

A WORD ABOUT CHRONOLOGIES

Don't get frustrated if you have trouble in the first couple pages of the workbook and you wonder why we spend so much time on the chronology. We first have to get the setting of the stories in history so that we can understand the wonderful workings of our God, and the great faith of these Bible characters as they were living under pressure. The good news is that the chronology parts don't last long, and you might even find them interesting!

Always keep **Appendix A** (the chronology that links everything together) handy during your study and **Appendix F** (pieces together Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther).

Disclaimer: There is some uncertainty about the chronology of this period we will study. We have carefully considered the arguments for each alternative, and decided to adopt the version presented in **Appendix A** (as presented by bro H.P. Mansfield in The Story of the Bible). Bro. Michael Ashton give a summary of the various chronologies in his book The Exiles Return (pages 205-211), but he follows "the 60-year gap" view, which has Ezra returning some 60 years after the temple is finished.

REFERENCES

Christadelphian Books

Story of the Bible (H. P. Mansfield) [Vol 4 page 137 through Vol 5 page 68]

Nehemiah (Ron Abel)

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (H. P. Mansfield – Expositor)

The Prophets After the Exile (John Carter) - *follows the "60 year gap" theory*

The Exiles Return (Michael Ashton) – *follows the "60 year gap" theory*

Christadelphian Audio Classes (can be downloaded free from christadelphianbibletalks.com)

There are many good Bible classes covering this period on this website. Just do a search for "Ezra" or "Nehemiah" or "Haggai" or "Zechariah" or "Malachi" or "Esther" and you will find plenty to keep you listening till Youth Conference begins!

Non-Christadelphian Resources

The Bible Commentary (edited by F.C. Cook) – also known as Speaker's Commentary [this can be downloaded free from classicchristianlibrary.com].

It's also very useful to have access to a computer with Bible software on it. This saves hours of time finding references and looking up words in Strong's or Bible Dictionaries!

Note: Scriptural references used in the Workbook are from the **New King James**

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Section 1 - Kings and Things - Getting Our Bearings

“Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them. So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD, and who meditate on His name.” Mal 3:16

Objective:

- To get acquainted with the story of the Exiles
- To build a framework for our study and understand how all the pieces fit together
- To wade through all the technical stuff as painlessly as possible so we can get into the meat of our study

Introduction

In our study of the *Return of the Exiles* it is crucial that we understand the historical and scriptural context of Ezra and Nehemiah. Only then can the characters of our story become real and dynamic, and the principles we learn from their experiences become meaningful to our own lives.

However, we appreciate that not everyone enjoys history or tedious chronologies. With this in mind, we’ve done a lot of the legwork for you. Please use the chronology chart, hand-in-hand with your open Bible, as a reference throughout your study. The chronology chart can be found in *Appendix A*. You will find it very useful in helping to integrate all the material which we will be studying.

In addition, one exercise that will greatly benefit you later in the study is to color in any “time markers”. Details to color would include any references to particular months, years, festivals or events, and to the reign of kings; anything that will help us flag the passage of time. This will enable us to get a handle on what’s happening and when.

e.g. **Ezra 4:7**- “In the reign of Artaxerxes, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.”

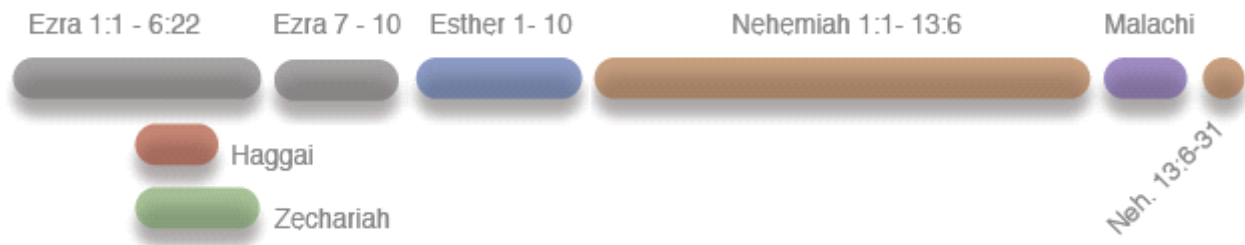
A list of verses with important time markers can be found in *Appendix B*. There are only a few so it shouldn’t take much time, but it will prove to be invaluable later on (and it makes a great CYC activity too!) Please note that some verses have more than one item.

Exercise 1.1 - 1.5 (Optional) Bible Marking in Appendix B

Putting the Pieces Together

Our study of *The Return of the Exiles* encompasses nine books of the Bible: **2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah** and **Malachi**. Each book helps us to see the story from a unique perspective, and enables us to understand how everything fits together. It will be a challenge to integrate all these sections of scripture but for now we just want to get acquainted with the story of the Exiles and to establish a basic framework for our study.

This is how our study fits together chronologically:



Fill in the blanks, using your Bible and the chronology chart in Appendix A as a reference:

The story of the Exiles begins in 605 BC; the year the Babylonian invasions began. 20 years later, there was nothing left. Judah's population had been systematically deported, its cities destroyed. Even the Temple had been looted and burnt to the ground. The remnant of God's people had been resettled throughout the Babylonian Empire and for a generation the Jews lived as exiles in a foreign land. For some, each passing year made them yearn more intensely for their lost homeland. For others, Babylonian society offered too exciting a temptation to resist, and they eventually assimilated with the world around them.

50 years passed. Then in 536 BC, literally overnight, their world changed forever. The great city of Babylon fell to the armies of the Medo-Persian Empire (see **Daniel 5**). The Persian general Cyrus soon became king, and in the _____ year of his reign he made the famous proclamation allowing the Exiles to return to Judah under the leadership of _____ (who was also known as Zerubbabel).

Many of the Exiles leapt at the opportunity to return. After a long and arduous journey, the Jews arrived back in the Land. But it was nothing like they remembered. Instead they found a desolate wasteland; the City of Jerusalem a heap of overgrown rubble. The Exiles soon set about the work of restoring their nation. Nearly two years after they arrived, they laid the foundation of the _____. However, because of intense adversity and opposition from their enemies, they became discouraged. The work was stopped for _____ years until eventually, through the influence of the prophets _____ and _____, the work to rebuild the Temple was revived. Having overcome their apathy and discouragement, the people finally complete the Temple in _____ BC, _____ years after originally being destroyed by the Babylonians (as foretold by the prophet Jeremiah).

After the Temple was dedicated in Ezra 6, some people think there is a significant gap of 60 years in the record, while others believe Ezra 7 occurs immediately after Ezra 6. You will find expositors (both Christadelphian and others) differ on this issue. (*Appendix A* does not follow the gap theory). Although the Persian king of Ezra 6 is _____ and the king of Ezra 7 is called _____, it is possible that these are the same person. Ezra 1-6 was about events before Ezra returned, and then Ezra was present for the events of Ezra 6-10. The Jews in the land may have called the Persian king, *Darius*, while Ezra and many others in Persia referred to the same king as *Artaxerxes*. The writer of the book of Esther may have referred to this same king as *Ahasuerus*. These are just titles like “king” or “prime minister” and do not refer to any specific individual. It makes a lot of sense that as soon as the temple was finished, Ezra returned to work in the new temple. Some time between Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 1, the story of Esther probably occurred. When Ezra returned to work in the temple he had trouble getting Levites and others to return with him. So God used Haman to convince more Jews to leave their comfortable life in Persia, and return to Israel. According to **Esther 3:12; 4:3**, Haman’s plot for genocide not only affected those in Shushan, but *all* the Jews throughout the whole Empire. Ezra returned in the _____ year of Artaxerxes, and then Nehemiah came to build the walls in the _____ year of this same king. Nehemiah is governor in Jerusalem for approximately _____ years, during which time he works closely with Ezra to build up and strengthen the ecclesia of Judah. They encounter many serious issues and difficulties, but continue to work patiently and faithfully with their brothers and sisters.

Nehemiah is then temporarily recalled to Shushan by King Artaxerxes for an unknown period of time. The prophet _____ likely prophesied during his absence. When he returns, Nehemiah finds that much of his efforts had been undone, and the people had once again slipped into spiritual decay. Refusing to admit defeat, Nehemiah throws himself back into the work.

Nehemiah’s heart-felt prayer “Remember me, O my God, for good” concludes the story of the Exiles on an unfinished note. Were Ezra and Nehemiah ultimately successful? We don’t know. But their spirit of faithful perseverance lives on today. In the face of declining morals, problems in the ecclesia, in CYC, at home, or in our personal lives, we must keep patiently working together in hope, no matter how discouraged or alone we may feel. The majority of our study focuses on what we can learn from the principles we see in action in their lives and in their ecclesia.

Section 2 – The Captivity of Zion

Objective:

- To look at how, but more importantly, *why* God’s people were sent into captivity in Babylon
- To understand how the Exile was all about a spiritual transformation
- To see how the Exiles’ experiences parallel our own struggles to uphold our faith today

The Story Begins...

At the very birth of Israel as a nation, the LORD declared the attributes of His character to Moses on Mount Sinai. For hundreds of years these principles have defined God’s relationship with His people.

1. Read **Exodus 34:5-7**. These principles of God’s character are manifested in the way He responds to the decisions that Israel makes. Think of some specific examples in Israel’s history that demonstrate the outworking of God’s character.

2. God chooses to reveal His character in Ex 34 after he could have justly wiped out the nation of Israel. Why does God show His people so much mercy? What should we learn from this about how we treat each other?



“Behold the Goodness and Severity of God”

3. The cycle of “Sin, Suffering, Seek, Save” was not confined to the time of the Judges, but continued when Israel became a kingdom. We can see this cycle in action in **2 Chron.12:1-7,12**. How did the Children of Israel sin in **v.1**? How did they suffer in **v.2**? Instead of a judge, who did God send in **v.5**? And how did God respond in **vs.7,12**?

4. Read **Jer.7:25-28** (keep in mind that Jeremiah prophesied during Judah’s last days). Why was God ready to give up on His people?

Right up to the last minute, God pleaded with His people to turn back to Him but they would not hear. He wanted to show them mercy, but they refused to accept His kindness. Judah’s fate was effectively sealed when Jeremiah wrote a scroll and sent it to Jehoiakim, one of the last kings of Judah (**Jer.36:1-2**).

5. How did Jehoiakim react? (see **vs.21-24**)

6. What was God’s response? (see **vs.29-31**)

An Ecclesia in Ruins

The ecclesia of Judah was in ruin, with many devoid of spiritual understanding. **It is remarkable that only 20 years earlier the nation had experienced a great spiritual revival under King Josiah.** But now, after that brief flicker of hope, the light had finally gone out. The time for repentance was past; Judah's lampstand was about to be extinguished. Review the following list which paints a dismal picture of the factors that eventually contributed to Judah's spiritual- and national- downfall.

Problem	Reference
Unresponsive to God's Word	Jer.7:23-26
Injustice and treachery rampant	Isa.59:4,13-15; Eze.22:9
Violence and murder	Isa.59:6-7; Eze.22:6
Oppression of the poor and destitute	Jer.22:17; Eze.22:7,29
People did not know God	Hosea 4:6; Isa.5:13; 44:18-19; cp. Jer.22:16
Despised God's holy things, profaned the Sabbath	Eze.22:8; 20:16
Apathy and complacency towards the Truth	Zeph.1:12
False worship and abominable lifestyles	Eze.16:36; 23:37; Jer.32:35
Unfaithfulness and betrayal of God	Eze.16:31-32; 23:30
Hypocritical lip-service to the Truth	Eze.23:38-39
Utter failure of spiritual leadership	Micah 3:9-11

Acts 28:26-27 indicates the hearts of the people had grown dull, their ears were hard of hearing, and their eyes were closed. Similarly, **Hosea 4:6** says that the ecclesia of Judah was destroyed because they had lost all sense of spiritual perspective.

7. Our own ecclesias can lose perspective as well. Why do you think this loss of spiritual perspective occurs? By reflecting on how the brothers and sisters in Judah got to this point, brainstorm on what negative factors (or lack of positive influences) in *our* lives can lead *us* down this path too, **and how we might overcome these negative factors.**



Kingdom of Judah Destroyed

8. In January, 588 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's army arrived at the walls of Jerusalem. They began a brutal siege which lasted for nearly two years. Read **2 Kings 24:18-25:30** and fill in the table:

2 Kings 25	What Happened To...
v.7	Zedekiah the King:
v.18-21	Seraiah ** the High Priest:
v.11	Surviving remnant of Jerusalem:
v.12, 24-26	Poorest of the Land:

9. **** Note:** One of Seraiah's sons is mentioned in **Ezra 7:1**. Who is he and why is this significant?

Exiled from the Promised Land

Between 598-582 BC, an estimated 15,000-25,000 Jews were deported to Babylon in several waves. (Optional) Read the account of Judah's last days in *Appendix D* to help you appreciate the turmoil of this horrible chapter in Israel's history.

10. Take a moment and try to enter into their experience. As one of the few survivors of the siege, what would you have witnessed? What would you have smelled, heard, or felt? What had happened to your family and friends?

Life in Babylon

11. Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon after Jerusalem was destroyed. Read **Jer.29:4-7** and note the key points of his message. What do you think life was like in Babylon?

12. **Thought Provoker:** If God's motivation was simply to punish His people, wouldn't it have been enough to destroy them in the siege? Why then did He send them into *captivity*? Based on **Jer.29:10-14**, what do you think God tried to accomplish by the captivity?



Key Principle...

God was not so much sending His people away but rather bringing them back to Him spiritually. The Jews had already "exiled" themselves from Him through sin- i.e. they had already made the journey to Babylon in their hearts. The Exile was all about the process of repentance and reconciliation, a spiritual transformation.

13. Babylon was all about assimilation, the pressure to conform. Sadly, many of the exiles adapted to life away from Jerusalem. But there were a few who maintained their faith in God while in Babylon. Daniel is a stellar example of a young person who upheld God's principles against the challenge of the world. How did Nebuchadnezzar try to pressure him and his friends to conform (**Dan.1**)?
14. How did they overcome this pressure, and what can we learn from this? (e.g. **Rom.12:2** cp. **2 Cor.4:16-18**)

A Work in Progress

15. God often uses adversity and difficulty to help us grow spiritually (Heb.12:8-11; 2 Cor.4:17). How do you think the exiles' experiences in Babylon helped to develop their faith? How is this true for us?



16. On the whole, the experience of the Exile helped God's people to see the foolishness of their previous way of life. The following table shows which problems the Jews struggled with before, and after, the Exile. Use the verses provided to determine just how much (or how little!) the Exile actually changed **the people**:

Problem	Before ?	After?	Reference
Unresponsive to God's Word	✓	✗	Neh.9:1-3
Injustice and treachery rampant	✓		Mal.2:10
Violence and murder	✓		n/a
Oppression of the poor and destitute	✓		Neh.5:1-5
People did not know God	✓		Jer.24:5-7
Despised God's holy things, profaned the Sabbath	✓		Mal.1:12-12; 2:11
Apathy and complacency towards the Truth	✓		Hag.1:2-5 but Ezra 3:10-11
False worship and abominable lifestyles	✓		n/a
Unfaithfulness and betrayal of God	✓		n/a
Hypocritical lip-service to the Truth	✓		Mal.2:11-12
Utter failure of spiritual leadership	✓		Ezra 9:2 but Neh.2:17-18

As we'll see later on, there were additional problems which raised their ugly heads after the Exile:

Problem	Reference
Not separate from the world	Neh.6:17-19
Marriage outside the Truth	Neh.13:23-27
Divorce and breakdown of family unit	Mal.2:4-16
Children being lost to the world	Neh.13:23-24

People with rough edges... like us.

This sets the scene for the rest of the workbook. Our study is about people; people who are real and dynamic; people who change, for the better or for the worse; people who have high points and low points, who struggle with their faith and who make mistakes; people who do the best they can, but often fall short. This study is about people like us.

Section 3 – The Exiles Return

Objectives

- To see how prophecy comes true in powerful, incredible ways and how we can learn to put our full confidence in God's promises
- To examine the faith the Exiles demonstrated by leaving Babylon
- To learn from the resolve, integrity, and dynamics of ecclesial life which we see in Ezra 3

Introduction

The books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel were all written when Judah was in exile. Each of these books adds a different perspective: Jeremiah ended up with the surviving lowest-class Jews in Egypt, where he was taken against his will; Ezekiel was among the middle-class exiles in Babylon; and the young princes Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah rose to prominence in the court of king Nebuchadnezzar.

When Prophecy Comes True...

For many years daily life in Babylon dragged on. Slowly, the exiles became accustomed to their new surroundings; they managed to build a new life for themselves, finding employment and building homes and families. A generation passed. Then a miracle happened.

1. What earth-shattering event happens in **Daniel 5:30-31**?
2. Read **Jer.25:11,12** and **Jer.51** (note **vs.28,47-58** in particular). Compare this to **Jer.33:7-11**. For those who knew their prophecy, how would they have felt when they saw these 'current events' taking place? (What would the fall of Babylon have implied about their future?)
3. When does **Dan.9** take place? (see **vs.1-2**)
4. Read **Dan.9:16-19**. Moved by his understanding of Jeremiah's 70-year prophecy, and electrified by the "signs of the times" around him, Daniel turns to God in heart-felt prayer. What does Daniel specifically pray for? What evidence is there that he had **Jer.29:12-14** in mind?

Dan.6 (the story of Daniel and the lions' den) probably takes place at this time (cp. **v.1**). As Daniel rocketed to prominence in the court of Darius the Mede, many of the other officials began to resent Daniel. They plotted to destroy him:

5. How did they plan to trap Daniel? (see **vs.5,7,11**)
6. What likely was the obvious thing Daniel was praying for in v.10? Do you think this is a link to chapter 9? Support your answer.

That very same year, only months later, an amazing thing happened: the Jews were given permission to return to their homeland. The Exile was over! The new world superpower, the Medo-Persian Empire, was actually a federation of two distinct tribes (the Persians eventually dominated the Medes).

Answered Prayer

What an amazing example of answered prayer! Daniel was now an old man, but he lived to see the day when his brethren headed back to the land of his birth. What emotions must have flooded his heart! No doubt his thoughts went back to the days of his youth, when, as a young man, he was torn from his home and dragged away to Babylon. Now, decades later, towards the end of his life, he was witnessing God's answer to so, so many prayers.

"We hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Romans 8:25)



7. The fulfillment of prophecy clearly had a profound effect upon Daniel and many of his fellow exiles. **Rev.19:10** says that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." What does this mean to you, and how do you think prophecy can be the same motivating force *today* that it was for Daniel and the exiles so many years ago?

"Cyrus, My Shepherd"

Cyrus the Great is a remarkable figure in both the scriptural narrative and in the annals of history. Under his leadership the Persian Empire rose to dominate world affairs and he was renowned for being a prudent and effective ruler. He allowed his subjects to continue their cultural traditions and to enjoy religious freedom. In fact, when he conquered the Babylonians, he claimed to be sent by their god Marduk and was welcomed by many as a liberator.

8. Isaiah mentions Cyrus by name 120 years before he was even born! Not only does Isaiah *name* Cyrus, but he actually details his character and his work. Read **Isaiah 44:26-45:4** and jot down the key details of this prophecy.
9. **Isa.45:3** indicates that Cyrus would come to know about the God of Israel. The Jewish historian Josephus says that Cyrus was actually shown a copy of Isaiah's prophecy. Which influential Jew would have been in a perfect position to open Cyrus' eyes to these things?

Josephus Writes...

"Accordingly, when Cyrus read [Isaiah's prophecy] and admired the divine power, a earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written; so he called for the most eminent Jews that were in Babylon, and said to them that he gave them leave to go back to their country, and to rebuild their city Jerusalem, and the temple of God..."

10. **Ezra 1:1** says that “the Lord *stirred up* the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so *that* he made a proclamation...”. The same Hebrew word for “stirred up” is used again in **v.5**. What is the idea behind this word? Based on what we’ve been looking at, how do you think God was stirring up, or moving these people, and how should this apply to us?

11. The Bible presents Cyrus as a type of Christ as below. You may want to mark these in your Bible:

Cyrus	Jesus
Prophesied of 120 years beforehand Isa.44:28	Prophesied of from the beginning of the world Gen.3:15
“He is my shepherd” Isa.44:28	“I am the good shepherd” John 10:11
Born among shepherds	Shepherds present at birth Luke 2:8-20
Name signifies “like the heir”	The Heir Matt.21:38
“He shall perform all my pleasure” Isa.44:28	Dedicated His life to God’s will John 5:36; Deut.18:18
God’s “Anointed” Isa.45:1	Messiah means “Anointed”
God held Cyrus’ right hand Isa.45:1	Sits at God’s right hand Rom.8:34
Nations given into his hand Isa.41:2-3; 45:1-2	Psalm 2, Psalm 8
Destroyer of the Power of Babylon	Revelation 17-18
Savior of Jerusalem	Matt.5:48
Liberator of the Jews	Rom.11:26
Lover of Justice and Righteousness	2 Sam.23:3; Isa.32:1

A Journey of Faith

In 536 BC, Cyrus made his famous decree which permitted the exiles to return to their homeland. This brings us to the beginning of the Book of Ezra. Chapter 1 records how the exiles left Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel (a.k.a Sheshbazzar), and Chapter 2 gives a detailed account of the names and families of those who made the journey back to Judah. In a sense this section can be seen as a “roll call of faith” (like **Heb.11**), because these are the people who had enough faith to leave Babylon and strike out into the unknown. Many of these names keep popping up throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It will be interesting to trace how they develop spiritually and we will come back to these chapters later.

12. According to **Ezra 1:3-6**, not all the exiles returned to the Land of Judah. How many went back with Zerubbabel? (see **Ezra 2:64-65**)

13. In contrast to the cushy lifestyle they enjoyed in Babylon, with all the services of a modern society, what were the conditions like back in Judah? (e.g. **Jer.33:10; 9:11**). How would you have felt?



14. When they first arrive in the land, the exiles resettle “their cities” (**Ezra 2:70**). Why didn’t they all just stay at Jerusalem- what was significant about the need to specifically return to “their” cities? (hint: **Neh.11:20**) (P.S. This is an awesome fulfillment of **Jer.32:1,6-15**!)

Don't forget to Bible mark any neat points you discover! You'll be glad you did when you're sitting in discussion groups at Conference!

15. Not willing to give up their comfortable lifestyle, some elected to stay in Babylon. By not going back to the Land, what were they throwing away? Which other Bible character did this? (see **Gen.25:29-34**), and how can we effectively do the same thing today? (Hint: **Heb.12:14-17**)



16. Think about the incredible implications this decision would have on others, especially on their children! If you decided to stay, it meant your children would grow up in Babylon. Also, this personal decision would greatly influence your friends' own decision whether or not to go back. How can your decisions *now* affect your family's future and your friends' well-being? (e.g. I take a job now that is going to make it hard for me to get out to CYC, or to have family time once I have kids)



Zerubbabel and Jeshua

Zerubbabel is an obscure but significant character in the Bible. For example, his name pops up in the list of Christ's ancestors in **Matt.1:11-13**. He was a direct descendant of King David, and therefore a royal heir to the throne of Israel. We also know that he plays a prominent role in the story of the exiles. Lets find out a little more about Zerubbabel:

17. According to **Matt.1**, who was his grandfather, and what had happened to him? see **2 Kings 24:15-17; 25:27-30**.

18. What does the name Zerubbabel mean?

19. We can learn a lot about someone by how they react to different situations in their life. Read **Ezra 3:2,8** and **4:1-4,24; 5:1-2**. Based on the characteristics he displays in these verses, describe what kind of man you think Zerubbabel was.

As we just saw from **Ezra 3:2**, Zerubbabel worked closely with **Jeshua** (or Joshua), the high priest. As we'll see throughout our study, Jeshua and his family are not cut and dry- they are very... human.

