

OT Bible Characters - 4

Captivity & Return

Alan Hitchen

Contents

Daniel 1	1
Daniel 2 - Nebuchadnezzar's Dream	5
Daniel 3 - Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Interpreted	10
Daniel 4 - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego	15
Daniel 5 - Nebuchadnezzar's Journey to Faith	19
Daniel 6 – Belshazzar's Feast	25
Daniel 7 – Hand Writing on the Wall	30
Daniel 8 – In Medo-Persia	33
Daniel 9 - Dreams	38
Daniel 10 - Israel's Return	43
Ezekiel 1 - Vision Calling into Service - 1	48
Ezekiel 2 - Vision Calling into Service - 1	53
Ezekiel 3 (3-8)	57
Ezekiel 4 (8-10)	61
Ezekiel 5 (11-14)	67
Ezekiel 6 (14-24)	71
Ezekiel 7 (25-32)	77
Haggai & Zechariah	84
Zechariah	93
Visions of Zechariah	98
Prophecies of Zechariah	102
Ezra the Scribe	106
Ezra in Jerusalem	111
Ezra Confronts their Sin	115
Esther	118
Nehemiah	135
Malachi	154
The Prophets and the Nations	166
The Prophets and the Messiah	179

Daniel

Introduction:

Daniel is one of the more famous characters in the Old Testament. Daniel and the lions den have captured the hearts of many children. The “*handwriting on the wall*” is also recorded in his book. His faithful service to God, his interpretation of Nechadnezzar’s dream, his friends Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego being cast into the fiery furnace all make Daniel riveting. On the other hand, his dreams of the future have been interpreted and misinterpreted for centuries. Perhaps most important for God’s people is how God felt about him.

*At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for **you are greatly beloved**; Dan 9:23*

*And he said to me, “O Daniel, **man greatly beloved**, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.”*

*And he said, “O **man greatly beloved**, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!” Dan 10:19*

Yet he is never mentioned in the NT and His writings are mentioned twice, both about the same event. There he is noted as Daniel the prophet.

*“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ **spoken of by Daniel the prophet**, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Mt. 24:15-16*

*“So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ **spoken of by Daniel the prophet**, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Mk. 13:14-15*

Daniel Taken Captive

Like Jeremiah and some of the other prophets, the date of the book is given in terms of the king who was reigning at the time of captivity. Daniel was taken in the very first captivity which is dated 606 BC.

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the LORD gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. ... 6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Dan. 1:1-2, 6

It is this same event in the fourth year Jehoiakim that Jeremiah proclaimed would begin the seventy year captivity.

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), ... 2 which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: ... 11 And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 ‘Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,’ says the LORD; Jer 25:1-2 11-12

Yet with this decree is also given the prophesy that Babylon would fall at the end of these 70 years. Although none of those alive then would see it, the fourth generation would like to see it. Daniel later refers to this same passage.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, ... 2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Dan 9:1-2

Was Daniel a Eunuch?

It is implied in many different ways that Daniel was a eunuch. First we have the prophecy that God had Isaiah give to Hezekiah that some of his sons would be taken to become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord: 17 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the Lord. 18 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" 2Kings 20:16-18

When Nebuchadnezzar took the first people captive, he instructed "the master of his eunuchs" to bring some of the "children of Israel," both "kings descendants" and "nobles" to work in the "king's palace." All of these words are in direct fulfillment of God's prophecy to Hezekiah.

Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, 4 young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. Dan 1:3-4

When this "chief of eunuchs" hand picks "Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah," and gave names" to them, again there is a strong inference that they were eunuchs under his authority.

Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. Dan 1:6-7

Finally, it is stated three different times that Daniel had both direct and indirect contact with this "chief of Eunuchs." There is no further evidence than this, so it can't be stated with certainty, but there is a strong possibility that this is the case.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ... 11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ... 18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Dan 1:8, 11, 18

Changing the Names

Evidently it was the custom of Nebuchadnezzar to change the names of those who were conquered. Whether it was to humble them, help them forget their previous nation, or for some other reason. He did this with the kings of Judah after he conquered them and he did it with these young men, including Daniel. "Daniel" either means "God is my Judge," or "the judge of God." His name was changed to "Belteshazzar" which either means "the prince of Bel," or "Bel (Lord), protect him (or his life)." "... the name of the chief god of the Babylonians..." (from Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament).

The exact meaning of the name is disputed. The full form (דָּנִיֵּאל) is probably more correct, ... so that the sense will be God is my Judge... Others interpret the word as the Judge of God, ... This interpretation is favored by the Chaldaean name, Belteshazzar (בִּלְטַשְׁצַר, 1:7, i. e. the prince of Bel; Sept. [Theod.]; Βαλτάσαρ; Vulg. Baltassar), which was given to Daniel at Babylon (Dan 1:7),. (McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia)

To Daniel, he gave the name Belteshazzar. In Babylonian this name was probably Belu-lita-sharri-usur, which means "O Bel, protect thou the hostage of the king," a most appropriate name for one in the place which Daniel occupied as a hostage of Jehoiakim at the court of the king of Babylon. (Standard Bible Encyclopaedia)

bēlṭē ša'ššar: A proper noun designating Belteshazzar. The Babylonian name given to Daniel by a chief official,

while Daniel was captive in Babylon. The name means “**Bel (Lord), protect (him or his life)**” in Babylonian. Daniel did not recognize this pagan god but served the Lord God. (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT)

Daniel's Character

The very first event recorded about Daniel had to do with his purity, holiness, and dedication to keeping God's commandments. Since “*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*” (Lk. 16:10-11), Daniel's feelings toward unclean food is an indication of his attitude toward God. He alone seems to have raised the objection, but his friends were also added as being in agreement with him.

*But **Daniel purposed in his heart** that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Dan 1:8-9*

*So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over **Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days,** and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." Dan 1:11-14*

***As for these four young men,** God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Dan 1:17*

The reasons for the objection could have been the one Peter raised, or it may have been the problem Paul spoke of in Romans 14 and 1Cor 8-10.

In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." Acts 10:12-14

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 1Cor. 8:7

This meat could not be determined to be clean, it may not have been properly bled, it had been sacrificed to their gods, and the wine may have contained alcohol.

Daniel made the decision to not eat this food or drink the wine. Under normal circumstances this would probably have led to his death, which subsequent events prove he would have been willing to do. But God did something through his providence that led to a favorable outcome.

Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. Dan 1:9-10

The chief of the eunuchs wanted to help Daniel, but he had his own life to be concerned about. His concern is legitimate. He could have lost his life if those in his charge became ill or looked bad and investigations led to the conclusion he had changed their died.

And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. Dan 1:5-6

Instead of turning him down he expressed his concern which Daniel has a fair proposal which he know God would help him with. They would conduct an experiment. The four of them would eat the vegetables and water, while the other young men ate the food prescribed by the king. At the end of ten days, it would be evident if this would cause a problem or not. Again, God's providence works as their appearance is far better after just ten days. As a result, all the Jewish men under the authority of the chief of the eunuchs was given the same vegetables and now ate clean food.

Daniel's Growth and Development

Daniel's age is never given at this point in the account. The term youth narrows it down to under forty, because they were still young men who grew up with the 41 year old Rehoboam(1Kings 12:10; 14:21). The only real time we have to work with are the seventy years of captivity. Daniel was still living after those 70 years, so we can work out that he couldn't have been thirty and

probably wasn't yet 20.

He came as a part of a group known for being, a cut above others.

*young men in whom there was **no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand**, Dan 1:4*

At the end of the three years, God had again used His providence to give them knowledge and skill. Daniel had also been given understanding in vision and dreams. Whether this was known before Nebuchadnezzar's dream is not stated.

***three years of training for them**, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. Dan 1:5-6*

*As for these **four young men**, God gave them **knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom**; and **Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams**. Dan 1:17*

It was made clear to the king that there was something special about them. No one in all his realm could compete with them. "In all matters of wisdom and understanding," they were "ten times better" than everyone else in the realm.

Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. Dan 1:19-21

Yet in the subsequent chapters the king seems to have forgotten about them. Their skill did not lead to any special position. Perhaps it was their being foreigners and captives, or perhaps it was because they were from Israel and served only their own God.

Daniel 2

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Once again the problem with dates arises. Nebuchadnezzar had conquered and taken Daniel in his first year.

*The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, **in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Jer. 25:1-2***

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. Dan 1:1

So Daniel was definitely taken in that same first year. Yet it was only second year of Nebuchadnezzar when the dream came.

*Now **in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; dDan. 2:1-2***

The difficulty arises because the first chapter ends with Daniel finishing his three years of training.

*And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and **three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. Dan. 1:5***

*Now **at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in**, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Dan. 1:18*

Hence it is not possible for all these things to be done in the order the book had been written. Two possibilities have been put forth. The first is that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah was his first year as co-regent with his father and the second year in Daniel is after his father died and he took the throne. , giving Daniel the time to finish his training before the dream came. The second is that it was in the first year of Daniel's three years of training that he had the dream. We don't have enough information to know which of the two is true.

Nebuchadnezzar's dreams were so vivid and so troubling that he could not sleep. So he called all the idolatrous men who claimed to have the power of the gods to read minds, see the future, and resolve issues like this one.

*Now **in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. 2 Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. 3 And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream." Dan. 2:1-3***

Nebuchadnezzar's Challenge to the Wise Men

These men thought to do what they had always done. To hear the dream and then after giving some thought to it, giving the king the most likely interpretation, claiming it had all come from the power of the gods. Because they always spoke in generalities, they had a great chance that this would satisfy the king.

*Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! **Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation.**" Dan. 2:4*

But for some reason, he doesn't want to leave it to chance or worse to deception. He comes up with an ingenious plan to be certain that they can really interpret it. It seems clear to the king that if they can really give him the interpretation, they should also be able to tell him the dream itself. This was the challenge he gave to his wise men.

*The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "**My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. 6 However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts,***

rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation.” Dan. 2:5-6

There are two outcomes. The first is both logical and fair. If they can't make known the dream, they are fakes and imposters who deserve to die for deceiving the king. The second is the same. If they truly can give him the dream and the interpretation, then they have proven their worth and ought to be rewarded for it.

One can only imagine the fear and consternation among these wise men. They know they can't do what the king asks of them. So they first seek for the best solution, which is for the king to change his mind and tell them the dream.

*They answered again and said, “Let the king **tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation.**” Dan. 2:7*

But the king is in no mood for any compromise. He sees their reasoning for what it is, an attempt to put off the inevitable. His decision now hardens. If they can't make known the dream, there is only one outcome. They have been telling him lying and corrupt words to him from the very beginning and now their lies have caught up with them and they deserve to be punished.

*The king answered and said, “I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: **9 if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation.**” Dan. 2:8-9*

These men have now reached the level of despair. They know that no one can do what the king has asked of them. No one has ever demanded such a thing from any astrologer or idolatrous priest. Their answer reveals their impotence and lack of any real relationship with the “gods.” If they had the power they had been claiming all along, they could have easily done this. They are like those who proclaim they can heal all diseases, yet they never go to a real hospital and help real people. If a truly sick person were brought before them, they too would be proven to be frauds.

*The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, “**There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.**” Dan. 2:10-11*

The king now sees that he has been deceived all these years and that no one truly has any power. He will never know the interpretation of the dream which has troubled him. Although his anger and fury reveal his character, there is a fairness in his judgment. The account is clear. He immediately began to carry out his threat of punishment. Even Daniel is not exempt from this sentence.

*For this reason **the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. 13 So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.** Dan. 2:12-13*

Daniel Intervenes

When Daniel becomes aware of his danger, he first seeks to find out its cause. Either he was left out or chose not to come, but he had attended this event, so he did not know the outcome. When the danger is revealed to him, he first seeks to find out the cause. The captain was evidently not happy with this task and possibly was a friend to Daniel so instead of simply killing him as commanded, he gives him the explanation Daniel seeks.

*Then **with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon; 15 he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, “Why is the decree from the king so urgent?”** Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel. Dan. 2:14-19*

Although it says that Daniel went in to the presence of the king to ask him for the time necessary to get the interpretation, the later account modifies it to he sent word to the king that an answer could be given and he should wait for that outcome. The king, seeing a ray of hope that he might get the answer he sought, granted his request. Daniel then went to his three friends and after

informing them of the problem asked their help by adding their prayers to his in finding the answer the king sought. It is evident that his request is not to save the lives of the idolatrous men who have been deceiving the king, but in saving his own life and that of his friends.

*So Daniel went in and **asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation.** 17 Then Daniel went to his house, and **made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions,** 18 that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that **Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.** Dan. 2:16-18*

As they prayed and pleaded with God the secret was revealed to him. This time God did not send a dream, but a vision. Daniel praised and glorified God for giving him the answer and thus sparing his life and that of his three friends.

*Then **the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision.** So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Dan. 2:19*

Dreams and Visions

Introduction:

God has spoken to men through dreams and visions from the very beginning. This is summed up by God as He defended Moses against the murmuring of Miriam and Aaron against Moses. We have a long list of both dreams and visions.

*Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, **I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream.** 7 Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8 I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?" Num. 12:6-8*

For sake of ease of seeing them, the dreams are first and the visions later. There is some difficulty in telling the difference. Some visions are given while awake while dreams are always while someone is asleep. Yet many dreams are later called visions and occasionally visions are called dreams.

Peter thought he saw a vision when the angel was leading him out of prison and Paul did not know if his vision of the third heaven was done while was in his body, or if God had taken him out of his body. In some dreams and visions, men speak to God or to an angel.

Dreams

*But God **came to Abimelech in a dream by night,** and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." Gen. 20:3*

*Then **he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth,** and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Gen. 28:12*

*Then **the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream,** Gen. 31:11*

*But **God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night,** and said to him, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad." Gen. 31:24*

*Now **Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers;** and they hated him even more. Gen. 37:5-6*

*And they said to him, "**We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it.**" So Joseph said to them, "**Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please.**" Gen. 40:8*

*Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "**The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do:** 26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads are seven years; the dreams are one. Gen. 41:25-27*

When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. 6 And when Saul inquired of the Lord, **the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.** 1 Sam 28:5-6

At Gibeon **the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night**; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" 1 Kings 3:5

"I have heard what the prophets have said who **prophecy lies in My name**, saying, '**I have dreamed, I have dreamed!**' 26 How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophecy lies? Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, Jer. 23:25-27

"The **prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream**; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the Lord. Jer. 23:28

As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and **Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.** Dan. 1:17

"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, **Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions.** Joel 2:28

But while he thought about these things, behold, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Mt. 1:20-21

Then, **being divinely warned in a dream** that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of **the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream**, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." Mt. 2:12-13

Now when Herod was dead, behold, **an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt**, 20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." ... And **being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee.** 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, Mt. 2:19-23

Visions

10 Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears." 15 So Samuel lay down until morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And **Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision.** 1Sam. 3:10,15

4 But it happened that night that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, 5 "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: "**According to all these words and according to all this vision**, so Nathan spoke to David. 2Sam. 7:4-5, 17

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Isa. 1:1

And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; **they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.** Jer. 14:14-15

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that **the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.** Ezek. 1:1-2

He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and **brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem**, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy. Ezek. 8:3-4

Then the Spirit took me up and **brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea**, to those in captivity. And the vision that I had seen went up from me. Ezek. 11:24-25

Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: Dan. 2:28

I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. Dan. 4:5-6

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, **Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed**. Then **he wrote down the dream**, telling the main facts. 2 Daniel spoke, saying, **“I saw in my vision by night**, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. Dan. 7:1-3

Then the Lord answered me and said: **“Write the vision And make it plain on tablets**, That he may run who reads it. 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. Hab. 2:2-3

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, **“Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”** Mt. 17:9

But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and **they perceived that he had seen a vision** in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. Luke 1:22

When they did not find His body, **they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.** Luke 24:23

Now there was a certain disciple **at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.”** And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12 **And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in** and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” Acts 9:10-12

About the ninth hour of the day **he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in** and saying to him, “Cornelius!” Acts 10:3

Now while **Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant**, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius ... 19 While **Peter thought about the vision**, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you Acts 10:17, 19

“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and **in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet**, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. Acts 11:5-6

So he went out and followed him, and **did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.** Acts 12:9-10

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 Now **after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia**, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:9-10

Now **the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision**, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; Acts 18:9

14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 19 “Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, “Therefore, King Agrippa, **I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision**, Acts 26:14, 19

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. **I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:** 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — **whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a one was caught up to the third heaven.** 2Cor. 12:1-3

Daniel 3

Introduction/Review

Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that is so vivid and so different from any other dream he has ever had. He wants the true interpretation so badly that he refuses to tell his wise men and enchanters (those who claim revelation from their god or supernatural power to see into the future). He knows that once they know the dream it will be easy for them to fabricate an interpretation. In his quest to know the meaning of the dream he does something that no king before him had ever done.

The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." Dan. 2:10-11

He is so enraged at their inability that he decrees death to them.

For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. Dan 2:12

Before we judge him too harshly, we need to remember that he had supported these men all these years because he believed they truly had the power to help him see the future. If they can't fulfill this request, it proved to him that they had deceived him all these years and taken his money without really giving him any service at all. He doesn't give them any more time but immediately sends out captain of his guard to arrest them, then either immediately, or some time later executed them.

When Daniel heard that his life and that of his three friends was now in danger, he went to his home and with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah begin to plead with God for knowledge of the dream and its interpretation. God heard their prayers and gave Daniel the knowledge he sought.

Daniel's Praise to God

What Daniel said to God is recorded (Dan. 2:20-23). This may have been a prayer, and it may have later been made into a Psalm. It covers every aspect of God's gift to Daniel. Praising God's name of His amazing attributes that gave to Daniel what he needed to save his life.

*Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His
And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings
He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding
He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him
I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might
And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand*

He spoke of God's power to change **times and seasons** (referring to the history of man and the nations God would set up and take away).

And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. Acts 1:7-8

He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, Acts 17:26-27

He also **removes kings and raises up kings**

This will be one of the central themes of the book of Daniel.

In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.' Dan 4:17

25 till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He

chooses. **26 your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules.** Dan. 4:25-26, 32; 5:21

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Rom 13:1-2

Wisdom to the wise, knowledge to the understanding, reveals secret and dark things, knows what is in the darkness.

This is another important thing to remember in order to give God the praise and adoration due to Him. No one with wisdom can glory in that wisdom. It is a gift from God, both in whatever natural abilities one has and also whatever God has done to supplement them. We must never forget that what God did for Solomon He does for all to a lesser degree.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. Jas. 1:5-6

God had just revealed a dark secret to Daniel, but it is a small thing compared to what God has the ability to do.

You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. 3 You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. ...6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it. ...14 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. Ps 139:2-4, 6

Daniel Tells Nebuchadnezzar's the Contents of his Dream

It is the opening words of this account that forced us to understand what was said in verse 16 in a more general way. The king held off his decree to kill the wise men because of Daniel's words, but it appears from the later account that the king did not know exactly who would bring him the interpretation. Daniel returned to Arioch and told him he would not have to destroy these wise men. He asked to be taken before the king where he would give the interpretation. He didn't tell Arioch that he also knew the dream itself, but waited until he was in the presence of the king.

16 So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation. ... 24 Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation." 25 Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation." Dan. 2:24-25

Nebuchadnezzar has not changed his stance and position. He is still demanding the contents of the dream before he will accept any attempt at the interpretation. Daniel is now in the presence of the king and made it clear as had been said earlier that these men could never meet the king's demand. No man on earth could tell another man his dream because "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. (1Cor. 2:11). Only God knows the thoughts of all men.

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. 1 Chr. 28:9-10

Daniel made a contrast between those who serve the God who created the world and the abilities of those who follow any idols. Those who follow idols can't do it, but a servant of God can. Yet even with that Daniel took no credit. All the glory belonged to God. It was the God of heaven who had revealed these things.

The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?" 27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the

magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. 28 But **there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.** Dan. 2:26-28

God had told Israel something very similar under the preaching of Isaiah. No one but God can declare the end from the beginning. It is interesting that in the passage God proclaimed the very impossibility that those who serve idols also knew. Only God can do this.

*"I have **declared the former things from the beginning**; They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and **they came to pass**. 4 Because I knew that you were obstinate, And your neck was an iron sinew, And your brow bronze, 5 Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; **Before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, And my carved image and my molded image Have commanded them.'** ... I have **made you hear new things from this time, Even hidden things, and you did not know them**. 7 They are **created now and not from the beginning**; And **before this day you have not heard them**, Lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.' 8 Surely you did not hear, Surely you did not know; Surely from long ago your ear was not opened. For I knew that you would deal very treacherously, And were called a transgressor from the womb. Isa 48:3-5, 6-8*

Not only would Daniel recount the dream, but also what Nebuchadnezzar was thinking about before he fell asleep. He tells him that God was actually revealing to Nebuchadnezzar the things that would happen in the latter days. He reminded Nebuchadnezzar of his thoughts before falling asleep that night. He had been thinking about what the future might hold. Daniel then emphasized again that he had nothing to do with this interpretation, but that all was given by God. God simply wanted to give Nebuchadnezzar the answer to his questions. The dream was actually that answer.

*As for you, O king, **thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this**; and He who reveals secrets has **made known to you what will be**. 30 But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, **(to the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king ASV)**, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart. Dan. 2:29-30*

One can only dimly imagine what this must have done in the king's heart. While it began with some general words, he got more specific as the content of the dream is revealed. His eyes must have grown wider and wider and his heart must have been filled with astonishment, awe and amazement.

An Image with Four Metals, with Feet of Iron and Clay Mixed

The dream is simple and straightforward. It is a great image of a man, but made with different metals that are all blended into a whole. God also gave to this image a glory and splendor that exceeded the metals it was made of. There are five parts of the image. A head of fine gold, the chest and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron, and its feet a mixture of iron and clay, rendering the image very unstable.

The dream continued with a stone cut out of the ground that began to roll. Whether it rolled because it was on a hill or mountain, or just started moving on its own, only Nebuchadnezzar knows. But it rolled into the image and the image was broken into pieces so small that they became like chaff and the wind blew it away. But then the rock grew into a great mountain that filled the entire earth.

*"You, O king, were watching; and behold, **a great image!** This great image, whose **splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome**. 32 This image's **head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze**, 33 **its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay**. 34 You watched while **a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces**. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were **crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.** Dan. 2:31-35*

Daniel didn't give the king time to say anything, but immediately moved into the interpretation.

Daniel Told Nebuchadnezzar's the Interpretation of his Dream

As one can see from the image below, through this dream God has revealed to king Nebuchadnezzar the future. God already knows who will rule in the kingdoms of men for the next 600 years. Not only who would be ruling, but which nations they would be ruling over. God had already done this with Cyrus in Isaiah.

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.'" Cyrus, God's Instrument 45 "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: Isa. 44:28-45

Since Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, The image begins It has already begun with this king. He is the head of gold. Although God does not reveal this to Daniel or Nebuchadnezzar, this kingdom will be of a very short duration of less than 50 years. God intended to punish Babylon even before the Jews were allowed back to their own land

Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 37 You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all — you are this head of gold. Dan 2:36-38

In this dream God doesn't give the details he will give to Daniel in chapter seven and eight. But to Nebuchadnezzar it is revealed there will be three lessor kingdoms following his. The second kingdom will be of silver, the third bronze and the fourth iron.

*But after you shall arise **another kingdom inferior to yours**; then another, **a third kingdom of bronze**, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And **the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron**, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Dan. 2:39-40*

As can be seen from the Seventh chapter, the figures are changed from an image to animals, but the same kingdoms are described.

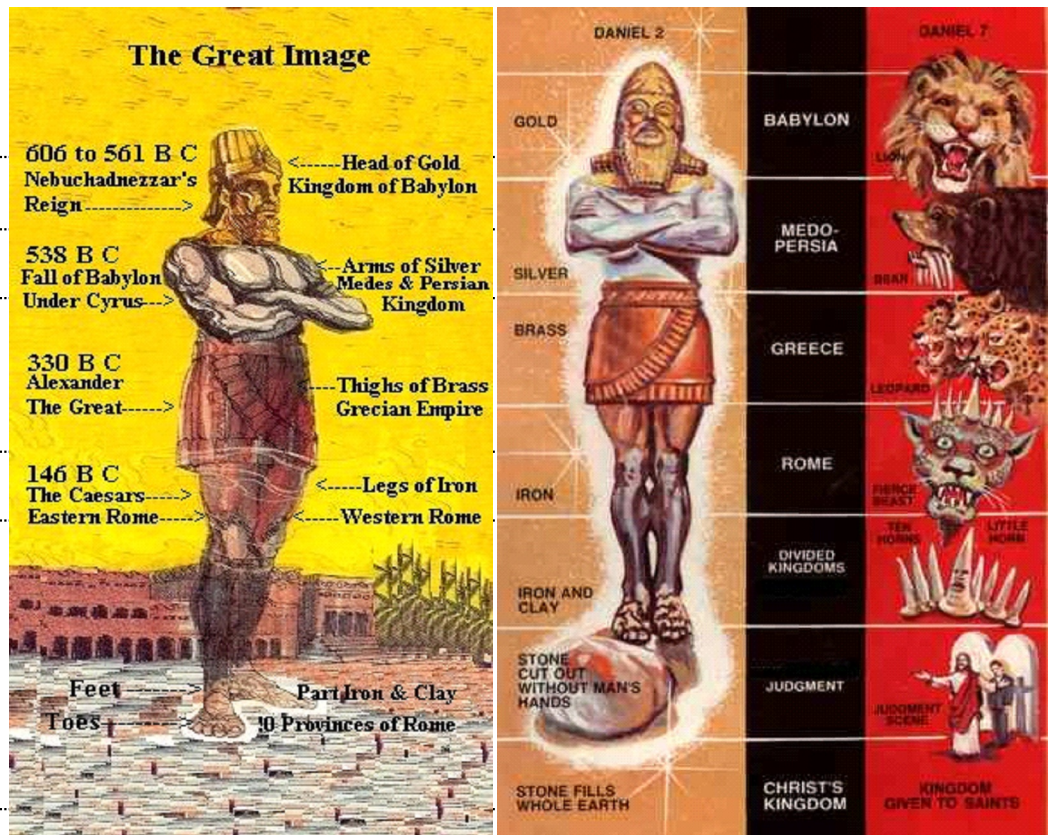
Dan 7:4-7; 8:1-27

The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings.

suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear.

a ram— two horns, the kings of Media and Persia

a male goat came from the west, ... the male goat is Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation



The fourth kingdom is not identified in Daniel. Later history revealed it to be Rome.

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar and the two dreams/visions of Daniel reveal the same events emphasizing different aspects. We will look at them more fully later in the class.

God will set up a Kingdom

The final interpretation is the most important of all. Once again illustrating that God rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever he chooses. God will set up a kingdom that can never be destroyed while at the same time destroying all these other kingdoms

*And in the days of these kings the **God of heaven will set up a kingdom** which shall **never be destroyed**; and the kingdom shall **not be left to other people**; it shall **break in pieces** and **consume all these kingdoms**, and it **shall stand forever**. 45 Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold — **the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.**" Dan 2:44-45*

Although It is not mentioned again, in the original dream this stone became a great mountain.

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days **That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains**, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. 3 Many people shall come and say, "Come, and **let us go up to the mountain of the Lord**, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. NKJV Isa 11:1-2 11 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isa. 2:2-3*

***They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain**, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. 10 "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious." Isa. 11:9-10*

***Even them I will bring to My holy mountain**, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." Isa. 56:7*

***But you have come to Mount Zion** and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. Heb. 12:22-24*

Daniel 4 - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

Introduction/Review

God first brought Daniel and his three friends to the attention of Nebuchadnezzar after their initial training when they were interviewed and found to be “ten times better” than every other wise men in his kingdom.

Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better Dan. 1:19-20

Later after the failure of all his wise men to make known the dream, God revealed it to Daniel. After Daniel reveals the dream and the interpretation, the king is astonished.

Nebuchadnezzar is Overwhelmed

The amazement that Daniel could reveal the dream and the awesome revelations of the future nations that he knew must be true because Daniel knew the dream brought the king to a powerful display of respect. First he falls down before Daniel in token of his homage. Second, he brings an offering and incense to him, in recognition of his greatness. Third, he speaks of Jehovah as a God above all gods. Although we would have hoped for more, subsequent history proves he is still an idolater. So all that God had done for him through Daniel only brought Nebuchadnezzar to a recognition that Daniel’s God was greater than all the other gods.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. 47 The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret." Dan. 2:46-48

Nebuchadnezzar is still in the early stages of the process of conversion. It will take several more events (the fiery furnace, the dream that warned him and the curse that humbled him) to bring him to the full recognition that led him to say “I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever” (Dan. 4:34)

God has now brought Daniel into the favor of the king and in a position to have influence over the people of Babylon. He has been made:

1. Ruler over the whole province of Babylon.
2. Chief administrator over all the wise men.
3. Sat in the gate(court) of the king.

Daniel then sought and succeeded in bringing his three friends, faithful to God and to him into the same position of influence and authority.

Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king. Dan. 2:48-49

Nebuchadnezzar’s Image of Gold

There isn’t much to go on as to the nature of this image. The Aramaic term is only used in the second and third chapters of Daniel, but there is enough information to draw a few conclusions. It is used of the image of his dream in the second chapter, which was clearly the image of a man.

*"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great **image!** This great **image**, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. 32 This **image's** head was of fine gold, **its** chest and arms of silver, **its** belly and thighs of bronze, 33 **its** legs of iron, **its** feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Dan. 2:31-34*

It is used in the third chapter of this image and then of Nebuchadnezzar's face.

*Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the **expression** on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. Dan. 3:19-20*

From these uses it is evident that this is not just a pillar, but the image of something. The most obvious image would be that of a man, but beyond that we really can't go. Some think it was his own image, others the image of his father, or perhaps even a replica of the image he saw in his dream, but no one knows because God didn't reveal it. What we do know is that this image is 60 cubits high(90') and 6 cubits wide(9'), and thus could be seen far away.

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Dan. 3:1-2

Nebuchadnezzar's Decree

His invitation is interesting, because Daniel has not been invited. All the government officials have been commanded to attend, but the one above all of them is not there. The most obvious reason would be Nebuchadnezzar's respect for him and his God, but the reason is not given.

And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Dan. 3:2-3

After they arrive the heralds reveal the plan of Nebuchadnezzar regarding the image. A large "band" or "orchestra" has also been assembled along with these leaders. A song of some form has been selected, and the plan was to play that song, and when they heard it, they were all in unison to fall down prostrate in front of the image to manifest respect to it and to the king's command. After the command is given, the punishment for those who chose to disobey it is also decreed. The fact that it was to be done immediately infers that the fiery furnace was also present somewhere near the image.

Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; 6 and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." Dan. 3:4-6

Everything was done exactly as the herald had described, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego have again agreed to remain faithful to God. While the idolaters could easily worship another idol along with their own, Israel could not. They could not bow down to an idol without violating one of the Ten Commandments.

*"You shall not make for yourself a carved image — any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 **you shall not bow down to them** nor serve them. **For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. Ex 20:4-6*

Charges Against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

After the initial event, some of the Chaldeans bring charges against them.

There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up." Dan. 3:12

After his dealings with Daniel, it should not have been surprising to the king that his friends would not bow down to his image. But the respect he had shown to Daniel because his "God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings," did not extend to these friends. His concept of God was still limited, and he still showed no fear or respect to him.

Instead of becoming concerned that he had put these friends of Daniel who served the God of gods, into a difficult position and showing the proper respect to God, he became enraged and demanded that they choose between life and their service to their God.

Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?" Dan. 3:13-15

The rage and fury reveal that this king could not tolerate any lack of respect or disobedience to his commands. Yet, in spite of his rage, he offered them a second chance. It is evident from the statement that "the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego," that in the beginning he held them in some regard. Perhaps he doesn't believe those who charged them or maybe he wants to put additional pressure on them. But they must now make a decision. Once again it is obvious that what Daniel had done in making known the dream did not make a lasting impression on him. In spite of all he had already seen and confessed He makes the foolish statement that no god can deliver them.

But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" Dan 3:15

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego Proclaim their Decision

There is an important truth for all to consider in this situation. These men declared their loyalty to God along with Daniel as soon as they arrived in Babylon after being taken into captivity. There had been no compromise from the very beginning. Once this has been done, it is much easier when placed in this situation to remain fixed to that decision. But, if there had been any compromises at any time prior to this, they would have been greatly tempted to compromise again. There really was no decision to for them to make. Their heart was fixed and steadfast and they would be so to the end.

There is a boldness to their answer that should have caused him to pause and consider what he was doing. It is not lack of respect that led them to speak in this manner. They knew that he already had enough experience with God to know what they would say. If he is going to force them into the position of making such a choice, then there is only one answer to give and he should have already known it. First, God is able to deliver them from the fiery furnace. His answer to Daniel's request for the dream and its interpretation already proved that. Second, no matter what God would deliver them out of the hands of the king either by delivering them from death or delivering them through death. But regardless of what God chose to do with them, they would never serve any other gods or bow down to the gold image.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." Dan. 3:16-18

Nebuchadnezzar's Rage

Whatever respect the king felt toward these men because of their relationship to Daniel was gone and the expression on his face hardened into the decision that they must die. In that rage, he did something that would greatly increase the power of the miracle God was about to perform.

- 1 Since it was all done "in the same hour," all those gathered for the initial event were now witnessing their execution.
- 2 Their anticipation is heightened as they watch the preparations and the time it took for the furnace to become seven times hotter than it normally would be.
- 3 They watch as the three men are tied up and prepare for execution.
- 4 Nebuchadnezzar chooses some of his best and well known men, mighty men of valor(heros) to

carry them to the furnace to cast them in.

- 5 The heat of the fire is now so hot that it could not be approached. Those who got close enough to cast them inside are killed in the heat and are lying dead at the mouth of the furnace.
- 6 Every eye is glued on that furnace. Obviously most could not see inside, but they could observe the king.

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. 20 And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Dan. 3:19-23

these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Dan. 3:19-23

Daniel 5

King Nebuchadnezzar's Astonishment

The king is close enough to see into the furnace. As he watches, he sees the men he sent lying dead in front of the furnace. He watches the three of them fall inside, but instead of seeing them die, God gives him a vision by allowing him to see a fourth person in the furnace.

We need to visualize this scene. All the leadership of Babylon is present to watch this execution, but instead of seeing it, they witness the king quickly arise and speak to all his counselors who are near enough to see into the furnace with him. His question must have aroused amazement at least as great as that of the king. They are not dead, but their bonds have been removed and they are now walking around inside of the furnace.

The most amazing thing of all to the king was the fourth person God allowed all of them to see. While the king reveals his own observation that the bearing and appearance of the fourth was unlike anything on the earth. Later he calls him an angel, but we don't know who it was.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." 25 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Dan 3:24-27

Again, in the presence of all the witnesses, the king walks as near as he dare to the mouth and calls for them to come out. Now he refers to God just as he did of Daniel. "Most High God." It is emphasized again all the people who saw this event.

While the mighty men are still smoldering on the ground, the three servants of God have suffered no effects at all. Their hair and garments are not singed and there is no smell of fire upon them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. 27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them. Dan, 3:26-27

Nebuchadnezzar's Journey of Faith

After the interpretation of his dream, Nebuchadnezzar responded with a acknowledgment of the power of God.

"Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret." Dan 2:47-48

What sounded like a confession of faith turned out to only be a recognition that of all the gods in Nebuchadnezzar's experience this is a god with specific powers regarding secrets. We see this by the building of the very image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused to serve.

Now, In the presence of all the other leaders of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar reveals the next level in his journey.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!

No longer what "(g)od can deliver," it is now "Blessed be the God." but it is clear in the next chapter that he has still not recognized the exclusive sovereign power of God.

After the next dream and it's consequences, his words become clearer and obvious.

*I blessed **the Most High** and **praised and honored Him who lives forever**: For His dominion is **an everlasting dominion**, And His **kingdom is from generation to generation**. 35 **All the inhabitants***

of the earth are **reputed as nothing**; He does **according to His will** in the **army of heaven** And among the **inhabitants of the earth**. **No one can restrain His hand** Or say to Him, "What have You done?" Dan 4:34-35

Nebuchadnezzar's Decree

While he extolled the convictions of the men, without seeking to share them, he also expressed his own convictions regarding the event. While the later translations deal with the actions of the three men in "*frustrating*" "*violating*" or "*setting aside*" the king's command, the ASV follows every other use with the term change.

An Aramaic verb meaning to *change*; to be *different*. It refers to a difference that has become evident in something or persons; they have changed (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT 8133)

While they did violate his command and bring on themselves the penalty, it was God's intervention that brought about the change in the command itself. They yielded their bodies rather than manifest any disrespect to their God.

Far from wanting this hidden as a rebellion against his authority, he wants it clearly understood that this event has changed this command leading to a new decree. The first decree was to worship his image alone. The second decree places God on the same or slightly higher level as the image he had made.

While he had been prepared to kill them for not honoring his image, now he will kill anyone who speaks anything amiss (blasphemy).

29 Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other god who can deliver like this." Dan 3:28-29

Lastly, adding even further credibility to the story, he promotes the very men who violated his command regarding the image to an even higher position.

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon. Dan. 3:30

Chapter Four

The Completion of Nebuchadnezzar's Journey

This is an amazing chapter. There are some important things we can conclude from this regarding God's mercy and providence. God did some things for Nebuchadnezzar that we don't see anywhere else in the Old Covenant. He gave him a dream, brought about a catastrophe, and allowed Nebuchadnezzar to see things about Him that others had rejected and ignored. We know God is not partial so whatever was done to Nebuchadnezzar openly, would also be done to everyone else.

*Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that **God shows no partiality**. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. Acts 10:34-36*

*For **there is no partiality with God**. Rom*

*And if you call on the Father, **who without partiality judges according to each one's work**, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; 1Pet. 1:17*

Since God is not respecter of persons this is not a special sign of favor. It fits right in with the rest of what is spoken of in the Old Testament. What we are not accustomed to reading into these verses is that it extended beyond Israel to the rest of mankind. Since all men have souls and God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, it should not surprise us that even among the Gentiles, He is not far from each one of us, and that the tests He gives show the right responses, He will give more. Abraham was called in uncircumcision and as he passed God's tests of faith, God gave more and more to him.

I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. 1Chr 29:17

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts. Pr 17:3

The Lord is in His holy temple, The Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. 5 The Lord tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Ps. 11:4-5

The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. 14 From the place of His dwelling He looks On all the inhabitants of the earth; 15 He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works. Ps. 33:13-15

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? 10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. Jer. 17:9-10

The chapter begins with Nebuchadnezzar's praise for the results of God's work with him. Since the last account of his words and deeds, we don't know how deeply into his character these things have gone, but since love believes all things (puts the best motive and outcomes on the words), it is very likely that this is a deep and sincere faith. It appears to be a good confession, made not privately, but to all the peoples, nations and languages on the earth.

*Nebuchadnezzar the king, To **all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth**: Peace be multiplied to you. 2 I thought it good to declare the **signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me**. 3 How **great are His signs, And how mighty His wonders!** His kingdom is an **everlasting kingdom**, And His **dominion is from generation to generation**. 4:1-3*

It is interesting that the same terms that are used throughout the NT are also used here. Nebuchadnezzar wants to extol the "signs and wonders" God has shown to him. They are what have convinced him, and what he wants everyone else to understand. Pharaoh never spoke like this. These were signs and wonders work for him and he was fully aware of it.

The Events as they Transpired

A second dream, but he has not learned to fully trust Jehovah the God of Daniel. He begins with all the wise men again. He is still putting his fate and outcome in the hands of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers. Although he tells them the dream this time, they are afraid(?) or maybe learned a lesson from the previous dream, not wanting to put their heads in the chopping block.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace. 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. 6 Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its interpretation. 4:4-6

After they have heard and feared to make something up, he called Daniel. It is important to see the distinction even in the names. After these events, Nebuchadnezzar now calls him Daniel, a name he had never used before for when he first called him to interpret the dream, it was still Belteshazzar.

*But at last **Daniel** came before me (his name is **Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him is the Spirit of the Holy God**), and I told the dream before him, saying: 9 "**Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that the Spirit of the Holy God is in you, and no secret troubles you, explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation.** 4:8-9*

This time he made a distinction between the name that proclaimed Daniel's relationship to the one true God and the one he had given him to extol his own.

"**Daniel**" either means "**God is my Judge,**" or "**the judge of God.**" His name was changed to "**Belteshazzar**" which either means "**the prince of Bel,**" or "**Bel (Lord), protect him (or his life).**" "... **the name of the chief god of the Babylonians...**" (from Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the OT)

There are a few discordant notes in these words, but they are a description of his mind set before

the signs and wonders. He still makes the distinction “my god” (still calling him “**my**” god) and the “*Spirit of the Holy God.*”

The Contents of the Dream

This time it was a great tree and not an image that God sent to him in a dream/vision. Although it began at a great height, it continued to grow as he watched. It became so large that it could be seen by to the ends of the earth. It was large enough for the beasts of the earth(not just farm animals, but all beasts) to find shade and the birds of the heavens to live within. It also possessed the fruits that could feed the entire earth.

*“These were the visions of my head while on my bed: I was looking, and behold, **A tree in the midst of the earth, And its height was great. 11 The tree grew and became strong; Its height reached to the heavens, And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. 12 Its leaves were lovely, Its fruit abundant, And in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, And all flesh was fed from it. 4:10-12***

This part of the dream was fixed in his mind before the next event occurred. It is difficult to fully understand this “*watcher*,” for although Daniel quotes it later, he attributes it all to God. It may have been part of the vision, an inference to angel or archangel, or some other being. But this “*watcher*” has come with a decree to cut down the tree. After the tree is cut down, branches cut off, leaves stripped and fruit scattered, it is bound with iron.

*“I saw in the visions of my head while on my bed, and there was **a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. 14 He cried aloud and said thus: ‘Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts get out from under it, And the birds from its branches. 15 Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, Bound with a band of iron and bronze, 4:13-15***

Then with no explanation the pronoun is changed. It is to be wet with dew, but let **him** graze with the beasts. His heart is to be changed from man to beast, and seven times are to pass. The final words of the watcher give the power and authority of the decree. Once again, it is the “*watchers*” and “*holy ones*” who make this decree, leaving us to grapple with its full meaning. But the intent of the vision leads to a single result. All living must know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and it is by His will that the one who receives the rule is determined.,

*In the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, And **let him graze with the beasts On the grass of the earth. 16 Let his heart be changed from that of a man, Let him be given the heart of a beast, And let seven times pass over him. 17 ‘This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.’ 18 “This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able, for the Spirit of the Holy God is in you.” 4:13-18***

Daniel Explained the Second Dream

The relationship between Daniel and the king are now detailed. Daniel appears to respect and like this king and is deeply troubled by the interpretation. It doesn’t appear to be fear, but concern. This is a dream on those who hate and are his enemies could enjoy interpreting.

*Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was **astonished** for a time, and his **thoughts troubled him.** So the king spoke, and said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you.” Belteshazzar answered and said, “My lord, may the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies! 4:19*

As is evident from the final words about the heart of a man, he and the nation he leads (Babylon) are the tree. As the head of gold and the greatest kingdom of the first dream, so also the lovely leaves and abundant fruit here.

“The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and

which could be seen by all the earth, 21 whose leaves were lovely and its fruit abundant, in which was food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home — 22 it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth. 4:20-22

The interpretation is a terrible prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar's future. He is to become the beast wet with dew and he will remain in that condition until seven times (a term for completeness). Only after he acknowledges the power of God will his reasons return to him. Yet God assures him that the kingdom will remain his and he will in fact come to that knowledge of God.

this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: 25 They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. 26 "And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump and roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules. 4:24-26

Nebuchadnezzar Ignores Daniel's Advice

Daniel knows what the king needs to do. He must repent before these things force him to do so. If he will acknowledge now what he was to learn from the humiliation it may be averted. Daniel makes clear what this full acknowledgment of God's rule would mean. He would break off his sins and iniquities by replacing it with mercy to the poor.

Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity." 4:27

It was an act of pride and self-sufficiency that led to the fulfillment of the threat that had been decreed against him. He had not take the words about God ruling and giving him this power. He took all the glory to himself. At the moment these words left his mouth the judgment fell.

All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. 29 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" 31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! 32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." 4:28-32

The description of this ailment defies any human explanation. This was a divine judgment specially given to Nebuchadnezzar to complete his journey of faith. Though the circumstances are entirely different, there are still similarities between what happened to Saul of Tarsus and here.

That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. 4:33

The Lessons Nebuchadnezzar Learned and the Praise it Created.

No mention is made about the length, only that as soon as he learned what was necessary, it was removed. It mentions that his reasoning departed and returned, yet there had to be enough reasoning ability in him to make these decisions and learn these lessons.

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?" 4:34-35

The final outcome is that Nebuchadnezzar follows the path of Job. What he lost was restored and all was as it was with the exception that the rest of his life is spent giving God the glory. He even confesses the sin of pride as one of the reasons he was put into that position.

36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

This is one of the most amazing events we read about concerning God's dealings with the Gentiles after He "gave them up." It is similar to that of the widow and leper in the days of Elijah, which again revealed this was not an exclusive case. God gave this to Nebuchadnezzar and by its public nature also gave a lot to the wise men. Yet we will learn in the next chapter it gave no help to his son.

Daniel 6 – Belshazzar’s Feast

Introduction:

For centuries skeptics proclaimed that the words found in Isaiah 53 were too close to the actual events to be a prophesy. With no proof except for translations that could not take us before the birth of Christ, it was impossible to refute and could only be accepted by faith. But when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1947-1956, and a copy of Isaiah that was written before the birth of Christ was found, it proved that this prophesy was in fact given before Christ’s birth.

The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa) is one of the original seven Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran in 1947. It is the largest (734 cm) and best preserved of all the biblical scrolls, and the only one that is almost complete. The 54 columns contain all 66 chapters of the Hebrew version of the biblical Book of Isaiah. Dating from ca. 125 BCE, it is also one of the oldest of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some one thousand years older than the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible known to us before the scrolls' discovery. (Digital Dead Sea Scrolls)

In exactly the same way, this chapter in Daniel has been the brunt of the skeptic’s scorn. There were no secular records mentioning the name of Belshazzar. The commentaries written before the 1850’s all noted the discrepancy, and simply stated that it was a matter of faith with no way to prove its truth. But in 1854 a archeological discovery again changed the view.

In 1854, J.G. Taylor found four cuneiform cylinders in the foundation of a ziggurat at Ur. These were deposited by Nabonidus; all four apparently have an identical inscription. In 1881, Assyriologist Hormuzd Rassam made an important find at Sippar in Babylonia (now called Abu Habba), where he discovered the temple of the sun. There he also found a clay cylinder of Nabonidus.[4] This cylinder, excavated in the royal palace, is now in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. A copy is in the British Museum in London. (Wikipedia)



Belshazzar is called king several times in the Book of Daniel (5:1,9,30; 7:1; 8:1). He is referred to as the son of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 5:21-22. There may be many things we still do not know about the historical setting of Daniel, but we understand from Babylonian records that Nabonidus was the king of Babylon at this time (556–539 B.C.). How can it be said that Belshazzar is king, and how can Daniel be third in the kingdom (Daniel 5:7,16,29)?

The inscriptions proved that the ruined tower was the temple of the city of Ur. The words were a prayer for the long life and good health of Nabonidus—and for his eldest son. The name of that son, clearly

written, was Belshazzar! (Ferrell Jenkins)

Clay foundation cylinder naming Nabonidus and Belshazzar. British Museum ME 91128. Photo by Ferrell Jenkins.

Belshazzar's Feast – “God Rules in the kingdoms of men” (Part 2)

After the dream in the previous chapter, and God’s judgment poured out on Nebuchadnezzar, he had confessed and lived the rest of his life with this new conviction:

I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down. Dan 4:36-37

As the new chapter begins, a new king sits on the throne, and although he knew everything that had happened to his father, he rejected any reverence.

This feast is very similar to the one we read about in Esther, and was evidently a common event.

*in those days when **King Ahasuerus** sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 3 that in the third year of his reign **he made a feast for all his officials and servants — the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him —***

4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all. Est 1:2-4

Although a common event among the kings, Belshazzar decided to use it as an opportunity to insult and blaspheme God. To take the vessels taken from His temple alone would have been a blasphemous act. But to use them in praise to other gods is a powerful insult. His gods had conquered the God of Israel and destroyed His temple. He felt no fear.

Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. Dan. 5:1-4

God' Passes Judgment

The account doesn't indicate if the king was the only one to see this vision. As they are drinking and praising their own gods, he suddenly sees the fingers of a man's hand. The vision obviously forced him to realize that the rest of that hand was in another realm with great power. The candlestick may have been the one taken from the temple in Jerusalem, or it may have been only one that was already there.

In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Dan. 5:5

The change in the king's countenance indicates that he knew there was a risk in doing what he had done. Later Daniel will charge him with a wilful knowledge of what he was doing. He had been aware of what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar and he was using his youthful pride against God to spite Him. When God immediately sent a judgment, he could not read the writing, but he knew it was going to be against him.

6 Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. Dan. 5:6

Did he forget about Daniel or just ignore him? He goes to his own gods and astrologers offering a great reward, seeking some sort of solace and a way to remove his fear and dread, but they can't help him. The mood in the banquet hall has turned from festivity and carelessness to dread and anguish and the entire assembly is now "astonished/perplexed"

The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished. Dan. 5:7-9

At this point the news begins to spread through the household and the "queen" (most take this to be his mother, or even Nebuchadnezzar's widow. Enters the hall and speaks to Belshazzar. Her advice was to contact Daniel (probably the last man he wants to see). She reminds him of all the great things Daniel had done. Unfortunately she also reminds him that he serves "the Holy God," (the one he has just insulted)!

The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change.

*11 There is a man in your kingdom **in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God.*** And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father — your father the king — made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. 12 Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel,*

whom the king named Belshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation." Dan. 5:10-12

*– **“in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God”** (NKJV NASB) – **“in whom is the Spirit of the holy gods.”** (KJV ASV ESV NIV). Why is there a difference in these translations? It is not a textual problem. The reason lies in a different direction.

Here are the facts. Because Daniel was written in Aramaic, this is an Aramaic term for God and not the Hebrew. In the Hebrew both the singular (**el**) and the plural (**elohim**) refer only to Jehovah, the God of Israel. But in the Aramaic, the plural (**'alaahiyn** - the origin of the Arab **allah**) always refers to idolatrous gods and the singular (**'elaahaa'**) to Jehovah the God of Israel.

'elah OT:426, "god." This Aramaic word is the equivalent of the Hebrew **'eloah**. It is a general term for "God" in the Aramaic passages of the Old Testament, and it is **a cognate form of the word 'allah the designation of deity used by the Arabs**. The word was used widely in the Book of Ezra, occurring no fewer than 43 times between Ezra 4:24 and 7:26. ... In the only verse in the Book of Jeremiah that was written in Aramaic 10:11, the word **'elah** appears in plural form to describe "gods" that had not participated in the creation of the universe. Although such false "gods" were being worshiped by pagan nations (and perhaps worshiped by some of the Hebrews who were in exile in Babylonia), these deities would ultimately perish because they were not eternal in nature. ... In the Book of Daniel, **'elah** was used both of heathen "gods" and the one true "God" of heaven. The Chaldean priests told Nebuchadnezzar: "And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh" Dan. 2:11. The Chaldeans referred to such "gods" when reporting that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused to participate in idol worship on the plain of Dura Dan. 3:12. The "gods" were enumerated by Daniel when he condemned Nebuchadnezzar's neglect of the worship of Israel's one true "God" Dan. 5:23. In Dan. 3:25, the word refers to a divine being or messenger sent to protect the three Hebrews Dan. 3:28. In Dan. 4:8-9, 18; and 5:11, the phrase "the spirit of the holy gods" appears (KJV, RSV, NEB, NIV). Elsewhere the references to **'elah** are to the living "God" whom Daniel worshiped. (Vine's OT 426)

Since the word in both forms is only used in Jeremiah (once in plural (**'alaahiyn**) for idols) Ezra, and Daniel, it is difficult to find a pattern. The general rule throughout both books is that the plural refers to idols and the singular refers to God. But sometimes in context the singular refers to an idol. In the case of the plural use in Daniel, the (KJV– 1611), ASV – 1901), (NASB, – 1971), (NIV – 1978), (ESV – 2001) all stayed with the consistent **“holy gods.”** Only two of the later translations (NKJV – 1982), and AMP – 1965) translated **“Holy God”**. There doesn't appear to be any good reason for this except for one, The attitude of the speaker. Did Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:18), the queen who came to Belshazzar (Dan. 5:11) and Belshazzar (Dan. 5:14) still refer to Daniel as a servant of **“gods”** - KJV, ASV, NASB, ESV, NIV) or **“God”** (NKJV, AMP)? It is not a textual or grammar issue, but an issue of putting the best motive or simply being consistent with the text. Do we want to see faith growing in their hearts manifested by their newfound confession. Yet there is no other good reason to change the text like this. Because of time limitations, I did not look up all the Hebrew uses of this word (91 times) to see if there was ever a clear use of the plural to refer to God. Perhaps someone else can do that.

The king then calls for Daniel, and in spite of the terrible nature of the events continues to keep up the appearances of being confident and in control of the situation. He acts like he doesn't know anything about Daniel, but if it is the case, Daniel will later accuse him of wilful ignorance. He offers feeble praise in spite of the fact that he is the last one to be called and it is the God of Daniel that he has chosen to insult. He would have been better off to begin with humility instead of hubris.

*Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who is one of the captives from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard of you, **that the Spirit of God is in you***, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. 15 Now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. 16 And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." Dan. 5:13-16*

Daniel Teaches, Reminds, and Rebukes

Daniel is not rude, but brisk and to the point. He wants nothing to do with the gifts or rewards now offered to placate a painful conscience. Although he doesn't want the reward, it is not because he doesn't have the ability. He will both read the words and then give the interpretation.

Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. Dan. 5:17

But before he reads the words he gives Belshazzar a brief history lesson and then a rebuke.

- 1st Daniel reminded Belshazzar that the great power and majesty of Nebuchadnezzar had been given to him by the Most High God (the very God he had just insulted).
- 2nd When Nebuchadnezzar's heart had been lifted up (in a manner exactly the same as that of his son now), God had deposed him from the throne and took all the glory away from him.
- 3rd In a merciful judgment, Nebuchadnezzar was cursed, but only to the degree that he might learn his error and repent.
- 4th He was left in his curse until he learned the vital lesson that should have been learned by an entire nation, but at the very least by his family.
- 5th Nebuchadnezzar learned that God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. 20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. 21 Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. Dan. 5:18-21

After this brief history lesson already well known, Daniel sternly rebuked this young man. He had not learned the lesson of history and was now doomed to be punished.

In an inspired revelation, Daniel tells Belshazzar exactly what was going on his mind when he did the things that brought the handwriting

- 1st He had not humbled his heart. Like so many before and after, they knew God, but refused to glorify him as God. He knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar, he knew the truth of all the words, but refused to submit or be humbled.
- 2nd By bringing those vessels to drink wine from, he had "**lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven.**"

rûm: An Aramaic verb meaning to lift up, to exalt. It literally means to raise up. Used of God, it means to exalt Him (Dan 4:37[:34]). It refers to honoring or promoting a person (Dan 5:19); it indicates a person's heart being lifted up, becoming arrogant (Dan 5:20); or persons lifting themselves up against God (Dan 5:23). (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:7313)
- 3rd You praised gods of silver... who can't see or hear or know.
- 4th The God who holds your breath in his hand and owns all your ways you did not glorify.

"But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. 23 And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before

you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Dan. 5:22-23

Daniel 7 – Hand Writing on the Wall

Daniel Reads the Writing

Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. 25 "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. Dan. 5:24-25

Since the words are given in Aramaic (the language of the Chaldeans), there must have been some reason why they could not be read. Perhaps they were written in an entirely different language (Hebrew) or a language from heaven and Daniel puts them into words they could all understand. The definition of Scholars is much more limited in the books of Daniel and Ezra. These are the only books written in Aramaic. Even Ezra only has a few chapters in Aramaic, so there are very few places to compare to determine the meaning of the term.

We are therefore much more reliant on the interpretation than the workd themselves, as the first two are somewhat ambiguous. The first word is "MENE" which is only used here in the OT. It is generally understood to be a weight of measurement of coins or money.

mene ... weight of measurement. It indicates a unit of weight of gold and/or silver (Dan. 5:25,26). Dan. 5:25,26. (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:4484) see *mina*

The second term "TEKEL" is also a weight of money, in this case a shekel.

teqal ... weigh cognate to Hebrew *teqel* shekel ... (TDWOT 3063 - 8025)

as a verb: 1) to weigh; (P'il) to be weighed as a masculine noun: 2) a tekell, a shekel; (P'al) tekell, a unit of weight, a shekel (Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lex. 3063 - 8025)

The final term is very close to the Hebrew that they can be used to help understand.

peres ... *upharsiyn* ... *parsiyn*: I. An Aramaic verb meaning to be divided, to be broken in two. It refers in its participial form to something divided, split up; in context Babylon (Dan. 5:28). ... II. A masculine proper noun *peres*. The word is set aside in quotations or put into capitals and treated in a special way by some translations since it was part of an original message that was being interpreted (Dan. 5:28). (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT: 6537)

peras break in two, divide. Hebrew similar *peres* ... probably half-mina (KB, half-shekel). The word is probably used as a word play in Dan. 5:25, in the handwriting on the wall, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." The words can be taken to mean mina, a shekel, and a half mina (or half shekel). This makes little sense and Daniel interpreted it as the verbs number, weigh, and divide. The last verb may have a double word play in its similarity to Persia, which was about to conquer Belshazzar. The word "upharsin" is the conjunction "and" plus the plural of *peres* (TDWOT 6537)

Daniel Interprets the Writing

MENE The first term "minah" or weight looks to the result of the judgment. The kingdom itself has been assessed and found to have nothing worthy within it. What has been taught clearly to Nebuchadnezzar was now completed in his son. As God had told Abraham, the cry of Sodom and future of the seven nations of Canaan led Him to number their kingdoms as well.

And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." ... Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." Gen 18:20, 32

But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." Gen 15:16

God also did this with the flood as he assess each man's imaginations and found not one.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Gen 6:5

He had told Jeremiah if he could find one man he would spare Jerusalem.

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; See now and know; And seek in her open places If you can find a man, If there is anyone who executes judgment, Who seeks the truth, And I will pardon her. Jer 5:1

What God had done with all these He had also done with Babylon. There was nothing worthy in Babylon so it was not finished and the first portion of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was now fulfilled.

TEKEL The second term takes on a more personal note. First the kingdom and then the individual.

Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; Dan. 5:26

Belshazzar had been weighed in the balances and there was not enough there to spare the nation or him. He had done a terrible thing in pitting himself against God in the manner he did. It revealed a character of very little worth and when placed on the balances of God's judgement and assessment the balance tips. The weight of righteousness and equity placed on each man was too heavy in this case. He had not measured up to the potential God knew he was capable of becoming.

"Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: in the balances they will go up; they are together lighter than vanity. Ps 62:9



Goods are bought and sold based on weight, and fairness requires the weight and balance used to determine value be fair.

"A false balance is an abomination to Jehovah; But a just weight is his delight" Pr. 11:1

"You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in measures of length, of weight, or of quantity. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, you shall have" Lev. 19:35-36).

We learn here that God too weighs everyone in a just balance. Both the balance and the weight of duty that each man can carry are fairly distributed.

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. 48 But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. Lk. 12:47-48

And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; Mt. 25:15

For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. 2 Cor 8:12

In this case, whatever had been required of Belshazzar he had not brought the beam up to it. Whatever abilities and whatever he had, he had failed to use and was found wanting.

UPHARSIN

Some have wondered if the actual kingdom was divided between the Medes and the Persians, and although there is a possibility that this is the meaning, it doesn't appear in Scripture. The more obvious meaning is seen in the dream of a head of gold and its chest and arms of silver. Something was divided or lost between the two kingdoms.

Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." Dan. 5:28

Belshazzar's Final Command

Although the interpretation is of the worst possible, Belshazzar does not argue or dispute it. Instead he gives the promised reward. It is now impossible to assess why he responded in this manner. Perhaps his conscience smote him, perhaps he just wanted to get him out of there as quickly as possible.

Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the

kingdom. 30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. Dan. 5:29-30

There is no way to verify or dispute the statement that it occurred that very night. Those with faith in God and the Scriptures accept it without question, while archaeologists dispute these facts with no evidence except skepticism.

Darius the Mede

Once again we are faced with the problem of harmonizing secular history and Biblical history. To this day there is no mention of Darius in any of the discoveries in archeology. He just isn't there. This has led atheists and agnostics to proclaim the demise of the inspiration of Scripture. Our answer is simple. There is no mention "YET!" Such an issue does not impact the faith of God's people. He will be found in time, and even if not found, he is still there.

And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old. Dan. 5:1-4

Since this is the only record we have, we can say no more than what the Scripures here reveal in Daniel.

Daniel 8 – In Medo-Persia

Daniel Works under Darius

When one nation takes over another nation, generally all from the old are swept away. For some providential reason, Daniel was kept on and placed above these 120 satraps. Not only was he one of the 120 satraps

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; 2 and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Dan. 6:1-2

Over time, Daniel's honesty integrity and ability brought him to the attention of Darius.

Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. Dan. 6:3

He had an “*excellent spirit.*”

yattiyr: An Aramaic adjective designating something as excellent, outstanding. Its basic sense is excellence, superiority. It refers to the splendor of the statue in Dan. 2:31 as extraordinary, outstanding. It has the sense of very or extremely (Dan. 3:22; 7:7,19); surpassing, exceeding (Dan. 4:36[33]); special or excellent (Dan. 5:12,14). Daniel had an excellent spirit (Dan. 6:3[4]) and possessed superb wisdom. (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:3493)

rûah: An Aramaic noun meaning wind; spirit of a person, mind; spirit divine. All occurrences of the word are located in the book of Daniel. (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:7308)

It is interesting that the word spirit has the same basic meaning as it does in Greek. It can be the wind, our own spirit, or the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to determine which of the latter two was under consideration, but at this point it was more probable that it was his own spiritual mental and moral disposition. He had an integrity and honor that even his adversaries recognized as they sought to destroy him.

Jealousy or greed caused the other two governors and the 120 satraps to find the means to remove Daniel. They may have wanted him out of the way because they wanted to use their power in more practical and useful ways that would benefit them, while Daniel only sought the best interests of the king in righteousness.

Initially, using themselves as standards, they assumed they could find some charge based on his own weaknesses. But when they could find nothing, they began to realize that they would have to set up a trap. Again using normal means was fruitless so they finally settled on the plan to force Daniel to choose between obedience to the king or the violation of the laws of God. Perhaps they learned of his initial disobedience in not wanting to eat the food of the king of Babylon. Perhaps it was the example of Shadrach Meshach or Abed-Nego that gave them the idea.

So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then these men said, “We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” Dan. 6:1-5

The Manipulation of Darius

Both miscalculation and overreach were then devised. They did not realize how much respect Darius had for Daniel, and they did not foresee how angry it would make the king when it became clear that they had used him to destroy Daniel. Maybe they thought Darius would not see through what they were trying to do or maybe they figured there was nothing he could do to so many, but they made a terrible mistake.

Their goal was easy enough to accomplish. They had found by researching Daniel's character that he was always praying to his God in a public manner three times a day. They decided to use this obvious means to destroy him. The plan was simple. They would use the vanity of the king to bring

about the goal of removing Daniel. They asked for a new law that would last for thirty days. It would demand that all citizens in the Medo-Persian empire would only pray to him. For idolaters this would pose no problem, but for Daniel, it would be an insurmountable one. Even the punishment of being cast into the den of lions (no different than the fiery furnace), would not deter him was their hope.

With his background as an idolater and an evident inclination toward pride, Darius did not foresee the implications or consequences of this command, so he signed it without hesitation.

So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him: "King Darius, live forever! 7 All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree. Dan. 6:6-9

Daniel's Response to their Threat

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Dan. 6:10

The truth that "*he knew the writing was signed*" implies that he knew about the law and either could not or chose not to intervene. Maybe he sought to change the direction of these men, but was unable to do it. Whatever the initial reasons, he now knew about the decree. He had at least three options. He could go down into a private chamber for 30 days and pray toward Jerusalem, not changing his habit in the least. He could have stopped praying aloud or at all for that thirty days, or as his enemies hoped, he could continue to do what he had always done. He knows the reason and purpose of their for their plan and held their efforts?

Was God testing the king here? Was it Daniel's decision or did God command it? We know there would have been nothing wrong with becoming more private in his devotions. But he chose to continue to do what he had always done in respect to God, knowing full well the outcome of the decree. We also learn that it had been Daniel's custom since his early days of youth to pray to God three times each day.

The Trap is Sprung

First, they catch Daniel in the act of violating the law. They knew where he would be and what he would be doing so it was easy to catch him. Then, as eyewitnesses, they approached the king and act as though they are only seeking the best interests of the kingdom. They quote the new law and the king immediately agrees that it is the law. They knew this would seal Daniel's fate because the law could not be changed.

Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. 12 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." Dan. 6:11-15

After the affirmation about the law came the accusation that Daniel had violated that law. They identified Daniel not as the governor that all of them had to report to but as one of the captives of Judah who had not shown due regard to the king and had actually violated "*the decree you have signed.*" These were prosecuting lawyers who knew the law and knew the best way to frame it to indict and convict Daniel. He is not only violated the law, but is doing so three times every day.

So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day." Dan. 6:12

Darius sees it all in an instant and realized he had made a great blunder by placing his most trusted

servant into such a position. Thinking it was a mistake, he sought to save Daniel from his own blunder. He then had the opportunity to see how wicked and conniving these governors and satraps were. They would not compromise or allow the king to change the edict.

And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. 15 Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed." Dan. 6:15-16

Seeing himself painted into a corner, he had no choice but to fulfill the command. He was forced into the position of violating his own law or keeping law and order in the nation by being bound by the same laws as everyone else. The satraps were right when they said the law could not be altered. there was nothing he could do except trust that Daniel's God would protect him through the night.

So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." 17 Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed. Dan. 6:16-17

A Just King

There is a very important point made in this passage. Note how the king who does not want to put Daniel into the lions den and labors through the day to find a way to save him. In the end, there was nothing the king could do.

Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed. 16 "So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." Dan. 6:15-16

There was a law that had been signed and set into place. That law could not be altered regardless of the consequences. The king could set aside the law and cease to be just and bring great damage to the justice and order of his kingdom or he could remain just and submit to the law. He chose the latter as the only proper decision.

This event illustrates one of the more important doctrines set forth in the NT. It illustrates Jesus atonement on the cross. What Darius was faced with was the same position in which our Heavenly Father found Himself. He did not want to punish those who loved and trusted Him. But there was a law that He had never and never could set aside.

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, 2Pet. 2:4-5

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; 7 as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Jude 6-7

This was something God had always done (even before the creation?) and must always do. He could not be just and save Noah and his family when He destroyed all other sinners in the flood. Nor could he spare Lot when he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

The sad truth is that all have sinned and the wages of sin is death.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Rom 3:23-24

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom. 6:23

Just as Darius could not simply set aside His law and remain just, neither could God. Yet God

found another way.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Rom 3:24-26

It took the grace, redemption (*redeem one by paying the price or ransom*) and propitiation (*appeasing and expiating*) through Jesus' blood to "demonstrate God's righteousness." Before Jesus died on the cross, God could only forbear (*holding back, delay, a truce*) and pass over (*ignore, withhold punishment, suspension of penalty*).

After the gospel "revealed God's righteousness from faith to faith: (Rom. 3:23), showing how Jesus death of the cross fully atoned for the sins of all men.

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. 1Jn. 2:2

In this act, God became "**just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus.**" Jesus paid the penalty that gave God the right to set aside our punishment laying it on Him. The propitiation (placating and appeasing) that Jesus endured on the cross involved at least the following:

By His stripes we are healed.	Jehovah laid upon him the iniquity of all of us.
It pleased God to bruise him and put him to grief.	He made his soul an offering for sin.
God was satisfied by the travail of his soul.	He shall bear their iniquities.
He poured out his soul unto death	He was numbered with the transgressors.
He bore the sin of many.	

So that now "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1Jn. 1:9).

Darius' True Character

Darius begins to reveal his own character and possibly why Daniel had made such a great impression on him. He spends the night fasting and removing from himself all the normal pleasures he enjoyed. He could not sleep because of his concern. These are all the marks of a good man who truly loved this neighbor (Daniel) as himself). He rose up early in the morning and rushed to the lions den to see what had occurred.

Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. His "lamentable" voice stressed the grief and pain in his heart. Dan. 6:18-20

*siyb ... An Aramaic verb meaning to pain, to grieve. It is similar to the Hebrew word *āsāb* (6087) It appears only one time in the form of a passive participle and is used as an adjective to modify *qôl* (6963), meaning voice." (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:6088)*

Darius' confession was absolute truth. He must have spoken to Daniel or some other to get this knowledge. His question is simple. Was God able to deliver you. He knew that only God could stop those lions from devouring him. Doubtless the men who had set the trap made certain the animals were ready. Daniel's answer amazed and comforted the king. Daniel proclaims to things about God and the reason God saved him. First, Daniel was found innocent in the eyes of God and thus worthy of having his life spared. Second, he had done no wrong to the king and was thus undeserving of this punishment. God has sent His angel. Whether this was Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21) or the Angel of Jehovah spoken of so often during the times of Moses, Joshua, and the Judges or some other angel is not revealed.

The king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” 21 Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! 22 My God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you.” Dan. 6:20-22

Darius full feeling toward Daniel is expressed by the joy and happiness that he felt because he was spared. They brought him out of the den unscathed. A third reason is now given as to why God spared Daniel, He believed in his God.

Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God. Dan. 6:23

Now that the law has been fulfilled and Daniel has been spared and proven to be innocent, the men who set this trap and manipulated him into having to put Daniel in the lion’s den are now brought to the same fate. This time there is no deliverance and the hunger and ferocity they had hoped would remove Daniel was not unleashed upon them. The scriptures are graphic and detailed. The 120 satraps, 2 governors, their wives and all their children were cast into this den. It doesn’t reveal if this was done all at once or over time as they were gathered from their various locations.

And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions — them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den. Dan. 6:24

Darius Letter

This would have been the equivalent of a royal proclamation. It was addressed to all peoples nations and languages in his realm which infers that it would have been sent out to them and read to them.

