

Discover your Destiny: Finding your Place in God's Wall...

The Background and Historical Setting:

1. Ezra and Nehemiah were originally a _____ book (per the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, the Jewish historian Josephus, and the oldest manuscripts of the Septuagint with Origen, A.D. 185-253, being the first to separate this book into 2 separate books) of historical narrative that was compiled from a variety of historical sources, including the personal _____ of Ezra the scribe (458 BC) and Nehemiah the cupbearer to the king (445 BC), which, according to Jewish tradition, Ezra compiled into its current form. The purpose of these narratives was to encourage the Jews who had returned from exile by reminding them that their sovereign God was keeping His _____ and continuing His _____ work in and through them for His glory. The compilation date was likely around 425-400 BC.
2. _____ play a significant role in the creation of this narrative: temple artifacts, those who initially returned from exile, leaders who returned with the exiles, those involved in mixed (non-believers) marriages, those who rebuilt the wall, those who sealed the covenant, new residents of Jerusalem and the villages, the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel. _____ correspondence also provides role in the thematic structure of these books: decree of Cyrus, letter of Rehum to Artaxerxes, reply of Artaxerxes, letter of Tattenai to Darius, memorandum regarding Cyrus' decree, the reply of Darius to Tattenair and the letter of Artaxerxes on behalf of Ezra.
3. Three themes of Ezra and Nehemiah are found in the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-4): (1) _____ the temple in Jerusalem is God's objective at this point in the story of redemption; (2) the people of God as a _____, not just the leaders, are vital for accomplishing this purpose; (3) the _____ word is a powerful tool and guide used by God His objective.
4. The larger historical context includes Cyrus, King of Persia who in 539 BC Cyrus turned against Nabonidus and captured Babylon, in part because Cyrus was more respectful of Marduk and other Babylonian deities than the unpopular Nabonidus. Cyrus would issue his decree in 538 BC (the Cyrus Cylinder was discovered in March 1879 in Babylon/Mesopotamia) allowing those conquered peoples living in exile to return to their own homeland with their sacred objects (the Jews did have "idols" but were given the sacred temple vessels). However, it took many years before large numbers of Jews would return to Jerusalem, in part because after about 70 years, they had become comfortable with living in Babylon.

5. While the Persians should never be considered "democratic," many of the kings did take a more lenient approach to ruling conquered peoples, giving much more freedom than most preceding empires.

Discovering your Destiny and Finding your Place in God's Wall begins with _____ your _____! Nehemiah 1:1-2:8

1. _____ your _____...
 - 1) What do you _____ about? This reveals your _____.
 - 2) What do you _____ about? This points to your _____.
 - 3) What do you _____ about? This brings you _____.
2. _____ yourself to _____...
 - 1) _____—get into the _____!
 - 2) _____—see the big picture of your _____ life.
 - 3) _____—open yourself to _____ God wants.
3. _____ your _____...
 - 1) _____ divine opportunities by _____ faithfully where you are (from 1:1 to 2:1 is 4 months!) and _____ attune to the _____ of God in your life.
 - 2) _____ confirmation by _____ action (true faith in a planning faith—see 2:6) and _____ to others for help because no one can do it all _____.

"You are only as strong as your purpose, therefore let us choose reasons to act that are big bold righteous and eternal." Barry Munro