

Bible Study # 3
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Proof of the Bible Series (Part 3)—The Time of
Ezra & Nehemiah: The Fifth Period of
Canonization of the Old Testament

I want to continue with the material we had been getting into the last time, when we were **going through the last period of the canonization of the Old Testament—the time of Ezra and Nehemiah**. I want to go back and go into some things in Ezra and Nehemiah. I think it **will help us to understand more clearly the things with which we are dealing**. There was a lot involved in that time period.

If you remember the story, Judah had gone into captivity beginning 604 B.C.—the first period of invasion and captivity. Coming down, about ten years later, was a second Babylonian invasion, and then seven to ten years later, a final Babylonian invasion. The city was burned, the temple was destroyed and the people were taken into captivity. We noticed Daniel was taken captive as a young boy. He had access to and preserved the Bible during that interim time.

Then we read in Daniel 5:30-31, the story we are very familiar with—the Medes and the Persians invading and taking Babylon. This was in 539 B.C. (one of the major dates of history)—falling on the Feast of Trumpets that year and the night Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall (vv. 1-5). The empire of the Medes and Persians was established. Daniel continued in the immediate future in a high position (about five years) under Darius (Daniel 6:1-3).

After the Medes and Persians came in, we pick up the story in Ezra.

Ezra 1:1-3, “Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? May his God be with him! Now let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah and build the house of the Lord God of Israel. (He is God), which is in Jerusalem.”

Verse 7, “King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which

Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods.”

We find that they left to go back to Jerusalem. This was done by Zerubbabel, or Sheshbazzar, as he is termed in Ezra 1:8-11.

Ezra 3:1, “And when the seventh month had come and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.”

Verse 4, they set this up and kept the Feast of Tabernacles. That began the process of reorganization.

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, and Joshua the son of Jozadak, 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.”

Verse 11, the foundation was laid.

The prophets at that time were Haggai and Zechariah. They were contemporary with Joshua and Zerubbabel (c. 534-500 B.C.). The major thrust of the work of God at that time was the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 3:8—6:15). Read II Kings 17. What happened in II Kings 17 is crucial to understanding the later story of what happened in the canonization of the Old Testament and later the New Testament. Approximately 721 B.C. (120 years before Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Judah), the Assyrians invaded Northern Israel and transported the ten tribes into captivity. Israel had sinned and walked in the statutes of the heathen.

II Kings 17:8, “and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.”

Verse 10, “They set them up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill, and under every green tree.”

Verse 16, “So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image, two calves, made a wooden image and worshipped all the host of heaven and served Baal.” They did all the things God told them not to do.

Verse 18, “Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.” They were taken out. They were not left behind. They were transported.

Verses 22-23, “For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away out of their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.” —“to this day.” —The time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Israel was still where they had been 200 years earlier. They had not returned with the Jews. Notice what happened.

Verse 24, “Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.”

Verse 25, instead of the children of Israel, he brought Babylonians and some of the surrounding suburbs and settled them in Northern Israel. Meanwhile, wild animals had increased.

Verse 26, “So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, ‘The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria know not the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land.’” They sent a message to the king of Assyria: ‘We have a problem. We want you to send someone to teach us the manner [rituals] of the God of the land.’

Now who was the king of Assyria going to send to teach them about the God of the land? —The priests of Northern Israel! What were they?

I Kings 12:28-31, “Therefore the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one, as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priest from every class of people [KJV, “made priests of the lowest of the people”], who were not of the sons of Levi.”

Jeroboam had gotten rid of the priests and made priests of the lowest of the people.

Verse 32, “Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made.” The people never departed from the

sins of Jeroboam. And it was because of this they went into captivity.

Now, what were the priests going to teach them? What he did was to attach the name of God to their old pagan religion. They retained the name of God; they talked about God, but they didn’t really serve God in sincerity and truth.

Verse 29, “and he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.” Each nation made gods of its own.

Verses 32-33, “Jeroboam ordained a feast on the *fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the Feast that was in Judah*...So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, *in the month which he had devised of his own heart*. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.”

I Kings 13:34, “And this thing was sin of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate and destroy it from the face of the earth.”

