

## Handout: Nehemiah Lesson 5

Josephus' account concerning Ezra's death: *So it came to pass that after he had obtained this reputation among the people, he died an old man, and was buried in a magnificent manner at Jerusalem. About the same time, it happened also that Joachim [Joiakim], the high priest, died and his son Eliashib succeeded in the high priesthood.*

Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.5.6 [158]

“This miserable condition of the Jews and their capital must have been after the death of Esdras [Ezra], their former governor, and before Nehemiah came with his commission to build the walls of Jerusalem; nor is that at all disagreeable to these histories in Jerusalem...”

William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*

Jerusalem's High Priests during the times of Sheshbazzar/Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah:

1. Sheshbazzar/Zerubbabel = Jeshua/Joshua\* (Ezra 5:2; Hag 1:1; Zech 6:11)
2. Ezra = Joiakim son of Jeshua\* (Neh 12:10, 12, 26)
3. Nehemiah = Eliashib son of Joiakim (Neh 3:1, 20; 12:22, 23; 13:4, 7, 28)

\*Jeshua in Hebrew is the same name as the Aramaic form of Joshua (see Hag 2:2, 4), and Joiakim is the shortened form of Jehoiakim.

Problematic verses in Part II of the Book of Nehemiah believed to be scribal additions:

1. Nehemiah 8:9 ~ *Then His Excellency Nehemiah and the priest-scribe Ezra*  
The oldest copies of 1 Esdras and the Greek LXX omit “His Excellency Nehemiah.” The verb is also in the singular that suggests there should be only one subject noun.
2. Some translations for Nehemiah 9:6 include *And Ezra said* that is missing from the Greek and Hebrew text.
3. Nehemiah 12:26 ~ *These lived in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest-scribe.* Joiakim had died by the time Nehemiah made his mission to Jerusalem; therefore, the link between Nehemiah and Ezra is in error.
4. Nehemiah 12:36 ~ *The scribe Ezra walked at their head ...*  
These verses appear to be scribal additions dating from the period of Rabbinic Judaism. Either the additions are absent from the oldest Hebrew manuscripts, are missing from the Greek Septuagint, have singular verbs indicating a single subject when two subjects are present in the sentence, or contradict Josephus' historical account.

The historical record in Nehemiah referred to in 7:5 in the time of Ezra's mission concludes at the end of Chapter 8 and continues with Nehemiah's reforms after the wall and gates were completed without any mention of Ezra:

1. Josephus wrote that Ezra was dead by the time Nehemiah began his mission to Jerusalem in 445 BC.
2. Chapter 9 returns to the time of Nehemiah because it comes after the first of the month of Tishri in 8:2 which would have been the celebration of the Feast of Trumpets and ten days later the Feast of Atonement. The celebration of the Feast of Shelters from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> with a sacred assembly on the 22<sup>nd</sup> in Ezra's time is described in Chapter 8. Therefore, when Chapter 9 gives an account of a communal assembly of repentance and covenant renewal on Tishri the 24<sup>th</sup>;

it has to be a return to Nehemiah's time. It makes no sense for a ceremony of repentance and covenant renewal two days after celebrating covenant renewal in the Feast of Shelters.

Note: Headings at the top of passages are not in the sacred text but are additions of the editors and may reflect the wrong interpretation based on the scribal additions.

The historical review in 9:7-15:

1. Verse 9:7 recalls Abraham's call and God's promises to him (Gen 11:31-12:3).
2. Verse 8 recounts God's covenant with Abraham concerning the land of Canaan (Gen chapter 15).
3. Verses 9-12 list the events of the Egyptian liberation and the exodus out of Egypt including the ten plagues (Ex Chpt. 5-13), the parting of the Sea of Reeds and the destruction of Pharaoh's army (Ex Chpt. 14), and the visible presence of God in the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 3:7; 13:21; 14:10, 21-23; Dt 4:34).
4. Verses 13-14 recalls the Theophany at Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments and the other articles of the Law (Ex Chpts. 19-23).
5. Verse 15 mentions the miracle feeding of the manna and the miracle of the water from a rock (Ex 16:4; 17:6; Num 20:6-13).

