

Lesson 33 Ezra and Nehemiah

Read Ezra and Nehemiah

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How does the writer of Ezra and Nehemiah view the imperial edict of Cyrus permitting the exiles to return? How does Scripture regard the kings of Persia? 2. What signs are there that an exclusive attitude (faith is only for the Jews with the, right pedigree, all others need not apply) will now prevail with the Jews? How do you explain this development? Is it positive or negative?
3. There is a mixed reaction to laying the Temple's foundation? The destruction of Nebuchadnezzar has been total. Why do the old people weep?
4. What problems block restoration of the Temple and the city?
5. There are now two groups of Israelites; those who are returning from exile and those who never left. Which group becomes the dominating influence and how does the other react?
6. Who is Ezra? Who is Nehemiah? How does Nehemiah go about establishing a contented society? What would "the Book of the Law of Moses" read by Ezra probably have been? How do the people link the desert days of the Exodus with their present experience?

Psalm 122 and prayer.

Exiles return to Jerusalem with great happiness.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah must be interwoven to gain the sense of sequence of the events. The Chronicler (the same person who wrote the books of Chronicles) did not seem to realize in using his source material that there were at least two Persian Kings each with the names of Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, so the history he assembled suffers chronological problems which we will attempt to unravel.

The exiles return. The beginning of the story of the return from exile is in the last chapter of II Chronicles which recounts the story of the exile and lays out the hope for the future. The Book of Ezra then opens with the famous Edict of Cyrus which encourages all exiles to return to their homes and to rebuild their Temple. **1. Ezra 1- 4:5.** Cyrus' edict.

Sheshbazzar is the important name, because as a surviving son of Jehoiachin he is a "son of David" and upon him rest the Messianic hopes. 50,000 (the number is questioned) people under his leadership may have started out from Babylon for Jerusalem within a year of the edict of 539 with the financial assistance of the king. Names and genealogies of those returning, leaders, laymen, Temple priests, and Levites become very important. Those of dubious genealogy must have their background checked by a priest drawing Urim and Thummim. The times are excitedly viewed as a Second Exodus.

Finally the new Temple is built. Time goes by that is not recorded. Sheshbazzar dies without fulfilling messianic prophecies, and a grandson of Jehoiachin, Zerubbabel, is looked to as the longed-for Prince of Judah. The Messianic hope now rests on him. With the High Priest Jeshua, the altar is first rebuilt so that offerings and sacrifices to God can resume. Finally, after much delay, the foundations of the Temple are relaid to the great rejoicing of some, but to the grief of the eldest who can remember the glory of Solomon's Temple. The process from the time of the edict has taken about twenty years.

The return has not been peaceful - there are strong adversaries.

The local people are hostile to the return of these thousands of people, and besides, they are turned down by the returnees as being unworthy to help on the projects because they don't have the right credentials. So they begin to frustrate the work of the returnees and the work ceases with only the foundation of the Temple in place. **2) Ezra 4:24 - 6:22.** Darius I is now reigning monarch of Persia. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah stimulate the people to activity again under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. These two, the prophets assume, are the Messianic Rulers of the Davidic line who will fulfill the glorious prophecies. Work is begun on the Temple again. But the jealous and suspicious neighbors write to King Darius complaining. He looks up the legal documents of Cyrus and finds the Jews have been authorized to rebuild the Temple. The complaint backfires when Darius forces the jealous governors and leaders of the area to help in every way those whom they would rather thwart. Royal revenues and taxes will go into the rebuilding. If the governors don't turn these funds over to the rebuilders, there will be dire consequences. So the governors of these

provinces contribute, and under the inspiration of the two prophets the Temple is completed. (Artaxerxes name appearing in verse 14 is an error, he is not yet on the scene.)

Joy and high expectation meet reality. It is a struggle to build the Temple; everything in the work facing them is a struggle. Their eyes have been turned longingly to Jerusalem all the days of captivity - fifty years. One generation has passed that longing on to another, and people who had left Jerusalem as youngsters are now old. In exile in the houses of the devout, a new generation has been brought up around study of the Law. The Sabbath has been kept, circumcision has become an important ritual, food proscriptions have been carefully observed. Scribes and priests have found a very honored place in the community. Ezekiel's great Temple plan has been poured over by eager men who hope to rebuild it. They imagined they would go back, rebuild that glorious living-place for the Almighty, gather tightly around it, and live out the Law rigorously - they would become the Holy People, the People Set Apart. As the Holy People they would do all the things that their fathers had neglected. They would then see the wonderful prophecies come to pass on their behalf - the Davidic King and the marvels of that Kingdom would be restored to them. From Deutero-Isaiah's words, it seemed that the whole thing would happen like a tremendous miracle. Without the labor of childbirth, the holy city would give birth to sons of the Messianic age. What an act of God was Cyrus' Decree! The exiles had set out a happy, expectant group. Back in Jerusalem after the long and difficult journey, they could only marvel that they were actually there. They were eager to get on with the reconstruction. But immense obstacles soon became apparent. The Temple and the walls had been burned in the fires of Nebuchadnezzar's triumph. The gigantic blocks of limestone they had counted on to put back in place were ruined. Limestone becomes crumbly like plaster when it is burned. Jerusalem had been desolate for fifty years. It was all overgrown with stubborn vegetation. No one lived on the site except a few poor folks. Besides all this, no one was happy to see them. The inhabitants living round about scratching out their own living, were appalled at the size of this group of immigrants who needed to be

housed and fed. They were guilty themselves of having taken over lands of the exiles, many of them moving in from less fruitful areas in the south, while Edomites moved in behind them. They didn't like to see the original folks coming back. The first few weeks and months were very hard. Those returning from exile had to set right to work to earn their bread. Survival was first. There was food to be grown and shelters to be raised. Though Sheshbazzar had managed to gather some men to build an altar so that the priests could assume their duties and religious worship could begin, an altar was all that was accomplished for years. Grubbing for a daily living took over. Discouragement became as much an enemy as the disgruntled populace who put blocks in the way of the returnees as often as possible.