II Kings 17:29, “However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt.”

Verses 32-34, “So they feared the Lord, and from every class they appointed for themselves priests of the high places [KJV, “made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places”], who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. They feared the Lord yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the Lord, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the Lord had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel.”

Verse 41, “So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children’s children have continued as their fathers did, even to this day.”

What we have given here in II Kings is the origin of the Samaritans—the Samaritans that we are going to read of in Ezra, Nehemiah and the New Testament—in the book of Acts. This is the origin of the Samaritans. They were not Israelites; they were Babylonians. They resettled them in the land and then brought back the priests. They paid lip-service to the God of Israel, but in reality they continued the same old pagan religion they had all along. Does that sound familiar? What we need to understand is

that this was the Babylonian approach to religion, the Babylonian Mystery Religion, but they now attached to it the name of God. They identified themselves as Israel, but in reality, they were Babylonians. This is the group that we are going to meet in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and the group later in the New Testament. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, Sanballat was the chief leader of the Samaritan followers of the Babylonian Mystery Religion.

You look around today and see the successors. They still have their graven images and fear the Eternal to this day—the same people doing the same thing. It was important that the Samaritans be known. They were quick to claim that they were Jews when it was to their advantage. Alexander the Great gave a release to the Jews during the Sabbatical year to not have to pay taxes, and the Samaritans (Babylonians) said they were Jews, too. When the Jews were being tortured and butchered, the Samaritans were quick to say they didn't have anything to do with them.

In Ezra 3, we find that the work of God, at the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua, was reorganization and rebuilding.

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 Eternal 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 Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.’”

Ezra called them the adversaries of Judah. One of Satan's tactics is to infiltrate from within. Judah had gone into captivity because of disobedience to God.

Then the work of God was established: rebuilding the temple and temple worship, re-establishing the nation into which Jesus Christ the Messiah would come at a later time and setting the stage. Right after work got started, the Samaritans came and they said, ‘We're good Christians just like you. We all worship the same God. We want to get in on this. We'll help you.’ They used God's name, but didn't really follow the Scriptures.

Verse 3, “But Zerubbabel and Jeshua [Joshua] 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.’” ‘You

have nothing to do with us.’ God had stirred up Cyrus to bring them back to do the Work.

Verses 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 went to court. Look up the word “counselors.”

Verses 6-8, “And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. And in the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter was written in the Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion.”

Verses 11-12, “This is the copy of the letter that they sent him—To King Artaxerxes from your servants the men beyond the River, and so forth: Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come up to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and the evil city, and are finishing its walls, and repairing the foundations.” —‘This bad city and they are setting up walls.’ They took facts; they took the truth and made it sound bad.

Verse 13, “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 will cut your revenues. They won't pay taxes.

Verses 14-15, “Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause was this city destroyed.” We are coming to you as loyal citizens to tell you about these things.

Verse 16, “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.”

Verse 21, “Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me.”

Verses 23-24, “Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' 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 to cease. 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 first tried to infiltrate and get inside. When that didn’t work, they hired lawyers and then put padlocks and closed it up. Those are old tactics and have been around for a long time.

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 Joshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.”

They just began to act—injunction or no injunction. Go back and read Haggai and Zechariah.

Verses 3-5, “At the same time came 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 the wall?’ Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter.”—All the way to the Supreme Court.

Verses 11-17, “And thus they returned us an answered, saying: ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was build 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. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon—those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. And he said to him, ‘Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple site that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.’” Then the same Sheshbazzar

came and laid the foundation of the house of God, which is in Jerusalem; and from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not yet finished.’ Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king’s treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us this pleasure concerning this matter.”

Then the truth finally comes out.

Ezra 6:1, “Then King Darius issued a decree, and search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon.” He makes a decree.

Verse 11, “Also I issue a decree that whosoever alters this edict, let timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this.”

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 commandment of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month 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.”

This is in the latter part of the sixth century, around 515 B.C. There is a gap when you pick it up in chapter 7. You will notice that there is a gap of about 50 years—a generation. Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah had died. Now their children are on the scene.

Ezra 7:6-11, “this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skillful 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. Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 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 Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel.”

