

Bible Study # 27
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Old Testament Series—Ezra and Nehemiah
(Chart at end)

Let's look at some of the chronology of the invasions. The last Bible studies, we have been using this Chronology of Kings and Chronicles. You note that 604 B.C. is the time of Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion, and then there was a subsequent invasion a few years later in 592 B.C. That was the invasion that Daniel and Ezekiel went into captivity. Jeremiah was prophesying during that time. Finally in 587 B.C. the third invasion occurred that completely destroyed Jerusalem and burned Solomon's temple.

As we continue down through the story recorded in Daniel, it gives the story of what was happening in Babylon prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. The fall of Babylon was in 539 B.C. It was the Feast of Trumpets in 539 B.C. and it was the "handwriting on the wall" for Babylon (Daniel 5). Within a matter of five years the decree was issued by King Cyrus that allowed the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem in 534 B.C. Zerubbabel led the Jews back from Babylon. He was the governor appointed by the Persians. Haggai and Zechariah were prophets who flourished at that time. The book of Ezra starts out with that.

By 515 B.C., the second temple was completed. Only a tiny portion of the population returned. There were a lot of problems involved in building things up. There were external problems. When Northern Israel went into captivity in 721 B.C., the Assyrians deported all the Israelites and put in other people who were practicing the Babylonian Mystery Religion. These people were there when the Jews began to return. They immediately ran into problems.

From 515 B.C., there is a gap of time in terms of the story, and we don't pick up the story again until a generation later **when Ezra came in 457 B.C.**, 58 years after the temple had been finished, basically a generation. From the time the temple was finished to the time Zerubbabel came was like from our time now back to the Great Depression—there were not a whole lot of people around who would have had a first-hand account of it. Ezra does not have control of the civil government. He has religious authority by the Persian king.

In 444 B.C. Nehemiah came back as the civil governor. He and Ezra joined together.

When the curtain rises with Ezra's return, the people are part and parcel with this society. Satan's efforts to destroy the work are evident in Ezra and Nehemiah. Satan had several methods of attacks. There was an attempt at a frontal assault. The Samaritans hired lawyers and put the whole work of God into receivership—a lengthy legal hassle. Zerubbabel won a reversal. When that didn't work, then there was a subtle infiltration to water down, to compromise, to destroy the work of God from the inside. Ezra brought the temple scrolls back. Daniel had access to them. As Ezra comes on the scene, he brings these things back.

From the time Haggai and Zechariah preached until the time Ezra returned, that 60-year period was the time during which Esther became queen. This is what set the stage to enable Ezra to return. **Ezra and Nehemiah are responsible for canonizing the Old Testament.** *Josephus* wrote, "The prophetic spirit ceased among the Jews with the death of Ezra." Jeremiah had prophesied that Jerusalem would lay desolate for 70 years. So from Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion to the return of the Jews in 534 B.C. was exactly a 70-year period. God allowed Cyrus to issue a decree that allowed the rebuilding of the temple. It is very apparent that the only ones who ever returned were the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and some of the Levites, not the ten tribes.

Let's start with Ezra.

Ezra 1:5, "Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priest and the Levites, with all those whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." These went back.

Ezra 2:2, "Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:" Zerubbabel is mentioned in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. He was in the direct ancestry of Jesus Christ and a direct descendant of David. "Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua..." It starts with Jeshua and goes through the various other ones.

Verse 64, "The whole congregation together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty." Just over 42,000 returned out of the original four million.

Ezra 3:1-6, "And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Then Jeshua, the son of Jozadak and

his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening burnt offerings. They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day; and afterward they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed Feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not yet been laid.”

To institute daily sacrifices, all that has to be done is to consecrate an altar. I went through a sermon on the Middle East and stated that daily sacrifices would have to be instituted. It doesn't take long to consecrate an altar. A temple doesn't have to be built.

Verse 8, “Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozakak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord.” They told them, ‘Let's get started.’ So they began the building. There were a few elderly people who came back who remembered Solomon's temple and its glory (v. 12). It was not nearly as impressive.

Those who returned were of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. The leaders of the return were Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the high priest.

Ezra 4:1-2, “Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, ‘Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.’” They said, ‘We are good Christians just like you. Let us join together.’

Verse 3, “But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, ‘You may do nothing with us to build a

house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.’” The Samaritans suggested, ‘Let us build with you; let us all be in this thing together.’ Did the Samaritans worship God the way He wanted? –No, of course not.

