

We began in January of 2009, to study through the Bible.

We followed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob - the 12 tribes - Moses - Joshua, the Judges, the Kings - then the apostasy and the captivity in Babylon. We studied the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which promised a return to the land. Last time we read through the story of Esther.

(I know - we skipped Daniel. We will come back to Daniel.)

And now we have come to Ezra-Nehemiah. The two accounts were originally one scroll. It was later divided. It is really one story. And the prophets Haggai and Zachariah prophesied during this same time period.

So today we will begin our study through both books:
Ezra and Nehemiah

So what are these two books doing way back after Second Chronicles??

TORAH- HISTORY AND LAW

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

THE JUDGES-HISTORY

Joshua

Judges

Ruth

1 Samuel (1 Kingdoms in Greek)

2 Samuel (2 Kingdoms in Greek)

THE KINGS-HISTORY

1 Kings (3 Kingdoms in Greek)

2 Kings (4 Kingdoms in Greek)

1 Chronicles (1 Paralipomenon in Greek)

2 Chronicles (2 Paralipomenon in Greek)

Ezra

Nehemiah (with Ezra = 2 Esdras in Greek)

Esther

POETRY

Job

Psalms

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

Song of Solomon

WRITINGS OF PROPHETS - MAJOR

Isaiah – pre captivity

Jeremiah – pre captivity

Lamentations - By Jeremiah – pre captivity and post destruction

Ezekiel - during captivity

Daniel - during captivity

WRITINGS OF PROPHETS - MINOR (Some to the North, Some to Judea in South)

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai - prophet of the return

Zechariah - prophet of the return

Malachi - 400 years before Christ

The time line of these books has always thoroughly confused me. So let's look at some websites.

<http://wwwFOUNDATIONSforfreedom.net/References/OT/Historical/Nehemiah/Nehemiah00HistorI ntro.html>

http://www.imagodeichurch.org/podcast/Ezra-Nehemiah_Timeline.pdf

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Bible/Writings/Ezra_and_Nehemiah.shtml<http://www.muncherian.com/ChronologyofEzraNehemiahEsther.pdf>

www.muncherian.com/ChronologyofEzraNehemiahEsther.pdf

Cyrus I (Cyrus the Great) - conquered Babylon -

Then made the decree that any Jews who wished to return to Judea could do so.

And the decree to rebuild the Temple @ Jerusalem.

First: Jeremiah had prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years. And it did!

(Jeremiah 51:1, 11; Jer 25:11-12; Jer 29:10)

Second: Isaiah's amazing prophecy which called Cyrus by name.

Isaiah 44:28 Who says of **Cyrus**, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure,

Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."
Isaiah 45:1 "Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To **Cyrus**, whose right hand I have held-- To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut:

2 I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron.

3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel.

4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.

(Isa 44:28-4 NKJ)

I'm sure that when the Jews read this portion of their scrolls to the King he was impressed.

TO BE FAIR: The Edict of Cyrus concerning other peoples, said much the same things about their gods and their temples. It was the policy of the Persians to free captured peoples, to return them to their homelands, AND to encourage them to live under their former laws. The new rulers felt that this gave stability to the empire. Law abiding citizens. Happy citizens - less likely to rebel.

THE CHARACTERS:

Sheshbazzar was the leader and governor of the 1st group of captives to return.

(Ezra 1:8, 5:14)

His nephew **Zerubbabel**, who had accompanied his uncle to Judea and led in the building project - continued as governor after his uncle. (Ezra 3:2, Neh 12:1, Hag 1:1)

20 years after the 1st return - **Haggai & Zechariah** - prophets of God - stir and inspire the people to finish the Temple.

Ezra - describes the 1st return, during the reign of Cyrus, but he does not appear on the scene until Chapter 7 - - - 70 to 80 years (depending on which commentary you read) after the 1st return. 58 years after completion of the Temple.

Nehemiah arrived 13 years later in 445 (approx.)

He was an administrator - and a good one.

The books make it seem like all of this took place over just a few years - but - NO.