The Persians were considered God's instruments by the prophets. God, however, would use the great power of the Persian Kings for the next seventy-five years mostly to favor rebuilding the city and the Temple. Their bountiful resources would be put at the disposal of the refugees, and most of their edicts would favor the Jews in their struggles with enemies. The Jews will remember the Persians, and especially Cyrus, kindly for this. The Persians established a kingdom much larger than any the world had ever known (map 18B - the list of Persian rulers in found in the back of the Map book); it was the first ruled by Aryans, or Indo-Europeans rather than Semites (the Hittite kingdom was an Aryan kingdom, and recent research finds it much more influential than was previously thought). Under Darius I they established a great network of roads, a postal system, and a strong organization for ruling all their territories with fairness. Religiously, their worship was enlightened. They did not worship in temples teeming with gods and goddesses as the others around them. Rather they had a spiritual religion following the great prophet Zoraster who taught around 570B.C. Two spirit worlds were envisioned, one good and the other evil. The good was headed by Mazda (God), and the bad by Ahriman (Satan). A man chose which of these kingdoms he would serve. If Mazda, then he spread light; but if Ahriman, he spread darkness. Cyrus was a devotee of this religion, and Darius I built Zoraster a fine tomb. The effects of this religion on the rulers of Persia made a positive impact on the Jews and allowed them to carry out The Lord's plan. The tomb of Cyrus, the famous edict cylinder, and coins of the Persian realm are

pictured in the map book on B-18. Kings in order of their occurrence in the text of Ezra and Nehemiah are found on B-41:

Cyrus 539 captures Babylon and rules 550-530

Darius I 522-486 the great organizer who supported the Jews

Xerxes (Ahasuerus) - 486-465 who temporarily stopped their building

Artaxerxes I 465-424 who also stopped them, but because of Nehemiah's intervention amplified the order (no oriental King could rescind an order) to continue the policies of Darius, allowing Nehemiah and Ezra to rebuild and rule the Jews under his authority.

Artaxerxes II 404-358 who sent Ezra back to Jerusalem and supported his efforts.

Xerxes is swayed by enemies to stop the work. 3). Ezra 4:6-4:23. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) stops further work because of a second accusation against the Jews. After he dies another letter is received by his successor, Artaxerxes, accusing the Jews of rebuilding a rebellious and seditious city. He searches through the archives and confirms that Jerusalem has been trouble in the past for all who attempted to rule it. So he sends a decree that the city shall not be rebuilt unless he sends further word. Seventy-five years have gone by since the edict that returned the first of the exiles. Discouragement at the slow movement of restoration all but wipes out their vision.

Nehemiah is able to come to the aid of Jerusalem. 4). Nehemiah

1-7. Nehemiah is a wealthy and influential Jew who is a courtier of the King of Persia. He is, however, thoroughly religious, a Jew who has kept the Law of Moses in his heart and one who follows the fortunes of his people with great interest. When he hears from some Jews, newly come to court from Jerusalem, about the discouragement and condition of the city - the walls are still down, and there is only shame there, he is moved to act. Enemies may plunder the city at will and have no respect for the poor Jews who attempt to live there - only a walled city can command respect. Jerusalem, still a ruin despite the reconstructed Temple, is unable to develop as a community because it has no walls.

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People live beyond in the small towns, not in Jerusalem. The grand visions of the new Davidic age have all but faded away. Everything depends on the walls. Nehemiah is touched by the report. A true man of God, he fasts and prays for God's will, and then with great courage prepares to speak to the King. After all, it is Artaxerxes whose order has stopped the work of rebuilding in Jerusalem. As a result of his prayer, the King, a potentate of pure unchallenged power, opens the conversation. Nehemiah's faith is answered. Artaxerxes is moved to grant his request to go back to lead the rebuilding of the city, giving him letters helping the cause.

Despite serious obstacles, Nehemiah is able to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. When Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, the old enemies of the project are displeased and begin their harassment which continues through his twelve years of leadership of the Jews in Jerusalem. He begins by inspecting the walls by night, decides what must be done and meets with the elders. With his encouragement and leadership people are gathered and the work begins. However, Sanballat, governor of Samaria (all Sarnaritans are considered apostates) and Tobiah, an Ammonite with Hebrew connections, both consistent foes of the Jews, begin attempts at blackmail. Yet the community gathers from the outlying villages and begins its work despite the opposition. The account evokes images of family groups working together to rebuild a section of wall the best way possible with the stones available. A picture of this wall is on B-18. Sanballat, Tobiah, and company mock the attempt (note that RSV 4:1-4 is AB 3:33-3:38); saying a fox climbing this wall could break it down. But ridicule doesn't stop the workers. They have the heart for their work 4:6. Threats don't work, so violence is initiated. A small war is planned against the wall builders stopping further building until Nehemiah works out a plan whereby half the people work and half defend the wall. God will defend them, says Nehemiah. He keeps the people from going home at night, asking them to sleep in Jerusalem. A trumpeted alarm will herald attack.

At the same time a severe social problem must be solved. Even as they are trying to reestablish a law-abiding community, the poor, afflicted by a famine, have had to borrow from the rich. The rich are charging such high interest that the poor are being forced to sell their

children into slavery. Nehemiah is outraged. The law of Moses has clearly said there can be no usury, no interest may be charged by Jews to members of their own community. Needs of all must be met with no one getting rich in the process. Calling the leaders together, Nehemiah scolds them; and they agree his anger is justified. Usury is a destructive thing; they will return what they have exacted and forgive debts. Nehemiah, himself, takes no money to maintain himself and his household even though he has a right to do so. As governor he does not take the lands that he may claim for his official position. He begs God often to remember that he has done only good for the people. His enemies arrange an assassination, but he goes about his work. They plant false prophets to strike fear into him that will make him appear a bad example, but he doesn't fall for that plot either. Extraordinarily strong minded, he works till the walls are up and the gates are in. The city shell is there, but where are the inhabitants?

A celebration is staged for the Davidic times that must be near. 5). **Nehemiah 11-13** Lots are drawn to fill the city with people, and others willingly offer to live there. The people are listed according to their essential role as priests, gatekeepers, overseers of Levites, etc. The wall finished (the scriptures say in 55 days, in another record over 4 years, which seems more reasonable), it is time for a great celebration. The people are divided in half for the ceremony staged on the walls with half the people marching in one direction and half the other. It is a time to polish up the old Davidic promises to a gleam. Perhaps the fortunes of the Jews have changed and they are ushering in the Messianic era. In the 12th chapter where the ceremony is described, the name of David is invoked with David's ways, David's commands, David's instruments, David's stairs, etc. Nehemiah sets up payment for liturgical leadership. When he goes off to report to King Artaxerxes, his task seems complete. During his time away, leadership deteriorates. The high priest's family is tainted with involvement with the enemy Tobiah who wields too much influence. While Nehemiah goes to Susa, the summer capitol of Persia, this foreigner moves right into a suite in the Temple.

With Nehemiah's return he finds the Temple in a state of neglect.

This fellow Tobiah is living in it. Stipends he arranged for the liturgists have not been paid. He kicks Tobiah out and appoints treasurers to make sure accounts are kept up to date. He also must get Sabbath observance back in line. The Sabbath rest can be observed because of the walls and gates. Nehemiah organizes regulation of the gates so foreign tradesmen can be prevented from interfering with the Sabbath. He also observes the detrimental effect of foreign wives on the Jews. Their children cannot become part of a purified community ; they do not even speak the sacred language. Nehemiah's patience has been tested time and again, but now he gives way. It is crucial that the people speak the one language that makes propagation of the faith possible. What good is all his work if this does not happen? He exacts a promise from the people to stay away from intermarriage which is a first step toward reforms that Ezra will bring with him.

