

Bible Study # 92  
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The Writings Series—Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles

This evening we **are wrapping up the Old Testament**. We are right at the very conclusion of the Old Testament, wrapping up this section of the Writings. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as Chronicles, have already been covered in one form when we went through an earlier Bible study on the historical survey of the Old Testament. However, I want to cover these books this evening in a little different way because these were the books that marked the conclusion of the third section of the Old Testament, the Writings section.

These books are what are called “postexilic.” That just means “after the exile.” The exile was one of the major events in the history of God’s dealing with ancient Israel. It was certainly a major event in the history of the Jewish people. Basically, they would rank the Exodus and then the exile in terms of the major events that define them.

The exile was the captivity that Nebuchadnezzar brought about. He invaded Jerusalem and Judea in 604 B.C. He took some of the leaders and some of the young princes of the children of the noble families back to Babylon as hostages. He took some captives and exacted a heavy penalty or tribute—a yearly tax that was to be paid. Things went along for several years. Then, when he decided that the king of Judah that he had left on the throne wasn’t paying up as much tax as he should or as frequently as he should, he came back in 596 B.C. and put Zedekiah on the throne. In general, he did some other things. He finally came in, completely destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and took the whole nation into captivity in 587 B.C. That concluded the independent Jewish nation.

The book of Daniel tells the story of the entire period that Judah was under the Babylonian domination. Daniel was in that original captivity of 604 B.C. His time as an individual of note in the Babylonian Empire went all the way down to 539 B.C. when Babylon fell and the Medes and the Persians took over. It then extended for several years on into the time of the Medes and the Persians.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were always reckoned as one book—they were simply two sections of one book. They did not appear

separate in any Hebrew manuscript up until about 1500 A.D. Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the restoration of God’s people after the exile.

The book of Daniel tells the story of the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. We saw that the night of the “handwriting on the wall,” the army of the Medes and the Persians came in under Darius the Mede. Then a few years later, Cyrus himself came back and took the throne of Babylon, after having defeated all the armies elsewhere. He came back and ensconced himself there. Cyrus was the one who issued a decree that allowed the Jews to begin to return to Jerusalem. A period of almost 70 years had gone by. The Jews had been in exile since Nebuchadnezzar’s original invasion.

Cyrus issued a decree. When he issues that decree is where it opens it up in Ezra. Ezra 1 is the story of Cyrus issuing a decree. When he issued a decree, a man of the royal house, whose name was Zerubbabel, was appointed as the Persian governor for Judah. He was authorized to lead a delegation of Jews—those who wished to go—to lead them back and to rebuild the cities and rebuild Jerusalem. Accompanying him were a number of people, including the man who was to be the high priest upon the return to Jerusalem—a man by the name of Joshua. Zerubbabel and Joshua came back, led the delegation back out of Babylon and began the restoration. One of the things that they immediately did, of course, was the physical rebuilding; they laid and dedicated an altar and began work on the temple.

The book of Ezra carries us down through the completion of the work that Zerubbabel did. Then, we skip a period of time—in the neighborhood of just about 60 years—from the end of the story of Zerubbabel’s completion of the temple until the time that Ezra himself returned from Babylon. The gap is right there in the book of Ezra. In that gap, there is nothing in the book of Ezra that tells us exactly what happened. The only book of the Bible that fills in the middle of that gap is the book of Esther. The book of Esther gives the gap of the story, but the story is given elsewhere. Ezra himself came back several years later. He came back as a priest. Then Nehemiah was allowed to come back about ten years later. He came back as the new Persian governor.

Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries. The book of Ezra covers a duration of about 80 years. The book of Ezra starts prior to Ezra’s lifetime. It tells the story of the original return under

Zerubbabel. Then there is a gap of about 60 years, and it picks up the story with Ezra's return.

If you go through the story, as told in Samuel and Kings, and compare it with Chronicles—I and 2 Chronicles provide a parallel account of the accounts that are given in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings—you find that Chronicles tells the story from a totally different viewpoint. When we went through it in the historical outline of the Old Testament, we went through sort of a harmonized version of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. We went through the historical flow and through whichever book that had relevant material.

But if you were to just read the story flow, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings run through consecutively telling the story. 1 Samuel starts with the end of the Judges period—the time of Eli and Samuel—and comes all the way down through Saul and King David. Then, we pick up the story with Solomon and come all the way through the events of all the kings of Israel and Judah, which takes us down through the end of 2 Kings.

When you read the story in Chronicles, you are reading of the same period, but it's written in a totally different way. Chronicles does not try to repeat; it's not merely a repetition of what you can read elsewhere. Since it was written for a specific reason, a specific purpose, it highlights different information.