II Kings 17 shows they used God's name, but they kept worshipping the same old idols. They served their graven images to this day—right on down to our day. Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the heads of the fathers said, ‘You are not with the program. We are not on the same wavelength. We are not compatible.’ They refused to become unequally yoked together.

Ezra 4:4-5, “Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.” They hired lawyers.

Verse 6, “Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.” They began to make accusations.

Verses 11-13, “This is a copy of the letter that they sent him—To King Ahasuerus from your servants the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundation. Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished.”

They are trying to make it sound bad. They are trying to make it sound terrible. ‘That rebellious city, they are rebuilding it.’ How did he know that they were not going to pay their taxes? He didn't know. He was just accusing.

Verses 16-23, “We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion over the region beyond the River. Then the king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions, who dwell in Samaria, and to the rest in the region beyond the River. Peace, and so forth. The letter, which you sent to us, has been clearly read before me. And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the provinces beyond the River;

and tax, tribute and custom were paid to them. Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings? Now when the copy of King Artazerzes' letter was read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease."

Now they had their court order and came charging in with all their troops.

Verse 24, "Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." They shut the work down. They got a court order.

Ezra 5:1-2, "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. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them." Zerubbabel rose up to do the work.

Verses 3-4, "At the same time Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: 'Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?' Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building." They went to subpoena the record. It wrangled through court for the next few years. Finally the decree came in. They made all their pronouncements (vv. 8-10).

Verses 11-13, "And thus they returned us an answer, saying: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God.'" They said, 'We had an order from Cyrus.'

Ezra 6:1-3, "Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was

written thus: In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: 'Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits.'" Darius makes a search. Finally when the answer came down and was settled, it settled on the side of God's work.

There is an amazing parallel here in Ezra. Those who remember back in 1979, this case here is a very remarkable parallel. One of the things you learn is that what Satan does is not original. He uses the same old tactics again and again. What should we do when we find ourselves in circumstances like this? Like Zerubbabel, court order or no court order, we have to do the work of God.

Verses 14-16, "So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. 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."

Verse 19, "And the descendant of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month." This was 515 B.C.

Between chapter 6 and chapter 7 there is an almost 60-year gap.

Ezra 7:1, "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah...." We are looking here at Artaxerxes.

Verse 6, "this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." Ezra was a priest.

Verses 10-14, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Now this is the copy of the letter that King Artazerzes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes in Israel: Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm,

who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand.”

Ezra was allowed to carry back the official temple scrolls released from Babylon. Artaxerxes was the son of Ahasuerus who was the husband of Queen Esther. The one who issued the decree was a stepson of Esther, and he had a favorable attitude toward the Jews. He now issued some favorable decrees.

Verse 18, “And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God.” He gave them “carte blanche” to do whatever they had to do.

Verse 21, “And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, do issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently.” That is pretty much of a carte blanche. ‘Whatever this guy needs, you give it to him.’ We have here the return of Ezra. We notice that Ezra was a priest, and his attitude on his return was that he was coming back to teach the law and restore the Scriptures to their central place (v. 10).

Ezra 8:21-23, “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. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, ‘The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.’ So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.”

They got ready to leave and were heading across this “no man’s land” with these marauding raiders, and what they really would like was to have a transport of soldiers to protect them. ‘We are sitting ducks. But how can I go back and ask for this help? I have just told him how great and powerful God is. I am embarrassed that I don’t have the faith like I said.’ So he called a fast. God’s ministers have wrestled with the same emotions and feelings that we do.

Ezra 9:1, “When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, ‘The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people 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.”

One of the great sins that Ezra discovered was that intermarriage had taken place. The Jews had intermarried with the Samaritans and others of the lands. They were on the verge of losing their identity as a separate, identifiable people. Where did the problem start?

Verse 2, “For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is intermingled with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.” People follow their leaders. They all got in line. Not every single person, but throughout history they always followed by and large as a group. People tended to follow their leader. So when the princes and rulers began to mix and mingle, others did too. Ezra was very concerned with this. This was a major problem.

Literally, the identity of God’s people was at stake—religiously, ethnically and culturally. The Jews would have ceased to exist. If Satan can’t subvert God’s plan one way, he always tries another way. God has always wanted His people to maintain a separate identity from the world. They were a nation-state as well as a Church. It was important to God that they preserve their identity. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob placed great emphasis on who their children married so that the identity of the people be preserved.