20. Who was Jeshua's father, and what was his family background? (cp. **Ezra 3:2; 1 Chron.6:13-15**)

21. How is Jeshua related to Ezra? (**Ezra 7:1**)

22. Jeshua, along with his sons and brothers, provide stellar leadership and are initially very active in the work of rebuilding the Temple (**Ezra 3:8**). But years later, some of his family were implicated in leading Judah astray. What were they involved with, and what insight does this give us into the character of this priestly family? see **Ezra 10:18**

Also, in the time of Nehemiah, the high priest Eliashib, who is Jeshua's great-grandson, constantly undermines Nehemiah's efforts to build up the ecclesia (see **Neh.13:7,28-29**). Sadly, **Malachi 2:7-8** seems to be a direct condemnation of Jeshua's descendants, even though Jeshua himself is commended, and appears as a type of the Messiah (cp. **Zech.6:11-13**).

“As One Man”- Ecclesial unity

We now get into **Ezra 3** when the exiles arrived back in the Land after the long journey from Babylon.

23. Read **Ezra 3**. When does this chapter take place?
24. Compare **Ezra 2:70** with **3:1**. The exiles gathered together at Jerusalem “as one man”. This phrase is significant because it shows how the ecclesia was united in their resolve to do God's work (see also **Neh.8:1**). Think about what this expression *really* means, and then consider **1Cor.12:12-27**. Write down your thoughts.
25. As we can see from **Ezra 3**, the exiles are able to accomplish a great deal when they work together as one unit. The exiles were able to achieve more by working together than they could have done by working as individuals, and the result is phenomenal. You could say that, in many respects, **Ezra 3** is the picture of ideal ecclesial life. After reading this chapter, jot down all the things that they were doing right.
26. The lesson is clear: in ecclesial life we must work *together* for the glory of God. As members of the body of Christ, we all have something to contribute to our community. Brainstorm on the following:
- What are some practical benefits of true Christian fellowship?
 - How does division and asserting individual agendas take away from these benefits?
 - What are some practical ways that you can contribute to our worldwide family?



The Altar: Beginning with the Basics

One of the first things the exiles do when they return to the Land is to rebuild the Altar (**Ezra 3:2-3**).

27. It specifically says that they “set the altar on its *bases (or sockets)*”. What does this mean? Does this indicate they were establishing something *new* or *restoring* something old? What “instruction manual” were they using (**v.2**)?
28. **Ezra 3:2,6** says they began to offer the Burnt Offering, which signifies total dedication to God. What were they in effect saying to God by presenting this particular offering?
29. Compare **Ps.141:1-2**, **Exo.29:41-43**, and **Ezra 3:3**. These verses relate particular sacrifices and offerings to communication with God through prayer. The first thing the exiles do when they go back is to rebuild the altar. They wanted to reopen communication with God. What’s the lesson for us?

The Seventh Month

As we see from **Ezra 3:1,6**, the exiles had gathered at the ruins of Jerusalem in the seventh month, the Hebrew month *Tishri*. This corresponds to our September/ October. There are 13 days of religious significance during this busy month. In *Appendix E* there is a chart which briefly summarizes the meaning of these events and helps us to appreciate *why* the exiles began their work of renewal and restoration during this special month.

30. **Ezra 3:4** says that the exiles specifically kept the Feast of Tabernacles. What was this event designed to remind God’s people of and why was it appropriate to commemorate this as they began to reclaim their homeland and restore their nation? Use **Lev.23:34-43** as a reference.

Laying the Foundations

31. How long have the exiles been in the Land when they begin to rebuild the Temple?
32. This is clearly a spiritual high point for the Judean ecclesia. One of the factors that must have contributed to this is strong spiritual leadership from people who are actively involved in the work. Who was providing this spiritual leadership? see **Ezra 3:8-11**
33. The response of the people is phenomenal. How do they respond in **v.11**?

Many years later the exiles once again “gather together as one man” (**Neh.8**). A great spiritual revival takes place and the people are lifted up to spiritual heights. The common denominator is strong spiritual leadership. This underscores the immense importance of leadership in our ecclesias. This is a theme which we will constantly come across throughout our study and hopefully discuss in depth in our groups at Conference.

34. Why did the older brothers and sisters in the ecclesia weep? Comment on **Haggai 2:3** and **Zech.4:9-10** in your answer.

35. Think about **Zech.4:9-10** in more detail. What does it mean to “despise the day of small things”? How could we potentially “despise the day of small things” in our relationships with our friends, families, ecclesias, or at work or school?



Concluding Thoughts

As we have seen, the Exile had a profound effect upon the Jews. For some, the challenges of Babylon caused a change of heart and drew them back to God. As the years passed they yearned more intensely for the Land of Promise. For others, however, the immediate pleasures offered by Babylon presented an irresistible alternative to the God of Israel and the far-off hope of one day returning to a ruined city.

As the 70 years drew to an end, the trials of the captivity gave way to the excitement of the return- the dawn of a new age for God’s people- a second chance. Many of the exiles left behind the Babylonian world and struck out in faith for the Promised Land, following the footsteps of their forefather Abraham. They had high hopes, no doubt inspired by the grand words of the prophets who told of Zion’s future glory. And they got off to a great start. The Judean ecclesia was energized by a pioneering spirit and everyone fell into line behind the strong spiritual leadership provided by Zerubbabel and the Levites. They opened up communication with God through prayer, kept the Feast of Tabernacles, and set about rebuilding the Temple, working together as one man, united by their hope and faith.

However, we leave Chapter 3 with the ominous words “the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard afar off...”. Trouble was on the horizon. Soon their adversaries would hear of their efforts and their faith and newfound zeal would be challenged in a terrible way.

But for now, let us take away the positive lessons of an ecclesia zealous for God. Here is a summary of principles we see in action in **Ezra 3**. *Can you think of any more?*

<i>Spiritual integrity & depth</i>	<i>Prayer</i>
<i>Unity & ecclesial synergy</i>	<i>Enthusiasm & zeal</i>
<i>Strong leadership & support</i>	<i>Infusion of God’s Word</i>
<i>Courage in the face of fear</i>	<i>Good organization & sharing of the workload</i>



Section 4 – The Work Ceases

Objective:

- To carefully analyze the obstacles the returned Exiles encountered soon after laying the foundation of the Temple
- To learn who the adversaries that opposed Judah and Benjamin were and their impact on the returned ecclesia
- To understand an ecclesia in crisis and draw parallels to our own ecclesias that are opposed from within and without

How to read Ezra 4

The key to reading Ezra 4 is to simply read it chronologically. Its purpose is to show how the recently returned Exiles encountered adversity and resistance to their work of restoration, and how this gradually wore out the spirit of the exiles and the work finally stopped. It is a section that helps us to understand the animosity that develops between the Jews and the “people of the land” and sets the scene for later problems they face as worldly influences creep into the Judean Ecclesia. Verses 4-5 span the years of trouble and state the adversaries frustrated the Jews from the time of Cyrus till the days of Darius (when the temple was finished). Then verses 6-7 mention specific troubles the adversaries caused during the reigns of the two kings who reigned between Cyrus and Darius. When the chapter is read this way, it’s easy to follow.

[Note: those who follow the 60 year gap idea, find **Ezra 4** confusing because they think it’s not arranged in chronological order. They have to take parts of Ezra 4 and place them after chapter 10 and before Nehemiah 1 – very confusing!]

Ezra 4 encompasses the reigns of 4 Persian kings.

Name in Ezra 4	King’s name	Length of reign	Ezra 4
Cyrus	Cyrus the Great	9 more years	v.5
Ahasuerus	Cambyses	8 years	v.6
Artaxerxes	Gaumata or Gomates	7 months	v.7
Darius	Hystaspes	36 years	v.5,24

[If you are interested in seeing how those that follow the 60 year gap idea juggle the kings of Ezra 4, see [The Return of the Exiles](#) by Michael Ashton for one of the possibilities.]

‘The Adversaries of Judah and Benjamin’

The phrase “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” apparently encompasses a variety of groups of people who develop over time.

Group 1 – Samaritans (specifically)

1. What do we learn about this group of adversaries from **Ezra 4:2, 9-10**?

2. There is more in the Bible on the history of the Samaritans. Give a brief synopsis of who they were and where they came from. (Hint: Ashurbanipal is probably Osnapper. See **2 Kings 17:24-41**)

Group 2 – ‘The remainder beyond the river’ (generally)

3. This phrase is used from the perspective of people living in Persia. What river is being referred to? Who would these people be?

The Subtle Approach – Ezra 4:2

4. The adversaries came to the busy Jews with some interesting and convincing words in **Ezra 4:2**.
 - a. What was their reason for thinking they should be allowed to build the Temple with the Jews? Was their claim true? (Hint: see **2 Kings 17:41**)
 - b. The same issue came up in **John 4** when Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman by the well. What are Jesus’ comments to this woman in **John 4:21-24**?
 - c. If you were standing there in **Ezra 4** (but you actually had a Bible with OT and NT in your hand) as these adversaries came persuading you to let them build the Temple with you, write down what you would say and why (If stumped, use **1 Tim.2:4-5**; **2 Cor.6:14-18** to get you started)
5. This is not just an old problem where people sacrifice God’s truth in order to be ‘one’. You will feel pressure from many different areas of your life to ‘conform’ and be like others. It could be school, it could be work, it could be at home, and it most certainly will be in your heart – and each of these places could pressure you into sacrificing God’s truth and separateness. Discuss a circumstance in your life that led you to want to conform to others – what was it like? Did you say no or yes? What was the outcome?
6. What was the response of Zerubbabel and Jeshua? Do you think it was a good response? How does **2 Cor.11:13-15** fit into this?



‘they troubled them in building’ – Ezra 4:4-23

7. It would seem that the ‘righteous’ agenda of these adversaries had been resolutely foiled. Now they go for a more direct approach.
 - a. What were the goals of the adversaries here and what methods did they use?

- b. ‘discouraged’ (NKJV) them – what does this word mean? What was the purpose of the prophets (**Hag.1:13,14; Zech.8:9**)? What is the connection to today (**Hebrews 12:12**)?
- c. ‘troubled them in building’ – what does this mean? (cp. **Ezra 3:3; 2Tim.1:7**)
8. Read **Ezra 4:7-23**. The Samaritans are represented by five individuals. Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about these men and jot down what you find:
- **Bishlam:** e.g. Name means “In peace”. An officer or diplomat of Artaxerxes who was stationed in Samaria.
 - **Mithredath:**
 - **Tabel:**
 - **Rehum:**
 - **Shimshai:**
9. In **vs.7-16**, Rehum and Shimshai write to King Artaxerxes. What are they so concerned about?
10. What did they accuse the Jews of?
11. After searching through the “Library of Congress” as it were, Artaxerxes finds the incriminating record of the Jewish insurrections against the Babylonians. Fearing for the stability of the Region Beyond the River, the King quickly sends his reply in **vs.17-22**. What did Artaxerxes command?
12. What did Rehum, Shimshai, and their companions do after they received Artaxerxes’ reply?

The Work Ceases

Under the frustrating and discouraging state of things, the returned Exiles cease their work. They throw in the towel on rebuilding the Temple of God. They have had enough. Besides, they have better things to work on – their own houses have not received much attention since they came back. They haven’t had much time planting flowers in the front yard. And the driveway is getting a little bumpy. What we are looking at is an ecclesia that has crumbled apart in the face of adversity. They have lost the ‘one man’ spirit they had at first.

13. The Prophets give us great insight into why the ecclesia crumbled. List some reasons why the work on God’s house stopped. (Hint: see **Hag.1,2; Zech.3:2-5** for help – these two prophets are prophesying at this very time)

14. In contrast, we come to Nehemiah’s day, when the ecclesia stood up and prospered, even in the face of fierce adversity. What made the difference? Fill in this chart to see:

Verse	Reason for prospering even in adversity
Neh.4:4,9	
Neh.4:16	
Neh.4:14,20	
Neh.4:22	

It would seem that after being in the land for only a few years, their initial zeal and enthusiasm had worn off. So it is, or can be, with projects in the Ecclesia. We start off with enthusiasm, but soon encounter problems and unseen difficulties and we easily become disillusioned. And all too often, we begin blaming others, and become very critical and negative.

But as we’ve seen, God’s purpose cannot be undermined or stopped. And as Nehemiah demonstrated, God was able to overcome the opposition and counsel of the adversaries. So clearly, the weakness rested with the Ecclesia of **Ezra 4**. They needed some help and encouragement, which God was ready to supply.

Paul the apostle went through the exact same problems as he preached the gospel and ‘built’ God’s ecclesias in Asia Minor. He faced great opposition and adversity in the work he did: “I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation, for indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears!” (**2Cor.7:4-5**)

15. In this chart, comment on how these verses would have helped those discouraged in **Ezra 4** and how it will help you in dealing with discouragement:

2 Cor.4	Suggestions for Ezra 4	Suggestions for you
v.8-9		
v.16-18		



Years of Spiritual Stagnation

And so the efforts of the adversaries had been successful – work on the Temple slowly but surely came to a halt in the short reign of Artaxerxes [the imposter Gaumata or Gomates] and would not be restarted until the 2nd year of Darius (**Ezra 4:24**). The sound of working implements stopped, the shouts of workers and carpenters was silent. The house of God stood unfinished and empty while the returned captives concerned themselves with fixing their own houses and working the fields around their homes. Spiritual focus was lost, and the very core of their mission in returning – to put God in the center of their lives – was forgotten. The ecclesia had thrown in the towel on the one project that kept them unified and spiritually focused. Now they were just like the people around them – tending to the day-to-day necessities. What a contrast between how the Exiles had started out (**Ezra 3:1**) and how they ended up after they had stopped work on the Temple (**Hag.1:9**)

16. Many undoubtedly thought that there would be fewer problems if they just stopped working on the Temple, since this is what angered the adversaries the most. Would you say this conclusion was true after understanding **Hag.1:6,10-11; Zech.1:4**? Why or why not?

17. We all have moments of disillusionment in the Truth – those in your ecclesia, including yourself, are no different from those in the Bible.

a. Name someone in the Bible who threw in the towel. Explain why they did this, if they recovered and how.

b. List 5 different things that would motivate you for good, if you were spiritually weak and disillusioned. Discuss why they would help and if anyone has ever done these things to help you.



Section 5 - The Prophets

Objective:

- To understand the importance of the prophets to getting the Temple completed
- To understand apathy and its real threat to the truth
- To understand the methods used to renew a spiritual motivation to build and find out how we can sharpen our vision of the kingdom to be motivated now

'Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.' **Ezra 5:1**

Overview

Zechariah and Haggai were prophets that motivated the people to build the Temple. We will cover **Ezra 5:1-5; Haggai and Zechariah 1-7** in this section. (the first 7 chapters of Zechariah are about this time)

1. When did Zechariah & Haggai prophecy?
2. It is critical that we understand the role of a prophet sent from God. Read **Deut.13:1-5; 18:20-22; 1 Pet. 1:6-12** and then summarize what the job(s) of a prophet were.
3. Haggai and Zechariah were very successful in their attempts to motivate the people to build. After understanding these verses, write down the methods used to motivate:
 - a. **Zechariah 1:4; Haggai 1:5,7** –
 - b. **Haggai 2:4-5; Zechariah 4:9** –
 - c. **Zechariah 2:5; 3:10; 6:12-13; 8:9** –

Apathetic Builders of the Temple

4. One of the biggest problems that Haggai and Zechariah fought against was apathy.
 - a. What does the Bible tell us about apathy? (**Revelation 3:14-22; Judges 5:16-17** may be helpful, but don't limit your comments to these)

- b. Why do we become apathetic? Think of when you lost interest in something or ran out of steam – why?
 - c. It is a sure thing that we will suffer from apathy at some point in our lives. How do we recover from it? How do we help others?
 - d. Is it possible to have a false recovery? To be excited and enthusiastic but for this to be only temporary? Explain how this could be true in the context of Ezra and Nehemiah.
5. **Practical:** You need to plan how you will not slip into apathy when it comes to serving your God:
- a. How will you counteract this apathy in your life? List 3 specific ways you will do this
 - b. List one way you will try to help others with their spiritual apathy.



Key Principle

We can see that apathy is a lack of purpose or vision which leads to a lack of real and tangible results. You can see how the returned Jews, suffering from chronic apathy, desperately needed prophets to provide a strong motivation to re-invigorate them to the work of building the Temple. Strong leadership, specific rebukes and solid answers were used by the prophets to do this. And they jumped into the work themselves to help. We will see that Ezra and Nehemiah were the opposites of apathetic (Ezra 9:3)! We see how apathy is the medicine this world drinks – TV numbs the emotions and the shock we should feel at immorality and spiritual depravity. Facebook can numb us from what real interaction between humans is, reducing a colorful and many-faceted person to a few sound bytes, and covering up all the problems and issues we face in our real lives. We become indifferent, uncaring, unloving, unmotivated. We stop realizing the potential that God wants to see in us and instead we lose faith and turn to cynicism and skepticism. God wants us to be on fire for Him (Jeremiah 20:9), and His inspired and holy word is the only cure to apathy. There is no quick ‘pick-me-up’ from it, no lazy-man’s way out – only God’s word will provide a vision for us to follow hard and passionately after, only His word to rebuke us and comfort us and help us to put off our lazy and fleshly ways and replace them with Christ’s grace and servant-oriented thinking. We will always need Haggais and Zechariahs to help us regain spiritual focus and to rekindle our fire to build the Temple of God!

Understanding Zechariah and Haggai

6. It is important to ask two questions about Haggai and Zechariah: **1.** How did their message strengthen the people and; **2.** what extra information are we given about the time of Jeshua and Zerubbabel? This is what we will do in the following charts. This will help us to understand how powerful Haggai and Zechariah's messages were.

Haggai	How would this strengthen the returned captives?
1:4-11	
1:13	
2:3-4	
2:5	
2:6-9	

Haggai	What is the extra information given about the time of the captive's return?
1:1,15	Days between beginning message and action:
1:4, 6, 9-11	

Zechariah	How would this strengthen the returned captives?
1:1-6	
1:11, 16	
2:6-13	
3:2-5	
4:6-10	
5:1-4	
6:1-8	

7. **In Depth Study Question:** There are visions that Zechariah has that can be difficult to understand. Since our study is not strictly focused on it, we do not have the time to look at all of them. Some of the visions are listed below – pick one and do an in-depth study on their significance and application so you can explain it to others at the conference:



- a. **1:7-17 The man & horses among the myrtle trees**
- b. **1:18-21 The 4 horns & 4 craftsmen**
- c. **2:1-13 The man with the measuring line**
- d. **3:1-10 Joshua's clothes will be changed**
- e. **4:1-14 Lampstand & 2 olive trees**
- f. **5:1-11 The flying scroll and basket**
- g. **6:1-15 The 4 chariots & gift from the captives**

All these visions give us insight into Zerubbabel and Joshua, as they were used by God through Zechariah as tool to teach about His eternal purpose – to have a kingdom of priests, crowned and full of His truth, led by the great BRANCH who had removed sin and rebuilt the walls and the Temple of Jerusalem. This would have been a great help to the people at that time who worked with Joshua and Zerubbabel to build the Temple, but also gave them hope for the future. Not only would the enemies around them be removed but sin itself would be annihilated by this BRANCH. And the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles into the ecclesia would be a confirmation of the promises to Abraham that stated that 'in you all nations of the earth will be blessed.' And to think that you would hear all this at the time through using visions that focused on your two leaders, Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel the governor in Judah.

Section 6 – The Final Push

Objective:

- To understand the effectiveness of the prophetic messages of Haggai and Zechariah and then to understand how we can also stir each other up to good works
- To understand how Tattenai attempted to stop the final push and then to draw lessons from how God's will and justice always succeeds
- To understand, and copy, a high-functioning and spiritually active ecclesia
- To feel the emotions that are the fruits of making godly choices and following them through to the end

'Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.' **Ezra 6:16**

Overview

This section is all about the final push to get the Temple of God built, despite more opposition and uncertainty. This section will cover **Ezra 5-6**. In **Ezra 5**, the work resumes at the encouragement of the prophets (**v.1-2**); there is the challenge of Tattenai and his companions (**v.3-5**); and then Tattenai and his companions write a letter to Darius (**v.6-17**). In **Ezra 6**, Darius responds to Tattenai's letter (**v.1-12**); Tattenai and his companions obey the royal decree (**v.13**); the Temple is completed (**v.14-15**); and finally, the returned exiles celebrate the completion by dedicating the Temple (**v.16-22**).

The work resumes

8. Who was Tattenai and what is his title? (**Ezra 5:3,6; 6:6,13**)
 - a. What does 'governor' mean? Who else is given this title? (**Neh.5:14; Hag.1:1**)
 - b. What does Nehemiah say about the governors that came before him? (**Neh.5:14-15**)
 - c. There is also Shethar-Boznai and some 'companions' that follow along with Tattenai. These are identified by Darius as 'the Persians who are beyond the river' in **Ezra 6:6**. What was the remedy to these opposing forces? (Hint: **Ezra 5:5**)
 - d. Was this consistent with what the prophets had said? Find one verse from Haggai and one from Zechariah to support your answer.

9. Tattenai sent a letter to King Darius, a copy of which is recorded in **Ezra 5:6-17**.
- a. Tattenai asks who commanded them to build the temple and complete the walls (**v.9**). Their answer is anything but a straight answer – it is more like a history lesson! It is a declaration of faith and an understanding of God’s purpose. List the main points of their answer.

 - b. Looking at **v.12**, do you think the Jews had learned the lesson of the captivity? Explain.
10. **Ezra 6:1-12** is Darius’ response to Tattenai’s letter. It was not quite what he was looking for.
- a. Where and what is Achmetha?
(Hint: look in a Bible Dictionary)

 - b. List the main commands that Darius made of Tattenai. How were all these commands to be carried out? (**v.12**)

 - c. We see that the King made Tattenai and his people pay for the very thing they were trying to have stopped – the building of a Temple to God! This is absolute irony! Using verses like **Neh.4:4-5; Est.9:25; Psalm 7:14-16** and **1 Cor.3:16-17**, comment on how God’s justice ultimately works on those who oppose His will, then and now.
11. The 2nd Temple is finally completed by the returned exiles in **Ezra 6:15**.
- a. How long had it taken them to build the Temple? (refer to The Chart)

 - b. Was the 70 Years prophecy spoken of by Jeremiah and Daniel fulfilled? (refer to The Chart and **Dan.9:2**).

 - c. This should strengthen our faith since, in **2 Peter 3:9**, we find ourselves in a similar situation – waiting for God’s promise of Christ’s return to be fulfilled. If we keep reading in **2 Peter**, what does he say we should be doing while we await the fulfillment of God’s sure promises? (**v.14-18**). How should you do this specifically in your life?



Temple worship restored

12. In marked contrast to the elders at the time of the laying of the Temple foundation (**Ezra 3:12**), the elders of the Jews now take a leading role in the hard work of finishing the Temple. Please fill in the information we find out about these wonderful spiritually-motivated elders:

Passage	Comment on Elders
Ezra 5:5	
Ezra 5:8-11	
Ezra 6:14	

13. Looking at the New Testament, we are given many things to think about in our time when it comes to the important role elders play in the church. Please read and comment on these passages that talk about spiritual elders in our ecclesias: **1Tim.5:17-19; Titus 1:5-9; Heb.11:1-2; James 5:14-15; 1Pet.5:1-5**. How are elders important in your ecclesia? Are they doing a good job or not? How can you help them? What is your relationship to them? (Hint: you might need more space than this!)



*In **Ezra 6:15**, the Temple was finally completed – the Temple of the living God was done! Think of this! What an event. When was the moment when the last tool was heard clinking on the work and there was silence as it was inspected by the elders and the masons and the carpenters? When was the moment when all agreed that it was finished? When that moment came, there was rest from their labor of approximately 20 years – rest from stressful, anxious, worrying, threatening, challenging, hard work. And it had been worth it.*

14. In **Ezra 6:16** these people celebrated the dedication of the temple with joy. Joy is the delicious and fulfilling fruit to this whole exercise that the Jews have been going through and this is summed up in **Psalms 126** – ‘He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.’ Appreciation for what God has done, based on where you were before is an absolute must for the believer.

- a. What are examples of others who have had joy over what God had done for them? (helpful verses to start with: **Deut.12:5-9; 2 Chron.7:10; 2Chron.30:23-27**)

- b. What are some things that God has done that has made you joyful, compared to where you were in the past?