A covenant marks the beginning of reforms. 6). Nehemiah 9:38-10:39 Nehemiah establishes a covenant based on his understanding of the Mosaic law which he restates in brief. It is sealed by Nehemiah and the rest of the people in a joint oath. The list ends with a promise that they shall not neglect the house of the Lord. There is no mention, however, of separation from foreign wives, only that their sons and daughters will not marry foreigners.

Enter the Law codifier and enforcer, Ezra. 7). Ezra 7-10 Artaxerxes 11(404-358) now sends another man to Jerusalem to help in the reconstruction and this one is a zealot for the Law of God. He is sent not from Susa, but from Babylon where he has been a scribe and priest whose whole life has been formed by the Torah. Genealogies are now very important to verify who is or is not one of the people of God, and Ezra traces his family tree back to Aaron, the first high priest. Artaxerxes gives him a letter of introduction and sends people along with him. While the group assembles, they encamp by a tributary of the Euphrates, and Ezra sends off for more Levites for the trip. He has told King Artaxerxes that with God they don't need armed guards, so they make the long hard journey with some trepidation. But they reach Jerusalem without encounters with bandits who would steal the valuables they are carrying. They rest upon their arrival, then make offerings and deliver the treasures that the King has invested in their

return. The Persian king has given them *carte blanche* for help from provinces Beyond the River, with severe penalties for those who interfere. Ezra praises God for guiding the heart of the King.

Intermarriage breaks Ezra's heart. When Ezra returns to Jerusalem what he sees appalls him. Intermarriage! Everywhere is the resultant dilution of the people of God. It couldn't be worse. Though Nehemiah has noted the problem and secured promises from the people to stop intermarriage in the future, Ezra finds the practice so abominable he demands that foreign wives be put away, along with their children, and now! The people weep bitterly over this, yet they agree to a process of discarding foreign wives and children.

Foreign wives and children are separated. 8). Nehemiah 8:1-9:37 When the process of separation of wives and children is complete, Ezra reads the Book of the Law before the assembly. Though they are grieving, he encourages participation in the happy festival of the Feast of Booths. They have repented from the evil of their marriages, and now may worship God more purely, so Ezra prays a prayer of blessing over them relating their whole history into which their present experience fits so well. He then renews them in the promises of the covenant, and seals them in the ancient covenant with God.

Under Nehemiah and Ezra an *exclusive* society is being formed.

The returnees are intent on being a people free from all the errors of the past. Walls were essential for the purity of the people clustered around their Temple, it enabled them to begin a process of freeing themselves from all outside influences. A contained community is what they require, one whose activities can be regulated by the priests of Yahweh. They want to do everything right according to the laws of Moses. From our perspective it seems excessive and cruel. Yet, what would have happened to revealed faith without this exclusive attitude? The People of God who hold the lamp of Truth have been diminished to a small colony in a pinpoint place - yes, there are colonies of Jews in many parts of the world who do not come back to Jerusalem, but how adulterated would faith become without the gravity of Jerusalem? The great

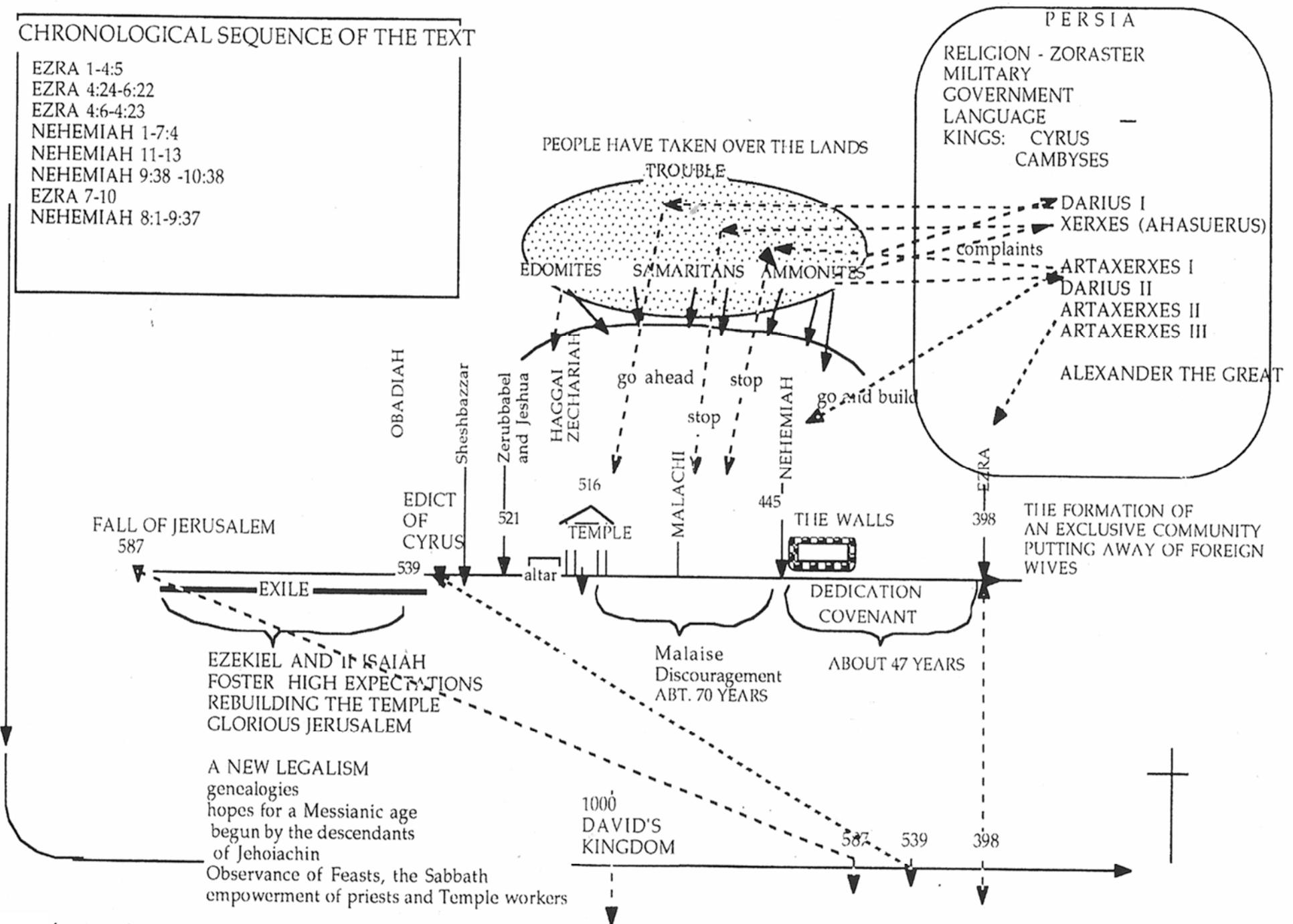
prophet, Second Isaiah, whom we read last week, was inclusive, viewing the whole world and all peoples and nations as God's. He visioned all nations flowing towards Jerusalem where the great suffering leader would redeem all through his death. That is not the idea of Nehemiah or Ezra. Yet without their exclusivity would it have been possible to have the vision of II Isaiah come to reality? We have this law-conscious little group in Jerusalem hoping to be the set-apart people that Moses ordained. If they are not true to their tradition there will no platform upon which to raise the cross of the Suffering Servant.