First, if you look at it, Chronicles has genealogies and then picks up the story of the kings. It tells you everything it has to say about King Saul in a few verses and spends the rest of the entire book of 1 Chronicles on the reign of King David. About two-thirds of 1 Chronicles is spent on the reign of King David. The first ten chapters of 2 Chronicles are spent on the reign of Solomon, and then everybody else is jammed into the next 26 chapters. We find, even then, that only a few kings are picked out and a great deal of attention is given to them. Most of the others are summarized in a matter of a few verses.

Second, Chronicles tells the story from a standpoint of what was going on in Judah and Jerusalem and virtually omits any information on what was happening in Israel, except as it had connection or relevance to what was going on in Jerusalem. Kings, on the other hand, tells the story in a much more evenhanded way.

Why was Chronicles written in that way? Why was the story retold from a different vantage point? One thing we have to understand is that

Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Satan has always—in the past, the present and the future—wanted to destroy God's work and God's people. I don't think that's any great revelation to any of you. I suspect all of you knew that and heard that before. We all know that. God inspired this material to be preserved for us because it gives us insight. When we find ourselves in similar circumstances, we know how to handle it.

1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul tells us, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come." The things of the Old Testament are written down as examples for us. They are written down as examples for our admonition.

Verse 13, he also tells us, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; ..." The point is that any problem we find, anything we encounter in our lives, anything we encounter as God's people today, similar type things have been encountered by God's people in the past. One of the reasons for the stories and examples in the Old Testament is so we can look through and see how God's people handled and responded to these matters. That's an important key to being able to handle it properly. We find Satan has always wanted to destroy God's people, and when the Jews came back under Zerubbabel, Satan was prepared. He had adversaries stirred up, but notice the way he went about it.

Let's start in Ezra. In Ezra 1 and 2, we have the story of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return; we have the list of those who were going to be coming back.

In Ezra 3, we find the altar was rededicated and the Feast of Tabernacles was kept.

Now notice, as they began to work, what happened.

Ezra 4:1-3, "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.' 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.'"

Notice, we are told that these were the adversaries, these were the enemies. What was their first attempt? You know, the devil has a couple of different tactics. One, he will try and “weasel” in from the inside; if he can’t “weasel” in and destroy something from the inside, then he will attack it from the outside. If he can’t destroy it from the outside, he will try to “weasel” in from the inside. When you go down through the story of the people of God through the centuries, that’s what you find. The devil is either trying to get in on the inside, “weasel” in and destroy it from within or he’s trying to attack it and harm it from without. No, he’s not particular; whichever way will work is fine with him.

The first thing he did—these fellows came and said, ‘Hey, you know, look, let’s all join up together. We all worship the same God; we’re all going to the same place. We will just all kind of pitch in and do this thing.’ Zerubbabel said, ‘No, we won’t. Guess again. You have nothing whatsoever to do with us and what we are doing.’

Now, who were these people? They were the Samaritans. Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles are the books that conclude the Old Testament; they end the Old Testament and set the stage for the New Testament. The Samaritans play a very important role, and their role is made plain when you read Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. It is plain where God is working and where God is not working. Now, that is helpful because when we come into the New Testament, we are going to read some things about these Samaritans. We are going to find that they played a very key role in establishing a great false church that purports to be the Christian church. The origin of these Samaritans was given back in 2 Kings 17. You remember?

Samaria was originally the capital of Northern Israel. Omri, who was one of the kings of Northern Israel, was the father of Ahab. The city of Samaria was founded and built under Omri’s dynasty, which consisted of himself for a number of years, then his son Ahab (who is perhaps better known), and then their successors. Samaria was the capital of Northern Israel. Northern Israel, about 200 years after Solomon’s death and its establishment as an independent kingdom, was invaded by the Assyrians and taken into captivity. When the king of Assyria took them, he settled them in an area up between the Black and the Caspian Seas, and he brought in other people. He brought in Babylonians and

settled them in the area, in the cities of Northern Israel, the cities centering there in Samaria.

2 Kings 17:6, this story is told, “In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.” This was because of their sins. They had disobeyed God and had not heeded what God had said.

Verse 23, we are told, “until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, to this day.” Up until the time that Isaiah wrote this, that was the way it was.

Verse 24, “Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and from Sepharvaim [These were all suburbs around the city of Babylon.], and he placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities.” So, here’s a different group of people. One of the Israelite priests was sent back to teach them.

Verses 27-28, “Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, ‘Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.’ Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord.”

We find the king of Assyria sent one of the Israelite priests back to be in the area. He taught them how they should fear the Lord. Now, don’t you know these priests of Northern Israel did a good job; these were the ones that Jeroboam had made priests.