15. It is obvious that the amount of offerings at this 2nd dedication is very small compared to Solomon's dedication (2 Chron 7:5) – yet God is still pleased by it (**Hag.2:3-9**)! Explain what that means to you in your life of serving God. Be specific!
16. One of the first things the Jews do after completing the Temple is celebrate the Passover, as recorded in **Ezra 6:19-22**. This was highly significant as we will see after understanding the Passover.
- Why do you think these people felt it was important to keep the Passover? (Hint: feel free to read **Exodus 12** about the Passover)

The building was finished!

Looking back over the ground we've covered so far, we can see an interesting pattern. The sequence of events concerning these exiles is very similar God's purpose for all believers as revealed in Christ. Think of how the following can apply to us.

Pattern:

- Call went out
- Altar was built
- Foundations were laid
- Opposition and Adversity
- Prophets' message of hope and encouragement sustains the exiles
- Temple completed

The most important part of building the Temple wasn't actually the construction of the physical building, it was the construction of the people, working together, becoming a strong and fortified ecclesia that put God in their center and opposed the wickedness around them. In a way, the actual Temple was only a means that God used to work on his chosen remnant, to mold and shape them into a house that he could live in. So it is with us.

Section 7 - Ezra Returns

Read:

Ezra 7-10

Objective:

- To get a feel for Ezra's character, mission and motivation
- To follow Ezra as he journeys back to the Land
- To look at Ezra's mantra "Hand of our God" and lessons for us

"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. **Ezra 8:21**

Review of Background to Ezra

The first six chapters of the Book of Ezra are an account of the events which happened when the exiles first returned to the Land under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. They tell us how the exiles rebuilt the Temple and overcame opposition through the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The last part of the book (chapters 7 to 10) introduce Ezra the Scribe and tell us how and why he went back to the Land of Judah. Chapters 9 and 10, in particular, explain the huge problems Ezra encountered and how he tried to overcome these challenges as a spiritual shepherd of God's people. Later, Ezra also appears in Nehemiah 8, where he works with Nehemiah to lead the people in a great spiritual revival after the Wall has been completed.

1. Read **Ezra 7:1-10**
2. The name Ezra comes from the Hebrew word "ezer", meaning "to aid or help" (#5830), and is closely related to another word which conveys the idea of overshadowing protection and care (#5826). Nehemiah's name means "Consolation of Yahweh". Nehemiah was a governor/prince. Ezra was a priest. How did Ezra and Nehemiah foreshadow the work of the Lord Jesus Christ? Keep this in the back of your mind as we progress.

Ezra's Family

Ezra 7:1-5 traces Ezra's genealogy (see *Appendix G* for an outline of the priestly family). Cross-reference this list of names with the family tree found in **1Chron.6:3-15** (pay special attention to **vs.13-15**). **2 Kings 25:18-21** says that Seraiah was executed by Nebuchadnezzar soon after Jerusalem was destroyed around 586 BC. The high priesthood then passed to his son, Jehozadak. Presumably Jeshua then inherited the position of high priest sometime during the Babylonian captivity, and subsequently led the people back to Judah with Zerubbabel in the first year of Cyrus (536 BC).

So what's the point? Why do we need to know all these details?

- First of all, the implication of these first five verses is that Ezra was in the lineage of the high priest, being a direct descendant of Aaron himself. This establishes his authority. It also stands in contrast to those who could not prove their heritage, and were therefore excluded from the priesthood (see **Ezra 2:62-63**).

- Ezra was Jeshua's uncle.
- Some have suggested that Ezra became the spiritual head of the Jewish community who remained in the Captivity after Jeshua and Zerubbabel returned to Judah.

Ezra is described as both a priest and a scribe. This dual responsibility is emphasized quite a bit (see, for example, **Ezra 5:1-5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 21, Neh.8:1,2,4,9,13**).

PRIESTS

All priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests. To be a priest you had to be a descendent of Aaron. Priests had many roles in the nation of Israel: ministering in the Temple, acting as intermediaries between God and man, distinguishing between clean and unclean, acting as judges and arbiters, as well as being guardians and teachers of God's Law. They were organized into 24 shifts (called "lots" or "courses") by King David (e.g. Zechariah in **Luke 1:5-10**). The Levites supported the priests in their duties. When not ministering or on duty in the Temple the priests and Levites were dispersed throughout the Land where they lived among the people of different tribes since they did not have their own inheritance. The priests and Levites relied on the support of the people through tithes and offerings. Apparently the priesthood became corrupted and was heavily influenced by Hellenistic (Greek) philosophies by the time of Jesus. Because of this apostasy, it appears that a new group of individuals, known as scribes or rabbis, came to be regarded as the primary religious authorities and teachers of the people.

God's purpose was for Israel to act as a collective nation of priests towards the other people of the earth, to teach and instruct the Gentiles in His ways. They were to be His special people (just like the priests and Levites were). This is our calling too: not only are we to show God's light to others around us now, but in the Kingdom Age we will be kings and priests (**1 Pet.2:9; Rev.1:6; 5:10; 20:6**).

SCRIBES

The scribes of the Old Testament were the guardians of the Holy Scriptures, painstakingly transcribing every jot and tittle of God's Word for the instruction of future generations. Some think that Ezra himself was responsible for assembling much of the Old Testament. Around the time of the Exile the scribes began to supersede the priests as the respected authorities on matters of the Law and became the primary teachers of the people. Eventually they also assumed judicial responsibilities and formed part of the Sanhedrin. Sadly, by the time of the First Century A.D., the rabbis, as they were then known, had forgotten Ezra's fine example; Jesus harshly criticized them for their inflated self-importance, legalism, and hypocrisy.

Read **Ezra 7:6**. How is Ezra described in this verse? Research the meaning of this phrase (Hint: Strong's #4106, which is derived from #4116, also appears in **Psalms 45:1**). Compare what you find to **7:11**. What kind of man do you think Ezra was?

3. In **7:10**, we find another glowing description of Ezra. To which three things had Ezra committed his life?

4. What does it mean to “prepare” one’s heart? (e.g. **2 Chron.12:14**). What other people in the Bible prepared their hearts, and why is this so important for us to do as well?



This is our introduction to the man Ezra. It is immediately apparent to us that he must have been a man of the Word. But we must not mistake him for a dusty old scholar, for he dedicated himself to the practical application of the Word and its teaching (“seek, do and teach”).

Ezra was no Pharisee: he walked the talk, which is more than can be said about the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day.

5. Read **Matthew 23**. How did the religious authorities of Jesus’ day, the scribes and Pharisees, behave? Jesus had compassion on people’s shortcomings and reached out to sinners, but he vehemently attacks these men. Why?

6. After condemning the scribes and Pharisees as whitewashed tombs, Jesus says in **Matthew 23:28**: *“Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”* Do you ever struggle with being hypocritical towards the Truth? What are some practical strategies for identifying and overcoming hypocrisy in our own lives? How can we help others to do the same? (think of helpful verses like **Psalms 51:10** and examples like Josiah—only the reformed can reform!)



7. First look at **Luke 11:52** then compare what you find there to **Deut.30:10-16**. What were the scribes and Pharisees missing, and what should we never forget?

Read **Phil. 2:19-21**. This was Ezra to a tee: one who sincerely cared for the well-being of his brothers and sisters; one whose sincere love and unfeigned faith stood in contrast to those around him, such as his corrupt relatives who Malachi condemns (**Mal.2:7-9**)

8. Ezra purposed in his heart to provide the godly leadership and guidance that the hassled Judean ecclesia desperately needed. In contrast to so many religious leaders in Israel’s history, Ezra became a true shepherd for God’s people. Consider **Ezk.34**, a passage with which Ezra would have been intimately familiar. Then look at **Matt.9:35-36** and **John 10**. What are some characteristics of true spiritual shepherds, and their attitude towards the flock?



9. Read **Ezra 7:11-28** and review the table below, then try to summarize Ezra life work in a few words:

'THE KING GRANTED ALL HIS REQUEST' (7:6)	
REFERENCE	COMMENTS
7:13	He wanted the remaining captives to be free to return
7:14, 25	He wanted permission to apply and teach God's laws in Jerusalem and Judah
7:15-18	He wanted to take gold and silver to beautify the house of God and to buy everything needful for the sacrifices

10. Fill in the following table to establish the who, what, when, where and how's...

'SO WE CAME TO JERUSALEM' (8:32)		
QUESTION	REFERENCE	COMMENTS
Who went back with Ezra?	7:7,28	
When did they leave Babylon?	7:7-9	
Where did they stop and for how long?	8:15,31	
When did they arrive in Jerusalem? How long was their journey?	7:7-9	

About 13 years before Nehemiah (**Ezra 7:7** cp. **Neh.2:1**), Ezra obtains the goodwill of King Artaxerxes and leads 2,000 of his countrymen back to their homeland. With them, they carry an estimated 30 tons of treasure donated by the king and his counselors to beautify the Temple in Jerusalem (**7:15-16**). Some have suggested that this treasure was worth nearly \$100,000,000 USD. Evidently the King of the Persian Empire invested a great deal of trust in this man Ezra, which says something of his character and integrity.

11. Ezra's effort is not slipshod nor haphazard. Review the following chart and look at how Ezra rallies his brothers and sisters around the work of the Truth. Think about how these principles are important in a practical way, and how they can be applied in your ecclesia or CYC.

EZRA'S APPROACH	REFERENCE	HOW CAN WE APPLY THIS PRINCIPLE?
First begins as an individual commitment	7:10	
Rallies support for his cause	7:28	



Brings the people together at Ahava, and gets organized	8:15	
Asks for help from capable brothers	8:16-18	
Inspires the people to have a spiritual focus	8:21	
Breaks up the workload and engages the people by assigning responsibilities	8:24-30	e.g. CYC needs to <i>engage</i> young people. By involving young people—letting them take responsibility and get their hands dirty—we can develop a sense of ownership and commitment for our CYC’s. The hallmark of a great leader is not to do all the work themselves, but to rally other people in the cause. And besides, many hands make light work.

Ezra gathers the people together at the River Ahava and camps there for three days. In **Ezra 8:15-18**, Ezra realizes that there were no Levites with them! He entrusts a group of men to visit a nearby town called Casiphia, which was apparently a renowned place of Jewish scholarship, and convince some Levites to join them. Sherebiah, his brothers, and their families respond.

Read **Ezra 8:21-23**. Ezra was no hypocrite— he “*let go and let God*”. He was not about to tell King Artaxerxes about God’s providential care, and then turn around and ask him for an armed guard just in case God’s care wasn’t enough!



12. This brings up a really challenging point for us. Do we really believe what we profess? Later on, Nehemiah asked the king for letters to permit him to pass through the regions to get to Jerusalem, and also took some of the king’s captains of the army and horsemen with him (Neh 2:7-9). Why do you think these two faithful men went about their returns differently?

13. This phrase in **v.21**—“humble ourselves before God, to seek from Him the right way for us and for our little ones and all our possessions”—is incredible! Ezra led the way by making it clear he was convinced that God was working in their lives. Spend some time reflecting on verses like **Prov. 3:5-7; Isa.66:2; Psalm 25:8-12; 143:8; Prov. 16:9; 14:12; 21:2** In order for God to be able to work in our lives, what must our perspective be?

14. Ezra clearly had the right perspective. He was a man of faith and deep conviction— someone who was very aware of God working through the circumstances of his life. In fact, Ezra’s mantra was “*The hand of our God*”. This phrase also appears in **7:6,9,28;8:18,22,31** and it even seems to have rubbed off on Nehemiah in **Neh.2:8,18**. Grab a colored pencil and Bible mark Ezra’s mantra.

The Hand of God: *Understanding how the Yahweh works in our lives is something that many of us struggle to come to terms with. As young people we have many important life decisions to make and not a lot of experience to go on—choices about school and work, a husband or wife, a place to live, or things such as purchasing a house or doing missionary work, for example. How can we determine God’s will for our lives? This is an important question, and we hope to explore it in detail during one of our evening classes at Conference.*



Conclusion

Having sought God’s providential care, Ezra and his brethren arrive safely at Jerusalem. He is eagerly welcomed, and delivers the treasure to the Temple. But all is not well. As Ezra soon discovers, the situation in the Judean ecclesia is dire and threatens to undermine all the progress the Exiles had made since returning from Babylon with Zerubbabel...

Section 8 – Solving Ecclesial Problems

Read:

Ezra 9-10

Objective:

- To understand the dire situation which existed in the ecclesia of Judah when Ezra returned
- To study Ezra's reaction to an ecclesia which was decaying from the inside out

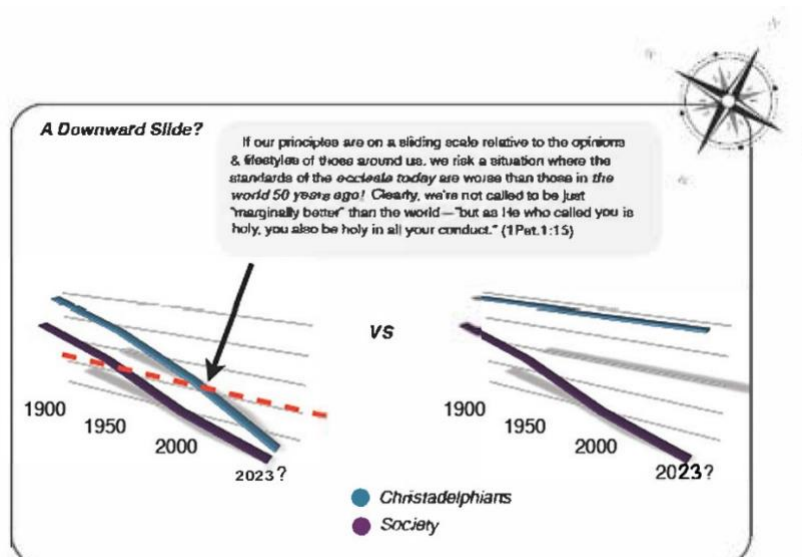
"And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage." **Ezra 9:8**

Introduction

After an exhausting journey of four months Ezra and 2,000 of his fellow exiles arrive at Jerusalem. Within days an urgent report opens his eyes to the disturbing reality which he faced. His heart sunk; the situation was worse than he had anticipated!

Worldly influences were undermining the very fabric of their ecclesia— even the leaders were affected! There was a tremendous need for spiritual encouragement from brethren who were willing to stand up and lead others in doing what was right.

1. Who brought this report to Ezra? Who were implicated? Who were 'foremost' in causing this problem? (9:1,2)
2. Overall, what was the *general* issue at stake here in **Ezra 9:1**?
3. And what was the *specific* symptom of this problem? (9:2)
4. What was the sad result? (9:2) (cp. **Psalm 106:35-41**)



5. What are some ways we can ensure that our personal, family, and ecclesial compass always points “true north”? (use scripture to support your answer)

6. Not only was the ecclesia letting things slide, but the leaders were actually promoting the problem by setting a poor example: “they were foremost in this trespass”. Imagine being in an ecclesia where your arranging brothers were marrying women of this world and allowing your children to be brought up in the Churches. This is the “Doctrine of Balaam” at work! Take a look at **2Pet.2:13-15**; **Rev.2:14** (cp. **Num.25**) and do a brief study on this phrase and what it means. Bonus marks for spotting connections to Balaam/**Num.25** in Ezra or Nehemiah (e.g. **Neh.13:1-3**).

The Doctrine of Balaam?

*None of us are perfect and we all have areas of weakness in our lives. But we should never trivialize or gloss over sin because it is considered “normal”. For example, a quick perusal of some Christadelphian Facebook sites reveals that it is apparently okay for us to swear, go drinking with school friends, and enjoy explicit music and movies. Is this “normal” behavior for Christadelphian young people? Its one thing to have shortcomings you’re working on, its another to promote them as an acceptable lifestyle. **By our own actions in the pursuit of fulfillment we could be selling out our brothers and sisters by influencing them to go the way of the world.** Are our friends becoming the unintended casualties of our pursuit of the “pleasures of sin”? Maybe the Doctrine of Balaam is closer to home than we think.*

7. Consider some areas of your life where you could be unintentionally encouraging this downward slide by normalizing an un-Christ-like lifestyle in your CYC or ecclesia, then list some ways you can stop being a Balaam and instead be a force for good like Ezra.

8. Read **Malachi 2**. In the context of intermarriage with unbelievers, Malachi lays a condemning accusation at the feet of the priests and spiritual leaders of the nation: “*You have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi.*” This “covenant of Levi” is also mentioned in **v.5**, where it is referred to as a “covenant of life and peace”. This is another echo back to **Num.25:11-13**. What was happening in **Num.25**? Who was the covenant made to, and why was it made?



9. So, in Ezra and Nehemiah’s day there was a dire need for a “modern day” Phinehas, one who had the qualities of **Mal.2:5-7**. What were these qualities?

These characteristics could easily be used to describe the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest (who turned many away from iniquity!), but they could also be perfectly applied another priest, a direct descendant of Phinehas— Ezra! The one who had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach it!

10. When worldly lifestyles become “normal” and accepted in our ecclesias, we need people like Phinehas and Ezra; men of depth, integrity, and sincerity to stand firm against the tide—not only by what they say, but most importantly, *by how they live*. No doubt when you hear the word “leadership”, the first thing that comes to your mind is an older brother who sits on your arranging board, or speaks at Bible schools. But leadership is so much closer to home than that! For instance, leadership could be as simple as encouraging spiritual conversation at CYC, or not playing worldly music in your car on road trips. Reflect on what Ezra’s example of leadership means to you. What are some practical ways which you can follow that example?



11. How can younger brethren show leadership in resisting the ‘downward spiral’? How about sisters?



12. Ezra is visibly distraught at the news; he rends his clothes and tears out his hair! What does this action express? (e.g. **Job 1:20**— think about what Job had just experienced)

13. Ezra was devastated by the news of Judah’s waywardness, but he doesn’t react angrily or lash out at people who he could have easily condemned. Instead, his response is tempered by serious reflection and focused by prayer. Too often we tend to respond in the heat of the moment and our reaction is harsh and instantaneous. *No doubt the best policy in ecclesial life is an objective response after careful consideration and prayer.* Develop some scriptural principles on this subject. Here are a few verses just to get you started— **Prov.16:32; 21:23; Psalm 106:33, 2 Pet.1:5-7, Gal.5:15, James 3**



He who rules his spirit...

*It is significant that Ezra fasts all day until the evening sacrifice. You can almost hear people saying ‘why doesn’t he just do something!’ But we must not mistake Ezra’s patient and tempered approach for an unwillingness to take action. Ezra did not act rashly in the heat of the moment when he was upset, but took the matter to God in prayer. **Sometimes ecclesial life requires quick, decisive action; at others a patient, tempered approach is needed.** Indeed, ecclesial leaders must show temperance, gentleness and patience, and be able to control their own emotions— especially during controversy (**Titus 1:7-9; 1 Tim. 3:2-7**).*

15. Read **Ezra 9:6-15**: Ezra says some incredible things which show just how deeply his mind was rooted in God’s Word (e.g. **v.8!**). Summarize his prayer below:
16. Read **Ezra 10:1-6**: That evening, as Ezra was weeping and praying, a very large assembly of the Exiles began to gather around this priest who had just arrived from Babylon. The people, we are told, wept “very bitterly”. Who else in scripture wept bitterly, and why? Do you think there’s any comparison to how Ezra was feeling?
17. In **vs.2-4** a man named Shechaniah encourages Ezra to be strong and take action. “Yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this,” Shechaniah says. Later, in **Neh.8**, Ezra’s own advice to the people was “do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (**v.10**). All of us have experienced the wave of shame and guilt which sweeps over us when we realize how far short we have fallen of the glory of God. But like Shechaniah, we must realize that we can still turn to God for forgiveness and build anew. Study **2 Cor.7:8-11** to define “godly sorrow” and explain how it can “lead to salvation”. In contrast, explain how “worldly sorrow” can eat us up if we’re not careful.



In **v.5** Ezra arises and compels the leaders of the priests, the Levites and the people to swear an oath that they would commit to taking drastic steps to heal their nation before it decayed from the inside out. Incidentally, we read in **v.18** that even some of Ezra’s own relatives had been implicated in this trespass. This was not a theoretical problem for Ezra— it was emotional and close to home.

18. **Ezra 10** is a difficult section of scripture to understand. *Appendix M* reviews some of the relevant scriptural principles on intermarriage with unbelievers and the issue of putting away. You may find it helpful to read through *Appendix M* before answering the next few questions.

19. Read **Ezra 10:7-17** and fill in the table below:

‘NO ONE CAN STAND BEFORE YOU BECAUSE OF THIS’ (9:15)		
QUESTION	REFERENCE	COMMENTS
What was their plan to restore the spiritual integrity of the ecclesia?	10:3,11	
Whose advice were they acting on?	10:3,10-11	
Was this in accordance with God’s will, or not?	10:11	
In what way was the plan to be implemented?	10:3	
What law is being referred to?	Deut. 24	
Who was to be put away: just the unbelieving wives, or their children as well?	10:3, 44	
Who else was to be separated from?	10:11	
Who supported this plan? Did anyone resist it?	10:12,15-16	
What was the goal of this plan?	10:14	(cp. Num.25:11)

And so, Ezra and those “who trembled at the commandment of our God” issued a proclamation in **vs.7-8** for all the descendants of the Exile to gather in Jerusalem. Within three days, all the Jews had assembled in the open square before the Temple. Ezra arose and laid the guilt squarely at the feet of the Exiles. He exhorted them to confess their sin, and turn back to God by separating from the peoples of the land and putting away their unbelieving wives.

It was now early winter, and cold rain drenched the people as they sat trembling before the house of God. With the rain came a solemn resolve to begin anew, to retrace the wayward steps they had so foolishly tread.

And so, on that rainy day, the work of healing the nation began in earnest. A special ‘committee’ of Arranging Brethren was formed to lead the effort. Men who had married foreign wives and their wives



were forced to make some major decisions and after four months the spiritual integrity of the nation was restored.

20. If they simply forced all men with foreign wives to separate, it could have been done in a week. Why do you think this procedure took four months?

How many men in the end had to put away their wives?

How many were priests and Levites?

If there were about 50,000 exile men who returned so far, does it appear the problem of marriages with unbelievers was as bad as first thought?

Although the Law of Moses accommodated the putting away of Jewish wives (**Deut.24**) because of the hardness of their hearts (**Matt.19:8**), a provision which Ezra uses here to solve this bad situation, this doesn't mean that brothers today should divorce all their unbelieving wives!



Here's a Case Study to consider: Five years ago a sister in your meeting was baptized as a result of the Learn to Read the Bible Effectively seminars. She has two young children who she has been bringing to Sunday School. However, her husband is blatantly antagonistic towards the Truth and constantly ridicules the Bible in the home. Recently he has been preventing the children from attending Sunday School, insisting that they not waste their weekends with religion. Not only that, but whenever she struggles to pray or read her Bible she is deflated by a derogatory comment from her husband. The Truth is becoming a source of contention which is tearing apart their family. Things have gotten so bad that she wonders how much longer she can survive spiritually in this situation. Should this sister use the precedent of Ezra and the Exiles to separate from her husband for the sake of herself and her children?

20. How does **2 Cor. 7:10-16** influence your decision in this matter? What about the example of Abigail in **1Sam.25**?

Conclusion

We leave Chapter 10 with Ezra, like his role model Phinehas, standing in the gap and turning away God's wrath. Indeed, as Shechaniah had said, there was still hope in Israel despite of this. Ezra had narrowly averted disaster, but there still work to be done and he would continue to nurse his suffering ecclesia back to spiritual health.

Optional Exercise

The latter part of chapter 10, **verses 18-44**, is an account of the many in Judah who had sinned in the matter of intermarriage. Many of the children of the people who initially returned in zeal with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, are implicated here.

If you were to color in all the families in **Ezra 2** that showed up in **Ezra 10**, what would become obvious is that there are a lot of families that are hurting from the intermarriage of their members.

Optional Exercise: Color in the names which occur in both Ezra 2 and Ezra 10. Use the material in *Appendix H* as a reference.

Summary and Conclusion to Part 1

Looking back over the ground we've covered so far, we can see an interesting pattern. The sequence of events concerning these exiles is very similar God's purpose for all believers as revealed in Christ. Think of how the following can apply to us.