Exclusive or inclusive, which is best? It is easy to see the rigidity and intolerance building in Jerusalem. Jesus will try to crack through that legal set of mind which beginning with Ezra continues for four hundred years. Yet, surrounded by enemies who would be glad to see the remembrance and worship of Yahweh wiped out, it is essential to the continuance of truth that the Jews assemble in tenacious unity around the Law of God. The best image that we have of the counterbalance of exclusivity and inclusivity has been Pope John Paul II. He held firmly to the age-old convictions of the Church, upholding her doctrines and dogmas, not minimizing one. He was very tightly a Church man, for which he received a good deal of acrimony. Yet, he moved through the world opening his arms to all, more than just as a person, but as a head of an exclusive Church. He is all-inclusive in love. It is just such a tension that is essential for the Church. First, she must know who she is, what she believes and cling to this truth with ferocity against all who would minimalize it. Then she opens her arms and invites all to come to the truth.

Lesson 33 Ezra, Nehemiah

CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE OF THE TEXT

- EZRA 1-4:5
- EZRA 4:24-6:22
- EZRA 4:6-4:23
- NEHEMIAH 1-7:4
- NEHEMIAH 11-13
- NEHEMIAH 9:38 -10:38
- EZRA 7-10
- NEHEMIAH 8:1-9:37



Lesson 33 Ezra and Nehemiah Synopsis in chronological order

Ezra

1. in the first year of Cyrus comes a proclamation in writing God of heaven has charged me to build a house in Jerusalem exiles are to go, rebuild assisted by silver, gold and goods those whose spirit God stirred rose to go under Sheshbazzar who took back gold, silver vessels that were taken from Jerusalem
2. people who returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Jeshua totaled 42,360 in small migrations named in family groups and according to office of priest Levites, Temple servants, sons of Solomon's servants, those of dubious genealogy excluded from priesthood considered unclean until checked by drawing of Urim and Thummim added were servants and animals some gave money for the Temple some lived in Jerusalem vicinity
3. and came into Jerusalem to work Jeshua and Zerubbabel build the altar of God for burnt offerings they keep the Feast of Booths and daily burnt offerings the Temple foundation not laid they give money to masons food and drink to Sidonians and Tyrians for cedars
2nd year Zerubbabel and Jeshua begin to build the Temple

under oversight of Levites Jeshua and vested priests with song leaders lead shout to God at laying of foundation however, the old men weep at comparison to the first Temple people of the land (Samaritans) approach Zerubbabel to help build they claim to sacrifice to Yahweh Zerubbabel and Jeshua say we alone will build which causes these people to make threats

4.
4:24 the work ceases until the second year of Darius Haggai and Zechariah prophesy inspired, the building begins again jealous governors question them Tattenai of Beyond the River and others send to Darius reporting the building they are building for the Great God under Cyrus' decree and his governor Sheshbazzar let a search be made
has a decree really been made?
5. archives searched in Ecbatana a decree is found of Cyrus' the Temple shall be built at government expense gold and silver taken from the Temple shall be returned Tattenai, let the work go on moreover, help them take royal revenue for the needs if this is not obeyed a house timber is pulled out and the disobedient one impaled
- 6.

Tattenai and others diligently obey Haggai, Zechariah inspire the work the Temple is finished in 516 B.C. its dedication celebrated with joy then they kept the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread with ritual purity for seven days

4:6-4:23

another protest to King Ahasuerus and yet another to Artaxerxes(?) by Rehum and Shimshai, others from Ashurbanipal's deportation the Jews rebuild a rebellious city because we eat your salt we must report this to you you will find in the ancient records this is a rebellious city when it is finished the Jews will not serve you Artaxerxes' search confirms this so he makes a decree that the building stop till further notice the Jews are forced to discontinue

Nehemiah

1. from Nehemiah's memoirs in 20th year at Susa - 425? he asks visitors from Judah about Jerusalem - a sad report the walls lie broken, gates ruined Nehemiah weeps, fasts, prays confesses sins of his fathers' according to the words of Moses you have redeemed by your power hear, grant your servant success grant mercy in sight of the king
2. Nehemiah is cupbearer to the king who notes his sadness

fearfully Nehemiah describes the city of his fathers, requesting permission to go to rebuild it the King, the Queen sitting next grants permission, sends letters to use king's timber for building the good hand of my God was upon me, says Nehemiah he is sent with army and horsemen Sanballat, Tobiah are displeased Nehemiah secretly inspects walls speaks to priests and officials come let us rebuild the walls strengthened, they arose to build Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem deride they are told they have no portion or right in Jerusalem

3. priests rebuild the Sheep Gate as far as Tower of Hundred men of Jericho next whole wall built by families Fish Gate, Old Gate, Broad Wall Tower of the Ovens, Valley Gate Dung Gate, Fountain Gate Pool of Sheklah, stairs to the city of David, sepulchres of David artificial pool to the Angle, Ophel and Water Gate, Horse Gate, East Gate, Muster Gate to Sheep Gate - everyone works Sanballat in anger ridicules Tobiah says a fox on these walls would cause them to fall they plot to fight against builders so a guard is set for protection Nehemiah stations defenders remember the great, terrible God they return to work half to build half to guard, all carry weapons
- 4.