1 Kings 12:31, “He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class [KJV, “lowest”] of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.”

Remember, those were some of the lowest people. He had made them priests—people who were not Levites. Jeroboam had instituted the golden calf and all of this. That’s what Israel had been doing ever since. So, don’t you know, one of these priests was going to do a really good job of really teaching them how to serve God.

2 Kings 17:29, notice what it says, “However, every nation continued to make gods of its own [used their own idols], and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, ...”

Verses 30-31, it then names off what they did.

Verse 32, KJV, says, “So they feared the Lord, and made unto themselves of the lowest of them priests of the high places, ....”

Verse 33, KJV, “They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, ....” Now, that is a key statement.

Verse 34, “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...” It says they don’t really fear God; they don’t really keep His statutes or His laws or His commandments. They are not really obeying God.

Verse 41, “So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images; also their children, and their children’s children, have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.” That’s the origin of the Samaritans. This is the group of people that showed up when Zerubbabel came back, and said, ‘We worship your God just like you do. We are all in this thing together. We are all going to the same place. Let us help. We will help build the temple. We’ll just all get together.’

They didn’t really worship God. They used God’s name, and this is the key to understanding the Samaritans and their contribution. Frankly, when you look at the Catholic Church, what you see is just “baptized” paganism. The Protestants have just taken it and perhaps refined some rough edges, but they are just “chips off the old block,” too. Their holidays and their basic customs derive from “Big Mama” all the way back to Babylon.

Well, what do they do? They use the name of God; they use the name of Christ. They use the name of various people in the Bible; they use biblical-sounding terminology. They use the names of “saints” out of the Bible, and they keep on following the same old pagan stuff they have always followed. They had their various idols—the god of this, that, and the other. But now, instead of being the “god” of travel, well, he’s the “patron saint” of travel. Instead of being the “god” of this, well, he’s the “patron saint” of it. They just changed the name and kept doing the same thing. The only change was changing the name. Just sprinkle a little water on it—this statute was “this” and now it’s “that.” They kept doing the same thing. It’s incredible.

I don’t know if any of you have actually been to St. Peter’s Cathedral. If you’ve ever seen pictures of St. Peter’s Cathedral, you will notice right there in the great courtyard this giant

obelisk that sticks up there that you see in all the pictures. Do you realize what that was? That was actually transported from Egypt. It was the temple of the sun god at Heliopolis in Egypt. It was one of the great feats of the ancient world. They actually transported that thing across miles of North Africa, loaded it on barges, brought it across the Mediterranean and brought it up there at St. Peter’s courtyard. They wanted the real thing. It’s the most pagan thing you can get—the center and absolute symbol of ancient pagan sun worship. Heliopolis, which means “the city of the sun,” was the center of the worship of the sun god in Egypt. They took it and set it up right there at St. Peter’s. I don’t want to get off into that or into some of the symbolism. The point is that the Samaritans played a very important part and this has always been the Samaritan approach.

In Ezra and Nehemiah, we have the story of Satan’s attempt to undermine the work of God. We have the story in Ezra and Nehemiah and the restoration of God’s work. The nation had gone into captivity with the Babylonians and, now, the work was being restored. The work of God in that day consisted of building a literal temple and preparing the way for Christ’s first coming. Christ was going to come to His own (John 1:11); there was to be an identifiable group. That was necessary.

There were a number of important things to be done that set the stage for the New Testament. First, the Old Testament Scriptures had to be put in final form and preserved. Part of the work of God was the preservation of the Scriptures because that’s part of the very foundation of the Church. That’s what points to Jesus and identifies Jesus as the Messiah. So, it was important that the Scriptures be preserved. If the Scriptures are going to be preserved, you have to know where to look to find them. The knowledge of the truth had to be preserved.

Second, an identifiable people of God had to be preserved to serve as a nucleus around which God’s Church would be built. When Paul went throughout the Roman Empire and preached—even in the Gentile cities—do you know where he always went first to preach? He went into the synagogues because that was where the converted Jews, as well as the Gentiles who attended synagogue services, were. Gentiles did not convert to Judaism but would attend synagogue services and hear the law read.

Why was it necessary to start there? –Because you started with people who knew the law—people who were familiar with the Sabbath, the

Holy Days, clean and unclean meats, and all of these things. They were familiar with the Scriptures. They were familiar with the Bible. You had a nucleus of people that were familiar with the Scriptures and familiar with the law. Then, as others who were not familiar with those things were converted, they were added to the group. They were added to the nucleus where certain customs and practices were already being done. That was simply the way that God chose to build His Church. These things had to be preserved.