In Deuteronomy 32:8-9, God separated the people by geographical boundaries: the Himalayan Mountains, Sahara Desert, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, the biggest obstacles you could put in Satan’s path. He has been busily trying to get around it. Satan stirs up people to do the opposite of what God tells them to do. It seems inborn. Whatever God wants you to do, Satan stirs you up to do the opposite.

What he commanded them to do about it: Ezra 10:3, “Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the counsel of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.”

Drastic measures had to be taken. Let me point out here that this is a practice among the Jews that is causing problems today. If your mother is Jewish, then you are considered a Jew, not if your father is a Jew. That is the reason Ezra made them put out the Gentile wives. Even if the father was Jewish, the children were not

considered Jewish. That is the basis on down to this day. They were sent away from Judah.

Ezra had come back in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king (Ezra 7:8).

Nehemiah's background was that he was a cupbearer to the king (Nehemiah 1:11). **God used Nehemiah to clean house.**

The grandson of the high priest did not put away his pagan wife. As time went by, people resented the fact of what those at the top were getting by with. They complied, but they were not convinced and did not internalize these values. They went along with the rules, but they never got the point.

Understand something. If all you do is go along with the rules and don't get the point, then sooner or later you will go back. It is the change on the inside—not changing what we are but what we think. If what I am on the inside becomes different, than the actions on the outside are going to be different. It was going to take more than someone coming back to preach and teach.

This was the nation that Jesus was to be born into over 450 years later. The Scriptures had to be preserved. This was going to be the basis of the Church being raised up. Having an identifiable people that are obeying the law would serve as a nucleus when Jesus Christ came. It was an attempt to derail the entire future of the purpose and plan of God, to water down, dilute and destroy the Scriptures of God.

There were different personalities in the kings. Some were stronger and more disciplined. They all had their strengths and weaknesses. Nehemiah was a very strong-willed man. He was perhaps as strong a ruler—a strong and determined ruler—as ever ruled the people of God. He was a man who meant business. He was very determined. He was a strong-willed man who was needed for a very difficult time. There was nothing wishy-washy about Nehemiah. He was sent back as their governor.

Nehemiah 5:14, “Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions.”

Nehemiah 2:5, “And I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.’” He requested the job from the king and got it. He was given leadership and authority.

Verses 9-10, “Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.” Sanballat was the leader of the Samaritans; Tobiah was his assistant.

Verses 15-16, “So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned and the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.” The rulers didn't know what he was doing.

Verses 17-18, “Then I said to them, ‘You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.’ And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, ‘Let us rise up and build.’ Then they set their hands to do this good work.”

The city had really never been completely rebuilt. The city was still laying waste. There was debris. The population was sparse; the gates had not been replaced.

Verse 19, “But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed us to scorn and despised us, and said, ‘What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?’” They made fun.

Verse 20, “So I answered them, and said to them, ‘The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem.’” ‘You don't have anything to do with it. We don't want you around here.’

Nehemiah 3 describes some of the layout and the details of repairing the city.

Nehemiah 4:1-3, “But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria and said, ‘What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—stones that are burned?’ Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, ‘Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down

their stone wall.” They were making fun. All these ideas expressed.

Verses 6-8, “So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion.”

Verse 11, “And our adversaries said, ‘They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.’”

Verses 16-18, “So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all of the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.” Nehemiah was determined. ‘We are going to build this wall if we have to stand guard.’

Verses 21-23, “So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, ‘Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.’ So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.”

‘We never even got undressed when we went to bed. We were on guard. We kept right there at the wall. We changed clothes in order to wash the ones we had on.’ You see the kind of determination that Nehemiah had. He was going to build this wall and he wasn’t going to give them a chance to tear it down.

Nehemiah 5 is a backdrop for the book of Malachi. Malachi prophesied during this time. Malachi 3:9, “‘You are cursed with a curse because you have robbed Me.’” Notice the background. What was the curse they were cursed with?

Nehemiah 5:1, “And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.”

Verses 3-4, “There were also some who said, ‘We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine.’ There were also those who said, ‘We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our lands and vineyards.’” They had to mortgage their land for food. They had to borrow money to eat and pay taxes.

Verse 5, “...‘and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are brought into slavery already. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.’” They were selling their children into servitude. When Malachi said they were cursed with a curse, they were.

Verse 7, “After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, ‘Each of you is exacting usury from his brother.’ So I called a great assembly against them.” Some were taking advantage of those who had less.

Verse 14, “Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor’s provisions.” He didn’t even take the salary he was paid and he told the people they had better not be in it for what they could get.