5. the trumpeter will warn all sleep in their clothes difficulty with enough to eat some mortgage house, field and vineyard for food in famine sell sons and daughters as slaves Nehemiah is angered by this brought charges against nobles for exacting interest walk in fear of God, lend money without interest, return any gain fields, vineyards, olive orchards houses, a hundredth of grain, wine, oil and promise to restore the people made oaths to do so Nehemiah was appointed governor he did not take tax allotted to him did not burden the people because of the fear of the Lord supplied his own table for 150 men remember, Lord, what I have done

6. Sanballat, Tobiah plot a fifth time accuse the Jews of rebelling they report you want to be king to the Persian king Nehemiah says you invent this now, God, strengthen our hands Shemaiah tries to frighten him to go into hiding in the Temple Tobiah, Sanballat had hired him the wall was finished in 55 days nations perceived it was done with God's help Tobiah corresponds with nobles of Judah bound by oath to him he threatens Nehemiah doors set in place, gatekeepers singers, Levites are appointed

Nehemiah gave his brother charge guards appointed for gates nobles, officials and people enrolled by genealogy no houses yet built in Jerusalem

Nehemiah

11. the leaders live in Jerusalem they cast lots to bring one in ten to live there, the other nine live in other towns around people blessed the volunteers list of chiefs of the province, overseers, priests, Levites gatekeepers, Temple servants settled provision for singers and villages where people lived in districts depending on relation to Benjamin and Judah

12. list of priests, Levites who came with Zerubbabel and Jeshua at the dedication of the wall all the Levites in their places celebration with singing cymbals, harps and lyres priests and Levites purified then the people, the gate and wall princes of Judah upon the wall with two great companies in procession, one left, one right (Ezra is a different one or a gloss) up by the stairs to city of David both companies to the Temple with singers and trumpets rejoicing with great joy women and children too joy heard afar off men appointed for various duties Levites and priests ministered

13. according to command of David daily portions for singers gatekeepers, Levites, priests read from the book of Moses no Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly; foreigners separate Nehemiah reports to Artaxerxes Eliashib then gives Tobiah a large chamber in the Temple Nehemiah comes back throws him out with his belongings restored the vessels while he was away portions not given to Levites and singers who had gone back to the fields why is God's Rouse forsaken? Nehemiah gathered the people put them in their stations and Judah brought the tithe treasurers appointed over stores remember my good deeds, Lord the Sabbath not being kept Phoenicians trading there Nehemiah says to the nobles you are bringing wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath he commanded gates be closed from beginning to end of Sabbath foreign merchants sent away purified Levites keep the gates Jews had married foreign wives children spoke Philistine language Nehemiah cursed and beat them made them take an oath to stay away from intermarriage must not be like Solomon trouble caused by pagan wives Chief Priest is in with Sanballat remember them O Lord because

they have defiled the priesthood • cleansed them from foreign things remember me O God for the good

(end of book - but not of the story)

Nehemiah

9 :3 8 a list of those who set their seal to the covenant beginning with Nehemiah all others who have separated themselves from foreigners enter into a curse and vow to walk in God's Law we will not intermarry, or buy and sell on the Sabbath forego crops on the 7th year and forgive debts one third shekel for Temple tax for the work of the house of God obligate themselves to bring in first fruits to dedicate the first born offering the first of everything with tithes to the Levites and tithe of tithes to the priests not to neglect the Lord's house

Ezra

7. reign of Artaxerxes II Ezra, a genealogy back to Aaron a scribe skilled in the Law left Babylon in 397 under the king's protection also more of the people came after a five month journey Ezra sent to study the Law and to teach His statutes in Israel Artaxerxes gives him a letter that he is sent by the King

and others may go with him to take silver and gold offerings of the people and priests to the house of God to buy offerings with money the rest according to God's will deliver the vessels, anything else provided from the king's treasury treasurers of the province Beyond the River to give to Ezra what he needs lest wrath of God of heaven comes against the Persian kings and their sons not lawful to impose taxes on priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Temple servants Ezra appoints magistrates whoever does not obey the Law of the Lord God let judgment be executed upon him God is blessed for putting this into the heart of the king Ezra gathers leading men of Israel to go with him genealogy of those who went they gathered at a tributary of the Euphrates they needed more Levites so more were gathered a fast proclaimed to ask God for a straight way ashamed to ask the king for protection since Ezra said "God is with us" fasted before God for this set aside twelve leading priests and ten kinsmen to carry gold and holy vessels to guard and keep until weighed

9 . safely inside the Lord's house the Lord protected them they came to Jerusalem and waited three days then weighed gold and silver in the house on fourth day returnees give burnt offerings and deliver king's commissions Ezra is horrified at the discovery the holy race is mixed in faithlessness foreign wives are everywhere the chief people are the worst Ezra rends his garments and pulls his hair all trembled, and gathered till evening sacrifice Ezra fell on his knees praying ashamed for people's iniquities they have been a favored remnant God has not forsaken them in bondage He extended *hesed* to repair the ruins we have forsaken commandments the Samaritans are unclean do not take their sons, daughters shall commands be broken again? we are a remnant who escaped we can't stand before you, God because of guilt

10. Ezra prays, makes confession weeps, casts himself down a great assembly gathers all are weeping bitterly people suggest casting off wives according to Ezra's counsel priests and Levites take an oath Ezra fasts over faithlessness all will assemble or property forfeit

and banned from the congregation they assembled within three days sat in the rain trembling Ezra condemns foreign marriages demands confession, separation the people ask for time and an orderly progression Ezra allows it and selects men to examine sons of priests put away foreign women and offer guilt offerings and the list of the others who did the same

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Nehemiah

8. then all the people gather the book of the Law is read from morning till midday by Ezra who stood on a wooden pulpit at Water Gate all were attentive Ezra blessed the Lord people replied Amen worshipping God Levites helped people understand Nehemiah was governor (a gloss) this day is holy to the Lord don't mourn or weep rather celebrate with joy so they had great rejoicing on the second day head men came to study the Law and they saw how to observe Feast of Booths which was kept eighth day, a solemn assembly on the 24th day they separated from all foreigners confessed their sins read from book of the Law

Levites cried to God with a loud voice in praise Ezra prays, God is creator He chose Abram, covenanted saw affliction in Egypt delivered and divided the sea cast the pursers in its depths came down on Sinai, spoke gave ordinances from heaven gave manna, water from rock brought them to possess the land yet they refused to obey God ready to forgive He did not forsake them gave the good Spirit for instructor forty years He sustained them they defeated Sihon and Og and possessed their lands captured cities and lands delighted in goodness but disobeyed with blasphemies so He put them into hands of enemies to suffer God delivered them again but they stiffened their necks and would not obey though warned by the prophets God did not forsake them God kept the covenant He loved them with steadfast love through all the hardships of Assyria to this day He has dealt faithfully yet we are slaves today a rich yield goes to kings over us and we are in distress

Lesson 33 Ezra and Nehemiah Outline

I. Historical Background of the Times of Nehemiah and Ezra

A. The first Aryans, Indo-Europeans, rule the world 539 B.C.- 333 B.C.

1. first non-Semitic rulers, the Persians mark a great racial change
 - a. Semites originated in southern pastures, Aryans in northern pastures
 - b. Assyrians, Babylonians were Semites
2. followed by other Indo-Europeans - the Greeks, Romans etc.
 - a. related to all Europeans and European languages
 - b. also to groups that settled in India - Sanskrit language
3. had been nomadic herders in the great steppe E. of the Caspian Sea - 2000 B.C.
 - a. they had no written language
 - b. their priests were called fire-kindlers in a religion of good thoughts and deeds
 - c. by 1800 B.C. broke into two groups
 - 1) 1/2 to India - hints in their Vedas of old days of Aryan unity
 - 2) 1/2 to Iran (Aryan) to Fertile Crescent
 - a) Mitanni were tribes of this group
 - b) later became Persians and Medes who founded Ecbatana