This is what we find. Satan tried to subvert by entangling the work of God with people who were not serving God. They were just practicing the same old paganism, but they had cleaned it up a little bit. These Samaritans continued to practice the same old Babylonian religion but called it by the name of YHVH, the God of Israel. Instead of calling their idol Baal or Marduk or whatever, they called him YHVH. They used the name of God and Biblical-sounding terminology to apply to the paganism they had been practicing. That was what the Samaritans did.

That's one of the reasons it's called the Babylonian Mystery religion. The thing was so mixed up and so mysterious that you couldn't figure out one thing from another. The first thing they did—they tried to subvert; they tried to come in from within. It has always been a major problem of the people of God to preserve their distinct identity and not to lose that identity by simply becoming absorbed with the world and the society around them. When God's people lose their identity, then they are quickly on the way to ceasing to be the people of God. So, the Samaritans tried to subvert it this way.

Zerubbabel rebuffed them and said, 'No, you don't have anything to do with this.' Notice what they did. Did they really want to help build the temple? Notice.

Ezra 4:4, "Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building..." They stirred up trouble, spread gossip and rumors and, just in general, were a source of trouble.

They also went to court. I tell you—read verse 5 and down the rest of the chapter and it sort of sounds like 1979.

Verse 5, "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 wrote an accusation. They went to court and literally got a court order from the court of the Persian king that was a cease and

desist order that said 'you have to stop until we investigate this matter.'

They wrote an accusation.

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."

Verse 12, they said, "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 foundations." It's amazing how you can make something sound bad. How are you going to build a city if you don't set up (finish) the walls and join (repair) the foundation? But the way they were telling it, it sounds sinister, 'They are setting up the walls of that place and are building the foundations.' That's what they came back for! That was no secret. They said they were building the rebellious and evil city.

Then they made an accusation.

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 said, 'You know why they are building that city? They are going to build the walls and then they are going to quit paying their taxes.'

That wasn't true, but you can accuse anybody of anything. They hired counselors (attorneys, lawyers) and they went to court. They said, 'We are worried about the king and don't want to see the king lose any money.' They were just being good helpful citizens. You can hardly read some of these verses with a straight face.

We have an order that was issued.

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."

Verse 23, "...they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease." They sent in troops and stopped the work. They took the work of God under receivership, if you will. It is a remarkable parallel to what we experienced in 1979, which just shows that the devil is not really original.

The reason why there are so many parallels is because he does the same thing over and over again. Human nature is the same and the devil is the same. He has the same objectives and uses a lot of the same tactics. He tried to subvert, discourage and stir up adversaries and enemies. The work of God ceased.

Ezra 5:1, "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.” Haggai and Zechariah were stirred up as prophets and told Zerubbabel that he needed to get back to building—and so he did.

Verse 2, “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.” They got back to building, and it went back to court. Finally, the issue was fought out in court.

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 foundation of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits...’”

Darius made a search of the records and found the decree that Cyrus had issued allowing the temple to be rebuilt. Finally, the court case was won.

Verses 14-16, the temple was finished and rededicated. So, we go through this struggle with the Samaritans.

In Ezra 7, we pick up the story about 60 years later with Ezra the priest returning.

Ezra 7:10, “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.” He was given authority by the king to return and was allowed to take something back that had evidently not been taken back earlier.

Verse 14, “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 brought back the official temple scrolls of the Law from Babylon. He was given authority by the Persian king to go back and inquire of the state of the nation and to take the Law back with him. Ezra was allowed to go back.

We find that he came down and he came into Judah.

Ezra 9:2, when he got to Jerusalem, he was informed, “For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is intermingled with the people of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders [princes] and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.”

When you go through and find problems among the people of God, you very rarely find problems in the congregation if you don’t find problems in the leadership. When you find a righteous king of Israel or Judah, you find the people pretty well doing what they should do. When you find a wicked king, you find the people doing what they should not do. When you find a righteous judge that God had raised up, you find people pretty well responding to that. When you find a lack of righteous leadership and a bad example being set, you find people not doing what they should do, at least as a general thing.

Here, we find ‘the hand of the leaders and the rulers had been foremost in this trespass.’ What we have now come to is that the very identity of the people of God was threatened. They were on the verge of losing their identity—in terms of culture, religion, language and as a separate ethnic group—in every area. If this had gone on, within another couple of generations they would have simply lost their identity and been absorbed into the general mix of the Middle Eastern population. There wouldn’t have been a separate identity. There wouldn’t have been a Bible preserved and an identifiable people who would have remained.

