

EZRA

MEMORY CHALLENGE

THEME: The Second Exodus: Rebuilding the Temple

OUTLINE:

- I. THE RETURN & RECONSTRUCTION UNDER ZERUBBABEL: *Work* (EZRA 1-6)
- II. THE RETURN & REFORM UNDER EZRA: *Worship* (EZRA 7-10)

KEY CHAPTERS:

- The Decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1)
- The New Temple Completed (Ezra 6)
- Ezra's Prayer of Confession (Ezra 9)
- The Covenant Renewed (Ezra 10)

KEY PASSAGES:

Ezra 3:2 "Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God." – *Sacrificial worship reinstated according to the Word of God!*

Ezra 4:3 "But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." – *Zerubbabel and Joshua reject the help of the Samaritans.*

Ezra 7:10 "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel. – *Ezra's approach to ministry*

Ezra 10:10-12 "'You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives. Then all the assembly replied with a loud voice, "That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do." – *Ezra tells the people to put away their foreign wives, and most of them agree to do so to avoid the wrath of God.*

KEY PEOPLE:

Cyrus – King of Persia / Babylon (559-530); conquers the Babylonian empire and allows the exiled Jews to return to Judea and rebuild the Temple of God (538-530 B.C.).

Ezra – Priest, Scribe, Great Reformer and expert in the Law. Under his spiritual leadership the children of Israel put away their foreign wives.

Zerubbabel – "Prince of Judah"; Sheshbazzar was his Babylonian name; led the first wave of captive Jews back to Judah and there served as governor of the returning exiles

Jeshua – the High Priest, who returned with and aided Zerubbabel in rebuilding the altar and the Temple. His name is written as Joshua in Haggai and Zechariah.

Tattenai – the Persian governor for the territory West of the Euphrates, including Judah.

Darius I – Became King of Persia in 521 until 486, and decrees that a portion of the tax raised in the Judean territory that is under Persian governorship, but given to the efforts to rebuild the Temple.

Artaxerxes I – Becomes King of Persia in 464 until 424, and allows the second return from exile in 458 B.C.

I. INTRODUCTION:

- I. OVERVIEW: The Jews have been held captive in Babylon for seventy years. They are now allowed at last to return to their homeland of Judah. Israel's 'Second Exodus' is led first by Zerubbabel, then by Ezra, to rebuild the temple and revive the spiritual condition of the people.

God had originally brought Israel out of the slave markets of Egypt in the Exodus almost one thousand years prior (1445 B.C.) and set them up as a nation under theocratic rule. Hundreds of years later, before the events recorded in the book of Ezra, God told His people that if they chose to break their covenant with Him, He would again allow other nations to take them into slavery (Jer. 2:14-25). In spite of God's repeated warnings from the mouths of His prophets, both Israel and Judah chose to reject their Lord and to participate in the worship of foreign gods, in addition to committing the abominable practices, which accompanied idolatry (2 Kings 17:7-18; Jer. 2:7-13). True to His promise, God brought the Assyrians and Babylonians to issue His chastisement upon wayward Israel and Judah (722 & 605).

Where Chronicles ends, Ezra begins, in chronicling the spiritual history of God's chosen people—with a special theme in mind—the proper worship of the one true God. Moreover, Ezra incorporates this particular theme with his original readers in mind—the remnant who had returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, himself, and Nehemiah as these three books form a part of the longer series, Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah corpus. Some scholars theorize that Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah form a complete narrative comparable to that of the Samuel-Kings corpus.

1 Chr. 1-9	Genealogy lists from Adam to post-exilic Judah
1 Chr. 10-29	History of David's reign
2 Chr. 1-9	History of Solomon's reign
2 Chr. 10-36	Kings of Judah down to the end of the exile
EZ 1-6	First exiles return to Judah
EZ 7-10	The coming of Ezra and his reform
NE 1-7	Memoirs of Nehemiah about rebuilding Jerusalem's walls
NE 8-10	Ezra's covenant renewal ceremony
NE 11-13	Continuation of Nehemiah's memoirs

The book of Ezra begins with the decree of Cyrus one year after the Persian king overthrew the Babylonian empire (539 B.C.), and it chronicles the reestablishment of Judah's national calendar of feasts and sacrifices, including the rebuilding of the second temple (begun in 536 and completed in 516 B.C.). As there had been 3 waves of deportation from Israel into Babylonian captivity (605, 597, and 586), so will there be three returns to Jerusalem over a 9-decade span (536, 458, 445).

- II. TITLE: The book, named after its principle character, originally formed one work with the books of Nehemiah and Chronicles. Both the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and the Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome, named the book of Ezra "First (I) Ezra" or

“Esdras A”. Even though Ezra’s name does not enter the account of Judah’s post-exilic return to Jerusalem until 7:1, the book bears his name, meaning ‘YHWH helps’, as its title.

- III. AUTHOR: Ezra, the probable author of this book was a godly man marked by a strong trust in the Lord, moral integrity, and grief over sin. Given that Ezra is attributed authorship of Chronicles, it would have been natural and customary for the same author to continue the OT narrative by showing how God fulfilled His promise by returning His people to the Land after 70 years of captivity. Additionally, the concluding verses of 2nd Chronicles are virtually identical to the beginning verses of the book of Ezra, affirming his authorship of both.

Although Ezra is not mentioned in the book as its author, he most likely did write the book using various documents (4:7-16), genealogies (2:1-70), and personal memoirs (7:27-9:15) as sources from which he compiled this book. It should be noted that after his arrival in Jerusalem (458 B.C.), Ezra changed from writing in the third person to writing from the first person perspective. In his earlier writing, it is likely that he had used the third person because he was quoting directly from these aforementioned memoirs.

Both Jewish and Christian tradition widely attributes authorship to this famous scribe—a priestly descendant of Aaron (7:1-5). As a scribe, Ezra had access to the royal archives of Persia, which accounts for the myriad of administrative documents found recorded in the two books, especially the book of Ezra. Very few people would have been allowed access to the royal archives, but Ezra proved to be the exception (cf. Ezra 1:2-4; 4:9-22; 5:7-17; 6:3-12). His role as a scribe is spelled out in 7:10: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” What is more, tradition states that Ezra was the probable founder of the Great Synagogue, where the complete OT canon was first formally recognized.

- IV. DATE: The book of Ezra records the fulfillment of God’s promise to restore Israel to her land after the 70 years of captivity in Babylon. This spans the period of three Persian kings (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes I) as well as Jewish leaders such as Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezra and covers a period from Cyrus’s decree (538 B.C.) to approximately 456 B.C. following the second return of Jews led by Ezra.

Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26 are written in Aramaic and not the traditional Hebrew language. The linguistic similarities between these passages and other fifth-century Aramaic papyri from the Jewish community at Elephantine, Egypt, aid in dating the compositional date of the book to Ezra, who lived during the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 8:1-9; 12:36), approximately 444 B.C. Thus, Ezra probably finished composing the book between 456 B.C., when the events of 10:17-44 took place) and 444 B.C., when Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem.

- V. THEME: Given that Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah form a larger contextual corpus, the central theme and focus upon the spiritual history of the nation remains throughout the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In these books, God remains the sovereign actor of history and over history. Thus, history serves as theological purpose, depicting those events that God deemed necessary for “carrying” the story-line of His mighty power, merciful purpose, and miraculous redemption of man.

The basic theme in the book of Ezra is thus, the spiritual, moral, and social restoration of the returned remnant in Jerusalem under both Zerubbabel and Ezra. Israel’s worship was revitalized and its people were purified. Spiritually, Ezra reestablished the importance of the Aaronic priesthood by tracing his ancestry to Eleazar, Phinehas, and Zadok (7:1-5). More importantly, the book of Ezra traces the sovereign hand of God at work in the hearts of earthly kings to be so moved as to overcome opposition to reestablish Israel as Abraham’s seed, nationally and individually in the Promised Land.

- VI. LESSON: While the book of the Chronicles was written to encourage the remnant of God in reminding them of their spiritual heritage and identity during the difficult times they were presently facing, the book of Ezra now leads them out of captivity and admonishes them to further trust in God’s faithfulness and to accept the task of raising the new temple on the site of the old temple, all the while, remaining true to the Lord. The true spiritual foundation of the people was of utmost importance to Ezra. To further this cause, racial and religious purity, the law of God, the temple of God, and the priesthood are once again stressed upon their return from captivity. Ezra continues where Chronicles left off in stressing the blessing of their renewed covenant relationship with God.

