–Save This Page as a PDF–

The Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah



The Purposes of Ezra-Nehemiah: Since the author seems to have used the **Ezra** Memoirs (EM) and **Nehemiah** (NM), the question arises about the purpose of each of these writings. The reasons may be somewhat different for the memoirs; for example, the NM may constitute, at least in part, **Nehemiah's** report to the Persian king. When we try to determine the comprehensive motives for the book, however, we find that the EM and NM are quite in accord with the purposes of the final compiler and author.

The Continuity of God's Plan and People: One of the primary objectives of **Ezra-Nehemiah** was to show that **the Israelite** community that had existed *before* **the exile** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gu – Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**) would continue to exist *after* **the exile**. Thus, **they** would continue to see **ADONAI's** redemptive works. This was a new exodus. As soon as **the** new **Temple**, which took the place of Solomon's **Temple**, was completed (see **Ba – The Completion of the Temple**), **they** celebrated the festival of **Passover (Ezra 6:19-22).** Later, after reading **the Torah Scroll of Moses**, **the people** celebrated **the** festival of **Sukkot (Nehemiah 8:13-18)**. These feasts remember **Ha'Shem's** great saving acts in the exodus.

This new exodus proved to **the exiles** that **they** represented the continuation of **Ha'Shem's** redemptive plan. Hence, **God's** providential care is repeatedly

emphasized. It was **YHVH** who was responsible for the decree of **Cyrus** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ia – The Deliverance by Cyrus the Great**). **He** also secured the permission for construction to continue **(Ezra 5:5, 6:14** and **6:22)**, and for **Ezra** and **his** group of **exiles** to return to **Yerushalayim (Ezra 7:27)**. **He** even protected **them** on the way **(Ezra 8:22)**. It was **the LORD** who secured **Nehemiah's** appointment **(Nehemiah 2:8)** and guided all the details of the construction of **the wall (Nehemiah 4:14** and **20). ADONAI** frustrated the plans of **the Jewish** enemies and preserved **the Jewish** community (see **Cc – Samaritan Opposition to the Building of the Walls of Jerusalem**). Just as we find throughout the writings of the prophets, **the Chronicler** interpreted history in terms of **God's** actions.

In fact, the author emphasized that **YHVH** can even use foreign rulers to fulfill **His** purposes for the **Jewish** community. This can be seen in the edict of **Cyrus (Ezra 1:6)**, in **Artaxerxes'** letter to **Ezra (Ezra 7:11-27)**, and in the many details of **Nehemiah's** mission **(Nehemiah Chapters 1-6). The LORD's** sovereignty encompasses the entire world, all the nations, to ensure the continuation of **His** redemptive plan through **the Jewish people**.

This continuation of **the people of God** also meant the continuation of **the covenant of God**. The little **Jewish** community that returned from **the exile** was receiving the blessings of that **covenant** as described in the scroll of **Deuteronomy** (see **Bm – Ezra Read the Torah Scroll of Moses**). The prayers of **Ezra 9:6-15**; **Nehemiah 1:5-11**, and **Nehemiah 9:5-37** demonstrate **their** deep understanding of that **covenant**. **You are Adonai, the God who chose Abram . . . and You made the covenant with him . . . You have fulfilled Your words, for You are righteous (Nehemiah 9:7-8).** Both **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** recognized and confessed that **the people** broke the covenant, and for that reason suffered the Babylonian **exile**. However, they appealed to **Ha'Shem's** covenant mercy and promises for the reestablishment of the **covenant** community.

In fact, the new situation under foreign rule meant that **the Jewish people** became again more strictly a **covenant** community, and not a nation as **they** were in the monarchy. The identity of **the Israelites** in **exile** did not depend on **their** political institutions or identity as a nation but on **their** special **covenant** relationship with **ADONAI**.[9] In **God's** providence, this was a step in the preparation for the coming of **Yeshua**, the start of the Messianic Community (see the commentary on **Acts Al – The Ruach Ha'Kodesh Comes at Shavu'ot**) where **Ha'Shem will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more** (see the commentary on

Jeremiah Eo – The Days are Coming, declares the LORD, When I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Isra'el).