

“Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites – everyone whose heart God had moved – prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.” -Ezra 1:5

“The temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.” –Ezra 6:15

“But we prayed to God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.” –Nehemiah 4:9

1. Cyrus' Decree (Ezra 1)

- a. Time is now the first year of Cyrus king of Persia.
 - i. God stirs Cyrus so that he declared that the exilic people of Judah may be released to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of the Lord.
- b. Ezra 1:1
 - i. See Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10-14, and Zechariah 1:12-16.

2. The First Returnees (Ezra 2)

- a. List of people who returned.
 - i. They returned each to his own town.
 - ii. 42,360 in all + 7,337 servants + 200 singers.

3. Altar Reconstructed, Temple Foundation Laid (Ezra 3)

- a. The people gathered as one man in Jerusalem
 - i. Built the altar of the God of Israel – immediately begin offering sacrifices.
 - ii. Kept the Feast of Booths.
- b. 2 years later, they lay the foundation for the temple.
 - i. The people sang (responsively)
 - ii. Many of the older people who had seen the first house wept when they saw the foundation of this house.
 - iii. See 3:11-13.

4. Adversity (Ezra 4)

- a. Adversity faced.
- b. Chronology gets complicated here:
 - i. V4-5: people of the land discouraged them and made them afraid, and bribed others to frustrate their purpose – all the days of Cyrus king of Persia – even until the reign of Darius king of Persia (see timeline).
 - ii. V6: tells of additional adversity faced during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) (see timeline).
 - iii. V7-23: opposition during the days of Artaxerxes with respect to the building of the walls.
- c. Outline:
 - i. V1-5 refer to the time at hand (538-515).
 - ii. V6 refers to the time of Ahasuerus (486-464)
 - iii. V7-23 refer to the time of Artaxerxes (464-423)
 - iv. V24 returns to the time at hand.

5. Rebuilding Re-begins, Authority to do so is Questioned (Ezra 5)

- a. Rebuilding begins again.
 - i. Prophets Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned as being present and prophesying.
 - 1. See Hag. 1:1, 3-4, and 13-14.
 - ii. Some questioning over the authority to do so.
 - iii. V11-17, Israel makes their case – refers to the decree of Cyrus, suggests making a search of the royal archives to review the decree.

6. Temple Rebuild Completed (Ezra 6)

- a. Darius receives the letter, makes a search, finds the decree of Cyrus, affirms it be adhered to.
 - i. V12 – may the Lord get his way.
- b. The elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah (v14).
 - i. House was finished in the sixth year of the reign of Darius.
- c. Passover celebrated.
 - i. Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated.
 - ii. V22 – “for the Lord had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them...”

7. Ezra Returns to Jerusalem (Ezra 7)

- a. During the reign of Artaxerxes, Ezra (whose lineage is traced back through to Aaron), went up from Babylonia.
 - i. Described as a scribe (NIV teacher), skilled in the Law of Moses – v6, “the hand of the Lord his God was on him”
- b. Ezra and others come together in Jerusalem.
 - i. V9: “for the good hand of his God was on him.”
- c. V11-26: A copy of the letter that Artaxerxes gave Ezra.
- d. V27-28: Ezra’s praise, acknowledges that God put this in the heart of Artaxerxes.
- e. Ezra took courage (“for the hand of the Lord my God was on me”), and gathered leading men from Israel to go with him.

8. Ezra Leads Out of the Exile (Ezra 8)

- a. V1-20 list of those that returned with Ezra during the reign of Artaxerxes.
 - i. V18 – good hand of God on us.
- b. Ezra proclaims a fast and sought out God’s hand for a safe journey (V21-23).
 - i. V22 – was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect against the enemy on our way since we had told the king, “the hand of our God is with us.”
- c. Ezra splits out some offerings, tells the men to keep them and guard them until they weigh them in the temple.
- d. V31, they set out from the river Ahava.
 - i. Hand of the Lord was on them.
 - ii. God delivered them from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes.
- e. They get to Jerusalem rest 3 days and then offer up the offerings that Ezra had split out.

9. Ezra Battles Intermarriage and Secularization (Ezra 9)

- a. The officials approach Ezra and tell him that the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the land and their abominations.
 - i. Specifically, they have intermarried (see 9:1-2).
 - ii. Ezra hears this, tears his clothes and pulled hair from his head and beard, and sat appalled.
- b. Ezra cries out to God (V5-15)
 - i. V12, quotes an OT passage on not intermarrying.
 - 1. Do not intermarry, never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.
 - ii. V15b – We are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.”