Verses 13-14, “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 came back bringing the copy of the Scriptures. He came on the scene about 50 years after the curtain has dropped from what we saw at the time of Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Ezra 8:1-20 shows the various ones that came back from Babylon.

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 for our little ones and all our possession. 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.”

The alternative was to fast. ‘We can’t ask the king to protect us because it would look like we didn’t trust God to protect us.’

Verses 31-32, “Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road. So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.”

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 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.’”

Now, what has transpired in these 50 years? The Jews have not kept themselves separate in a physical sense or a spiritual sense. They had mixed and mingled and intermarried with the people of the land. The rulers (leaders) failed to set the example. They didn’t keep themselves pure and separate as they should have. When

there are problems, it always gets back to a failure on the part of the leadership to set the right example they should have. Problems usually start at the top and work their way down. Everyone has to take responsibility for his own actions, but it’s ultimately because the leaders didn’t keep themselves pure and separate in the way they should have.

Ezra heard this and he was so absolutely overwhelmed. He couldn’t believe it! He came down there, and he saw this mess that had developed. Fifty years earlier the people had returned and they came to do a work. They built the temple. They had gone through the persecutions and all the problems. Finally, the work was done and the persecutions, seemingly, had stopped. But Satan didn’t retire. He started back on infiltration again.

I Peter 5:8, understand, we have an adversary—a roaring lion that’s going about seeking whom he may devour. If he can’t overwhelm by frontal attack (discouragement and cause us to fall by the wayside), then he tries to subvert from within. If he gets caught there, he makes a frontal attack and tries to overwhelm from without and tries to discourage. If that doesn’t work, then he comes back. –Different tactics but really the same old tactics.

Verses 4-15, “Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, and said, ‘O my God: I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. 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. For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we

say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, “The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.” And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people of these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this.”

Ezra 10:1-7, “Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large congregation of men, women, and children assembled to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, ‘We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. 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. Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also will be with you. Be of good courage, and do it.’ Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. Then Ezra arose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib [high priest (Nehemiah 3:1); grandson of Joshua]; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem.”

Word went out. Ezra could see that the very existence of the congregation of God was in danger. He sent out a decree and commanded that the entire nation be assembled.

Verse 8, “and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the congregation of those from the captivity.” If anyone refused, they were to be disfellowshipped, cast out of the congregation and their property was to be forfeited. Ezra ruled with a strong hand. They knew a strong hand from somewhere had arrived. God had raised up Ezra and sent him back from Babylon because the very existence of God’s Church was in jeopardy.

Verse 9, “So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain.”

Verses 10-18, “Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, ‘You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the pagan wives.’ Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, ‘Yes! As you have said, so we must do. But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. Please, let the leaders of our entire congregation stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed time, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter.’ Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support. Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers’ households, were set apart by the fathers’ households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives. And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives the following were found of the sons of Joshua the son of Jozakdak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.”

Verse 44, “All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.”

A period of about 13 years goes by, and we pick up the story in Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a servant of the king in the palace of Susa in the 20th year of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:1). He had a position in the Persian court.

Nehemiah 1:3-4, “And they said to me, ‘The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.’ So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.”

What he heard was going on in Jerusalem bothered him. Ezra had come down and, through force of personality, “carried the day” for a while. We find that the very family of the high priest had intermarried. The high priest’s grandson, who was in line to be high priest, had married the daughter of Sanballat, the leader of the Samaritans (Nehemiah 13:27-28). Trouble was brewing. Ezra said they would all have to put away these strange wives. Some of the leaders refused to do so (Ezra 10:15). If they refused, the reform among the people would be short-lived. Now, 13 years later, Nehemiah became aware of the state of things.

Nehemiah 1:3, “And they said to me, ‘The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.’” They had never finished repairing the city. Nehemiah was greatly bothered.

In verses 5-11, he prayed and asked God to give him an opportunity to have a part in straightening it out.

Nehemiah 2:1-5, “And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. Therefore the king said to me, ‘Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorry of heart.’ Then I became dreadfully afraid, and said to the king, ‘May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lay in waste, and its gates are burned with fire?’ Then the king said to me, ‘What do you request?’ So I prayed to the God of heaven. 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.’”