Ezra was very concerned. He was astonished by what he saw and the state of things. Ezra called the people together. He called the nation together and told them that they needed to enter into a covenant.

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.” They made a covenant to put away all of these foreign wives. There had to be a distinction. The nation was at the point of losing its identity.

Verses 5-7, “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 rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; 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.”

It then goes into this covenant that they made.

Now we skip down about 12 years. We pick up the story in Nehemiah 1. Nehemiah goes to the

king of Persia and requests the job of governor. Ezra was not governor. He had certain civil authority, but primarily he was a priest and had the authority to teach and bring back the Law. Perhaps, Nehemiah had been in communication with Ezra and maybe others. He knew what was going on and was very concerned about it. Things really hadn't changed a whole lot; we are going to see why they hadn't changed.

Nehemiah 2:5, Nehemiah went to the king of Persia, Artaxerxes, and asked for the job of governor in Judah.

Verse 6, he was given the job and was allowed to return with full governmental authority.

Nehemiah 3 describes how he came in and began to oversee the repair of Jerusalem.

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.'"

Tobiah the Ammonite was with him and Tobiah was making fun of it. He said a fox could jump over that wall.

Verse 6, Nehemiah said, "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."

We find that Sanballat, Tobiah and all of these others created trouble.

Verses 8-9, "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."

When Nehemiah came back, he found the work was in shambles. The tendency of people is to lose their zeal and their enthusiasm. When they came back under Zerubbabel, they were all charged to do the work; they were excited. They were coming back to Jerusalem. They were going to rebuild the temple and they were really going to get back on the right track.

There have been a lot of revivals and ups and downs of God's people through the centuries. That's a part of the story. And boy, they were all charged and were really going to get back on track. Difficulties came and time went on, and you know what happened. It's hard for people to

maintain excitement and enthusiasm. They got sidetracked. They got absorbed in their businesses, building their own houses and doing their own thing. After a while, interest was diverted. When trouble came up and the work was interfered with, interest was diverted. Then God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and Zerubbabel finished the temple. Then, again, they got off track.

Sixty years went by. By the time Ezra got there, they were intermarrying with the people of the land; their religious practices were affected. It was a mess. Ezra preached and the people promised they were going to do better. They were all charged, but it didn't last.

Nehemiah came back; the wall was still in shambles and all sorts of things. He said, 'The first thing we are going to do is get this thing cleaned up and get it into shape.' Immediately, the Samaritans were the source of the problem. They were stirring things up again. They did everything they could think of. They conspired and tried to discourage the people. They spread gossip and rumors and made accusations and threats.

Nehemiah was a remarkable character. Read through the story of Nehemiah. God has worked through different types of people and people of different personalities. The time that we are looking at here was a crisis period. It was a period when the very identity of the people of God could have been lost. It was one of those crucial periods in history. Nehemiah was a strong leader. I mean, he was the kind of guy that you would not want to cross. You can read the book and find out what happened to the ones that did. Nehemiah was a remarkable individual in that way.

Every leader that God has worked through hasn't necessarily been as forceful and determined as Nehemiah, at least in the sense that Nehemiah was going to get it done. It was going to be done a certain way, and he was not going to tolerate any deviation from it. A man of that caliber, a man of that sort of temperament, was really needed because if someone had taken a softer approach than Nehemiah, it wouldn't have "stuck." It was everything Nehemiah could do to set things back on the right track.

Certain things remind you of other things. Any time I read the book of Nehemiah and about some of the things where Nehemiah sort of "scorched the hair off" of them with some of the things that he said, it sort of takes me back a few years. It sort of reminds me of a few sermons that I heard Mr. Herbert Armstrong give in Big

Sandy when he sort of rattled the metal building there. There are a few of you who remember some of those things.

When I go through and think of Nehemiah, I think Nehemiah must have sort of been like that. Nehemiah had a way of really throwing the fear of God into the people. He was facing a monumental task. They prayed to God, got busy and built. Nehemiah went to God about it, but they guarded this thing. You talk about working! Verse 18, “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.” The Samaritans said they would disrupt the work. Nehemiah said, “We are going to build this thing. We are going to camp out here; we are going to work around the clock.”

Verse 23, “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.”

“None of us even took off our clothes except to change in order to wash what we had on. There is no rest. We sleep in our clothes; we have our sword by our side. The guy who was to sound the trumpet of alarm was next to me and we kept this thing under surveillance around the clock.”

Nehemiah was the kind of guy that you weren’t going to scare; you weren’t going to discourage him. You talk about determined; you talk about a fellow that you didn’t want to rile up. There were a couple of things you weren’t going to do to Nehemiah: you weren’t going to scare Nehemiah and you weren’t going to discourage him. Nehemiah understood where the real help came from. It came from God.

