

# Long Story Short: Ezra-Nehemiah



## The Big Picture:

### Ezra

- 1-6 First wave of returnees with **Zerubbabel**
  - 1-2 Exiles return to Judah w/ Zerubbabel
  - 3-6 Rebuilding of the temple
- 7-10 **Ezra's** reforms among the returnees
  - 7 Ezra becomes Judah's spiritual leader
  - 8-10 Ezra's reforms **fail**

### Nehemiah

- 1-7 **Nehemiah** comes to rebuild Jerusalem
- 8-10 Ezra renews the covenant and Torah reading
- 11-13 Nehemiah's reforms > **Failure**

## Main Themes in Ezra-Nehemiah:

1. The return to the land after the exile was one of the key prophetic promises of Israel's restoration
  - o See Isaiah 11:11-12, Jeremiah 29:10-14
2. The need for rebuilding is emphasized
  - o New Temple (Zerubbabel's project in Ezra 1-6)
  - o New Walls (Nehemiah's project 1-7)
  - o New Religious Traditions: Passover reinstated (Ezra 6); Torah reading instituted (Neh 8)
3. Both Ezra and Nehemiah lead the people in social/spiritual reforms
  - o Prayer: Ezra 6:10, 8:23, 9:6-10, Neh 1:4-11, 9:5-37
  - o Commitment to Torah: Neh 8
  - o Covenant Renewal: Neh 9-10
  - o Racial purity: Ezra 9-10, Neh 13

**Key Observation: Most of Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra's work is compromised by half-successes or failure:** see Nehemiah 13

## Key Questions: What is the author trying to tell us with this "bad ending"?

4. What was the result of the temple rebuilding project?
  - o Mixed response to the foundation laying ceremony: Ezra 3:12-13
  - o The job was left unfinished for years: Ezra 4:24
5. Injustice became rampant in Judah: Neh 5:1-5 (see reflections of this in Isaiah 58)
6. Should the Jews have excluded non-Israelites from participating in the rebuilding of the temple or the city? (See Ezra 4:1-3)
  - o Ezra 1:4 said anyone should participate
  - o The prophets envisioned that the rebuilt temple would be for all nations to worship Yahweh: Isaiah 2:1-4, 56:1-7, Zechariah 2:10-16
7. Should Ezra/Nehemiah have demanded the exclusion of all foreign wives? (Neh 13:1-3)
  - o Other prophets opposed divorce (see Malachi 2:13-17)
  - o Other prophets attack Israel's nationalistic patriotism (see Jonah, Ruth)

**Key Implication:** Ezra and Nehemiah are being offered as realistic examples of spiritual leadership. They can promote change, but ultimately cannot change the hearts of the people. The promise of a new covenant where God will renew the hearts of the people remains a future hope (see Jeremiah 31:31-34)