In this midst of the letter Darius passed another law that he wanted all his people to know about. He demanded that in every dominion of his realm, all must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. The power of this act to influence the Jews at the very least and other truth seekers is obvious. Darius again makes a very public confession that Daniel’s God is the living God. While Nebuchadnezzar had learned that God rules in the kingdoms of men, Darius proclaims even more. God has a kingdom that will never be destroyed. This was the final conclusion of the first dream about the image. Added to this is that His dominion will endure to the end and he will deliver and rescue as His will decrees, but never by limited power. Added to this are things he could only have learned from the Scriptures. God works signs and wonders in heaven and delivered Daniel from the power of lions.

Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. 26 I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end. 27 He delivers and rescues, And He works signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. Dan. 6:25-27

Daniel then continued in his position throughout the reign of Darius and into Cyrus. Since Darius had “given thought to putting him over the entire kingdom, it seems very probable from these words that he did so.

So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Dan. 6:28

Daniel 9 - Dreams

Introduction

The theme that resonates through the book of Daniel was spoken to Nebuchadnezzar in the third chapter.

In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.' Dan. 4:17

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. As we read the book of Romans we learn that this was not something for only that time. It is still true today.

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Rom 13:1-2

Implications of the First Dream

As Daniel pleaded with God for the dream and its interpretation, God gave him both. As he interpreted the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, it was clear that God had foreknowledge of future kingdoms. There would be four kingdoms coming in succession.

***You, O king, are a king of kings.** For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; — **you are this head of gold.** 39 **But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze,** which shall rule over all the earth. 40 **And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron,** ... you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, Dan 2:41-42*

*And **in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed;** and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Dan 2:44-45*

As we consider this passage, we see two very important things. First, God has a foreknowledge of how the events in the future will unfold. As Paul preached in Athens, he revealed this was a fundamental part of God's plan.

*And He has **made from one blood every nation of men** to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has **determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,** 27 **so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him,** though He is not far from each one of us; Acts 17:26-28*

Added to foreknowledge in Daniel is also His ability to change the course of history at will, bringing down nations and raising them up.

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Jer 18:1-4

*Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, **as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand,** O house of Israel! 7 **The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,** 8 **if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.** 9 **And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it,** 10 **if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.** Jer 18:5-10*

So some interesting applications must now be made. Who is God speaking to when He speaks concerning a nation? Through Daniel we find that at the least He is speaking to the angels like Gabriel and Michael.

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. Dan 10:13-14

Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And **now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come.** 21 But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. **(No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince.** 11 **"Also in the first year of Darius the Mede, I, even I, stood up to confirm and strengthen him.)** 2 And now I will tell you the truth: Behold, **three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece** Dan 10:20-21; 11:1-2

So within the pages of Daniel we are given a glimpse of how God rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He pleases. All the visions in Daniel carry on this same theme.

The Vision of the Wind and the Sea

These visions come in chronological order, but are unrelated to the time events of the book itself. The first vision takes us back to chapter five and the ascension of Belshazzare after the death of Nebuchadnezzar.

*In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then **he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts.** 2 Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and **behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.** 3 And **four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.** Dan 7:1-4*

Daniel watches the roaring of the sea and witnesses four different beasts leaving the sea.

The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. 5 **"And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear.** It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!' 6 **"After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.** Dan 7:4-6

Then a fourth beast different than all the others came up out of the sea.

"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. Dan 7:7-8

Then the application of the vision is again set forth. God is in control of all these events and they are all designed for one important purpose.

*"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, **One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.** 14 **Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.** Dan 7:13-14*

Since most of this vision can be confirmed by other Scriptures, there can be no doubt that this is talking about Jesus. Since the clouds received him out of their sight, the next is from heavens perspective as He comes with the clouds. The dominion, glory, and kingdom are clearly described by Peter.

*Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. 34 **"For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, 35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'**" 36 **"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."** Acts 2:33-36*

Peter also quoted David after the first serious persecution describing again how Jesus was placed in heaven as King of Kings. He revealed that God had set up the circumstances whereby Pilate of

Rome and Herod an Idumean who ruled over Israel with the High Priests under both of them. These ruled over and brought the power of the Gentiles against Jesus. Yet all these men, set in place by God, could only do exactly what he had purposed to be done.

*who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The **kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord and against His Christ.**' 27 'For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Acts 4:25-29*

The people of Israel included both the Jewish leaders Peter pointed out in the first sermon and all the Jews in the second. Both the Jewish Sandehim and the people who denied him at the judgment seat of Pilate.

*Him, being delivered **by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God**, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; Acts 2:23-24*

*The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom **you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.** 14 But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and killed the Prince of life, Acts 3:13-15*

All of this is summed up in Daniel.

'Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.' Dan 7:17-18

As we look at Paul's statement in Galatians we can now form some important conclusions.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Gal 4:4-5

God needed Babylon for the seventy year captivity. He needed Medo Person to return them to their land. He needed Alexander the Great to spread the Greek culture and language throughout the world so there would be a common language, and He needed Rome in place to crucify His son.

The Vision of the Ram and Goat

Two years after the first vision in the third year of Belshazzar, Daniel had a second vision which was another way of setting forth the first vision, but with added details.

*Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was **a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. 4 I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great.** Dan 8:3-4*

*And as I was considering, **suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. ... 7 And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand.** Dan 8:5-7*

*Therefore **the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. 9 And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land.** Dan 8:8-10*

There is no doubt to whom this is referring as the angel revealed it even as we learned in history class in school.

*"Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be. 20 **The ram which you saw, having the two horns** — they are the **kings of Media and Persia**. 21 **And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece**. The **large horn that is between its eyes is the first king**. 22 **As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.** Dan 8:19-22*

The events here described occurred long after they were recorded here, but they again reveal both the foreknowledge and power of God.

The Vision of the man clothed in Linen

The third and final vision centered more on the one bringing the message. He is wearing a linen robe with a belt made of fine gold. But it wasn't the clothing that set this man apart but his appearance. The stone "beryl" comes in a variety of colors so it is impossible to see it as Daniel, but the burnished bronze gives us a golden like color. With a face like lightning, eyes like torches of fire, and a voice like that of a multitude, it must have been a fearsome vision.

*Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that is, the Tigris, 5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, **a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz!** 6 **His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.** Dan 10:4-6*

Though the words of explanation were soothing, Daniel the touch and appearance led him to tremble in his knees and hands. was still trembling at what he saw.

*Suddenly, **a hand touched me**, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. 11 **And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you."** While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling. Dan 10:10-11*

Even the next words which contain some of the highest compliments in Scripture still did little to sooth his heart.

*Then he said to me, "**Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. ... Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come.**" Dan 10:12-14*

Daniel is given a great privilege that again emphasizes the foreknowledge and power of God to bring it about. In order to help Daniel get past his fear another person enters the vision. This time it looks like a son of man and he too speaks soothing words, but it is difficult for Daniel to get over the shock of what he had seen.

*14 **Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come.**" 15 **When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless.** 16 **And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength.** 17 **For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me."** Dan 10:14-17*

We now return to this king of Greece, who will conquer Medo Persia, but not live long enough to enjoy or consolidate his reign. His four generals will replace him, but only two of the four have any impact on the future of God's people so only they are under consideration.

*he shall **stir up all against the realm of Greece**. 3 **Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will.** 4 **And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these.** Dan 11:2-4*

It is with the kings who will rule to the south and the north of Israel that the angel now describes. They will

be the Ptolomy's of Egypt and the Antiochus of what was Syria and Damascus.

*"Also **the king of the South shall become strong**, as well as one of his princes; and he shall gain power over him and have dominion. His dominion shall be a great dominion. 6 And at the end of some years they shall join forces, for **the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement**; but she shall not retain the power of her authority, Dan 11:5-6*

*"Also **the king of the North shall come to the kingdom of the king of the South, but shall return to his own land**. 10 However his sons shall stir up strife, and assemble a multitude of great forces; and one shall certainly come and overwhelm and pass through; then he shall return to his fortress and stir up strife. Dan 11:9-10*

Daniel 10 - Israel's Return

Introduction

Daniel and his three friends were taken into captivity the first time Nebuchadnezzar took the city of Jerusalem.

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the LORD gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. ... 6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Dan. 1:1-2, 6

Jeremiah's Baskets of Figs

After the second captivity, God gave Jeremiah the vision of the baskets of figs. Those in the first and second wave of those taken captive to Babylon are called the basket of good figs, while the people left after that second captivity that Jeremiah continued to work with were called the bad figs

Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah, whom I have sent out of this place for their own good, into the land of the Chaldeans. 6 For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Jer. 24:4-6

8 'And as the bad figs which cannot be eaten, they are so bad' — surely thus says the Lord — 'so will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, his princes, the residue of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. 9 I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them. 10 And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they are consumed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.'" Jer. 24:6-10

Jeremiah's Letter

It is of these good figs that Jeremiah spoke of in the letter he sent to the captives regarding the time they would spend in Babylon, and what God would continue to do for them while they were there. Since it was to the prophets who were already in Babylon, this would be Daniel and Ezekiel.

Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive — to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. ... 4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters — that you may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace. 8 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord. 10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. Jer. 29:1-10

Also included in the letter are the wonderful promise God gave them and that Daniel is now basing the prayers and supplications of this chapter.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I

will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive. Jer. 29:10-14

King Cyrus will Help them Return

There is no indication that Daniel ever met Cyrus. He is mentioned in Daniel. It is perplexing why in the first chapter Daniel is said to continue until the first year of Cyrus, since he was still prospering in the reign of Cyrus and still receiving prophesies in his third year Darius.

*Thus **Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus. Dan 1:21***

*So this **Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Dan 6:28***

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. Dan 10:1

There are a few possibilities. The most likely is that Daniel retired after the reign of Darius. If he was 15 when he arrived at Babylon, he would be 85 when Cyrus had the people return to Jerusalem 70 years later. There is not indication that Daniel ever met Cyrus.

Ezra Records the Exodus

Though it is mentioned in as the king when he had one of his final visions, but if there was any personal interaction between Daniel and this king, it is not recorded in Scripture. Ezra records it in the beginning of the book that bears his name.

*Now **in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem Ezra 1:2-4***

Zerrubabel, Haggai, Zechariah and Joshua bring the people back to Jerusalem.

Yet Ezra never met Cyrus as he began his work either. Zerrubabel brought the people back to Jerusalem with Haggai, Zechariah, and Jeshua (Joshua in Zechariah).

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. Ezra 5:1-2

It was long after these things that Ezra began his work.

Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest — 6 this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. Ezra 7:1-7

Thus his return to Jerusalem was in an entirely different reign. Artaxerxes reigned about 50 years after that of Cyrus.

Between the dedication of the temple in the sixth year of Darius and the arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem, a period of fifty-seven years had elapsed. "In the reign of Artachshasta king of

Persia, went up Ezra," etc. ... The fact that the Artachshasta of the book of Nehemiah (Neh 1:1; 5:14; 13:6) can be no other than Artaxerxes, is decisive of this point: for in Neh 13:6 the thirty-second year of Artachshasta is mentioned; while according to Neh 8:9; 12:26,36, Ezra and Nehemiah jointly exercised their respective offices at Jerusalem. (Keil & Delitzsch)

The fulfillment of the Prophecy Long ago Given by Isaiah

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: "I am the Lord, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; 25 Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness; 26 Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers; Who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited, 'To the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built, 'And I will raise up her waste places; 27 Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers'; 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." 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. 5 I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; 7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things.' Isa. 44:25-28; 45:

Daniel Prayer of Repentance and Confession

All of this is the context of the events recorded in Daniel 9.

9 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans — 2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Dan 9:1-2

Daniel only speaks of the books, which would include Jeremiah as quoted above and though he does not mention it, Isaiah. He does not tell us whether there was also some revelation from the Spirit. History here is sketchy, but we have this quote from Keil and Delitzsch

Darius did not become king over the Chaldean kingdom by virtue of a hereditary right to it, nor that he gained the kingdom by means of conquest, but that he received it (Dan. 6:1) from the conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus, the general of the army. The first year of the reign of Darius the Mede over the Chaldean kingdom is the year 538 B.C., since Babylon was taken by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus in the year 539-538 B.C. According to Ptolemy, Cyrus the Persian reigned nine years after Nabonadius. But the death of Cyrus, as is acknowledged, occurred in the year 529 B.C. From the nine years of the reign of Cyrus, according to our exposition, two years are to be deducted for Darius the Mede, so that the reign of Cyrus by himself over the kingdom which he founded begins in the year 536, in which year the seventy years of the Babylonish exile of the Jews were completed; (Delitzsch, Franz; Keil, Karl Friedrich)

Once Daniel explains what led to the events of this chapter, he then explains what was done.

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. 4 And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, 5 we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. 6 Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. Dan 9:3-7

Daniel takes just as much a part in the guilt of their captivity as the worst of the sinners. This is not hyperbole, because he too recognizes his sins. He too could not keep the Law or the prophets. Even though he has never descended to the level of the wicked who remained behind as part of the “*bad figs*,” he recognizes he is a part of this. He is very different from the Pharisee Jesus described.

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘**God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.** 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, **this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**” Lk. 18:9-14

Daniel extols God for their present circumstances have nothing to do with him.

O Lord, **righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face**, as it is this day — to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which **You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.** 8 “O Lord, **to us belongs shame of face**, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. 9 **To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.** Dan 9:7-10

He is far from those who Ezekiel had to deal with.

The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, 2 “**What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge?’** 3 “As I live,” says the Lord God, “**you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.** 4 “Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; **The soul who sins shall die.**” Ezek 18:1-4

He praised God and fully admitted that they have received exactly what they deserved.

We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets which He set before us by His servants the prophets. 11 **Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.** 12 **And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.** Dan 9:10-12

Daniel then turns to the curses proclaimed in the book of Deuteronomy and admits that everything God had said would happen had occurred. God had been very specific as to what would occur and things had been done exactly as it had been revealed. It appears that even now, the children of Israel have not been praying or repenting.

13 “As it is written in the Law of Moses, **all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.** 14 Therefore the Lord has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice. 15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as it is this day — **we have sinned, we have done wickedly!**” Dan 9:13-15

Daniel himself pleads with God to be merciful and forgive Israel for the sins they committed while in Jerusalem and the sins committed while in Babylon

“O Lord, **according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us.** 17 Now therefore, our God, **hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord’s sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.** 18 O my God, **incline Your**

ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. 19 O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name." Dan 9:16-19

It is at this time that God sends an angel to give His answer.

Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God, 21 yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. 22 And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. 23 At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision: Dan 9:20-23

Ezekiel 1 - Vision Calling into Service - 1

Introduction

Jacob was the first recorded servant to be given a vision. Followed by Moses on Mt Sinai and Isaiah at his call.

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Gen 28:12-14

Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10 and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. 11 But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank. Ex 24:9-11

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. Isa 6:1-4

In each of these visions the setting changes from "a ladder" to "a paved work of sapphire stone," to "a throne in the temple." Ezekiel's visions of God at his own call into God's service was far more elaborate than any before or after him.

Dating Ezekiel

Although the exact date and place are both given for this event, it takes some comparing and examination to fully understand it.

*Now it came to pass in **the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month**, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. 2 **On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity**, 3 the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. Ezek 1:1-3*

It begins with "the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month," but doesn't give the context of the thirtieth year. He goes on to say it was "fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity," which we can work with: We simply have to compare different passages to put it together. First, Jehoiakim reigned 11 years in Jerusalem, and Daniel was taken captive in the third year.

***Jehoiakim was 25 years old** when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem*

***In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah**, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And **the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand**, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. Dan 1:1-2*

About ten years into Daniel's captivity, Jehoiakim died and Jehoiachin began his 3 month reign.

*So Jehoiakim rested with his fathers. Then Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place. 8 Jehoiachin was **18 years old** when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem **3 months and 10 days**. 2Kings 24:6*

His reign was cut short because of his wickedness. Babylon returned and took the second captivity from Jerusalem at that time.

And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, as his servants were besieging it. 12 Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner. 2Kings 24:10-12

It was after this captivity that the word came to Jeremiah that the good figs were taken and what

was left would be considered bad figs.

The Lord showed me, and there were two baskets of figs set before the temple of the Lord, after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. 4 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: **'Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah, whom I have sent out of this place for their own good, into the land of the Chaldeans.** 6 For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. Jer 24:1-2, 4-6

Soon after the second captivity either just before or just after this vision of the figs, the letter is sent to those in Babylon about their seventy year captivity.

Now **these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who were carried away captive — to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon.** 2 (This happened after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) ... 4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 **Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit.** 6 **Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters — that you may be increased there, and not diminished.** 7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace. 8 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord. 10 For thus says the Lord: **After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.** Jer 29:1-10

After this **Zedekiah** reigned 11 years before the fall of Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. 2Chr. 34:1; 36:1-3; 5; 9-10; 11-13; 36:1-3

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was penetrated. Jer. 24:7

If we take all this information we can gather the following facts.

Jehoiakim reigned 11 years. In the fourth year of his reign Daniel was taken captive (607-606bc)]
Jehoiachin took the throne and reigned 3 months and 10 days and was taken with others (597-596)
The prophecy of the good figs is fulfilled and this is all who will be going to Babylon
Jeremiah wrote his letter regarding the captivity of Judah after Jehoiachin taken captive.
In the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity Ezekiel is called by God (592-591)
Zedekiah then reigns 11 years and Jerusalem is destroyed. (587-586).
6 years after Ezekiel is called Jerusalem is destroyed.
Seventy years after the initial captivity they are freed and allowed to go back to Jerusalem (537-536)
This is 55 years after the call of Ezekiel.

So the call of Ezekiel was 15 years after Daniel was taken captive, and five years before Jerusalem was destroyed. We don't know if Ezekiel was taken with Daniel or with Jehoiachin ten years later.

So what about the thirtieth year? Many have suggested it was the age of Ezekiel when he was called, others the age of the Babylonian empire. The truth is we don't know what this date refers to.

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. 2 **On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity,** 3 the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans

by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.

Since their Calander began with the Exodus and corresponds to what is now called Easter, it is in the month of March to April. The fifth month would therefore correspond to July to August. So on a summer day, the heavens were opened and Ezekiel saw visions of God.

Ezekiel's Visions of God

As with Jacob's ladder, and what Moses and Isaiah saw, so also here, it must be taken into account that there is some symbolism in the vision. Whether these are real, or only given to help those seeing it to appreciate the awesome nature of the event is not explained in Scripture.

A Whirlwind in a Cloud

In the distance, Ezekiel witnesses a whirlwind coming out of the North. We don't know if there is any significance to the north.

Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Ezek. 1:4

Ezekiel is not the first to witness a whirlwind in the presence of God. Both Elijah and Job had direct interaction with a whirlwind.

*Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and **Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.** 2 Kings 2:11*

***Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind,** and said: 2 "Who is this who darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Job 38:1-2*

***Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind,** and said: 7 "Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me: 8 "Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? Job 40:6-7*

Four Living Creatures

The description of the four living creatures who came out of the whirlwind presents the picture of a being standing like a man, with four different faces and four wings sparkling like the color of bright brass.

*Also **from within it came the likeness of four living creatures.** And this was their appearance: they had **the likeness of a man.** 6 **Each one had four faces,** and **each one had four wings.** 7 Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They **sparkled like the color of burnished bronze.** Ezek 1:5-8*

*Their **wings touched one another.** The creatures **did not turn when they went,** but **each one went straight forward.** 10 As for the likeness of their faces, **each had the face of a man;** each of the four had **the face of a lion on the right side,** each of the four had **the face of an ox on the left side,** and each of the four had **the face of an eagle.** ... 13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was **like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures.** Ezek 1:9-10, 13*

The description of the four living creature follows the same general idea as that of the seraphim in Isaiah and living creatures in Revelation.

*Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were **four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.** 7 The first living creature was **like a lion,** the second living creature **like a calf,** the third living creature had a face **like a man,** and the fourth living creature was **like a flying eagle.** Rev 4:6-8*

Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" Isa 6:2-3

Wheel in a Wheel Full of Eyes

As Ezekiel continue to watch the next detail that caught his eye were the wheels sitting on the earth next to each living creature. Each wheel was large enough to be awesome and each wheel's rims were full of eyes. While some picture this as two separate wheels, it is also possible they formed some form of sphere.

*Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, **a wheel was on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces.** 16 **The appearance of the wheels and their workings was like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness.** The appearance of their workings was, as it were, **a wheel in the middle of a wheel.** 17 **When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went.** 18 **As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims were full of eyes, all around the four of them.** Ezek. 1:15-18*

The wheels were connected in some way to each living creature whose wings were all connected to each other so they formed a square with wheels moving beside them.

*When the living creatures went, **the wheels went beside them;** and when the **living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.** 20 **Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, because there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.** 21 **When those went, these went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.** Ezek 1:19-21*

The Likeness of a Firmament Above their Heads

The firmament represents the area above the earth. When God first created the heavens and the earth He created two firmaments. The first separating the water from the clouds and the second the stars from the earth.

*Then God said, "Let there be a **firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.**" 7 **Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so.** Gen 1:6-8*

*Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. 17 **God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth,** Gen 1:16-18*

In the same way, there was some form of firmament above the living creatures and the wheels that separated them from what was above. It was like the color of an awesome crystal and it stretched out over their heads. This created a separation that allowed the living creatures and wheels to operate separately from what was above. Under this firmament the noise of waters and an army, the movement of the living creatures.

***The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads.** 23 **And under the firmament their wings spread out straight, one toward another.** Each one had two which covered one side, and each one had two which covered the other side of the body. 24 **When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings.** 25 **A voice came from above the firmament that was over their heads; whenever they stood, they let down their wings.** Ezek 1:22-25*

Above the Firmament the Likeness of a Throne

Above the firmament was the likeness of a throne which was the color of a sapphire stone. On the throne was the likeness of a man, but from his waist upward the color of amber and from his waist appearance of fire. Like the appearance of a rainbow on a bright day was the appearance of the fire above the throne. This was the likeness of the glory of the Lord. Note not white light, but light broken into it various parts.

And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.** 27 **Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of

amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. 28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. Ezek 1:22-25

Ezekiel 2 - Vision to Call into Service - 2

Introduction: -

Though there are distinct differences in the events leading up to them (*The Burning Bush, The Lord in the temple, The word of the Lord came to me*) the call of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are nearly identical.

*And the Lord said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8 So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, ... 10 **Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.**" Ex 3:7-8, 10*

*Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "**Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."** 9 **And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'** 10 "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed." 11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, Isa 6:8-12*

*But the Lord said to me: "**Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak.** 8 Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord. 9 Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. Jer 1:7-9*

The Call of Ezekiel

As Ezekiel sees the magnificent vision, he falls on his face, but is told to stand as he hear the voice of One speaking. This one may have been the one on the throne or someone else. As the voice was heard the Spirit entered Ezekiel and set him on his feet. It appears that at this commission, his inspiration by the Holy Spirit occurred. At that same moment, he was picked up and set on his feet.

So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking. Ezek. 1:29

*And He said to me, "**Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.**" 2 Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. Ezek. 2:1-2*

It has been decreed that Ezekiel would be sent to the house of Israel which is still identified as a rebellious nation. Though they had been taken into captivity nearly fifteen years back, and are were identified as a part of the "good figs" they have not yet repented nor left their attitude of stubborn rebellion against the Lord. Once again his inspiration is plainly stated with "you shall say to them 'Thus says the Lord God.'"

*And He said to me: "**Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.** 4 For they are **impudent** and **stubborn** children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, '**Thus says the Lord God.**' me. Ezek. 2:3-4*

They are both "impudent" and "rebellious." The first is "hard faced" and the second "hard hearted."

*qasheh ... An adjective meaning **hard, harsh, cruel, severe, strong, violent, fierce.** This term's basic function is to **describe something as hard.** (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:7186)*

*chazaq ... "**strong; mighty; heavy; severe; firm; hard.**" This adjective occurs about 56 times and in all periods of biblical Hebrew. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of OT Words OT:2389)*

It has not not yet been determined (although God already knows, Ezekiel is not to be concerned about the success effectiveness. Whether they will hear and submit or refuse to submit is the the main reason God has sent them. What matters is that they know God has sent a prophet to them.

*As for them, **whether they hear or whether they refuse** — for they are a rebellious house — yet they **will know that a prophet has been among them.** me. Ezek. 2:5*

He is not to fear them or be afraid of them even if they treat him like briars and thorns or even scorpions. Persecution is clearly a part of this call, but he is not to fear their words or be dismayed by their looks. God repeats again the charge Ezekiel must keep. He is only responsible to speak God's words, their response is immaterial.

*"And you, son of man, **do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. 7 You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious.*** A scroll is then handed to him from the vision and it is written on both inside and outside. *me. Ezek. 2:6-7*

God warns Ezekiel that he must not drop to the level of the rest of the house of Israel. While they are violating negative commands of "you shall not...", Ezekiel is warned of a positive command he has just been given (*to him who knows to do and does it not, to him it is sin*). He must eat the scroll that is then handed to him out of the midst of the vision from the previous chapter. As He reads the words of the scroll, he notes its contents are *lamentations, mourning and woe*. Yet he is commanded to eat it.

*But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. **Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.*** 9 Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. 10 Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe. *Ezek. 2:8-10*

Although there is a chapter break here, the thought continues without interruption. The eating of this scroll would complete his inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Eating these words was the final step in Ezekiel's commission. After he ate it, he would be prepared to go and speak. At the very least the woe and lamentations would be the words he must speak to Israel since they are rebellious with a hard face and heart.

*Moreover He said to me, "**Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.**"* 2 So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. 3 And He said to me, "Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you." So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness. *Ezek 3:1-2*

The sweetness of the scroll has been interpreted in different ways so far apart that it is evident no one really knows. It does follow the same pattern as that of John, but in John it only prefaces his further prophecies and again no reason is given for the initial sweetness and the subsequent bitterness. At the least it may indicate the sweetness of speaking to God and receiving God's words and the bitterness of having to speak those words to the rebellious.

And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." 10 Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. 11 And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings." *Rev 10:9-11*

Once again, God returns to the rebellious nature of the children of Israel. He will speak God's words, but like all the previous prophets, they will not be able to understand him. God then makes an interesting observation. If you had gone to a people who spoke a different language than you, they would listen (at least they would hear him out and try to understand his words), but the children of Israel had heard it all before (from Jeremiah). As God had earlier told Isaiah at his call, they simply could not hear and understand what God was telling them. Through their prejudice, lack of interest, and inattention (too involved in the here and now), they were blind to the light.

*Then He said to me: "Son of man, **go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. 5 For you are not sent to a people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, but to the house of Israel, 6 not to many people of unfamiliar speech and of hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them, they would have listened to you. 7 But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hard-hearted.*** *Ezek. 3:4-7*

God identifies the real problem. How can they listen to the messenger who is bringing God's word when they will not listen to God Himself. (*He that rejects you, rejects Me and Him who sent Me*).

While Israel is rebellious (hard faced) and impudent (hard hearted), Ezekiel will have a strong face and a strong forehead. The message God has sent him with, the faith and obedience Ezekiel has been commanded to possess, and the providence of God, Ezekiel will not be overcome by them. Yet once again, God reveals that this will be the response he will receive from his message. While the preacher must be careful to only preach God's word the response of the people must never be a consideration in the style or content of the message.

Behold, I have made your face strong against their faces, and your forehead strong against their foreheads. 9 Like adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house." Ezek. 3:8-9

Once again the contrast between Ezekiel and the house of Israel to whom he was going to preach is emphasized. He must receive all the words into his heart and listen to them. But their response is not the key factor, only Ezekiel's obedience.

Moreover He said to me: "Son of man, receive into your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. 11 And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse." Ezek. 3:10-11

Ezekiel is again made aware of the vision he had seen and it will be the last event he will observe before he is taken to the children of Israel to whom he is to speak.

Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great thunderous voice: "Blessed is the glory of the Lord from His place!" 13 I also heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, and a great thunderous noise. Ezek. 3:12-13

Like John above, the bitterness sets in as he "returns" to the captives at Tel Abib. Evidently this is a return more from the spiritual realm of the vision to the mundane realm of this world. He started among the captives when the vision began, so the return is likely not physical. As he returns the feelings that had been created by the vision came to the forefront and he sat and pondered them for a full week. There was a bitterness either at the change of course of his life, or the truth that no matter what he said to these people, he would not convince them. There was a heat (zeal or indignation at their rebellion) and an astonishment at what he had seen and heard.

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. Ezek 1:1-2

So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me. 15 Then I came to the captives at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar; and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days. Ezek 3:14-15

Ezekiel Begins his Work as a Watchman

God gave him those seven days to think through and prepare his heart then the inspiration given at the call began to be used. God now gives him further instructions as to how he is to view his mission.

Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came to me, Ezek. 3:16

God then gives him a parable that will reveal to him the nature of the work he will be doing. A watchman is a man selected by the city to keep an eye out for the coming of danger. When a watchman sees any form of danger approaching, he has been commissioned to give a warning. A faithful watchman will see danger and immediately blow the trumpet or indicate in some other way that danger is approaching and immediate attention must be given to it.

This is one of the most glaring inconsistencies in man. When he is warned of a material danger that he can see, he is grateful for the warning, takes it seriously and thanks the one who has given it.

But when it is a spiritual warning that cannot be seen, it is often ignored and the one who brought it is hated and persecuted.

God now reveals in very specific terms how He wants Ezekiel to be a watchman over the children of Israel. Every word that God revealed to him regarding the wickedness of these people, he must give that warning to all the people. When he gives Ezekiel the words that will condemn these sinners to a sure death, he must faithfully deliver them to those he has been sent to. Whether he does his work or not, the man himself will die in his iniquity. The difference in Ezekiel's response will only impact him.

If he faithfully gives the warning, then it is no longer his responsibility. He has fully discharged his mission and done all that he could to warn the man of his coming fate. Yet God doesn't begin with the positive, but with the negative. If God gives Ezekiel a warning, and Ezekiel fails to give that warning, God will require that man's blood at his hand, since his death might have been prevented Ezekiel will bear some part in his death and God will require him to explain that.

*"Son of man, **I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel**; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and **give them warning from Me**: 18 When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and **you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.** 19 Yet, **if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.** Ezek. 3:16-27*

The other side will also be demanded. Should Ezekiel find a righteous man, or something he is doing that is righteous that has been given up, so that the man is no longer righteous, ultimately God will punish that man for his apostasy and sin.

Yet once again, Ezekiel has a duty whenever he sees such an event. Just as he is to warn the wicked, he is also to warn those who have fallen away and joined them.

*"Again, **when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.** 21 Nevertheless **if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.**" Ezek 3:16-27*

Much discussion has been made regarding this commission and if and how it is to be applied today. Ezekiel's commission was given to the people of Israel and no one else. No other prophet was made a watchman. He had been qualified to be a watchman and was responsible to them. Are Christians also watchman and if so over whom? We know the apostles were given such a charge as well as the evangelists and elders. The Christian has a general command to preach the gospel, but is everyone he meets under this charge and will he lose his soul and be guilty of that man's blood if he misses any. How far does this charge go? Should all Christians quit their jobs and spend all their time warning? The NT does not reveal it. Each Christian must assess this and determine his own obligations.

Ezekiel 3 (3-8)

Introduction:

We have two places in Ezekiel where he reveals the time from of the book. He will work with Israel for 12 years before the city of Jerusalem will fall, and he continues working with them at least until the 25th year.

And it came to pass **in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month**, that one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "**The city has been captured!**" Ezek 33:21

In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, **in the fourteenth year after the city was captured**, Ezek 40:1

Ezekiel told to Go to the Plain

After the commission and the warning to fulfill it, Ezekiel's work begins not by preaching to the people but going to a place where God could speak to Ezekiel. The phrase "*the hand of the Lord was upon me*" is another clear indication of inspiration.

Then the hand of the Lord was upon me there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out into the plain, and there I shall talk with you." Ezek 3:16-27

Ezekiel immediately complies with God's command. Once again a vision similar in some respects to the one seen at the beginning of the book creates the same response as Ezekiel falls on his face. Once again the spirit enters and puts him on his feet.

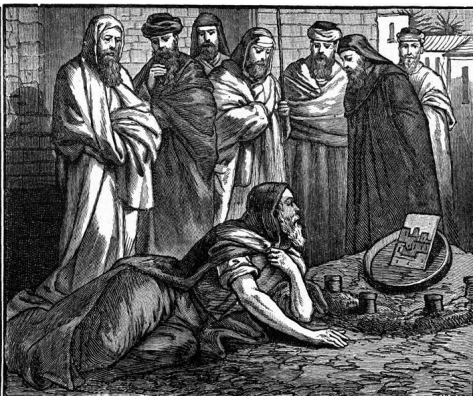
This time the command seems to contradict the previous one. He is to shut himself inside his home.

23 So I arose and went out into the plain, and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. 24 Then the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet, and spoke with me and said to me: "Go, shut yourself inside your house. 25 And you, O son of man, surely they will put ropes on you and bind you with them, so that you cannot go out among them. 26 I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be one to rebuke them, for they are a rebellious house. 27 But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house. Ezek 3:16-27

Ezekiel's Four Part Demonstration

The opening of his work is not in a sermon, but in a very powerful (and uncomfortable) demonstration. Because the details are scant, it is difficult for us to set it forth. **First**, He is either to do all this on a clay tablet or he is to draw a picture of Jerusalem on the tile then built the siege around it, or it is all to be done on the clay tablet. This is to be a sign to the house of Israel.

*"You also, son of man, take a clay tablet and lay it before you, and portray on it a city, Jerusalem. 2 Lay siege against it, build a siege wall against it, and heap up a mound against it; set camps against it also, and place battering rams against it all around. 3 Moreover take for yourself an iron plate, and set it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face against it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. Then take an iron plate and place it between him and the city. **This will be a sign to the house of Israel.** Ezek 4:1-3*



Second, he is to lie for 390 days on his left side and then 40 days on his right side to depict the punishment of the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The Lord will be restraining him so he can't turn from side to side.

Third, he is to take three vessels and place them before him. In the first vessel is all the food he is to eat (wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt) for all the days. The second vessel is to hold the water he is to drink. This third vessel was to contain the human waste he was to use to cook his bread, but after a serious objection for the uncleanness of such a fire, God relents and gives him cow dung.

Fourth as he eats his bread and drinks his water, he is to do so with anxiety and dread All this to reveal the circumstances that Jerusalem is to face.

*"Also take for yourself **wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread of them for yourself.** During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it. 10 And your food which you **eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day;** from time to time you shall eat it. 11 **You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time to time you shall drink.** 12 And you shall eat it as barley cakes; and **bake it using fuel of human waste in their sight.**" Ezek. 4:9-12*

*So I said, "Ah, Lord God! Indeed **I have never defiled myself from my youth till now; I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has abominable flesh ever come into my mouth.**" 15 Then He said to me, "**See, I am giving you cow dung instead of human waste, and you shall prepare your bread over it.**" 16 Moreover He said to me, "**Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread,** Ezek 4:14-16*

The Fifth Demonstration:

This fifth thing that Ezekiel is to do either just before or just after these things is the cutting off of the hair and beard. Which is to be measured into three parts. At the end of the seige, a 1/3 of the hair will be burned on the tile of the city that Ezekiel has made for the seige. Another 1/3 is to be taken with struck with a sword, the final 1/3 is to be thrown to the wind. A very small portion is to be set aside, some tied to the garment and the rest again thrown to the wind.