9:16-21 contain a confession of the covenant people's sins during the Exodus journey and wilderness years. The prayer recounts a list of when they were persistent in resisting Yahweh's commands despite God's continuing acts of mercy:

1. Verse 17a recalls the Israelites' ingratitude for God saving them from Egyptian slavery and vengeance. It also refers to the accusation they made that God took them out of Egypt to destroy them and their request to return to slavery where they had plenty to eat (Ex 16:1-3).
2. Verses 17b-20 praise God for His mercy, forgiveness, and faithful covenant love [hesed] despite their sins; even when they made the image of the golden calf and worshipped it (Ex 32:4-1-60).

In 9:18b-23, the prayer lists the ways God continued to care for the Israelites despite their sins:

1. He led them on their journey with a physical manifestation of His presence in the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 13:21-22; 33:9-10; Num 12:5; 14:14; Dt 31:15).
2. He blessed Moses and the elders with His spirit to instruct them (Ex 33:9-11; Num 11:17).
3. Yahweh fed them with bread from Heaven that they called "manna" (Ex 16:4-36; Josh 5:12) and gave them water from a rock to quench their thirst (Ex 17:1-7; Num 20:1-13).
4. God saw to their physical and material needs for the forty years in the wilderness: their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen (Dt 2:7; 8:4).
5. He gave the Israelites in the land of Canaan on the west side of the River Jordan and the territory of the Ammonites on the east side of the river (Num 21:32-35; Dt 2:24-3:11).
6. God kept the promises from His covenant with Abraham for land and many descendants (Gen 12:1-3; 15:4-6, 18-21; 22:17).
7. 9:24-25 summarize Israel's successful conquest of Canaan in the Book of Joshua.

Reminding God of His great compassion paves the way for what follows in 9:32-37:

1. Their current misery dates from the times of the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests (verse 32).

2. A confession that their sufferings are the result of the people's sins, and God is not at fault (verses 33-35).
3. Their current misery comes from the fact that they are not a free people but "slaves" to a foreign ruler in the land Yahweh gave them. It is a lament as well as a reminder and a plea for God to intervene for them as He has in the past (verse 36-37).

Chapter 10: Those who signed the oath document that was then marked with Governor Nehemiah's seal included:

1. Nehemiah the Governor and Zedekiah (probably his secretary)
2. The names of twenty-one priests
3. The names of seventeen Levites
4. The names of forty-four leaders of the people

The laws listed in the oath concerning conduct in Chapter 10 include:

1. 10:31 ~ refusing to approve or engage in unlawful marriages to foreigners who have not converted to the covenant with Yahweh (cf., Ex 34:11b-16; Dt 7:1-4).
2. 10:32a ~ to observe the Law commanding the Sabbath rest by not purchasing any foodstuffs from foreigners selling their produce on the Sabbath or on holy festival days (Ex 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:1-3; Lev 19:3; 23:3; Num 15:32-36; Dt 5:12-15).
3. 10:32b ~ They will observe the Sabbath year obligations to let the land rest by not planting any crops or fruit or harvesting what grows naturally and will forgive all debts (Ex 23:10-11; Lev 25:2-7, 18-22-55).

10:32b-40c include pledges to observe obligations associated with the Temple:

1. 10:33 ~ to pay the Temple tax (Ex 30:11-16)
2. 10:34 ~ to provide for the loaves of permanent offering in the Holy Place (Lev 24:5-9), the regular grain and wine offerings associated with the twice-daily liturgical worship service of the Tamid perpetual burnt offering (Ex 29:38-42; Num 28:1-8), sacrifices for the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10), New Moons (Num 28:11-15), annual and periodic festivals (Num 28:16-29:39), consecrated gifts for the feasts and communion sacrifices (Lev Chap. 1-7), and the communal sin offerings for the expiation of Israel's sins (Lev 4:1-21; 16:1-34; Num 29:7-11)
3. 10:36 ~ to provide the Temple with all the first fruits of produce harvested from the soil and orchards (Num 18:12-13)
4. 10:37 ~ to deliver to the Temple all the firstborn from the herds and flocks and to dedicate and redeem all firstborn sons according to the law (Ex 22:29-30)
5. 10:38a ~ to bring the best of the dough, fruit, new wine and oil to the priests (Num 18:12) and the tithe of the harvest to the Levites for storage in the Temple.
6. 10:39-40ab ~ A chief priest accompanied by a delegation of Levitical lesser ministers will collect the tithe to support the Temple ministers with the chief priests receiving a tenth of everything collected (Num 18:26-28).
7. 10:35 ~ they agree to be responsible for providing the allotments of wood for the altar of sacrifice fire (Lev 6:8-13).

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