Nehemiah wanted to rebuild the city. The temple had been rebuilt under Zerubbabel, but the work had kind of faded down. What always happens when people begin to mix and mingle with the world around them and become absorbed in the world and its ways? They lose their zeal to finish the work. This is what happened here.

Verses 6-9, “So the king said to me (the queen was also sitting beside him), ‘How long will your journey be? And when will you return?’ So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Furthermore I said to the king, ‘let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah., and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.’ And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me. 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.”

The king sent him back.

Verse 10, “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.” It upset them. They were leaders of the Samaritans.

Verses 11-20, “So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down and its gates, which were burned with fire. Then I went on the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. 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. 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. 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?’ 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.’”

Nehemiah 3:1, “Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananeel.” They began to rebuild the wall.

Nehemiah 4:1-2, “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?’”

They made fun of the Work of God.

Verses 6-10, “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. Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. Then Judah said, ‘The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.’”

Verses 18-21, “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. Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, ‘The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Therefore, whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.’ So we labored in the work, and half of the

men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared.”

They went through a very strenuous time. There were many problems to be straightened out.

Nehemiah 5:1, “And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.” The book of Malachi was written at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Malachi 3:9, “You are cursed with a curse....” The curse they were cursed with was in Nehemiah 5. They were in such hard times; they had to borrow money to eat and pay taxes (Nehemiah 5:2-5). Put Nehemiah 5 with Malachi 3.

Malachi 3:10, God said, “‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and prove Me now in this,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’”

Nehemiah 5:6, Nehemiah was very angry because of the state of things.

Verse 7, the people weren’t helping each other, but taking advantage of each other and charging interest.

Verse 12, he called them together and required an oath of them.

Verses 14-15, from the time Nehemiah was appointed governor in Judah—in 12 years—he didn’t take his salary or exhort taxes from the people.

Nehemiah 6:1-5, “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?’ But they sent this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner. Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand.”

Verses 8-9, “Then I sent to him saying, ‘No such thing as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.’ For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, ‘Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.’ Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.”

Verses 13-14, “For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so

that they might have occasion for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.” He continued in the work.

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

Verse 19, “...And Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.” The Samaritans were doing everything they could to subvert what was going on.

Nehemiah 7:4-5, “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 [534 B.C.; Ezra 2]...”

Nehemiah 8:1-4, “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 [Feast of Trumpets, Leviticus 23:24]. Then he read 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 beside him, at his right hand, stood...”

Verses 5-14, “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. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen!’ And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground...and the Levites helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their places. So they read distinctly from the book, the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. 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. Then he said, ‘Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom

nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.’ So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, ‘Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. Now on the second day the heads of the fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the Feast of the seventh month [Feast of Tabernacles, Leviticus 23:34, 39-42].”

Verses 17-18, “...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 [Last Great Day, Leviticus 23:36, 39, 44] there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.”

The Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day—the people were assembled.

Nehemiah 9, in his prayer, Nehemiah gives an historical review.

Nehemiah 9:38, “‘And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our leaders and our Levites and our priests seal it.’”

Nehemiah 10:1-27, a covenant was made and the ones who signed the covenant are listed.

Nehemiah 10:28-31, “Now the rest of the people (the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding), 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—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 people 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 [collection] of every debt.”

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 for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities.”

Notice that when the people returned to God with all their hearts, they returned in these areas:

- 1) They separated themselves from fellowship with the world (v. 28).
- 2) They became very conscious of properly observing the Sabbath (v. 31).
- 3) They paid their tithes (vv. 35-38).

This is the way in which they turned around.

Verses 38-39, “And the priest, the descendants of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse. For the children of Israel and the children of the Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God.”

Nehemiah 11:1-2, “Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.”

Problems were not entirely solved.

Nehemiah 13:1-4, “On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the congregation of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel. Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah.”

Verse 5, Eliashib the high priest was allied with Tobiah. Tobiah actually had a chamber right there in the Temple where he would come in and stay. He stayed in the place where they brought in meat offerings and tithes.

Verses 6-12, “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, and I came to Jerusalem [Nehemiah had been gone for 12 years] 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. Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense. 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.”