*"And you, son of man, **take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair.** 2 You shall **burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city,** when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall **take one-third and strike around it with the sword,** and **one-third you shall scatter in the wind:** I will draw out a sword after them. 3 You shall also **take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment.** 4 Then **take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire.** From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel. Ezek 5:1-4*

The Horrible and Terrible Explanation for this Sign is then Given.

The destruction of Judah and Jerusalem will not follow the normal path of a seige as it is a special divine judgment as the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah were before them. God is to do thing He has never done before and would never do again. The nature of their sin is so far more wicked than anything man has ever done before, God will use an extraordinary means to punish them.

Some of these judgments are based on "God is not mocked, A man will reap what he sows." These people have sunk so low in wickedness and ungodliness that they would stoop to do what others would never consider. To eat their own family members.

*"Thus says the Lord God: 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her. 6 **She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes.**' 7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you' — 8 therefore thus says the Lord God: '**Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.** 9 **And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again,** because of all your abominations. 10 Therefore **fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you,** and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the*

winds. Ezek 5:5-10

Added to this are some additional explanations as to the severity of their sin which merited such punishment. God had given them His sanctuary. The one place on earth where He would meet with His chosen people. The honor that had been given to them was not only squandered but defiled and spat upon. The brought detestable images into the sanctuary. This is given as the reason why they would be killed in the manner God had selected.

They will become a *“a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that are all around you.”* Even to this day, we can learn some very important lessons from this passage.

'Therefore, as I live,' says the Lord God, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you; My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. 12 One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. 13 Thus shall My anger be spent, and I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it in My zeal, when I have spent My fury upon them. 14 Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that are all around you, in the sight of all who pass by. 15 'So it shall be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that are all around you, when I execute judgments among you in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I, the Lord, have spoken. Ezek. 5:11-16

The Time Frame of Ezekiel:

*And it came to pass in the **sixth** year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, Ezek 8:1
It came to pass in the **seventh** year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, Ezek 20:1
Again, in the **ninth** year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Ezek 24:1
And it came to pass in the **eleventh** year, on the first day of the month, Ezek 26:1
In the **tenth** year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, Ezek 29:1
And it came to pass in the **twenty-seventh** year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, Ezek 29:17
And it came to pass in the **eleventh** year, in the first month, on the seventh day of the month, Ezek 30:20
Now it came to pass in the **eleventh** year, in the third month, on the first day of the month, Ezek 31:1
And it came to pass in the **twelfth** year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, Ezek 32:1
It came to pass also in the **twelfth** year, on the fifteenth day of the month, Ezek 32:17
And it came to pass in the **twelfth** year of our captivity, tenth month, fifth day of the month, Ezek 33:21
twenty-fifth year of our captivity, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, Ezek 40:1*

A Prophecy against the Mountains of Judah

Like Jeroboam who was ignored as the altar was condemned, long ago, God again does not speak to Israel, but to the mountains and valleys where their idols had been served and their wicked deeds had been done.

*Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, **set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them,** 3 and say, '**O mountains of Israel,** hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, to the hills, to the ravines, and to the valleys: "**Indeed I, even I, will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places.** 4 **Then your altars shall be desolate, your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain men before your idols.** 5 And I will lay the corpses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones all around your altars. Ezek 6:1-6*

This is very similar to the warning God had given to Judah through Jeremiah.

it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room. 33 The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. Jer 7:32-33

God's own Heartache Revealed

God will leave a remnant to remember the terrible things they have done and the anguish and agony they had given God with their adulterous heart.

*"Yet **I will leave a remnant**, so that you may have some who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the countries. 9 Then **those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations** where they are carried captive, **because I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me, and by their eyes which play the harlot after their idols; they will loathe themselves for the evils which they committed in all their abominations.** 10 And **they shall know that I am the Lord; I have not said in vain that I would bring this calamity upon them.**" Ezek. 6:8-10*

God Continues to Address the Land of Israel

We don't know how much of this is heard by those who are with him in Babylon. It seems evident that this would be preached to them as it was to the mountains valleys and land, but it is not stated that they did so.

Once again the reasons behind the punishment are described. This is a divine judgment and there will be no pity.

*Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "And you, son of man, thus says the Lord God **to the land of Israel: 'An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land.** 3 Now the end has come upon you, **And I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways, And I will repay you for all your abominations.** 4 **My eye will not spare you, Nor will I have pity; But I will repay your ways, And your abominations will be in your midst; Then you shall know that I am the Lord!**" Ezek 7:1-4*

Ezekiel 4 (8-10)

Review

Ezekiel was given a vision. There were four living creatures with four wheels beside each of them. There was a firmament like crystal with a throne of sapphire sitting on it and on the throne was “a likeness of the appearance of a man” from the waist up, the appearance of amber with fire in it and from the waist down the appearance of fire with brightness which “was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” Since the wheels moved and went up and down, it appears to be some form of transportation.

After the Spirit entered him he was told to go to the house of Israel and preach to them. He is given a book to eat and is filled with the words God wants him to preach. He then returns to his existence here and ponders what he has seen for 7 days.

After those seven days the Word of the Lord came again and made him the watchman over Israel, then he was told to go into the plain where he again met the vision of the glory of the Lord. He was told to make a tablet of the city of Jerusalem, then put up a siege. He is to gather food and water and plan to lie on his left side for 390 days and his right side for 40 days. He must cut his hair and divide into portions as a sign of the terrible things that would come upon Judah and Jerusalem.

He then prophesies to the rocks and mountains of Judah where all their idolatrous activities had taken place, warning that all those who had worshipped there would lie slain beside the altars.

Now six years have passed and God gives Ezekiel another vision. Since Jerusalem will fall in the twelfth year, only six years remain.

And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has been captured!" Ezek 33:21

The Sixth Year

Though in his own home, in the presence of the elders of Israel, the hand of the Lord fell on him. This appears to be the language of how he went into a vision or trance. Once again he sees a vision very similar to the one in the beginning. From the waist down fire and from the waist up amber. We are not told what the elders were allowed to see nor their response. They are not mentioned again.

And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there. 2 Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire — from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber. Ezek. 8:1-2

Ezekiel Taken in a Vision to the Outer Court of the Temple in Jerusalem

What follows is a very complex vision taking up 8, 9, 10, and 11. It is an explanation to Ezekiel of the why and the how of what the Lord will do to Jerusalem and the people of Judah. The same person seen in chapter 1 on the throne. He stretched out not a hand, but the form of a hand. He touched a lock of his hair(which has now grown back), he was brought “in visions” to Jerusalem and is now looking from the North gate of the inner court, so he is right in front of the temple that always faced east. This time too the presence of the LORD is depicted with the same vision of the chariot as it was in the plain except, as Isaiah before him now right next to the temple.

He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy. 4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain. Ezek 8:1-4

The image of jealousy is some form of idol that has been placed right outside the temple itself in the courtyard right next to the door. Added to this are some form of abominations that Ezekiel is allowed to witness. These things have forced God to leave His temple. He did not leave voluntarily, they forced him out. He then warned Ezekiel that this is only the beginning and not the worst of the abominations he would see.

*Furthermore He said to me, "**Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations.**" 7 So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. Ezek. 8:6-7*

After seeing the hole in the wall that would allow him to enter the court right before the temple, we are not told if he is seeing inside the temple, or if these things are on the outer wall of the temple. Nor are we told if they were really there, or only a part of the vision to depict what they brought inside of their hearts as they approached the temple. We do not know who Jazaniah is, but he is clearly an important man. The censers that should be using the offer the incense to the Lord is being offered instead to his idols.

*Then He said to me, "Son of man, **dig into the wall**"; and when I dug into the wall, **there was a door.** 9 And He said to me, "**Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there.**" 10 So I went in and saw, and there — **every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls.** 11 And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. **Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up.** Ezek. 8:8-11*

The vision is actually not of the temple, but what these leaders were doing in their inner rooms before they arrived at the temple to do their work. No holy hands here. Their reasoning was of the most wicked character. They had reasoned that since God had forsaken the land after the captives were taken He could no longer see them.

*Then He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen **what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols?** For they say, '**The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.**'" Ezek. 8:12*

Ezekiel then returns to the North gate of the temple and saw the women of Israel weeping for Tammuz. Various opinions have been set forth to explain who Tammuz was. The best answer is the general one, he/she was an idol the women had sympathy for. Even Ezekiel is dismayed at this obvious sign of apostasy.

*And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing." 14 So He **brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord's house;** and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. Ezek. 8:13-14*

Even greater abominations await him as he enters the inner court of the Lord's house(temple). Between the altar and the porch that enters directly into the temple. They are not looking at the temple where the presence of God was, but instead have their backs to the temple while they worshiped the sun.

*Then He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, **you will see greater abominations than these.**" 16 So He brought me into **the inner court of the Lord's house;** and there, **at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshipping the sun toward the east.** Ezek. 8:15-16*

To fully complete the picture, God now sums up why He is destroying the city and nation. If this was not enough for them to be destroyed in violating the commands to serve the Lord and worship him alone, they have also violated the command to love their neighbor. They have filled the land with violence. God likes it to putting the branch to their nose. This expression had puzzled those who deeply study this verse and no real substantial solution has been offered. Some see it as a further

explanation of how they have set themselves up to the wrath of God. Either another form of idolatrous worship, or an idiom for that day of how someone does something to bring about great trouble upon themselves, akin perhaps to they shot themselves in the foot or put their foot in their mouth. God will not spare them when adversity finally comes and forces them to cry out to the only one who can truly save them, as they had done since the time of the Judges.

*And He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? **Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. 18 Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.**" Ezek 8:17-18*

Judgment is Decreed

This voice is not identified, it might be the Lord, the Word, or an angelic being. It is time for the preparation of judgment. As we witnessed a single angel kill 185,000:

*Then the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians **one hundred and eighty-five thousand**; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses — all dead. Isa 37:36*

Now there are six men (only in appearance as men), who have a deadly weapon in their hands and are prepared to destroy all in the city. Yet in thier midst is another "man" clothed in linen (not ready for battle), with a writers inkhorn in his hand. They all came to the side of the alter where animal sacrifices were offered.

*Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, "**Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand.**" 2 And suddenly **six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.** Ezek. 9:1-2*

The imminent nature of this calamity is not pictured as God has removed himself from between the wings of the cherubim as God had promised Solomon He would be to hear the prayers of those who prayed to the temple. Now He has left that place and is now at the threshold of the temple, one step away form leaving. While He is still in the temple, the man with the inkhorn is called.

*Now the **glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple.** And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; Ezek. 9:3*

The concern of Abraham over Sodom and Habbakuk over the coming of Babylon is first addressed. One of them must go through the city and identify the righteous. He now identifies these righteous servants by their attitude toward what is happening in the city. If they are sighing and crying over the abominations then they have proven themselves to be worthy of the mark that would identify them as God's people.

*and **the Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."** Ezek. 9:3-4*

This is the attitude we see in Lot and we do not see in those who are condemned in Romans 1.

*and delivered righteous Lot, who was **oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked** 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, **tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds**) — 9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, 2 Peter 2:7-10*

*who, **knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.** Rom 1:32*

The Lord then commands those with the battleaxes to follow right behind this man and if they do not find a mark, they are to kill. No one is to be removed from this judgment. Even the young

children who have not yet reached the age of accountability but are already steeped in the attitudes of their parents are not to be spared.

To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. 6 Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple. 7 Then He said to them, "Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!" And they went out and killed in the city. Ezek. 9:5-7

Ezekiel seeks to mediate for the people as Moses before him and Christ after him.

So it was, that while they were killing them, I was left alone; and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, "Ah, Lord God! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?" Ezek. 9:8

But it is too late for them. They are passed the iniquity level that removes any right for them to hold the land or their lives.

Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, 'The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!' 10 And as for Me also, My eye will neither spare, nor will I have pity, but I will recompense their deeds on their own head." Ezek. 9:9-10

This was the exact warning God had given to them when they came out of Egypt.

You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you 27 (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), 28 lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. 29 For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Lev 18:26-29

'You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. 23 And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. Lev 20:22-24

But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." Gen 15:16

As soon as God pronounces this doom on Jerusalem the man returns with the inkhorn revealing to the Lord that what he had been asked to do with the mark on the forehead

Just then, the man clothed with linen, who had the inkhorn at his side, reported back and said, "I have done as You commanded me." Ezek. 9:11

Judgment is also depicted by the use of portions of the chariot that God has ridden on. The same man that had marked the heads of the foreheads is now told to take fire out from the midst of the wheels of the chariot and take some of the coals and scatter them over the city.

And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of the likeness of a throne. 2 Then He spoke to the man clothed with linen, and said, "Go in among the wheels, under the cherub, fill your hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." And he went in as I watched. Ezek. 10:1-2

It is difficult to say with certainty, but it appears that these cherubim are the true reality of the ones depicted in the temple above the mercy seat. That which was only a likeness in the temple now leave the temple along with the presence of God, which is no longer in the temple, but is in the court.

Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of

the brightness of the Lord's glory. 5 And **the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard** even in the outer court, like the voice of Almighty God when He speaks. Ezek. 10:3-5

The fire is taken from the wheels and the cherubim places it in the hands of the man in linen garments.

Then it happened, when He commanded **the man clothed in linen**, saying, "Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim," that **he went in and stood beside the wheels**. 7 And **the cherub stretched out his hand from among the cherubim to the fire that was among the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed with linen**, who took it and went out. 8 The cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings. Ezek. 10:6-8

The wheels depicted in the first chapter are now described again.

And when I looked, there were four wheels by the cherubim, **one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by each other cherub**; the wheels appeared to have **the color of a beryl stone**. 10 As for their appearance, **all four looked alike** — as it were, **a wheel in the middle of a wheel**. 11 When they went, they went toward any of their four directions; **they did not turn aside when they went**, but followed in the direction the head was facing. They did not turn aside when they went. 12 And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and **the wheels that the four had, were full of eyes all around**. 13 As for the wheels, **they were called in my hearing, "Wheel."** Ezek. 10:9-12

The creatures are again described. Either one of the faces has now changed or the face of the cherubim was like that of ox that it replaced

Each one had four faces: the **first face was the face of a cherub**, the second face **the face of a man**, the third the **face of a lion**, and the fourth the **face of an eagle**. 15 And the cherubim were lifted up. **This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar**. 16 When the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also did not turn from beside them. 17 When the cherubim stood still, the wheels stood still, and when one was lifted up, the other lifted itself up, for the spirit of the living creature was in them. Ezek. 10:14-17

Now the glory of the Lord leaves the temple and rises above the throne on the chariot.

Then **the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim**. 19 And **the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight**. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord's house, and **the glory of the God of Israel was above them**. Ezek. 10:18-19

The nature of the four living creatures is now revealed as they are identified the end of the chapter as the cherubim. They are now on the south side of the temple.

This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the River Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim. 21 Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. 22 And the likeness of their faces was the same as the faces which I had seen by the River Chebar, their appearance and their persons. They each went straight forward. Ezek. 10:20-22

Ezekiel 5 (11-14)

Review

This vision began in chapter 8 when Ezekiel was brought to Jerusalem and given the opportunity to witness the wickedness of Judah and the judgments God was preparing against Jerusalem. As a parent explains the reasons for the discipline of a child, so God now does for Ezekiel. Many who see God's wrath think it is too severe, but after hearing God's side, it is only righteous indignation.

The Abominations of Judah (8:1-18)

- (1) The image of jealousy at the North gate of the inner court.
- (2) Though a hole in the wall he saw the abominations in the hearts of the 70 men of the elders.
- (3) The women of Judah weeping for the idol Tammuz.
- (4) The 25 men with their backs to the temple worshipping the sun.
- (5) In addition, God reminds Ezekiel that the land was filled with violence.

Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them." Ezek 8:18

Those who sigh and cry over these abominations – marked and spared (9:1-11)

- (1) Six "men" with battle axes are called, and one with an inkhorn are given instructions.
- (2) The latter is to mark the foreheads and the others to destroy all without that mark.
- (3) Ezekiel cries out as they begin to kill and God shows why and proclaims He will not spare.

The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; ... as for Me also, My eye will neither spare, nor will I have pity, but I will recompense their deeds on their own head." Ezek 9:9-10

The "chariot" Ezekiel saw appears: God is now leaving His Temple (10:1-22)

- (1) The man in linen takes coals of fire from under the wheels and casts them over Jerusalem.
- (2) The glory of the Lord moved from over the Cherub to the Threshold of the temple.
- (3) The glory of the Lord moves past the threshold to stand over the chariot.
- (4) The chariot begins to move away and pauses at the East gate of the temple.

Ezekiel is also lifted up and moved to the East Gate.

He now witnesses another 25 men. Although they may or may not be the same men, they are now in a different location. God identifies these men as those who are "princes," who "devise evil and give wicked counsel" to Jerusalem.

*Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to **the East Gate of the Lord's house**, which faces eastward; and there **at the door of the gate were twenty-five men**, among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, **princes of the people**. 2 And He said to me: "Son of man, **these are the men who devise iniquity and give wicked counsel in this city**, 3 who say, **'The time is not near to build houses; this city is the caldron, and we are the meat.'**" Ezek. 11:1-3*

Their counsel is "the time is not near to build houses," may be as direct contradiction to Jeremiah's words to the captives. As was even spoken right after the letter was written.

*Now therefore, **why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth** who makes himself a prophet to you? 28 For **he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, 'This captivity is long; build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat their fruit.'**" Jer 29:27-28*

These man are likely contradicting these words. Then they are saying. We are more than protected here in Jerusalem. The city will protect us from the danger of death just like a pot protects the meat from burning in the fire.

God commands Ezekiel to prophesy against them. Whether this was actually done or only part of

the vision is impossible to know for certain. Either way, the main purpose of the whole vision is to give more power and emotion to the prophecies he will make when he returns to the captives. He is to strongly rebuke them for the thoughts they still harbor in their minds of escaping God's punishment. The reality is that it is not them, but those already slain who are the meat and soon they too will be drawn out and slain by the sword. The punishment given is due to their rebellion against God's statutes and judgments.

*Therefore **prophesy against them, prophesy**, O son of man!" 5 Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and said to me, "Speak! 'Thus says the Lord: "**Thus you have said, O house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind.** 6 **You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain.**" 7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "**Your slain whom you have laid in its midst, they are the meat, and this city is the caldron; but I shall bring you out of the midst of it.** 8 **You have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you,**" says the Lord God. 9 "**And I will bring you out of its midst, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and execute judgments on you.** 10 **You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.** 11 **This city shall not be your caldron, nor shall you be the meat in its midst. I will judge you at the border of Israel.** 12 **And you shall know that I am the Lord; for you have not walked in My statutes nor executed My judgments, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you."** Ezek. 11:4-12*

Again, whether only in the vision, or the vision interrupted and Ezekiel actually speaking these words, in the midst of his words, Pelatiah died and Ezekiel is again deeply distressed with the results of the task he has been given.

*Now it happened, **while I was prophesying**, that **Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died**. Then I fell on my face and cried with a loud voice, and said, "**Ah, Lord God! Will You make a complete end of the remnant of Israel?**"*

Words of Comfort to Ezekiel

God gives Ezekiel a comforting explanation, although the comfort will not come for many centuries. God is going to punish all who are guilty of this wickedness. But of those who have been cast far out among the Gentiles, God will give them sanctuary and bring them back with a new heart of flesh and not stone. Yet those who continue to rebel against him will only reap what they have sown.

*14 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 15 "**Son of man, your brethren, your relatives, your countrymen, and all the house of Israel in its entirety, are those about whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Get far away from the Lord; this land has been given to us as a possession.'** 16 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "**Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.**" 17 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "**I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.**" 18 And they will go there, and **they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there.** 19 **Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,** 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. 21 **But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads,**" says the Lord God. Ezek. 11:14-21*

God leaves the City

The final portion of the vision shows Ezekiel that God is now high above the wheels of the "chariot" and that the chariot now moves out of the midst of city to a mountain on the east side. Ezekiel is then taken by vision back to the captives in Babylon. The vision ends with his return and he immediately begins to tell the captives all that he saw while he was there.

*22 So **the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them.** 23 **And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city.** 24 **Then the Spirit took me up and***

brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to those in captivity. And the vision that I had seen went up from me. 25 So I spoke to those in captivity of all the things the Lord had shown me. Ezek. 11:22-25

Ezekiel is Given Tasks to Portray Judah's Captivity

Pack your Belongings and Dig through the Wall

Similar to Jesus parables, God uses different ways to allow Judah the opportunity to grasp the enormity of what was occurring in Jerusalem either at that moment or soon. First, he was to prepare (pack) his belongings as though going into captivity

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they are a rebellious house. 3 "Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they are a rebellious house. 4 By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity. Ezek. 12:1-4

After going through all the previous events of packing and going, he is now told to dig through the wall and carry his belongings through the wall at twilight. In this way he has now become a sign to them.

Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out through it. 6 In their sight you shall bear them on your shoulders and carry them out at twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground, for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel." 7 So I did as I was commanded. I brought out my belongings by day, as though going into captivity, and at evening I dug through the wall with my hand. I brought them out at twilight, and I bore them on my shoulder in their sight. Ezek. 12:5-7

The next morning, God now gives him the exact response he is to tell these people when they ask him about the events of the day before. He is a sign to them for exactly what they saw Ezekiel would soon be done by the king of Judah.

And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' 10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them."' 11 Say, 'I am a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall be carried away into captivity.' 12 And the prince who is among them shall bear his belongings on his shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry them out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with his eyes. 13 I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there. 14 I will scatter to every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his troops; and I will draw out the sword after them. Ezek. 12:8-14

The fulfillment of these words was recorded by Jeremiah:

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the city was penetrated. ... 4 So it was, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled and went out of the city by night, by way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls. ... 6 Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. 7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon. Jer 39:2-7

Ezekiel is to leave nothing out. The terror of their deaths and the terror of the captivity of those who did not die.

"Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. 16 But I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go. Then they shall know that I am the Lord." Ezek. 12:15-16

Eat and Drink with Trembling and Anxiety

The second parable he is to portray before them is how he is to eat his food and drink water. This time as they see him doing these things, he explains that they too are in imitation of what is to occur in Jerusalem.

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 18 "Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety. 19 And say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the land of Israel: "They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink their water with dread, so that her land may be emptied of all who are in it, because of the violence of all those who dwell in it. 20 Then the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall become desolate; and you shall know that I am the Lord."'" Ezek. 12:17-20

Expose the Folly of their Proverb:

Once again, God commands Ezekiel to speak directly to the people regarding the false information they have been given. Just as today we hear the day of the Lord is imminent, when God has told us it will be as a thief in the night, so then what was imminent was being proclaimed as far off.

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 22 "Son of man, what is this proverb that you people have about the land of Israel, which says, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision fails'? 23 Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel." But say to them, "The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. 24 For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 For I am the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the Lord God.'" 26 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 27 "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.' 28 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord God.'" Ezek. 12:21-28

Condemnation of False Prophets

God now commands Ezekiel to do what all true servants of God are called upon to do. Error must be exposed and condemned. All who move the people from the plain words of God into their own teachings must be dealt with. God is very clear here. All who speak from their own heart and contradict the true words of God will be condemned and those who follow them as well.,

*And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, **prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, 'Hear the word of the Lord!'**" 3 Thus says the Lord God: "**Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!** 4 O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. 5 You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the Lord. 6 **They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says the Lord!'** But the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. 7 Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? **You say, The Lord says, but I have not spoken.** Ezek. 13:1-7*

God accuses them of seduction, of building what will be destroyed by flood, hail and stormy wind.

*"Because, indeed, because **they have seduced My people, saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace — and one builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar —** 11 **say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall. There will be flooding rain, and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it down.** 12 Surely, when the wall has fallen, **will it not be said to you, 'Where is the mortar with which you plastered it?'**" 13 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will cause a stormy wind to break forth in My fury; and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and great hailstones in fury to consume it. 14 **So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.** Ezek. 13:10-14*

Condemn the False Prophetesses

Not only were there prophets among them who were teaching error, but also there were women among these who were also proclaiming themselves to be speaking for God.

*"Likewise, son of man, **set your face against the daughters of your people, who prophesy out of their own heart**; prophesy against them, 18 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: **"Woe to the women who sew magic charms on their sleeves and make veils for the heads of people of every height to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive?** 19 **And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies?"** 20 'Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against your magic charms by which you hunt souls there like birds. I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like birds. 21 I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people out of your hand, and they shall no longer be as prey in your hand. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. 22 **"Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life.** 23 Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; **for I will deliver My people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.**"'" Ezek. 13:17-23*

God will not Answer those who have Idols in their Heart

God used the opportunity of the hypocrisy of the elders who came to Ezekiel to seek God's counsel when they were fully committed to idols to reveal He can see through their hypocrisy.

*Now **some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me.** 2 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 3 **"Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?** 4 "Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: **"Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols,** 5 that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.'" Ezek. 14:1-5*

Ezekiel is to use this opportunity to try to create godly sorrow that will lead them to repentance.

*"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: **"Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.** 7 For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, **who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself.** 8 **I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb,** and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. Ezek. 14:6-8*

Ezekiel 6 (14-24)

(Important Passages in Ezekiel)

Introduction:

Although they are not part of Ezekiel's life, there are some important parables, prophecies and details about our spiritual life. We will give a quick overview of them.

Deliverance by Righteousness (Ezek 14:

Judgment on Nations (14)

It may be that this is similar to what God did with Cain and what God did after they left the ark. The first time it occurred, God gave Cain a lighter sentence, but after they left the Ark, God now demands the death penalty. As Abraham pleaded for Sodom, God promised to spare the cities if there were 10 righteous. Not knowing the size of the cities, this may have been a much larger percentage than we think. Here, God makes it clear that nations are no longer going to be spared simply because there is one righteous man in its midst. God first uses famine, then moves to wild beasts, a sword, and pestilence. Finally he speaks of the four severe judgments (probably those above as He was about to send on Jerusalem. Jeremiah speaks of all of these many many times.

*"Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will **cut off its supply of bread**, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. 14 **Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,**" says the Lord God. ... 15 "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they empty it, ... 16 even **though these three men were in it, as I live,**" says the Lord God, "they would **deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered**, and the land would be desolate. ... 17 "Or if I **bring a sword on that land,** ... 18 even **though these three men were in it, as I live,**" says the Lord God, "they would **deliver neither sons nor daughters, but only they themselves** would be delivered. ... 19 "Or if I **send a pestilence into that land** and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, 20 **even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live,**" says the Lord God, "**they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves** by their righteousness." ... "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem — the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence — to cut off man and beast from it? Ezek 14:12-23*

The Parable of the Vine (15)

There are many types of wood that man can carve and cut into furniture and other things. But the wood of the grape vine is not among them among them. It is worthless for anything. God then adds that this vine has been placed in the fire and is partially consumed. At that point what could anyone do with it? This is how God now sees the nation of Judah

*Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, **how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood**, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? 3 Is wood **taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg** from it to hang any vessel on? 4 Instead, **it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work?** 5 Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned? 6 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: **'Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem;** 7 and I will **set My face against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them.** Ezek 15:1-7*

God's Marriage to Jerusalem — Continued unfaithfulness(16).

We have to understand that this is not literal, but spiritual. These two nations were among the seven wicked nations Israel destroyed when they took the land, but their heritage was so similar in spiritual likeness that God used it. Though Abraham and Sarah were neither Amorites nor Hittites, using these two nations would cause a visceral response.

"Son of man, **cause Jerusalem to know her abominations**, 3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: **"Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.** 4 As for your nativity, on the day you were born **your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths.** Ezek. 15:1-4

The next section revealed the disgust and lack of value others had. This is a very apt description of all of us before we are washed in the blood of Jesus. But God had pity on this poor and despised orphan. Through God's blessings and providence, Israel grew.

5 **No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born.** 6 "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' 7 **I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful.** Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. Ezek. 15:5-7

God then likened Israel in Egypt as the time of love. God swore an oath and gave a covenant. God cleansed them and clothed them in beautiful garments.

8 "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed **your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness.** Yes, **I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine,**" says the Lord God. Ezek. 15:8

God then made her more beautiful in their new land giving them beautiful clothing and jewels.

9 "Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. 10 **I clothed you in embroidered cloth** and gave you **sandals of badger skin**; I clothed you with **fine linen** and covered you with **silk**. 11 **I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck.** 12 And I put a **jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.** 13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. **You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil.** You were **exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty.** 14 **Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,**" says the Lord God. Ezek. 15:9-14

Jerusalem's Harlotry

Jerusalem became a harlot to the god's of other nations. She gave them as sacrifice God's blessings. Then they took their own sons and daughters, God had given to them and threw them into the fire. She forgot the days of her youth and became a brazen prostitute. God then began to send judgments to bring them to their sense. The judges is an example of the unfaithfulness of these people.

15 **"But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. ... 20 "Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be ... you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood. ... You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry. 26 You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger. ... 27 "Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. 28 You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. 29 Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied. 30 "How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord God, "seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot.** Ezek. 15:15-30

God continued his comparison to a wife of a good man. Just like Gomer with Hosea. She became a prostitute who left her husband. But she was so lewd and lustful she did paid them.

Yet you were **not like a harlot, because you scorned payment.** 32 You are an adulterous wife, who

takes strangers instead of her husband. ... 35 'Now then, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord! 36 Thus says the Lord God: ... with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them, ... I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy. Ezek 15:31-39

Those they had sought will now be those who destroy them. God then revealed again the anguish of heart, jealousy and anger Jerusalem had provoked in Him all these years.

they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords. 41 They shall **burn your houses with fire**, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will make you cease playing the harlot, and you shall no longer hire lovers. 42 **So I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more.** 15:40-42

The depth of their depravity led to the accusation that Jerusalem had become more wicked than Samaria and Sodom.

44 "Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use this proverb against you: **'Like mother, like daughter!'** 45 You are your mother's daughter, **loathing husband and children**; and you are the **sister of your sisters**, who loathed their husbands and children; your **mother was a Hittite** and your **father an Amorite**. 46 "Your **elder sister is Samaria**, ... your **younger sister**, who dwells to the south of you, **is Sodom** and her daughters. 47 You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, **you became more corrupt than they in all your ways.** ... "neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. 49 Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had **pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness**; neither did she **strengthen the hand of the poor and needy**. 50 And they were **haughty and committed abomination** before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.

God still Promised to Remember His Covenant

God is faithful. The promises made to Abraham and given again to Israel must be kept even if they are unfaithful. God had made many promises regarding Jerusalem. They must be kept and would be when Jerusalem was moved from earth to heaven. She is now the church and her humility has replaced her pride.

60 "Nevertheless **I will remember My covenant** with you in the days of your youth, and I will **establish an everlasting covenant with you**. 61 Then you will **remember your ways and be ashamed**,... ... And I will **establish My covenant with you**. Then you shall **know that I am the Lord**, 63 that you may **remember and be ashamed**, and **never open your mouth anymore because of your shame**, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done," says the Lord God."

"Riddle" and "Parable" of the Eagle and Vine (17)

This is both a riddle needing proper investigation and meditation. An eagle takes the top of a great cedar on the great mountain of Lebanon. This eagle transplants this and it becomes a great tree. But the plant rejects the eagle that planted it and chose another eagle. Thus the plant withered and died. The God gave the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar had spared them and made a covenant with the remnant, but they had chosen Egypt instead. God will allow Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Egypt and those who broke the covenant will be judged and punished.

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, **pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel**, 3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "**A great eagle with large wings and long pinions, Full of feathers of various colors, Came to Lebanon And took from the cedar the highest branch.** "**But there was another great eagle with large wings and many feathers; And behold, this vine bent its roots toward him, And stretched its branches toward him,** "Say now to the rebellious house: '**Do you not know what these things mean?**' Tell them, 'Indeed **the king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and took its king and princes, and led them with him to Babylon.** 13 And he **took the king's offspring, made a covenant with him, and put him under oath.** ... that **by keeping his covenant it might stand.** 15 **But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people. Will he prosper? Will he who does such things escape? Can he break a covenant and still be delivered?** Therefore thus says the Lord God: "As

I live, surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will recompense on his own head. ... I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed against Me. Ezek 17:20-21

The Proverb of Sour Grapes (18)

Israel has coined a proverb to describe their current plight. Through no fault of their own (in their eyes), they have found themselves captives in Babylon. What their father's had done is now imputed to them and they must pay the price for their fathers actions. God destroys this reasoning, hoping they will no longer use this proverb again. Yet it is still being used up to this present day by those who teach that Adam's sin was imputed to all of us.

"What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge'? 3 "As I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. 4 "Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die. Ezek 18:2-4

God begins with a just man who has favor with Him. When he has a wicked son, God makes clear that it is for his own sin that he will die. He moves then to the son of this wicked man who sees the wickedness of his father and refuses to follow him, once again becoming a just man. It seems like what the wicked want is an excuse to remove responsibility. It is not my fault is much more comforting even though a lie. God shows if to what it is.

19 "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?' Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. 20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. ... "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 22 None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him ... when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; ... "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? 26 When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. 27 Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. 28 Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ... "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"

God gives an Account that Summarizes the History of Israel (20)

God starts His history with His covenant to them. He gave an account of Israel's wickedness we don't find in Exodus. Even before they left Egypt, God had been tempted to destroy them, but spared them for His name's sake. This was later used by Moses to seek God's compassion after the golden calf.

*Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Then **make known to them the abominations of their fathers.** 5 "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "**On the day when I chose Israel and raised My hand in an oath to the descendants of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I raised My hand in an oath to them, saying, 'I am the Lord your God. Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'** 8 **But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, 'I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.'** 9 **But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they were, in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt.** 20:1-9*

A Parable of Fire (in Jerusalem?) (20)

God now gives another parable about a forest fire that will destroy the land of the South. At the end of it Ezekiel proclaims Israel's attitude toward his preaching.

"Son of man, set your face toward the south; preach against the south and prophesy against the forest land, the South, 47 and say to the forest of the South, 'Hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree and every dry tree in you; the blazing flame shall not be quenched, ... 49 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! They say of me, 'Does he not speak parables?'" Ezek. 20:46-49

Prophecies Regarding the Destruction of Jerusalem (21-22)

Sighing and The Sign of Two Roads

God wants those in Babylon that Jerusalem's end is now imminent. He will do this first by sighing, then by a setting up a sign as an indication that even then the king of Babylon is on his way to Jerusalem.

"Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel; ... Sigh therefore, son of man, with a breaking heart, and sigh with bitterness before their eyes. 7 And it shall be when they say to you, 'Why are you sighing?' that you shall answer, 'Because of the news; when it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. ... The Lord came to me again, saying: 19 "And son of man, appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go; both of them shall go from the same land. Make a sign; put it at the head of the road to the city. For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver. 22 In his right hand is the divination for Jerusalem: to set up battering rams, to call for a slaughter, to lift the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to heap up a siege mound, and to build a wall.

Judgment of Jerusalem

God now lists all the terrible things that are going on in Jerusalem. Not only are there idols, but there are also many other perversions. Murder, sexual perversions of incest and false prophets.

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Now, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yes, show her all her abominations! 3 Then say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself. ... 7 In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow. 8 You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths. ... 18 "Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they are all bronze, tin, iron, and lead, in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver... The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. 26 Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean;

God Sought for a Man

Like Jeremiah, God also tells Ezekiel that He had sought for one man who could heal the breach, but could not find one.

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God. Ezek 22:30-31

Parable of the Two Harlots (23)

This parable is similar to the one in verse sixteen. God again uses the figure of a wife under

covenant to her husband who becomes a prostitute. This time He speaks of the sins of Samaria and Jerusalem.

