

Ezra – Nehemiah

Harvest Community Church
Fall 2022



This is an exciting time for Harvest as we renew our commitment to be disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus. This Fall we'll turn to the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which tell a single story of God's people pursuing spiritual renewal. As these books relate the successes and failures of ancient Israel's renewal efforts, they reveal numerous lessons that will guide and benefit us as our church pursues Jesus' Great Commission.

What is Ezra-Nehemiah About?

These books cover the last part of Israel's history that the Bible records before the time of Jesus, known as the "post-exilic" period. It comes after a very dark time for God's people: Israel's golden age under kings David and Solomon was a distant memory, and foreign invaders had overthrown their government, demolished their temple, destroyed the city at the heart of their worship (Jerusalem), and deported most of the survivors out of the Promised Land. That's where Ezra-Nehemiah picks up the story.

Originally one unified book, Ezra-Nehemiah recounts the return of the Israelites from exile to rebuild the temple, restore their worship, and repair their city. This return came in three separate waves led by three different men, with each wave building on the work of the one before it. Our series will follow the same structure that's in the text:

Wave	Leader	Passage	Week	Focus
1	Zerubbabel	Ezra 1-6	Sermons 1 & 2	Rebuild the temple
2	Ezra	Ezra 7-10	Sermon 3	Restore God's law & right worship
3	Nehemiah	Nehemiah 1-13	Sermons 4-6	Repair the city wall & consolidate gains

Did they succeed?

Interestingly, the Bible describes the results of this renewal effort as a mixed bag.

- On the one hand, faithful men who were zealous for God prayed for his help, received it, and restored some of what had been lost. There is a lot of hope as we see God working, and his people doing what we (and they) thought would never be done again.
- On the other hand, all these achievements ring somewhat hollow. The temple is rebuilt... but God's glory never descends on it as before. Israel renews the covenant... but falls away from it just as quickly as before. The leaders establish a degree of obedience... but it fades as soon as they turn their backs.

The book ends ambiguously, with Nehemiah desperately trying to sustain momentum while the reader doubts that it can last. The restoration progresses with God's help, yet something still seems to be missing: the hearts of the people haven't changed. Taken as a whole, the message of the book is that **for God's people to rightly worship and follow him, they need a righteous, God-dependent Savior who can change their hearts.**

A Lesson in Spiritual Renewal

This book is helpful for our church right now. It teaches us that **if Harvest is to become an effective disciple-making church, we need Jesus to change our hearts.** May this study lead us to submit fully to Jesus' life-changing work, so that we can help all people find and grown in him!