In this, the book of Ezra presents a four-fold purpose:

1. To present the necessity for covenant renewal between the remnant and the covenant-keeping YHWH. This becomes the order of the day.
2. To rebuild & restore the temple and the city walls of Jerusalem as demonstration of God’s promises being fulfilled.
3. To reestablish the continuity, the idea of community, between pre-exilic and post-exilic Israel.
4. To indicate that the reconstituted remnant was indeed the legitimate ‘elect people’ of God. The remnant is those who return (1 out of every 4 Jews) from captivity. These are legitimately the elect of God and God is going to reestablish them as a nation once again. Conversely, those who remained in Babylon were excluded from the covenant renewal and are not part of the remnant.

II. OUTLINE OF EZRA:

- I. RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE UNDER ZERUBBABEL (EZRA 1-6)

a. FIRST RETURN TO JERUSALEM: (Ezra 1-2)

i. **Decree of Cyrus (1)**

1. These verses are almost identical with 2nd Chr. 36:22-23. Isa. 44:28-45:3 contains this amazing prophecy of Cyrus' coming years, approximately one century prior to the great Persian ruler being born. This decree is an amazing fulfillment of Scripture.
2. This decree would be rediscovered by Darius I some 20 years later (6:2-5)
3. The Persian policy regarding prisoners of war was much more relaxed than that of the Babylonians as the Persians encouraged the Jews to return to their land, to rebuild their temple, and to even pray for his (Cyrus') welfare.
4. To be sure, the Spirit of God worked in the hearts of the people of God and their captors. Even the temple treasures were restored to the Jews. The Jews could not restore temple worship without the appointed fixtures, so many of the articles that were looted (Dan. 1:2; 2 Kgs. 24:13-15; 25:13; Jer. 3:16; 27:16-22; 2 Chr. 36:7) was returned (Ez. 1:9-11).
5. Sheshbazzar (1:8, 11) is Zerubbabel's Babylonian name (compare Ez. 5:16 with Zech. 4:9), the appointed governor who leads the first return in 536 B.C. "the prince of Judah."

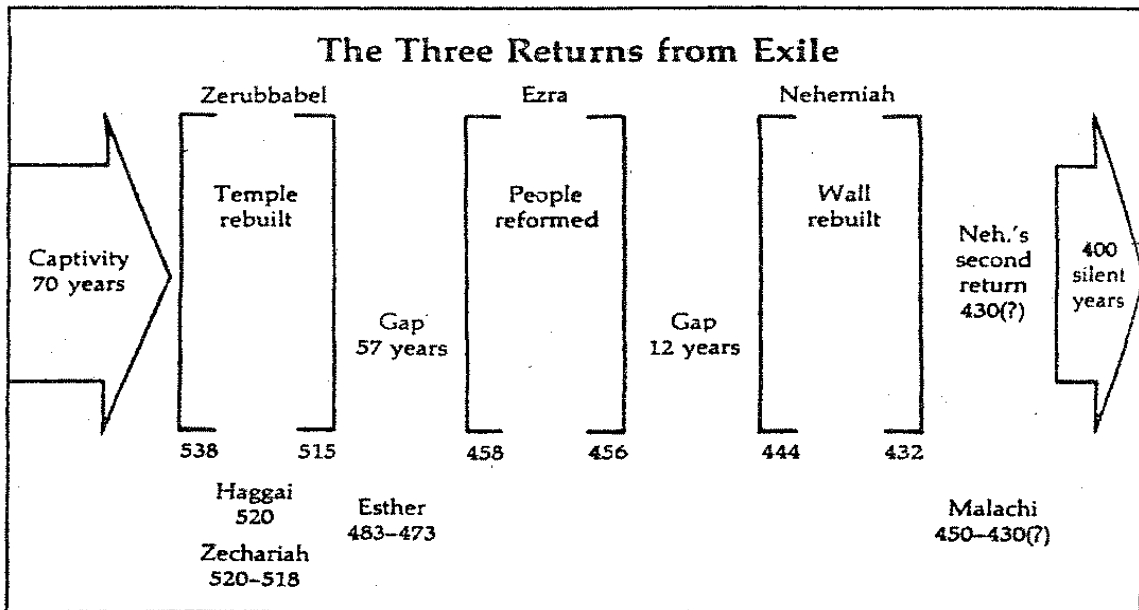
ii. **Census of the People (2a)**

1. The people, approximately 50,000 Jews were concerned enough to leave the safety and luxury of Babylon and return to their own land.
2. This same list/census is cited in Nehemiah 7:6-73, which indicates that some of these returned with Zerubbabel, some with Ezra and some with Nehemiah. This also helps to date the writing of Ezra around 444 B.C. as previously mentioned.
3. Note that this register is in special groupings:
 - The leaders (1-2)
 - Certain families (3-20)
 - Certain Towns (21-35)
 - The priests (36-39) – 4,289 returned
 - The Levites (40-42) – only 74 returned (8:15) due to their inferior status in relation to ministering priests
 - The Nethinim, or temple helpers (43-54) – descendants of the Gibeonites (Judg. 9)
 - Solomon's servants (55-58) – prisoners of war
 - Those with no genealogies (59-63)
 - The Total: 49, 897 men and beast were registered; all twelve tribes were represented in this remnant, "all Israel" (2:70); see also Acts 26:7 and James 1:1 (twelve tribes mentioned in NT). Ezra 6:17 records the priests offering

twelve male goats as a sacrifice on behalf of the twelve tribes (also 8:35).

iii. **Return of the People (2b)**

1. The journey from Babylon to Palestine would have been approximately 900 miles and would have taken around 4 months (7:8-9).



b. CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE (Ezra 3-6)

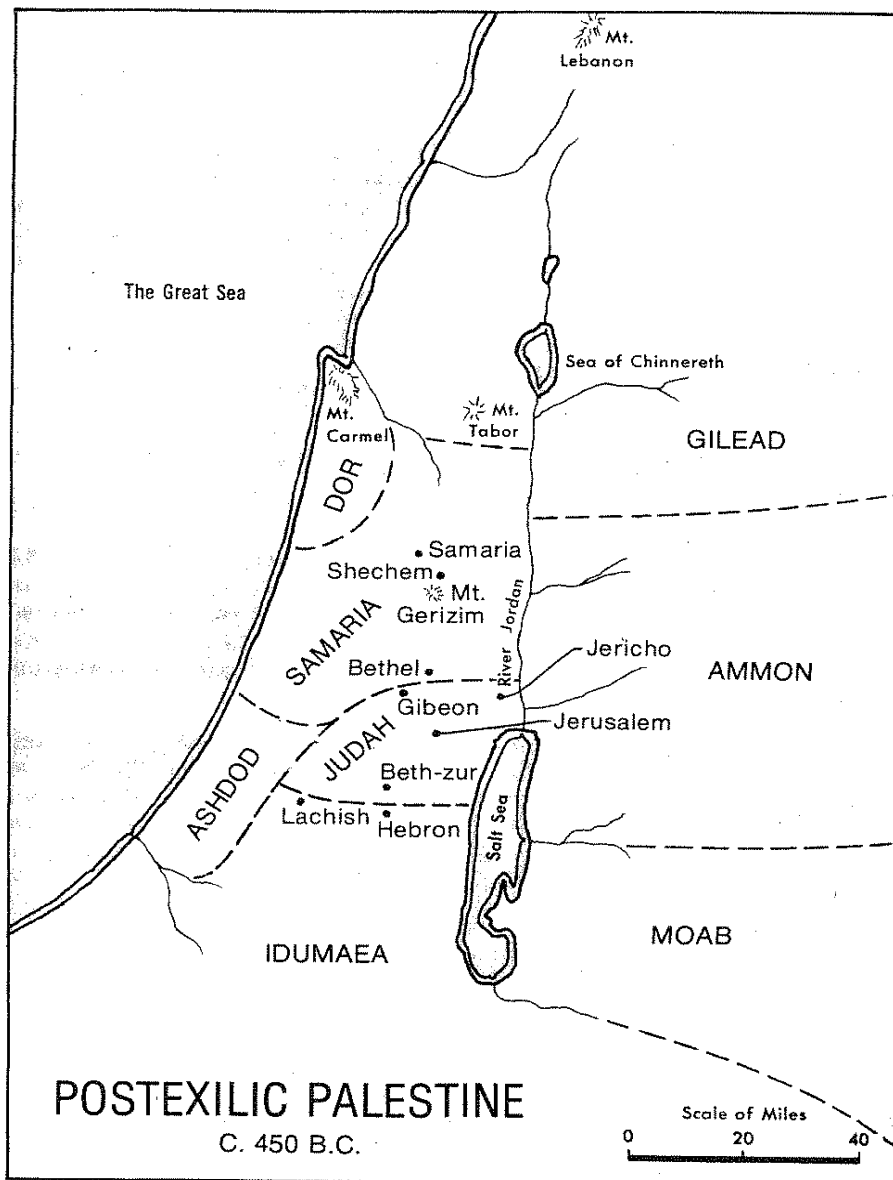
i. **Foundation of the Temple Laid (3)**

