

**POSTEXILIC INFLUENCES
OF
EZRA AND NEHEMIAH**

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe the postexilic influences of Ezra and Nehemiah by: a) describing the purpose and messages of their books, b) providing a background, including authorship, date of writing, overall structure and organization of the two books, c) reviewing their biblical accounts, d) examining the international and political and spiritual conditions at the time of the restoration, e) describing extrabiblical evidence regarding this period, f) suggesting several theological themes running throughout these books, and g) providing application to contemporary Christian living.

The Biblical Record of Ezra and Nehemiah

Purpose and message. The purpose of Ezra and Nehemiah appears to be the highlighting of Yahweh's faithfulness to his Covenant, his providential care for Israel, and the disclosure of how he works among human kings and governments. The dominant theological idea in both books is covenant renewal in the postexilic community of Israel.

Authorship and date. Like many ancient writings, Ezra and Nehemiah give no clear indication of authorship. The Jewish Talmud attributes the authorship of these books, and 1-2 Chronicles to Ezra, but adds that Nehemiah completed to work. Most modern scholars agree that an author-compiler, traditionally identified as 'the Chronicler,' wrote everything except the Nehemiah memoirs.¹ In the early Hebrew Old Testament, Ezra and Nehemiah form a single book. Most biblical scholars today, regardless of theological persuasion, agree that the combined books of Ezra and Nehemiah were compiled by a postexilic chronicler. It is assumed that the compiler of the books of Chronicles also edited the book of Ezra-Nehemiah because 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 constitutes a colophon, or closing inscription, presupposing the introductory

¹ William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1996) 558.

verses of Ezra 1:1-2.² Jewish tradition identified Ezra as the chronicler of the postexilic history narrated in 1-2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. Most interpreters today however, believe the redactor is unknown.

The majority of evidence seems to indicate that a single author/compiler completed Ezra and Nehemiah around the early fourth century since neither book mentions any person or event later than 400 B.C. This is in opposition to a few scholars who assert that they were written somewhere around 300 B.C. claiming the books' intentions were to discredit the Samaritan temple at that time.

Overall structure and organization. Generally speaking, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah cover the postexilic history from about 538 B.C. to sometime after 433 B.C., a period of about 100 years. The accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah overlap with each other as seen in the interleaving of the literary units by the compiler:³

Sheshbazzar/Zerubbabel Narrative (Ezra 1--6)

Ezra's Memoirs: Part 1 (Ezra 7--10)

Nehemiah's Memoirs: Part 1 (Neh. 1:11—7:73a)

Ezra's Memoirs: Part 2 (Neh. 7:73b—10:39)

Nehemiah's Memoirs: Part 2 (Nehemiah 11--13)

The nature of coordination between Ezra and Nehemiah is difficult to assess since neither mentions the other in their memoirs, except where Ezra the priest and scribe is listed among those who instructed the people as they listened to the reading of the Law of Moses upon returning to their homeland.

The order of Ezra/Nehemiah. Scholars are unsure of the order of the arrivals of Ezra and Nehemiah to Jerusalem. The biblical account is that Ezra preceded Nehemiah, arriving in 458 B.C. during Artaxerxes' seventh year (Ezra 7:7). Nehemiah arrived thirteen years after in 445 B.C. during Artaxerxes' twentieth year (Neh. 2:1). He remained in Jerusalem as governor for

² Andrew Hill and John H. Walton, A Survey of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing, 2000) 268.

³ Hill 275.

twelve years, then returned to Persia in 433 B.C. during Artaxerxes' thirty-second year (Neh. 13:6). A short time later he came back to Judah for a second term of unknown length (Neh. 13:7). In spite of these clear biblical markers some scholars still believe that Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem before Ezra. They base their argument on the supposition that the Artaxerxes of Ezra was actually Artaxerxes II who reigned from 404-358 B.C. placing Ezra's return around 398 B.C. They also believe the compiler gave a distorted interleaving of literary units since the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah never mention each other with the exception of a few places in the accounts (Neh. 8:9; 12:26, 31-36).⁴ Even though there may be arguments against the order of Ezra and Nehemiah, the biblical sequence of events remains the most plausible.

