

- Recap of last week: Cyrus King of Persia releases the Israelites from captivity and rebuilds Jerusalem as the prophet Isaiah had predicted. (Ezra 1) There are very detailed records of all the Israelites who returned from exile; they had clearly prospered in Babylon just as Jeremiah had predicted. (Ezra 2) Those who returned from exile began sacrifice to God and then started rebuilding the temple. They sang, some shouted, and some wept. There were so many people making so much noise that you could not tell who was making what noise. (Ezra 3) Other nations first try to tell Israel that they want to help, when they are refused, they hire lawyers to slow down the work, then appeal to Artaxerxes to stop the construction and it works. (Ezra 4) Finally, the new king Darius discovers that Cyrus had originally commanded all this, and he lets them continue. They finish, consecrate the temple, and celebrate the Passover. (Ezra 5 and 6)
- Ezra was still living in Babylon under King Artaxerxes. Not all the Israelites went back to their land right away, many had to stay behind in Babylon even after the Persians had taken over. So, while Ezra 2 lists the people who went back right away, there were still a lot left and they were going when they could. Ezra is one of those people who goes back to Jerusalem to study and teach. (Ezra 7:1-10).
- Ezra is going to correct a problem that Israel had with lack of knowledge. God had told them through Hosea that this was the case. (Hosea 4:6)
- It is the same today except that we have better study tools, most importantly scripture. The only way to get deeper knowledge of God today is through study. (2 Timothy 2:15)
- Artaxerxes sends Ezra to Jerusalem with riches for use in the temple and a letter (decree) that he is in charge and all men who live in Israel must worship his God. (Ezra 7:11-27)
- There is a very specific list of the people who went with Ezra including their lineage. It was about 1300 men. (Ezra 8:1-14)
- Ezra found that there wasn't anyone there of the priestly tribe of Levi so he sends for some. (Ezra 8:15-29)
- Ezra proclaims a fast so that they can pray for protection from their enemies (Ezra 8:21-23)
- Fasting remains a way to devote one's self to prayer. It is often practiced throughout the NT, and although it is never commanded, it should be assumed. We read about Anna practicing it (Luke 2:37), Jesus practicing it (Matthew 4:1-11). In fact, Jesus assumed people would fast and pray, but he also cautioned against doing it to be seen by others. (Matthew 6:16-18) Saul fasted for three days after he encountered Christ on the road to Damascus in his conversion experience (Acts 9:8-11). In fact, we read of fasting occurring on many important events such as the installation of elders (Acts:14:23). The common thread in all these is prayer, which is what Ezra was doing.

- Ezra instructs some of the priests to guard the riches of the temple. (Ezra 8:24-30)
- The people with Ezra arrive in Jerusalem and immediately make sacrifices to God. (Ezra 8:31-35)
- Ezra is grieved that the Israelites continue to intermarry with people in the lands around them and asks God for counsel on this issue. (Ezra 9)
- The people see that this issue grieves Ezra and repent and divorce their foreign wives and abandon their families they had with them. (Ezra 10)
- Late in the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, there was an Israeli named Nehemiah that was the cupbearer for the King. He hears about Jerusalem and the wall which was in disrepair and he is moved by this news. (Nehemiah 1).
- Artaxerxes lets Nehemiah go on leave for rebuilding after they agree on how long he will be gone. (Nehemiah 2:1-9)
- Nehemiah doesn't tell anyone why he is in Jerusalem, but he rides around for three days inspecting the wall and other elements of the city. (Nehemiah 2:11-16)
- Nehemiah declares that the wall must be rebuilt despite the objection of some. (Nehemiah 2:17-29)
- Nehemiah organizes the work. There is a very specific list of which person was assigned to which task. A lot of people were involved. Work is easier when lots of people are working together. (Nehemiah 3)

Questions:

1. What two things did Ezra go to Jerusalem to do?
2. In doing this, what problem was Ezra trying to correct?
3. How do we study today?
4. Who sends a letter with Ezra and what does it say?
5. About how many men accompanied Ezra to Jerusalem?
6. What problem did Ezra run into with temple worship and how did he solve it?
7. How does Ezra solve the problem of being faced with enemies?
8. What is the purpose of fasting?
9. Who does Ezra get to guard some of the temple riches?
10. What do the people with Ezra do first when they get to Jerusalem?
11. What issue continues to grieve Ezra to the point that he even petitions God about it?
12. What is the people's response to this issue?
13. Who was Nehemiah and what troubling news does he get?

14. What did Artaxerxes do about Nehemiah?
15. How long does Nehemiah's inspection take?
16. After his inspection, what does Nehemiah declare?
17. Does Nehemiah do all the work himself personally?