



EZRA-NEHEMIAH

WALKING IN GOD'S WORDS

Growth Group Study Guide



Our midweek
growth groups
are the heart of our church
life together. They are, as the
name suggests, about growing!
We grow in...



- **our understanding of God's Word**

Our studies follow the Sunday sermons, and there's lots of room for interaction, discussion and questions.

- **our love for God**

Meeting together is truly life-changing as God works powerfully in us by His Spirit through His Word.

- **our love for God's family**

They're a great place to build real, encouraging friendships, while providing opportunities to practically serve, care and pray for one another.

- **our love for God's world**

Our groups are a place where we can pray and partner with one another in God's mission to the world.

in His love & grace,

Hamish, Sam & Doug

INTRODUCTION

Global empires, powerful kings, and home-sick exiles — all in the hands of the God of Heaven! Ezra & Nehemiah is originally one book and has one action packed story. It's got it all! It's full of highs and lows, joy and disappointment, success and failure, obedience and disobedience. Often the book of Ezra & Nehemiah is used to speak about leadership or building projects, but it's about so much more!

It's a book about God

God is the primary actor in the story of Ezra & Nehemiah! He is the “God of heaven” who fulfills his promises and moves the hearts of rebel kings and sinful subjects. Whilst there are some great characters in Ezra & Nehemiah, the focus is on our great God. He is the prime-mover who works in and through humanity for the furthering of his good plans.

It's a book about Jesus Christ

The story of Ezra & Nehemiah is also about God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's solution to the disappointment and mess of the Old Testament. Even this particular story, about an earthly city and its temple, comes to a grand conclusion in the New Testament with a new city and temple. This book is about our glorious saviour Jesus! Keep your eyes open!

It's a book for us

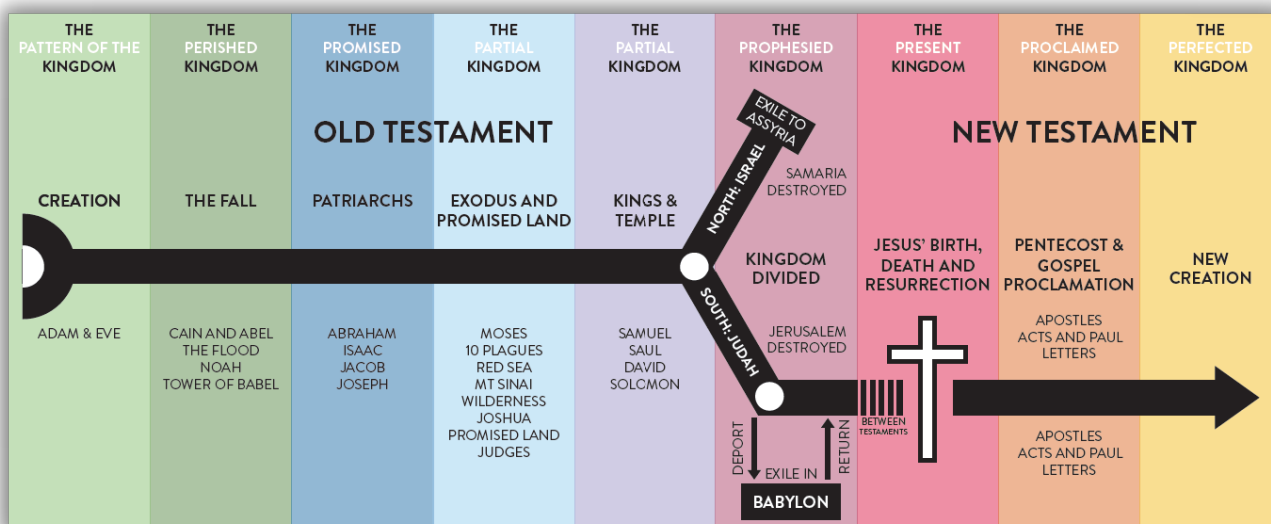
Finally, Ezra & Nehemiah is for us. This is a book that was written for our sake-to show us how to know and follow Christ. So as you read the story, make sure you learn from the good, the bad, and the ugly! Learn from God and learn from his people. Let this story speak into the details of your life today.

OVERVIEW

Like any movie or book it can be helpful to know the backstory, the setting, and the characters. The same can be said when we're reading the story of Ezra & Nehemiah!

The Backstory

Ezra and Nehemiah comes at the end of the Old Testament story. It narrates the return of God's people to the land of Israel from exile in Babylon/Persia. But that begs the question: how did they end up in exile!? In short, the Israelites failed to be faithful. So, as God had warned, the divided nation of Israel and Judah were dragged away from their home. Several relocations of large groups of Israelites occurred, but "the exile" typically refers to the Babylonian exile. This backstory is illustrated below:



The Setting

Israel's return from exile means that the book of Ezra and Nehemiah is set between multiple locations. The story shifts between the cities of Babylon, Susa, and Jerusalem. It tracks the return of God's people to the land, and even the correspondence between the Kings of Persia/Babylon and the leaders of Israel. A map of the location can be seen below:



The Characters



Zerubbabel & Co.

Surprisingly, Zerubbabel is one of the earliest characters in the story. He (and others) led the first group of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem in 539 BC. They began the task of rebuilding the temple and its altar.



Ezra

Appears quite late in the story (Ezra 7:1)! He was a priest and a teacher of the law of Moses. He lived in the city of Babylon but returned to Jerusalem in 465 BC to work on the temple.



Nehemiah

The cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He lived in the city of Susa and returned to Jerusalem to restore its walls in 445 BC. Eventually he was appointed the governor of Judah.



King Nebuchadnezzar

Ruled over the Babylonian empire. He destroyed the city of Jerusalem (and the temple!) in 606-587 BC. He originally took the Israelites to Babylon.



King Cyrus

Ruled over the Persian empire. He conquered Nebuchadnezzar and ruled over both the Persian and Babylonian empires from 539-522 BC. He sent the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel.



King Darius I

Took reign of the Persian and Babylonian empire after Cyrus in 522 BC. The temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt during his reign in 515 BC.



King Xerxes/Ahasuerus

The dual named king ruled after Darius. Xerxes took the reign of the Persian and Babylonian empire in 485 BC. He can also be read about in the book of Esther.



King Artaxerxes

Ruled the Persian and Babylonian empire in 465 BC. During his reign, he sent the second and third group of exiles back to Jerusalem led by Ezra & Nehemiah.

STUDIES





Study 1

EZRA 1-2

Playtime!

Click the QR code to watch a video of an overview of Ezra.



Pray & Read Ezra 1-2

The Context

1. Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-23. How does the conclusion of 2 Chronicles 36 connect to the opening of the book of Ezra & Nehemiah?

2. Read Isaiah 44:24-45:6. What do these verses tell us about the opening of the book of Ezra & Nehemiah?

The Story

3. Where is the 'drama/action' as you read this story, and what's your reaction/questions to it?

4. How does the story:

- Start

- Proceed

- End

5. What's the overall vibe/theme of the story? (Check out Appendix A for some help!)

The Message

6. What do we learn about our God in the story?

7. What do we learn about God's people in the story?

8. How does this story point us to Jesus Christ? (Check out Appendix B for some help)

9. How can we apply the message of the story in light of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension (Check out Appendix C for some help):

- To ourselves

- To our church

- To our world

Group Prayer Points