Name and Canonical Location. The names of the books follow the names of the respective principle characters. In English Bibles, Ezra and Nehemiah are placed with the "historical books after 1-2 Chronicles, but in the Hebrew Bible they are part of the "Writings," along with Chronicles, and are located as the last three books in the canon. Even though their accounts follow those of Chronicles, the Masoretic Text places the books of Ezra-Nehemiah ahead of Chronicles. Their division in the Hebrew Bible into two books did not take place until the fifteenth century A.D., apparently in Christian circles.⁵

Background

After the Jews had been in exile for seventy years, God moved the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to let his people return to Jerusalem. This was done to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1-4). Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, became king after defeating the rebellious Median army around 559 B.C. in Ecbatana; a city was located within the tiny Elamite state of Anshan. In a very short time he expanded his Persian borders westward and northward to the frontier of Afghanistan. He then moved eastward toward the Tigris-Euphrates Valley in the direction of the Babylon. Without any fighting he defeated the Babylonian army in 538 B.C. most likely being viewed as a liberator rather than a conqueror by those who became disenchanted with the leadership of Nabonidus and Belshazzar.⁶ The decree of Cyrus stipulated

⁴ LaSor 561.

⁵ LaSor 551.

⁶ Charles F. Pfeiffer, Baker's Bible Atlas (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Baker Book House, 1961) 172.

that anyone who wished to return to his or her homeland could do so freely. It also gave permission to the Jews to rebuild their temple. Cyrus himself graciously contributed resources from his royal treasury to help finance the reconstruction. Temple vessels, previously seized by Nebuchadnezzar, were returned to the Jews so that they might again use them in their temple worship.

Several parallels can be seen between Israel's postexilic restoration and their exodus from Egypt. Both events enabled the Jews to go to their God-given land and both events were met with strong opposition. Similarly, both events brought God's people out of another culture, with its pagan religions, and formed them into a pure race united under a common Law.

The postexilic return of the Jews to their homeland took place in three separate waves over a period just under 100 years. Under the decrees of Persian kings, the exiles were permitted to make their way back to their homeland. Cyrus authorized the first wave; Artaxerxes Longimanus authorized the second and third waves.

The First Wave (Ezra 1—6)

The first wave was led by Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar, and Jeshua in 538 B.C., and consisted of 49,897 Jews (Ezra 1:64-65; Neh. 7:4-69). When they came to Jerusalem it was the seventh month of the year and they arrived in time to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was a way of remembering their Exodus from Egypt and in some ways the feast can be considered as looking forward to a regathering of Israel from a worldwide dispersion to celebrate the earthly reign of the Messiah. The genealogical list in Ezra 2 carefully documents those who were priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple workers, all needed to recapture the worship practices and culture of Israel's past.

Sheshbazzar is only mentioned in the book of Ezra (1:8, 11; 5:14, 16) and is called "the prince of Judah" (1:8), not necessarily making him a descendent of the royal family of David, but certainly pointing to the fact that he was a recognized leader.⁷ It is thought that Sheshbazzar is

⁷ Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, Tremper Longman III, A Biblical History of Israel (Louisville, Kentucky; Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 288.

the same as Shenazar, the fourth son of king Jehoiachin (1 Chron. 3).⁸ Little is known of Jeshua, the high priest listed in Ezra 2:2, Nehemiah 7:7, Haggai 1:1, and Zechariah 3:1ff.

Zerubbabel however, is mentioned more extensively in Ezra-Nehemiah as another leader of the exiles. Haggai lists him as the governor of Judah (Haggai 1:1), who was also a descendant of David and thus part of the kingly line.⁹ His story is described in Ezra 2:2—5:2, and also in 1 Chronicles 3:19; Nehemiah 7:7; 12:1, 47; Haggai 1:1, 12, 14; 2:4, 21, 23; Zechariah 4:6-10; Mathew 1:12, and Luke 3:27. He was one of the leaders who rejected the insincere offer of the surrounding peoples to help rebuild the temple. Later, perhaps discouraged by the subsequent halting of the temple reconstruction by Israel's enemies, he probably became discouraged like so many others but was encouraged by God through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1-2).