Verses 19-21, “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, wherever 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.”

In Nehemiah 10:29-39, we find that the people were brought together to renew the covenant and they were reminded not to intermarry with the people around, with other nations. They were commanded to strictly observe the Sabbath. They were told to bring in the tithes and the offerings and all these things were done.

In Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah was gone for a little while. When he came back to Jerusalem (v. 6), he found that things had fallen in disrepair while he was gone. These people really didn’t have a whole lot of heart to obey.

Nehemiah 13:15-17, “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. 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?’”

Verses 19-20, “...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 gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.” Here were people that hadn’t really gotten the big picture, yet. They sort of got on the outskirts.

Verse 21, “So I warned them, and said to them, ‘Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you [He wasn’t talking about ordaining any of them either.].!’ From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath.”

He came down there and said, ‘I thought I told you guys to “get.” If I see you here again, I am going to turn you every which way but loose.’ They didn’t come back.

Verses 23-26, “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. 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.’”

Here is a key.

Verse 28, “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.” Now, you wonder why there was so much problem of getting this thing straightened out. The high priest’s grandson was married to the daughter of the leader of the Samaritans. That



was why they had never really been able to get the situation straightened out, up until then. People knew what was going on and they said, 'Why should we do so and so? The high priest's grandson is married to old Sanballat's daughter.' Nehemiah said he had enough, 'You've had enough time to do something about this.' So, he chased him out.

Now what happened? Josephus tells us that Sanballat then built a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim up in Samaria and made this grandson of Eliashib (whose name was Manasseh) the high priest of the Samaritans.

Let me just call your attention to the statement in John 4. When Jesus confronted the woman at the well in Samaria, do you remember what she said?

John 4:20, "'Our fathers worshiped on this mountain [Mt. Gerizim], and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.'" Why were the Samaritans worshiping in Mt. Gerizim? –Because that's where old Sanballat had built the temple and that's where the apostate priest had gone.

Verse 22, Jesus said, "'You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.'" Jesus made it very plain where you look to find the work of God. It's preserved in Jerusalem (Romans 3:1-2). It was preserved in the Jewish community, not by the Samaritans. You don't look to Samaria to find the inspired text of the Bible. You don't look to Samaria to find the pattern for what you should do. You don't look to Samaria; you look to Jerusalem. You don't look to the Samaritans; you look to the Jews. It was very apparent where God was working and where God's work was centered. It was centered in Jerusalem.

The story of Ezra and Nehemiah is the story of revival and decline—God's Old Testament Church getting off track and getting put back on track. As soon as somebody wasn't looking, they were getting off again—on and off and on and off. God had a work to be done. He had to set the stage for the New Testament period and the coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The problems that were extant, in terms of the Samaritan community, are clearly identified.

Now, let's just look very briefly at **1 Chronicles**.

1 Chronicles 1-9 deal with genealogy.

Chapter 10 tells the story of King Saul.

1 Chronicles 11:1, 3, "Then all Israel came together to David at Hebron, .... Then they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the Lord by Samuel."

Verse 4, "And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, ...."

Verse 5, "...Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David)."

He made this the capital.

Verse 9, "Then David went on and became great, and the Lord of hosts was with him."

1 Chronicles 11-29 all deal with David.

Chapter 11 tells how he became king and Jerusalem was made the capital.

Chapter 12 goes on and tells a little bit about the things that David did as king.

Chapter 13 tells about bringing the ark to Jerusalem.

Chapter 14 tells more of David's greatness as king.

Chapter 15 tells the story of how the ark was brought in.

Chapter 16 goes on and discusses more information about the ark being brought into Jerusalem and shows that this was the headquarters of the work of God.

Chapter 17 tells about David wanting to build the temple.

As you come on down through Chronicles, chapter 22 tells how plans were made for the building of the temple.

Chapter 23 gives more details of these plans.

Chapters 24 and 25, David sets and reorganizes the priests and the Levites; songs are written and added to the canon of Scripture.

Chapter 28 tells how Solomon was given the pattern of the house.

Chapter 29 tells more details about the building of the temple.

1 Chronicles focuses on King David's reign and primarily focuses on the part that had to do with building the temple.

**2 Chronicles** starts with the reign of King Solomon. The first nine chapters deal with Solomon and the building of the temple.

2 Chronicles 1:1, "Now Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him and exalted him exceedingly." It talks about all the grandeur connected with Solomon.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 tell about the building of the temple.

Chapter 5 talks about the building of the temple and about the Ark of the Covenant being brought into the temple.