B. Persia and the Persians are a unique entry in the world

1. their religion was formed by a prophet from old fire worship
 - a. Zoroaster, a Median prophet (after fall of Assyria)
 - 1) unable to win his own people he went south to the Persians
 - 2) healed one of the Persian king's horses and converted him
 - 3) Darius I later erected a tomb for Zoroaster
 - 4) he left a book of sacred writings called *Avesta*
 - b. a noble, spiritual religion, but not *revealed* doctrine
 - 1) he taught the struggle of good and evil
 - 2) the good god named Mazda, or Ahuramazda
 - a) he was lord of Wisdom
 - b) led a group of helpers - angels, one the greatest Light, Mithras
 - 3) personified evil was called Ahriman
 - 4) whatever course a man followed, he must expect judgment
 - 5) retained old Aryan veneration of fire as visible symbol of good
2. their new military approach
 - a. as soldiers, depended on archery and cavalry
 - 1) experts with the bow, chief weapon that was light to carry
 - 2) overwhelmed enemy by hail of arrows
 - b. very swift - no armor or heavy equipment
 - 1) carried light, hide covered shield

- 2) avoided hand to hand combat
- c. Cyrus was the conquering Persian military genius
 - 1) relatively humane, just, intelligent
 - 2) towns were spared, inhabitants treated with relative mildness

3. Persian government

- a. established common coinage
- b. two hundred years of peace and security, prosperity
- c. a safe highway system
- d. first world-wide postal system
- e. efficient government with provinces headed by governors, (20 satraps)
- f. all landowners paid taxes

4. language

- a. Aramaic, the Babylonian language, used by Persia as the official language
 - 1) now written on papyrus, no longer clay tablets
 - 2) bilingual, they also spoke old Persian tongue
- b. Hebrew no longer spoken except on cultic occasions
- c. cuneiform writing dying away, and soon lost
- d. the code broken in 1840's - Behistun monument of Darius I deciphered

C. the Persian Kings affected the Israelites

1. Cyrus (not the great conqueror, but his grandfather)
2. Cambyses I
3. Cyrus II
 - a. first conquered to the Aegean Sea against
 - 1) a coalition of Babylon (Nabonidus), Egypt, (Amosis) Lydia (Croesus)
 - 2) boasted of restoring all gods to their sees
 - b. 539 B.C. conquered Babylon - handed over by the Babylonian priests
 - c. 538 B.C. promulgated the Edict for return of exiles
 - 1) text is authentic in Ezra 6:3-5
 - 2) the Aramaic version (which was the official Babylonian language)
 - d. died in 529 B.C. in a war against nomads
 - e. his tomb was found 200 yrs. later by Alexander
4. Cambyses II - conquered Egypt in 525 B.C.
5. Darius I 521- 485 B.C.
 - a. confirmed Cyrus' decree
 - b. gave support to the Jerusalem community
 - c. Temple was built during his rule ca 520 B.C.
 - d. Haggai and Zechariah were Israel's prophets
 - e. he crushed all rebellions by 520
 - f. he sent learned Egyptian high priest back to Egypt to start a medical school

- g. encouraged astronomy in Babylon
- h. interested in exploration
- 6. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) 486 - 466 B.C.
 - a. responded to a letter of complaint by stopping construction
 - b. the King who took the Jewess, Esther, as Queen
- 7. Artaxerxes I 466-425 B.C.
 - a. received a letter of complaint and stopped work in Jerusalem ca 462
 - b. later sent Nehemiah to recommence and supervise the work ca 445
 - c. the prophecy of Malachi describes a time of discouragement and malaise before Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem
- 8. (Xerxes II, Logdianos, Darius 11424-405 B.C.)
- 9. Artaxerxes II 404-358
 - a. gives support to Ezra
 - b. sends him to Jerusalem ca 397 B.C.
- 10. Artaxerxes 111358, followed by Arses 339, then Darius III 336
- 11. Alexander the Great 333 who defeated Persia and made the world Greek
- D. the deciphering of cuneiform comes late
 - 1. the great Darius I inscription with three languages: Elamite, Babylonian cuneiform, and Persian
 - 2. found and deciphered by Rawlings in 1835-1847AD
 - 3. opened up the study of all Mesopotamian history

II. Textual Problems

- A. The Chronicler (author of 1,11 Chronicles) assumed only one king of each name and tried to fit his sources around them ca 300 B.C.
- B. Sources - Nehemiah's journal, Ezra's writings, genealogical charts
- C. Different translations number chapters differently - very difficult to follow
- D. Sometimes a scribe trying to ease confusions added names
 - 1. Nehemiah in Neh 8:9
 - 2. Ezra in Ne 12:26,36
 - 3. connecting sentences Ne11:26 (times were later than this, Joaikim, Jeshua's son, and Ezra not present yet), Ne 8:9
- E. A possible chronological Order - (not the only possibility)
 - 1. Ezra 1- 4:5: Edict of 538/ Return of exiles/ Sheshbazzar/ Zerubbabel build altar/ lay foundation of Temple/ Samaritan interference
 - 2. Ezra 4:24 - 6:22, work stops/ prophets encourage! Darius "yes"! Temple finished and dedicated
 - 3. Ezra 4:6 - 4:23:complaints to Xerxes/Artaxerxes I/ work to stop

- 4. Nehemiah 1-7:4: Nehemiah petitions/goes to Jerusalem/walls built/ plots/ usury condemned/threats to report him/ finished the wall/ gates/ enrolls the elect
- 5. Nehemiah 11-13 :/ people to live in J./dedication of the walls/ back to Persia/ all undone when he gets back/ anger at intermarriage
- 6. Nehemiah 9:38-10:39: covenant made and ratified
- 7. Ezra 7-10:Ezra comes/ scolds intermarriage/ demands foreigners put aside
- 8. Nehemiah 8:1-9:37: separation complete, keeps Feast of Booths, history reiterated! Ezra complains about Persian rule