10. Repentance and the Putting Away of Foreign Wives (Ezra 10)

- a. The people repent and put away their foreign wives.
- b. V6 – Ezra fasts, mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles.
- c. All of the returned exiles in Jerusalem and throughout Judah are called to assemble at Jerusalem within 3 days – if they do not show up, their property would be forfeited and they would be banned from the congregation of exiles.
- d. Everyone comes together and Ezra speaks to them.
 - i. Explains what they have done.
 - ii. Calls them to make confession.
 - iii. Calls them to right the wrong – separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.
 - iv. V15 records two men that opposed this, and a couple of others that supported the opposition.
- e. They take 3 months to go through each man that had intermarried – offering sacrifices as they went.

11. Report from Jerusalem and Nehemiah's Reaction (Nehemiah 1)

- a. Hanani came with certain men of Judah and told Nehemiah that the remnant in Jerusalem was in great trouble and shame due to the wall being broken down and the gates destroyed by fire.
 - i. Nehemiah hears this, mourns for days, fasts, and prays before the God in heaven.
 - ii. Confesses sins, and the sins of Israel.
 - iii. Asks for God to give success to him and to grant him mercy.
 - iv. We're told that Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king.

12. Nehemiah Goes to Jerusalem, Assesses the Situation, Proposes a Solution (Nehemiah 2)

- a. King Artaxerxes senses that Nehemiah is sad (NETBible: depressed), asks him about it.
 - i. King asks him what his intentions are, Nehemiah prays to God and answers that he would like to go and rebuild the city.
 - ii. King asks him how long it will take, Nehemiah responds and requests letters ensure his safe passage as well as provisions for building materials.
 - iii. Remember: this is the same King Artaxerxes that we read about in Ezra 4:7-23 who had commanded all of the building in Jerusalem to cease.
- b. Nehemiah comes to the province Beyond the River, gives the governors the letters.
 - i. Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite heard and were displeased that someone was coming to help the people of Israel.
- c. Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem – was there three days before he begins inspecting the walls by night.
 - i. Approaches the leaders of the city with the problem and the solution
 1. V18 - to the leaders, "the hand of my God had been upon me for good."

13. Rebuilding the Wall (Nehemiah 3)

- a. The whole chapter is a description of who was building and where.

14. Opposition and the Sword and Trowel (Nehemiah 4)

- a. Opposition.
 - i. V9: "And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night."
 - ii. Nehemiah encourages them to be strong and to remember the Lord who is great and awesome.
- b. V15 – "God had frustrated their plan (the opposition's that is)."

- i. They return to work.
- ii. Half of the people worked construction while the other half held weapons.
- iii. V17 – laborers described as performing work with one hand while holding a weapon with the other (trowel and sword).

15. Nehemiah Opposes the Oppressed Poor (Nehemiah 5)

- a. V1-5 describes in part the financial situation and spectrum of those involved.
 - i. Focus is made in verses 4-5 on the oppression of the poor.
 - ii. V6: Nehemiah's response – I was very angry.
 - 1. People respond in agreement to Nehemiah's plan to abolish collecting interest.
- b. V4ff: Nehemiah's generosity detailed.

16. External and Internal Conspiracies (Nehemiah 6)

- a. When the opposition heard that the wall was complete (Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem), they called Nehemiah to a meeting.
 - i. They intended to do him harm, so Nehemiah refused – four times.
 - ii. Fifth time, Sanballat's messenger arrives with an open letter.
 - 1. States a conspiracy V6-7).
 - iii. Nehemiah responds that this is all nonsense – sees through the scheme.
 - 1. Prays for God to strengthen *his* hands (V8-9).
- b. Nehemiah then faces conspiracy from within – Shemaiah.
 - i. Tries to get Nehemiah to seek refuge in the temple.
 - 1. Numbers 18:7 prevents a layman from entering the sanctuary.
 - ii. Nehemiah sees through this as well.
- c. The wall is finished, enemies are afraid, letters continue to be exchanged.