Parable of the Cooking Pot

Ezekiel is told to get some very precious ingredients to make a stew and put it into a pot. After it is well cooked and seasoned Ezekiel puts the ingredients into the fire to be burned up and the empty pot is put on the fire to be destroyed.

The Death of Ezekiel's Wife is to be a Sign and Parable

God warns Ezekiel that his wife is going to die that day and he is not to mourn for her because no one will mourn for Jerusalem when she falls.

Also the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 16 "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. 17 Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow." 18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded. 19 And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these things signify to us, that you behave so?" Ezek. 24:16-18

Ezekiel 7 (25-32)

Introduction:

The last portion of Ezekiel can be outlined in the following way:

- 25-32 Prophecies against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt
- 33
 - Ezekiel gives Israel the parable and interpretation of the watchman (1-11).
 - Immediate affects of sin and repentance — God's Way is Fair! (12-20).
 - Fall of Jerusalem – words of those who remain rebuked (21-29).
 - How they hear the words of Ezekiel but don't do them. (30-33).
- 34 Rebuking the Shepherds of Israel
- 35-36 End for Esau and Israel
- 37 The vision of the dry bones
- 38-39 God & Magog
- 40-48 A Vision of a New Temple

Prophecies against the Surrounding Nations (25-32)

The thing that ties the prophecies against the first five nations is their hatred, jealousy, or covetousness that had been created at the fall of Israel.

Ammon felt a sense of accomplishment and relief. Their claims of divine protection finally crushed.

*The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, **set your face against the AMMONITES**, and prophesy against them. 3 Say to the Ammonites, 'Hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God: "**Because you said, 'Aha!' against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity, 4 indeed, therefore, I will deliver you as a possession** to the men of the East, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings among you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. Ezek 25:1-5*

Both Moab and Edom feel this sense of glee that the protection God had given them was finally removed. They may have attributed it to the fact that God was not that powerful or maybe even just an idol. The thought that this was a righteous judgment and the pity that should have been created were completely absent.

*'Thus says the Lord God: "**Because MOAB and SEIR (EDOM) say, 'Look! The house of Judah is like all the nations,' 9 therefore, behold, I will clear the territory of Moab of cities, of the cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kirjathaim. 10 To the men of the East I will give it as a possession, together with the Ammonites, that the Ammonites may not be remembered among the nations. 11 And I will execute judgments upon Moab, and they shall know that I am the Lord.**" Ezek 25:8-11*

Edom had taken it a step further and taken part in it. They had taken vengeance on supposed past wrongs and thus greatly offended against God.

*'Thus says the Lord God: "**Because of what EDOM did against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has greatly offended by avenging itself on them," 13 therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will also stretch out My hand against Edom, cut off man and beast from it, and make it desolate** from Teman; Dedan shall fall by the sword. 14 I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel, that they may do in Edom according to My anger and according to My fury; and they shall know My vengeance," says the Lord God. Ezek 25:12-14*

So also the Philistines had taken vengeance with spite in their heart at the fall of Judah.

*'Thus says the Lord God: "**Because the PHILISTINES dealt vengefully and took vengeance with a spiteful heart, to destroy because of the old hatred," 16 therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast. 17 I will execute great vengeance on them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I lay My vengeance upon them."**" Ezek 25:15-17*

Tyre also felt a great sense of vindication, due to the fall of Jerusalem. They took it one step further, thinking that this fall would lead to greater riches and prosperity for them. The judgment of is of such importance that Ezekiel goes on for another two chapters dealing with the details of their destruction.

*And it came to pass in the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, **because TYRE has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.'** 3 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: '**Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. 4 And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. 5 It shall be a place for spreading nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,**' says the Lord God; 'it shall become plunder for the nations. 6 Also her daughter villages which are in the fields shall be slain by the sword. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.'
Ezek 26:1-6; 27-28*

Sidon and Egypt appear to be far enough away that their feelings or attitudes toward Judah are not even mentioned. It doesn't say Sidon will fall, but God will execute judgments in her.

*Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 21 "Son of man, **set your face toward SIDON, and prophesy against her,** 22 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "**Behold, I am against you, O Sidon; I will be glorified in your midst; And they shall know that I am the Lord, When I execute judgments in her and am hallowed in her.** Ezek 28:20-22*

Like Sidon, Egypt is not rebuked for their feelings toward the fall of Jerusalem or Judah. Also like Sidon, God does not prophesy a full end. Like Judah Egypt will also return after a period of

*In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "**Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of EGYPT, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt.** 3 Speak, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, O great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers, Who has said, 'My River is my own; I have made it for myself.' 4 But I will put hooks in your jaws, And cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales; I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, And all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales. Ezek 29:1-4*

*I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and among the cities that are laid waste, **her cities shall be desolate forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries.**" 13 'Yet, thus says the Lord God: "**At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were scattered. 14 I will bring back the captives of Egypt and cause them to return to the land of Pathros, to the land of their origin, and there they shall be a lowly kingdom. 15 It shall be the lowliest of kingdoms; it shall never again exalt itself above the nations, for I will diminish them so that they will not rule over the nations anymore** Ezek. 29:12-15; 30:1-32:23*

The Watchman

Although God had already made Ezekiel a watchman back at the very beginning of his work (Ezek. 3:16-21), Israel was not told at that time. Now Ezekiel is told to give a parable to them fully describing the work and value of the watchman over a city. This is the amazing thing about the human race. They would be so happy if someone warned them about saving their physical life and property, but become irate when it is their spiritual life.

*Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "**Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them:** 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, 3 when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life. 6 But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'
Ezek. 33:1-6*

Israel is also informed that Ezekiel informed that God has made him their watchman. While he is responsible to warn them (a duty he has done well), they are responsible to take warning. If they refuse to take warning, each one will “die in his iniquity.” God then uses their own words against them. They have proclaimed that in their terrible fate in Babylon they were pining away. If that is how they truly feel, they are manifesting the godly sorrow that precedes repentance. Yet they must take this sorrow and turn from their evil ways or they will still die in those sins. God then reveals an important part of His character. He did not create the heavens and the earth so he could punish them with eternal death. He created so that people would turn and live.

*"So you, son of man: **I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel;** therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 Nevertheless **if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity;** but you have delivered your soul. 10 "Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say, "**If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?"**" 11 Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, '**I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?**' Ezek. 33:7-11*

God then returned to the subject He had revealed to them in Ezekiel 18. There, their proverb regarding sour grapes was refuted and shown to be false. There, their concern was the ability of the guilt of their father's sins to be transferred to them. God completely repudiated that doctrine. Since all souls come from the hands of God, only the soul that sins can die. Now, he speaks of the immediate consequences of sin and repentance. Any righteous man who sins immediately dies and all his previous acts are forgotten. In the same way any wicked man who repents will have all his previous sins forgotten and he shall live.

*"Therefore you, O son of man, say to the children of your people: '**The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor shall the righteous be able to live because of his righteousness in the day that he sins.**' 13 When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but **he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die.** 14 Again, when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' **if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right,** 15 if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, **he shall surely live; he shall not die.** 16 **None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live.** Ezek. 33:12-16*

Israel considers this totally unfair! In their eyes, a man who lives his entire life faithful to God then falls at the end and loses it all. With all forgotten, it seems unfair that the wicked sinner who lived his entire life in sin, then repented at the last minute, he would live. Their concept of unfairness centered on the amount of effort and work both had put forth. The one man had done many righteous deeds, while the sinner had done few. Weighed on the scale, the righteous man had many more good deeds than the wicked. What seemed unfair was completely fair, when God reminds them of the terrible consequences of sin.

*"Yet the **children of your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.'** But it is **their way which is not fair!** 18 **When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it.** 19 **But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it.** 20 Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways." Ezek. 33:17-20*

The time frame is not in exact order here, so these events are not necessarily tied to the passages above. Ezekiel has been informed that the city of Jerusalem had fallen. God then revealed to Ezekiel that there was no remorse or repentance in the hearts of those who were still alive. Instead there was still a sense of entitlement because of their relationship to Abraham. God then revealed that with their sinful conduct their physical relationship from Abraham would be of no avail.

And it came to pass **in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has been captured!"** 22 Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me the evening before the man came who had escaped. And He had opened my mouth; so when he came to me in the morning, my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute. 23 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 24 **"Son of man, they who inhabit those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, and he inherited the land. But we are many; the land has been given to us as a possession.'** 25 **"Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "You eat meat with blood, you lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood. Should you then possess the land? 26 You rely on your sword, you commit abominations, and you defile one another's wives. Should you then possess the land?"**" 27 **"Say thus to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "As I live, surely those who are in the ruins shall fall by the sword, and the one who is in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who are in the strongholds and caves shall die of the pestilence. 28 For I will make the land most desolate, her arrogant strength shall cease, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that no one will pass through. 29 Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed."**" Ezek. 33:21-29

Although Ezekiel was made a watchmen, God now revealed to him that it was all a show and a sham. These people had no care or concern for God's word. They spoke like they did and acted like they did, but because it did not translate into doing, it was all in vain.

"As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.' 31 **So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. 32 Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. 33 And when this comes to pass — surely it will come — then they will know that a prophet has been among them."** Ezek. 33:30-33

Condemnation of the Shepherds with a Promise of Better Shepherds to Come.

The shepherds of Israel were those leaders among the priests and Levites who were also teachers and guides. These men had been entrusted with the spiritual welfare of the people. Yet they had failed the people in every way. Using the lives and possessions of the people to enrich themselves.

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 **"Son of man, prophecy against the shepherds of Israel, prophecy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. 6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them."** Ezek. 34:1-6

God warned them much as James did that they would receive a heavier judgment because not only had they sinned and fallen short in their own lives, but also they had failed the people.

7 **"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 8 "As I live," says the Lord God, "surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock" — 9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! 10 Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them."** Ezek. 34:7-10

God, then promised to remove these worthless shepherds take over. He would become their true shepherd and with the mention of David as their king, moves it ahead to the time of the church. He also spoke of a new covenant in which things would be very different than they are in the present.

'For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. 16 "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." Ezek. 34:11-15

'Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. 21 Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, 22 therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them — My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. 25 "I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness Ezek. 34:20-25

Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people," says the Lord God." 31 "You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God," says the Lord God. Ezek. 34:30-31

God Continues His Judgment of Mt Seir (Edom)

There can be no doubt that this is a judgment on the brother of Jacob, Esau.

So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom. 9 And this is the genealogy of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir. Gen 36:8-9

As you rejoiced because the inheritance of the house of Israel was desolate, so I will do to you; you shall be desolate, O Mount Seir, as well as all of Edom — all of it! Then they shall know that I am the Lord." Ezek 35:15

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it, 3 and say to it, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O Mount Seir, I am against you; I will stretch out My hand against you, And make you most desolate; 4 I shall lay your cities waste, And you shall be desolate. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. 5 "Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity came to an end, 6 therefore, as I live," says the Lord God, "I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you. 7 Thus I will make Mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it the one who leaves and the one who returns. 8 And I will fill its mountains with the slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those who are slain by the sword shall fall. 9 I will make you perpetually desolate, and your cities shall be uninhabited; then you shall know that I am the Lord. Ezek. 35:1-9

"Because you have said, 'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them,' although the Lord was there, 11 therefore, as I live," says the Lord God, "I will do according to your anger and according to the envy which you showed in your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. 12 Then you shall know that I am the Lord. I have heard all your blasphemies which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, 'They are desolate; they are given to us to consume.' 13 Thus with your mouth you have boasted against Me and multiplied your words against Me; I have heard them." Ezek. 35:10-13

After God completed His words of Judgment he promises a different end for Israel. This is an excellent commentary of the words of Malachi.

2 **"I have loved you,"** says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us? 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?'" Says the Lord. **"Yet Jacob I have loved; 3 But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness."** 4 Even though Edom has said, "We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places," Thus says the Lord of hosts: **"They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. Mal 1:2-4**

"And you, son of man, **prophecy to the mountains of Israel,** and say, 'O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord! 2 Thus says the Lord God: "Because the enemy has said of you, 'Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession,'" ... 5 therefore thus says the Lord God: **"Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country."** Ezek. 36:1-2; 5

God then revealed His thoughts and intents.

Israel did not deserve this grace from God and God did not do it for them, but for His holy name. He would do so many wonderful things under the New Covenant that even the Gentiles would take notice and be converted.

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 17 "Son of man, **when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own ways and deeds;** to Me their way was like the uncleanness of a woman in her customary impurity. 18 **Therefore I poured out My fury on them for the blood they had shed on the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it.** 19 **So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds.** 20 **When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name** — when they said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.' 21 **But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went. Ezek. 36:16-21**

"Therefore **say to the house of Israel,** 'Thus says the Lord God: **"I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.** 23 **And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord,"** says the Lord God, **"when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. 24 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. ... 31 Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 Not for your sake do I do this,"** says the Lord God, **"let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!" Ezek. 36:22-32**

The Figure of the Bones

God then gave Ezekiel the parable of a symbolic resurrection for Israel. At this time they were likened to a valley full of dead bones. God asked Ezekiel if these bones could live and Ezekiel with trust replies that only God could know the answer for only God had the power to do it.

The hand of the Lord came upon me and **brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones.** 2 **Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry.** 3 **And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"** So I answered, **"O Lord God, You know."** 4 **Again He said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. 6 I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and**

put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord."" Ezek 37:1-6

First the bones came back together, then the sinews returned and the flesh and skin covered them. Yet they were not yet alive. At that time God breathed into them to breath and they lived. Like this resurrection, God would restore Israel to its former glory.

*7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and **suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone.** 8 Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and **the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.** 9 Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'"" 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and **breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.***

*11 Then He said to me, "**Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.** They indeed say, '**Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!**' 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "**Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.** 13 Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. 14 **I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,"** says the Lord.'" Ezek. 37:11-14*

The time is then established as that when both tribes return together in one nation, and the king will reign again.

Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 16 "As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: 'For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions.' 17 Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand.

"And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, '**Will you not show us what you mean by these?**' — 19 say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Surely **I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel,** his companions; and I will **join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick,** and they will be one in My hand.'" 20 And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.

"Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "**Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;** 22 and I will make **them one nation in the land,** on the mountains of Israel; and **one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.** 23 They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but **I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them.** Then **they shall be My people, and I will be their God.**

"**David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd;** they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. 25 Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and **My servant David shall be their prince forever.** 26 Moreover **I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.** 27 **My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.** 28 The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.""" Ezek 37:15-28

The remainder of the book is made up of some very symbolic language that no one seems to agree on its meaning.

Haggai and Zechariah — Return From 70 Year Captivity

Introduction:

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are the historical books recording the final years of Israel's history. The end of the captivity is generally set at about 536, but after that, the dating becomes very controversial and there is very little to go on. For our purpose, there is no great need to place exact dates. It is clear from the writings that Ezra's writings start right at the captivity, but Ezra comes anywhere from 50 to 100 years later. With the characters listed in the early part of the book, we can easily place the minor prophets who worked during this time as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Review:

It was **Jeremiah** who first spoke of the seventy year captivity, **Isaiah** who gave the name of the king who would allow them to return to the land, and **Daniel** who identified the time when it would occur.

*"Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, 9 behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the Lord, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. 10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 **And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12 'Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the Lord; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation. Jer 25:8-13***

*Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness; 26 Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers; **Who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited, To the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built, 'And I will raise up her waste places;** 27 Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers'; 28 **Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Sa ying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built, "And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." 45 "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. 5 I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; 7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things.' Isa 44:25-45:7***

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans — 2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. 3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. 4 And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, 5 we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Dan 9:1-6

Ezra's Historical Account Begins

Ezra's account begins shortly after Daniel began his prayers and supplications. It is evident from later in the book that Ezra was not a part of this initial return, but was inspired by the Spirit to reveal it. Much like Moses wrote Genesis, though not present, so also Ezra writes this account of things

as they occurred 50 to 100 years before he began his work. He makes it clear that everything recorded by Isaiah and Jeremiah was now being fulfilled. It is clear that it was a direct command of Jehovah that led Cyrus to send the children of Israel back to their land to rebuild the temple.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, 2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem. Ezra 1:1-4

He gives every aid including a request for freewill offerings. He also returns the articles of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had removed.

King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; 8 and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9 This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, 10 thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. 11 All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra 1:7-11

many from Judah, Benjamin and the Levites took advantage of this opportunity. and others are so moved by the command and the response that they offer generous offerings.

Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. 6 And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered. Ezra 1:5-6

Soon they are on the journey from Babylon to the land of Israel, retracing the steps of their father Abraham who had made this same journey after his call from Ur of the Chaldees. After they arrive they took a census of the number who had returned. They find there are 42,360 people, 7,337 servants, and 200 singing men and women, which brings the total number to a little less than fifty thousand. (49,897). It appears at this time that some chose to dwell in Jerusalem, while others went back to the land given to their family by lot at the time of Joshua.

The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers. 66 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 67 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty. ... 70 So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities. Ezra 2:64-67, 70

noun masculine plural **Nethinim** (properly **those given to the service of the sanctuary**, as Levites are called (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon OT:5411))

Main Characters of Zechariah and Haggai, Introduced in Ezra,

Not long after their return they begin the necessary steps to renew their worship to Jehovah. Two key figures are Zerubbabel the governor (of the tribe of Judah) and Jeshua (also called Joshua – the high priest) from Aaron. They built the altar for Jehovah and began to offer the burnt offerings. After their arrival the first festival they have the opportunity to observe is the feast of Tabernacles which began on the 7th Month and the 15th day, lasting 7 days and a holy convocation on the 8th day (Lev 23:33-38). No mention is made of the day of atonement which was to be held on the 10th day

of the 7th month. With no tabernacle or temple, perhaps it was not possible for them to observe it. We will also find out in Zechariah that Joshua is still defiled in sin, and thus truly unprepared to offer the atonement (Zech 3:1-3).

And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, 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. 3 Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening burnt offerings. 4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. 5 Afterwards they offered the regular burnt offering, and those for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, although the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid. 7 They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia. Ezra 3:1-7

Soon after they lay out the foundation of the temple which leads to a mixed reaction from the people. The young (under 75-80) shouted with joy while the old who had seen the first house some 70 years earlier wept because it was so much smaller than the one Solomon had built.

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off. Ezra 3:10-13

The Adversaries Rise Up

At this point those who were living in the land (Samaritans and others) acted the part of a hypocrite. Although they were actually adversaries, they acted as though they wanted to help build. They wanted to have fellowship with Israel in the building of the temple, but they cannot have such fellowship with Gentiles so they refuse.

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." 3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." Ezra 4:1-3

The Samaritans

These adversaries referred back to the time when the king of Assyria brought them to the land of Israel. We learn here the type of people they were and the manner in which they "seek your God as you do" and "we have sacrificed to Him."

Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. 25 And it was so, at the beginning of their

dwelling there, that they did not fear the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them. 26 So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land." 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land." 28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord. 29 However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt. 2 Kings 17:24-29

The Adversaries discourage then Stop the Temple being built

Because they were not allowed to build with them, their true intentions come out as they do everything they can to discourage the people. Finally they begin the process of getting the king to stop the building. Keil and Delitzsch estimate that it was 14 years before they began to build again.

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. Ezra 4:4-5

After the death of Cyrus, they see the opportunity to get the building stopped completely.

In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7 In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia Ezra 4:6-7

A full copy of the letter revealed the devious methods they used.

To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: 12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing its walls and repairing the foundations. 13 Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. 14 Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city is a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed. 16 We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River. Ezra 4:11-16

The answer to this letter stopped the building completely, though Haggai will later condemn them for delaying and submitting to this edict.

The king sent an answer: To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. 18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before me. 19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made, and it was found that this city in former times has revolted against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. 20 There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the region beyond the River; and tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. 21 Now give the command to make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the command is given by me. 22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the kings? Ezra 4:17-22

Only after God sent Haggai and Zechariah to prophesy against the people did the building of the temple begin again.

Haggai and Zechariah

Introduction:

We noted in our last class that the first few chapters of Ezra continue the Chronicles after the captivity and also describe the exodus from Babylon and the return to Judah and Jerusalem. Zechariah and Haggai were also preaching at this time.

536	49,897 return from Babylon
536	7 th Month built altar— offered sacrifice
535	Work on Temple begun
520	Work renewed by Haggai, Zechariah
516	Temple Completed
478	Esther Becomes Queen
457	Ezra goes to Jerusalem
444	Nehemiah rebuilds the Wall
432	Nehemiah returns a second time (Halley's Bible Handbook 229-230)

Cyrus II "the Great"	550-529 BC
Cambyses II	529-522 BC
Darius I	522-486 BC
Xerxes I	486-465 BC
Artaxerxes I	465-425 BC
Xerxes II	425-424 BC
Darius II	423-404 BC
Artaxerxes II	404-359 BC
Artaxerxes III	359-338 BC
Arses	338-336 BC
Darius III	336-330 BC

Remember that Cyrus was already king in Persia before the fall of Babylon. So the dates are easy to match up once we realize that it is from the time of the fall of Babylon that these dates apply. It is the the kings Cyrus and Darius that our books cite as important historical dates. are

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Ezra 1:1

Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Ezra 3:8-9

Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. Ezra 4:4-5

There is some difference of opinion about how long this gap took. It depends on when in Cyrus reign this new king began to reign. Some believe that while Cyrus reign continued, a new king (Ahasuerus / Artaxerxes) arose. We have no means to verify these things in secular history, but somehow, Cyrus was reigning, but so also was this king.

*5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. 6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. ... 11 ... (This is a copy of the letter that they sent him) **To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men of the region beyond the River, and so forth: ... 24 Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. Ezra 4:5-6, 11, 24***

Some reckon that the building of the temple was suspended for only nine years; I am willing to believe that fifteen years were the utmost. During this time they had an altar and a tabernacle, which no doubt they made use of (Matthew Henry's Commentary)

Somewhere between 2 (Barnes) and 15 years the temple lay waste. Then God sent Haggai, to

Zerubbabel (governor) and Joshua (High Priest) to rebuke them.

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, Hag. 1:1-2

Zechariah also began his work at this time.

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. Ezra 5:1-2

Why they did not do that at the same time the other letter of accusation was written to the new king probably reflects a lack of interest or concern since they are rebuked for it. God did not consider the persecutions of the people as a just reason for this delay. God complained that though the people affirmed it was not time to build his house (since they had been forcibly stopped), they had no difficulty in building their own homes.

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 2 "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."'" 3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! 6 "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Hag. 1:1-6

God bid them consider the fruitless nature of the efforts they had been putting forth to prosper as long as his house and their need to worship and honor him was placed second to their own desires.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! 8 Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the Lord. 9 "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. 10 Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. 11 For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands." Hag. 1:7-11

After this stirring call for repentance, both Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the remnant of the people began to build. It would be wonderful to believe it was as a result of their faith in God, but it appears from latter words, that it was only a desire for the blessings God was then withholding.

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the Lord. 13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the Lord." 14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, 15 on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius. Hag. 1:12-15

As they began to build more adversity comes upon them, but this time they do not stop building.

At the same time Tattenai the governor of the region beyond the River and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" 4 Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. 5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this matter. 6 This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent:

Ezra 5:3-6

Tattenai then sends a letter to Darius to see if the Jewish claims would be acceptable to him or not. Evidently those who had written the first letter have either died, or they were no longer interested. But when word reached the governor, he was concerned. He asked about the authority they had to begin this work and they cited the letter to Cyrus.

(They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus) To Darius the king: All peace. 8 Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands. 9 Then we asked those elders, and spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?" 10 We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who were chief among them. Ezra 5:7-10

He also included the claims the Jewish leaders were making at this time which he could not verify.

And thus they returned us an answer, saying: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. 12 But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. 13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. 14 Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that was in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon — those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. 15 And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple site that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.' 16 Then the same Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished." 17 Now therefore, if it seems good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it is so that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this matter. Ezra 5:11-17

Evidently this new king knew nothing of the previous letter and decree of the previous king. So he sent to verify the claims the Jews were making. The letter he found here is different from the things said in the first chapter of Ezra. He gave the details of the new Temple.

Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. 2 And at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record was written thus: 3 In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, 4 with three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. 5 Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which is in Jerusalem, each to its place; and deposit them in the house of God" — Ezra 6:1-5

With this letter to verify the claims, not only does Darius allow the building, but commands that the money to build it be provided from the Persian treasury. Thus when men determine to do God's will, God providentially helps with it.

Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who are beyond the River, keep yourselves far from there. 7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site. 8 Moreover I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes on the region beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. 9 And whatever they need — young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who are in Jerusalem — let it be given them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons. 11 Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. 12 And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy

any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently. Ezra 6:6-12

Tattenai, fully submits to these commands and the Jews continue the work, which still takes another four years to complete.

Then Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. 14 So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15 Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. Ezra 6:13-15

After the temple is finished, they dedicated it and assigned the priests who would do the work.

Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses. Ezra 6:16-18

God then comforts those men who have been influenced by the smaller size of the temple. It appears there were two forms of weeping. Those weeping here were those who felt it was not enough honor to God to build such a small structure.

In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying: 2 "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 3 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? 4 Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the Lord, 'and work; for I am with you,' says the Lord of hosts. 5 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!' Hag. 2:1-5

While God commended those above who felt it was not glorifying Him, there were others whom He rebuked

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 9 "The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. 10 For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth." Zech 4:8-10

God then promised that He would build a new temple (the church).

"For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. 8 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the Lord of hosts. 9 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the Lord of hosts." Hag. 2:6-9

The Hebrew writer builds on this as it also ushered in the eternal home.

but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." 27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire. Heb 12:26-29

Although the temple will take four years to build, God does not wait for the completion.

In the four and twentieth (day) of the ninth (month), in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet, saying, ... 15 And now, I pray you, consider from this day and backward, before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of Jehovah. 16 Through all that time,

when one came to a heap of twenty (measures), there were but ten; when one came to the winevat to draw out fifty (vessels), there were but twenty. 17 I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the work of your hands; yet ye (turned) not to me, saith Jehovah. 18 Consider, I pray you, from this day and backward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth (month), since the day that the foundation of Jehovah's temple was laid, consider it. 19 Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree have not brought forth; from this day will I bless (you). Hag. 2:15-19

Zechariah

Introduction:

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah and the beginning of the book of Ezra cover the same period when the temple was being rebuilt in Jerusalem. Ezra begins with their leaving Babylon and describes the first attempts to rebuild and the interference of the Gentiles (Samaritans) that stopped their work for many years.

Cyrus: (Year and Month)

- 1 Now ***in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia***, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, Ezra 1:1
- 2 2 Now ***in the second month of the second year of their coming*** to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work Ezra 3:8
- ? Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was ***discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia***. Ezra 4:24

God sent Zechariah and Haggai to rebuke Israel for not completing the work of the temple and exhort them to begin the work. This began in the second year of Darius and continued until the temple was rebuilt in the sixth year of Darius. Haggai's book closes with two promises, one of which is a messianic prophecy. First, God promised to bless them, since they were now working to complete the temple. Second, God promised that Zerubbabel would have a son who would be made like a signet ring (Jesus the Messiah and Christ).

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them. Ezra 5:1-2

Darius: (Year, Month, Day and Prophet)

Y M D (Year, Month, Day)

- 2 6 1 Z In the ***second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month***, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ... 2 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.'" Hag. 1:1-2
- 2 6 24 H So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, 15 on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius. Hag 1:14-15
- 2 7 24 H In the ***seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month***, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying: ...
- 2 7 24 H In the ***seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month***, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying: Hag 2:1
- 2 8 Z In the ***eighth month of the second year of Darius***, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, Zech 1:1
- 2 9 24 H On the ***twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius***, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, Hag 2:10
- 2 11 24 Z On the ***twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month***, which is the month Shebat, in the ***second year of Darius***, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of

Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet: Zech 1:7

4 4 9 Z Now in the **fourth year of King Darius** it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, on the **fourth day of the ninth month**, Chislev, Zech 7:1

6 12 3 E Now the temple was finished on the **third day of the month of Adar**, which was in the **sixth year of the reign of King Darius**. Ezra 6:15-16

Zechariah

While Ezra introduces Zechariah along with Haggai as the prophets who rebuked and exhorted the people to begin rebuilding the temple, there are only a few places where it is mentioned of it in the book that bears his name. While Haggai is focused exclusively on the rebuilding of temple, Zechariah only touches on it briefly, never with rebukes or commands to build it, but only God promising it would be built.

*"Therefore thus says the Lord: **"I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,"** says the Lord of hosts, "And a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem." Zech 1:16*

*Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 9 **"The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. 10 For who has despised the day of small things? Zech 4:8-10***

*9 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Let your hands be strong, You who have been hearing in these days These **words by the mouth of the prophets, Who spoke in the day the foundation was laid For the house of the Lord of hosts, That the temple might be built. Zech 8:9***

A casual reading of Zechariah leads to the conclusion that this book is so highly symbolic that it will take great efforts to understand. It follows much the same path as Revelation, moving from one figure to another with little explanation to understand or interpret it. Some things are so highly figurative that it appears nearly impossible to understand and interpret properly. There are a few places where it is to understand, but for the most part the passages move from difficult to so complicated that no one really knows exactly what they mean. Yet the some great prophecies of the coming Messiah make the book of great value to God's people.

God's Providential Care Over all the Earth

In the first vision, God revealed to Zechariah that He is aware of what is occurring in all the earth and has sent forth His angels to oversee them. There are several characters. First, there are the horses red, sorrel (*sorrel, reddish, tawny, bay – BDB OT:8320; speckled*), and white, then the "men" who are part of the vision. An angel who is speaking to Zechariah and the angel of the LORD. Although these appears to be a possibility here that the angel and the angel of the LORD are the same, no one takes that view. The "men" have been sent forth to walk to and fro over the earth.

*I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him were horses: red, sorrel, and white. 9 Then I said, "My lord, what are these?" So the angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they are." 10 And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "**These are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth.**" 11 **So they answered the Angel of the Lord, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."** Zech 1:8-10*

In Daniel we are told that not only do they watch, but they also play an active role in seeing that the will of God is accomplished.

*Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 **But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. ... 20 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And **now I must return to fight*****

with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. 21 But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince. Dan 10:12-14; 20-21

The phrase “*We have walked to and fro*” throughout the earth, is used twice more in Zechariah and several other times in the Scriptures. Each of them emphasizes a different aspect of God’s knowledge of what occurs over all the earth.

Then the strong steeds went out, eager to go, that they might walk to and fro throughout the earth. And He said, “Go, walk to and fro throughout the earth.” So they walked to and fro throughout the earth. Zech 6:7-8

*They are **the eyes of the Lord**, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.” Zech 4:10*

*For **the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth**, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. 2 Chron 16:9*

God’s Love for Jerusalem

Zechariah is to proclaim that through the intercession of the angel of the LORD, God will care for and protect Jerusalem. He is zealous for Jerusalem, will return with mercy and be sure His house is built there. God promised to comfort and choose Jerusalem.

*Then the Angel of the Lord answered and said, “**O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?**” 13 And **the Lord answered the angel** who talked to me, **with good and comforting words**. 14 So the angel who spoke with me said to me, “**Proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “I am zealous for Jerusalem And for Zion with great zeal.** 15 I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; For I was a little angry, And they helped — but with evil intent.” 16 ‘Therefore thus says the Lord: “I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,” says the Lord of hosts, “And a surveyor’s line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.” 17 “Again proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: “My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; **The Lord will again comfort Zion, And will again choose Jerusalem.**”’” Zech 1:12-17*

God’s Intervention in the World

The angel now discusses the four horns that Zechariah has seen. Since they are the horns that scattered Judah they are most likely the nations. God speaks Although God not identify them the timing of the comments coincide with the letters going back and forth to Persia over the fate of the building of the temple. But it may have to do with the past or the future.

*18 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and **there were four horns**. 19 And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these?” So he answered me, “These are **the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.**” Zech 1:18-19*

God promised that he would send “craftsmen” (craftsman, artisan, engraver, smith) *T Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:2796*) to terrify and cast out these “horns of the nations.”

*Then the Lord showed me **four craftsmen**. 21 And I said, “What are these coming to do?” So he said, “These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but **the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.**” Zech 1:20-21*

Joshua: The Defiled High Priest

This is an amazing vision with a mixture of spiritual truth and symbolism. How much of each is present is difficult to know. Joshua is standing in the presence of the Angel of Lord, and in the presence of Satan. Satan is opposing and the Angel of the Lord to cleanse and restore him. The LORD is also present, but speaking in the third person says “*the LORD rebuke you: Satan.*”

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. 2 And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” Zech 3:1-2

There is so much we don’t know. Is this a vision or a reality? We know Michael the Archangel did something similar with the body of Moses.

Yet **Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you! Jd 9**

Who is the LORD that said to Satan "the LORD rebuke you?" Some point to the Psalms and to Hebrews, where there is no question that God the Father is calling Jesus Lord and God.

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." 2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Ps 110:1-2

But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; **Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." Heb 1:8-9**

John says much the same thing:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the **Word was with God, and the Word was God.** 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... 14 And **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.** John 1:1-3, 14*

Though a vision, everything in it is validated by other Scriptures. Satan is the accuser of our brethren. Jesus is Lord and God, Michael also rebuked Satan exactly as here, and Joshua was in dire need of cleansing since both he and his office were defiled.

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. 10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. Rev 12:9-11

This is not the only place in the Scriptures where the Angel of Jehovah appears to be deity, so it is entirely possible that the entire vision is literal.

Joshua is standing with filthy garments which indicate the defilement that had occurred both to the office and to him. The office was defiled before they went into Babylon and both the temple and the High Priest were removed. Joshua was defiled when he was not the moving force behind the temple being built. Since Satan is accusing "him" it may be the latter, or it may be both. The office of High Priest was in need of cleansing and this vision revealed that it was done.

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. 4 Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes." Zech. 3:3-5

The Angel of the LORD Admonishes Joshua

This is clearly a part of the vision since the angel is showing him this. Whether Joshua got this directly or later through Zechariah is difficult to determine, but it is most likely the latter. He has been cleansed, but that cleansing is contingent on his being faithful and obedient. He does not identify "these who stand here." But when the Angel of the LORD continues in the next verse, it appears that these are other men who are present with him.

Then the Angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, And if you will keep My command, Then you shall also judge My house, And likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk Among these who stand here. Zech. 3:6-7

What follows is a messianic prophecy about the Branch. There is no doubt from other Scriptures that Jesus is the branch that is being described here.

*'Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, You and your companions who sit before you, For they are a wondrous sign; For behold, **I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.** 9 For behold, the stone That I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,' Says the Lord of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. Zech 3:8-9*

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isa 11:1-2

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Jer 23:5-6

"Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord; 13 Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both." Zech 6:12-13

Although we know the branch is Jesus, we do not know about the stone since it is only mentioned here. But it is probably the stone described in other passages.

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Isa 28:16

The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. 23 This was the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. Ps 118:22-23

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 1 Peter 2:4-6

The Self-Filling Lampstand

The majority of those who write about this passage see a greater fulfillment in the New Covenant. Although it is a beautiful example of a type-antitype, there is nothing in the New Testament to validate it. It is obvious from the first reading that this had its fulfillment in the rebuilding of the temple in the days of Joshua and Zerubbabel. This was a promise of strong assurance that God would not need human power as He did with the lampstand in the temple. This lampstand would always have oil provided for it through the power of God.