The wall was completed, but the gates were not complete.

Nehemiah 6:1-3, “Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, ‘Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono.’ But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, ‘I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?’” They said, ‘Let us meet together.’ Nehemiah answered, ‘I have too many important things to do.’

Verse 5, “Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand.” He kept trying to get to Nehemiah, to lure him off.

Verse 6, “In it was written: ‘It is reported among the nations...that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king.’”

Verse 8, “Then I sent to him, saying, ‘No such things as you say are being done, but you invent

them in your own heart.” He said, ‘You just made it up.’

Verse 9, “For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, ‘Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.’” ‘You are just trying to weaken the work.’ They were trying to undermine things.

Verses 15-16, “So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty-two days. 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.”

Verses 17-18, “Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah and the letters of Tobiah came to them. For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechia.” Intermarriage occurred here among the Jews, even some of the leaders.

Nehemiah 7:1-5, “Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. And I said to them, ‘Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut the doors and bar them; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house.’ Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return....” God inspired him to call people in to increase the size of the city.

Nehemiah 8:1-5, “Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the congregation, of men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate, from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and

the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood up.”

He opened the Book in the sight of all the people. They all stood up and Ezra blessed God (v. 6).

Verse 8, “So they read, distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.” That is the way God’s ministry preaches.

Verse 9, “And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep.’ For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.” This was on the Feast of Trumpets; that is what we teach today.

Verses 16-18, “Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. So the whole congregation of those who had returned from the captivity made booths; and sat under the booths for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day-by-day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the Feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.”

The people kept the Feast of Tabernacles. It was more thoroughly done than since the days of Joshua.

Nehemiah 10:29, we find a covenant, pledging their faithfulness, “they joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes—.” God’s law contains both blessings and curses. If you walk in it, you are blessed; if you walk against it, you are cursed.

Verses 30-31, “that we would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; that if the peoples of the land bring wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and

that we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exaction of every debt." There wasn't to be intermarriage and or selling of wares on the Sabbath. 'We will keep the Sabbath; we will not be involved in business.'

Verse 37, "to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities." The covenant involved an agreement to faithfully obey the Law, to not intermarry, to keep the Sabbath faithfully, to tithe and to give offerings.

Nehemiah 13:6, "But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king."

Nehemiah was gone for a while, and then he came back after 12 years. I want you to understand and focus on this a little bit. Here was Nehemiah insisting on all these reforms and then he was gone for a period of time. You know what he found? He found Eliashib had prepared a room in the temple for Tobiah, the leader of the Samaritans.

Verses 7-8, "and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room." He came in there and said, 'What in the world is going on here?' He started picking up stuff and heaving it out. He thought he had gotten rid of these people. How deep do you think the reform was?

Mr. Herbert Armstrong drew a lot of analogies and emphasis on these things. There was a seven-year period in 1979 to 1987—seven years in which he emphasized over and over again that God had brought him back to get the Church back on the track. Here God brought Nehemiah back to get things back on the track. Nehemiah was gone, and some of the people obviously had not entirely gotten the point. The leader of the Samaritans had moved in. Nehemiah cleaned house.

Verses 10-12, "I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, 'Why is the house of God forsaken?' And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the

tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse." Nehemiah began to organize things.

Verse 15, "In those days I saw in Judah some people treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions." They were harvesting on the Sabbath.

Verses 16-19, "Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, 'What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.' So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gate, so that no burden would be brought in on the Sabbath day."

They had set up shop outside the gate. He said, 'Why are you doing this outside the wall? If you do it again, I will lay hands on you (v. 21).' They got the point. 'No more "Mr. Nice Guy," I mean business.'

Verses 23-25, "In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, 'You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.'"

He jerked up a few of them, knocked them around and explained to them what they were to do. He made it very plain to them.