Ezra was a priest and a scribe. He had devoted himself to the study and the observance of the Law of the Lord and to teaching its precepts. Josephus praised Ezra and wrote that he died at a ripe old age - in Jerusalem - the City he loved. He - as perhaps no prophet since Moses - realized that man "does not live by bread alone," but by every word of God." He brought the people back to the LAW.

THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT UNDER THE PERSIANS:

Under Darius I, at the height of the Persian Empire.

Divided into 20 “satrapies”

Which were divided into provinces -

supervised by governors (usually of royal blood).

Zerubbabel and Nehemiah were governors.

Palestine belonged to the satrapy called “Beyond the River” (West of the Euphrates)

Palestine included: Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine.

This was the first time that the term Palestine was used to refer to the whole region rather than just former Philistine territory.

THE ENEMIES:

Sanballat was governor of the north province of Samaria.

Tobiah was governor of Ammon-Gilead - the province on the East.

Gershem was governor of Arabia-Idumea - on the South.

Some wonder WHY these governors of other provinces would care what happened in Jerusalem. Why??? Because Satan HATES the people of God!! Satan put the hatred in their hearts.

The returning captives really held little but Jerusalem and its suburbs.

The Edomites (Esau) had taken over the southern hill country.

The Samaritans - “worshipped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought” (II Kings 17:33).

When Ezra demanded that the Jews separate themselves from the peoples of the land, it seems exclusive and intolerant to us - but it meant survival for the small vulnerable faith covenant community. The syncretism (mixed practice) of the Samaritans would have proved fatal. Ezra’s account of subsequent actions by those who offered “help” shows us that they were - in fact - enemies. Their motives were clearly subversive.

I want to be sure that I give credit here: “The New American Commentary” - by Mervin Breneman published by Broadman&Holman.

OPPOSITION:

1. By ridicule (Neh 4:1-23)
2. By plot (to stir up trouble) Letters to Kings
3. Internal opposition (by the Devil) - discouragement and fear

4. Internal opposition - extortion by the rich (5:1-5)
5. By trickery (6:1-19)
6. By intimidation (6:10-14) In this story Shemaiah, who was thought by many to be a prophet of God, (who was a priest - but not a righteous one, tried to get Nehemiah to meet him inside the Temple. But Nehemiah was not a priest - and could therefore not legally enter the Temple. Much earlier a man named Uzziah was stricken with leprosy for so doing. So Shemaiah wanted Nehemiah to break the Law of God, and incur wrath.)
7. By intermarriage (This had been the beginning of the fall of Israel - starting with Solomon)

LISTS OF THE THOSE WHO RETURNED

IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE LAW OF GOD - Blessing depends on it!!!!

Ezra read the Law - and the priests explained its meaning clearly.

Fascinating - that the priests who return with Christ for the 8th Day kingdom will teach the law, and settle disputes, and govern (rule) the people.

COVENANT RENEWAL -

The returning captive DID enter into a renewed covenant with Yahweh.

I find it incredible that the same will be true of the returning priests of God, on the 8th Day.

(This return - is **a type** of THE return - to the land.)

KEEPING THE FEASTS:

The first feast celebrated by the returnees was Sakkot. A man named Yeshua led out in the rebuilding and consecration of the alter.

The first feast celebrated AFTER the Temple was completed was Passover!

A couple of thoughts: It is possible that some of the captives from the North, who had been relocated by the Assyrians into areas within the new Persian Kingdom, probably “returned” with the Jews, Benjamites, and Levites. It is hard to believe that they retained their Israelite nationality for 100 years - but it’s possible.

During the captivity Aramaic became the principle spoken language of the captives. The Israelites had also adopted Aramaic script. A portion of Daniel is written in Aramaic.

BECAUSE THESE FORMER CAPTIVES BRAVED THE ELEMENTS, AND THE ENEMIES, AND PERSEVERED - WE HAVE THE OLD TESTAMENT. AND WE HAVE A SAVIOR

BORN TO DESCENDANTS OF KING DAVID - WHO LIVED AND DIED IN JUDEA.

So Let's skim through the two books - noting the highlights. I will tell you which verses I marked in my Bible, and what color I used. (I have a color marking system. With colored pencils.)