Chapter 6 tells about the temple and God's covenant with Solomon.

Chapter 7 tells about Solomon's prayer and the dedication of the temple.

Chapter 8 tells about Solomon's palace.

Chapter 9 tells about the Queen of Sheba. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 tell the story of the split between Israel and Judah and what transpired. Then we go through the story of the ups and downs, the revivals and the declines. Chapters 14, 15 and 16, we look at the story of Asa, the story of the revival and the renewal of the covenant on Pentecost. Chapters 17, 18, 19 and 20, we have the story of Jehoshaphat, a righteous king who was setting judges and was trying to turn the people to obey God and to teach the law. Chapters 22, 23 and 24 tell of a remarkable occasion. It tells the story of the royal family of Judah. One of Jehoshaphat's sons married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and it tells the problems that were created. This is the only time that Samaria and Northern Israel get mentioned, and it was in a negative context. Jezebel and Ahab's daughter Athaliah married Jehoshaphat's son and there was trouble. When Athaliah's husband and her son died, she ultimately made herself "king"; she tried to kill all her kids and grandkids. She was a "chip-off-the-old-block" in terms of her mother. One of her little grandchildren, a little one-year old grandson, Joash, was hidden in the temple. Six years later he was brought out and crowned king. He was made king and she was executed. Chapter 26 tells of King Uzziah who tried to appropriate to himself the dignity of the priesthood. Chapters 29, 30, 31 and 32, we have the story of King Hezekiah, one of the great periods of revival in Judah. It was a time when the very existence of the nation was threatened from without by Assyrian invasion and how Hezekiah sought God. God hearkened, intervened and wiped out the Assyrian army. It tells about the expansion of the canon of Scripture in 2 Chronicles 32:32. It tells how Hezekiah sought to repair the temple and rediscovered the Law. It tells about the great Passover that was held and how he was involved in all this sort of thing. In chapter 33, we have the story of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, and his problems. Chapters 34 and 35 tell about the great revival under Josiah. In 2 Chronicles 34:15, it tells about the rediscovery of the Book of the Law and the revival that took place as the people turned back to God. Chapter 36 summarizes everything else that happened. It ends up with the captivity and then the fact that Cyrus, King of Persia, allowed the Jews to return. 2 Chronicles 36:23 ends with permission to return, to "go up!"

Even though Samuel and Kings were already a part of the canon, Chronicles was written to tell the story from an entirely different outlook. It tells the story from a priestly outlook. It deals almost entirely with the history of the southern kingdom, the Kingdom of Judah. It deals with the house of David. The emphasis is on Jerusalem as God's headquarters and the place where God has set His name. The focus is on David, Solomon, the temple and the periods of revival in Judah. It is setting the stage for the New Testament. It is focusing in on what we need to know when we come to the New Testament period. We got a little glimpse of it in John 4 when we found the contrast between the Jews and the Samaritans.

When you come down a little further to Acts 8, you read that Philip went to Samaria to preach. You find that there was a certain man there who was the religious leader of all the Samaritans. His name was Simon, Simon the Sorcerer, known in secular history as Simon Magus. "Magus" is simply the Greek word for "sorcerer" or "magician." That's where we get our word "magician."

We are told in Acts 8:9-11, that all of the Samaritans from the greatest to the least gave heed to Simon the Sorcerer. He was an individual that was looked to by all of them, wherever they might be, regardless of their station in life. We are told that he, for a long time, had bewitched them with sorcery. He was an individual who worked great false miracles and lying wonders. We are told that Simon was acknowledged by the Samaritans as being the great power of God. They viewed him as the religious leader, the great power of God. They looked to him; they venerated him as their religious leader.

Verses 12-13, we are told that when Philip came and preached and many of the Samaritans were baptized, Simon himself was baptized. But it's very apparent that all Simon did was get wet because a little bit later when Peter and John came down, Simon was very impressed with what they did.

Verse 18, he called Peter aside and offered to give him money. He offered to buy a position of leadership—to pay him. He wanted an apostleship. He wanted the power that Peter had and the position and rank that Peter had. He offered to buy it.

Acts 8:20-21, KJV, Peter said, "...Your money perish with you, .... You have neither part nor lot in this matter: ...." Now, the expressions "part" and "lot" are only used one other place.

It's used in Acts 1:24-26 to refer to Matthias being chosen by *lot* to have *part* of the apostleship of the Twelve to take Judas' place. It was a play on words. Peter is quoting Acts 1:24-26 from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 as a prophecy of Judas and what would happen. It's used in Acts 1, and Peter uses the same play on words when he tells Simon "you have neither part nor lot in this matter."