Verses 27-28, "'Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?' And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me." He "ran him out of town on a rail." He was in line to be high priest. This had been the "fly-in-the-ointment" all along. Nehemiah finally saw it. What happened was that Sanballat built a temple

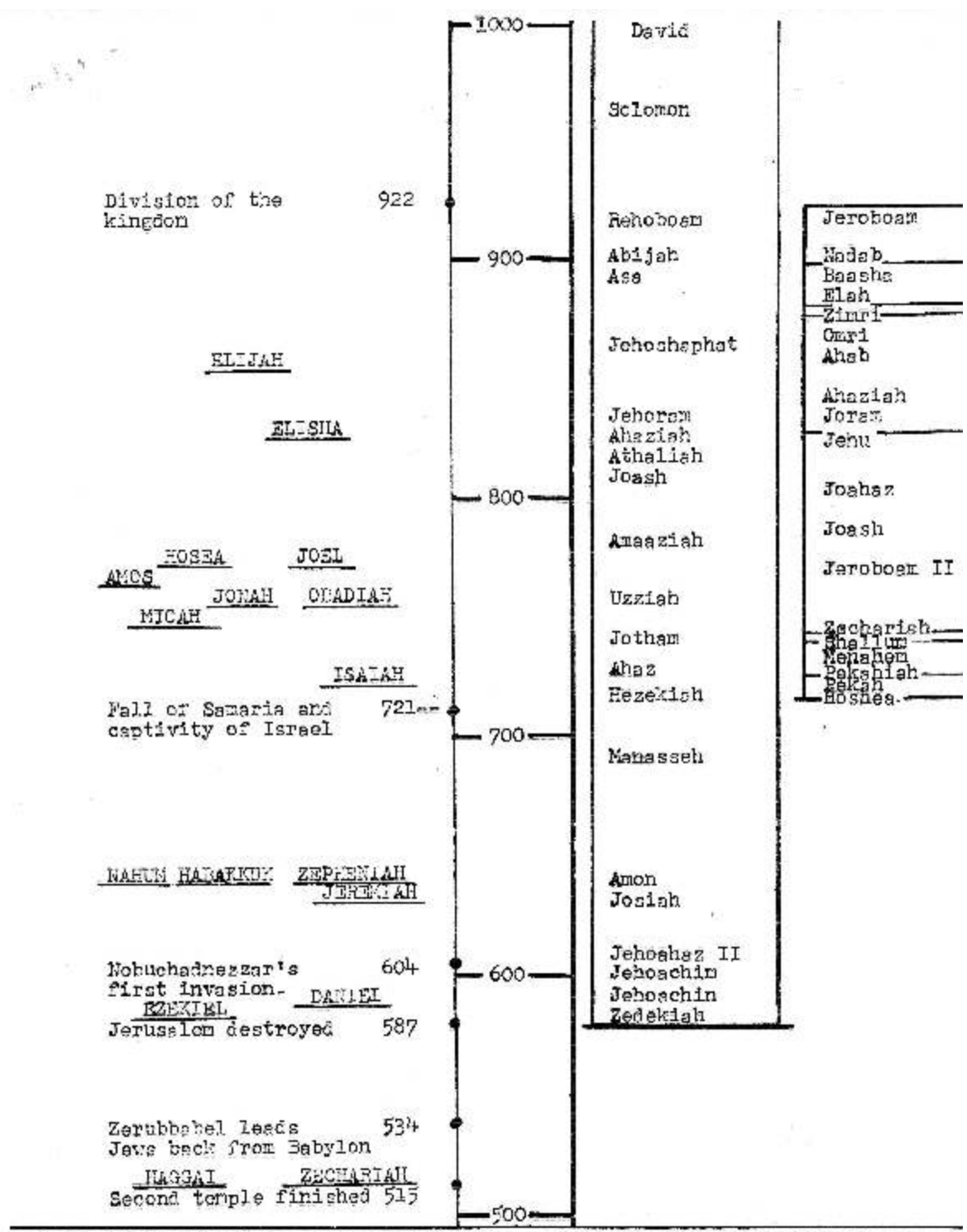
on Mt. Gerizim. He said, 'We will put you in business up here.'

Now when you read the story in John 4, the woman at the well said, 'Our fathers worship in this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Remember that statement she made? On Mount Gerazim was the false temple that Sanballat had built for this renegade priest. 'You Jews say it ought to be in Jerusalem.'

John 4:20-22, "'Our fathers worshiped on this mountain [Mt. Gerizim], and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.'" 'You Samaritans worship what you do not know.' He made it plain to her who had preserved the Scriptures.

Nehemiah 13:29-31, "Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleaned them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good!" Nehemiah was used by God to clean house. It was an important job that took a man of a unique temperament and approach to be able to do something like that. Nehemiah was the one that did that and stood out in that way.

There aren't any questions to be passed out for next time. I will go over and discuss some things leading up to the New Testament. This has been a historical survey. Hopefully, it has given you a little insight, and it is important for us to learn the lessons for us today.



Chronology of Kings and Chronicles