Pattern:

- Call went out
- Altar was built
- Foundations were laid
- Opposition and Adversity
- Prophets' message of hope and encouragement sustains the exiles
- Temple completed

The most important part of building the Temple wasn't actually the construction of the physical building, it was the construction of the people, working together, becoming a strong and fortified ecclesia that put God in their center and opposed the wickedness around them. In a way, the actual Temple was only a means that God used to work on his chosen remnant, to mold and shape them into a house that he could live in. So it is with us.

😊 **Have a rest and then get ready for Part 2** 😊
It's not as long as part 1!

Appendices

BC Youth Conference 2023

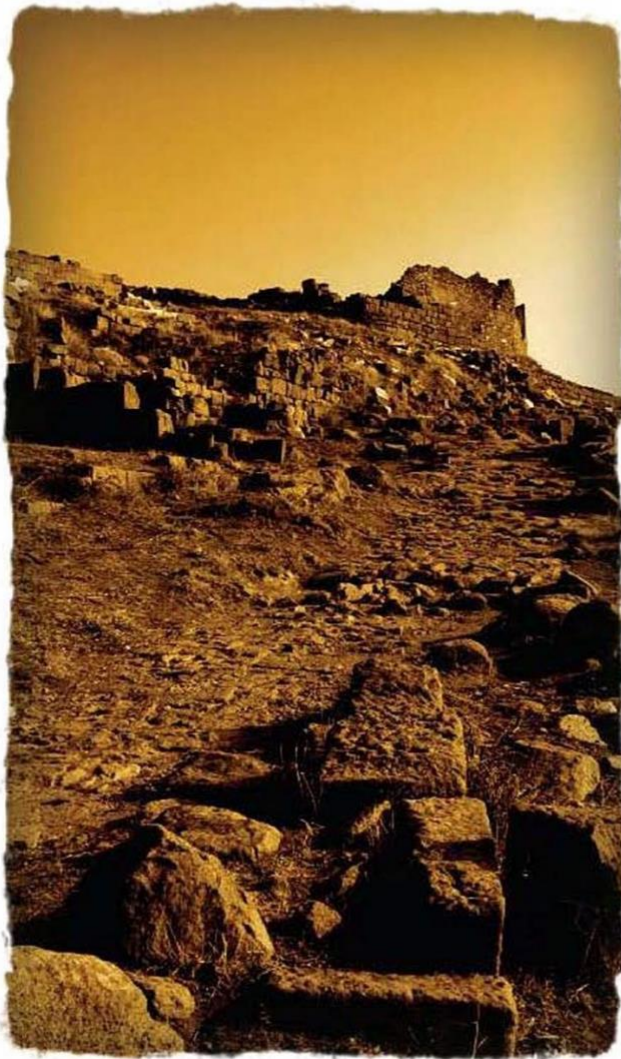


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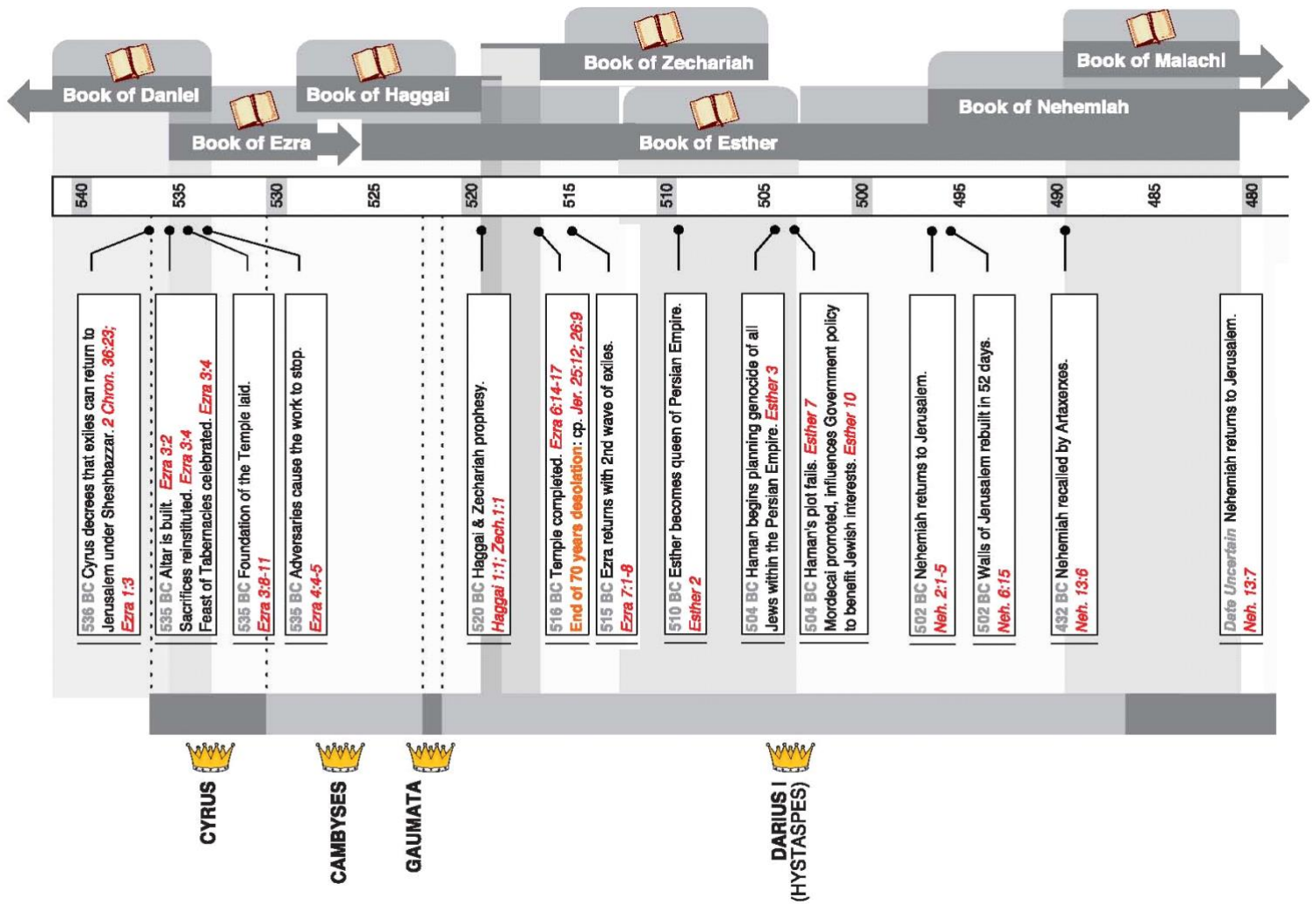
Judah's Last Days

Appendix E

The Seventh Month

Appendix A

CHRONOLOGY OF THE EXILES



Significant events prior to exile (all years are BC)

- 605 Nebuchadnezzar becomes king of Babylon, invades Judah
- Daniel taken captive, interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream in 603 BC
- 598 10,000 captives deported to Babylon, including Ezekiel
- Zedekiah becomes king
- 593 Ezekiel begins prophesying
- 588 Zedekiah rebels, Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah
- Jerusalem besieged for 18 months
- 587 Jerusalem falls, Kingdom of Judah comes to an end
- 586 City destroyed, Temple burnt, most survivors deported
- Gedaliah assassinated, remainder of people flee to Egypt

EXILE

Significant events during "the 400-year silence" (all years are BC)

- 330 Persian Empire conquered by Alexander the Great *cp. Dan. 8*
- 165 Judas Maccabeus leads revolt against Greeks, establishes independent Jewish state (Hasmonean Kingdom).
- 150 Pharisees and Sadducees rise to prominence in Jewish religion and politics.
- 65 Judea becomes a Roman province.
- 37 The Herods become rulers of Judea.
- 4 The Lord Jesus Christ is born in Bethlehem.

Appendix B | Bible Marking

BOOK of EZRA	
CHAPTER	VERSE
1	1
2	-
3	1, 6, 8
4	5, 6, 7, 24
5	13
6	3, 15, 19, 22
7	1, 7, 8, 9
8	31, 32, 33
9	5
10	1, 9, 13, 16, 17

PROPHECY of HAGGAI	
CHAPTER	VERSE
1	1, 15
2	1, 10, 20

PROPHECY of ZECHARIAH	
CHAPTER	VERSE
1	1, 7
7	1

BOOK of NEHEMIAH	
CHAPTER	VERSE
1	1
2	1, 11
3	-
4	-
5	14
6	15
7	73
8	2, 3, 13, 14, 18
9	1
10	-
11	-
12	27, 43, 44, 47
13	1, 6, 15, 23

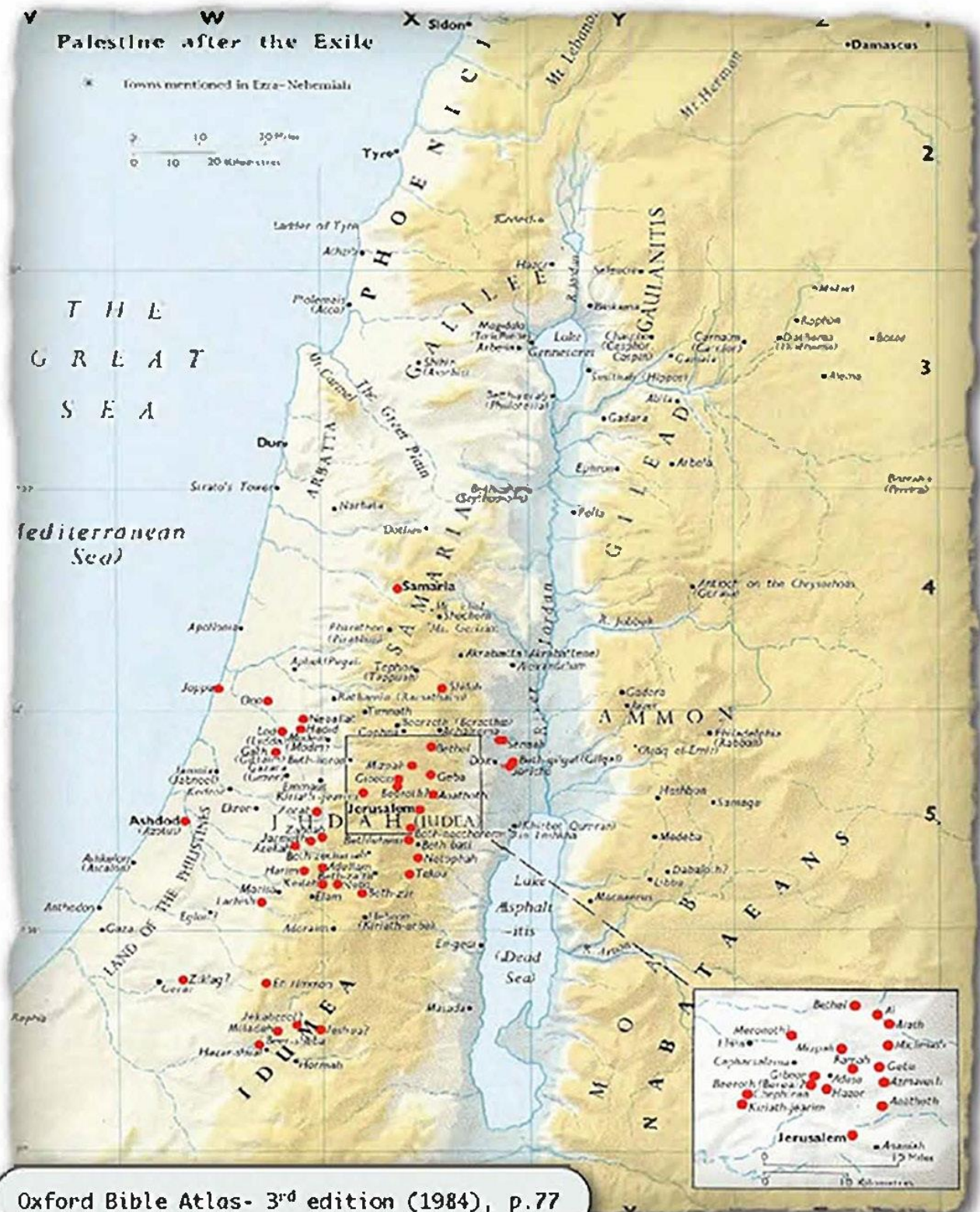
BOOK of ESTHER	
CHAPTER	VERSE
1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10
2	1, 12, 16, 21
3	7, 12, 13
4	11, 16
5	1, 8, 9, 12, 14
6	1
7	2
8	1, 9, 12
9	1, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21
10	-

*Ezra
had prepared his
heart to SEEK the
Law of Yahweh,
and to DO it,
and to
TEACH
statutes and
ordinances in
Israel*

Ezra 7:10



Appendix C | Map of Judah After the Exile



Oxford Bible Atlas- 3rd edition (1984), p.77

Appendix D | Judah's Last Days

SUMMARY of EVENTS		
YEAR	EVENT	REFERENCE
609 BC	+ Josiah meets Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo and is killed in battle.	2Kings 23:29-30 2Chron. 35:20-24
	+ Jehoahaz elected king by the people.	2 Kings 23:31 2 Chron. 36:1
	+ Jehoahaz deposed and imprisoned by Pharaoh.	2 Kings 23:33 2 Chron. 36:3
	+ Judah becomes tributary to Egypt. Jehoiakim made king by Pharaoh.	2 Kings 23:34-35 2 Chron. 36:3-4
606 BC	+ Nebuchadnezzar becomes king of Babylon.	—
	+ Babylon invades Judah. Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem.	Daniel 1:1-2
	+ Jehoiakim surrenders to Nebuchadnezzar and serves him for three years.	2 Kings 24:1 2 Chron. 36:6
	+ Daniel and the young nobles brought to Babylon.	Daniel 1:1-4
603 BC	+ Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream.	Daniel 2:1
602 BC	+ Jehoiakim rebels after three years of servitude.	2 Kings 24:1
598 BC	+ Jehoiakim is defeated by Nebuchadnezzar and taken captive to Babylon along with 3,023 others (including Ezekiel).	2 Kings 24:1 2 Chron. 36:6 Jeremiah 52:28; Ezekiel 1:2
	+ Nebuchadnezzar carries away some vessels of the Temple to Babylon.	2 Chron. 36:7 cp. Daniel 5:2
597 BC	+ Jehoiachin made king and reigns three months.	2 Kings 24:6,8 2 Chron. 36:8-9
	+ Babylonian army attacks Jerusalem again and Jehoiachin surrenders. The Babylonians sack the city and plunder the Temple again.	2 Kings 24:10 2 Chron. 36:10
	+ 10,000 Jews deported to Babylon.	2 Kings 24:14-16
	+ Zedekiah made king. Reigns 11 years.	2 Kings 24:17-18 2 Chron. 36:10-11
593 BC	+ Ezekiel begins prophesying.	Ezekiel 1:2

588 BC	+ Zedekiah rebels. Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem for 18 months.	2 Kings 24:20; 25:1-2 2 Chron. 36:13
587 BC	+ Jerusalem falls. Zedekiah killed.	2 Kings 25:3-7 2 Chron. 36:17-18
586 BC	+ Jerusalem destroyed, the Temple plundered and burnt.	2 Kings 25:8-11 2 Chron. 36:19-20
	+ 832 survivors deported to Babylon.	Jeremiah 52:29
	+ Gedaliah made governor.	2 Kings 25:22-25 Jeremiah 40:5
	+ Refugees return from surrounding nations.	Jeremiah 40:12
	+ Gedaliah assassinated two months later by Ishmael. Babylonian garrison massacred.	Jeremiah 41:1-3
	+ Remaining Jews flee to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them.	2 Kings 25:26 Jeremiah 41:17-44:30
582 BC	+ 745 Jews deported to Babylon.	Jeremiah 52:30

"Between 606 and 582 BC, in the first half of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar repeatedly invaded Judah. Finally he besieged Jerusalem, carried away the surviving inhabitants to Babylon, and destroyed the Temple. Within this period of fierce and intense activity, there were two major deportations..."

The Exiles Return (page 9)

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF JUDAH'S LAST DAYS

In 598 BC Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah (formerly Mattaniah), was installed by Nebuchadnezzar on the throne of David; he was twenty-one years old and reigned for eleven years.

Despite the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah, Zedekiah made alliances with the Egyptians and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. In 588 BC Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of Babylon, marched his armies south to suppress the insurrection.

Vigorous measures of defense were planned by Zedekiah (Jer. 33:4). But as winter approached, news of the advancing Babylonian army filled the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah with terror (Jer. 52:2-6).

"We looked for peace, but no good came. And for a time of health, and there was trouble! The snoring of his horses was heard from Dan. The whole land trembled at the sound of neighing of his strong ones; for they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it, the city and those who dwell in it." (Jeremiah 8:15-16)

Nebuchadnezzar took up residence at Riblah in northern Lebanon; from there he dispatched his forces and directed the campaigns in the south. As the powerful Babylonian armies crossed Judah's northern border and began their invasion, waves of Jewish refugees fled across the Jordan into neighboring nations— Moab, Ammon and Edom— to escape the fighting (cp. Jer. 40:11-12). Many people living in the country fled to the safety of the fortified cities (Jer. 8:14). Some hid in the wilderness— in caves and fields (Jer. 4:27, 28; Eze. 33:27-28)— hoping the storm would pass them over. But the Babylonians could not be stopped: the fortified cities of Judah fell one by one until only Azekah, Lachish and Jerusalem survived.

In Lachish archaeologists have uncovered ancient letters, dating back to the Babylonian invasion. This remarkable discovery gives us an intimate glimpse into the deteriorating situation of Judah's last days- *these people were real!* Imagine what it would have been like: from your home in Jerusalem you would see the angry black smoke billowing in the distance, where Lachish burns. You fear for your family, but have nowhere to turn. Wounded survivors fleeing the fighting would confirm the horrible news: Lachish has fallen. The Babylonian army is advancing towards Jerusalem. There's nothing you can do- you and your family are next.

The Lachish Letters:

"A discovery of unusual significance for Biblical studies was made in 1935, when eighteen letters written in Hebrew of the time of Jeremiah were uncovered. They were written on broken pieces of pottery, and they were found in and near the right-hand guardroom of the outer gate, mixed in the burned debris of the final destruction of the city.

"Of the best preserved are letters written by a certain Hoshaiah, apparently a subordinate military officer stationed at an outpost or observation point not far from Lachish, to Yaash, the commanding officer of Lachish. That the letters were all written within a period of a few days or weeks is indicated by the fact that the pieces of pottery on which they were written were from jars of similar shape and date, and five of the pieces actually fit together as fragments of the same original vessel. The fact that all but two of the letters were found on the floor of the guardroom naturally suggests that they were deposited there by Yaash himself upon receiving them from Hoshaiah.

"The letters reflect the disturbed and excited condition of the country just before the final destruction of Lachish at the end of Zedekiah's reign. Professor Albright plausibly suggests the later summer of 589 BC as the date of the letters- the period just before the arrival of the main body of Nebuchadnezzar's army which laid siege to Jerusalem in the middle of January, 588 BC. The presence of a great number of burnt olive stones in the nearby ruins suggests autumn as the actual time of destruction, after the conclusion of the olive harvest.

"Letter 1, though only a list of names, is of striking significance since three of the nine names which occur- Gemariah, Jaazaniah, and Meriah- appear in the Old Testament only in the time of Jeremiah. A fourth name is Jeremiah, which, however, is not limited in the Old Testament to the prophet Jeremiah, and need not refer to him. A fifth name, likewise not limited to this period, is Mattaniah, which Biblical students will recognize as the pre-throne name of King Zedekiah.

"Letters 2-6 are the best preserved and the most easily read. All of them are similar in salutation. Letter 3 begins: "Thy servant Hoshaiah sends to report

to my lord Yaash: May YKHH cause my Lord to hear tidings of peace.” Throughout this group of letters Hoshaiiah is continually defending himself to his superior, although the charges against him are not always clear. It is tempting to think that he is in sympathy with the Jeremiah faction which wanted to submit to the Babylonians instead of rebelling; but, of course, we cannot be sure. He describes some, probably the princes, in almost the same words which the princes use against Jeremiah in Jer.38:4.

“In Letter 3, Hoshaiiah reports to Yaash that a royal mission is on the way to Egypt, and that a company of this group has been sent to his outpost (or to Lachish) for provisions, an allusion which points directly to the intrigues of the pro-Egyptian party under Zedekiah. Of unusual interest is the reference in the same letter to “the prophet.” Some writers have confidently identified this prophet with Jeremiah. This is entirely possible, but we cannot be certain.

“The final statement of Letter 4 affords an intimate glimpse into the declining days of the Kingdom of Judah. Hoshaiiah concludes: “Investigate, and (my lord) will know that for the fire-signals of Lachish we are watching, according to all the sign which my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah.” This statement calls to mind the passage in Jer.34:7.” [See also Jer.6:1]

In January, 588 BC, the entire Babylonian army of King Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem. They surrounded the city, encompassing the hearts of the people with fear; the brutal siege lasted nearly two years. At first the City's defenses held but it was only a matter of time; the Babylonian army built siege towers and ramps and began slowly battering through the wall.

The situation within the city soon became desperate. Five hundred and forty four days into the siege, the food reserves of Jerusalem were completely exhausted (2 Kings 25:3). The ensuing famine was so severe that many of the people resorted to cannibalism, killing their own children and boiling their emaciated bodies (Lam.4:9-10; Jer.19:9; Lam.2:20; cp. 2 Kings 6:28-29). In horrific fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28, mothers smothered their newborn children and secretly devoured them, along with the infant's afterbirth (v.54-57). Jer.19:9 speaks of the sheer desperation experienced by the survivors who were driven to despair. There are no words in our language to express the severity of the physical and mental agony and anguish they endured.

Zephaniah had prophesied of this time: “Because they have sinned against the LORD, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse” (Zeph. 1:17). Corpses fell “like cuttings after the harvester, and no one gathered them” (Jer.9:22; Psalm 79:2-3). The dead bodies were piled up in the streets of Jerusalem; many were thrown over the wall, into the Valley of the Son of Hinnom (Jer.19:6-9). The stench of death permeated the City and disease spread rapidly throughout the inhabitants of Jerusalem. All the while, the sound of Babylonian soldiers battering through the stone walls grew louder and louder with each passing day.

In mid-July, 586 BC, the Babylonians broke through the wall. As Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers rushed into Jerusalem's streets, the surviving Jews were too weak to mount an effective defense, and the City soon fell. That night, Zedekiah, knowing all was lost, fled the City with his soldiers towards the Jordan Valley (Jer.39:4-5). He was captured at Jericho, where freedom was literally within his sight. He was brought to Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah where he was forced to watch the execution of his sons, the last image he saw before his own eyes were put out. Dragged in chains to Babylon Zedekiah spent the rest of his life in prison (Jer.52). A month later, Nebuzaradan, Captain of the Guard, arrived in Jerusalem. Under his command the Temple was burnt and the walls of Jerusalem razed to the ground. Soon after, 1000 of the surviving

Inhabitants of Jerusalem and the defectors were carried away to Babylon, a five month journey of nearly 600 miles. As they left the smoldering ruins of Jerusalem they traveled north passing city after city destroyed by the Babylonian army. Behind them lay only death and destruction. Seared into their memories forever was the horrors of the siege and the desolation of the land which once flowed with milk and honey. The Temple— where once God had dwelt among His people— was in ruins, a fitting symbol for the spiritual state of the nation. Ahead was an uncertain future in a foreign land, a strange culture with laws, customs, religion, and language they did not understand.

When they arrived in Babylon months later they joined the Jewish community already established by the first captives who had arrived with Daniel and Ezekiel 15 years earlier. Daniel and his three friends were already prominent in the Babylonian government.

Only the poorest of the Jews remained in Judah. Nebuzaradan had left them to tend the land as vinedressers and farmers (Jer.52:16). A Babylonian military garrison was stationed in Mizpah where Gedaliah, a Jew, was set up as a puppet governor under Babylonian jurisdiction. Gedaliah advocated peaceful co-existence with the Babylonians. Soon, the refugees began to return from Moab, Ammon and Edom, where they had enjoyed a fruitful harvest (Jer.41:11-12).