Their first act of the returning remnant was to build an altar to God and sacrifice burnt offerings on it in accordance with the Mosaic Law (Ezra 3:1-2). So eager were these returnees to worship Yahweh that they began to worship Yahweh immediately not waiting for the temple to be rebuilt.

Their second act was to rebuild the temple foundation but the reconstructed second temple foundation turned out to be was nothing like the first temple. When the older priest and Levites saw it they wept in bitter disappointment (Ezra 3:12) while the younger people shouted with great joy. The shouts of praise by the younger generation became mixed with the loud weeping of the older men so that no one could distinguish between them (Ezra 3:13). It was a bittersweet moment in Israel's history.

Two years after (536 B.C.) returning to Jerusalem they began the reconstruction of the temple but after six years it was halted due to opposition from the enemies of Judah and Benjamin (Ezra 4:1-24). At first the opposition was disguised in the form of a friendly gesture to assist the Jews with their temple reconstruction, but later it grew into outright opposition through the tactics of hired "counselors" whose objective it was to discourage the people of Judah (Ezra

⁸ Werner Keller, The Bible As History (New York, NY; William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980) 301.

⁹ Ray Stedman, "The Way Back: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther," [http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/highlights/ch12.html].

4:4-5). When that didn't succeed, Israel's enemies cleverly used political methods by lodging an accusation before Xerxes that Israel was building a "rebellious and wicked city (Ezra 4:6-12). Here we see the opposition of God's enemies, as is seen all through the Old and New Covenants. Xerxes immediately gave a "stop work" order and for the next ten years no work was done on the temple. However, in 520 B.C., the reigning king of Persia, Darius I, was approached by the Jewish leaders requesting that he search the royal archives for Cyrus' decree which previously given the Jews permission to rebuild their temple. Being moved by God, Darius located the previous decree of Cyrus in one of the archives in Ectbatana (Ezra 6:2) and immediately authorized the resumption of the temple reconstruction. The movement to appeal to Darius was inspired by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1).

There is little information about what happened between the first wave of returnees which was led by Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, and the second wave which was led by Ezra. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah give us insights into the first period when the people returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple, and the second period when Ezra returned and restored the people to the Mosaic Law, but not much is known of the 58-year period between these two periods. It was probably during this gap period that the story of Esther took place.

The Second Wave (Ezra 7--10)

Darius was eventually succeeded by Artaxerxes Longimanus who issued a decree permitting Ezra and any other Israelites to go to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1-26). His decree allowed any Jew who wanted to go to Jerusalem to travel with Ezra, who probably acted as an advisor to Artaxerxes on Jewish religious affairs. The Persian king provided him with financial support from his royal treasury and permitted the relocated Jews to have their own civil magistrates. Ezra was descendent of Aaron giving him his priestly role. Scholars are unclear about the exact date of Ezra's return but the traditional view is that it took place in 458 B.C. The only clue given for Artaxerxes' reason for permitting the return is found in Ezra 7:14, "to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God." God himself put it in the king's heart to make this decision (Ezra 7:27).