Acts 8:23, he told Simon, "'For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.'" 'You are bound and wrapped up in lawlessness, iniquity and in transgression of the law; you are bitter.'

We find, 20 years later, Paul is writing in 2 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 2:7, he says, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; ..." The mystery of lawlessness was already at work less than 20 years after Peter's encounter with Simon of Samaria.

There were two dispersions; there were two Diasporas in the ancient world. One was the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Middle Eastern areas and into Europe. But there was another dispersion that had taken place during the days of Alexander the Great—a dispersion of the Samaritan community. There were sizable colonies of the Samaritans, particularly in Alexandria, Egypt and Rome, Italy. Simon, we are told, was acknowledged by all of the Samaritans, from the greatest to the least, as the great power of God.

What we have is the story of the beginning of two different churches that, for a while, gave the outward appearance of being one. Paul recognized and wrote to the Thessalonians that the mystery of iniquity was already at work. The mystery religion that taught lawlessness and turned grace into license was already at work less than 20 years after that.

Jude 3, Jude had to write to the Church and exhort them to, "...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." By the time Jude was writing in the late 60's A.D., it was already getting to the point that you had to look for and be careful to find 'the faith once delivered' because there was a counterfeit gospel. Another gospel was being preached—a false gospel—a gospel that was simply a message about the person of Christ but ignoring the message of the Kingdom that He brought. It was a message that turned grace into license to sin. It de-emphasized and played-down the law until, by the end of the century, the law was being outwardly and openly discarded.

The mystery of iniquity grew up around the nucleus of the Samaritan community in Rome and Alexandria, just as the Church of God grew up around the Jewish community as a nucleus, and then other cities of the Roman Empire. Simon and the Samaritans had always tried to take what looked like the best things going that any other religion had to offer and just sort of mix it in with what they had. They watered it down and made it easy. People didn't really have to do very much. The stage was set.

The postexilic books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles are put at the end of the Old Testament to tell the story of the conflict between the people of God and the adversary of God's work. They are there to tell the story of how Satan sought to undermine the work of God. They are there to tell the story of how God's work was preserved and to make plain where God was working and where you should look for the authoritative canon of Scripture. You are not to look off somewhere, here or there, but you should look to the official Jewish community in Jerusalem.

John 4:22, Jesus said salvation was of the Jews. They are the ones who had retained and preserved the knowledge necessary for salvation, not with the Samaritans.

John 4:22, Jesus told the woman at the well, "'You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know [You don't even know what you are talking about.]; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.'"

Romans 3:1-2, the Jewish community preserved the authoritative Word of God and that is where you look to find the Bible. The stage was set for the New Testament work of God. The end of the Old Testament made it plain to God's people in the first century of the New Testament where you should look to find the work that God was doing.

The Old Testament is filled with the stories of the ups and downs of the work of God and of the people of God. God has chosen to work through human beings; he raised up people and he raised up a work. Time goes on; people die and another generation comes along. There are very vital and important lessons. That's why these examples are recorded for us. Human nature hasn't changed; the pulls of human nature are the same. There may be specifics that change, in terms of what the specific issue is at a given point in time, but the principles remain the same.

There is the importance of God's people retaining and preserving their identity—the importance of retaining a complete allegiance

and devotion to God, of not being enticed by the world around us and the attempts that Satan will make either to subvert God's work from within or to attack it and destroy it from without.

The one thing you can be assured of is that the devil is never going to let God's work alone. He is either going to be doing one or the other, but he's not just going to go out and leave it alone. You go through the Scriptures and find over and over this continual thing. God is allowing that because that's a trial and a test on God's people.

Are we, when the work is being attacked from without, going to show courage and the dedication to look to God, to trust God and to serve God in the midst of external persecution and difficulty? When the work is being attacked and the devil is attempting to subvert it and destroy it from within—either through gossip, rumor and accusation or through compromise as occurred in the days of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah—what are we going to do? Are we going to keep our eyes on God's law? Are we going to be careful and do what we should do?

These things were preserved for God's people. The thing we can be assured of is that we go through some of these things over and over. We have to keep our orientation where it should be—to serve God, to put God first and to realize that God has a plan and a purpose. We can't afford to get derailed from the track that God wants His people going down. As you go through the story, you find over and over that those were the issues.

When God concluded the Old Testament, He concluded it in the Writings section, with books that had a timeless message for the people of God. That set the stage for the New Testament with information that was important for God's people to understand at the time when Jesus came as the Messiah and the New Testament Church was raised up and established.

With that, we have concluded the Old Testament. We have concluded the section of the Writings. We will get into the book of Revelation next Bible study.