION 2:** EZRA 6-10
 - EZRA'S INFLUENCE IN JERUSALEM
- **SESSION 3:** NEHEMIAH 1-7
 - NEHEMIAH REBUILDS THE CITY WALLS OF JERUSALEM
- **SESSION 4:** NEHEMIAH 8-13
 - GOD'S FAITHFULNESS + THE ISRAELITES' REBELLION

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

- 1. READ THE GENRE + BOOK OVERVIEWS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES**
- 2. READ THE CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE FOR EACH SESSION**
- 3. READ THE CHAPTER SUMMARIES ON [EVERYDAYSCRIPTURE.ORG](https://everydayscripture.org)**
- 4. ANSWER THE QUESTIONS + REFLECT ON THE READING**

This study encourages going at your own pace, allowing each session to be a day, a week, or however long you need. Each session contains questions to be used for individual reflection or small group discussion.

This study was made to be used alongside Bible reading. Although we have created chapter summaries, there is no substitute for reading God's Word.

QUESTIONS TO GET YOU STARTED

- What type of literature is this book of the Bible? Does that affect the interpretation?
- Who is the intended audience of this book? What purpose does it serve?
- What does this passage of Scripture reveal about God's character?
- What can I learn from this Scripture passage? How does it apply today?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Everyday Scripture: Ezra](#)
- [Everyday Scripture: Nehemiah](#)
- [Everyday Scripture: Old Testament History](#)
- [The Bible Project: Ezra + Nehemiah Overview Video](#)

GENRE OVERVIEW: OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

The books of Old Testament History follow the story of the Israelite people. Immediately following the books of Old Testament Law, these books highlight the aftermath of the Israelites' disobedience to God's commands.

Joshua, the successor of Moses, led the Israelite people into the Promised Land of Canaan. Once they were settled, the Israelites appointed leaders and judges to rule over the land. Although God provided righteous judges and priests, the Israelites wanted to be like the other nations who were led by kings. Despite the warnings of God and the prophet Samuel, the Israelite people appointed a king named Saul.

Saul started out as a promising king but ultimately failed the Israelites. After Saul came an unlikely king, David, who had previously been a lowly shepherd and musician. God loved David and promised to send Jesus from his line of ancestors (the line of Judah).

David's son Solomon succeeded him as king and was one of the wisest and wealthiest men who ever lived. Like his father, Solomon had many moments of both righteousness and failure. David wrote most of the Psalms, and Solomon wrote a portion of wisdom literature during this time (Old Testament Poetry).

Following Solomon was king Rehoboam. Because of Rehoboam's poor leadership and unrighteousness, the Israelites rebelled against him and instead followed another leader, Jeroboam, which split the nation in two. Two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) remained loyal to Rehoboam. These tribes became known as the southern kingdom of Judah. The other ten tribes, led by Jeroboam, became the northern tribes.

Throughout this time period, God sent prophets to warn the Israelites that their rebellion and deviation from God's law would cause them to be removed from their land. After many messages of warning and opportunities for repentance, the Israelites did not turn back to God. Because of this, they were taken into captivity by different world powers and did not return to Canaan for seventy years.

After the captivity, a faithful remnant of Israelites returned to Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. God helped establish the people and influenced the rebuilding of the temple. The books of Old Testament History show how God worked to restore and redeem the Israelite people.

BOOK OVERVIEW: EZRA + NEHEMIAH

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one combined narrative. Both Ezra and Nehemiah describe life in Jerusalem for the newly freed Israelites after their exile. Ezra focuses on the rebuilding of the temple, while Nehemiah focuses on the rebuilding of the city walls.

After the Israelites were freed from captivity, many of them returned to Jerusalem. Cyrus, the King of Persia, allowed the Israelites to rebuild the city and establish themselves once again.

The book of Ezra records the leadership of two men, Zerubbabel and Ezra, who worked to rebuild the temple and teach God's Word to the Israelites. Both Zerubbabel and Ezra struggled with including other nations in the rebuilding process. When the Israelites married foreign women, Ezra added to God's Word and instated laws that God never commanded. The challenges faced by these two men showcase the difficulties and obstacles of rebuilding the city and following God's instruction.

While Nehemiah was in Jerusalem, he faced great opposition from the surrounding nations. Israel's enemies saw Israel as a rebellious nation and objected to the rebuilding of the city walls. Despite his many struggles, Nehemiah was consistent and faithful in his quest to rebuild the city walls.

Hoping to encourage the Israelites' faith, Ezra and Nehemiah gathered them to teach God's Word for seven days and celebrate the annual Feast of the Tabernacles. During this time, the Israelites renewed their covenant with God and vowed to remain faithful to His law.