Ezra was a member of a new group of religious scholars—the scribes—who had come into being during the exile.¹⁰ Ezra was a precursor of the age of anonymous scribes, the period known in Jewish history as the era of the *Knesset Gedolah* (the Great Assembly).¹¹ Scribes, who had mastered the art of Hebrew writing, were in high demand to prepare written copies of the Law. Ezra was one of these scribes and “was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). It was during this period that many of the exiles developed a renewed zeal for their Jewish roots, and met in small groups, possibly early “synagogue” meetings in order to study the Mosaic Law. As the leader of the second wave, traveling to Jerusalem over a four-month period, he provided a much needed spiritual renewal. Traveling with him were 1,500 men, 38 Levites, and 220 helpers for a total of about 1,758 (Ezra 8:1-14). Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Ezra was shocked to discover that the Jews had intermarried with neighboring Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites (Ezra 9:1-2). Metaphorically, the intermarriages represented the battle between the flesh (marrying foreign wives) and the spirit (obedience to God). When Ezra heard that the people had disobeyed God by intermarrying these foreigners it was unbelievable to him and he tore his garments, pulled the hair from his head and beard, and sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.¹² He fell to his knees with his hands spread out to the Lord and confessed to God the sins of Israel even though he, himself, was blameless (Ezra 9:3-15). What followed was one of the saddest events in Israel’s history as wives and children of Jewish men were expelled from Israel. This event makes a sharp contrast to Israel’s earlier outcry of joyous celebration that took place when the temple foundation was completed. Although numerous mixed marriages were dissolved and the reform of Ezra seemed successful, it is believed by some scholars that serious opposition came from some in the higher circles of the priesthood.¹³

¹⁰ G. Ernest Wright, Great People of the Bible and How They Lived (Pleasantville, New York; Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., 1974) 280.

¹¹ Adin Steinsaltz, The Essential Talmud, (Basic Books, A Subsidiary of Perseus Books, L. L. C., 1976) 14.

¹² Stedman 3.

¹³ Charles F. Pfeiffer, An Outline of Old Testament History (Chicago, Illinois; Moody Press, 1960) 135.

The Third Wave (Nehemiah 1-13)

About thirteen years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem, Artaxerxes Longimanus granted a request from his cupbearer, Nehemiah, to go to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. Nehemiah had risen to a position of influence in Persia becoming a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in Susa (Shushan), the king's winter capital. He was not only a trusted cupbearer to Artaxerxes but also a trusted companion. After all, the king's life depended on Nehemiah. Since most men who held this position were eunuchs it is likely that Nehemiah was one also. With close proximity to the king he often received updates on the situation in Jerusalem, and grew increasingly concerned about what was taking place. In December 445 B.C. a kinsman named Hanani returned from Jerusalem with sad news of what he had seen there (Neh. 1:1-2). He explained to Nehemiah how their fellow Jews were in great trouble and shame, and that the wall in Jerusalem was broken down. Upon hearing the sad news about the predicament in Jerusalem he wept, mourned, and fasted for days prior to his humble prayer to God, asking for his help in this matter (Neh. 1:1-11). Like Ezra, Nehemiah also took on the responsibility for Israel's sins, and prayed to God for renewal, and for the spiritual return of Israel to Yahweh (Neh. 1:5-11). His sadness was obvious to the king who at first thought he was ill. Nehemiah then relayed the bad news of Jerusalem to the king and how he desperately wanted to go to the city and rebuild its walls.

The Persian king freely granted Nehemiah's request and gave him letters of authorization to obtain timbers for the construction of the city gates in Jerusalem. He also sent army officers and cavalry with Nehemiah for protection (Neh. 2:6-9). The number of Jews returning with Nehemiah is not stated but probably consisted of only a few exiles.

Upon arrival in Jerusalem, not wishing to provoke opposition, Nehemiah did not immediately begin the work of rebuilding the walls but quietly surveyed the situation at night for three days (Neh. 2:11-12). Like Zerubbabel, Nehemiah faced strong opposition to God's work (Neh. 2:19). Chief among those who opposed the rebuilding of the walls were Sanballat, governor of Samaria, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab (Neh. 2:19; 4:1-8). Nehemiah, who was a very skilled planner and organizer, had half of the men work on the reconstruction of the wall, and the other half standing ready with spears, bows and armor should the city be attacked (Neh. 4:16-18). He also had the people rebuild the portion of the wall that was