The brief moment of peace was not to last. Ishmael, one of the royal descendants, a Jewish terrorist who resented the Babylonian presence in the Land, assassinated Gedaliah and led the destruction of the Babylonian garrison. He carried the remnant of Judah away captive, intending to defect to the Ammonites. But when Johanan, a veteran soldier from the Babylonian war, heard of it, he attacked Ishmael and delivered the people. Fearing Babylonian reprisals, most of the remaining Jews fled to Egypt, taking the prophet Jeremiah with them against his will.

Four years later an additional 745 Jews were deported to Babylon, leaving literally only a handful of Jews remaining in the Promised Land.

The Jewish community that fled to Egypt, against God's will, did not find peace there. Jeremiah had prophesied only misery and death (Jer.43-44): the sword of Nebuchadnezzar would find them, even in Egypt. Ironically, when Egypt eventually fell, Nebuchadnezzar carried captive to Babylon many of those Jews who had fled to Egypt for refuge against God's will (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 5, Chapter 4, p.80).

When the turmoil finally settled Judah was ruined - all her cities were completely wasted (Jer. 4:5-9). Jerusalem itself, once the City of Kings (Psalm 48:1-3), was nothing but a heap of debris where jackals and wild animals made their dens in the midst of the rubble (Jer. 9:11). The land was almost entirely desolate and uninhabited.

The neighboring nations took little notice of this once prosperous land, now wasted by nearly 20 years of upheaval and conflict. For decades Judah remained a desolate wasteland... until...

"They were carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to the King of the Chaldeans and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years." (2 Chron. 36:20-21)

Appendix E | The Seventh Month

Hebrew Month TISHRI			
DAY	EVENT	COMMEMORATED	SIGNIFICANCE TO EXILES
1 st	Feast of Trumpets <i>Rosh-Hashanah</i> Leviticus 23.23-25	First day of the new year, (starting over, new beginning...)	<i>Hint: Ezra 3:6- "began"</i>
2 nd - 9 th	Days of Repentance <i>Yamim Nora'im</i> Tradition	Jewish tradition holds that the days between Rosh-Hashanah and Yom Kippur should be a time for serious introspection to consider past mistakes and prepare one's heart for repentance.	<i>Hint: Zech. 1:1-6</i>
10 th	Day of Atonement <i>Yom Kippur</i> Leviticus 23.26-32	National reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins	<i>Hint: Jer.33:7-9</i>
15 th - 21 st	Feast of Tabernacles <i>Sukkot</i> Leviticus 23.27-43	Deliverance from Egypt	<i>Hint: Jer.50:33-34; Ezra 9:8-9</i>
?	Fast of Gedaliah Zechariah 7.3-7; 8:19	One of the 4 fasts of mourning established during the Captivity to commemorate the destruction of Judah. This particular fast marks the assassination of Gedaliah	Zechariah said that the exiles' fasts of mourning would be turned into feasts of joy. This was partially fulfilled when the Temple was completed (Ezra 6:16,22). It will be ultimately fulfilled in the Kingdom. cp. Zech 8:19-23

Appendix F: Detailed Chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther

As suggested by bro. H. P. Mansfield

Day	Mth	Yr	King	Reference	Event
-	.....	.....2	Darius	Ezra 4:24	Rebuilding of temple commenced
-	.....	.....3	Ahasuerus	Est. 1:19-22	Vashti deposed
4	.....9	.....4	Darius	Zech. 7:1	Instructions regarding fasts
-	.....	.....6	Ahasuerus	Est. 2:8-16	Esther brought to Shushan
3	.....12	.....6	Darius	Ezra 6:15	Temple completed
14	.....1	.....7	Darius	Ezra 6:19	Passover observed
-	.....	.....10	Ahasuerus	Est. 2:16-18	Esther's marriage
1	.....1	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 7:1-9	Ezra leaves Babylon
9	.....1	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:15-21	Ezra halts 3 days at Ahava
12	.....1	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:31	Ezra leaves Ahava
1	.....5	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 7:9	Ezra arrives at Jerusalem
4	.....5	.....7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:33	Vessels delivered to the temple
20	.....9	.....-	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:9	Assembly at Jerusalem
1	.....10	.....-	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:16	Assize begun to assess heathen marriages
1	.....1	.....-	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:17	Assize finished
-	.....	.....1	Ahasuerus	Est. 3:7	Haman casts lots
13	.....1	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 3:12	Posts go out
15	.....1	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 5:1-8	Esther's appeal
16	.....1	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 5:8	Esther's banquet
23	.....3	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 8:9-14	Mordecai's posts
13	.....12	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:1-12	Massacre day
14	.....12	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:15-17	First Purim
15	.....12	.....12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:18-27	Second Purim
-	.....	.....9	Artaxerxes	Neh. 1:1	Hanani's report
-	.....	.....1	Artaxerxes	Neh. 2:6	Nehemiah leaves for Jerusalem
25	.....6	.....20	Artaxerxes	Neh. 6:15	The wall is finished
1	.....7	.....-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:2	Public reading of Law by Ezra
2	.....7	.....-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:14	They read of dwelling in booths
15	.....7	.....-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18	Feast of Tabernacles
21	.....7	.....-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18	Completion of Feast
22	.....7	.....-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18	Day of solemn assembly
24	.....7	.....-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 9:1-2	Heathen wives put away
-	.....	.....-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 13:6	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem after leave of absence

The above chronology, which gathers together most of the references to time periods in these contemporary books, is based upon the suggestion that *Darius*, *Ahasuerus* and *Artaxerxes* are titles assumed by one king – *Hystaspes*. A slight confusion is apparent in a few cases where months are numbered according to their position on the calendar instead of from the time when the king began to reign. For example, “*Adar*” of Ezra 6:15 is the twelfth month of the sacred year, whereas the “*first month*” of v.19 is the first month of the ensuing year. Both occurred in the sixth year of Darius, for his sixth year overlapped the Jewish sacred year. The above chronology is an attempt to synchronize the events of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, and appears the most logical and consistent when all problems are considered. It also explains some very interesting facets of this period of Bible history, as will be revealed as our story of the period unfolds – H. P. Mansfield

Introduction - Part Two

*Congratulations on making it this far! Hopefully you were able to capture some practical lessons from the experience of the exiles in the first few chapters. We've now come to Part Two where we hope to delve head-first into a study of the life and work of two phenomenal men of faith— Ezra and Nehemiah. In the first part, we covered the background of the exiles and then covered chapters 1-6. Now we're going to move into **Esther**, then finish Ezra, then cover Nehemiah.*

Part Two		
#	Workbook Section	To get the context, read....
9	God Motivates more Exiles to Return	Esther
10	Nehemiah Returns	Nehemiah 1-2
11	Let us Arise and Build	Nehemiah 3-6
12	Renewal, Dedication & Reforms	Nehemiah 8-12
13	Principles of Separation	Nehemiah 13

Section 9 – God Motivates More Exiles to Return

Objective:

- To understand who Esther & Mordecai were & how they fit into our study of Ezra & Nehemiah
- To experience how God worked in the lives of His people to encourage them to make good decisions – return to Israel!
- To get excited about Part 2 so you will finish the workbook!

'For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.' **Est 10:3**

Overview

The Temple has been built and the encouragement and labor of the prophets has paid off! The people have celebrated with the keeping of the feast of Passover, such a fitting event, considering they had once again been brought out of captivity and been brought to a land where they were free! Now, under the watchful eye of God and his active hand upon them, they had completed the symbolic spiritual center of their world – the Temple. Their celebration was much needed! They had before them the tangible results of their faith and trust in God, their ability to work as 'one man' and their humility to be led and persuaded by spiritual leaders. And, in contrast to **Ezra 3:12-13**, the joy and celebration was unanimous! No longer were the people divided in their loyalties, some preferring the Temple of Solomon and some only experiencing this new Temple. Now all were celebrating together the good

hand of God that had united them through chastening and trouble – and we understand that it is not the pleasant journey that brings us together in the end, but a bunch of tough, real-life situations that help us to appreciate God and each other. Peter tells the ecclesias in the Diaspora, *'Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy'* (**1 Peter 4:12-13**).

But the spiritual challenges and troubles were not over, as we shall see in the second part of our study – but neither was the praise to God or the spiritual growth of many of the individuals. Ezra probably returned right after the dedication of the Temple and with his spiritual leadership the nation would get at the root of some of the problems they were dealing with. Up to now, not a word has been said in this account about marriages to the nations around them. Neither has reading or praying together been a focus. But this man, with God's strength, is about to lead a spiritual building of the altar and Temple in their hearts, and it will prove to be very difficult. Here comes a man into the ecclesia that has *'prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel'* (**Ezra 7:10**). And that is saying nothing of Nehemiah who would come about 13 years after Ezra, as another great spiritual and team leader to unite the ecclesia again and deal pragmatically and efficiently with many problems that had cropped up in the ecclesia yet again. We will see that God's purpose with these leaders was to bring His people closer to Him by removing their sin through their repentance and change of conduct. Such is the lot that we are in. Such is the challenge that we are faced with.

The Timing of Esther

Although many of the Jews had returned to the land of promise, there were still others who had stayed behind for one reason or another. Mordecai and his younger cousin, Hadassah, were just such an example. We will get into the details and lessons of this book, but first, let's get our bearings. The story of Esther falls into the time of Ahasuerus, the king of Persia, who is most likely the same king as Darius Hystaspes in the book of Ezra.

1. In what city do most of the events in Esther take place? (**Esther 2:5**) Where else in scripture is this place mentioned? (Hint: **Dan.8:2**) Look briefly at a Bible encyclopedia and comment on the importance of this place.
2. Where else were some Jews located, besides Israel? What kind of a people are they? (**Esther 3:8-11**)
3. Where was the genocide of the Jews supposed to take place? (**Esther 3:12-14**) Where did the people defend themselves at? (**Esther 9:2**) From understanding this, how widespread was the deliverance that Mordecai and Esther's courage brought?
4. Where did Nehemiah live? (**Neh.1:1**) Would he have probably known Esther?
5. In Nehemiah 2:6, why do you think Scripture mentions "the queen also sitting beside him (King Artaxerxes)"

In the book of Esther, the Jews are saved by the courage and faith of Mordecai and Esther. The Jews are allowed to defend themselves from all those who hate them – the recurring theme of the Jewish existence. **Esther 9:1-5** relays the events that took place across the empire as the Jews destroyed those who would have exterminated them. It is very possible that Nehemiah, from Shushan, would have been involved in this amazing deliverance from the enemies of the Jews.

6. Even though the Jews had been saved by their loving Father, the nations around were clearly not happy. According to **Neh.4:23** what happened after the deliverance? Why do you think this happened?

You can see that there is a lot packed in between **Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 1**. The dramatic events of Esther all happen within this time period, showing us the opposition the Jews continued to face, and the wonderful deliverance that God worked out for his chosen people.

The Book of Esther

The whole book is a microcosm (like a small history) of the story of the Jews – near extinction and ruin to a glorious end and salvation. God shows Himself powerful through the instrument of a delicate and beautiful woman, Esther, who finds herself at the very center of the most powerful nation on earth at that time. God redeems His people through the work and faith of Mordecai, and also triumphs over Haman (a descendant of Amalek) through him.

7. It is important to understand the characters that are in this account.
 - a. How would you describe **Esther** from these verses: **2:7-18; 4:4-16; 5:1-8; 7:1-8; 8:3-7; 9:12-13**. Why would you love to have her in your ecclesia?
 - b. How would you describe **Mordecai** from these verses: **2:19; 3:2; 4:1-14; 4:16; 6:10-12; 7:10; 8:2; 8:9; 8:10**? Why would you love to have Mordecai in your ecclesia?
 - c. How would you describe **Haman** from these verses: **3:1-15; 5:9-14; 6:4-14; 7:1-10**? Explain why or why not you would want Haman in your ecclesia.



8. Esther found out from Mordecai that all the Jews were going to be murdered and annihilated because of Haman. The way that she approached the king to persuade him to change this verdict is very helpful to us. After reading **5:8; 7:3-6; 8:5**, explain how you think Esther is amazing to you. Girls, how can you emulate Esther? Guys, write down how this kind of a response is easy to respond to in a positive way.

9. List 3 ways Esther shows her faith throughout her trials and deliverance.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

10. Mordecai is an awesome foreshadowing of our coming King! Just let the following verses wash over you and be amazed at the beauty of God’s word **8:15; 9:4; 10:2-3**. Write down as many parallels to Jesus as you can.



We see then, “the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful”. He had saved his captives and brought them relief through His good plan. The end of Esther, ends on a note that speaks to us of Christ’s return and our salvation: “For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen [or seed]” (**Esther 10:3**). When Christ rules this world in righteousness and peace, he will be second to the Great King, his Father – ‘when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all’ (**1Cor.15:28**). And He will seek the good of his brethren and He will be well received by them all.

Thus the interlude between **Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 1** has been given a small amount of attention. What a message of hope would have reached the ears of the free Jews of Jerusalem who would also have been under the threat of persecution and annihilation! We don’t know for sure but we can imagine them praising and offering sacrifices of praise upon their altar at the Temple to thank God for being so gracious to them and once again saving them from death and ruin. For His mercy endures forever!

Section 10 – Nehemiah Returns

Objective:

- Understand how Nehemiah felt about his brethren in Jerusalem
- Get to know Nehemiah and brainstorm about spiritual leadership
- See Nehemiah's faith in action with the king
- Understand Nehemiah's method of convincing others to build
- Learn how to stand up for the Truth!

"Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand." **Nehemiah 1:10**

The state of Jerusalem

In Jerusalem, the 'survivors' were in 'great distress and reproach' and 'the wall of Jerusalem is also broken down and burned with fire.' It appears that all the work finishing the temple didn't continue into building up the ruined city of Jerusalem. When Nehemiah comes, the Temple has been built, the altar for sacrifice has been set on its bases and used, but the walls lie in ruin. This leaves the people in a state of fear.

In **Neh.1:3** we have the Jerusalem report that Hanani brings to Nehemiah when he is in Persia serving the king. Let's take a look at some of the words he uses:

1. What does 'distress' mean? It seems there may be more to this word than first meets the eye. How else is it translated?
2. What does 'reproach' mean? Was this ever used about the children of Israel in the past?
3. The 'wall of Jerusalem' was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Why were walls important to a city? (Hint: **2Sam.5:6-9; 1Ki.3:1; 2Chron.32:5; Zech.2:5**)

Nehemiah comes on the scene

4. So who is this Nehemiah? His name means 'consolation of Yah' or 'Yahweh comforts' – one of those fitting names in scripture. Read **2Cor.1:3-7** and comment on similarities between Paul and Nehemiah.

- 5. After reading vs.4-11 and understanding how Nehemiah responds to this bad news about Jerusalem, write down what kind of a man you think Nehemiah was, as he responds to hearing about the state of Jerusalem. What were his priorities?



- 6. One of Nehemiah’s first reactions is to pray to God – do you do this as a first reflex? Why or why not? Write down the main elements in this prayer. (ex. v.5 - extolling God’s greatness)

Nehemiah was a man of the Book – he studies God’s word in order to live acceptably before Him. To establish how well Nehemiah knew his scripture, we need to look into this prayer. It is both a cry to God and also an insight into Nehemiah’s heart and mind. First off, there are so many ties to Daniel’s prayer in Dan.9:3-19, it’s hard to keep track of how many! This makes perfect sense, as we see that Nehemiah probably looked up to the memory of faithful Daniel who had prophesied about the return of the Jews, and even greater things beyond.

Here are some of the prayers of Nehemiah throughout the book. Write down a one sentence summary explaining what each of them is about:

Prayers of Nehemiah	
1:5-11	Asking the Lord to remember his promises with Israel and to help his brethren in Jerusalem as well as himself before the king
2:4	(Hint: use your imagination!)
4:4-5	
5:19	
6:9	
13:14	
13:22	
13:29	
13:31	

In v.11 Nehemiah tells us his occupation - He was THE cupbearer – what is that? How important of a job was it? Use a Bible Encyclopedia to help you.

Like Daniel, Joseph, Esther, Mordecai or Ezra, he was a man clearly held in high esteem by the rulers. And the moment came for Nehemiah to answer the same question that Mordecai had posed to Esther in **Esther 4:14**, ‘who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’

Godly leadership

As we study Nehemiah, we will see the qualities of a great and godly leader. We will see a man who led by serving. We will see a man who was able to conquer his doubts and fears, a man who would stand up for God when he needed to, a man with a goal in his mind and a way of including everyone in it.

7. List some characteristics of great leaders - what are the qualities that make them great? It would be great if you have scripture to back you up, but you don't have to. Jot down as many things as you can.



Going before the king boldly

8. For how long had Nehemiah been fasting and praying? (Hint: **1:1**; **2:1** – refer to the Hebrew Calendar in Appendix I)
9. When we say that Nehemiah's prayer in front of the king in **2:4** was quick, keep in mind that Nehemiah had been praying, fasting and meditating on this day for many months before! Much preparation and thought goes into the ability to make quick and godly decisions on the spot. List some situations that you might find yourself in where you would offer a quick prayer to God.



Nehemiah the cupbearer goes before the king with sadness written on his face. He could no longer hide the deep empathy he felt for his brethren. Sadness in front of the king could bring instant death! No wonder it says that Nehemiah was ‘dreadfully afraid’! Even so, he came boldly to the throne. Is he scared? Yes! Does he know how things are going to turn out for sure? No, but he is prepared after prayer and communion with his God – he leaves it in his Father's care.

10. In **2:3**, what is Nehemiah's primary reason for being so depressed? Why is he so preoccupied with this? Why should WE be preoccupied with similar thoughts? (Hint: **Psa.122; 125; 137; 102:14; 87**)



11. In **V.5**, Nehemiah teaches us a valuable lesson about manners. How does he preface his question? Who else uses similar words to help obtain something? (Hint: **Est.7:3; 8:5**). What is the lesson here when asking our parents, our friends or others for a favor?

'So it pleased the king to send me' – the word 'pleased' is the same as in **v.5** where it says 'favor in your sight' – Nehemiah had gotten exactly what he asked for!

12. What are the 3 main things Nehemiah (boldly) asks the king for in **v.5-8**?

Nehemiah saw all these events 'according to the good hand of my God upon me' (**v.8**) as Ezra did earlier in our studies – both men saw God's providence clearly!

13. Think about how the good hand of God has been upon you and come prepared to discuss this:



The journey home

So Nehemiah begins his journey to Jerusalem. He was not alone though – as the governor, he was given an escort from the king in **v.9**.

14. This was very different from what Ezra had done when he had come back in **Ezra 8:21-23**. Why do you think they did this differently? Is one more right than the other? Explain.

On Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem, he would have come from the north through Samaritan country. We are introduced in **v.10** to two men who eye Nehemiah as a threat - Sanballat and Tobiah. They are 'deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the wellbeing of the children of Israel.' That phrase alone tells us a lot about these two individuals. Mordecai did the same thing as Nehemiah – **Est.10:3**.

15. We really need to get a handle on Tobiah and Sanballat because we will be constantly coming up against them as they oppose the Jews time and time again in the book of Nehemiah. Using a Bible Encyclopedia and a concordance, jot down some notes on each: who they are, where do they come from and what are the ways that they oppose the Jews:



With great secrecy at night, Nehemiah travels around the city to inspect the walls. Look how well he knows the city from **vs.13-15** – it's like giving someone directions to the house you've lived at all your life! He knows every landmark – in the dark! He names off gates, wells and pools as if he grew up in Jerusalem!

16. What does this tell us about Nehemiah? (Hint: **Psalm 48:13**). What does this tell us about ourselves who have never seen the kingdom?

17. Nehemiah first examines the state of the city secretly, before he begins working on it (**2:13,15**). Why do you think he did it secretly? Why do you think it was wise to examine everything first? What is the lesson for us? (Hint: **Prov.27:23** – look up how the word 'state' is translated)

Formula for winning others over

From what we can see, things are about as bad as Hanani had reported. But Nehemiah is optimistic – better than optimistic, he is faithful! In **vs.16-18** we have an incredible example of how to impress others to join in a Godly plan. Nehemiah needs to convince others of how important it is to have walls for protection and security. In the chart below, fill in the details of the steps he took to unify Judah:

Verse	Step	Details
17	Identifies a need	
17	Provides a solution	
17	Gives a goal	
18	Encourages them spiritually	
18	Their response	



Key Principle

Often, a situation in our life can feel like this – we see problems without solutions, we have concern or fear for what the future will be like, we feel confusion about what course of action to take. We may feel frustrated because we see problems, but can't seem to fix them. We may feel that we have no one to look up to or that everyone else doesn't care about the Truth. If we feel like this, we have identified with these men and women who were wringing their hands in an ecclesial crisis. There was a physical problem: no walls for defense and security. But there was an even bigger spiritual problem: lack of faith, prayer and action to build spiritual homes. And here we learn a critical principle that God would have us learn: We CANNOT respond to physical problems in our lives with a physical solution – We MUST respond to physical problems with spiritual solutions. Prayer, spiritual encouragement and reading God's word will help us do just this!

'Let us rise up and build!' The people had been won over by Nehemiah's spiritual thinking and practical plan. They were united in purpose! 'Then they set (or strengthened) their hands to this good work'.

18. Read **Matt. 7:24-27**! Perhaps Jesus was thinking about this very instance. What is the lesson for us in light of Nehemiah and his brethren? How do we do this in our daily lives?

Nehemiah empowered the people to take ownership of their lives by providing spiritual guidance – this led to incredible fruit after the building of the wall was complete – we'll see that from **Nehemiah 6-12**.

Nehemiah sets the stake in the ground

And then right away, Judah is hit by the mockery and disdain of the nations around that hear of their plans to build the walls of Jerusalem. They oppose Nehemiah and the workers by questioning their authority to build – 'what is this thing you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?'

19. In **v.19**, another adversary is introduced who worked so actively against the Jews: Geshem the Arab. Using an Encyclopedia and a concordance, sketch out a similar biography of this man, as you did with Tobiah and Sanballat.

20. Geographically, these three with their followers definitely surround the small Jewish enclave that had returned from captivity (refer to Appendix C). These three come together to laugh at the beginning of the building of the walls – they despise these Jews. List others in scripture that were laughed at and despised for their godly faith and obedience. (Hint: you can start with **Job 30:1**). What things in your life could seem ridiculous to others, simply because you are trying to be faithful to God?



21. Nehemiah says that the ‘God of heaven’ would prosper their way. This title for God is a pretty unique phrase which is heavily used in Ezra (1:2; 5:11,12; 6:9,10; 7:12,21,23). It seems almost as if Nehemiah has heard Ezra say it and he decides to use it to identify his God as the One who looks down on the earth from above – all powerful and all seeing. Find where else this phrase is used.
22. There is not a HINT of compromise in Nehemiah’s answer. This is what he says: ‘you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem’ (v.20). Look at these 3 pieces closely:
- a. No portion:
 - b. No right:
 - c. No memorial:
23. We may be asking, ‘isn’t it harsh how Nehemiah answers these people?’ or ‘but I don’t know when to use this no-compromise approach to separation’ or ‘this wouldn’t really help these men to see the love of God would it?’ What would you say to that? Why did Nehemiah answer so negatively? Was it right? (Hint: think about if these 3 men came into your ecclesia – what would you do?)



Key Principle

Isn't this the same thing that Jesus faced in the Pharisees, Sadducees and Lawyers of his day? The 'spiritual' leaders were so like Tobiah, Sanballat and Geshem. They mocked Jesus, they laughed him to scorn and they opposed his faith in God. He would rebuke them so sharply, yet comfort and encourage an adulterous woman. It was 'Woe to you!' to the scribes and Pharisees', but 'fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' to his disciples. His emotions were compassion and care for the multitudes that came to hear him teach the gospel, but anger and frustration at the teachers of the law that hated his healing on the Sabbath and led others astray by their legalistic religion.

24. So when something opposes our God, what do we do? If someone who is not Christian told you that your ‘Bible-thumping’ was old fashioned, that it impeded the progress of our society, that your intolerance and your exclusivity is stupid, that your teaching that sex before marriage is wrong and so impractical, that your God is clearly a myth and you’re trying to uphold his standards is ridiculous, what do you say?