III. The Return to Jerusalem In Stages

- A. Stage One, early return under Sheshbazzar (Shenazzar?) 538 B.C.
 - 1. Edict of Cyrus Ez 1:1ff
 - a. God of heaven has charged me to build a house in Jerusalem
 - b. go and rebuild assisted by silver, gold and goods
 - c. those whose spirit God has stirred may return
 - 2. the return seen as reenactment of the Exodus
 - 3. trip probably took 100 days
 - 4. Temple vessels carried away by Nebuchadnezzar were sent back
 - 5. not all exiles returned - many had made a comfortable life
- B. Stage Two, 20 yrs. later under Darius I , Zerubbabel leads
 - 1. is the Persian name for Zerubbabel, Sheshbazzar? or is Sheshbazzar the same as Shenazzar? The latter seems likely
 - a. there is no Sheshbazzar in the genealogies in I Chronicles 3:17
 - b. Chronicles lists Josiah and sons, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah
 - 1) Jeholachin (Jeconiah) the king taken into exile 597B.C.
 - 2) His sons are Shealtiel, Malchiram, *Pedaiah*, *Shenazzar*, Jekamiah, Hoshama, Nebadiah
 - 3) Pedaiah's son is listed as *Zerubbabel* (Jeconiah's grandson)
 - 2. describes small migrations, numbers add up to nearly 50,000 Ez 2:1ff
 - a. include Temple officials, priests, Levites, Temple servants, servants an those of dubious genealogy
 - b. animals and servant class
 - 3. Zerubbabel and Joshua build an altar in Jerusalem Ez 3
 - a. they keep the Feast of Booths
 - b. they offer daily offerings
 - c. they begin to get ready for building of the Temple
 - 1) money for masons
 - 2) trading for cedar from Tyre (Lebanon)

- d. in the second year begin to build the house
 - 1) at the laying of foundation some happy, others sad
 - 2) vested priests and song leaders lead praise to God
- 4. trouble starts Ez 4:1ff a, Samaritans offer help
 - b. because of their mixed blood they are refused
 - c. they cause trouble and the building stops
- 5. prophets Haggai and Zechariah
 - a. give encouragement Ez 5:1ff b. building begins again
- 6. jealous governors write to King Darius
 - a. Tattenai reports the building of the Temple
 - b. do Jews have authorization?
 - 1) archives searched
 - 2) Cyrus' decree found - a temple to be built at government expense
- 7. let the work go on and aid them Ez 6:6-11
 - a. even to giving Jews offerings Ez 6:9ff
 - b. pray for the life of the king
 - c. severe penalty if this is not done Ez 6:11
- 8. the Temple is finished in 516 B.C. (22 yrs. after Cyrus' decree)
- 9. dedication with offerings and services written in the Law of Moses Ez 6:16f
- 10. Passover is kept Ez 6:19 and Feast of Unleavened Bread
- 11. another protest is written to Ahasuerus(?) Ez 4:6 to discourage rebuilding
 - a gap of many years when nothing is done
- 12. and another protest to Artaxerxes I - altogether 91 years go by
 - a. Samaritans are still unhappy Ez 4:9 they are not considered Jews
 - b. check the records and you will see this is a rebellious city
 - c. when finished the Jews will not serve you
- 13. Artaxerxes stops the work till further notice
- C. Stage three, Nehemiah under Artaxerxes I is sent to rebuild (see below)
- D. Stage four, under Artaxerxes II Ezra will establish religious purity (see below)

IV. The new legalism

- A. Accomplishments of the Exile result in an exclusive community
 - 1. the Scriptures come together
 - a. the Pentateuch is finished
 - b. the priestly code written
 - c. other writings are finalized
 - 2. the synagogue study and worship is in place

- 3. there is an elevation of priests and Levites, Temple functionaries
- B. The genealogical lists are developed Ez 2:3ff
 - 1. good Hebrew genealogy is required Ez 2:62, Ne, 11:4ff, Ne 12:1ff, Ez 8:1ff, Ez 10:20
 - a. without it, a priest must confirm true bloodline with Urim and Thummim
 - 2, especially for the priests - without it they are considered unclean
 - 3. fear of influence of foreigners
 - a. recall the corruption foreigners caused Solomon; Jezebel and other foreign influences over the centuries
 - b. the corruption of religion threatened because of mixture of races under Assyrian mixed race policy in 721 B.C.
- C. There is good and bad in this effort to purify community
 - 1. they are small, isolated, insignificant, but fervent
 - 2. they retreat from the world, do not re-emerge for 200 yrs. when they must face Hellenism
 - 3. the problem of intermarriage Ne 13:1, Ne 13:23 ff
 - a. children being brought up not able to speak Aramaic or Hebrew
 - b. therefore, unable to learn the scriptures, or understand the liturgy
 - 4. this attitude probably saved the faith from extinction
- D. Hopes for the Messianic age build at first
 - 1. strong messianic hopes under Zerubbabel and Jeshua
 - 2. these begin to fade as High Priest becomes more important and nothing comes of the line of David
 - 3. the mention of David is because of this focus Ne 12:24, Ne 12:36, 37
- E. The Prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, prophesy to encourage
 - 1. they bring God's word close to the people to jack up fading resolves
 - 2. inspire Messianic hopes by supporting Zerubbabel and High Priest Jeshua
- F. They begin to observe Feasts again
 - 1. Feast of Booths - Succoth Lv 23:40-43
 - 2. Feast of Weeks Ne 8:13-18 associated with harvest and the Exodus

V. Enemies of Rebuilding and Delays

- A. The poor left there had taken over lands and now oppose the newcomers
- B. The Edomites are distant relatives
 - 1. they came into Judah from barren Edom when the Judahites were exiled
 - 2. as "brothers" (Edom was founded by Esau) this was considered especially greedy and heartless
 - 3. Edom reportedly rejoiced at the destruction of Jerusalem
- C, Samaritans, Ammonites are old enemies li Kgs 17:24-27ff

1. Sanballat angry with Nehemiah because Judah had been detached from his governorship and given to Nehemiah
 2. Sanballat was related to the High Priest at Nehemiah's time
 3. Tobiah the Ammonite hated the Jews with ancestral hatred
- D. Demoralization is a chronic problem
1. the people needed a shove from Haggai and Zechariah
 2. the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra especially motivated them
 3. there were times of apathy, also times of apostasy and social unrest reported in Malachi's prophecy

VI. Nehemiah's Years and Influence

- A. His Involvement begins 425B.C. - ninety-one years after the Temple had been built
1. little more done because of decree by Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes I
 2. some relatives arrive in Susa and speak of plight of Jerusalem Ne 1:2
 3. Nehemiah prays and fasts, begs God
 - a. a Deuteronomic man - a Moses man Ne 1:7
 - b. grant mercy in the sight of the King
 - 1) absolute power of these monarchs
 - 2) no one could question on pain of death
 - 3) word was law - effective and could not be revoked
- B. King Artaxerxes sends Nehemiah back to Jerusalem according to his request
1. he is a cupbearer to the King Ne 2:1 ff
 2. his sorrow is noted
 3. he requests to go to Jerusalem to rebuild
 4. permission given with power and funds sent along
- C. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem are entrenched enemies Ne 2:10
1. so Nehemiah inspects the walls at night
 2. speaks to the people of leadership
- D. They arise to build Ne 2:18
1. the wall is built by families, in sections Ne 3
 2. enemies threaten, but the walls are defended, work continues Ne 4:1,7
- E. During a famine the poor borrowed from the rich Ne 5:1 ff
1. to repay they must sell children into slavery Ne 5:5
 2. Nehemiah fights officialdom
 - a. usury with other Jews is against Jewish law
 - b. they must return what has been exacted
 - c. they swear an oath to return what was taken Ne 5:12
- G. Nehemiah is appointed governor Ne 5:14 1.
he lays no tax burden on the people

