

Rebuilding What Was Lost
The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah



Rebuilding What Was Lost

- *A Little Bit of Background*
- *The Return (part 1)*



The Return



Funky little teaching moment...

- Remember, we're looking at *Ezra-Nehemiah* as one continuous story, not two separate books
 - We're telling the story of the return of God's people to their homeland after a 70-year exile
 - In 733-722 BC, the Assyrians invaded under King Tukultī-apil-Ešarra (Tiglath-Pileser III) and others
 - The Northern Kingdom of Israel was basically dissolved, repatriated with Assyrians, and turned into the vassal state of Samaria



The Return



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 - We're telling the story of the return of God's people to their homeland after a 70-year exile
 - In 733-722 BC, the Assyrians invaded
 - In 586 BC, the Babylonians invaded under King Nabû-kudurri-uşur (Nebuchadnezzar II)
 - The Southern Kingdom of Judah was utterly destroyed and basically left a wasteland, its people dragged off to Babylon
 - Nebuchadnezzar even destroyed the Temple, burned every copy of the Torah, and tried to stamp out the Hebrew language
 - Isaiah 14 more or less straight-up parallels King Nebuchadnezzar to Satan



The Return



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 - We're telling the story of the return of God's people to their homeland after a 70-year exile
 - In 733-722 BC, the Assyrians invaded
 - In 586 BC, the Babylonians invaded
 - But in 540 BC, Babylon itself was invaded by Persian King Kūruš (Cyrus II, or "Cyrus the Great")
 - And Isaiah 45:1 actually calls Cyrus a "messiah" who was commissioned by God
 - Because in Isaiah 44:28, the Lord says, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'"
 - NOTE: That prophecy was given 150 years before the events of Ezra 1:1...



The Return

- Let's look at Ezra-Nehemiah itself...
 - The first verse is really important, so let's look at that in some detail...
 - Ezra 1:1
 - "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD..."
 - Stop for a second and think about that—
 - Why did Martin Luther want the exilic historical Book of Esther removed from the Bible?
 - What is the core theological concern of God's people reflected by its structure?
 - How does the exilic poetical Book of Lamentations begin?
 - (NOTE: The Hebrew name of the book is simply, "How...?"—and what does *that* suggest about how the people of God were feeling right about then?)
 - Why would Nebuchadnezzar believe that the Jews would actually bow and worship him in the historical/prophetic book of Daniel?
 - God had *abandoned* His people, hadn't He?



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 - Stop for a second and think about that
 - But here at the beginning of Ezra-Nehemiah, God says that He had *always* had a plan to bring His people back home—even demonstrating His sovereignty over a pagan king *called by name*
 - Theologically speaking, how does that change things?
 - Practically speaking, *when* should that change things?
 - When, in retrospect, you *recognize* that?
 - What does that suggest that *we* could learn today, even from the first part of the first verse of Ezra-Nehemiah?



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 - Practically speaking, *when* should that change things?
 - When everyone was asking, “Where is God?” this writer says, “He's been with us all along—He's been *sovereign* all along”
 - We're just so myopic, so blinded by pain, that we haven't seen that our pain was what we'd *earned*—but that even His righteous chastisement of us had *never* been His end goal
 - It was what we needed to bring us to this point in our history



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 - Theologically speaking, how does that change things?
 - Practically speaking, *when* should that change things?
 - When everyone was asking, “Where is God?” this writer says, “He’s been with us all along—He’s been *sovereign* all along”
 - So how can we apply all of that to our own lives today?



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 - Ezra 1:1
 - “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah...”
 - Stop for a second and think about *that*
 - In Jeremiah 29:10-11, This is what God had said to the Jews in exile in Babylon—
“I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
 - This is not a “life verse” promise that God always has plans to prosper everyone, but a *personal* promise from God to His people that He will not abandon them
 - They might have decades of suffering, but that's just to refine them, temper them, and make them yearn to come home and realize what they've been taking for granted
 - Can we apply that today?



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 - Stop for a second and think about *that*
 - In Jeremiah 29:10-13, This is what God had said to the Jews in exile in Babylon—
"I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."
 - That suggests that they *hadn't* been doing that before, doesn't it?
- Can we apply that today?

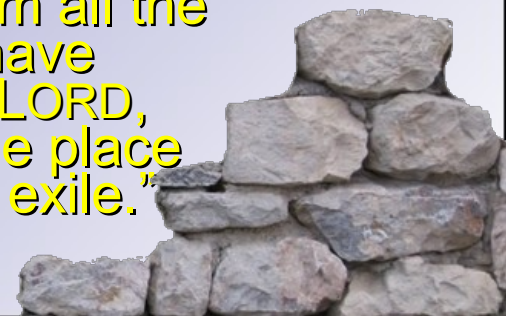


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 - Stop for a second and think about *that*
 - In Jeremiah 29:10-14, This is what God had said to the Jews in exile in Babylon—

"I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. **I will be found by you,** declares the LORD, **"and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,"** declares the LORD, **"and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."**

- Can we apply *that* today?



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 - Summarize: Which King carried the people of God off into exile in Babylon—was it Cyrus or Nebuchadnezzar?
 - *YAHWEH Himself* carried His people into exile *and* carried them every day *during* their exile *and* had already promised to carry them home *after* their exile—and all *because* He absolutely knows what He's doing
 - Can we apply that?



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 - Ezra 1:1
 - “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing...”