Section 11 – ‘Let us arise and build’

Objective:

- See the ecclesia HARD at work on the wall
- See that there are always problems in ecclesial life, even in the background
- Understand how we are building the walls of our Jerusalem
- Feel the challenge of dealing with opposition from within and without
- Understanding Nehemiah’s personal trials and triumphs

“And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.” Nehemiah 6:16

Introduction

With the words ‘Let us arise and build’ coming from the people and not JUST Nehemiah, the effort to do God’s will became a national initiative. Nehemiah had changed the perspective of the Jews who had lived fearfully with broken down walls for years. Now, the ecclesia began to take responsibility for themselves in the sight of God. Their Father had already done so much – the fact they were back in the land should have amazed them every morning they woke up and realized they were not in captivity! And now the action starts in **Nehemiah 3**.

The parallels between Christ’s ecclesia and the events in Ezra and Nehemiah are almost unparalleled in scripture. There are so many ties with the NT about spiritually building up ourselves and our ecclesias. **1Cor.12** just oozes with echoes to Nehemiah building the wall with his brethren (**1Cor.12:18,19,22,26-27**). And so that is what we are going to talk about now – an ecclesia that has risen to build!

An ecclesial snapshot

Many of these builders work hard because they understand that ‘the Lord loves the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!’ (**Psalms 87:2-3**). In faith, they knew the promises that God had given to David in **2 Samuel 7:16** and knew that the right thing to do was build! But an ecclesia is not perfect – as long as humans are in it! This is a snapshot of the ecclesia, ‘warts and all’. Please look at the verses in the chart, look at the connecting verses and then write a little about these characters. Ask questions like these: Where are they from? What was their job? What else did they do other than build? Good or bad or in between? Lessons for us?



Neh.3:	Group/Individual
1	Eliashib - 3:20-21,28; 13:3-8,28
2	Men of Jericho - 7:36 *ironic that Jews who occupied the former city whose walls were destroyed came to help! Build!

Neh.3:	Group/Individual
4	Meshullam - 3:30; 8:4; 6:18-19
5	The Tekoites - 3:27; 5:6-9; 1Cor.1:26-31; 1Tim.6:17-19; Mark 10:42-45
6	Jehoiada and Meshullam (Hint: they were probably both sons of the Nethinim - Ezra 2:49) - 3:26; 2 Chron.2:17-18
7	The men of Gibeon - Josh.9:3,4,27
8	Uzziel - 3:31,32; Mal.3:2-3; 1Pet.1:7
8	Hananiah - Ex.30:25; Rom.15:1-3; 2Cor.2:14
12	Shallum - Ezra 10:24; Ex.35:25; Acts 21:8-9; Phil.4:3; Psalm 144:12

Key Principle

You can see that the ecclesia in Israel at the time of Nehemiah had many similarities to our very own: Diversity of culture and ethnicity; Diversity of occupation; Diversity in gender. 'For you are all one in Christ Jesus'!

Building the Walls of our Jerusalem

In **Revelation 21:9**, an angel comes to John and says, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ And what does the Lamb’s wife look like? The ‘great city, the holy Jerusalem’ (**v.10**)! The Lord’s bride which is the multitude of saints from every generation are likened unto Jerusalem, the city of peace! We are a city, where God dwells, where the spiritual center of our lives resides. So the question is, how are we building that New Jerusalem? That’s our job now in the 21st century.

1. Read **1Cor.3:5-18**. Explain the parallels from this passage with Nehemiah and the builders on the wall. Then explain the lessons that these verses help us to understand.
2. What is the purpose of building walls around a city? What is the spiritual analogy to us? (don’t say it’s keeping out everybody, since Jesus has asked us to go ‘into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’). Please be as detailed in your thoughts here as you can be.



Cruel mockings

In **Nehemiah 4**, we come across some of the largest challenges that the team of builders in Jerusalem come across. This chapter was happening at the same time as **Nehemiah 3** – not after. We will witness some of the most hateful, angry and godless men in scripture in this chapter. In **Neh.4:2-3** Sanballat and Tobiah mock and make fun of the Jews – this is never a good idea!

3. In **v.1** Sanballat is FURIOUS and very indignant that the Jews would even THINK of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem! How dare they! In **v.2** he calls the Jews ‘feeble’. Why would he have thought this? (**Hint: Zech.12:8**)
4. Show some examples about how God chooses the weak to demonstrate his strength. (Hint: look at **1Sam.14:11-12; 17:43-44** to start off with)
5. Bringing the point home to us, what do you make of **1Pet.2:4-5**? What is Peter trying to tell us here?

6. In **v.3**, Sanballat's 'sidekick', Tobiah, joins in the mockery. What does he say here and what happens in **Nehemiah 12** that would see Tobiah singing a different tune?

7. With all these crushing insults and mockings, how does Nehemiah respond in **Neh.4:4**? Can you think of anyone else who suffered the same fate that Nehemiah prayed his enemies would come to? (Hint: **Est.9:25**)

Key Principle

*God Himself states in **Num.23:23** the rules about persecuting or manipulating His chosen people: 'For there is no sorcery against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!'' No one can bring anything against His people if he has not commanded it. Let that be a warning to any nation in our day that comes against the seed of Abraham! As Nehemiah knew very well from Zechariah's prophecy in **2:8**, it is like touching the eye of God!*

Their strength is failing

Neh.4:10-12 describes the general feeling of the people – real fear and weakness. These workers and families were tired out, exhausted and their nerves were rubbed raw from the constant fear that they felt and the constant vigilance they had to show day and night.

8. In **v.11-12** do you think the threat was real or imagined because the people were fearful? Explain the dangers of acting out of fear and find one or two other occurrences in scripture of where this happens. What was the outcome in these examples?

God's strength made perfect in weakness

We have already seen in **Neh.4:4,9** how Nehemiah combats opposition and mockery with prayer – that is his FIRST line of defence. Before making strategies of protection, or pep talks to the people, he bends his knees with the people before his God. He is an incredible example of this: *'Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.'* (**Psa.127:1**)

9. After praying, Nehemiah puts into action a thorough strategy of defence if they are attacked at any time, day or night, on the wall or in the city. Outline the steps that Nehemiah went to in order to ensure the safety of the people in **Neh.4:13-23**.

In **v.17** those building on the walls and those carrying burdens ‘loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon.’ This explains a great balance in ecclesial life – building together and defending and fighting together! Both are incredibly important. TSK says this: “Every man was as much a soldier as a builder.”

10. Read these verses **1Cor.16:13**; **2Cor.6:7**; **Eph.6:11-20**; **2Tim.2:3**; **2Tim.4:7** and explain their relevance to these soldiers/workers and to us.

11. In **v.19** Nehemiah realizes the work was extensive and great (very broad, wide) – they were spread out - they were vulnerable to the world. Paul expresses the condition of being a Christian in **2Cor.4:7-8,17** – ‘hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed...’ **v.20** is the formula for an ecclesia! It is a stronger unit than we possibly could be by ourselves! Explain the relevance of **1Cor.12:12-27** and **Heb.10:24-25** to the builders.



12. How critical is the ecclesia to your spirituality? Explain from what you see in **Neh. 4** what would build the ideal ecclesia for God’s glory? Does your ecclesia do this?

13. In **v.20** Nehemiah declares, ‘our God will fight for us’. Where is Nehemiah getting this phrase from? List at least 2 verses of when this phrase was used and explain who used it and about what.

14. Nehemiah’s personal vigilance and work was an incredible example to the rest. **V.23** shows how obsessively Nehemiah and his brethren worked. How does **Rev.16:15** tie into this and what is the lesson for us? Any other interesting scriptures on this that you can find?

Key Principle

“There are few Christadelphians today prepared to leave the comforts of their Persian palace for the hardships and difficulties of the wall-building in the Jerusalems of the West Indies and South America (in this part of the world). All too often, family ties, job possibilities and the amenities of the American way of life are more appealing than the open door of preaching in the mission fields. Nehemiah was not only a man of faith and prayer, he was a man of action, prepared to do. Let us emulate his example! Many a Jerusalem awaits the Nehemiahs.” (Ron Abel, Let Us Arise and Build, 19)

Oppression from within

For the time being, the enemies of the Jews had been held off – but Nehemiah and the rest of the builders were on constant watch against them in case any surprise invasions should happen while they were still vulnerable without a fully functional wall. The trumpet was ready.

But all was not good *within* the walls. **Nehemiah 5** shows us that, just when we think things may be bad enough, there is still more things to go wrong - at least according to what WE consider ‘wrong’. These pressures and difficulties of life are the very things God uses to shape our character so that we manifest His glory. Let’s take a look at the other side of the wall – the inside.

15. What we have in **v.1** is an ‘outcry’ from the people against their Jewish brethren. In **v.2-5** we have two main problems the poor Jews are crying out about (we will come back to these in a bit):
- a. **Debt and Usury – v.2-4** – What does the law tell us about this?
 - b. **Slavery – v.5** – What does the law say about this? Even more sinister and against the law is what is being conveyed in this: ‘some of our daughters have been brought into slavery.’ This time the word slavery is different – what does it mean and what is the implication? (Hint: **Est.7:8**)

Stimulus – PAUSE - Response

As soon as Nehemiah hears about this, he is incredibly angry as **v.6** says. His emotions probably were telling him to throttle whoever these rich Jews were that would be so ungodly and unmerciful towards their very own friends and relatives. But he doesn’t act on his anger as **James 1:19** and **Eph.4:16** teach. Instead, Nehemiah ‘took counsel with himself’ (ESV). The TSK says ‘my heart consulted in me’ and the Hebrews words literally mean ‘I reigned over my heart’. This is a HUGE point for us to think about.

16. List 3 other Bible characters who also experienced anger? (Hint: **Mark 3:5**).

17. List 3 things that have made you incredibly angry in the past.

18. Anger can lead to a lack of self control, as we can see from Cain – his anger led him to kill Abel, his righteous brother. We know that anger can lead us to take positive, loving action or to take negative, vengeful, selfish action. So the question is, how can we, like Nehemiah, process anger in a positive way that honors God?



The spiritual answer to a natural problem

What are some things that Nehemiah would have been possibly thinking about during the time that he took to think before acting? He probably thought about what exactly it was that the 'Jewish brethren' had done wrong against God and their poor brethren. Had these evil 'shepherds' done wrong according to what God thought as recorded in the law? This might not be as clear as it seems at first. Fill in this chart to gain a clear understanding of what scripture says is allowed and not allowed:

Verse	Allowed	Not Allowed	Verse
Lev.25:14-16	Sell or mortgage things to your neighbor		Lev.25:8-10
Ex.21:1-11			Ex.21:1-11; Lev.25:39-42
Ex.21:7-11		Prostitution	Lev.19:29
Ex.22:25			Ex.22:25; Deut.15:1-6
-			Lev.25:14,17

19. What do we learn from this? The SPIRIT of the law! Explain what the Spirit of the law is to you.



Lesson

*Usury for us is anything that saps the resources/energy of the ecclesia. **1 Cor.13:5** says that real love does not keep account of wrong or evil. We can't think with a 'transactional' attitude – you owe me this, I owe you this. Instead, we GIVE freely, without expecting anything in return, as **Luke 6:34-35** teaches. Be motive by something greater – God is 'kind unto the unthankful and evil'.*

20. After reigning over his heart, how does Nehemiah respond? List and explain some verses that teach us when and how to do this in the right way. (Hint: **Prov.27:5** for starters)
21. Then he calls the whole assembly together AGAINST these nobles and rulers. Was that the right way to tackle the issue? Explain why or why not, from scripture. (Hint: **Gal.2:11-21; 1Tim.5:20**)
22. What Nehemiah says next in **v.9** gets to the crux of the matter – why doing these things was really wrong. Explain this. (Hint: **Lev.25:17** may help)

In **v.11**, Nehemiah not only tells them to stop taking advantage of the poor, but tells them to restore what they had taken from them – their inheritance, their croplands, their homes, and the interest that they had previously charged (the 'hundredth'). And they agree to it! They recognize the error of their ways, agree to restore all and the priests even promise openly to do it.

Sacrificing for others

We would expect nothing less than what we find in **v.14-19** – Nehemiah is harder on himself than he is with others. He demands of his own behavior the generosity that goes beyond generous! Nehemiah understands the principle that Jesus teaches us in **Mark 10:42-43** – 'whoever will be great among you will be your minister' or your servant.

23. Nehemiah is like Paul in so many ways! Explain **1Cor.9:1-14** the similarities between Nehemiah and Paul.
24. According to **v.15**, why did Nehemiah do all this?

Generosity is something that God wants us to be clear on, since he is the one who gives us everything we have. He wants us to meditate on that and then reflect it as we interact with others in our lives. In order to understand what God loves to see in us, read these verses and comment on the overall picture of hospitality that we should pursue – **Acts 20:35; Rom.12:9-13; 1Tim.3:2; Tit.1:8; 1Pet.4:9; Heb.13:1-2; Luke 6:33-35.**



Nehemiah in the crosshairs

Are we done with the uphill struggle in **Nehemiah 6**? Well, there definitely is success – the walls are completed in **v.15** and the enemies are disheartened because of this. But there is more danger and intrigue before then – this time pointed directly at Nehemiah himself. Just like in Paul’s day, Nehemiah is being scrutinized since he is a leader to so many. There are three main ways that Nehemiah is threatened in this chapter: (1) an Invitation to Ono – **v.1-4**; (2) an Open letter with threats – **v.5-9**; and (3) the deceit of Shemaiah the ‘mole’ – **v.10-13**.

What we see in this chapter is how Nehemiah deals with **personal** challenges – not ecclesial ones. We see the way he reacts when his personal safety is threatened, or his integrity is questioned. And as we would hope, he is incredibly faithful and strong throughout! Let’s learn from a brother struggling with trials in his life.

Threat #1 – Invitation to Ono

The enemies need to step up their attacks now that they have heard that the walls are all joined together – only the gates need to be hung. Their window of opportunity to sabotage the Jews’ efforts is getting shorter by the day.

25. Contrast the mood of the adversaries in **Neh.4** to their mood in this chapter – do you think anything has changed? Why or why not?

So the two nice gentlemen, Sanballat and Geshem, send a pleasant invitation to meet Nehemiah in the plains of Ono for tea. The plains of Ono were located on the very border of Judah’s territory at this time, in the northwest corner – bordering Ashdod and Samaria (look at Appendix C). Let’s pick apart this gracious invitation from Sanballat to meet together in the spirit of ‘collaboration’.

26. Why would Nehemiah be skeptical about the invitation to meet?

These two men were anything BUT agreeable to each other – they were enemies in every way. And so, Nehemiah feels absolutely no need to meet.

27. Nehemiah’s answer could be summed up in one word: priorities! He tells his enemies that he doesn’t intend to leave the construction site and come ‘down’ to them. Why is this interesting from a spiritual perspective? (Hint: start with **Luke 10:30-37**)

28. Sanballat and Nehemiah saw eye to eye on one thing – time was of the essence. So Sanballat sent 3 more similar letters to wear him down. This is the way our flesh works – day after day, week after

week it can leave us weak and helpless. Where else in scripture do we see this and what do we learn about trying to combat this kind of daily pressure? (Hint: **Judges 16:6-20**)

Threat #2 – Open letter and threats

After being snubbed by Nehemiah, Sanballat sent an ‘open letter’ – so that whoever it came into contact with it could read exactly what it said. Sanballat was trying to incite distrust, suspicion and disloyalty to Nehemiah through lies and deceit.

29. What are the 2 main ‘rumors’ that Sanballat charges Nehemiah with in **v.6-7**? Any similarities to Jesus? (Hint: **Luke 23:2**)
30. After reading **Zech.9:9; 14:16** does it make sense what Sanballat is saying? Why or why not? If these passages are not talking about Nehemiah, who are they referring to and when did/will they happen?

Nehemiah’s answer back to Sanballat is simple, to the point and honest. He didn’t even feel like answering in detail – he was too busy building anyway! Nehemiah doesn’t give the time of day to those who hate him because he’s too busy doing God’s work.

31. Nehemiah does however pray to God in **v.9** for strength. How can you incorporate this into your life?

Threat #3 – The deceit of Shemaiah the Mole

2 trials down, 1 to go. Nehemiah is being attacked from every angle. He knows he has enemies outside the gates, but this third threat comes from within.

32. Nehemiah read right through this plot to get him into the temple. What do you think Nehemiah means when he says, ‘Should such a man as I flee?’ Explain the relevance to **John 10:11-15**
33. Was it wrong for Nehemiah to hide in the Temple? Why or why not? (Hint: **Num.3:38; 2Chron.26:16-23**)
34. Nehemiah was being scrutinized for any weakness that could be found. Find where Jesus’ adversaries did exactly the same to him. (Hint: start with **Matt.16:1**)

Key Principle

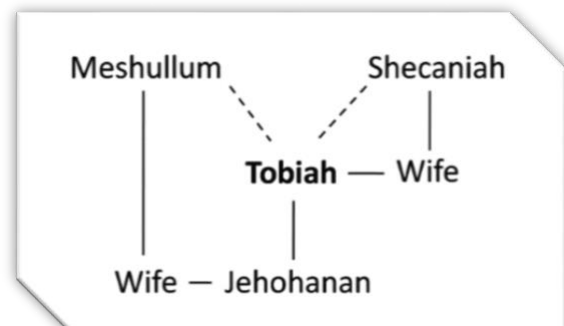
The enemies had tried every tactic in the book – pleasant invitations, threats, coercion, secret informers, fear tactics... they maximized their effort to make Nehemiah fear and it was all absolutely useless on this spiritual rock. As the Pulpit Commentary says, ‘Nehemiah’s influence depended greatly on the weight of his moral character. One false step, and he would have been lost; his influence would have been gone; and the work on which his heart was set would have come to naught’ (Pulpit Commentary, Vol.7, pg.63). Nehemiah was operating on a different plane, using spiritual principles that could not be swayed by the flesh. He was impenetrable because he was a dedicated servant of God. There is no compromise for men like Nehemiah; there is no questioning what the Bible says about right and wrong; there is no need to re-evaluate your decisions – those choices were made and committed to long ago. The Truth has been the same since the beginning of time. And real sacrifice that glorifies God cannot be measured. It goes to the very end, as Nehemiah was willing to do, as Christ was willing to do.

52 long days

52 days of labor were behind them – the walls that they had built and repaired were now towering above them. They were safe and secure inside. They had completed the vision that Nehemiah had given them back in **Neh.2:17**, ‘that we may no longer be a reproach.’ What an incredible moment it must have been to hear silence – no more work! But we can see their smiles and their gratitude to God and to their great leader, Nehemiah! It feels so GOOD when something in your life is accomplished! You put long, hard work into something and then when it’s done, you take a step back, admire the completeness of it, feel satisfied and thank the Lord for it. There must have been some joyous emotions within those walls and praise to the one who was the ‘fire all around’ Zion and ‘the glory in her midst’ (**Zech.2:5**).

But not all were happy and cheerful. The time was finally up for the enemies of Nehemiah who dwelt outside those strong walls. **V.16** says that they were ‘disheartened in their own eyes’, or, as Rotherham says, ‘they fell greatly in their own eyes’.

35. What was the main reason for why they were disheartened? Who were they really fighting against this whole time? Who else learned this? (Hint: **Josh.5:1** for starters, but there are a lot more)
36. Sadly, there were even those inside the walls who were not all as on board as Nehemiah was with separating from the world. The nobles of Judah were secret informers for Tobiah. Why did they do this? (Hint: ‘for’ in **v.18** speaks volumes). What did it lead to?



37. Is there a danger in us doing the same thing with others? Perhaps one verse that sums it up is 'Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits' (**1Cor.15:33**). Has this happened to you or someone you know? Share your experiences and how hard it was to still maintain obedience and faith to God.



Key Principle

*Why have walls if you fraternize with the enemy outside? Why go to all the trouble? What was the point of the whole exercise in separating yourself from the enemies of the God of heaven if you make them your companions for life and marry them? This was like Judas – **Psa.41:9; Lk.22:1-6,48**. Nehemiah was put at risk and made incredibly vulnerable because of the carelessness and selfishness of those in the ecclesia who decided it was ok to be close to the enemies of the Truth. We can never underestimate the impact on the Truth that our bad relationships with the world could have. Our loyalties are divided and our focus is off. We must remember this no matter how tough life's road is. God will provide what we need.*

Section 12 – Renewal, Dedication and Reforms

Objective:

- Witness an ecclesia focusing not on its fear but on its faith
- See the power of God’s word on this teachable nation
- See the spiritual growth of the Jews in Jerusalem
- Understand the importance of covenants
- Feel the joy of the people celebrating the dedication of the wall!

*“And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered.” **Nehemiah 12:44***

Introduction

Nehemiah 8 is a beautiful chapter about brethren and sisters and anyone who can understand, reading God’s word. They listen carefully to Ezra read the law and then they obediently keep the Feast of Tabernacles – the best that they had kept ‘since the days of Joshua’! **Nehemiah 8** is the foundation that **Nehemiah 9** sits on – the confessional prayer of individuals who can now discern right from wrong. Take a brief look at Appendix J – Judah is reaping the benefits and blessings of God because of their or righteous choices and hard work! This prayer and the ensuing covenant occur directly after the reading of God’s law.

Ezra reads the Book of the Law of Moses

1. In **Neh.8**, where does the reading take place? What is the significance of this? (Hint: **Deut.32:2**)
2. Read **v.3-6**. How did the people approach God’s word and how can we adopt this attitude towards worshipping God?
3. In **v. 9-10**, what happened when the people heard the word read and expounded? What’s the relevance to **Hebrews 4:12-13**?



Prayer of the people: Nehemiah 9

This prayer is very much like both **Psalms 106** and **Acts 7** – it recounts the general history of God’s chosen people. There are some great themes that we do well to trace in this prayer – it could help us keep our prayer life fresh as we speak with God about our life and the things that we are concerned about and amazed at. Fill in the main themes, as you see them from these verses:

Themes in the people's prayer	Nehemiah 9
God's greatness!	v.5-6,32
	v.17,19,27,31,32
	v.19-21,30
	v.28,
	v.33
	v.33
	v.16-18,26,28-30
	v.32-37
	v.38

4. After reflecting on the main themes and the beauty of this prayer to God, list three major lessons you get out of this that will help you to serve God (there are plenty!). Go into detail.

Those who sealed the covenant

5. What is a covenant? Name 2 covenants in scripture.
6. From **10:1-27**, who are the main groups of Jews who seal the covenant? Is this a pretty good representation of all the people? What does it mean to 'seal' the covenant?

Those who entered the covenant

7. In **vs.28-29**, who else followed the lead of the group from **vs.1-27**? Why is this significant?
8. It says here that the people 'joined' (NKJV) or 'clave' (KJV) unto their brethren. How could this word be better translated and where else is it used? Explain how this is a beautiful thing in the ecclesia. (Hint: **Deut.11:8**)
9. Overall then, who initiated this covenant – God or the people? Historically, who initiated past covenants? What does this tell us about the people working with Nehemiah? Were things spiritually good or bad and why?

'Be separate'

In the Bible, separation is used from the beginning to the end. Separation is something that God wants us to understand very well – what are we separating from? And what are we separating ourselves to? We will come back to this subject in Section 15 when we see all the different ways separation to God can be critical.

10. The classic separation passage is **2 Cor.6:11-18** – 'be separate'. There is something stopping the Corinthians from opening their hearts wide to Paul and others in the Truth – 'your own affections' (**v.12**). What is the context of this chapter? Paul says they are 'restricted' – what does this word mean and how do our 'affections' do that to us?



11. Paul admonishes them sharply in **v.14-18**. This goes through EXACTLY what the people in Nehemiah's time were doing! What is the lesson Paul is trying to teach here?

The Covenant's Details

Fill in what the details of the covenant were, as well as how they broke it later on in **Nehemiah 13**:

Neh.10	Detail	Law of Moses	Covenant broken...
v.29		Deut.30:15 (ch.28-29)	
v.29		Deut.5:1,32	
v.30		Ex.34:11-16; Deut.7:3	
v.31		Ex.12:16; 20:8-11	
v.31		Ex.23:10-11; Lev.25:4-7	
v.31		Deut.15:1-3, 7-9	Broken earlier in Ezra 5:3-5
v.32		Ex.30:11-16	X
v.34		Lev.6:12-13; Josh.9:27	
v.35-37		Lev.27:30-34; Num.18:23-32; Deut.12:17-19; 14:22-28	
v.38-39		Num.18:26-28	

The Purpose of a Covenant

12. **Thought Question:** We need to answer the question posed in this last section – what is the purpose of a covenant if all we do is break it? Using your knowledge of God's word, counsel from others, or any other source you can think of, answer this question to the best of your ability. This question has many different answers which could all lead to profitable discussion. As you answer this question, jot down practical ways to help you keep your covenant to God (if you are baptized) or practical ways to start keeping a covenant to God (if you are unbaptized).