1. The altar was erected on the first day of the seventh month (Sept.-Oct.), which coincided with the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets and Booths (Num. 29:1-6; Lev. 23:23-25).
2. Construction on the temple began around 535 (April-May) and was completed in 516 B.C.
3. The pattern that was followed was that of the building of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 5:7-12).
4. The Levites were responsible in leading the work.
5. The people were so excited and grateful at the laying of the foundation that they sang (Ez. 11; ref. Ps. 136) – the Great Hallel sung antiphonally for temple worship.
6. Still, the older men weep at the site of the new temple as it was much smaller and less magnificent than that of Solomon's temple in all of its glory and grandeur. This would also occur again some 15 years later when construction efforts on the temple are renewed by Haggai. Haggai then reminds these men (Hag. 2:3) that it is not good to live in the past for this breeds discouragement.

ii. **Opposition to the Temple** (4)

1. Compromise (vv.1-3)

- a. In 669 B.C. Esarhaddon, King of Assyria transplanted Assyrians to Samaria where they intermarried with the Israelites (e.g. Samaritans). This was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 7:8) in 734 B.C. (2 Kgs. 17:24). Here the Samaritans are referred to as 'the enemies'.
- b. Zerubbabel and Jeshua refused to accept the aid of the Samaritans in building the temple because these were the intermarried race (2 Kgs. 17) with a false religion. Even Jesus rejected Samaritan religion (Jn. 4:20-24). As a result, the Samaritans erect their own temple on Mt. Gerizim and remained separate from the Jews.



2. Interference (vv. 4-5)

- a. The people of the land hired men at court, “hired counselors,” in order to frustrate and cease construction work on the temple. Their plan succeeded as work stopped (4:24) for nearly fifteen years (534-520).
- b. The Jews constantly had trouble with their enemies. Worldly people use every means they can to hinder the work of the Lord.
- c. Ezra 4:6-23 presents some complications as it seems out of place, so to speak. The kings mentioned in vv. 6-7, Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes do not reign until much later in time.
- d. Cyrus (559-530); Cambyses (530-522); Smerdis (522); Darius I (521-486); Xerxes I, *Ahasuerus* (486-465); Artaxerxes I (464-424).
- e. Regardless, we know that work halts in 534 while Cyrus was still reigning and work was completed in 516 (6:15). The best interpretive means of vv. 6-23 are to take this passage as a parenthetical reference by Ezra recounting the history of opposition that both he and Nehemiah faced. Tabeel (4:7) is Tobiah (Neh. 2:19). Thus, the opposition faced in verses 6-23 account for a later time during the reign of Artaxerxes and his father Xerxes.
- f. Verse 24 then connects chronologically with 4:5.

iii. **Completion of the Temple** (5-6a)

1. Fifteen years past between chapters 4 and 5. It is not until the Word of God is proclaimed by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (520) that the work of the temple resumes. The Word of the Lord had begun the work (1:1), and now the Word of God would encourage the workers to finish the work (6:14).
2. Tattenai, the Persian governor of the region begins to inquire about the work being done on the temple. The elders of the Jews (Zerubbabel and Jeshua) suggest that he should investigate the records in the Persian archives for find the decree of Cyrus, which gave them permission to do so and to have part of the royal treasury designated to pay for the expense of building the temple.
3. *Darius’ Decree*: Chapter 6 then records Darius’ decree and Cyrus’ decree was found and read (6:3-5). As a result, Darius not only confirms Cyrus’ decree but added one of his own, which provided for some of the taxes to be given to the Jews (6:12). He instructs Tattenai to give a portion of the taxes collected from this region to the allotment of the temple as well as to provide animals and foods for the temple sacrifices.

iv. **Celebration of the Temple (6b)**

1. The temple was completed in 516-515 B.C. (6:15) under the leadership of the elders, Haggai and Zechariah as well as the provisions by Darius.
2. Though the new temple was not as grand and glorious as Solomon's and there were fewer offerings at this dedication (6:17) than by Solomon (1 Kings 8:63), this was still great celebration and joy over its completion.
3. Priests were appointed as the Jews dedicated the house of the Lord and Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was reinstated and observed (6:19-22).
 - Between chapters 6 & 7 there is a 57-58 year gap. The Book of Esther fits in here during the reign of King Xerxes and covers the years between 483-473 B.C.
 - The narrative in Ezra is suspended as it ends in 515 B.C. and will resume in 458 B.C. with the second return of the people from exile.

II. RESTORATION OF THE PEOPLE UNDER EZRA (EZRA 7-10)

a. SECOND RETURN TO JERUSALEM (Ezra 7-8)

i. **Decree of Artaxerxes I (7)**

1. Ezra's priestly genealogy is traced back to Aaron (7:1-5)
2. Ezra the scribe (7:6, 10)
3. The second group of Jewish exiles return under Ezra's guidance (7:6-9) and took four months, March-April 458 B.C.
4. King Artaxerxes I now issues his decree (7:11-26) allowing for any Jew to go up with Ezra and return to Judah. These Jews took with them a large free-will offering from Babylon to assist in the work of the Lord. The king also had given Ezra an expense account from the royal treasury up to 3.4 million in silver, 600 bushels of wheat and 600 gallons of bath oils and salt.
5. Ezra's task is defined in 7:25-26 as he was to establish order and religious worship in the land. For the king's graciousness, Ezra issues this doxology (7:27-28) in expression of his gratefulness to the king and primarily to God for answering prayer.

ii. **Census of the People (8:1-14)**

1. Similar to the census during the first return journey, another is now taken of those families who will accompany Ezra out of Babylon, totaling 1496.

iii. **Preparation for the Return (8:15-23)**

1. Knowing how few Levites (Casiphia) and Temple servants (Nethinim) returned with Zerubbabel, Ezra has to draft them and

request for them to return with him (8:15-17). 38 Levites and 220 servants responded to Ezra's call to enlist (8:18-20).