17. Nehemiah Relinquishes Charge of Jerusalem; Genealogy Recounted (Nehemiah 7)

- a. Once the wall was built, Nehemiah gave his brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem.
 - i. Tells them to keep the gates shut during the night.
 - ii. Tells them to appoint guards from the residents.
 - 1. Keeping some at guard posts and others in front of their homes.
 - 2. Notes that the city was large, but scarcely populated.
- b. God put it in Nehemiah's heart to record the genealogy of those who came up to Jerusalem with him.

18. Ezra Reads the Law, Festival of Booths Celebrated (Nehemiah 8)

- a. Ezra reads the Law to all the peoples in Jerusalem from the Water Gate.
 - i. Everyone was able to hear and understand.
 - ii. Those that could not understand were helped as well.
- b. V9 - Nehemiah was governor, Ezra was the priest and scribe, and the Levites taught the people.
- c. Ezra reads about the Festival of Booths – so they determine to celebrate it.
 - i. Not since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun had the people of Israel done so.
 - ii. And there was great rejoicing.

19. Israel Confesses and Recites Their History (Nehemiah 9)

- a. All the people of Israel come together, fasting, wearing sackcloth, dirt on their heads, confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers.
- b. The Levites call everyone to stand and bless the Lord from everlasting to everlasting. (V5).
 - i. V6-37: they recite in summary form the history of Israel up until the current time.

1. Very important summary.
- c. V38 – They make a covenant in writing.

20.A Covenant Made (Nehemiah 10)

- a. V1-27: list of names on the sealed covenant from 9:38.
- b. V28-39: details of the covenant.
 - i. To walk in God's Law that was given by Moses.
 - ii. To observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and statutes.
 - iii. V30 – We will not intermarry.
 - iv. V31 – We will observe the Sabbath.
 - v. V31b – We will observe the year of Jubilee.
 - vi. V32 – We will give yearly a third to the service of the house of our God – for all that hey do.
 - vii. V34ff – additional details
 1. V39 (end): “we will not neglect the house of our God.”

21. Populates of Jerusalem and the Villages (Nehemiah 11)

- a. The leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem.
- b. Lots were cast to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city (populating the city).
 - i. V3-24: list of those living in Jerusalem.
- c. V25-36: those who lived outside of Jerusalem.

22. Dedication of the Wall (Nehemiah 12)

- a. V1-26: list of priests and Levites.
- b. V27-43: Dedication of the Wall.
- c. V44-47: Service at the Temple.

23.A Covenant Broken: Nehemiah's Final Reforms (Nehemiah 13)

- a. “On that day”, they read that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, so they separated from Israel all those of foreign decent.
- b. v4, “Now before this...”
 - i. Eliashib the priest allowed Tobiah to live in a large chamber in the house of God.
 1. Making room for him by moving the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, etc out.
 2. While this took place, Nehemiah was not in Jerusalem.
 - a. For in the 32 year of Artaxerxes, he had gone to the King of Babylon.
 - ii. Nehemiah discovered this was going on when he returned.
 1. V8 – he was very angry.
 2. Through all of the furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber – booted him out and had the chamber cleansed.
 3. Recall: 10:39 (end): “we will not neglect the house of our God.”
 - iii. V10-14: he also found that the Levites were not being properly taken care of.
 1. Recall: 10:32 – We will give yearly a third to the service of the house of our God – for all that hey do.
 - iv. V15-22: he also found them not properly observing the Sabbath.
 1. Recall: 10:31 – We will observe the Sabbath.
 - v. V23-27: he also found them intermarrying.
 1. Recall: 10:30 – we will not intermarry.
 2. Half of their children were speaking the language of Ashdod and could not speak the language of Judah.
 - vi. V28-29: he also found the priesthood being desecrated.

- vii. V30-31 – summary: “Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the first fruits.
 - 1. Book ends: Remember me, O my God, for good.

24. For Next Time:

- a. Finish up Ezra and Nehemiah if you have not already.
- b. Reflecting back over our study, ask yourself the following questions – I encourage you to spend some thoughtful reflection here. Try journaling out your responses.
 - i. Why is it important for us to study the Old Testament Historical books?
 - ii. What have you learned about God from this study?
 - iii. What have you learned about yourself?
 - iv. Do you feel that you have grasped a better understanding of the timeline of Israel's history?
 - v. Why is this important?
- c. How does the history of Israel fit into God's Mission, that is, that repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in his name to all nations (Luke 24:47)?

25. Class Handouts, etc Available Online:

- a. I'm making all of the handouts, etc available online at:
 - i. www.toddsmindblogger.wordpress.com