closest to their house, thus ensuring a high level of commitment.¹⁴ In spite of outright opposition, the wall was rebuilt in just 52 days because of God's help (Neh. 6:15-16). It was not only the wall of Jerusalem that had been broken down but the people were also broken spiritually. After settling in their towns, the exiles gathered together "as one man in the square before the Water Gate" and told Ezra to publicly read the Book of the Law of Moses (Neh. 8:1). It was here in this open area that markets were held, tribunals were conducted, prophets, and teachers proclaimed their messages, and the riffraff of the town gathered.¹⁵ Standing high on a wooden platform, Ezra read the scriptures from daybreak until noon as the people listened attentively. The impact of hearing God's law read to them was incredible and they all mourned and wept. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the priests explained that this was a day for rejoicing not weeping, that their strength as a renewed nation is to be in the joy of the Lord (Neh. 8:9-10). What followed was a great festive celebration because the people now understood the scriptures.

The International Scene and Events During the Lives of Ezra and Nehemiah

The dominant force at the beginning of the exile was the Babylonian empire under the kingships of Nabopolassar (626-605 B.C.) and then his son Nebuchadnezzar (605-552 B.C.). It was Nebuchadnezzar who captured Jerusalem and led most of its elite citizens into captivity. The tactic at that time, when defeating an enemy, was to deport the captives from their homeland, and disperse them throughout the kingdom along with their respective gods. After its peak with Nebuchadnezzar as king, the Babylonian empire slowly declined as the Medo-Persian Empire became ever increasingly stronger under the leadership of Cyrus, son of the Persian king (Cambyses I) who had married a daughter of the Median king Astyages. Such a marriage between reigning families was not uncommon in that period and was more of a political gesture than anything else. Cyrus' Persian empire gradually grew as it united with the Medes to form an army far superior to Babylon's forces. Ancient tradition holds that some alienated Babylonians helped Cyrus defeat the Babylonians by providing much needed information about the city of Babylon so that he did not have to shed blood as his army entered it. The event is

¹⁴ Anderson, The Restoration Period, Ezra---Nehemiah (Unpublished lecture notes, June 2004).

¹⁵ G. Christian Weiss, Insights Into Bible Times and Customs (Lincoln, Nebraska; Back to the Bible Publications, 1972) 63.

recorded in Daniel 5:30 where Darius the Mede, probably an officer in the army of Cyrus, took over the Babylonian kingdom in one brief moment.¹⁶ Cyrus had a different tactic than Nebuchadnezzar regarding the dispersement of captives and their gods. Even though he maintained a tight grip on his empire through the strength of his army, he believed that the return of exiles and their gods to their homelands would make the gods happy again and that they would help to strengthen his empire. This was probably paramount in his mind when considering the return of the Jews to their homeland.¹⁷ He also adopted a general policy of letting his captives maintain their own religious beliefs, and to some degree, govern themselves under vassal leaders.

Another political aspect of Cyrus' decree was the hidden assumption that a kind of protective buffer zone would be established for his protection against the Egyptians and Greeks by having Judah occupied with a friendly and reasonably strong ally. Scholars suggest that this kind of symbiotic relationship continued between the Persians and the Jews until the early reign of Artaxerxes.

Extra-Biblical Evidence Regarding The Exilic And Postexilic Periods

It is interesting to note that the Bible does not give us much information about the exile itself, however, archeological evidence shows a "widespread destruction of major towns in Judah to the south of Jerusalem. Gravesites found in the Hinnom valley indicate that some people remained in the area of Jerusalem during the exile. Apparently, the Babylonians deported only a select few of Judah's leaders and urban elite at the beginning of the exile, leaving behind the "poorest of the land to work the vineyards and fields" (2 Kings 25:12; Jer. 39:10; 52:16). Archeological evidence reveals that even though Nebuchadnezzar did serious damage to Judah, the basic structure of society remained substantially intact.¹⁸ There is also evidence that many foreign people, like the Edomites, moved into the areas vacated by those who were carried off to Babylon.

¹⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House, 1963) 199.

¹⁷ Anderson, lecture notes on Ezra-Nehemiah, May 2004.

¹⁸ Provan 279.