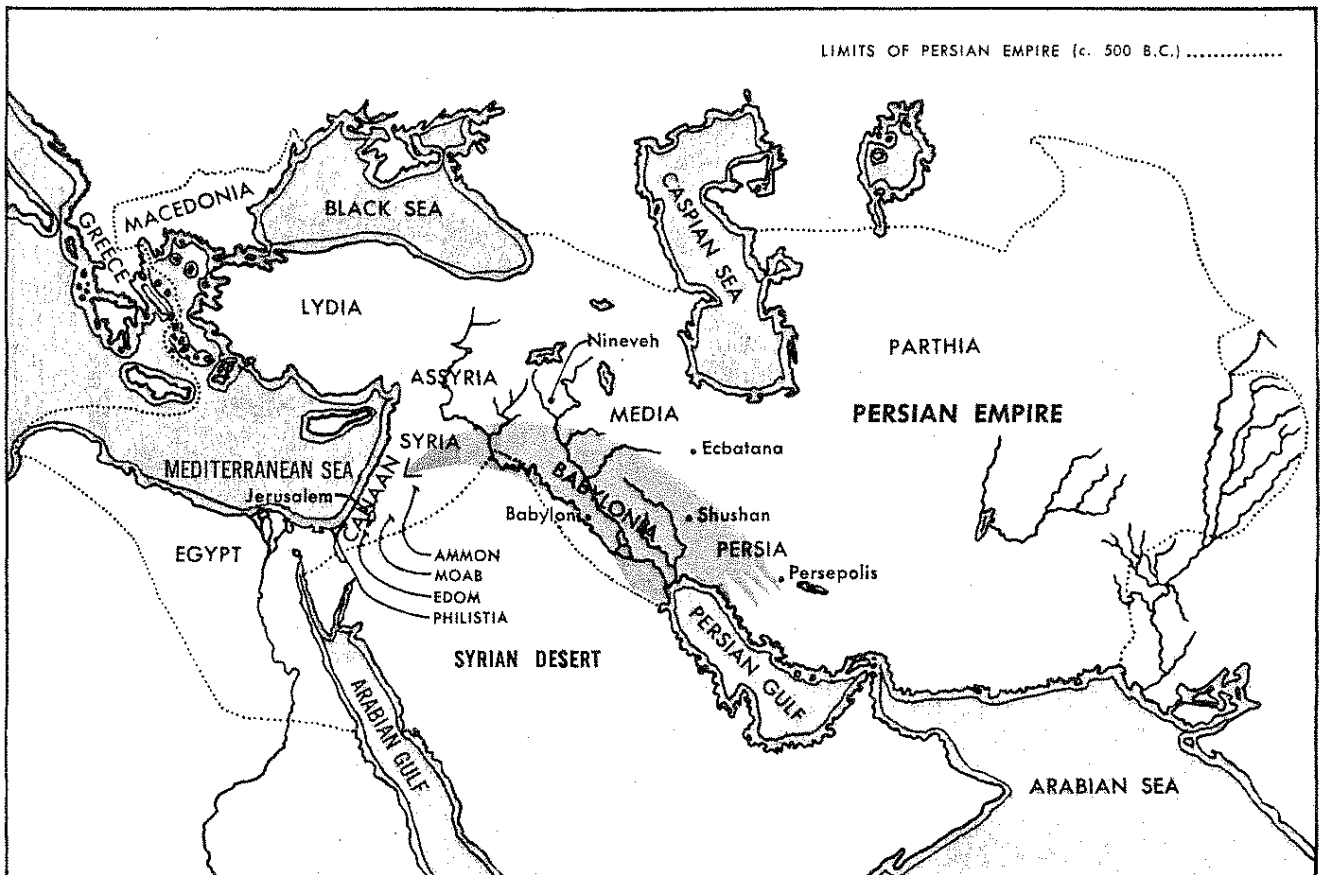
2. The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem was extremely dangerous, yet Ezra did not ask of the king for a military escort, but trusted in the 'hand of our God' to protect them on their journey (8:21-23). Still, to ask of an escort would not have been wrong as Nehemiah was given one (Neh. 2:9).

iv. **Return of the People** (8:24-36)

1. All of the king's provisions from the royal treasury that were intended for use in the temple were divided amongst 24 godly priests and men. They were to watch over these articles and utensils of holy use and then provide an account for them upon their arrival in Jerusalem (8:33-34). This is a great picture of Christian stewardship for us today as we are entrusted with spiritual treasures, the things of God, and at the Judgment Seat of Christ we will, one day, give an account of our stewardship.
2. Ezra and the people traveled an estimated seven miles a day for four months and eventually arrive safely in Jerusalem as the Lord protects them from enemies and ambushes (8:31-32).

GEOGRAPHY OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH-ESTHER SHOWING ROUTE OF RETURNING EXILES

MAP O



b. RESTORATION OF THE PEOPLE (Ezra 9-10)

i. **Ezra's Intercession** (9)

1. No sooner had Ezra arrived in Jerusalem (about 4 ½ months – 8:31; 10:9) than he is made aware of sin in the lives of the people. The problem of mixed marriages was brought to his attention (ref. Deut. 7:3-4; Ex. 19:5-6; Ps. 106:35). Burdened by this report, Ezra tore his clothing in sorrow and repentance, signs of indignation upon himself (Lev. 10:6; Neh. 13:25).
2. *Deut. 7:3-4* “Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.”
3. The Jews had mingled with heathen neighbors (Canaanites), who were Semites but pagans. Thus, the prohibition of marriage was not on racial lines, but on religious grounds. This sin had plagued Israel before and was a large part of the reason for their prior captivity (Judg. 3:5-6) and would continue to plague the nation in the time of Nehemiah and Malachi (Neh. 13:23-28; Mal. 2:11). This was a grave sin in the eyes of the Lord and Ezra understood the severity of their offense.
4. Ezra then offers a prayer of confession to the Lord (9:5-15). This is similar to the prayers of confession found in Dan. 9 and Neh. 9. This is 2 Chr. 7:14 at work in the life of the people.
5. In Ezra's prayer, though personally guiltless, he associates himself with the guilt of his people and acknowledges the past sins committed, present deliverance, present sins, deserved punishment and God's righteousness.

ii. **Israel's Reformation** (10)

1. God answered Ezra's prayer by touching and convicting the hearts of the people. They come to Ezra confessing their sins openly and offer to renew their covenant with God and to put away their unclean wives sparking a great revival amongst the nation.
2. The result was that a proclamation went throughout all of Judah, calling the people to gather in Jerusalem to settle this important matter. Whoever was guilty of intermarriage and did not come would forfeit his possessions as well as his place in the assembly.
3. The people gathered on Dec. 8, 457 and trembled out of both fear of God and because of the cold rain. The demand was that they must confess their sin against God and put away their foreign wives (repentance must always be accompanied by restitution).
4. The assembled people agreed, with the exception of four men (10:15), but the problem was so widespread that it could not be handled in one day. Thus, the leaders of the assembly aided Ezra in

cleansing the nation of this sin. It took from December to April to clean up the mess of the nation.

5. In all, the names of 113 individuals are listed (10:18-44) of which 17 were priests, 10 Levites, and 86 others. So thorough was the investigation that even the heathen children were exposed and expelled from the assembly. The passage implies that the Jewish husbands and fathers would have made provision for the welfare of these pagan wives and children, though they would live with them as husband and father no more.
6. Ezra 10 brings up the issue of how is it that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), yet requires it of his people here (10:3)? Some scholars have suggested that this concession for 'putting away your wife and children' here in Ezra 10 is not an establishment of the norm, but a special case in history. They argue that it seems to have been decided (10:3) on the principle that the lesser wrong (divorce) would be preferable to the greater wrong, that is, being polluted by intermarriage, so that the nation and the Messianic line of David would not be ended by being mingled with Gentile blood. To solve the problem in this way, they contend, magnifies the mercy of God in that the only other solution would have been to kill all of those involved (husband, wives, and children) by stoning, as was done during the time of the Exodus at Shittim (Num. 25:1-9).
7. But I submit to you that to hold to such a position would equate that God be placated and his wrath turned aside from the nation as it has been kindled because of their intermarriage if the people would simply commit another sin, though lesser sin. While this may seem logical to us and I do not deny that God's mercy and patience was extended to the guilty party here, sin is sin in God's eyes and one sin does not make another sin more or less of a sin. All sin warrants God's wrath, so divorce is not a special occasion here because it is the lesser of two evils, so to speak. My contention is that this is precisely the context in which Moses was addressing the nation in Deut. 24. This sin of intermarriage has always plagued the nation and will continue to do so as we have discussed. Christ likewise addresses this in Matt. 5:32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; and Luke 16:18. The proverbial 'exception clause' for divorce, only mentioned in Deut. and Matt., not Mark and Luke, is precisely what is evidenced here in Ezra 10. It is my belief based upon the whole of Scripture and coming to a difficult passage such as Ezra 10 and bringing the whole of Scripture to bear upon it and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and not what makes rational, logical sense to my mind, but the biblical exception for divorce, without getting into an even longer discussion is immorality (Matt. 19) and unchastity (Matt. 5), in the Greek, *pornonia*. So when Moses made the concession for divorce,

number one, it was because of the hardness of the people's heart, and number two, contextually, intermarriage was a problematic sin present in the life of the people. This is the key as well, God hates divorce and divorce is therefore, really never an answer even though it may seem like the lesser of two evils to us. God always desires reconciliation in marriage as marriage from the time of creation has always been sovereignly intended for one man and one woman for their lifetime. This is why God warns us repeatedly of intermarriage and the consequences it brings, namely, God's judgment. But in NT days, God further demonstrates how He does desire reconciliation versus divorce (1 Cor. 7) as in this context, Paul urges those who are married to an unfaithful spouse to remain married as a primary means of grace and testimony to the unbelieving spouse. The point is this: God did not momentarily hate divorce less and become appeased by the divorce of these 113 individuals. God has and always hates divorce, yet the concession he gives is for such instances as we find here in Ezra 10. But even with the concession, Christ and Paul urge us to forego divorce as an option altogether. In the end, do we trust in God's sovereignty over our marriages, that he has providentially given us to one another. Do we view our marriage as Christ (Eph 4:32) as it serves as a symbol of the relationship that exists between Christ the Bridegroom and His church. If marriage truly represents this symbol as Christ draws the comparison and even calls it a mystery, because it is not understood by many, ask yourself this one question to help give perspective then on divorce: Can or will Christ ever divorce His church? The answer is a resounding, "No!"