So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. 3 Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." 4 So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts. 7 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring fort the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"' Zech 4:2-7

But is this all? Zerubbabel is in the lineage of Christ and Christ also built a temple for the Lord. Throughout the book the Messiah is prominent. It clearly was fulfilled in the New Testament. But caution keeps us from directly applying it to the Messiah.

It is obvious when we look at it as a literal fulfillment in that day. The temple foundation had been laid and some had despised the day of small things, weeping at the size of the new temple. But who are the seven who see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel which are the eyes of the Lord? Are these eyes only looking at Zerubbabel, or do they also have in view the coming Messiah who would also have a plumbline in His hand?

"The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. 10 For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth." Zech 4:9-10

Visions of Zechariah

Introduction:

Like Jesus parables, most of the visions of Zechariah are basic and simple stories that are easy to visualize. Making the spiritual applications is sometimes easy and sometimes complex:

- (1) **Horses among Myrtle Trees**; A “man” speaking with the Angel of the LORD (1:7–17)
Walking through the earth – earth is resting quietly — God is aware ...
- (2) **Four horns** (animal or four corners of altar) and **Four Craftsmen** (1:18–21)
the nations that destroyed Judah, Israel and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen to terrify them.
- (3) **Man with a Measuring Line** to Measure Jerusalem (2:1-3)
Jerusalem will be inhabited and prosperous again. God will be a wall of fire.
- (4) **Joshua** (High Priest) **standing before the Angel of the LORD with Satan opposing** (3:1-5)
Defiled clothing removed and clean clothing restored
- (5) **Golden Lampstand with Bowl**, Pipes to each Lamp; 2 Olive Trees dripping oil into Bowl (4:1-3)
this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel ... not by might or power but by My Spirit.
- (6) **A Flying Scroll with a Curse** going over the Face of the Earth. (5:1–4)
On one side: every thief will be expelled and on the other: Every perjurer will be expelled
- (7) A **Woman Sitting in a Basket with a Lead Disk** (5:5–11)
woman (wickedness) placed in a basket with lead disk cover and carried away by two women with wings
- (8) **Four Chariots pulled by Red, Black, White and Sorrel Horses** (6:1–8),
Four spirits of heaven walking to and fro on the earth

Joshua: The Defiled High Priest

This is an amazing vision with a mixture of spiritual truth and symbolism. How much of each is present is difficult to know. Joshua is standing in the presence of the Angel of Lord, and in the presence of Satan. Satan is opposing and the Angel of the Lord is preparing to cleanse and restore him. The LORD is also present, but speaking in the third person says “*the LORD rebuke you: Satan.*”

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. 2 And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Zech 3:1-2

There is so much we don't know. Is this a vision or a reality? We know Michael the Archangel did something similar with the body of Moses.

*Yet **Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you! Jd 9***

Who is the LORD that said to Satan “*the LORD rebuke you?*” Some point to the Psalms and to Hebrews, where there is no question that God the Father is calling Jesus Lord and God.

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." 2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Ps 110:1-2

But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; **Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.**" Heb 1:8-9

John says much the same thing:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the **Word was with God, and the Word was God.** 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ... 14 And **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,** and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-3, 14*

Though a vision, everything in it is validated by other Scriptures. Satan is the accuser of our brethren. Jesus is Lord and God, Michael also rebuked Satan exactly as here, and Joshua was in dire need of cleansing since both he and his office were defiled.

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. 10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. Rev 12:9-11

This is not the only place in the Scriptures where the Angel of Jehovah appears to be deity, so it is entirely possible that the entire vision is literal. But we must be very careful, because we don't have enough to draw the final conclusion without violating Deut. 29:29.

Joshua is standing with filthy garments which indicate the defilement that had occurred both to the office and to him. The office was defiled before they went into Babylon and both the temple and the High Priest were removed. Joshua was defiled when he was not the moving force behind the temple being built. Since Satan was accusing "him" it may be the latter, or it may be both. The office of High Priest was in need of cleansing and this vision revealed that it was done.

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. 4 Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes." Zech. 3:3-5

The Angel of the LORD Admonishes Joshua

This is clearly part of the vision since the angel was still showing Zechariah all these things. Whether Joshua is receiving this directly or told these things later through Zechariah's teaching is difficult to determine with only this much information. He had been cleansed, but that cleansing would be contingent on his being faithful and obedient. He did not identify "these who stand here," But when the Angel of the LORD continues in the next verse, it appears that these are other men who are present with him.

Then the Angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'If you will walk in My ways, And if you will keep My command, Then you shall also judge My house, And likewise have charge of My courts; I will give you places to walk Among these who stand here. Zech. 3:6-7

All of this is a "wondrous sign," This is a messianic prophesy about the Branch. There is no doubt from other Scriptures that Jesus is the Branch being described here.

*'Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, You and your companions who sit before you, For they are a wondrous sign; For behold, **I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.** 9 For behold, the stone That I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,' Says the Lord of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. Zech 3:8-9*

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isa 11:1-2

*"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That **I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper,** And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.** Jer 23:5-6*

"Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord; 13 Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the **glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.**" Zech 6:12-13

Although we know the branch is Jesus, we do not know about the stone since it is only mentioned here. But it is probably the stone described in other passages.

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Isa 28:16

*The **stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.** 23 This was the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. Ps 118:22-23*

***Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."** 1 Peter 2:4-6*

When we return to this subject in chapter six, it appears that both this vision and the next one are both involved.

The Self-Filling Lampstand

The majority of those who write about this passage see a greater fulfillment in the New Covenant. Although it is a beautiful example of a type-antitype, there is nothing in the New Testament to validate it. It is obvious from the first reading that this had its fulfillment in the rebuilding of the temple in the days of Joshua and Zerubbabel. This was a promise of strong assurance that God would not need human power as He did with the lampstand in the temple. This lampstand would always have oil provided for it through the power of God.

*So I said, "I am looking, and there is **a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. 3 Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.**" 4 So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 So he answered and said to me: "**This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts. 7 'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring fort the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"**" Zech 4:2-7*

But is this all? Zerubbabel is in the lineage of Christ and Christ also built a temple for the Lord. Throughout the book the Messiah is prominent. It clearly was fulfilled in the New Testament. But caution keeps us from directly applying it to the Messiah.

It is obvious when we look at it as a literal fulfillment in that day. The temple foundation had been laid and some had despised the day of small things, weeping at the size of the new temple. But who are the seven who see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel which are the eyes of the Lord? Are these eyes only looking at Zerubbabel, or do they also have in view the coming Messiah who would also have a plumbline in His hand?

"The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of this temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. 10 For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the Lord, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth." Zech 4:9-10

The completeness of God's ability to see all adversaries and to overcome them is seen in the vision in the seven eyes that scan to and fro through the earth.

The final passage has no real key to understand. Who these holy ones are have been variously interpreted. Some say Joshua and Zerubbabel, but sadly, we don't have enough information to hazard a guess.

Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees — at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" 12 And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?" 13 Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 14 So he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth." Zech. 4:11-14

Flying Scroll and Basket

The two visions in chapter Five are set forth in a manner that shows they stand together. In the first we have a curse in the form of a flying scroll going out throughout all the earth. There are so many difficulties in this vision and so many interpretations that it appears that the best we can do is add our guesses to others. Yet we are forbidden to do that so all we have left is to make some general observations.

First, the size of the scroll is 30' by 15' and though many ingenious guesses have been made there is really nothing except size to interpret.

Second, the nature of the sins are stealing and perjury (false swearing). Why were these chosen and others overlooked? What do they represent? They are both questions with no clear answer. God will send this out over the face of the entire earth, yet only Judah is in covenant with God, why everywhere else? One thing is clear, your sins will find you out.

Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. 2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits." 3 Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: 'Every thief shall be expelled,' according to this side of the scroll; and, 'Every perjurer shall be expelled,' according to that side of it." 4 "I will send out the curse," says the Lord of hosts; "It shall enter the house of the thief And the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house And consume it, with its timber and stones." Zech 5:1-4

The second part of the vision is a continuation of the first, except now all sin (wickedness) is under consideration. Yet this vision is more obscure than the first. Many are ready to guess, but nowhere else is sin represented as being placed in a basket and carried to the land of Shinar. There is nothing to even base a guess on. All we can say with certainty is that God intends to remove sin to another place. This bears a certain resemblance to the scapegoat that also has the sins of the people placed on it and released into the wilderness. But it is not close enough. This could be the removal of sin in forgiveness, or forgiveness of sin in the removal of sinners.

Then the angel who talked with me came out and said to me, "Lift your eyes now, and see what this is that goes forth." 6 So I asked, "What is it?" And he said, "It is a basket that is going forth." He also said, "This is their resemblance throughout the earth: 7 Here is a lead disc lifted up, and this is a woman sitting inside the basket"; 8 then he said, "This is Wickedness!" And he thrust her down into the basket, and threw the lead cover over its mouth. 9 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were two women, coming with the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven. Zech 5:5-9

The Four Chariots

This vision resembles that of the horses and those visions that represent God as being aware of all that is transpiring and having the resources to deal with anything that should occur. How many horses are pulling them and who is sitting in them are not revealed.

Then I turned and raised my eyes and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze. 2 With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, 3 with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses — strong steeds. 4 Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" 5 And the angel answered and said to me, "These are four spirits of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth. Zech 6:1-6

Prophecies of Zechariah

Although the next events are done in real life, the symbolism is just as strong as it is in the visions.

From Visions to Reality

A gift has come from the captives of Medo-Persia in the form of gold and silver. Zechariah is commanded to take the gift and have an elaborate and ornate crown made from it. That crown is then to be taken, not to Zerubbabel, but to the High Priest Joshua. It is not to the kingly tribe of Judah that Zerubbabel represented as being a part of the lineage of Christ, but the High Priest from the tribe of Aaron.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 10 "Receive the gift from the captives — from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have come from Babylon — and go the same day and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. 11 Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Zech. 6:9-11

There is no way to misunderstand the reality that this figure represents. The BRANCH (the Christ) will build the temple and will sit and rule while at the same time be a priest on His throne. There will be no conflict between these two offices as they will be perfectly blended.

"Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord; 13 Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both." Zech. 6:12-13

The book of Hebrews spends several chapters dealing with this theme, but instead of using this verse, one of the Psalms is used.

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." 2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! 3 Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. 4 The Lord has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." Ps. 110:1-4

For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. Heb. 7:12-13

For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; 5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. Heb. 8:4-5

As Priest and King, Jesus would build the temple (church) of which we would be the living stones become a holy priesthood and offering up spiritual sacrifices.

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1Peter 2:4-6

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph. 2:19-22

Questions Regarding The Fasts of the Jews

Israel had gained an understanding about fasting, first from Moses 40 day fast on Mt Sinai and then from the day of atonement where the affliction of the soul is directly tied to fasting. The Day of Atonement fell on the tenth day of the seventh month (Tishri = Sept./Oct.), and was observed from evening to evening.

*"This shall be a statute forever for you: **In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict (OT:6031 – `anah) your souls**, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. 30 For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. Lev. 16:29-31*

It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the

month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath." Lev. 23:32

The general understanding of "afflict your souls" is fasting. This is based on two Scriptures that tie them together. The first a general observance of fasting and the second, probably the day of atonement because God said "Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict (OT:6031 – `anah) his soul?"

But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled (afflicted – OT:6031 – `anah) myself with fasting; Ps. 35:13

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, (OT:6031 – `anah) and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. ... 5 Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict (OT:6031 – `anah) his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the Lord? Isa. 58:3-5

Fasting moved into general use for the first time when the children of Benjamin has first struck down Judah and then Israel and struck down a total of 40,000 men. They recognized God was using Benjamin to punish them for their sins so they fasted and prayed.

Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. Judg. 20:26-27

Fasting soon moved from the feast of atonement to any time a powerful need arose that needed to be brought to God's attention.

David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. 22 And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' 23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? 2Sam. 12:16, 22-23

So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. 28 And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. 1Kings 21:27-29

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a straight way for us and for our substance. ... 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. Ezra 8:21, 23

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. Neh. 1:4

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" Est.4:15-16

Fasting was always associated with mourning, affliction, a dire need that fasting was added to prayer to make it heard on high. When disciples of the Pharisees and Jesus came to ask why his disciples didn't fast, he used this same reasoning.

Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high. Isa. 58:4

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? Mt. 9:14-15

It is the midst of all this that an inquiry comes from the Jews left in Medo Persia regarding the fasts they had been observing. They did not inquire of the prophet, but instead went to the priests, but God wanted this dealt with properly and along the same lines as Isaiah.

to ask the priests who were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and the prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?" Zech. 7:3-6

They were asking the wrong question and putting their priorities on the wrong things. The real issue was their repentance which they do not address, but God did. What that fast really for Him and not

for themselves? It is evident from their eating and drinking that they were only eating for themselves using none of the strength of the food for their service to God. Their problem was that even then after 70 years of captivity they were obeying the voice of the prophets no better than their parents had. So what was the true purpose of the fast?

Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, 5 "Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me — for Me? 6 When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? 7 Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?'" Zech. 7:4-7

God then gives two answers. The first regarding the moral condition of those who want to fast and the second, the transient nature of all these fasts revealed that they were not that important. It seems individual fasts for needs and not a day of fasting would soon become the way that fasting would be observed.

Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, 9 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. 10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.' 11 But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Zech. 7:8-12

There were actually four days they were now fasting. We have no real reference as to what these days represented. But only the 10th was commanded by the Lord and it too would be removed in days to come.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'The fast of the fourth month, The fast of the fifth, The fast of the seventh, And the fast of the tenth, Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts For the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.' Zech. 8:19

Did these fasts continue into the New Covenant. There are a few points that appear that Jesus expected His people to fast.

But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. Mt. 9:16

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Mt. 6:16-18

The only example of fasting in the New Testament occurred when the congregation was about to do something important and they wanted God's blessings.

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:2-3

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23-24

A promise of Good in the Future

This is a wonderful promise of life in the church. Instead of God seeking to punish those who are doing evil, it will be God's intent to do them good.

"For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Just as I determined to punish you When your fathers provoked Me to wrath,' Says the Lord of hosts, 'And I would not relent, 15 So again in these days I am determined to do good To Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear. 16 These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; 17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' Says the Lord." Zech. 8:14-17

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort

each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 1Th. 5:9-11

Miscellaneous Prophecies

The Coming King and His Dominion

Zechariah gives a prophesy that is quoted in gospels and called the triumphal entry when Jesus entered into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey. This is also further described in the book of Psalms.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey. 10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.' Zech 9:9-10

6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." 7 "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" Ps 2:6-9

The Coming Shepherd

The passages recorded in chapter 11 are not easy to understand and have been variously interpreted. Since there are two Messianic prophecies in their midst, it is clear that Jesus is a part of this prophesy, but how much is unclear and it seems futile to speculate. What we know is that Zechariah is commanded to take the role of a shepherd and to dismiss three unreliable and unfaithful shepherds. Again, how much is Zechariah and how much is Christ cannot be easily seen.

Thus says the Lord my God, "Feed the flock for slaughter, 5 whose owners slaughter them and feel no guilt; those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich'; and their shepherds do not pity them. ... 7 So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock. I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock. 8 I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. 9 Then I said, "I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. ... 12 Then I said to them, "If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain." So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. 13 And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter" — that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter. Zech 11:4-6

Him whom they have pierced

Again we are faced with a difficult passage with enough to conclude it is a Messianic prophesy.

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. Zech 12:10-11

And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." John 19:37

Smite the Shepherd

While the first few passages in the chapter are so obscure that it is very difficult to interpret them as occurring in the first century, but the latter portion is quoted in the New Testament.

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion," Says the Lord of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones. Zech 13:7

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.' 28 "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." Mk. 14:27-28

The final chapter of Zechariah is often used today to validate the Rapture. But there is nothing in the passage that would set the circumstances or the date with any certainty. It is one of those apocalyptic passages best studied and considered without violating Rev 22:18

Ezra the Scribe

INTRODUCTION:

Although these are estimates, they give a general time frame for us to fit the events that occurred after Israel returned after the 70 year captivity in Babylon. Although the book of Ezra begins with the return from Babylon in 636, Ezra does not actually return to Babylon until about 457 bc which is almost 80 years later and about 60 years after the temple was finished.

536	49,897 return from Bablyon
536	7 th Month built altar– offered sacrifice
535	Work on Temple begun
520	Work renewed by Haggai, Zechariah
516	Temple Completed
478	Esther Becomes Queend
457	Ezra goes to Jerusalem
444	Nehemiah rebuilds the Wall
432	Nehemiah returns a second time (Halley's Bible Handbook 229-230)

Cyrus II "the Great"	550-529 BC
Cambyses II	529-522 BC
Darius I	522-486 BC
Xerxes I	486-465 BC
Artaxerxes I	465-425 BC
Xerxes II	425-424 BC
Darius II	423-404 BC
Artaxerxes II	404-359 BC
Artaxerxes III	359-338 BC
Arses	338-336 BC
Darius III	336-330 BC

The Times of Ezra

Ezra is introduced with his genealogy that revealed he had the right to be high priest. He was descended from Aaron through his son Eleazar and grandson Phinehas. We don't know his relationship to Joshua and the current high priest because the genealogies take us only as far as Azariah who was Jehozadak's grandfather and also in "Jeshua's – Joshua's genealogy. So there was a close connection.

*Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, **Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest– Ezra 7:1-5***

*Shallum begot Hilkiah, and **Hilkiah begot Azariah; 14 Azariah begot Seraiah, and Seraiah begot Jehozadak. 15 Jehozadak went into captivity** when the Lord carried Judah and Jerusalem into captivity by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. 1 Chr. 6:13-15*

*In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to **Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest**, saying, Hag 1:1*

Ezra is called a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses. Which at that time would have referred to both his ability to make copies of the Scriptures as part of the job of scribe, but more importantly his ability to preach and teach the Law and the Prophets. It is stated that the king granted him all his request which could only mean that he sent word to the king, but also could indicate that like Nehemiah, Ezra also has some type of relationship with the king. As we later read the letter, we will have to judge the type of relationship they had. God's providence is also clearly indicated, and it too will be elaborated upon later.

*this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was **a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses**, which the Lord God of Israel had given. **The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.** Ezra 7:6*

Ezra, along with other children of Israel made the journey back to Jerusalem in the seventh year of this king. They started this journey on the first day of the first month and ended it on the first day of the fifth month. So it took them four months to travel from the city in Medo Persia back to Jerusalem.

Some of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim

came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 **On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, 7:7-8**

Providence and Preparation.

The connection between Ezra and God's providence is clearly indicated. God's "good hand was upon him," because (for) of three things: (1.) He had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord. (2.) To do it. (3.) To teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra 7:9-10

As Daniel before him, Ezra had made it his goal to seek the Law of the Lord and do it. This always brings us to God's attention. Every time his eyelids see someone who is truly seeking and striving to understand and do His will, God will begin the steps to bring him to that goal. He had also made it his goal to become a scribe and teacher. If we look at Joshua's command by God for success we see these three things there as well.

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Josh 1:7-8

A Copy of the Letter

God recorded the letter that the King sent to Ezra and from that letter we can seek to understand the circumstances and events of that time. As noted above, this is a personal letter which seems to indicate a personal relationship between the two men. The king calls Ezra "the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel."

This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel: 12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. 7:11-12

The contents of the letter record the decree and permission that the king has given to Ezra regarding the people who will return with him and those who would remain behind but might want to make a contribution. He is being "being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem." This gives Ezra the civil authority to make decrees and decisions that will be backed by the authority of the Medo Persian empire. More importantly, Ezra is commanded to do this "with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand." This clearly indicates that the king is commanding him to be careful to follow the Law of Moses exactly as it has been written and which he can understand because he is an expert.

He also authorizes Ezra to take "the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered" and use it to "be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem.

I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; 15 and whereas you are to carry to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem; 16 and whereas all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem — 17 now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:11-17

Added to this is the authority to draw from the king's treasury to do whatever is needed for the temple.

And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. 19 Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the

house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 And **whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay for it from the king's treasury.** Ezra 7:18-20

The king then issues a decree to all the treasurers on the other side of the river (Euphrates) are commanded to diligently take care of any needs Ezra might have. He then expresses his own faith in God that these things will be of benefit to the Medo-Persian empire. He does not want the wrath of God to be poured out upon his realm or his sons.

And I, even I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are in the region beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, 22 up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. 23 **Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?** Ezra 7:21-23

The letter concludes with the prohibition of any taxation on the priests, Levites, singers, etc. This is the basis of our own law regarding the taxation of churches. Our early leaders saw the wisdom of glorifying God in this way.

Ezra is then given a great compliment and vote of confidence: "you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River. The king recognizes the "God given wisdom" that Ezra has exhibited and he wants used. He also gives the criteria upon which these men are to be appointed: "all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them." There are two important points here. First, the king wants men who know the laws of God and second he wants those who are moved to teach them to others. Not enough just to know and live, but also to seek for others to do the same. Ezra is then given the authority to use the Medo Persian laws to execute, banish or confiscation of good or imprisonment.

Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. 25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. 26 **Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.** Ezra 7:24-26

Ezra's Praise to God for such a Letter

Ezra is deeply moved by this act of providence. He praises God for His providence. First for putting it into the heart of the king to do this. Since this is providence, it may very well be from the praise and confidence placed in Ezra that he played some role in bringing this about. Yet he sees this as God's hand using him and gives no credit at all to himself. Yet the king knows too much about him and has too many compliments and places too much confidence for this not to be the case. Ezra also praises God for the mercy that gave him such a wonderful role and position of confidence in the eyes of all these men. This gave him great comfort and confidence.

27 Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, 28 and has **extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes. So I was encouraged, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.** Ezra 7:27-28

Details of the Departure to Jerusalem

After receiving the letter the people gather together and a list of their names and genealogy are given (Ezra 8:1-14). They gather beside the River Ahava and after an assessment, Ezra realizes he is missing some important people. It is clear that he wants everything necessary to fulfill the king's command so that if they are lacking when he arrives he will still be able to do what the king has commanded. As a priest who knows the law, He needs the genealogies to properly prepare the temple for worship. Without them he will not be able to serve the Lord, so he takes the time to

gather them.

Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there. 16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo and his brethren the Nethinim at the place Casiphia — that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. 8:15-17

Ezra's Confidence in God's Providence

Ezra's plans are all based on His desire to serve God and He looks to God to make it all possible. When good things happen, he gives God the glory by ascribing to Him the good things that happen.

Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, 8:18

His trust in God's providence then takes a leap of faith. He needs God to bless them with a safe and prosperous journey, but he doesn't want to ask the king for help because of the unshaken confidence he has always shown in the presence of the king and his counselors.

He proclaims a three day fast for all who are returning to Jerusalem. He does this "*we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.*"

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 8:21

The term humble here is the same term used in the command regarding the day of atonement.

"This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. 30 For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. Lev. 16:29-30

This fast was designed to humble/afflict their souls to "seek from Him the right way for us." Ezra saw fasting that would humble and afflict their souls as the best means to receive God's providential care in this journey.

Ezra then explains why he didn't ask the king for the human means to bring this about. His trust and confidence in God has been the basis of all Ezra's dealings with the king. He was too ashamed to lower the view of the king about his faith to ask for an escort. They had affirmed to the king that "*The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.*" Since he could not ask the king for an escort, this "expert in the law of God" knew that fasting was the best option to gain the favor of God needed.

For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." Ezra 8:22

Since he felt he could not lower the nature of the faith they had proclaimed to the king about God, and since he did not want to tempt the Lord by assuming that God would take care of them. He chose the best possible method. They fasted three days and entreated God about this matter and God answered their prayers.

So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. Ezra 8:21-23

Ezra then found 12 trusted men and entrusted all the gifts that were being taken.

And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests — Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them — 25 and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered. ... 28 And I said to them, "You are holy to the Lord; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord God of your fathers. 29 Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem, Ezra 8:24-25, 28-29

They left the safety of Medo-Persia and embarked on the dangerous journey to Jerusalem. God delivered them from the thieves and the danger of ambush that was ever present and they arrived safely.

*Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And **the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road.** 32 **So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.** Ezra 8:31-32*

They then delivered all that they had brought into the temple and recorded the entire amount.

*Now on the fourth day **the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God** by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, 34 with **the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.** Ezra 8:33-36*

They then offered burnt offerings to God in the temple.

***The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel:** twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord. Ezra 8:33-36*

After they accomplished their obligations to the God of heaven, they turned their attention to the leaders of the Medo Persian empire. They delivered the letter containing the orders of the king to the satraps and governors as the king had commanded. All these leaders gave their full support to the work and mission of Ezra. Thus the providence of God is seen from beginning to end.

*And **they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God.** Ezra 8:33-36*

Ezra in Jerusalem

REVIEW:

Ezra has received a letter from king Artaxerxes, authorizing to return to Jerusalem to beautify the temple and offer sacrifices to the LORD. The key passages that give us the context for the class this evening center on Ezra and this letter from the king. Ezra is a great example for all men who want to preach or be a faithful servant of God.

according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra 7:9-10

The letter reveals that someone has worked very hard with this king and opened his mind and heart to the LORD. His faith and zeal are amazing in a heathen king.

I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; 15 and whereas you are to carry to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem; 16 and whereas all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, are to be freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem — 17 now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. Ezra 7:11-17

One of the important things that will have great bearing on how we interpret the events that occur when he arrives in Jerusalem is the civil authority given to Ezra when he arrives there. He is not arriving as a Jew who returned to Israel, but as a governor with the power of life and death over everyone in Israel.

Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. 25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment. Ezra 7:24-26

As Ezra prepares to leave with all the gold, silver and goods to return to Jerusalem, a difficulty arises. This is a dangerous journey and the amount of money they are carrying will make them of great interest to the thieves and wicked men along the way. Ezra has told the king of the great power of God and is now ashamed to ask the king for a guard. So he decides to fast, humble themselves and , seek from Him the right path.

Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 8:21

For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him." Ezra 8:22

Final Preparations for the Journey and Arrival in Jerusalem

Ezra then found 12 trusted men and entrusted all the gifts that were being taken.

And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests — Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them — 25 and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered. ... 28 And I said to them, "You are holy to the Lord; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord God of your fathers. 29 Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' houses of Israel in Jerusalem, Ezra 8:24-25, 28-29

They left the safety of Medo-Persia and embarked on the dangerous journey to Jerusalem. God delivered them from the thieves and the danger of ambush that was ever present and they arrived safely.

*Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And **the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road.** 32 **So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.** Ezra 8:31-32*

They then delivered all that they had brought into the temple and recorded the entire amount.

*Now on the fourth day **the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God** by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui, 34 **with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.** Ezra 8:33-36*

They then offered burnt offerings to God in the temple.

***The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord.** Ezra 8:33-36*

After they accomplished their obligations to the God of heaven, they turned their attention to the leaders of the Medo Persian empire. They delivered the letter containing the orders of the king to the satraps and governors as the king had commanded. All these leaders gave their full support to the work and mission of Ezra. Thus the providence of God is seen from beginning to end.

*And **they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the governors in the region beyond the River. So they gave support to the people and the house of God.** Ezra 8:33-36*

Ezra is now either the governor or satrap over Israel with the full support of all the satraps and governors in the region.

A Crime in Israel

As noted in last week's class, it has now been about 80 years since they returned from Babylon. That works out to about four generations. The temple had been finished for about 60 years and the original rulers (Zerubbabel, Joshua) and the prophets (Zechariah and Haggai) had passed from the earth and either no one had warned or rebuked them, or they had stiffened their necks again and refused to listen. They violated one of the fundamental rules of the Old Covenant. The very thing that had brought Solomon down was now the plight of the entire nation.

*When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "**The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.**" 9:1-2*

Israel had been strictly warned about this and had already fallen into it once bringing disaster of the nation.

*"**When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, 2 and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. 3 Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. 4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. 5 But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. 6 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.** Deut 7:1-7*

That the leaders were chief in this matter was especially troubling since Solomon and Ahab had been

influenced to great evil by such wives.

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites — 2 from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David. 1 Kings 11:1-6

Now Ahab the son of did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. 31 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. 1 Kings 16:30-32

But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. 26 And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. 1 Kings 21:25-26

Ezra is "astonished," which means he is "desolate, astonished, appalled, devastated, ravaged."

shamem A verb meaning to be desolated, to be destroyed. A second meaning of this verb, which is extremely common, is to be appalled or astonished ..." (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:8074)

shamam "to be desolate, astonished, appalled, devastated, ravaged." ... occurs approximately 90 times ... Just how the meanings "be desolate," "be astonished," and "be appalled" are to be connected with each other is not clear. In some instances, the translator must make a subjective choice. For example, after being raped by her half-brother, Tamar is said to have remained in her brother Absalom's house, "desolate" 2 Sam 13:20. However, she surely was "appalled" at what Amnon had done. ... " (Vines)

This was such an unforeseen problem that it was like a lightning strike.

So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. 9:4

Ezra spends the day fasting and sitting still. In the evening sacrifice he arises from the fasting, falls on his knees and offers a prayer to God.

5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God. 9:5

In this prayer all his "astonishment (*desolate, astonished, appalled, devastated, ravaged*) is on display.

6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we have been very guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as it is this day. 8 And now for a little while grace has been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage. 9 For we were slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bondage; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, 11 which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. 12 Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.' 13 And after all that has come upon us for

our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this, 14 should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there would be no remnant or survivor? 15 O Lord God of Israel, You are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!"
9:6-15

Ezra Confronts their Sin

Review

Ezra has returned to Jerusalem to beautify the temple with the authority of the king. (Ezra 7:27-28). He is also given authority over the people. It is not stated that he is a government official as a governor, but he is given the authority to set up civil authorities and to give them life and death power over the people.

*And you, **Ezra**, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. 26 **Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.** Ezra 7:25-26*

After he arrives, he receives a report from the leaders that a grave sin has occurred. The people have joined themselves to the pagans who remained in the land. Ezra is crushed by this news. First he tore his garment, and plucked out some hair from his beard and head and began fasting. As word spread those who trembled at God's word gathered around him. At the evening sacrifice, he fell on his knees and began to pray and confess to God. As he prayed, even more assembled and along with Ezra everyone was weeping.

The Solution is Suggested

The full emotions of the prayer are so powerful that word quickly spreads and a large assembly gathers together. His emotions quickly spread to these people. Again, how much of this is sincere repentance and how much great fear over the authority given to this man as governor can't really be assessed, but judging from previous prophets who had spoken to the people, it certainly had some bearing as he had the authority to imprison or even put to death.

***Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly.** 10:1*

One of those witnessing his distress offers a suggestion to him that will give hope in Israel. We don't know anything more about his man. He suggests that these people Make a covenant with God to:

- (1) Put away these unlawful wives that they had no right to be married to.
- (2) Put away the children who had been born to them.

*And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "**We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. 3 Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it.**" 10:2-4*

This is to be done by the counsel and advice and authority of:

- (1) **Ezra**; who had the civil authority from Medo Persia and was a scribe who knew the Law

*For Ezra had **prepared his heart to seek the law** of the LORD, and **to do it**, and **to teach in Israel** statutes and judgments. Ezra 7:10*

- (2) Those who **tremble at God's commands**; Those who tremble at God's word will always support and help those who are seeking to have that Law fulfilled. So Paul believed about Corinth (1Cor. 5).
- (3) **According to the law**. This too is an important concept. The law involved was clear.

*"When the Lord your God brings you into the land... cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, ... **You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to***

them. 3 Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. 4 For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. Deut 7:1-4

This was the law and its punishment. This is why Ezra was so upset with the people. They were even then provoking the anger of the Lord and destruction was imminent. Yet the Law gives no remedy. It only forbids it. What then does “**done according to the law**” mean? Clearly from what followed it meant both repentance and the fruits of repentance. Every law has this woven into it. When a law of God is violated, two options are built into it. The first is the full weight of the Law and the punishment prescribed. The second is the sincere repentance along with the fruits of repentance.

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter 2 Cor 7:10-11.

There is a critically important example for us to understand. The only way to fix this violation of the law was to remove its cause. They had married those whom they had no right to marry and the only solution that was “**according to the law**” was to void the marriage and send them away. Though man made wisdom might look to God’s grace to provide the solution of repentance and keeping the unlawful thing, but that can never be done regardless of the human wisdom and sophistry that have been devised to avoid it. Just as the one who stole must return the goods if the repentance is genuine as the clear and obvious fruit of their repentance, so also here.

The responsibility lies with Ezra, but those who love the Law are supporting him. He concludes with the encouragement to take courage and do it.

Ezra uses this opportunity to get a commitment from the people. He makes them swear an oath to God that they would put away their wives and those who were born to them.

An Oath is Sworn

Although Ezra has the civil authority to punish, he wants to handle this with grace and mercy, so he demands an other that they would “*do according to this word:*” which is again a powerful proof that what they did (put away wives and children) was absolutely necessary. Since they were swearing to do it.

Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity. 10:5-6

The “they” would be those among this group who had the civil authority to decree this. It is then and sent throughout the region commanding the people to gather and warning of the grave civil consequences if they failed to do so.

And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, 8 and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity. 10:7-8

It is obvious from this passage that very few if any of the ten tribes have returned since they are still called “Judah and Benjamin.” They are trembling because of the severity of the punishment and the gravity of the situation. Also it is the ninth month which corresponds to our December. Today the average temperature in December is a high of 57 and a low of 47.

So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house

of God, trembling because of this matter and because of heavy rain. 10:9

Ezra then sets forth the matter at hand. It appears the majority of this sin has been committed not by the women, but the men. It is the pagan wives that are under consideration. These wives have made Israel guilty of sin and so confession needed to be made. In order to “do His will,” they must “separate from both the people (contracts and covenants) and the pagan wives.

10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. 11 Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives." 10:10-11

Whether they did this out of loyalty to God is difficult to determine. The people had no choice in the matter because of Ezra’s civil authority and the direct command from the king of Medo Persia that he must make the people do all that is in the Law. It is also evident that this was a civil matter and not simply a decision of the people to leave their wives. It could not be “**the work of one or two days**,” because of the number of offenders. They must each come at appointed times so that the problem can be properly resolved legally. There were some who opposed this idea, but they had no authority or means to stop it.

12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. 13 But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter. 14 Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter." 15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support. 10:12-15

Compliance

It was done by appointing Ezra the priest, and certain heads of households (magistrates). They sat down and slowly examined the matter. It took three months to take care of this by questioning the men. Each case had to be carefully examined. The husband must give evidence that his wife was of the proper genealogy. If she was not then she had to be put away along with the children.

Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17 By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives. 10:16-17

The list that follows gives the examples of those who had to put away their wives and with this admission of guilt, the sacrifice to be offered to resolve the issue.

And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives the following were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering. Ezra 10:18-19

Then followed an abbreviated list of the common people who had taken foreign wives and had children by them who had to put them all away.

All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children. Ezra 10:44

Esther

Timeline:

536	49,897 return from Babylon
536	7 th Month built altar– offered sacrifice
535	Work on Temple begun
520	Work renewed by Haggai, Zechariah
516	Temple Completed
478	Esther Becomes Queen
457	Ezra goes to Jerusalem
444	Nehemiah rebuilds the Wall
432	Nehemiah returns a second time (Halley's Bible Handbook 229-230)

Cyrus II "the Great"	550-529 BC
Cambyses II	529-522 BC
Darius I	522-486 BC
Xerxes I	486-465 BC
Artaxerxes I	465-425 BC
Xerxes II	425-424 BC
Darius II	423-404 BC
Artaxerxes II	404-359 BC
Artaxerxes III	359-338 BC
Arses	338-336 BC
Darius III	336-330 BC

Introduction:

The book of Esther has been the brunt of many attacks. Because God is not mentioned in the book, along with other issues, many have rejected it as a book that should be in the Bible. Luther said:

"I am so great an enemy to the second book of the Maccabees, and to Esther, that I wish they had not come to us at all, for they have too many heathen unnaturalities. The Jews much more esteemed the book of Esther than any of the prophets; though they were forbidden to read it before they had attained the age of thirty, by reason of the mystic matters it contains.