The dedication of the wall – the desire accomplished

In **Nehemiah 12**, there was joy inside the completed walls, while on the ‘other side of the tracks’, the enemies of the Jews heard the ‘joy of Jerusalem... afar off’ (**12:43**). God had allowed the Jews to do what they had thought impossible, until His messenger, Nehemiah had challenged them. ‘Come, let us arise and build’ had cut through their complacent lives and jolted them into spiritual growth and physical action. All the while, it was the Lord who watched over them, who made sure that they were protected from their enemies at their most vulnerable moments.

13. Now that the walls were completed in **Nehemiah 6**, what had the Jews inside the wall been able to concentrate on in **Nehemiah 7-11**? Take a look at the Appendix J. After viewing this chart and seeing the progression of the ecclesia, write some thoughts on what the walls accomplished spiritually.

14. Discuss how you see this as an analogy to the spiritual growth and development of a believer in general. Use scripture to support your answer.



Thanksgiving Choirs

And so from **12:31-42** we have the procedure of how the 2 thanksgiving choirs worked as they started out in opposite directions about the walls of Jerusalem and then met near the Temple mount.

15. Choirs are very important in scripture because of the way they can reach God in a very special way. Find 2 choirs and explain the context of when they sang and why. (Hint: **1Chron.16:4-42** could be one of them but you can find them throughout scripture – even in **Revelation**)



It can be a little confusing how the procession moved around the walls. They are doing, in ceremony, what was instructed by the sons of Korah in **Psa.48:12-14** – ‘Walk about Zion, and go all around her. Count her towers; mark well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generation following!’

At the House of God

‘I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’’ (**Psalm 122:1**). This Psalm was probably another one that was on the lips of those two thanksgiving choirs as they met at the house of God to ‘sing loudly’ as **v.42** says, or as might be a better translation, ‘made their voice to be heard’! Jerusalem was now a ‘city compacted together’ as **Psa.122:3** says – the best proof of that was that one could walk ALL the way around it on top of the wall, without ONE breach!

16. In **12:43**, who was there at the Temple? What did they do once they got there?
17. Contrast this chapter with **Ezra 3:13**, when the Temple foundation had been laid. Based on this and any other evidence you have, would you say the ecclesia has grown spiritually?
18. Based on all that we have learned so far or anything you have seen in your own ecclesia, what really helps an ecclesia grow spiritually?



Rejoicing over the Priests and Levites

It could be argued that **Nehemiah 12:44-47** chronicles the pinnacle of spirituality in the nation of Nehemiah's day. 'At the same time' as the rejoicing with great joy was going on, at the same time that they were offering 'great sacrifices', the religious structure of Judah was being built – to LAST.

19. List the things that were reinstated to encourage permanent change in Judah in **vs.44-47**. Explain why each of them is important (we will talk more about tithing in the next section, but feel free to share whatever you want to here).

Key Principle

*At the end of **Nehemiah 12**, what is the tenor of the ecclesia? Fired up? Clicking? Firing on all cylinders? Spiritually motivated? Thankful? Diligent? United by love? Centered on God? Dedicated to Him? All these and more! How did they get there? Well, that's easy to see now that we've covered the rest of Nehemiah! Through a LONG and hard journey they had come to a point of spiritual growth and maturity where they were working side by side to bring God glory and rejoice together in the Lord. EVERY major part of the ecclesia was working. Were they doing things for the right reasons? Absolutely! Were they perfect? Of course not! Were they moving with momentum in the right direction? Without a doubt! Was the Lord on their side? **V.43** states that it was HIM that caused them to rejoice with great joy! Would you like to be a part of this ecclesia? We would! But unfortunately, some underlying weaknesses in this ecclesia once again manifest themselves when Nehemiah, the great leader of these reforms, goes back to Persia for an unknown reason. 'When the son of man comes (back), will he find faith on the earth?' We shall see in our next section.*

Section 13 – Principles of Separation

Objective:

- Understand separation in a positive way and as God's idea
- See the difficulties of not separating
- Learn what to separate from in order to draw near God
- Learn to ask God to remember us for good!

"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin."

Nehemiah 12:44

Introduction

We have come to the last part of our workbook. Like the chapters of real lives, the book of Nehemiah wraps up rather abruptly, without a 'fairytale' ending. If the book was to close after **Nehemiah 12**, we would all be smiling and feeling rather chuffed. However, God, in His infinite wisdom, made sure that **Nehemiah 13**, a chapter all about the principles of separation, was included. After reading it, we may scratch our head, wondering if spiritual growth can really be sustained... if perhaps there are dangers in relying too heavily on men in our ecclesia like Nehemiah... wondering HOW an ecclesia could slip into so many problems after such high spiritual ground was covered! Hopefully by the end, although we may not feel satisfied in loose ends that are left hanging, we feel the need to rely on God's word and His strength in our lives to persevere, no matter the highs or lows in our lives or in the lives of others. And hopefully, after finishing this book, our prayer, along with Nehemiah, is that our Father in heaven will remember us - for GOOD!

Separation[®] is God's idea

Before we get into **Nehemiah 13**, we need to discuss separation overall.

1. Using verses, define what godly separation is. (Hint: **2Tim.2:22** could be helpful to start you off)

2. When we look at Ezra and Nehemiah, we see separation EVERYWHERE if we just review some of the key verses. It is a HUGE theme within these books. Find at least 4 ways that we see separation in these two books. What were they separating from? Spiritually was it a good thing?



Tobiah the splinter

3. In **13:4**, a character comes up that we have not looked at since the building of the wall in **Neh.3** – Eliashib, the High Priest. Define what the role of the high priest was as God intended it to be and provide scripture to back up your answer. (Hint: stuck? **Lev.21**; **Mal.2:7** are key but there are many more!)

So then, we should see Eliashib popping up all over the record just like the High Priest Jeshua in the book of Ezra...right? But we don't.... he's nowhere to be seen or heard from. Where is Eliashib the High Priest during Ezra's reading of God's law? Where is he when the Levites led in the national confession of the people? Where is he when the most prominent leaders sign and seal the covenant to be pure and obey God's laws in spirit and in word? Where is he when the dedication of the wall is occurring and all of Jerusalem is shouting for joy? His spiritual leadership is not mentioned and his representing the people to God is not alluded to – ANYWHERE! Most incredible of all is that the record is absolutely silent about Eliashib at the moment when he was needed most – when the people would have sought the law from his mouth in **Nehemiah 8**! Where is he when he should have represented God's holiness and taught the people about the God who he was privileged to meet in the Most Holy? All that we know about him is his close connections to Tobiah in **v.5**, and that his grandson had married the daughter of Sanballat (**v.28**)!

4. In **v.4** what does the word 'alliance' mean and in what other situations is it used? (Hint: **Lev.25:25**; **Ruth 2:20**).
5. In light of what we've already looked at in **2 Cor.6:14** is it possible to maintain this kind of an 'alliance' and still function on all spiritual cylinders in the Truth? Explain the relevance of **Hos.7:8-11** to this situation.
6. Please explain (without getting too angry) what Eliashib had 'prepared' for Tobiah in **Neh.13:5**. Contrast this with what OUR God has 'prepared' for us from the foundation of the world – **Matt.25:34**; **1Cor.2:9**.
7. What had been taken out of the Temple to accommodate Tobiah's stuff? Explain the significance of this (Hint: **1Kings 7:51**):

8. In **v.8** we have Nehemiah's response. It grieved him bitterly. Not just grieved but 'bitterly'! The word means 'vehemently' or 'intensely'. Why? Who else was grieved 'bitterly' in scripture? What's the overall emotion that these individuals felt? (Hint: for starters, check out **Gen.6:6**; **Mark 3:5**)
9. Have you ever felt like this over something that has occurred in your ecclesia or with your friends? What did you do about it? Was it a fleshly response or a spiritual one?
10. In **v.9** what does Nehemiah do after throwing out Tobiah's stuff? Jesus provides a personal lesson about this in **Matt.12:43-45**. Explain the parable. What happened to this man in the end?
11. The spiritual lessons come out strong when we look at **1Cor.3:16-17**; **2Cor.6:19**; **2Cor.6:16**. What are these verses saying to you when we keep in mind what Nehemiah had just done at the Temple?



Key Principle

Have you cleaned out your temple lately? What things have you been working on to rid yourself of the unclean spirits? What are you identifying as things that make it easier for you to sin? Do you have an action plan for getting rid of these things in your life? They could be REAL objects like a computer that you have in your room which enables you to surf pornography, or romance novels that allow you to escape. It could be sinful thoughts, selfish habits or words that you speak.

And then the question is: what are you filling your temple with? The evil household stuff of Tobiah the adversary or the golden vessels of the sanctuary? With the deceitfulness of our hearts or the frankincense of the Levites? We want to fill our minds with God's word and brim over the top with ways to combat our flesh and fill our bodies with thoughts of love, peace, joy, self-sacrifice for others, with an eye that looks to the future when God's plan will be realized, with forgiveness on our lips, with a mind that daydreams of the kingdom and of doing God's work every day. The whole idea of baptism and change is to 'renew' our minds.

Spiritual Decline sets in

Sin multiplies and creates a ripple effect, just as we saw spiritual growth does between chapters 6 to 12. It may be helpful to refer to Appendix L for this section. Many of the pieces of the ecclesia that had been worked on and sweated over were falling apart while Nehemiah was absent. We know that after 12 years as governor in Judah, Nehemiah was recalled to Shushan by king Artaxerxes. We do not know why. The problems in Judah did not start while Nehemiah was away – they were probably issues that families faced during the week, that they were able to hide from the ecclesia... a little alliance with the world here, a little disobeying of the law of the Sabbath there. A little compromise here, a little smile at the dedication of the wall there. But however it went down, we know that one of the lynch pins of the whole spiritual machinery of Judah during the time from Mount Sinai until Nehemiah was the tithing of the people to the Levites and from the Levites to the priests.

12. What does **Nehemiah 10:32-39** have to do with **Neh.13:10-13**?

13. Because the Levites had no land to cultivate and grow crops on, they were incredibly vulnerable. They could not do their job of teaching the people about God if they were busy planting and harvesting crops – hence the tithe. In **Deut.14:29; 26:12-13**, who were the Levites lumped in with? Why do you think this was?

14. Malachi is almost certainly contemporary with this time period. What did he accuse the Jews of in **Malachi 3:8**? Although these tithes literally kept the Levites alive, who REALLY owned them?

The principle of the tithe was that God actually possessed EVERYTHING you had. But because he was merciful and caring, he only expected 10% of what you owned to be given to him – as a representative of the whole. When you brought your tithe to the priests and Levites, you were saying, ‘God, you own everything that I have – here is 10% to acknowledge that.’

Nehemiah remedied the problem by putting faithful men in charge of collecting, storing and distributing the tithes from Judah to the Levites. And with the spiritual foundation back in place, the nation was on the right track to recovery.

Intermarriage – again

As Nehemiah is closing his chapter on separation, the problem of intermarriage with foreigners comes up again. We saw that Ezra had to deal with it in **Ezra 9-10**. They decided that putting away their foreign wives was the right course of action.

In **Neh.13:23-28**, the details are given of these intermarriages. We are going to cover some ground work before dealing with this section, to establish a greater understanding of marriage, being yoked with the world (a theme that keeps popping up throughout our studies) and the importance of a ‘godly seed.’ (Hint: Appendix M has a lot of information – and many of the answers to the questions below!)

15. Was it wrong to be joined to the abominations of the nations around them? (Hint: **Lev.18**). Are God’s commandments in this chapter ambiguous or straightforward?
16. Since we know how you answered above (yes, it was a loaded question – our apologies), why then are there exceptions in scripture about gentile people being included in Israel, even MARRIED to the Jews? Rahab? Ruth? This is critical to answer so spend some time on this one!



17. What was God’s goal in marriage according to **Mal.2:15**? What was he looking for in a loving relationship between man and woman, from Adam and Eve to our time?



It would seem that the reason that God wants one man and one wife is because it is the best possibility and the most secure situation for them and their seed to manifest His glory – not two men, not two women, not one parent, not communal guardianship, but one husband with one wife, one mom and one father.

18. So now we come back to **Nehemiah 13:23-28**. We see that we have a very similar situation **Ezra 9**. What was the outcome of the marriages outside of Judah? Comment on the language problem – what’s the big deal? What is the bigger picture?
19. Nehemiah deals with those who intermarried differently than Ezra does. Why? (Hint: it may help to think about what had changed since Ezra’s day; **Mal.2:12** in the NKJV might also help). What does this mean to you?



20. In **v.26**, what example of marriage with unbelievers does Nehemiah use? Was it effective?

Key Principle

*We have talked a lot about separation and living faith to God. We know there will be oppositions in our lives. That we can't change. But what matters, and what God is looking at, is HOW we respond to these different oppositions and oppressions from within and without. Everyone who has loved God has struggled with this. God reassures us and tells us there is something that we will NEVER be separated from in **Romans 8:31-39** – we do well to think on these verses as we live our lives wholeheartedly to our loving Father!*

'Remember me, O my God, for good'

Nehemiah chooses to end his book with these words.

21. If Nehemiah is asking God to remember him, what can we assume about Nehemiah's belief in the resurrection?

22. Do we ask God to remember us? Before we answer, we may want to ask this question first: How can we, as sinners and transgressors, ask God to remember us? (Hint: it may help to think of the different attitudes towards God, as displayed in the publican and the Pharisee in **Lk.18:10-14** or understanding **Hebrews 11:13-16**)



In **Luke 23:40-43** we come to a scene in a place near Jerusalem where the Savior is on a cross, in the last moments of his life after years of desiring to do God's will and not His own. And he is there between two men – both thieves. The one thief understands that he is there because he deserves death since he has done something deserving it. He is not named, but we can see his heart in the exchange that he has with Jesus in these last few moments of their lives.

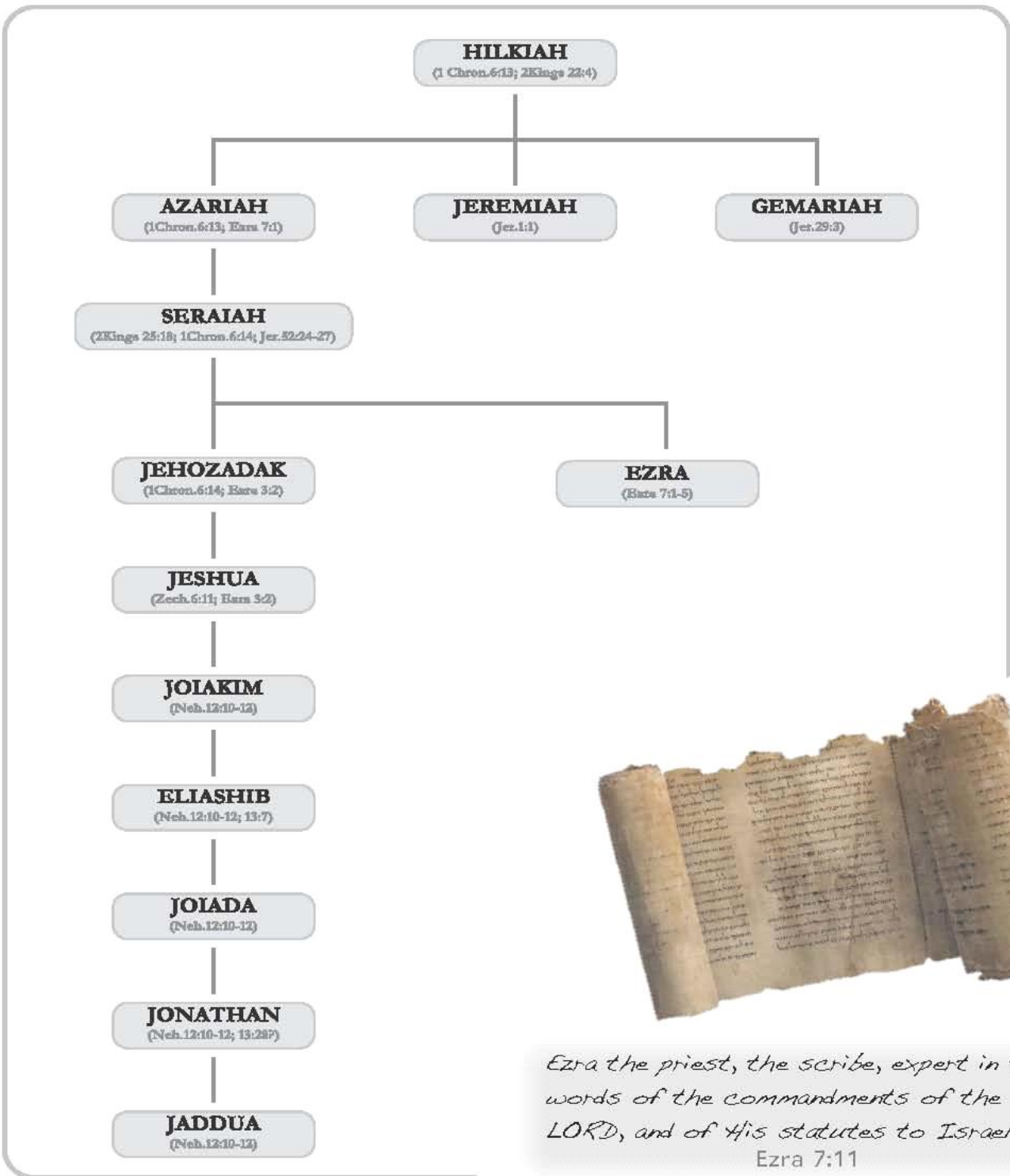
23. What does the thief ask of Jesus?

24. What is Jesus' response?

25. If Jesus promises to remember a thief when he returns to set up his 'paradise', can he remember you? The choice is yours.

REMEMBER US, O OUR GOD, FOR GOOD.

Appendix G | Ezra's Family Tree



Appendix H | Intermarriage — Ezra 2 & 10

Disclaimer: Given that more than one individual in the Book of Ezra shared the same name, this can only be a somewhat approximate study in how many of the families had problems with intermarriage.

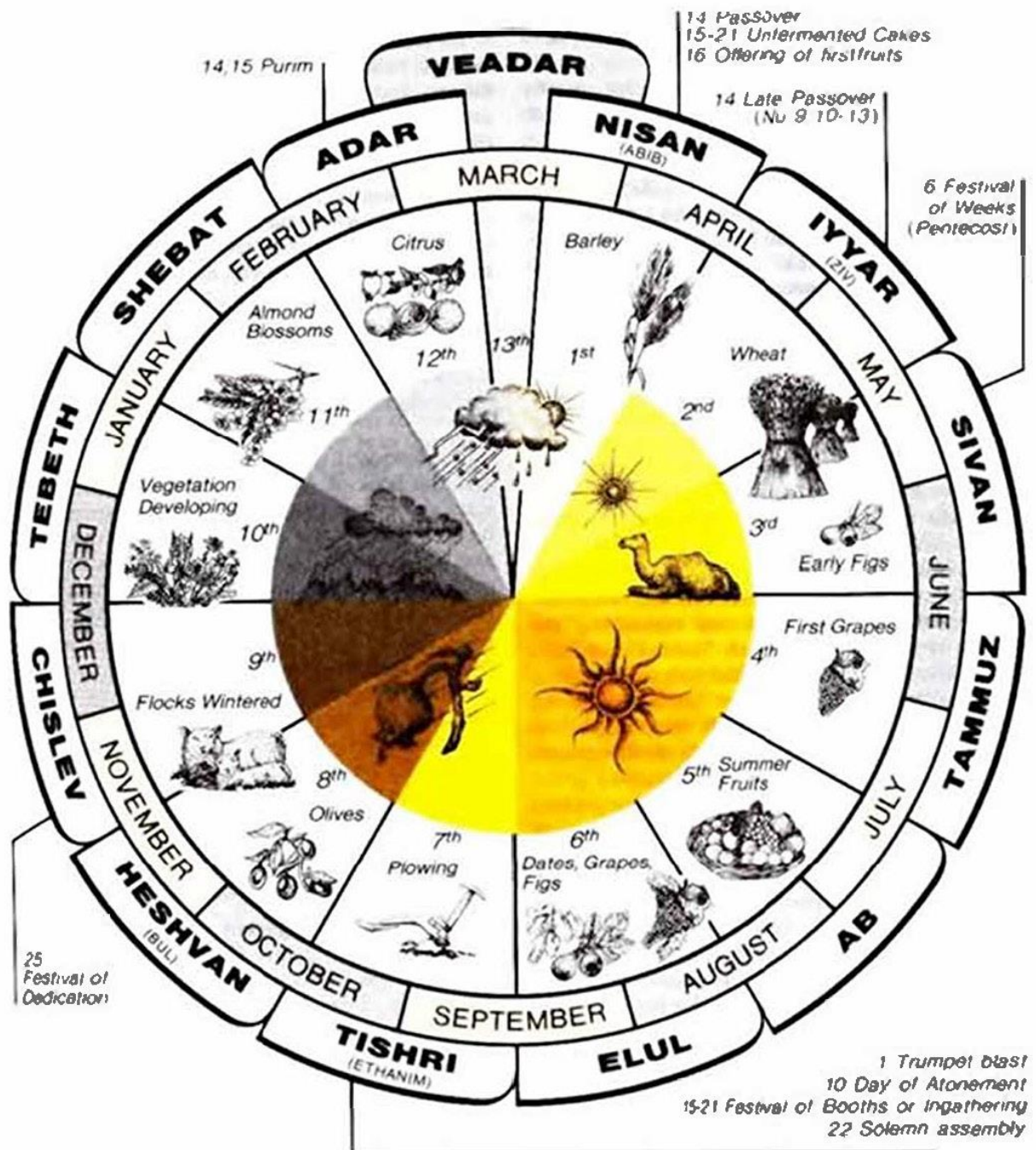
Optional Exercise: Bible mark the following table:

'ALL THESE HAD TAKEN PAGAN WIVES' (Ezra 10:44)		
CHAPTER 10	NAME	CHAPTER 2
v.20	Immer	v.37,59
v.21	Harim	v.32,39
v.22	Pashur	v.38
v.23	Judah	v.40 (also 3:9)
v.24	Shallum	v.42
v.25	Parosh	v.3
v.26	Elam	v.7
v.27	Zattu	v.8
v.28	Bebai	v.11
v.29	Bani	v.10
v.30	Pahath-Moab	v.6
v.31	Harim	v.32
v.33	Hashum	v.19

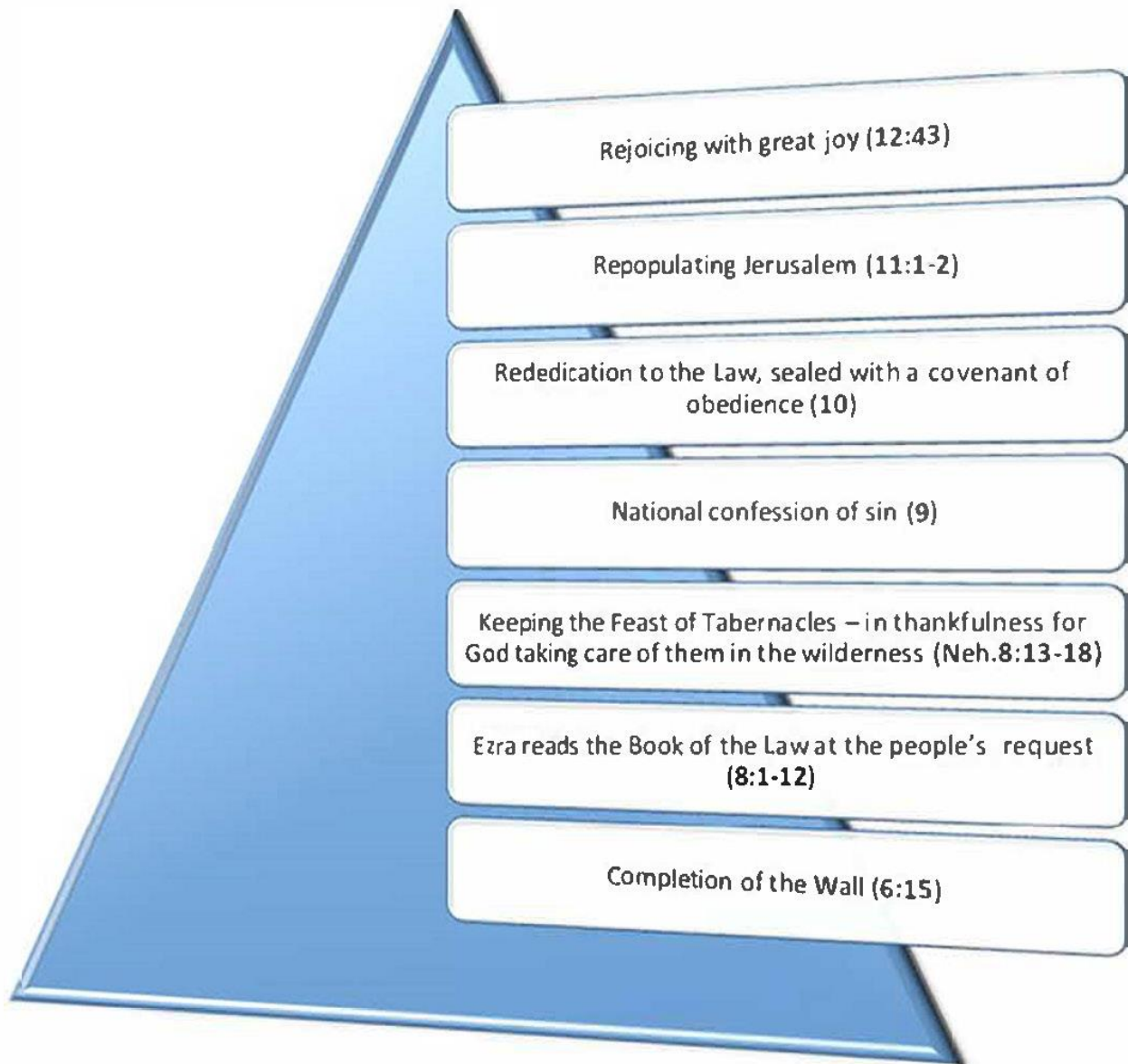
If you were to color in all the families in Ezra 2 that showed up in Ezra 10, what would become obvious is that there are a lot of families that are hurting from the intermarriage of their members. Were their parents strong? In many cases, it would seem so, being put in positions of trust and leadership or commendable service. But even then, there were intermarriage problems, the same age-old pull of the flesh that had the sons of God looking upon the daughters of men in Gen.6. The daughters of men were always fair, but now the sons of God decided to look in other areas for fulfillment, other than focusing on God.