8. Unfortunately, this sin of intermarriage would occur again in Nehemiah's day and would require the same repeated discipline of the people.
9. To rebuild the temple without reforming the people would have been folly and Ezra knew this. It was easier for Ezra, however, to rebuild the temple than it was to bring the sinful nation back to a right standing before God.

NEHEMIAH

MEMORY CHALLENGE

THEME: Man in Charge: Rebuilding of the Walls

OUTLINE:

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|---|------------------|
| I. <u>REBUILDING THE WALLS UNDER NEHEMIAH</u> | (NEHEMIAH 1-6) |
| II. <u>RENEWING THE COVENANT UNDER EZRA</u> | (NEHEMIAH 7-10) |
| III. <u>REFORMING THE NATION UNDER NEHEMIAH</u> | (NEHEMIAH 11-13) |

KEY CHAPTERS:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Nehemiah's Prayer | (Nehemiah 1) |
| Reading of the Law: 'Bring the Book!' | (Nehemiah 8) |
| Repentance of the People | (Nehemiah 9) |
| Dedication of the Rebuilt Wall | (Nehemiah 12) |

KEY PASSAGES:

Nehemiah 1:5-7 "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses."

Nehemiah 2:17 "Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach."

Nehemiah 8:1, 3, 8 "And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel... He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.... They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading."

KEY PEOPLE:

Nehemiah – Artaxerxes' cupbearer; Governor of Judea; Supervisor of construction of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Ezra – Priest; Scribe; Great Reformer and expert in the Law. Under his spiritual leadership the children of Israel put away their foreign wives.

Eliashib – son of Joiakim and high priest in Nehemiah's day.

Sanballat – Governor of Samaria; sought to end construction on the walls; sought to assassinate Nehemiah as his arrival was a direct threat to his control of Judea.

Tobiah – ex-slave, now governor of Ammon; co-hort with Sanballat against Nehemiah.

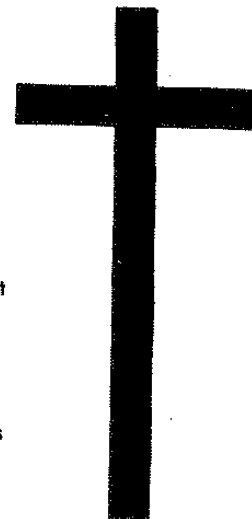
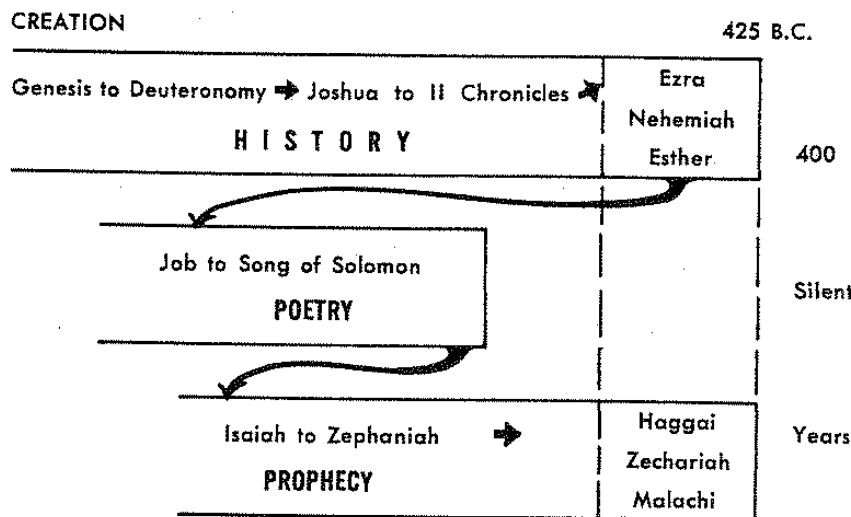
Artaxerxes I – Persian King (464-424) who was the son of Xerxes I and stepson of Esther. He allowed the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (444) under the leadership of Nehemiah.

I. INTRODUCTION:

- I. OVERVIEW: The book of Nehemiah continues the narrative where Ezra left off—of Israel—the story of their return to the Promised Land following 70 years in Babylonian captivity. Ezra tells of rebuilding the Temple; Nehemiah tells of rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall. Together they stand to tell the complete narrative of the Jew’s return from exile in Babylon to repossess their homeland.

At this time in Judah’s history, the Persian Empire dominated the entire Near Eastern world. Its administration of Judah, although done with a loose hand, was mindful of any disruptions or any signs of rebellion from its vassal states. Thus, the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls or of any conquered city seemingly posed a glaring threat to the central administration of the Persian empire. Only a close confidant of the king himself could be trusted for such an operation. At the most critical juncture in Judah’s revitalization, God raised up such a confidant to king Artaxerxes in Nehemiah, the King’s cupbearer, one of the most trusted and prominent roles in the empire. Life under the Persian king had its advantages for Nehemiah. Much like Joseph, Esther, and Daniel, he had attained a significant role in the palace, which then ruled the ancient world, a position from which God could use him to lead in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in spite of the implications for Persian control.

Of historical significance in regards to our context of the book of Nehemiah, Esther was King Artaxerxes’s stepmother (Est. 1:9) and possibly influenced the Persian king to look favorably upon the Jews. Second, the book of Nehemiah marks the beginning of Daniel’s ‘seventy-weeks’ (Dan. 9:25) with the decree of Artaxerxes in 458 B.C. Third, the book of Nehemiah provides historical background for the prophet Malachi. Nehemiah and Malachi represent the last of the OT canonical writings, both in terms of the time the events occurred (Neh. 13; Mal. 1-4) and the time when they were recorded by Ezra. The next message that God will have for Israel will not come for another 400 years known as the Intertestamental Period, or ‘silent years.’



- II. TITLE: “Ezra-Nehemiah” has not special meaning attached. Ezra means ‘YHWH helps; Nehemiah, perhaps, means ‘YHWH comforts’. As with the book of Ezra, the book of Nehemiah recounts selected events of his leadership and was titled after him. Interestingly, Nehemiah never appears or is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture outside this self-titled book and is not quoted by any NT writers. In the Hebrew, both Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book and viewed as a single work since they were written on a single scroll. Both the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and the Latin Vulgate, translated by Jerome, named the book of Nehemiah “Second (II) Ezra” or “Esdras B”.
- III. AUTHOR: Though much of this book was clearly drawn from Nehemiah’s personal diaries and written from his first person perspective (1:1-7:5; 12:27-43; 13:4-31), both Jewish and Christian traditions recognize Ezra, ‘the Chronicler,’ as the author. This is based on external evidence that Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book as reflected in the LXX and Vulgate. This fact is also based on internal evidence such as the recurrent “hand of the Lord” theme, which dominates both of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as well as the author’s known role as a priest-scribe.

The principle character from which the book derives its name, Nehemiah, has risen to a position of prominence in his pagan environment in Babylon. He was serving King Artaxerxes as his personal cupbearer (1:11; 2:1), an important responsibility in the king’s court that gives further insight into Nehemiah’s life and character. A mighty monarch such as the king of Persia would select for that position a man of wisdom and discretion, honesty, and trustworthiness. Nehemiah’s position reveals much about his intellectual capacities, his emotional maturity and his spiritual status.

- IV. DATE: The events of the book of Nehemiah commence late in the year 446 B.C., the 20th year of the reign of King Artaxerxes I (464-424). Nehemiah then flows chronologically from his first term as governor of Jerusalem (445-433; ca. 5:14, 13:6), which is recording in the first twelve chapters, to his second term as governor, possibly beginning around 424 B.C., as recorded in chapter 13.

The extrabiblical source, Elephantine Papyri, which was discovered in 1903, confirm the historicity of the book of Nehemiah, making reference to Sanballat (2:19) and Johanan (6:18; 12:23). This source also tells us that Nehemiah was replaced as governor of Judah by Bigvai around 410-408 B.C (10:16). The book of Nehemiah was then probably composed by Ezra during or after Nehemiah’s second term, sometime between (424-408 B.C.).