Verse 25, “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.’”

There kept being a problem because the family of the high priest was allied with the leadership of the opposition. And he never enforced it because his own grandson was married to a pagan woman.

Verses 26-31, “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. 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 son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed 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 time. Remember me, O my God, for good.”

Nehemiah finally cleaned house by chasing the grandson of the high priest out of the country. He disfellowshipped him! It never solved the problem until he started at the top and expelled the grandson of the high priest.

As we pick up the story from history, the father-in-law of this grandson took him in and the Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim. This grandson of the high priest became the high priest of the Samaritans, where he had intermarried.

When we come to the story in the Gospel accounts, we understand why there is such hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans in the time of Christ. The Jews wouldn't have anything to do with the Samaritans. Nehemiah made believers out of them!

Understanding what happened in the time of Nehemiah (as a background), when we come to the story in the Gospel account, we understand why there is such hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans.

John 4:4-9, "But He needed to go through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink.' For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.'"

Verse 20, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain [Mt. Gerizim, in Samaria], and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." This became the controversy. The family of the high priest that was expelled from Jerusalem claimed that the only thing that is the Bible is what Moses gave—the Torah (the first five books)—and they altered that. This was the situation in which it was necessary for Ezra and Nehemiah to make plain, once and for all, what constituted the Word of God.

The book of Chronicles was written by Ezra. Chronicles tells the story from a different viewpoint. It deals almost entirely centering on Jerusalem. The first chapter of Chronicles sets the stage and spends the whole book on King David and making Jerusalem the capital. II Chronicles 1-7 focuses on Solomon and the building of the temple at Jerusalem. The rest of Chronicles primarily focuses in on Kings Hezekiah and Josiah and the great revivals that took place.

The story of what happened in Northern Israel is only referred to in a very general sense. The story now has to be written to make it plain in a time of confusion. Charges and accusations were being made. Everyone was claiming to represent God. The family of high priest that was expelled from Jerusalem claimed to represent God. Ezra and Nehemiah said they represented God. It was in this context that the official canon of the

Scriptures was finally finished. Ezra, during this time, was a ready scribe of the Law who came back to teach the Bible. It was necessary that an authoritative seal be set because the Samaritans were seeking to subvert things from within. It was necessary that things be established.

The Jews, while in Babylon, had adopted a new method of writing—the square script of the Babylonians. The original Hebrew script was different. It looked more like the Arabic you see today. Hebrew is a much squarer script with bolder letters. Arabic is much more flowing, cursive. That is more akin to what the Jews had written with. The letters were the same, but the shapes were different.

The Jews had become familiar with the written Babylonian script while in captivity. Ezra now changed the Hebrew script from the older script that had been used to the Babylonian script they had adopted in Babylon. The reason being was that the Bible was recopied in this Babylonian script. This made a very clear distinction between what the Jews recognized as Scripture and what the Samaritans did because the Samaritans were unwilling to copy the Jews. They hadn't been there in captivity. They had adopted the Hebrew script hundreds of years earlier, and they weren't about to change back to copy the Jews. Now it was very apparent, at first glance, if a book was Samaritan or Jewish. The official canon of the Old Testament was set at this time.

The book of Chronicles focuses in on the periods of revivals, how everything was centered in Jerusalem, and that's where God's work was centered. It was necessary that this be done. Josephus testifies that from the time of Artaxerxes (Ezra and Nehemiah), no more books were added to the canon. Ezra edited certain things to bring it up to date, such as the expression, "to this day." This was the closing—the seal—of the official canon of the Old Testament. God, through Ezra and Nehemiah, had set the nation back on the right track, and the official final canon of Old Testament Scripture was completed.

Deuteronomy 34:10, "But since then there had not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." —Which we'll come to next in the New Testament. We'll see what caused the New Testament to have to be put together in the way that it was and that it very greatly paralleled the events of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was an attempt, again by the Samaritans—by the false church—to subvert, to infiltrate, to circulate all kinds of false and

spurious books and to claim that they were equal with Scripture. It became necessary for the people of God to know the difference and for an authoritative difference to be made.