

**The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe**  
**Week # 11– Adult Bible Study – 2025 & 2026**

**Discovering the Bible**

**NOTES – The Return**

**Nov. 18 & 19**

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*Ezra 3:8-13; 4:24-5:5; 6:14-15, The Temple Is Rebuilt*

*Ezra 6:16-22, The Passover Is Celebrated*

*Ezra 7:1-28, Ezra Arrives in Jerusalem*

*Nehemiah 1:1-2:20, Nehemiah Goes to Jerusalem*

*Nehemiah 8:1-12, Ezra Reads the Law*

*Nehemiah 13:15-31, Nehemiah's Reforms*

*Isaiah 60:1-7, God's Glorious Future*

*Isaiah 61:1-4, Good News Is Announced*

*Isaiah 65:17-25, The New Creation*

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1. For decades, the people of Israel had lived in captivity, far from their cherished homeland and the Temple, which was the center of their spiritual lives.
2. Cyrus, the King of Persia, conquered Babylon and became King of Babylon, it was his policy to return people captured by conquering armies, to their homeland. This allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem.
3. The Exile had an immense impact on forming and transforming the faith of Israel: centrality of the torah, emergence of the synagogue, rebuilding the temple, canonization of scripture, monotheism and covenantal identity and a strong drive to maintain a distinct Jewish identity.
4. Without a monarch, the roles of the high priest and scribes (scholars of the Law) became increasingly prominent in leading the community, particularly in religious and social matters.
5. The post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) provided guidance and encouragement to the returning exiles, urging them to rebuild the Temple, address spiritual apathy, and remain faithful to the covenant.
6. But temple life for those returning was shifting from the strong sense of social justice as a part of true worship to an emphasis on correct worship and the maintenance of racial purity.

7. Most contemporary scholars believe that the books of Jonah and Ruth were written to counter against the racial exclusivity being promoted after the Babylonian exile.
8. Without a monarchy this theocracy made the priests responsible for the government of not only ecclesiastical but civil affairs as well.
9. It was these priests who were responsible for the ever-increasing prominence that the Law came to have in Jewish life.
10. Every detail of the daily round was regulated by clear-cut injunctions based on obedience to God. The book of Leviticus that comes from this period gives a clear idea of how the Hebrew mind was then shaping.
11. The consolidation of civil and ecclesiastical power in the hands of the high priests after the Babylonian exile will ultimately proved disastrous.
12. Over time, many priests and high priests succumbed to the temptations of wealth and power associated with their combined roles.
13. The Hasmonean rulers, who were priests but also took the title of king, engaged in the same types of self-aggrandizement and bloodshed as previous secular regimes, which bitterly disappointed many Jews.
14. The combination of the "crown of priesthood" and the "crown of royalty" was seen by some as a violation of the Torah where rulers should come from the tribe of Judah (descendants of David) and priests from the tribe of Levi.
15. The internal strife and power struggles led to competing priestly and political factions to seek support from foreign powers, most notably Rome.
16. **EZRA** was a prominent Jewish priest and scribe who lived in the 5th century BCE. He is a central figure in the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, where he is depicted as instrumental in the spiritual restoration and reform of the Jewish community after their return from the Babylonian exile
17. Ezra 7:1-28 describes the mission of Ezra which was the spiritual and legal reform of the Jewish community based on the Mosaic Law,
18. **NEHEMIAH** was a Jewish leader and a high-ranking official in the Persian court who is known for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile.

19. Nehemiah 13:15-31 recounts Nehemiah's forceful actions to correct two major spiritual and social compromises that developed among the people of Judah during his absence: the desecration of the sabbath and intermarriage with foreign women.
20. **ISAIAH** was an 8th-century BC prophet in the ancient kingdom of Judah, known for prophesying about the coming of the Messiah and the importance of justice. He served as a royal advisor to several kings, and his ministry was characterized by a mixture of warnings about judgment for his people's disobedience and promises of future hope and redemption.
21. Isaiah 60:1-7 is a prophetic passage that lifts up the promise of the future glory and restoration of Jerusalem (Zion) as a radiant center of God's light, attracting nations and their wealth from around the world.
22. Isaiah 61:1-4 is a prophetic passage that serves as the mission statement for an "Anointed One" (the Messiah), who is empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring a message of hope, liberation, and total restoration to those who are oppressed, grieving, and brokenhearted.
23. Isaiah 65:17-25 Is a prophetic vision of God's future new creation, characterized by universal peace, joy, and the absence of suffering and death.

## REFLECTIONS

1. The Book of Ezra emphasizes God's sovereignty in using a pagan king (Cyrus) to fulfill His promises to His people (Ezra 1:1-4).
  - How does the narrative of God using unexpected people or world events to accomplish His will challenge your understanding of His providence in your own life or in current world affairs?
  - Can you recall a time in your life when help or blessing came from an unexpected, "unlikely" source, leading you to see God's hand at work?
2. The people celebrated with great joy when the temple foundation was laid, despite some weeping for the past (Ezra 3:10-13). How can we balance mourning past losses with rejoicing in the new work God is doing?
3. Nehemiah first responded to the news of Jerusalem's broken walls with weeping, mourning, fasting, and prayer (Nehemiah 1:4). What situations in your life or community break your heart, and how can you be more intentional about taking them to God in prayer?
4. Nehemiah faced external opposition (Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem) and internal strife (economic injustice among the people). When faced with diverse challenges, how do you handle both external criticism and internal conflicts?

5. Nehemiah refused to be distracted by attempts to lure him away from his work. What "distractions" (even seemingly "good things") might be diverting you from your primary calling or purpose?
6. Isaiah 60:1 says, "Arise, shine, for your light has come." What "darkness" in your own life or the world needs God's light to shine upon it today?
7. In Isaiah 64:8, the people acknowledge, "we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." How does embracing this posture of humility and dependence on God shape your understanding of your own actions and spiritual journey?
8. God extends His hands all day to a "rebellious people" (65:2). What contemporary forms of rebellion against God do you observe, and how should believers respond with both truth and grace?
9. Isaiah 65:17-25 describes a new heaven and a new earth where there is no more weeping, premature death, or violence. How does this vision of complete restoration inspire hope in you amidst a fractured world, and how does it affect your perspective on your current work and calling?

*Notes by The Rev. Janice Y. Cook, Executive Associate Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California*

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