- 538 B.C. Cyrus decrees that captive peoples may return.
- 536 B.C. The first return and reconstruction of the temple under Zerubbabel.
- 516 B.C. Temple completed (6:13 ff).
- 458 B.C. The second return and reform of the people under Ezra.
- 445 B.C. The third return and rebuilding of the walls under Nehemiah
- 424 B.C. The walls of Jerusalem are completely rebuilt and dedicated

V. THEME: The obedience of Nehemiah is explicitly referred to through the book through the numerous references to his memoirs and first person accounts. Throughout the book of Nehemiah we are given insight into his personal thoughts, motives and even disappointments as he faces opposition. Yet, through these encounters with opposition, Nehemiah remains steadfastly entrenched in his personal faith in God. Though Judah's enemies try to intimidate and attack him, Nehemiah's life is marked by prayer and exemplary behavior as he trusts that the 'good hand of God' will accomplish the work in spite of the opposition and setbacks (1:10; 2:8, 18). By God's sovereign guidance and Nehemiah's resolute faithfulness, the walls of Jerusalem were completed in only 52 days (6:15).

- Nehemiah exhibited many characteristics necessary for effective leadership. Donald K. Campbell lists twenty (20) such factors in Nehemiah's life. Here are nine of twenty such characteristics that marked Nehemiah's life:

1. He prayed at crucial times in his life.
2. He patiently waited for God's timing.
3. He did not argue with his enemies and was not discouraged by opposition.
4. He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance.
5. He assured others that God was overseeing the project.
6. He established his priorities in order to accomplish his goal.
7. He took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan.
8. He investigated the situation firsthand.
9. He identified himself as one with the people.

VI. LESSON: Spiritual leadership is critical to the success of any work for God. Such leadership, as demonstrated by Nehemiah, inevitably led to spiritual revival and national reform. At the heart of this reform was a renewed commitment to the reading of the Word of God (Neh. 8) and true repentance on the part of the people (Neh. 9).

II. OUTLINE OF NEHEMIAH:

- The time-line of chapters 1-12 of the book of Nehemiah encompass approximately one year (445-444 B.C.). After chapter 12 there is a long gap of time (approx. 20 years) between the dedication of the Jerusalem walls and the time of Nehemiah's second governorship and national reforms (424 B.C.)

I. REBUILDING THE WALLS (NEHEMIAH 1-6)

a. NEHEMIAH'S INTERCESSION: (Nehemiah 1)

i. **Report from Jerusalem** (vv. 1-3)

1. Even though Nehemiah had risen to prominence in the court of King Artaxerxes I, his heart longed for his homeland, particularly the city of God (ref. Ps. 137 'Song of the Exiles')

2. Hanani, a blood brother of Nehemiah (7:2) and some other Judeans tell Nehemiah the status of Jerusalem, the condition of the city and the state of the city walls that were in ruin.

ii. **Response of Nehemiah** (v. 4)

1. The king's cupbearer (1:11) was crushed at the words of his brother, weeping, mourning, fasting and praying, a model of biblical response to news of great distress.

iii. **Request of Nehemiah** (vv. 5-11)

1. Nehemiah does not draft a plan in and of himself, nor rallies the exiled Jews to his cause as they would hear of the same news. Rather, Nehemiah falls to his knees and entreats God for help. With a broken and contrite heart, he prays to God, pleading for His *hesed* love, His steadfast lovingkindness, confesses sin and identifying himself with the people, acknowledging God's justice and equity in bringing the nation into captivity—God is righteousness in all His ways, and asking for success in the eyes of the king (Artaxerxes). Nehemiah knew that God controls the heart of the king!
2. This book shows that Nehemiah, a leader of God, was a man of prayer (1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). In fact, the book of Nehemiah begins and ends with prayer.

<u>NEHEMIAH'S PROBLEMS AND HIS PRAYERS</u>	
<u>Problems</u>	<u>Responses</u>
1. Walls broken and gates burned (1:2-3)	1. Grief and <u>prayer</u> (1:4), and motivation of the people to rebuild (2:17-18)
2. Ridicule of the workers (4:1-3)	2. <u>Prayer</u> (4:4-5) and action (greater diligence in the work, (4:6)
3. Plot to attack the workers (4:7-8)	3. <u>Prayer</u> and action (posting of a guard, 4:9)
4. Slander against Nehemiah (6:5-7)	4. Denial (6:8) and <u>prayer</u> (6:9)
5. Plot to discredit Nehemiah (6:13)	5. Refusal to cooperate (6:11-13) and <u>prayer</u> (6:14)
6. Tobiah moved into a temple storeroom (13:4-7)	6. Tossing out Tobiah's furniture (13:8)
7. Neglect of temple tithes and offerings (13:10)	7. Rebuke (13:11a), stationing the Levites at their posts (13:11b), and <u>prayer</u> (13:14)
8. Violation of the Sabbath by business activities (13:15-16)	8. Rebuke (13:17-18), posting of guards (13:19), and <u>prayer</u> (13:22)
9. Mixed marriages (13:23-24)	9. Rebuke (13:25-27), removal of a guilty priest (13:28), and <u>prayer</u> (13:29)

b. NEHEMIAH'S PRESENTATION (Nehemiah 2a)

i. **His opportunity before the king** (vv. 1-3)

1. Nehemiah prays for four months, day and night (1:4), and finally the Lord presents the opportunity to address the king and find compassion from him in this situation. Though King Artaxerxes had apparently been opposed to some of the work being done in Jerusalem (ref. Ez. 4:6-23), Nehemiah was sovereignly placed in a position of great influence over the king of Persia.
2. No man was to come before the king with a sad countenance (Est. 4:1-2), though this is exactly what Nehemiah does and the king takes notice. This is why Nehemiah is afraid (2:2). Were it not for the providence of God, Nehemiah would have been put to death because of this, but found favor in the eyes of the king. As a result, the king allows Nehemiah to make a request of him.

ii. **His request of the king** (v. 4-8)

1. Nehemiah presents his request to the king and queen (indicating this was a private affair as it was customary that the queen would not be sitting beside him if this were a formal banquet) and states his desire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it.
2. He indicates to the king and queen that he will return after a short period of time, which was later extended to twelve years (5:14). Still, he did eventually return to Babylon from 433-420 before returning again to Jerusalem. (13:6-7).
3. Artaxerxes Longimanus decrees (Dan. 9:25) that he be given permission to lead a third return to Judah and provides Nehemiah with letters and an armed escort for safe travel to Jerusalem. These letters both guaranteed his safe travel as well as established him as governor of Judah. As with Ezra, "the good hand of the Lord" was with Nehemiah.
4. Dan. 9:24-25 – "*Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.*" – King Artaxerxes decree (445 B.C.) begins week one of Daniels seventy weeks.

c. NEHEMIAH'S PREPARATION (Nehemiah 2b)

i. **His arrival in Jerusalem** (vv. 9-11)

1. Nehemiah delivers the letters from the king to the regional Persian governor (like Tattenai, Ez. 5:3).

2. His arrival was not met well by Sanballat, governor of Samaria, and Tobiah, governor of Ammon who saw his arrival as a further threat to their control of the region.

ii. **His survey of the city walls** (vv. 12-16)

1. Nehemiah is wise and understands that Sanballat and Tobiah are probably having his every move watched. Later we will even see that there are spies amongst the nation, noble Jews, who are allied with Tobiah because of family connections (6:17-19).
2. So, Nehemiah waits three days after arriving before inspecting the city and city defenses. Once he does survey Jerusalem, he does so under the cover of darkness.

iii. **His challenge to the people** (vv. 17-20)

1. The walls had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and were still in ruin. Nehemiah was greatly distressed by this and saw this as reproach and a source of great shame and disgrace. So, he uses this reproach to motivate the people to work with him in restoring the city to its former glory, both for the glory of God and the good of the people – “Let us arise and build” (2:18).
2. Immediately, the opposition was aroused, but Nehemiah comforted the people stating that God will give them success (2:20).

d. NEHEMIAH’S DELEGATION (Nehemiah 3)

i. **The pattern of work**

1. The work was organized by the spiritual leaders. God took note of each worker and put his name in the book. Each man was then assigned a specific task and area of responsibility.