Archaeologists have been unable to discover significant extrabiblical records of Ezra and Nehemiah, but in 1879 a barrel-shaped cuneiform document, now known as Cyrus' cylinder, was discovered revealing the content of Cyrus' decree. The cylinder is now displayed in the British



Museum for anyone to view. Even though it contained no mention of Yahweh or Judah it confirmed what appears to be a broad policy of allowing certain people, who had been subjugated by the Babylonians, to return to their homelands.¹⁹ In addition to the Cyrus cylinder (536 B.C.), there are other extrabiblical sources for the exile period including the Behistun inscription, the inscription of Udjahorresnet, as well as Aramaic Elephantine papyrus, according to Provan. Apocrypha such as *I Esdras* through the *Rest of Esther* also provide extrabiblical insights into the exilic and postexilic periods.²⁰

The Spiritual and Political Relevance of Ezra and Nehemiah to Post-Exilic Israel

Several theological themes are carefully threaded throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. First, we discover that the author/redactor placed a special emphasis on God's willingness to embrace those who return to him after a period of disobedience to his laws. It was out of such disobedience to God, especially the ignoring of God's command to let the land fallow every seventh year (Lev. 25:1-7), that the exile took place. The Israelites ignored this Sabbath year for 490 years meaning that they owed God seventy years at the time of the Babylonian conquest. It is interesting to note that the exile lasted for seventy years.

A second theme found in these two books is found in postexilic Israel's twin bases of the Torah and the temple. In the opening portions of Ezra we see a special literary emphasis on the temple with an account of Cyrus' decree that the Jewish temple be rebuilt (Ezra 1:3-4). When completed, the temple represented the renewed presence of Yahweh among his people. The

¹⁹ A translation of the Cyrus cylinder can be found at [<http://www.kchanson.com/ANCDOCS/meso/cyrus.html>].

²⁰ J. Barton Payne, An Outline of Hebrew History (Bob Jones University, Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 54-11075, 1954) 167.

reading of the Law of Moses is also highlighted by the author/compiler, and the immediate convicting impact it had on the restored Jews gives this theme a special clarity.

A third theme is found in how God works mightily through the actions of human kings and Jewish leaders. Even though Cyrus may have had political and spiritual reasons for allowing the restoration, he was nevertheless under divine influence, “the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia” (Ezra 1:1). God worked in the heart of Artaxerxes also so that he would grant permission to Ezra and Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem.

A fourth theme, proposed by Walvoord, goes beyond the immediate context of Ezra-Nehemiah and points to the postexilic events as an indication that the God of the restoration will also someday directly intervene in restoring Israel’s freedom (Ezra 3:11; Neh. 2:20; 6:15-16).²¹

Applications to a Contemporary Audience From the Lives of Ezra and Nehemiah

Even though the story in Ezra-Nehemiah seems buried deep in Israel’s history it still has direct application to lives today. In it we see that the first action on the part of a believer who has returned from wandering in sin is to erect an “altar.” Instead of a stone altar, people today might erect an altar by overtly repenting of their “exilic” sins and giving control of their lives to God. Worship, the joyous expression of being fully restored into fellowship with God, is to follow just as it did when Israel confessed their sin and renewed their covenant agreement with God with a joyous celebration. Said another way, the celebration of worship is most appropriate following repentance. In Ezra and Nehemiah we see again how God always welcomes a contrite heart.

The story of Ezra-Nehemiah also reveals how God works in the hearts of world leaders and this should give us reason to pray confidently that God would continue to influence kings and leaders today. God is not only transcendent but he is also immanent with his creation.

Nehemiah’s prayers also serve as an example to a contemporary audience in that he a) included God in his plans, b) he put the expected results in God’s hands, c) he expressed anger to God but without taking matters into his own hands, d) he showed trust in God even while taking

²¹ F. Walvoord, The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook (Wheaton, Illinois; Victor Books, 1990) 70.

necessary precautions, and e) he took away compulsion to get revenge and entrusted justice to God.

Finally, the overall message of Ezra-Nehemiah gives us a clear message that God is always faithful in preserving and protecting his promises, even through periods spiritual exile, and he always welcomes the contrite back into a deep abiding relationship with him.

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