2. he takes care of needs of his people out of his pocket
 3. he often asks, "may God remember me kindly" Ne 5:19
- H. Several plots are laid to kill Nehemiah Ne 6
1. enemies ask for a meeting - Nehemiah doesn't trust them
 2. an intermediary tries to get him motivated by fear Ne 6:10
 3. he is never intimidated, but trusts God
- I. The wall is finished and Day of Dedication is celebrated
1. intrigue and connections of Tobiah Ne 6:18
 2. Nehemiah puts his brother in charge Ne 7:2
 - a. further organization on Day of Dedication Ne 12:44ff
 - 1) men appointed in charge of stores, contributions, first fruits, tithes
 - 2) daily portions to be given liturgists, priests, and Levites
 3. the gates are in place; he is now able to control coming and going
 4. the dedication
 - a. liturgy and liturgists Ne 11:27
 - b. ceremony atop the wall Ne 11:31ff
 - c. great thanksgiving
 5. reading from the Law Ne 13:1 ff
 6. separating out the foreigner Ne 13:1
- J. Few people live in Jerusalem Ne 7:4, 11:3
1. casting lots to bring one in ten to live in Jerusalem Ne 11:1
 2. others live in small towns round about Ne 11:25
- K. Nehemiah goes back to Susa, 12 yrs after arriving in Jerusalem
1. Eliashib, High Priest then gives Tobiah chambers in the Temple Ne 13:4
 - a. Ne 3:1 Eliashib built part of the wall
 - b. Ne 3:20 he lived near the wall in Jerusalem
 - c. his descendants listed in Ne 12:22
 - d. his grandson was married to Sanballat's daughter Ne 13:28
 - e. Tobiah's vested interests revealed in Ne 6:17 he corresponds with and related to many Jews
 2. Nehemiah returns; kicks him out of the Temple Ne 13:7
 3. finds that allotments have not been paid Ne 13:10
 - a. appoints treasurers considered faithful to distribute them
 - b. "God, remember my good deeds"
- L. The Sabbath is not being kept Ne 13:15
1. trade with foreigners was occurring on the Sabbath
 2. these lacks of observance were bringing wrath on the city Ne 13:18
 3. Nehemiah commands gates closed on the Sabbath
 - a. refuses to let merchants sit outside either

- b. "remember me, O God"
- M. Intermarriage brings ignorance of the sacred language
 1. Nehemiah curses and beats people Ne 13:25
 2. he made people take an oath to stay away from intermarriage Ne 13:25
 - a. Solomon sinned by marrying foreign women Ne 13:26
 - b. High Priest's grandson married a foreigner; defiled the priesthood Ne 13:28
- N. Nehemiah draws up a Covenant
 1. those who set their seal on the document are listed Ne 10 :1ff
 2. provisions of the covenant Ne 10:29ff
 - a. we will not intermarry
 - b. we will walk in the Mosaic Law
 - c. we will not buy or sell on the Sabbath
 - d. we will forego crops on the 7th year and forgive debts
 - e. 1/3 shekel tax to the house of God for its provision
 - f. we will bring in the first fruits
 - g. we will dedicate the first born and offering
 - h. there will be tithes to Levites, tithe of tithe to priests
 - i. the House will not be neglected

VII. Ezra's Years and Influence 30 years later - 397 B.C.

- A. Ezra's genealogy is as a priest of Aaronic line Ez 7:1
 1. he is a scribe skilled in the Law
 2. he is under the protection and provision of Artaxerxes II
 3. he set his heart to study the Law and teach it Ez 7:10
- B. He is sent to Jerusalem by decree of Artaxerxes II
 1. those who freely want to go, may go with him Ez 7:13
 2. sent with gifts of money which will buy offerings Ez 7:17
 3. more Temple vessels sent back
 4. treasurers of the province Beyond the River
 - a. to give Ezra what he needs for the house of God
 - b. and not to tax Temple functionaries
 5. Ezra has the power to appoint magistrates and judges Ez 7:25
- C. A group goes with Ezra Ez 8:1ff
 1. they gather at the River Ahava - a tributary of Euphrates
 2. he sends for more Levites Ez 8:16
 3. he proclaims a fast there Ez 8:21
 4. he is ashamed to ask for protection, they trust God alone Ez 8:22
 5. several priests carry offerings for the house; holy to the Lord Ez 8:28

- 6. they travel and arrive safely Ez 8:31
- D. They arrive at Jerusalem Ez 8:33ff
 1. they turn over the holy things and the money
 2. they offer burnt offerings for the returnees
 3. delivered commissions to satraps and governors and aided the people
- E. The intermarriage problem is encountered Ez 9:1
 1. foreign wives are still allowed and faithlessness among leaders is the worst
 2. Ezra is appalled Ez 9:3
 - a. he rent his garments and pulled out his hair
 - b. he fasted till evening sacrifice
 - c. then fell on his knees and prayed
 3. he is ashamed before God for the iniquity of the people
 - a. they are the remnant
 - b. God has been good to them through the Persians Ez 9:9ff
 4. people of the lands are polluted; don't intermarry has been Moses' Law
 5. they will be consumed again with God's wrath Ez 9:14
- F. A great assembly is called and gathers Ez 10:1
 1. the people weep bitterly
 2. they propose a covenant to put away their wives Ez 10:3
 3. Ezra is commissioned to do it
 4. he has priests and Levites take the oath
 5. Jehohanan is priest (Eliashib's son) 10:6
 - a. Ezra fasts all night and prays
 - b. mourns over the faithlessness of the exiles
 6. all are assembled in Jerusalem in the heavy rain
 - a. they ask for time; this is not work for one day
 - b. let people in mixed marriage come at appointed times
 - c. Ezra selected men to examine the matter
 - d. finally came to the end of all the men who had married foreign women
- G. Ezra reads the Law Ne 8:1
 1. he read to all the people from morn till midday
 2. Ezra blesses God, the people worship
 3. when taught the Law, the people grieve
 - a. Ezra says, don't grieve, celebrate
 - b. he encourages them to observe the Feast of Booths Ne 8:15
 4. they are separated from all foreigners after fasting Ne 9:1ff
 - a. they all cried with a loud voice to the Lord
 - b. Ezra prays, recounts their history Ne 9:6ff
 - c. they are in bondage even now (under Persia) Ne 9:36