ii. **The people at work**

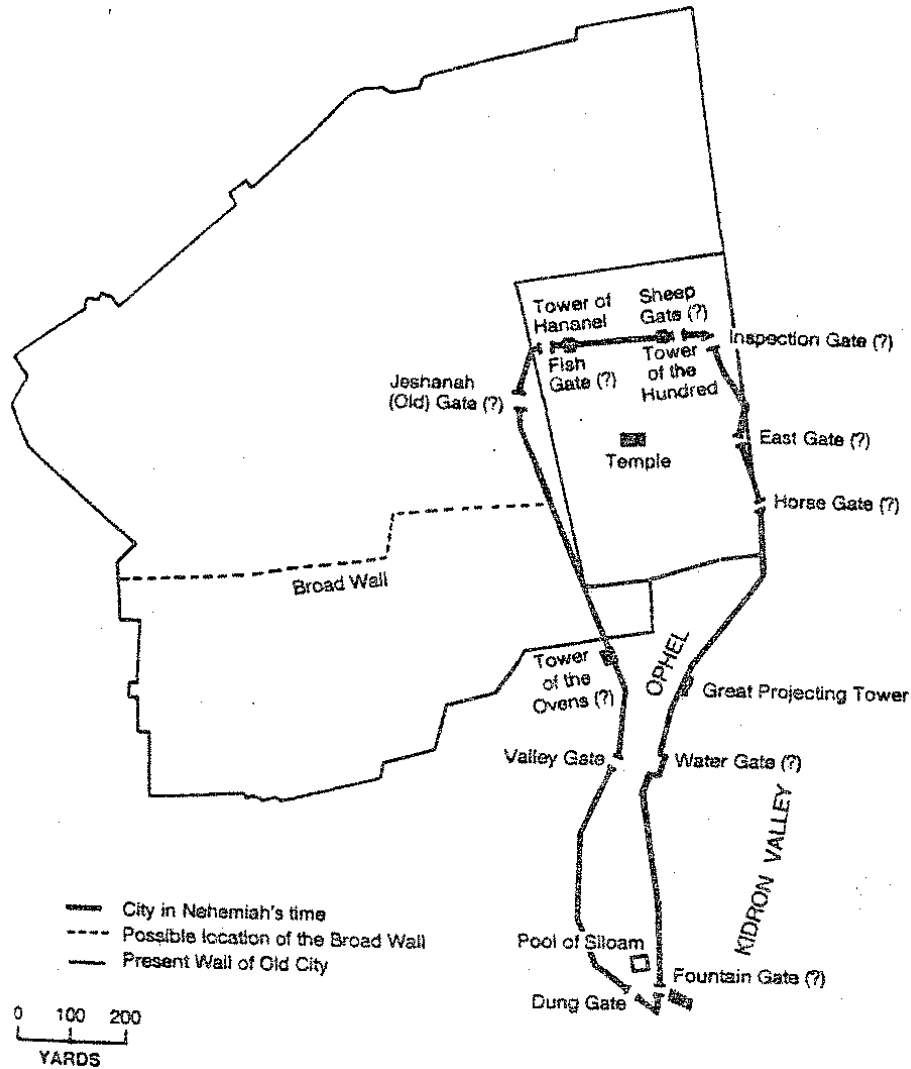
1. 42 groups of workers were arranged (priests, Levites, merchants, rulers, women, craftsmen, and even Jews from other cities). Some men were willing to do extra work. Some did their work near or at their home. Some were former backsliders that had put away their heathen wives and children (Ez. 10:31; Neh. 3:11). Still, some refused to work – the nobles of Tekoa, the birthplace of the prophet Amos, possibly out of fear of reprisal from Sanballat.

iii. **The places of work** – representing the full picture of the Christian life

1. The Sheep Gate – the first gate repaired; at the NE corner of the city through which sacrificial animals were brought into the city. Thus, the priests would have had a vested interest and priority in repairing this gate if sacrifices were to be reinstated and offered. This is the only gate that did not have locks or bars, symbolizing the door of salvation that is open to all. Further, this is the only gate that was sanctified, setting it apart for a special purpose. It

would be this gate that Christ would enter as our once and for all time sacrificial Lamb offering to God.

2. The Fish Gate – Located in the N section of the wall, just W of the Tower of Hananel. Serves as a spiritual reminder for NT believers that we are called by Christ to enter into this gate and to be ‘fishers of men’ (Matt. 1:17).
3. The Old Gate – at the NW corner of the city; this gate served as a reminder of the ancient, old paths and old truths of the Word of God (Jer. 6:16; 18:15).
4. The Valley Gate – at the SW corner of the city near the Tower of Furnaces. This is where Nehemiah’s reconnaissance began and ended.
5. The Refuse Gate – sometimes referred to as the Dung Gate, this is the gate through which the waste and refuse of the city were taken. Refuse was taken to the Valley of Hinnom through this gate to be burned. The Refuse Gate is located at the southern tip of the city.
6. The Fountain Gate – just NE of the Refuse Gate near the Pool of Siloam. The imagery of water speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and when viewed in connection with the order given of these gates (Valley, Refuse, Fountain) it stresses the marks of true saving faith—humility, cleansing and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
7. The Water Gate – this gate was on the E immediately S of the Temple; nearby was the tower adjacent to the city wall that guarded the eastern side of Mount Zion and the Temple. This is the seventh of the listed gates and speaks of the Word of God, perfection! Notice too, this gate is the only one not in need of repair (Ps. 119:89 “Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in heaven.”).
8. The Horse Gate – located E of the Temple; horses were symbolic of warfare and this could have possibly been the primary gate through which the military would have entered and existed the city.
9. The East Gate – just N of the Horse Gate and E of the Temple; this gate makes us to think of Christ’s Second Coming, His return from the E that we are eagerly looking to and awaiting. This imagery is seen in Ezekiel where the prophet witnesses the glory of God depart from the temple by way of the East Gate (Ezek. 10:16-22) and then return “from the way of east” (Ezek. 43:1-5).
10. The Inspection Gate – just N of the East Gate near the present Golden Gate; this gate is also know as the Gate of Miphkad, meaning the gate of appointment, account, review, inspection. This speaks of God’s future judgment, the appointed hour, in which every man will stand for inspection before God. Jesus may have entered Jerusalem via the Inspection Gate, which symbolizes for the believer that Christ has already met God’s inspection and those who are found in Him have no fear of God’s final judgment.



e. NEHEMIAH'S OPPOSITION (Nehemiah 4-6)

i. **External Opposition** (4)

1. Ridicule and mockery (vv.1-6)

- a. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem (Gashmu – 6:1, 6) were the primary opponents to the rebuilding efforts.
- b. Given that their father, Satan, is a mocker himself (Lk. 22:63; 23:35-37) they too ridicule the efforts of the people who they call “feeble Jews”; they mock the plan saying “will they finish in a day”, meaning how can these feeble-minded Semites come up with a decent plan that will actually be of success; and they attack the materials being used in the construction, calling it “stones and rubbish”.
- c. By this, Nehemiah was outraged because their words were a blatant attack upon God. Thus, he prays an imprecatory

prayer and asks God to kill them and send them to hell (4:4-5). (see also Ps. 139:19-24)

2. Conspiracy (vv.7-9)

- a. The host of enemies is growing as they conspire to attack the city while the wall remains only half-built.
- b. Nehemiah leads the people in prayer and instructs them to “Be on guard!”, “Be alert!”, “Watch!” This is also a common admonition in the NT (Mk. 13:33; 14:38; Eph. 6:18). We are to be on guard all the while praying lest we fall into temptation and allow the enemy of sin to creep into our lives.

3. Discouragement (v. 10)

- a. The threat of what seemed like an imminent attack on the half-built wall discouraged the workers

4. Fear (vv.11-13)

- a. Nehemiah recognizes their fear and seeks to comfort the people by calling upon them to remember the Lord and His faithfulness. This was the rallying point by which he then urged his brothers and sisters to fight for one another.
- b. Precautions were then taken: the workers are armed, trumpeters are positioned so as to sound the alarm if an attack comes, and those outside the city wall were encouraged to stay within the city for safety.

ii. **Internal Opposition** (5)

1. Selfishness – This is a sad chapter as we witness Jews preying upon one another. From all indications, no building occurs during this chapter because of the great economic burdens that were on the people. This was because of the famine of this time (Hag. 1:7-11), but primarily because of the taxes and tributes (mortgages and servitudes). The Jews were robbing one another. Nehemiah rebukes the people reminding them of God’s goodness to them personally, appealing to the Law, and the modeling his own financial practices. Ultimately the people vow to restore their ill-gotten profits and obey the Word of the Law!

iii. **External Opposition** (6)

1. Guile (vv. 1-4)

- a. Because the progress of the wall lessened the threat of attack, Nehemiah’s enemies devised a new plan to assassinate him. On four different occasions, they try to lure Nehemiah to the plains of Ono (19 miles N of Jerusalem) and on all four occasions, Nehemiah turns down their invitation. They say come to Ono, Nehemiah says “O No!”