Nehemiah later heard that Jerusalem had not remained steadfast to God, despite the renewal of faith. Around the city, the work of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah was being unraveled by the Israelites. Frustrated and concerned, Nehemiah cried out to God, begging Him to remember His work and not undo the good that He had done.

SESSION ONE: EZRA 1–5

THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM + TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION

- In Ezra 1:1, the Lord stirred the king of Persia’s heart, and Ezra 1:5 mentions that God stirred the hearts of the people of Judah. What do you think it means for God to “stir someone’s heart”? Can God change people’s hearts?
- In Ezra 1, how did Cyrus, the king of Persia, provide for the Israelites? Given their recent captivity, why would this be surprising to the people of Judah?
- How does Ezra 2 highlight the important role of the Levites and the significance of rebuilding the temple?
- Read Ezra 3:10–13. How did the Israelites respond when the temple’s foundation was laid? How did the response of the older generation differ from the response of the younger generation?
- In Ezra 4:3, Zerubbabel and the other leaders did not allow the enemies of Judah to participate in the rebuilding of the temple. Do you think this decision was wise and prudent or exclusive and foolish?
- Why do you think the Israelites faced opposition when rebuilding the temple? Consider how even God-ordained efforts face resistance and obstacles.
- Ezra 5:1 mentions the prophet Haggai. How did Haggai prophesy and teach about the importance of rebuilding of the temple (see Haggai 1:1–11)?

SESSION TWO: EZRA 6-10

EZRA'S INFLUENCE IN JERUSALEM

- King Cyrus made the original decree to rebuild the temple but went back on his word. How did King Darius use Cyrus' initial decree to allow the Israelites to continue their work on the temple (Ezra 6:1-12)?
- Read Ezra 6:21. Who was included in the Passover celebration? Why is this significant?
- After the rebuilding and dedication of the temple, Ezra led another group of exiles back to Jerusalem. How did both God and Artaxerxes bless Ezra's efforts?
- What do Ezra 7:6 and 7:10 reveal about Ezra? How would this serve him well in his leadership?
- Read Ezra 8:21-23. What did Ezra do instead of requesting an army? Do you think this was a genuine act of faith or a desperate plea for help?
- How could Ezra's prayer come across as problematic or racially insensitive? What was Ezra's purpose in wanting the Israelites to remain separated from other nations?
- Read Malachi 2:15-16. How did Ezra's decision regarding intermarriage contradict God's design for marriage (Ezra 10:10-11)?
- In Ezra 10:2, how did Shekariah show understanding of God's mercy and grace?

SESSION THREE: NEHEMIAH 1–7

NEHEMIAH REBUILDS THE CITY WALLS OF JERUSALEM

- In Nehemiah 1:3–4, what report did Nehemiah receive from Jerusalem? How did he respond to this news?
- What promise of God did Nehemiah recall in Nehemiah 1:8–9? How is this relevant to the exile and the return to Jerusalem?
- In Nehemiah 2, what did King Artaxerxes notice about Nehemiah? What did Nehemiah request of the king?
- Read Nehemiah 2:11–12. Why do you think Nehemiah kept a low profile during his visit to Jerusalem?
- Nehemiah 3 recalls the many gates around Jerusalem. Do you think there is any significance behind the names of these gates? Use a Study Bible or internet search for help.
- Why were Sanballat and Tobiah opposed to the rebuilding of Jerusalem? What perception did they have of the Jewish people?
- In Nehemiah 5, how did Nehemiah show generosity and compassion to those in need? What was his motivation for doing this?
- In Nehemiah 6, how did Nehemiah respond to Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem's schemes (Nehemiah 6:3, 6:12)?
- Read Nehemiah 6:15–16. How did Jerusalem's neighboring nations react to the finished city wall?

SESSION FOUR: NEHEMIAH 8-13

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS + THE ISRAELITES' REBELLION

- Ezra was known for his knowledge of the books of the Law. In our modern Bibles, what books are included in the Law?
- When the Israelites were listening to the books of the Law, what was the role of the leaders and priests (Nehemiah 8:6-8)?
- What did the Israelites do in response to hearing the books of the Law (Nehemiah 9:2)?
- What historical events were referenced in Nehemiah 9? How might these stories have been encouraging or faith-building to the Israelites?
- Read Nehemiah 10:39. How did the Israelites plan to maintain the rebuilt temple? Based on their previous actions, are you hopeful that they will be diligent in following through on this plan?
- In Nehemiah 12:43, how did the Israelites celebrate the dedication of the city wall? Why was this a significant event in Israel's history?
- In Nehemiah 13, how did the Israelites disrespect the temple, the Sabbath, and the city walls? How do you think Ezra and Nehemiah felt knowing that much of their hard work had been undone?