Many of our families in the truth come from such a background – parents that are split over the truth – one parent in, one parent out. This strains the work of the ecclesia, but it is a problem which dates back to the beginning of time. We work in an imperfect environment because we ourselves are imperfect. Yet God will work with us and bless our eager spirit to serve him with our heart, soul and strength.

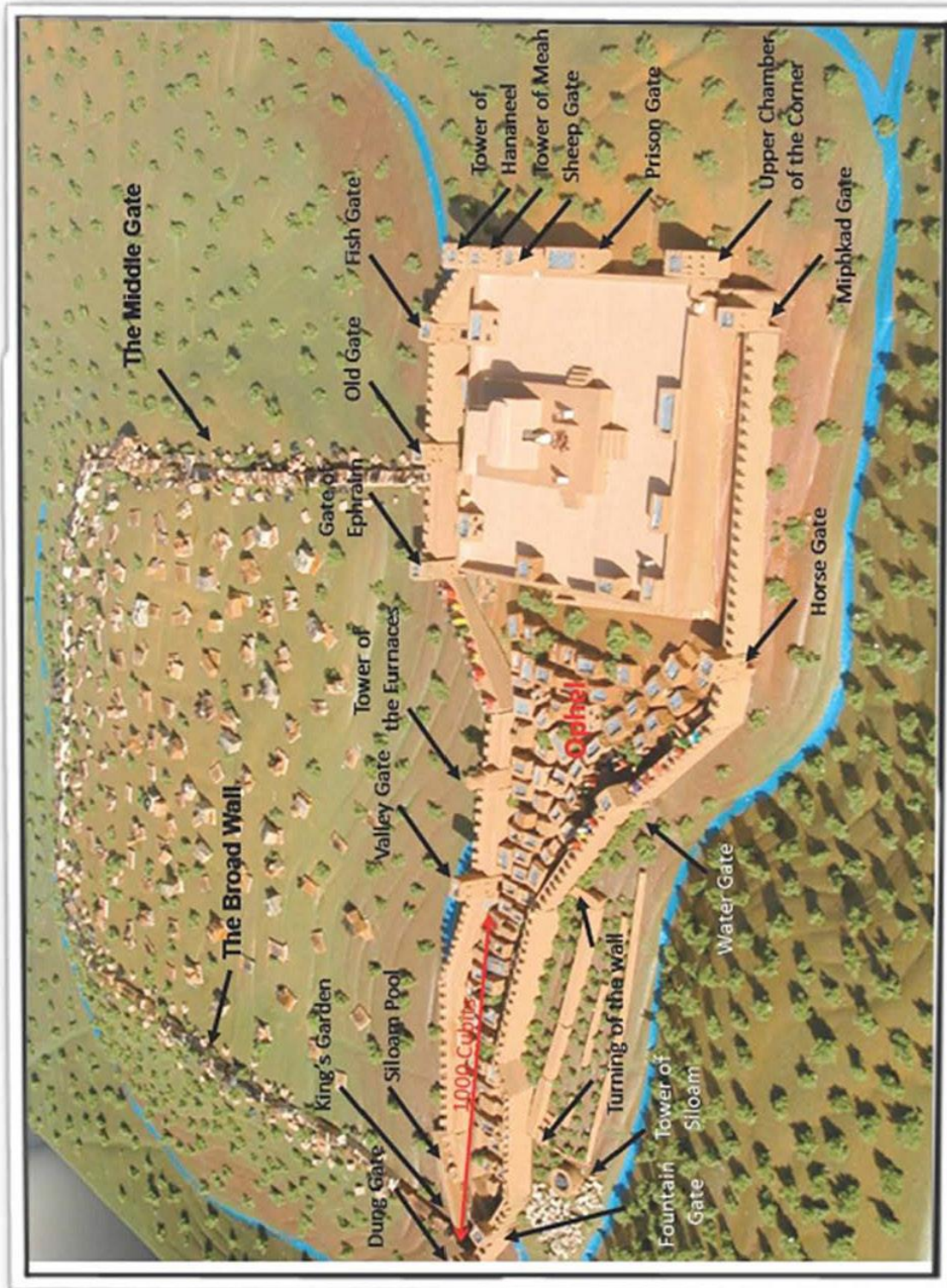
Appendix I | Hebrew Calendar



Appendix J | Spiritual Growth in Nehemiah

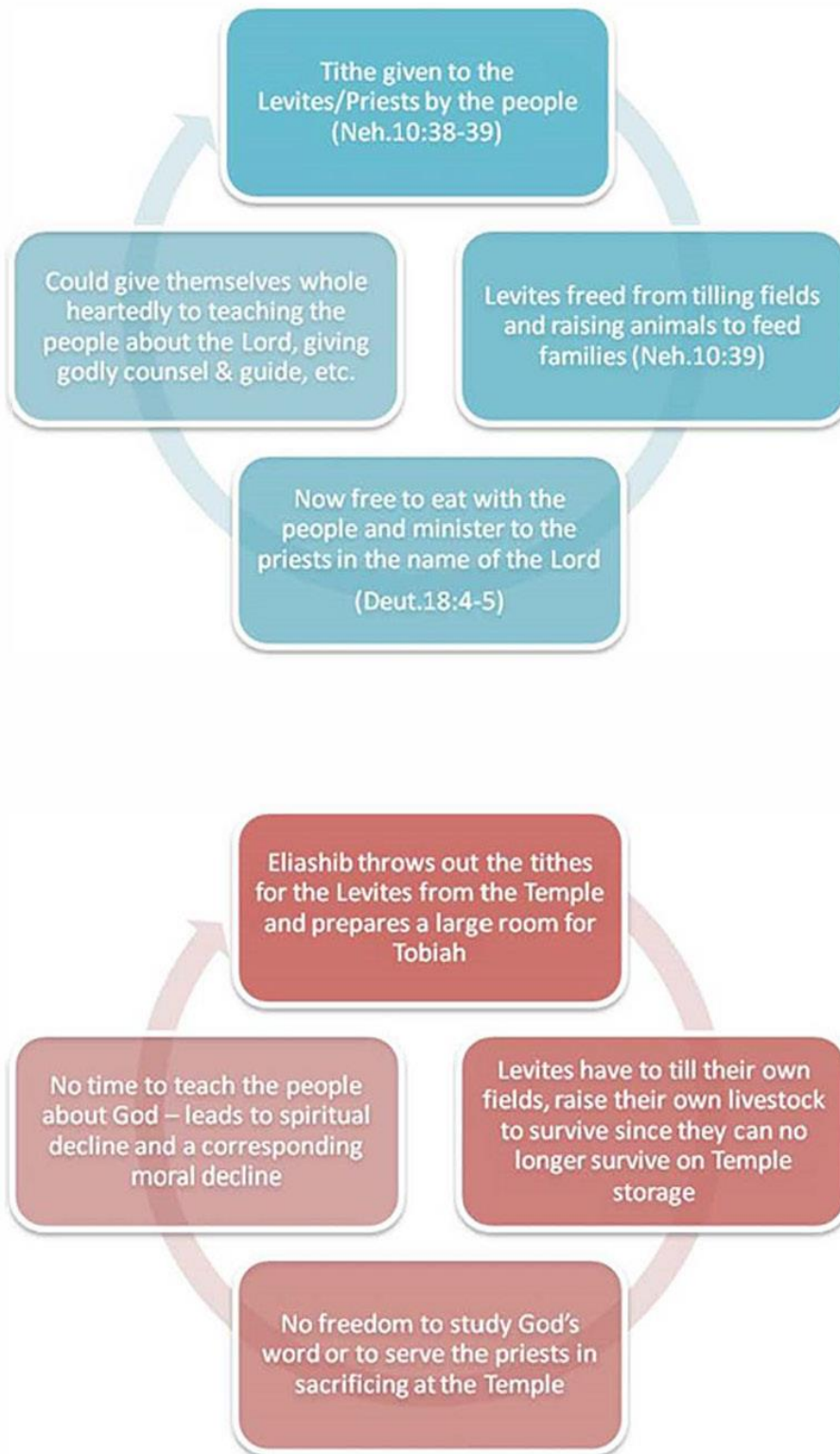


Appendix K | Jerusalem's Structures



Used with Permission from Brother Leen Ritmeyer

Appendix L | The Spiritual Cycle of Tithing



Appendix M

Marriage to Foreigners and Putting Away

Hard questions to answer

- How was it right to put away their wives? Doesn't God hate divorce?
- How was it right to go back to their first wives, if that's indeed what they did?
- What does it mean in Ezra 10:3 when it says that they were to put away their wives 'according to the law'? What law?
- What precedent(s) can be taken for us from these events? Specifically about:
 - Marriage
 - Divorce
 - Worldly relationships
 - Handling/dealing with others who are in these situations

Breakdown of Scriptures

Ezra

- **9:1-2** - Ezra is informed of the intermarriage and the consequences – mixed holy seed
- **9:3-15** – Distress of Ezra at the news and his prayerful confession and distress
- **10:1-4** – the people are on Ezra's side and encourage him as their leaders
- **10:5-17** – people called to put away foreign wives – a practical plan is put in place
- **10:18-44** – a list of those who had taken foreign wives and had children

Nehemiah

- **10:28-30** – part of the covenant they sealed was promising not to allow their children to intermarry with foreigners
- **13:23-29** – Nehemiah, after coming back from his trip to Shushan, deals with those who had reverted back to intermarriage with Ashdod, Ammon and Moab– very forceful

Malachi

- **2:10-17** – God accuses those who have left the wives of their youth with treachery and explains what godly marriage is

Other important scriptures about marriage and divorce

- **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** – grounds for divorce. There is also the stipulation on not being able to remarry the divorcee. Jesus says that this was in the Law 'because of the hardness of your hearts' and that this was not what God intended from the beginning (**Matt.19:1-9**).
- **Isaiah 50:1** – there is a difference between divorce and putting away. 'Putting away' is the actual physical separation; 'divorce' is the legal separation on paper – the conscious decision to separate
- **Jeremiah 3:1-14** – after 700 years of putting up with Israel's unfaithfulness and 'whoredoms', God finally divorced her and put her away. But in v.14, it sounds like he is still married to her even after their divorce. However, **Hosea 2:2** makes it clear that the present state of Israel with God is that she 'is not my wife, neither am I her husband.' And when the time comes that God does take back Israel, it will be under a new covenant, as **Hosea 2:19** says.

Definitions

'Putting away'

- The Lord hates it – **Mal.2:16**
- Strong's 7971 – Shalach – to send away, for, or out.
- Not totally interchangeable with 'divorce' – putting away is broader. Differences can be seen in **Deut.24:1** ('give her a bill of divorcement [3748], and give it in her hand, and send her out [7971] of his house') and v.3 ('... and write her a bill of divorcement [3748], and gives it in her hand, and sends her out [7971] of his house...'). The two words are related but express a slightly different action. Divorcement refers to the legal aspect of the end to a marriage and the sending her out refers to the actual physical separation between partners. In **Isa.50:1** we can see that God had put Israel away but had not written a bill of divorcement yet. But then, in **Jer.3:8**, he makes it clear that he has, after 700 patient and trying years, written this bill.

'Divorce'

- The legal separation between married partners – a 'bill of divorcement' is referred to in **Deut.24:1,3**; **Isa.50:1**; **Jer.3:8**.

Ezra 9

v.1-2

After Ezra has returned to Jerusalem and rested three days, he sets about giving the king's donations to the Priests and Levites to restore the Temple which was apparently in need of repair or beautification. After this was done in **Ezra 8**, the leaders came to Ezra and confessed a huge problem: *'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. For they have taken some of*

their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass' (v.1-2).

Was it wrong to be joined to the abominations of the nations around them?

Yes, according to Lev.18 – The Lord says that they were not to do according to the abominations of Egypt or Canaan. This chapter covers all of the horrible things that the nations around were doing before Israel moved in – sleeping with your mother, your sister, your aunt, your daughter-in-law, a woman and her daughter, your neighbor's wife, someone of the same sex, or with an animal. It also says you should not pass your children through the fires of the god Molech. After listing off all these things which God labels as 'abominations', he says in v.24, 'for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you.' And the warning to the Hebrews coming out of Egypt is 'don't go back' – 'you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you... I am the Lord your God' (v.30)

Why are there exceptions then in scripture about Gentile people being included in Israel, even MARRIED to the Jews? Rahab? Ruth?

BECAUSE THEY FORSOOK THE SAME ABOMINATIONS! They became MORE Jewish – in the sense that they became God's obedient children – than the natural born Jews. Rahab says she knows all about the God that delivered the Hebrews from Egypt and parted the Red Sea, and brought them to Canaan – and she casts her lot in with them. And Ruth commits herself totally to the religion and ways of Naomi – 'your God my God.' Those who fled from the lustful and abominable ways of the gentiles – feeling based, 'me'-centered, selfish lifestyle – and put their trust in God and His people were accepted by God based on their faith, not their ancestry. They were, as Paul says in Romans 2:29, 'a Jew who is one inwardly... whose praise is not from men but from God.'

What is meant by 'holy seed'?

There are some incredible scriptures which help out here – Ex.19:6; Ex.22:31; Deut. 7:6; Deut.14:2. These verses all stress the importance that God put on the children of Israel being holy to him – separate from the wicked nations around them simply by being faithful and obedient to Him. They were a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, a nation that would manifest God's awesome character as revealed to Moses in Exodus 33:6-7. In Isaiah 6:13, God says that the 'holy seed' would be the ones who were taken away into captivity and would return – 'So the holy seed shall be its stump' of the metaphoric tree of God's people. So these people in Ezra's day are incredibly right in what they say – they WERE the holy seed that had returned to the land. But they were not INTRINSICALLY holy – and that is exactly what they were struggling with now. Being God's holy seed was hard work! It required a strict adhering to his laws and the sacrifice of self for the glory of your God. And perhaps the most important place that 'godly seed' is mentioned is in Malachi 2:15. We need to look at the context to understand this (see below section on Malachi). We see from Malachi that one of the reasons God wanted spiritually stable marriages was to produce a godly seed that

would manifest him into the next generation! So marriage was another way that man could give back to God the glory that is due to his name.

This was exactly what Abraham learned when, in a moment of weakness, took his wife's bad advice and took Hagar, to lay with her and have children by her. He thought that this would be the seed that God had promised him. But it was not right. He should never have taken her and it was a strain on his marriage with Sarah. God says, 'Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called' (Gen. 21:12). Abraham heeded his wife's complaint and cast Hagar and Ishmael out – and God agreed with Sarah.

10:1-4

After Ezra confesses the sins of the people and asks for God to consider them in their hopeless estate, a large assembly of people come weeping to him. They recognize their trespass and realize the depth of their disobedience in choosing to be selfish or choosing to love their God with all their heart, soul and strength. But they still came with hope – 'yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.' They had a plan. They would put away all their foreign wives and the children born through these wives – as Ezra had apparently advised. It would be done 'according to the law', which would mean they were using the Deuteronomy 24:1-4 laws to do this. If a man found any 'uncleanness' in his wife he could divorce her. If ever there was an uncleanness in wives, it was in this situation which was going to ruin all of the returned captives. Shechaniah, who seems to be one of the ones who has married outside of Israel, tells Ezra that they need him to lead them in reform. 'We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it.' And that is exactly what they did.

10:5-17

After swearing an oath to do exactly what God had said, they implement their plan.

Malachi

2:10-17

This section establishes a few things that are essential to understanding the scenarios in Ezra and Nehemiah. First, it establishes what God thinks of marriage. Second, it establishes what God thinks of putting away 'the wife of your youth' and the consequences of it. Third, it establishes what God's goal was in bringing together one man and one wife. Let's tackle these three things to understand them from God's perspective.

There is no clearer section than this for explaining marriage from God's perspective. He explains, not just in fact but in emotion, what marriage is. Here are pieces of the incredible whole that makes up His definition of marriage in Malachi:

- v.11 – 'the Lord's holy *institution* which He loves' – 'institution' has been added in the NKJV. In the KJV it says 'the holiness of the Lord which he loves', which is a more correct translation. As Keil and Delitzsch point out, the 'holiness' is referring, not to God's holy sanctuary (i.e. The Temple), nor to the institution of marriage, but to Israel, the nation of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The

nation was called God's holiness in **Deut7:6; 14:2; Jer.2:3; Psalm 114:2; Ezra 9:2**. By marrying foreign women who did not share the same values as godly Hebrews did, these men were profaning the holy nation.

- **V.14** – 'the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth' – God is at your wedding and he is there during your marriage – he is witness. He takes your words at their face value. The Lord does not take anything you say or do in marriage lightly. God often sees a marriage as something that happens before him – he is an integral part of a wedding 'in the Lord'. Also, he specifically uses the term 'wife of your youth' – this phrase comes up in **Proverbs 5:18-19** when talking about being absolutely satisfied within marriage with 'the wife of your youth.' And obviously, here in Malachi, Judah's husbands had not followed this with the wives of their youth.
- **V.14** - 'Yet she is your companion'- exactly what was intended by God in the beginning when he made Eve – for her to be 'a helper comparable to him'
- **V.14** – 'your wife by covenant' – God puts full stock in your vows which you say on your wedding day. The covenant that you make is something that God heartily says 'amen' to and then expects you to stick by them – not to leave your wife since you are now together as one until one of you dies.

Summary: this is what God thinks of marriage: He is a witness as to what goes on within your marriage, he expects you to stay with the wife of your youth, he sees your spouse as your companion and that you are married by a covenant that God himself puts full trust in when you make your vows to one another.

So what does the Lord think of putting away the wife of your youth in favor of an unbeliever from the other nations?

- God calls it treachery – **v.10,11,14,16**. It means to act deceitfully, faithlessly, to offend, to cover. It's used in Job 6:15 when he says that his three friends have dealt deceitfully with him. It's also used over and over about the nation of Israel dealing treacherously with God in their relationship (**Jer.3:20; Hos.6:7**).
- God also calls it 'an abomination' in **v.11**. We have already seen **Lev.18** why it was an abomination – it was what these unbelievers brought to Judah that was so abominable – their sexual immorality, their worshipping of other gods (as alluded to in **v.11**) and their total lack of obedience and respect for the God of Heaven – the one true God.
- He hates it – **v.16**. God hates putting away. The NKJV translates this wrongly as 'divorce'. We have discussed the difference between the two already. Here, God is saying that he hates physical separation between a husband and a wife. And His final reason for hating it is because 'it covers one's garments with violence', or 'sin' as Keil & Delitzsch translate it. Putting away the wife of your youth covers you with sin. Garments are symbolic of the inner mind to God – **Rev.3:4; 7:14; 19:9**.

Summary: It's pretty clear what God thinks of putting away then – to Him, it is a treacherous abomination that covers the divorcer in sin, and He hates it.

So, what was God's goal with marriage? What was he looking for in a loving relationship between man and woman, from Adam and Eve to our time?

We need to really understand **Mal.2:15**. First let's lay out a few different translations to help understand:

And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. (KJV)

But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let non deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. (NKJV)

And did not hee make one? yet had hee abundance of spirit: and wherefore one? because he sought a godly seede: therefore keepe your selues in your spirit, & let none trespasse against the wife of his youth. (Geneva)

Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. (ESV)

It is evident that Malachi, under inspiration, is alluding back to the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis and talking about how they became one. There is an emphasis on this oneness in **Gen.2:24** after Adam has seen Eve (who was brought to Adam by the Lord). After Adam says *'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man'*, the Lord God Himself includes some narrative from his perspective: *'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh'* (v.24). Looking at the different translations, it is easy to see that there are some different ideas about what this verse means:

What does it mean that God had a 'remnant' or 'residue' of the Spirit when he made Adam and Eve one?

The word does not have to mean a little bit of the spirit left over, the dregs of God's Spirit. In fact, far from it, the same word pops up in **Esther 9:15-16**, where it is talking about the 'rest' of the Jews in all of Persia outside the city of Shushan. That would be the majority! It would seem that the Geneva translation has the best meaning of the both. It's meaning is getting at the point that God, with all the power and the might that we can fathom deliberately chose to make one woman (Eve) for one man (Adam) – that they might marry and become one flesh. Out of all the incredible things he could have done with his Holy Spirit power, he chose this simple institution. Therefore it is more than a divine institution – it is the BEST institution! This is what Matthew Henry says about it: *"Yet had the residue of the Spirit; he could have made another Eve, as amiable as that he did make, but, designing a help meet for him, he made him wife; had he made him more, he would not have had a help. And wherefore did he make but one woman for one man? It was he might seek a godly seed - seed of God (so the word is), a seed that should bear the image of God, be employed in the service of God, and be devoted to his glory and honour, - that man having his own wife, and one, according to*

the law, (1Co 7:2), they might live in chaste and holy love, under the directions and restraints of the divine law, and not, as brute beasts, under the dominion of lust, and thus might propagate the nature of man in such a way as might make it most likely to participate of a divine nature, - that the children, being born in holy matrimony, which is an ordinance of God, and by which the inclinations of nature are kept under the regulations of God's command, might thus be made a to serve him, and be bred, as they are born, under his direction and dominion."

Summary: It would seem that the reason that God wants this one man and one wife is because it is the best possibility and the most secure situation for their seed to manifest His glory – not two men, not two women, not one parent, not communal guardianship, but one mom and one father.