- b. The point is this: believers are never to walk in the counsel of the ungodly (Ps. 1:1) and Nehemiah knew this. He recognized the significance of the work he was doing and prioritized his life such that he would not come down off the wall! We are to likewise, stay about the task God has called us to, seeing it through to the very end, and avoiding the temptations that would have us come down off the wall.

2. Slander (vv. 5-9)

- a. A fifth messenger now arrives but not with an invitation for Nehemiah. This time, there is an open letter, meaning that it would have been publicly read or posted for all to read, and was filled with false accusations against both Nehemiah and his people (It is reported...They say...I have heard...). It is possible that they even hoped that the Persian governor would read this letter or even King Artaxerxes and put a stop to Nehemiah's work.
- b. But Nehemiah immediately exposes their lies and lets his life and character refute every accusation (Who says...who are 'they'?) Nehemiah was a man 'beyond reproach,' a man of utmost integrity! Because he cannot control what his enemies are saying, all he can control in his actions and integrity, Nehemiah, therefore, brings the situation to the Lord and puts it in the hands of the Sovereign King, asking for strength to continue the task at hand.

3. Treachery (vv. 10-14)

- a. Shemaiah claimed to have a special revelation about a plot against Nehemiah's life and suggested that the Holy Place in the Temple would be the only place where Nehemiah would find safety. But the suggestion itself unmasked his treachery, because only the priests could enter into the Holy Place (Num. 18:7). Since none of the former accusations would stick to Nehemiah, the enemies attempt to attack his very integrity now because if Nehemiah would have entered into the Holy Place, his testimony would have been ruined and he would have been struck dead by God.
- b. But Nehemiah again prays and then goes right back to work on the wall!
- c. Shemaiah shut himself up in his home supposedly out of fear of the enemy, but in reality he was working with the enemy. Why was he not helping build the wall? It pays to be cautious around so-called Christians who always have advice but never seem to get any work done for Christ themselves (2 Cor. 11:26).

f. NEHEMIAH'S CONTEMPLATION (Nehemiah 6:15-19)

- i. The wall was completed in 52 days during the hottest part of the year; God was glorified and the enemy was embarrassed. Still, Nehemiah was facing pressure amongst influential Jews to accept Tobiah because of family connections.

II. RESTORING THE PEOPLE (NEHEMIAH 7-13)

- Having completed the wall, Nehemiah now turns his attention to the people. The material building is now complete; it is now time to begin to build the people spiritually.

a. NEHEMIAH'S WORK (Nehemiah 7)

i. **Establishing security** (vv. 1-3)

1. Nehemiah appointed gatekeepers, singers, and Levites at the city gates in order to secure the city.

ii. **Numbering the people** (vv. 4-73)

1. This census is nearly identical with Ezra 2:3-63. The emphasis here was likely on the repopulation of the city of Jerusalem with those of pure ancestry (11:1).

b. EZRA'S MINISTRY (Nehemiah 8-10)

i. **Reading the Word** (8:1-8)

1. Ezra returns to Jerusalem to help Nehemiah in the dedication of the walls and the sanctifying of the people. Notice where the people are gathered, at the Water Gate, which symbolizes the Word of God.
2. The time was the Feast of Trumpets (Sept., 444 B.C.) when Ezra began to read the Word of the Law to the whole assembly. This account is the first mention of a podium or platform that held Ezra and 13 others as he read the book (8:4).
3. The people often stood as a sign of reverence and humility, lifted up their hands as to symbolize receiving God's blessing, and prostrate their faces to the ground in worship and adoration.
4. The reading of the law was interspersed with explanation (8:7-8) as well as translating it from Hebrew to Aramaic as this would have still been the only language for many of the returned Babylonian exiles.

ii. **Response of the People** (8:9-18)

1. The Word of God convicted the people of their sin and they wept and were sorrowful and their disobedience, but joyful at the fact that the law was now given to them with understanding.

2. The people obeyed the law as they gained understanding and reinstated the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles, which had not been observed by the entire assembly since the days of Joshua.

iii. **Repentance of the People (9)**

1. Having clung to the Word daily, the people, two days after the conclusion of the Feast of Booths, acknowledge their sins before God. Half of the day was spent reading the law, confessing and worshipping (9:3).
2. Ezra then offers a prayer on behalf of the people, which serves as a spiritual summary of OT Jewish history (9:5-38).

iv. **Ratification of the Covenant (10)**

1. Chapter 10 denotes the names of the brave and godly people who entered into renewed covenant with God that day. Little did they know that their names would be recorded eternally in the Word of God!
2. What a Bible-Conference! And notice how it ends: with application. Having renewed the covenant with God, the people now separate from evil, straighten out their homes (10:28-30), honor the Sabbath (10:31), contribute to the house of God (10:32-33), and serve the Lord with tithes and offerings (10:34-39). They obeyed exactly as they had heard!

c. NEHEMIAH'S LIST (Nehemiah 11-12a)

i. **Jerusalem occupants (11a)**

1. Nehemiah now returns to the story of the walls, which had been interrupted parenthetically in order to tell the spiritual work accomplished under Ezra (Neh. 7:5-10:39).
2. 10% of the remnant was now chosen to live in Jerusalem (approximately 3044 Jews according to vv. 3-19).

ii. **Judah and Benjamin (11b)**

1. The remaining 90% of the Jewish remnant was to live in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, each according to his own inheritance.

iii. **Priests and Levites (12a)**

1. These are the priests and Levites that returned with Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ez. 2:2) almost a century prior (538 B.C.).
2. Though David had established 24 divisions of priests (1 Ch. 24:4), only 22 names are listed, stressing that not everyone returned from exile but chose to remain in Babylon.

d. NEHEMIAH'S DEDICATION OF THE WALL (Nehemiah 12b)

i. **The people are cleansed**

ii. **The choirs are assembled**

iii. **The sacrifices are offered**

1. The actual dedication of the walls is described here in Neh. 12:27-47. Ezra and Nehemiah divided the people into two great companies, with Ezra leading one and Nehemiah the other as they processed around the city walls with both groups starting in different locations and meeting at the Temple.
2. Similar to their march around Jericho, this was an opportunity to publicly thank the Lord for the work accomplished. As a result, “the joy of the city was heard from miles away” (12:43).

e. NEHEMIAH’S REFORMS (Nehemiah 13)

- 13:6 indicates that between chapters 12 & 13, Nehemiah returns to Babylon after twelve years in Jerusalem (445-433), as promised to King Artaxerxes (2:6). After spending thirteen years spent back in Babylon at the king’s service, Nehemiah again asks leave of the king and returns to Jerusalem (ca. pre-424 B.C.). Upon his return, Nehemiah is appalled by the spiritual state he finds Jerusalem: interrelational marriage, commerce and religious observances; Eliashib, the high priest, had given Tobiah a room in the court of the Temple; the Levites and priests were not receiving tithes and having to work in the fields; and the Sabbath was not being kept as God had commanded. Oh how quickly the people forget the Word of the Law as they had previously obeyed God and repented of this same sins (Neh. 9-10). Notice the standard that Nehemiah bring the people back to in addressing the errors of their ways (13:1) – “On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses”. As a result, the following reforms were again instituted.
 - i. **Reforms concerning Non-Jews:** Foreigner’s are excluded
 - ii. **Reforms concerning the Priesthood:** the Temple is cleansed
 - iii. **Reforms concerning the Sabbath:** the Lord’s Day is sanctified
 - iv. **Reforms concerning Marriage:** The heathen are removed (ref. Ez. 10)

With the full OT revelation of Israel’s history prior to Christ incarnation being completed, the Jews had not yet experienced the fullness of God’s various covenants and promises to them. While there was a Jewish remnant and the covenant had been renewed between God and this elect remnant, as promised the Abraham (Gen. 15:5), the number of God’s remnant does not appear to be even as large as it was at the time of the Exodus (Num. 1:46) – 603,550 men, so around 2 million Jews. In fact it is even estimated that those who did return to Palestine accounted for roughly 17-25% of those deported into Babylonian captivity (only 1 out of every 6 or 1 out of every 4 Jews remained in Babylon).

Moreover, the Jews at this time neither possessed the Promised Land (Gen. 15:7) nor did they rule as a sovereign nation even (Gen. 12:2). The Davidic throne was unoccupied (2 Sam. 7:16), although the High Priest was of the line of Eleazar and Phinehas (Num. 25:10-13). God’s promise to consummate the New Covenant of redemption awaited the birth, crucifixion, and resurrection of Messiah (Heb. 7-10).