It was not found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and there are few mentions of it in historical books. The one argument in its favor that removes all doubt for most is that Jesus never condemned it when He used the Old Testament Scriptures. He certainly had the opportunity to comment on it and seek its removal if He thought it necessary. The rest of the arguments for and against seem small when compared to this fact. The Dead Sea Scrolls were written by a sect of the Jews even more strict than the Pharisees and so it is not surprising they had no reason to keep it among their writings. Josephus mentions it as part of the Scriptures.

The time of writing is placed somewhere between 483 and 473.

Although there are some difficulties and perplexities in this book, it follows the same path as Joseph. God is working through Mordicai and Esther in much the same way as He did Joseph. The dilemmas of Joseph as he is sold into slavery, in the house of Potiphar and in the jail all come together in his conversation with his brothers.

5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ... 7 And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Gen. 45:5-8

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Gen. 50:19-21

Note the similarities in Mordecai's words to Esther. *And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Est. 4:13-14*

Historical Background

We get a small glimpse into the workings of a king's court in Persia. The kings held power over a vast empire. It seems from the manner in which they are spending money that this was a very prosperous time in their history. This display was possibly done in a way similar to our museums.

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 3 that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants — the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him — 4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all. Est. 1:1-4



The Request of the King

As the days when the glory of the kingdom were displayed came to an end, a final seven days were given to all the residents of the capital city. Once again the splendor was revealed, but this time in the furnishings, the utensils and the quality of the royal wine that was available. Along with this was the edict that no one was compelled to drink and no limitation to the wine was given.

5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. 7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. 8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure. Est. 1:5-8

Along with the king the queen was also having a banquet. The king became “merry with wine.” This term doesn’t infer drunkenness although it implies it. Some would have the king so drunk he can’t understand the impropriety of his actions. This is certainly possible, but not certain. As he had shown the people his prosperity in material possessions, he also wanted to show the people the beauty of his queen.

Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus. 10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. Est. 1:9-12

Without knowing the customs of the Persians or the attitude of the people toward such a request, it is difficult to pass judgment on this event. Some would have the king making an unfair request of the queen and the queen within her rights to refuse to come. Some want the king to be asking the queen to be immodest or to do something unbecoming, but there is nothing in the text to base this upon.

The Dilemma Created by Queen Vashti’s Refusal

Why the queen refused his request is only important for our inquisitiveness. God doesn’t give us enough information to decide the question. She may have been in the right in her objection of the reason, but whether she could refuse the direct command of a king and a husband is another

matter. While we might want to feel sympathy for this beautiful queen, there just isn't enough information to condemn her or the king.

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him. Est. 1:12

The king doesn't act on his anger, but instead calls a counsel to discuss the issue. The problem with this event was not simple because not only was it public, but it was public when multitudes were present to observe it. They did not question the rightness of the king's request, or the fitness of her answer. It was a matter of Law. The king had given a command that the queen did not obey it. Nothing else matters here in this inquiry. As a servant to the king and a wife to her husband, the queen had created a great difficulty for these men.

Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, ... 14 the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom): 15 "What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?" Est. 1:13-15

They clearly saw the consequences. Right or wrong receded into the background that the affects of this event are weighed. This would create a great problem to all the husbands and wives across the land. Multitudes wouldn't care about the truth, only that the king and husband had given a command and the queen and wife had refused it. This would allow insubordination to grow rampant and would damage the stability of the homes throughout the land.

"Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.' 18 This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath. Est 1:16-19

There is little doubt that this is exactly what would happen. Evil companionship will indeed corrupt good morals. The wives in the land of Persia would be corrupted by these events.

If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. 20 When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small." Est. 1:19-20

The punishment seems excessive and perhaps evil from our perspective, but in the times of a harem, things are not the same as they are today. What we must remember here as we do in the book of Job is that the Holy Spirit records the words and the events, but this doesn't mean they are right. We just don't have enough knowledge to know. It doesn't say he divorced her, only that she was not to come into his presence again. It only says that her royal position was given to another. In their eyes this would solve the problem.

God's providence often works with what exists. He doesn't force people to do evil, but if they choose to do it, He will use it for His own purposes. All this reveals to us is that these are the events that occurred to open the door for God to bring about His purposes.

The solution pleased all these counselors. It was not a vindictive thing, only the best means to solve a crisis made either by the king's request and queen's refusal, or just the queen's refusal. A letter was sent to all the provinces in the land, in all languages. It was to accomplish one goal. Each man must be master in his own home.

And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. 22 Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people. Est. 1:21-22

Esther 2

Review:

What we know about the life of Esther occurred sometime between 483 and 478 which places it about 60 years after the return of Judah to their land. It is striking that the final three historical books (Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther) follow the same path as the life of Joseph. Outside of the dreams that he had and that he interpreted, there is no record of God speaking to him. The record we have of his life was lived wholly within the realm of providence. So also with Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. They all follow the same course. First, they use their understanding of God's will based on previous revelation to live their faithful life. Second, they pray and fast, and accept what occurs as the providence of God.

Although we have moved from the head of gold to the chest and arms of silver (Dan 2:31-45), this king was ruler over a vast empire with great resources giving him both ease and prosperity. He has absolute rule, and from the details of the first few chapters, he was a man with a vast harem and the opportunity to have a different girl every night. The cruelty of the laws there regarding this young women taken from their homes, seen for one night and left in obscurity for the rest of their lives is obvious.

The request to and response of the queen remain a mystery. Did he ask something unfair and immodest? Was she right in her refusal? No matter what the answer to this question, the events stand as historical facts. The concern of the wise men seems to be fair and logical. Her refusal did set a precedent that would have undermined the authority of the men. Their solution is not in harmony with the Scriptures, but again, this man is not under the law and we are only getting the facts as they occurred.

A New Queen is to be Chosen

The first verse of the Second Chapter is open to three views. Either the king feels remorse for wronging the queen because of his foolish request, or he feels remorse that he took such a harsh stand against her, or he is now lonely and needs another companion.

After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. Est. 2:1-2

His emotional state led to a suggestion to the king which he accepted. The criteria for a new queen is given and the king agrees to it.

Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; 3 and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them. 4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This thing pleased the king, and he did so. Est. 2:2-4

The cruelty of this decree is evident in several points. First, this is not a voluntary opportunity presented to these young women. Officials were appointed to go out into all the provinces of the kingdom and compel these women to come. Regardless of their plans, their hopes and dreams and their love of another, they are taken and brought into the women's quarters (harem).

Our Introduction to Mordecai and Esther

The main characters of our account are here introduced with the information God wanted us to know about their situation. They both lived in the capital. Mordecai's uncle and his wife had died and he was raising their daughter Esther. His genealogy comes through Benjamin and it is stated that he was taken from Jerusalem at the time of Jeconiah (second captivity - 596).

Mordecai is raising his uncle's daughter whose mother and father had died and left her an orphan. So her life of hardship and sorrow over the loss of her parents will now be compounded by the decree of the king. The love of Mordecai for his niece led him to raise her as his own daughter.

In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. 6 Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. 7 And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. Est 2:5-7

Esther was taken! She did not seek this out. Along with the rest her own hopes and desires were not taken into consideration. One day she was free with her own life to live and the next day she was captured and carried to the king's harem.

Once again we see the similarities to Joseph. Although not sold into slavery by her brothers, her bondage was every bit as bitter as his. **It is important for us to understand that this was not something Esther sought out, but something she was compelled to do.** So this is a story of a woman taken into captivity who did not give up and become bitter, but continued to serve her God and do her best under a terrible set of circumstances.

Her demeanor of a worthy woman soon brought her to the attention of the official that was responsible for the harem. She had that meek and quiet spirit that was not only of great price in the eyes of God, but of men. As in so many similar situations, God was able to give her favor in the eyes of Hegai. He went above and beyond what he had done with the other women to help her. He then appointed seven of the best maid servants from the palace to be given to her and she was moved to the best place in the house of the women.

So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. 9 Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women. Est. 2:8-9

After seeing how Haman used his information regarding the Jews, it is clear why Mordecai wanted her to hide her people and family. It was dangerous information could have brought harm upon her. Whether this was a good thing or not is not revealed. But when the time came for Esther to reveal that she was of the nation of Israel she was more than willing to do so, so it was not an act of cowardice, but of caution.

Mordecai was deeply concerned for Esther and was every day at the court to hear about Esther.

Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it. 11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her. Est. 2:10-11

The Details of the Selection Process

God wanted us to know exactly how they went about this process. It doesn't give credit to the king or the country that they would defile all these women one after another, but so it was. The sore travail and sorrow of this process is terrible to think about. A woman taken from her friends, family and home, setting aside all her plans brought into the palace to wait a full year for one night with the king. Six months day after day being prepared with oil and myrrh and another six months with perfumes and preparations. Then one day to enter into the king's presence. After that one night if the king found nothing to draw him to her, she was not allowed to go home and resume her life, but doomed to live a life of boredom with all the other women who had been rejected.

Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. 13 Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name. Est. 2:12-14

The true signs of a worthy and wise woman of a meek and quiet spirit is clearly on display. She

relies completely on the wisdom and discretion of Hegai. Because of both her attitude and her demeanor along with God's help in key moments, she obtained favor from everyone who saw her. We see the humility and submissive nature of Esther. While it was the third year of his reign when the events leading to Vahsti's banishment occurred (*that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants*" Est 1:3). So it is now four years later in the seventh year of his reign that these events occurred.

Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. 16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Est. 2:15-16

Due to her own wisdom and submission, and God's providence bringing her into the position where she could thwart the wicked devices of Haman, she wins the favor of the king. All those who had previously caught his attention are seen to be under her to the degree that he set the crown on her head and made her queen, giving to her the position from which Vahsti had been removed.

A new feast is proclaimed given the name "*the feast of Esther.*" He then proclaims a holiday and gave gifts.

The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king. Est. 2:17-18

Mordecai is also given Favor through God's Providence

The events of the next portion pose some difficulties to understand. Evidently after Esther's selection, the harem is still growing and there is a second gathering of these women. The life of this queen must have been difficult with these hundreds of women coming and going. But so it was in the days of Solomon also.

Why did Mordecai sit in the king's gate. This is always a sign that he was in some official position. Whether this position came through Esther, or was already his before these events occurred is not revealed. Another wonderful attribute that is also inferred in the qualifications of elders is that Esther continued to obey and respect Mordecai even after becoming queen. Such was her humility and submission.

When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. 20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him. Est. 2:19-23

An event that might have passed over into obscurity becomes a critical part of the story. Again, through God's providence Mordecai overhears or is told of the terrible act of vengeance planned by two of the king's doorkeepers. The clear communication between Mordecai and Esther is now revealed. It was easy for messages to pass between them. Esther then informs the king and the plot is revealed and the punishment of hanging decreed. Of great importance are the final words of the passage. The deed of Mordecai was recorded in the chronicles that were written of the events that occurred in the presence of the king.

In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. 23 And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king. Est. 2:19-23

The Introduction of Haman

Though his own wisdom and good fortune, Haman is promoted to the highest position in the kingdom of the Medo Persians. Although his nationality is given and some trace him back to the Amalekites, there is real way to prove it and so we don't really know much about him. After his promotion, the king himself commands that everyone bow to Haman. While Mordecai refused to

let Esther's nationality be known, it is clearly not out of fear since this is a very dangerous thing to do.

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. 3 Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" Est. 3:1-4

After some days, those who had watched Mordecai's disobedience decided to take the matter to Haman to see if He would be exonerated or punished for this disobedience. Mordecai told them that he could not bow down because he was a Jew. What portion of the Law was his concern is not stated as others had bowed down to men in the past. Some has proposed that there was some form of idolatry in this bowing, but although there was something that led Morecai to refuse, we are not told what it was.

Such was his pride and arrogance that Haman is filled with wrath at the thought that someone would refuse to bow to him for religious reasons. But his wrath cannot be removed just by killing one man, but everyone from the nation that would not bow down to him because of faith in their God must also be destroyed.

Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus — the people of Mordecai. Est 3:4-6

It was in the first month that these events occurred, and after casting lots, nearly an entire year must pass before it would be done.

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. Est. 3:7

The cruelty and selfishness of Haman and the king are on display. While Haman is guilty for conceiving the wicked plan of annihilating a nation, the king doesn't try to reign in his servants wrath, or even find out the reason for it. The charge is well laid. First he accuses the Jews of having different laws and not keeping the kings laws. This was a slander and false charge. It was only Mordecai who had refused these things. Perhaps Haman knows more about the Jews and this was only a pretense to destroy those whom he already hated and persecuted. From later events in which Haman's sons sought to destroy the Jews, it gives credibility to this possibility.

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries." Est. 3:8-9

Though Haman thought he needed to bribe the king, the king decides to give him this request as a favor.

So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you." Est. 3:10-11

Haman had moved very quickly on this plan. The idea and the lots had been cast and now it is only the thirteenth day of the month and the scribes have been called, the decree written and the seal placed.

Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded — to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring. Est. 3:12-13

Then the decrees are sent out by the king's couriers to all the provinces. The command is vicious and terrible: "to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month." Because of God's promises to Israel this command cannot stand and God will find a way to remove it. But though such a terrible decree has been issued, the king has no care or concern for these people and the misery it would cause. Instead they sit down to eat and drink.

But unlike the king and Haman, the rest of the city is deeply disturbed and perplexed by it.

And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day. 15 The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed. Est. 3:13-15

Esther 3

Review:

God's providence and the answering of prayer are the most prominent part, not only of Esther but also of Ezra and Nehemiah. The selfish cruelty of this king of Medo-Persia are mute by the beauty and humility of Esther. Her placement in the king's household has even moved Mordecai to speculate that this might be the case. And that is the mark of all providential events. Since God did not send us a letter, we always have to preface these things with maybe or might. After the unlikely selection process brought Esther to the throne in part because she pleased Hegai the king's custodian of the women, this problem arises over Israel through the same household that Esther is a member being the cousin of Mordecai.

Mordecai Hears about the Plan to Destroy Israel

It was in "the thirteenth day of the first month," that "a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded (Est. 3:12). When they cast lots to determine the day, it came to the furthest possible moment: "they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. (Est 3:7). Enough time has passed for this decree to reach "every province" and for all the Jews to become aware of it.

A typical response for the Jews was a combination of fasting, weeping, wailing and laying in sackcloth" each person choosing the manner in which they manifested their grief to God and made their requests known to him.

When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. 2 He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 3 And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. Esther 4:1-3

Fasting

Although vague in its initial observance, it is clear to most that fasting began with the day of atonement.

*"This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, **you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all**, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. Lev. 16:29-32*

*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 27 "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; **you shall afflict your souls**, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. 28 And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is **the Day of Atonement**, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. 29 For **any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people...** 32 It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and **you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening**, you shall celebrate your sabbath. Lev. 23:26-30 See also Num 29:7*

It is the sermon against its abuses that we find the most powerful explanation regarding fasting. It was a means by which they would be seen by God and taken notice. It was designed "to make your voice heard on high" and to "afflict his soul."

*3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? **Why have we afflicted our souls**, and You take no notice?' ... 3 "In fact, **in the day of your fast you find pleasure**. And exploit all your laborers. 4 Indeed **you fast for strife and debate**, ... 4 You **will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high...** 8 **Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the Lord?** Isa. 58:3; 8*

The first time we see it used by Israel to "make their voice heard on high" was after Israel was defeated twice in his battle with Benjamin. But it was used over and over again for the same purpose.

Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the Lord and **fasted that day until evening**; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. Judg 20:26

So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And **they fasted that day**, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah. 1 Sam 7:6

David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and **David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground**. 2 Sam 12:16

And he said, "While the child was alive, **I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?'** 23 But now he is dead; **why should I fast?** Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." 2 Sam 12:22-23

So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that **he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning**. 28 And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 **"See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days.** 1 Kings 21:27-29

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. ... 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. Ezra 8:21, 23

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; **I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven**. Neh 1:4

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 **"Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise.** And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" Est 4:15-16

Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for their good. 12 **When they fast, I will not hear their cry** Jer 14:11

Then I set my face toward the Lord God **to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes**. 4 And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, Dan 9:3

Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord. Joel 1:14

"Now, therefore," says the Lord, **"Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."** 13 **So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God,** For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. 14 **Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him** Joel 2:12-14

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, 7 **Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.** 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, **and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.** 9 **Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?** Jonah 3:5-9

Did Fasting Continue into the New Testament

This is a question oftentimes asked by Christians. The most Scriptural answer is that it did come into the New Testament, but not as a law or ordinance. It is an opportunity, not an obligation!

"Moreover, **when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance.** For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, **when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,** 18 so that **you do not appear to men to be fasting,** but to your Father who is in the secret place; **and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.** Matt 6:16-18

*Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "**Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?**" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But **the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.**" Matt 9:14-15 (and then **they will fast in those days**). Mk. 2:20*

***As they ministered to the Lord and fasted,** the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 **Then, having fasted and prayed,** and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:2-3*

*So when they had **appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting,** they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23-24*

Sackcloth

Sackcloth goes all the way back to Joseph and, unless it is accompanied with fasting, appears to have more with simple mourning. Yet a few times it was also used as a means to mourn in God's sight in hopes of His intervention.

*And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." 34 Then **Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned** for his son many days. Gen 37:33-35*

*Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "**Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner.**" 2 Sam 3:31*

Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes; and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked, and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body 2Kings 6:30

*And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, **that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.** 2 Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, **Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.** 2 Kings 19:1-3*

*Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. **So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces.** 1 Chron 21:16-17*

Ashes is not mentioned outside of sackcloth and/or fasting.

Esther and Mordecai Learn of Haman's Plan

We are not told how long Mordecai was doing this before Esther was told, but as soon as she heard about it, she sent word seeking to find out the cause. One of the eunuch's assigned to her is sent with clothing (probably so Mordecai could come and tell her himself), but he refused it. The eunuch is sent a second time to find out what had happened.

So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate. Esther 4:4-6

Mordecai begins with the events leading up to this decree. He reveals **all** that had happened. Not only does Mordecai have the details of the sum of money to destroy the Jews, but he also has a copy of the decree. He also sends the request for her to go to the king and seek to have this decree removed.

And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. 9 So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Esther 4:6-9

Esther's Plan

When Esther first hears this request, her first thought is for her life. After what happened with Vashti, she has some legitimate concerns. The fact that he had not called her for that amount of time may have led her to feel concern about his state of mind toward her. The death sentence was a serious punishment for a crime that doesn't seem to fit it. This is another indication of the nature of his character that he would even allow such a law to be enforced.

Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: 11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." 12 So they told Mordecai Esther's words. Esther 4:10-12

Mordecai's answer seems centers on one thing. Her fear that she might be put to death. First, he warns her against false assurance. She will not escape this decree by keeping silent. Second, Mordecai trusts in the Lord with all his heart. Like Abraham before him he has not wavered in unbelief, he knows God will keep his promises regarding the Messiah. Israel cannot be destroyed because there are still unfulfilled prophesies. Deliverance will come, but from all the circumstances that are then in place concerning Esther's rise to become queen, Mordecai's words hold great weight. She very well could have been providentially placed in that position for just this moment and she must not fail.

And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther 4: 13-14

Mordecai's words have exactly the affect he had spoken them to gain. But she knew the above facts just as we have them today and she wanted every bit of help she could secure in getting God to act in her behalf. She wanted all the Jews in the capital to be gathered together to fast for three days. Her attitude is not one of lack of faith, but one of conviction. No one knew God's will in this matter so the likelihood of her perishing was equal to that of not perishing. She is prepared for either outcome.

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" 16 So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him. Esther 4:15-16

It is interesting to consider the wording here. In their spiritual and family relationship Mordecai was the one to command and she was the one to submit. Yet the Scriptures use the term "command" for Esther's words.

tsawah command." This verb occurs only in biblical Hebrew (in all periods) and imperial Aramaic (starting from around 500 B C.). Biblical occurrences number around 485. Essentially, this verb refers to verbal communication by which a superior "orders" or "commands" a subordinate. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of OT Words, OT:6680)

It is likely that as his queen she is his superior, and since the official eunuch had brought these words, it would be a command and that is why the Scriptures word it in this way.

Esther 4

Esther Makes Her Request

After the fasting and prayers had been completed Esther prepared herself to present in the best possible way. She passed over her domain and entered the forbidden territory of the inner court where no one was allowed to be. Once again, she found favor. He knew she had risked her life to come before him, and he immediately did two things. First, he helped up the scepter which revealed his favor and allowed her to touch the top and thus be free from the law that could have brought death.

Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. 2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. Esther 5:1-2

The second things he did was to ask for the request that had brought her into such grave peril to make. By adding “up to half the kingdom” he sought to assure her that he was more than prepared to give her whatever it was that she needed. Her answer is possibly due to the people in the court and the delicacy of the request. It was putting the king in an uncomfortable position to change something already decreed in front of all his ministers or whoever was present. It is also possible that she already had a plan that she intended to use to resolve this.

And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you — up to half the kingdom!" 4 So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him." Esther 5:3-4

Esther's First Banquet

This is to be done the same day and the king summons Haman. After he arrived, they go to the place Esther has prepared for the banquet. The king presents the same offer as they are enjoying the banquet. Now it is perplexing why she gave the same answer to come to a second banquet. She obviously was not prepared to give it but why? Was it fear, wisdom, an attempt to soften him further? We will never know.

Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. 5 At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!" 6 Then Esther answered and said, "My petition and request is this: 8 If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said." Esther 5:7-8

Haman Plots Mordecai's Death

That night, Haman was filled with joy and gladness. All his plans seemed to be coming to fruition. But his pride led to his downfall. Mordecai still would not place himself under the authority of Haman. This time, his anger burning, he went home to devise a plan. He called all his friends together and begins to praise himself. He speaks of his great riches, his large family, his promotions to ever higher and higher positions, and how he now towered over all of the rest of the officials and servants of the king. Everything God has warned against, Haman did in a single night. Pride goes before destruction, let another praise you and not your own lips.

So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11 Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. Esther 5:9-11

His crowning achievement in his own eyes was the banquet he had been asked to attend. Little did he know the purpose of the banquet. Yet in his ignorance, he boasted that he was the only one who

had been invited along with the king. At that moment it appeared that his future was brighter than anyone in the kingdom.

Only one thing bothered him and in his own eyes it seemed to remove all the joy of all the other accomplishments: Mordecai. He just can't be happy until that man is killed and removed from his sight. Remember earlier he had disdained to only remove Mordecai, but had determined to remove the entire nation. Yet that is not enough because this man was tormenting him just by living.

Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. 13 Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Esther 5:12-13

This is a classic example of evil companionship corrupting good morals or flattery that brought his boldness to do what he wanted to do without holding back. He sees nothing wrong in this plan to murder. A 75' tower was a mighty undertaking and one that would be spoken of everywhere. People would ask what it was for, and the rumors would spread. It had reached the ears of the servants of the king the very next evening and what he had planned for Mordecai would be his own death.

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet." 15 And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made. Esther 5:14-15

Mordecai's Honor

Another probable act of providence occurs when the king can't sleep and the book of the records is brought. How probable is it of this occurring through the normal channels of time and chance? The night before Haman is going to ask for his death, he is listening to the book and as large as those books might be, he happens on the events where Mordecai had saved his life. He is in just the right mood to want to reward this man for such a service and when he finds out nothing is done seeks to rectify it.

That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. 2 And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3 Then the king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" And the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." Esther 6:1-3

This one seems to be too amazing to be anything else but providence. Haman has come to ask the king to kill Mordecai at the very moment that the king is seeking someone to reward him. While Haman is approaching the king, he is asking the servants who is in the court that could do this deed for Mordecai. So while Haman still has it in his heart to seek the death of Mordecai the king begins to question him about how he might want to be honored if he had done some great deed. Since Haman has decided that no one is greater than he and that Esther had just honored him the night before and was going to honor him again that night, thinks it must be him who is under consideration so he embellishes it to the highest degree possible.

So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5 The king's servants said to him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." 6 So Haman came in, and the king asked him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought in his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" Esther 6:4-6

He has wealth and power, so what he wants is to be viewed by everyone in the capital to know just how great he was. A royal robe the king has worn would have a special significance of honor as would the horse that the king had ridden. Only the highest of his servants would receive such an honor. The royal crest would make more likely that those who saw this event would not have to be told later that it was the king's. Then open of the most noble of the princes whom everyone would know was to proclaim the honor the king wanted to give to this man. This was to be done through the city square where as many people as possible would witness it.

And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, 8 let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest

placed on its head. 9 Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'" Esther 6:7-9

At the very height of his delight and great expectations, all his hopes and dreams are dashed to the ground. The very man whom he wanted to dishonor and kill is now that man that he must honor in the very manner he had described and hoped to receive himself. He can't even reduce what he had suggested in the least as the king has strictly charged him to leave nothing undone of all he had said.

Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken." Esther 6:10

Haaman Forced to Honor Morecai

Thus the greatest and most noble prince in the empire is now forced against his will to honor and bring attention to his most hated enemy Mordecai. Mordecai is returned to the city gate an honored man. But Haman sees the future problems that will occur as a result of the sudden turn of events. This is the worst time to bring up his desire to hang Mordecai, but all the city knows that is exactly what he wanted to do.

His wise men and even his wife now realize that he has picked a fight with one of God's chosen people and what had happened thus far had led to this conclusion. Daniel had been dead about 50 years, but his exploits with the dreams, the events around Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, the handwriting on the wall, and the lions den would be enough to convince them that he could not prevail.

He doesn't even have time to prepare any plans to avoid the terrible consequences that would occur if the king were to find out about these things. He is expected at the banquet and there is no way to make excuses, he had to go.

So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!" 12 Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. 13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him." 14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared. Esther 6:11-14

Esther's Second Banquet

This second banquet followed the same pattern as the first. Both the king and his most trusted minister enter into the room and the king makes it clear that he has had no change of heart toward her, repeating the same promise for the third time. We know that Haman's heart is troubled, but her first words would have turned his concern into panic. Esther is a Jew and his request to the king would also mean she would be put to death. She quotes the decree as it had been written by Haman and sent out to all the provinces.

Her second statement shows at what point she would have chosen not to risk her life in the manner she had. If Haman had been content to only enslave the Jews, she would have held her peace and not brought this to the king's attention. In his request to destroy them, Haman had not made known who these people were. He only described them as a scattered people.

So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. 2 And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!" Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. 4 For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my

tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss." Esther 7:1-4

She identified Haman as the man who had done this, in powerful terms. His desire to destroy the Jews had made him an adversary, enemy and wicked man. These words had enraged the king. He goes out into the garden to ponder what should be done. He had liked and respected Haman. He had not realized the consequences of the decree he had signed. He had promised his queen to give her the request, which had turned out to be more complicated than he had thought. He too was implicated in this since he was the one who had agreed to it. So he went out to consider all the implications and how he would deal with it. Haman knew the king well enough to see that he was in grave danger. His only hope was to plead with Esther to further her request by asking the king to spare his life. When he returned to render his decision, he found Haman showing his remorse and importunity by having fallen down before her.

So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" 6 And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. 7 Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. Esther 7:5-7

We will never know what decision the king had come to because at his return, although Haman was only pleading for his life, he had crossed the line of decorum, and the without even asking, the king chose to put the worst possible motive on what Haman had done.

8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Esther 7:8

Then the purpose of the gallows which was revealed when Haman had no fear and expected his request to be granted is now heart by the king. Mordecai's name had come up that very day in the morning so the king knew exactly who he was. You reap what you sow was then fulfilled. What Haman had plan for Mordecai came upon him.

Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!" 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided. Esther 7:9-10

As the truth continued to be revealed, the king acknowledged the relationship between Esther and Mordecai. The ring that had been taken from Haman and now given to Mordecai was the same ring used to seal the decree regarding the Jews (Esther 3:10-11). Having this ring would give to Mordecai the same authority to write law as Haman. Yet it was not just the ring. Mordecai was also given everything that Haman had possessed.

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. 2 So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman. Esther 8:1-2

Although Haman has now been destroyed the plan that he had devised could not be set aside. Since she had not been given a way to resolve this problem at that time, she found herself again in the position of needing to speak to the king. So she again enters king's presence and he again raises the sceptre. She now requests the ability to counteract the ordinance that had been signed two months ago and had already been posted in all the provinces.

Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. 4 And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, 5 and said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?" Esther 8:3-6

It is evident that Mordecai was already there among his chief advisers. The king spoke to both of them giving them the authority to write whatever decree they want, as he had Haman before them.

They called the scribes and since the event is not to occur until the twelfth month there are still about eight months in which to do it all. It was a massive undertaking. It covered the lands from India all the way to Ethiopia and consisted of 127 different provinces. There were many different languages and scripts into which it had to be translated, but it was soon done and sent out.

*Then King Ahasuerus **said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew**, "Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. **8 You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring**; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke." So **the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded**, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces **from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all**, to every province in its own script, **to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language**. **10** And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds. Esther 8:7-10*

When we compare the original decree with this one, it is evident that the new decree gives the Jews the same right to do to their enemies what Haman had given their adversaries. **(to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, ... in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions Est 3:13).**

*By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives — **to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions**, **12 on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar**. **13** A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. **14** The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel. Esther 8:11-14*

Mordecai is now shown to have the power by the garments and crown the king has permitted him to wear. All of this led to the Jews in Sushan to rejoice first, and then as the news went across the empire, they too began to rejoice. After this sudden turn of events, many of those who received the decree chose to take up the religion and culture of Israel.

*So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great **crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple**; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. **16** The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. **17** And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. **Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them**. Esther 8:15-17*

Conclusion:

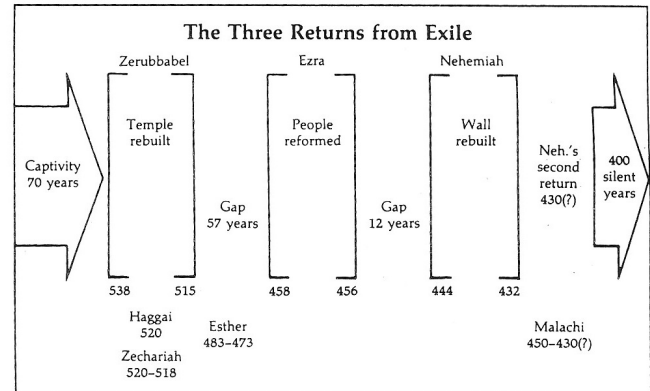
The final section of Esther reveals the details of how the Jews were able to protect themselves from their enemies and how Esther was able to create a national holiday much like our Thanksgiving. Unlike Jereboam, this was a civil holiday and not meant to replace or add to anything in worship to God.

Nehemiah 1

Introduction

Nehemiah is the last historical book. In the Old Testament. The temple has been rebuilt, but after carefully reading Nehemiah, the city itself is still in ruins. The walls and gates are still only rubble. There are some differences of opinion on the dates, but the divergence is only 10 - 15 years. It is evident from both charts that Malachi is working in the same time period as Ezra and Nehemiah, but they do not mention each other so the relationship is not revealed. But we can get a clear picture of the spirituality of the people by comparing the lives of these three men.

Ezra / Nehemiah Timeline				
	PERSIAN KING	DATES	BIBLICAL CORRELATION	Time Line
Chap 1 – 4:6,24	CYRUS	539-530	Return of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 1-3) Temple work begins	538 536
	CAMBYSES	530-522	Rebuilding at Jerusalem stopped (Ezra 4)	530
Chap 5 - 6	DARIUS I	522-486	Haggai and Zechariah prophesy Temple Completed (Ezra 5-6)	520 516
Chap 4:7-23 Chap 7 - 10	XERXES	486-464	Story of Esther (Esther 1-9)	
	ARTAXERXES I	464-423	Return of Ezra (Ezra 7-10) Return of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1-2) Prophecy of Malachi	458 445 443



The historical setting of the book places it in the heart of the reign of Artaxerxes 1, which spanned a period of about forty years. Ezra leaves for Jerusalem in the seventh year of his reign. Judging from the comments in Ezra, not only the king but the entire court was aware of Ezra and his mission and wanted him to restore the temple worship. It in the twentieth year of his reign and only thirteen to fourteen years later that Nehemiah appears sad in the presence of the king and is commissioned to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. Both Ezra (*you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people*) and Nehemiah (*I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah*) are given secular authority from the king to do their work. Ezra went “*in the seventh year of the king*” and Nehemiah “*from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years.*”

*1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, ... 6 and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. **The king granted him all his request**, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. ... 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem **in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.** ... 10 Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. ... 11 This is **a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel:** ... **12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven:** ... **13 I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you.** 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; ... 25 And **you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people** who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them. 26 **Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.** Ezra 7:1-26*

***Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions.** 15 **But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver.** Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. 16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there*

for the work. 17 And **at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us.** Neh. 5:14-18

No mention is made of Ezra when Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem until after the wall is finished then he appears as a priest and scribe, but it appears his political power was no longer a part of his life. We only have this one event where they worked together.

1 they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women ... 9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, Neh.8:1-9

Nehemiah leaves Jerusalem after the twelve years that were allotted to him, but returned again some time later. He still had the authority to command in Jerusalem, but we are not told whether he was still working as the governor.

But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem Neh. 13:6-7

News From Jerusalem

Some affirm from these words that Nehemiah was the writer of the book. Since Ezra was there and he was a scribe and likely writer of Ezra, some affirm that he was the writer. Some actually have called Nehemiah the Second Book of Ezra.

Chislev ... A proper noun denoting the month Chislev or Kislev. It is the name given to the ninth month of the year, equal to our November/December (Neh 1:1; Zech 7:1). (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT: OT:3691)

In this ninth month of their year Nehemiah is the cup bearer of the king and has spent his life working and living in Shushan. Esther also spent most of her life in this city (Esth. 2:5) as it was the capital city of the Medo Persian empire. Since the cup bearer had the life of the king in his hands as poison was the method choice to kill the king, Nehemiah is in a very important position as a servant of the king.

Some men returning from a trip to Judah meet with Nehemiah and after asking about their welfare, hears the terrible news. In spite of God bringing them back to their land and giving them the opportunity to restore the temple and city, they have not done so. After over a hundred years, they have not been motivated to the most obvious thing to protect their security. The walls Nebuchadnezzar broke down are still rubble and all the gates are still burned with fire. The fact that Nehemiah was able to finish it in 52 days, (Neh. 6:15) is a powerful indictment against them. If there had been someone who wanted to finish that wall, it could have been done. Yet while it is an indictment against them it is a powerful testimony to the zeal, faith, and determination of Nehemiah.

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." Neh 1:1-3

Nehemiah's devotion to God and to His people are clearly revealed both in his response and in his prayer to God. He did not feel bad for a moment and then concluding there was nothing more he could do he moved on with his life. His initial response was to mourn and weep. But many days later he was still mourning and weeping. He was not the only one who had felt this way. Even a Psalm had been written about it, while they were in Babylonian captivity.

By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion ... 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! 6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth — If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy. Ps. 137:1-5

Nehemiah's Prayer

Throughout these "many days," Nehemiah was fasting to enhance the power of his prayers so that

God would hear him.

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. Neh. 1:4

The address and contents were dedicated to having God intervene in behalf of the children of Israel and to help them to rebuild the gates and become established. He began by praising God's character and promises. God had Himself proclaimed these things. He is faithful to His covenant and He does keep mercy from generation to generation on those who love Him and keep His commands. Nehemiah uses this part of God's character as the basis for his plea. He also quotes Solomon's promise that God would be attentive and His eyes open to all who pray toward the temple in Jerusalem.

He reasons with God using some of the Scriptures penned by Moses concerning the very events that they had witnessed and were still in the midst of. He confesses the sins of the people and his own sins. He recognizes as we all should that we too bear a part in the judgments God has passed on His people for their sins. Not only have the fathers sinned but so have we and so had Nehemiah. All of us have acted very corruptly against Him and have not kept all the commands, statutes and ordinances. While their violations were from the Law given by Moses, our are from our violation of the teachings of the Christ.

*5 And I said: "I pray, Lord God of heaven, **O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments,** 6 please **let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open,** that You may **hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You.** Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 **We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded** Your servant Moses. Neh. 1:5-7*

The intent of the prayer is given in 1:9-10. The unfaithfulness is what had led to the scattering, but now there were some who were faithful to God and He had promised to bring them back to Jerusalem. That is what Nehemiah wants to do. He wants his faithfulness to lead God to bring him to Jerusalem where he can put all his efforts into rebuilding the walls.

*8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, **'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.'** 10 Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. Neh. 1:8-10*

Finally Nehemiah speaks of what he personally would like God to do for him based on all the above. He, along with others have been praying that Nehemiah will be allowed to return to Jerusalem. All of this centered on one thing: The same thing that had been given to Ezra by this same king some thirteen to fourteen years ago. He wants to receive mercy from the king that would lead to His being allowed to do the work. This is the same prayer that Esther had asked all in Shushan to pray and fast to God for. Since he was the king's cupbearer much of the prayer was already fulfilled. All he needed was the means to gain mercy from this king.

*11 **O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."** For I was the king's cupbearer. Neh. 1:11*

Four Months Later: the Request to the King

Since the month of Nisan is the first month of the year, it has been about four months since he has heard the news and begun praying and fasting.

nīysn: A proper noun referring to the month Nisan. It refers to Nisan, the first month of the Old Testament year. It was equal to our March/April period of time (Neh 2:1; Est 3:7), (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT: OT:5212)

The providential manner in which God brought about the answer to this prayer is now described. The very emotions that were leading to the prayers brought Nehemiah to the attention of the king

while he was performing his duties. Always of a cheerful disposition, now the marks of sadness on his face lead the king to ask him what is troubling him.

*And it came to pass **in the month of Nisan**, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that **I took the wine and gave it to the king**. Now **I had never been sad in his presence before**. 2 Therefore the king said to me, **“Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.”** Neh. 2:1-2*

The fear may have been for some other reason, but most likely it is the fear of having something important to ask, and when the moment arrives when it will be yes or no, we generally fear great fear since the moment of truth has arrived. He is very specific about his concerns. While Ezra had spoken for the temple, Nehemiah speaks of the condition of the city without walls and gates. The temple is there, but the city itself is still full of rubble and defenseless.

The king perceives in this statement a request that has not yet been worded, so he asks him directly exactly what he would like to do about it. He quickly explained that what he would dearly seek to do is to go to Jerusalem and rebuild it.

***So I became dreadfully afraid**, 3 and said to the king, **“May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”** 4 Then the king said to me, **“What do you request?”** **So I prayed to the God of heaven**. 5 And I said to the king, **“If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”** Neh. 2:2-5*

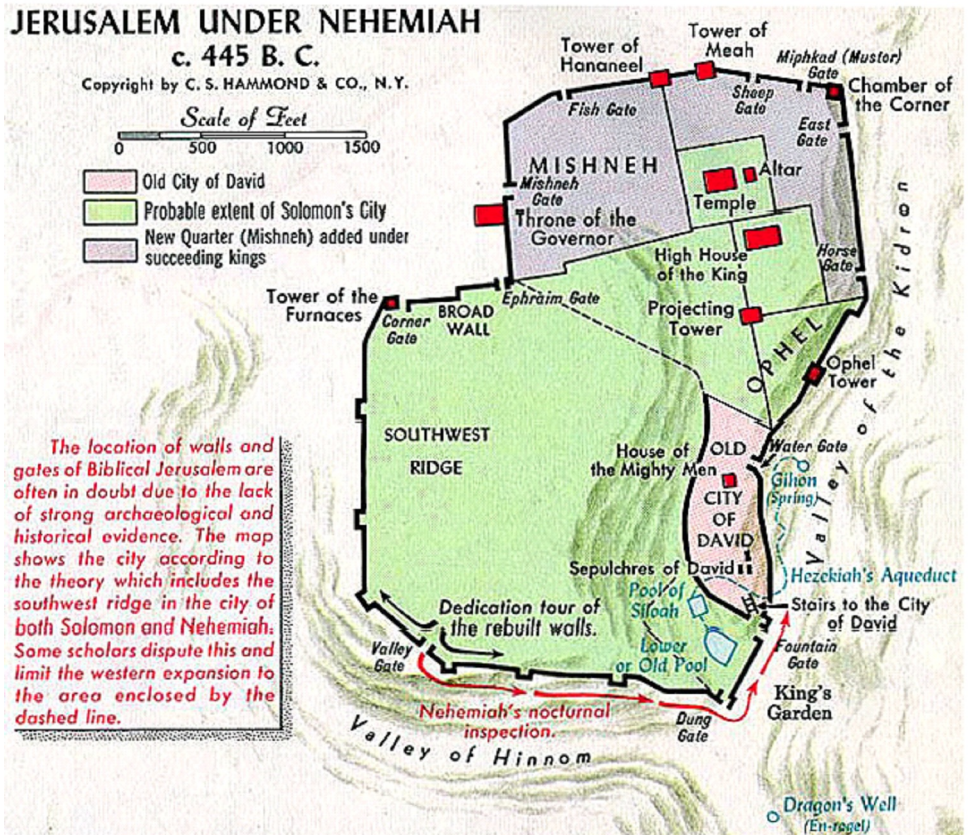
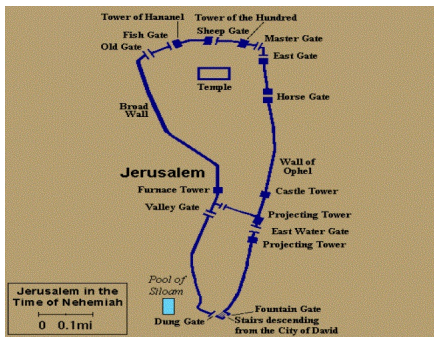
It is obvious to Nehemiah with these words that the request has been granted and only the means to accomplish are now being discussed. Since Nehemiah is actually gone for twelve years, it is very possible that this was the answer he gave to the king. Once this had been agreed, Nehemiah makes a second request for letters to give him safe passage to Judah, and a letter to the man who would be able to give him the timber he needed to set the gates of the temple, the walls of the city and the home he would occupy (probably the house Solomon had built for himself as he was building the temple. The king did everything he asked and Nehemiah gives God the glory.

*Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), **“How long will your journey be? And when will you return?”** So **it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time**. 7 Furthermore I said to the king, **“If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah,** 8 **and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.”** And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me. Neh. 2:6-8*

Nehemiah 2

Introduction

Nehemiah Arrives in Jerusalem



The first thing Nehemiah does as he travels to Jerusalem is to stop and speak with all the governors on the other side of the Euphrates river who might have any influence on what he was about to do. It appears he was well aware of the problems he would face as Zerubbabel and Joshua had faced similar issues with the Samaritans and other nations who stopped the rebuilding the temple. It was Nehemiah's intent to get all his defenses in order and then build the wall before serious opposition could be organized.

His concerns were reasonable as the opposition arises the moment those who were opposed heard that he was there. The enemies he would contend with are "Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official" Sanballat is considered by some to be a resident of Beth-horon and thus a Samaritan from the area of Ephraim, but others consider him to be from Horonaim, a town in Moab and thus a Moabite. These men were "deeply disturbed" (*grieved them exceedingly* - ASV; *very displeasing* - NAS). They had the upper hand and alliances in Jerusalem and thought it would remain in their power and they would keep the Jews from prospering.

Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. 10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel. Neh. 2:9-10

When Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he does not do what he did with the governors along the way. He keeps his plans and ideas to himself. He came to Jerusalem and for three days told no one what he had come to do. God had put it in his heart through the Scriptures just as He does today. He goes out in the night and looked at the damage the walls had sustained and made an assessment of the work. It is specifically stated that he did not tell anyone what he had in mind.

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. 15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed

the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And **the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.** Neh. 2:11-16

Once he had made his plans, he encouraged the Jews to build the walls and remove the reproach and weakness it implied. To motivate them, he first told them of God's providence and how God's hand had brought about his presence there. He then described the words and the letter that the king had given to him and the permission he had from the governors and from the nearby forests where they would get the timbers necessary. With no obstacles to doing the work, they were enthusiastic in their desire to rise up and build. Then they fulfilled their words by setting their hands to do the work.

Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work. Neh. 2:17-18

Another man joins in the chorus of Sanballat and Tobiah named "Geshem the Arab." They open their attack and reveal their opposition by mocking, scorning and laughing at the prospect of their being able to build these walls. Their obvious intent was to destroy the motivation and through discouragement force the Jews to stop working of their own accord.

They also throw in the hint that this is rebellion against the king, a threat Nehemiah had already inoculated them against this by showing that the king had already agreed that the walls and gates should be rebuilt. Nehemiah himself answered these taunts by reminding both the men who were opposed but more importantly the Jews who would do the work that they were relying on God to prosper and bring this about.

He concluded by telling them that they have no heritage, right or memorial in Jerusalem. They were not of the seed of Abraham and had no part in the covenants or promises. They could not stop the work and there would be no benefit to them when it was completed.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?" 20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem." Neh. 2:19-20

Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem

The third chapter details how the walls were rebuilt through the voluntary efforts of the people. The chapter lists each individual who volunteered and the section of the wall they chose to rebuild. Most agreed to build the wall from one gate to another, while others took on the task of building the gates. One man took the responsibility of rebuilding a gate and also 1000 cubits (1500 feet) of the walls.

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 Next to Eliashib the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. ... 13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Refuse Gate. Neh. 3:3-32

Not only did they rebuild, but at the end of the account we learn that many also donated money to further the work. Nehemiah led the way with 1000 gold drachma's, while the entire rest of the Jews gave 40,000.

And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments. 71 Some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas. 72 And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments. Neh 7:70-72

The Opposition of God's Enemies

The failure of the threats led to great anger. Their Second step in opposing was to mock and scorn their efforts in an attempt to discourage the people.

But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish — stones that are burned?" 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall." Neh. 4:1-3

Nehemiah responds by praying to God asking that the abuse they are heaping upon them will ultimately fall upon themselves (Reap what you sow; Vengeance is mine). He knows God wants these walls to be rebuilt and realizes that by mocking them they were provoking God to anger. It is probably that this prayer was known to the people and motivated them. After his prayers, the zeal of the people who had a mind to work led to the walls quickly growing taller until they are halfway built.

Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! 5 Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders. 6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. Neh. 4:4-6

This time the number of persecutors has grown. It now included not only Sanballat and Tobiah, but also the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites are all very angry at this turn of events. This was not a threat but a conspiracy. The plans were laid to secretly come and attack them while they are working in order to create confusion and stop the work.

After they heard about the conspiracy, once again Nehemiah and the other workers begin to pray that God would protect them. They also set up watchmen to keep an eye and ear open to their attack in order to warn the people of their approach.

But the mocking and threats are beginning to have an affect. We have moved from “the people have a mind to work” to “the strength of the laborers is failing.” Whereas before they had ignored the obstacles, now they begin to complain about the rubble and trash that was making the work more onerous. This is the affect of the increased pressure of the persecution. They are beginning to waver.

7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, 8 and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. 10 Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall." Neh. 4:7-10

Added to the above fear and loss of zeal, were the continual mental attacks created by these warnings, seeking to fan the flames of fear and get the work to stop. They are creating rumors that it will be a sneak attack and they won't even know what hit them. These rumors were told and retold, added too and seeking to increase the pressure. They threaten to ambush and kill those who are building the wall.

And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease." 12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us." Neh. 4:7-10

Nehemiah responded with a guard at the opening of the wall. He also asked the people to bring their swords, spears and bows in preparation for any attack. Nehemiah also continued to encourage them with a reminder of how Great and Awesome the Lord has shown Himself to be so many times in the past. He only needs them to have the faith to fight. He also exhorts them to fight for their brethren, sons, daughters, wives and houses. They had a lot to lose if they quit the work. So he encouraged them to fight.

13 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." Neh. 4:13-14

Two things happened that gave the people the courage to rise above all this persecution. First they knew that the enemies had learned that their plot had been discovered and thus secrecy was no

longer available to them. They also realized that God had brought this plot to nothing. This was all it took to get the people back to work. But now they were cautious and the work would go more slowly. steps taken to deal with it. This led to them giving up their plan. But although the people return to the work, they changed their strategy. Now half work and half hold a sword in preparation for any attack.

And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. Neh. 4:15-18

Nehemiah also took another step. He brought the one who would blow the trumpet right next to him. He warned all the people that if they heard that trumpet, they needed to stop the work and rush to the place where they had heard the trumpet sound. He also encouraged them that God would fight for them.

And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." Neh. 4:18-20

This was enough to allay the fears. But prudence demanded that other steps be taken. The threat was real and the anxiety of the people needed to be removed. So while the labor continued Nehemiah had half the men who had been working on the wall to hold spears from dawn to dusk. Then when night came, he commanded that everyone stay in Jerusalem in preparation for an attack. From that point onward everyone kept their clothes on except when washing. This sign of strength would lead to the enemies realizing that any attack would not be easy and there would be heavy casualties.

So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day." 23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing. Neh. 4:21-23

Nehemiah 3

Internal Problems also Threatened the Project

As the time staying in Jerusalem continued to lengthen two things occurred. Some of the poor began to run out of money to buy food. Instead of bringing the problem to Nehemiah to solve as the governor to resolve for them, they do what they had done ever since they left Egypt. They began to murmur. They are growing hungry and have no means to get any. Thus the work is threatened by their hunger and discontent. They want grain to eat and to live.

*And there was a **great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren**. 2 For there were those who said, **“We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live.”** Neh 5:1*

They give reasons for their murmuring and complaining.

They then justify themselves by giving the reasons why they have no grain.

1. We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, to buy grain because of the famine.
2. We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards.
3. We are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves
4. Some of our daughters have been brought into slavery.
5. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.

Some of these accusation are clear violations of the law and the leaders and rich who have done it are in sin. Other accusations are groundless since they are clearly justified under the law. But though lawful, they are not expedient.

*There were **also** some who said, **“We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine.”** 4 There were **also** those who said, **“We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards.** 5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed **we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.”** Neh 5:1-*

Some were violations others were not

A poor man had the right to sell himself in order to pay his debts and the wealthy had the right to purchase them. But they had no right to make them slaves. Instead they were to treat them as hired servants, which they were not doing. Also they had no right to sell them into slavery either to themselves or to other nations.

*‘And if one of your brethren who dwells by you **becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave.** 40 As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. 41 And then he shall depart from you — he and his children with him — and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. 42 For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; **they shall not be sold as slaves.** 43 **You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God.** Lev. 25:39-43*

This was a sin that Ezekiel had warned them against while in Babylonian captivity.

*If he has **oppressed the poor and needy**, Robbed by violence, Not restored the pledge, Lifted his eyes to the idols, Or committed abomination; 13 If he has **exactd usury** Or taken increase — Shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, He shall surely die; His blood shall be upon him. Ezek 18:12-13*

Yet they did have the right to take his field in sale and keep it until the year of Jubilee unless he has the power to redeem it. Even here though, the leaders had not quite kept the precept by keeping them from redeeming it because of the poverty with which they had returned from captivity.

***‘If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and ... if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, 27 then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. 28 But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession.** Lev. 25:25-28*

Nehemiah's Anger and Rebuke

While Nehemiah became very angry at this problem, he had to take some time to work through it all. Murmuring and complaining are never the best way to deal with any problem. It is probable that his anger took in both the murmurers and those who had mistreated them.

He decided not to deal with those who were murmuring. The fact that they had charged usury and were oppressing the people was enough to charge them with a serious crime.

And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. 7 After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." Neh. 5:6-7

Their sins: Usury and Selling the Poor into Slavery

The law allowed them to loan money and expect repayment. But it did not allow usury and preferred that he be helped.

If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. 36 Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. 37 You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. 38 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. Lev. 25:35-38

"You shall not charge interest to your brother — interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. 20 To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the Lord your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess. Deut. 23:19-20

In spite these clear laws against it, these people were guilty and thus rightly condemned.

Those Redeemed Captives from Babylon should not be Enslaved by their own People

Added to this was selling these people which was also a clear violation of the Law of Moses as we saw above. At this point Nehemiah calls an great assembly to condemn them. He reminds them that they had been forced to pay money to redeem these people to bring them back from the slavery of the Babylonian captivity. If they had gone to such trouble to get these people redeemed so they could return, what were they thinking to sell them again. The points were too obvious to be disputed. There wasn't anything they could say to justify themselves.

So I called a great assembly against them. 8 And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say Neh. 5:7-8

His Solution to Resolve these things

These sins were not good. They reflected on their lack of fear of God and the reproach it was creating among the nations around them. They were also a threat to the project. Nehemiah leads the way in the solution. He would lend (not give) them what they needed and then allow them to repay it as they had opportunity without interest

He then demands they restore the interest they had unlawfully taken from the people and restored their lands and possessions so they might have the opportunity to repay the debts they had incurred.

Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? 10 I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! 11 Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them." 12 So they said, "We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Neh 5:9-12

Even the Priests were Guilty

Finally, he calls the priest and takes an oath of them that they would keep their word about restoring and no longer taking interest. Both the guilty and the oppressed are happy with this outcome and all cry Amen! Give praise to God, and fulfill their word.

Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.

13 Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise. Neh 5:12-13

Nehemiah's Generosity

The Holy Spirit inspired the writer of the book to reveal Nehemiah's own conduct. We incidentally learn that he was the governor there for 12 years, which must have been the time he had told the king after being asked how long he would be gone. While he had the authority, he did all in his own power to help the cruel situation there. He refused to take even his own allotment for the work he was doing. He used his authority as governor to release them from these taxes and refused to allow any of the servants who were working under him to use any form of oppression or taxation on them. In comparison to all the other governors who had been before him, he was a welcome relief to the common people who must have been able to prosper and remove their debts.

His final words reveal that he continued to focus his efforts on the wall all the while he was there and did not get involved in commerce. He and his servants were only there to work.

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. 15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. 16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work. Neh. 5:14-16

Even with the heavy burdens the government placed upon Nehemiah, he found other means to fund them. He fed 150 Jews and rulers and all the visitors (ambassadors and dignitaries) from other nations. As he lists the provisions one can see it was a lot of money, but Nehemiah found ways to pay for it without burdening the common people. All this because at this meeting he had seen all the terrible problems these people were still facing.

And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. 18 Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people. 19 Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. Neh. 5:17-19

Threats Against Nehemiah

In the next account of the work, the enemies are still working to destroy the progress on the wall. Due to their diligence, the only openings left in the wall that the enemies could enter were the gates. Now the enemies try a more subtle approach. They tell him they only want to "talk" to him. Some ruse or another such as a petition for peace or some official duty that they claimed he needed to be in their presence to resolve or complete. But Nehemiah knew the real reason was to "do me harm." So he told them he was too busy to meet with them. He had a commission from the king so there was nothing else they could do except invite him again and again up to four times.

Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), 2 that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. 3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" 4 But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner. Neh. 6:1-4

Tactics change again when Sanballat sends a different letter the fifth time. This time it contains what Sanballat believes will convince Nehemiah to come. He now states that Nehemiah has been accused of treason. The rumor is that he plans to rebel against Medo-Persia and that is the reason for the wall. Also, that the rebellion is already well under way. His goal is to lead Nehemiah out of fear to come and meet with him as he is offering help to solve this problem.

Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. 7 And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "There is a king in Judah!"

Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together. Neh. 6:5-7

Nehemiah is not deceived. First, he knows that this rumor has no basis in fact. He also knows that the king in Medo-Persia has complete trust in him and that he could easily defend himself against these charges. He either knew or later learned that this was a plot to bring fear. Even if Nehemiah wouldn't come so they could assassinate him, it would at least cause some of the Jews to become afraid and discouraged which would slow or even stop the work. Nehemiah responds with a prayer that was either personal or a public one that all would Amen.

Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." 9 For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Neh. 6:8-9

The final attempt to destroy Nehemiah and keep the walls from being completed was to shame him and bring reproach upon him that would cause everyone to lose respect for him. Once again, it is an imminent plot to kill him. This time, a secret informer was used. We don't know much about Shemaiah, but it is clear that he proclaimed himself to be a prophet that God had sent to save him. (6:12) He sought to make this a matter of great urgency. The plot is laid and your death will come that very night. The solution is to hide within the temple, which was something that was not lawful for anyone but the priests to enter.

Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you." Neh. 6:10

Nehemiah's righteousness and godliness shield him from this danger. He would never do such a thing even if it meant his life. He refused to do so. Soon after this, he realized that God had not sent this man with this message. Perhaps the message itself gave him this insight or maybe in the next few days after it happened, he found out all the facts. He had given this prophesy at the urging of Nehemiah's enemies. He had sought to lead Nehemiah to sin so they could reproach him and discourage the people. Once again he prays to God to remember the evil these people have done and take His own vengeance upon them.

And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" 12 Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me. 14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid. Neh. 6:11-14

The Wall is Completed

With the statement above that Nehemiah continued to work on the wall for the entire 12 years he was there, "*Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.*" (5:16). Therefore, it is the completion of the walls and gates that were enough for the enemies to see that they were now in a fortified city that could not easily be breached that are described here. Since the work will continue for the next twelve years, it is evident that these words do not mean it was fully completed.

The fact that the city was now protected from all attacks created a great discouragement among the enemies because they knew that threats and intimidation would no longer work. Also it became evident to them that God had been working with them.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God. Neh. 6:15-16

Although the threat of attack had been removed, the conspiracy continued. Tobiah had many spies and friends among the Jews. The people mentioned here are not mentioned elsewhere with any clarity to identify them in connection to what they were doing among the Jews. They were pledged to this enemy both by family and other ties. So there was constant communication. They were informing Tobiah all of Nehemiah's actions and plans and at the same time speaking highly of Tobiah to Nehemiah. The threatening letters also continued.

Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. 18 For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son

of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. 19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me. Neh. 6:15-19

After the wall was completed Nehemiah delegated the daily activities of the gates to a Hanani whom he calls his brother. We have no information about him. Some try to connect him to the Hanani who spoke with Nehemiah at the very beginning of the book. But though this is a possibility, there is no way to prove it. Yet, he is a faithful man and Nehemiah felt confident to place this very important job to him. With all the enemies, it is probable that someone would seek to bribe someone who is watching or locking these gates, so Hanani had to be a man Nehemiah could trust with all of it.

He commanded that the gates be closely guarded and not opened until the sun was high enough in the sky to be hot. Each gate was to be shut, barred and guarded at night. Not only were the gates to be guarded but each man was to keep watch in his own home.

Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, 2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. 3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house." Neh. 7:1-3

Nehemiah 4

Review:

Nehemiah the cupbearer of the king of the Medo Persian empire has come to Jerusalem as governor to bring the city back into a condition similar to what it was before the captivity. Israel had returned from captivity in 538 and it is now 444. Their sloth and discouragement had allowed almost 100 years to pass and still the city was lying waste and nearly uninhabited. In a period of 52 days, Nehemiah had changed all that. Now they were safe in a walled city. No safer in respect to God's providential care, but much safer in the eyes of the world. It is always a terrible thing when the conduct of God's

people makes it appear that God is not with them. Because they had allowed the temple to lie waste for twenty years and the wall for a hundred years, the enemies could not see the power of God among them. With that change, the enemies saw them in a different light.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God. Neh. 6:15-16

Now that the city had been partially restored to its former glory, it was time to bring the people into the same condition. First, Nehemiah finds a way to bring many people back into the city and then, with Ezra's help, they begin the task of restoring the people.

Filling Jerusalem with People

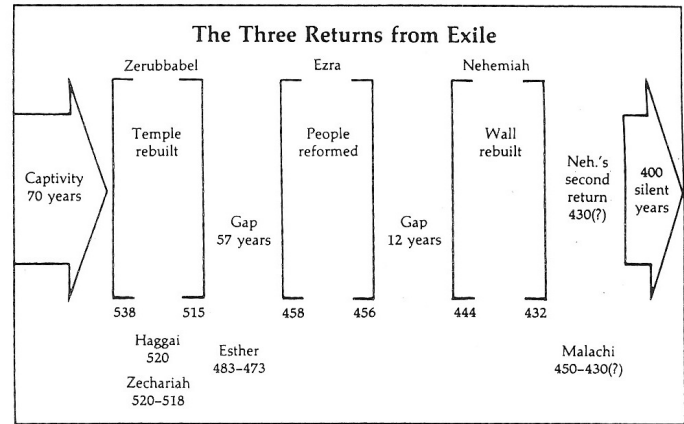
We see from this passage that even the houses within the city were still torn down and bore the marks of the consequences of Judah's sin. So Nehemiah does the research in the genealogies that had left off with Chronicles and continued by Ezra (Ezra 2:1-70). Since Ezra is mentioned at this time, it is probable that the two had consulted together. Ezra is here called the scribe which at the least implies that the commission he had brought from Medo Persia fourteen years earlier may have expired. This is the first time Ezra is mentioned in Nehemiah, but since it had only been 52 days to build the wall, and this is the next event, it is very probable that Ezra had been there the entire time. But God left it all unrevealed, so all we can do is speak of probabilities and possibilities. All we know is that at this time Ezra is reintroduced at the very moment when the genealogies in his book are discussed and used to prepare the people.

Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. 5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it: 6 These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city. 7 Those who came with Zerubbabel were . . . Neh. 7:4-7

Since a careful comparison of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 reveal that they are nearly identical. some form of discussion between these two men occurred. Both accounts have exactly the same concluding numbers: Whole assembly 42,360, 7,337 male and female servants, 200 singing men and women, 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels 6,720 donkeys.

66 Altogether the whole assembly was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 67 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers. 68 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 69 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty. Neh. 7:66-69

64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven;



and they had **two hundred men and women singers**. 66 **Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 67 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.** Ezra 2:64-67

Nehemiah gathers all the Jews who are left in the land, and using these genealogies, determines who is a priest and who is not and where each man should be living, based on his tribe and their lots. As the seventh chapter closes, it is clear that everything is now prepared for the meeting Nehemiah intended to gather. All the people have been verified, those who have no proof have been removed from the priesthood, and the only thing that remained was to gather them.

*So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwell in their cities. **When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.*** Neh. 7:73

The People Gather to Jerusalem and Ezra Reads the Law

The meeting of all the people occurred in the seventh month. Since they learned of the feast of tabernacles while there, that was not the reason for their coming, nor the day of atonement which did not require their presence in Jerusalem. This was the meeting described above that Nehemiah had demanded: "*Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy.*" After they had resolved the issues regarding genealogy, Nehemiah took the opportunity to have Ezra bring the book of the Law where all could hear and read it from morning until mid day. All the men and women remained attentive the entire time.

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. 3 Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. Neh. 8:1-3

We are given a clear picture of this event. Ezra is standing on a platform made of wood and on his right side were five men and on the left side there were seven. No reason is given for the unequal dividing of these men. This platform was high enough over the people that everyone could easily see him. As Ezra opened the book of the law, all the people stood to show they respect. Then Ezra led a prayer in which he blessed and praised God. As he ended his words, all the people cried out Amen twice and they also lifted up their hands. They were then moved by the moment and the great things that had been done. The walls were completed, the genealogies were fixed and the nation was ready to move forward.

4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Neh. 8:4-6

Others were among the people possibly dividing them up into smaller groups and giving them a "class" on the words that Ezra was reading so that they would understand the sense.

7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. 8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. Neh. 8:7-8

As the assembly drew to a close, Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levite encouraged the people. The people were weeping, hopefully in sorrow and repentance. They are encouraged not to sorrow as this was also a time of great joy.

9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 11 So the Levites quieted all the

people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. Neh. 8:9-12

The Feast of Tabernacles

The next morning the classes continued but this time with the leaders. As they gathered to Ezra to understand the words of the Law. They learned of the feast of tabernacles. It was their duty to proclaim this in all Israel, as well as bring the branches to make booths (tabernacles) to dwell in. This was quickly done and preparations were made to celebrate this feast.

13 Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. 14 And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, 15 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." Neh. 8:13-15

The next seven days were spent in these booths in which they would stay outside. One can only imagine the excitement of the children in getting to sleep outside and how that must have moved to the parents as well. They were individually built on their rooftops and courtyards and those without a place to do it moved into the large courtyards in the city near the gates. It is amazing to read that from the days of Joshua and through all the kings this feast had not been kept like this. Each day God's word was continually read

16 Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. 17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. 18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner. Neh. 8:16-18

The People Repent and Seal a Covenant with God

After the joyous occasion, the reason for the tears is revealed. They now come fasting in sackcloth and dust on their heads. They began confessing their sins as well as those of their fathers. Once again they read from the law for 1/4th of the day which was how the watches in the night were timed. Day and night were considered as 12 hours each and each watch was three hours during the night. Hence this is a three hour meeting. Then they took another three hours to confess and worship.

9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. 2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God. Neh 9:1-3

The Jews now acknowledge the justice that has led to the high taxes of the foreign kings who were now reigning over them because of their sins. They also acknowledge that the dominion that has been forced upon them, they seek to make a sure covenant. These words ring hollow after Nehemiah leaves and they immediately violate these things again.

36 "Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, To eat its fruit and its bounty, Here we are, servants in it! 37 And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, Because of our sins; Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle At their pleasure; And we are in great distress. 38 "And because of all this, We make a sure covenant and write it; Our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it." Neh 9:36-38

Even further, the rest of the people joined with the nobles to enter both a curse and an oath, which they too will violate not long after Nehemiah leaves. The promised to keep all the law, to keep their sons and daughters undefiled from the people of the land, and to never violate the Sabbath.

28 Now the rest of the people — the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding — 29 these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered **into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes:** 30 We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; 31 if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt. Neh 10:28-31

The Nature of the Covenant

At the urging of Ezra and Nehemiah, all the ordinances and customs of the old law were reinstated. The annual 1/3 of a shekel for the service of the house of God. Lots were cast for the bringing of wood to the altar

Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: 33 for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. 34 We **cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering** into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar ... 35 **And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground** and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, **year by year, to the house of the Lord; ... and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites,** Neh. 10:32-38

The next step was to seek a means to fill the city with enough people that it too can be rebuilt and feel like the city it once was. While all the leaders had already chosen to dwell in Jerusalem, now the common people decide that the too need to take up residence. Yet there are not enough volunteers, so they decided to cast lots. They set it up so that for every group of ten people, the lot would select one. Since there were about 40,000 people they wanted 4,000 of them to dwell in Jerusalem.

Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities. 2 And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. Neh 11:1-2

The Dedication of the Wall in Jerusalem

We have no time frame between 12:26 and 12:27. Yet it appears unlikely that it was the same time frame as the previous. Since they were all present at the gathering Nehemiah had made earlier, and now “*they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem,*” it appears as though they had left and were now sought to come back. But whether it was six months or just as possible nearing the end of Nehemiah’s time in Jerusalem: “*But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem* (Neh. 13:6).

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. 28 **And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem,** from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; **for the singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem.** 30 **Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall.** Neh. 12:27-30

The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director. 43 **Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.** Neh. 12:42-43

The Removal of God’s Enemies

Whether by design or by accident at this reading of the Law, they found the passage written after Balaam had been hired to curse Israel that “*no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God.*” At that time all those who had come from these nations were separated along with others of a “*mixed multitude.*”

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, 2 because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel. Neh 13:1-3

A Gap of Some Years and Nehemiah's Return and Need to Reform Again

An Ammonite in the Temple

Again, the time frame is impossible to determine. Nehemiah has left and after some time returned. We only know he was gone long enough for all the problems needing to be resolved had been created. The storeroom in the temple that had been set aside for all the grain offerings (a tithe of many thousands of farmers) would have been a sizeable room. Tobiah is identified several times as "*Tobiah the Ammonite official*" (Neh 2:10). Hence he should have remained banished per the law that had been enacted just prior to Nehemiah's departure. There was no excuse of not knowing after this event. Eliashib is identified as "*Eliashib the high priest*" (Neh. 3:1). So the high priest was guilty of a clear violation of the law.

With Nehemiah's return and finding things in such disarray, he became bitterly grieved and immediately set out to restore order. He throws out all of Tobiah's belongings, cleanses the room of its defilement and places the grain back in the room.

Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. 5 And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, ... which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. 6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8 And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. 9 Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense. Neh. 13:4-9

Temple Empty because Levites Neglected

This was only the surface. With the removal of the grain from the temple, came the graft and dishonest of someone keeping all that grain for themselves. The Levites being neglected, they had no choice but to go back to farming their fields. So the entire worship of God had been neglected for some time before Nehemiah's return. The corrupt high priest and the self-imposed banishment of the Levites had led to the entire temple being forsaken. Nehemiah puts everything back into its proper order beginning with the leaders who had taken on far too much authority, even setting aside the commands of God. When all Judah sees that things are back to a lawful condition they begin to bring the tithes and soon things are back into the manner God required of them. He also appointed men to be treasurers and thus accountable so that things would continue to be done honestly and with integrity. Because they were seen to be faithful, he knew things would be done properly as long as he was there.

He concludes this section with a phrase he has used several times in the letter beginning in 5:19, "remember me for good." He will repeat this in Neh. 13:14, 22, 31

I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. 11 So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. 12 Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. 13 And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. 14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services! Neh. 13:10-14

Sabbath Violated

Not only had the leaders stolen the tithes from the people, but they had also allowed the violation of

the sabbath. Not only were they allowing foreigners to violate it in their midst, but Nehemiah also witnesses them doing it themselves. He calls in the nobles and rebukes them sharply. They have done the very things that had led to their captivity. In such a short time they had revealed that their faithfulness to God was only enforced by Nehemiah's presence.

15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. 16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." Neh. 13:4-9

Since the Jewish day began at sunset, Nehemiah ordered the gates closed at dusk and no merchants be allowed to enter and no burdens be carried into the city. The sellers believed this would be short lived (probably because the avarice of the leaders), but Nehemiah quickly revealed to them that this was permanent. He threatens to put them in jail if he sees them there again. That was enough and they did not return again.

19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. 21 Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy! Neh. 13:19-23

Israel has returned to the practice of giving their sons and daughter to the heathen

Nehemiah's final reform at the close of his book is to once again restore the purity of the seed, just as Ezra had been required to do. Their promises and oaths, quickly forgotten they were deeply into this practice when Nehemiah returned. So far into it that some of their children could not speak the language of the Jews but spoke a foreign language. He punished them for their rebellion and violation of their oath. He reminded them that even Solomon could not withstand the influence of foreign women.

In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. 25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. 27 Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" Neh. 13:4-9

One of the grandchildren of the high priest had married the daughter of Sanballat the evil enemy of Israel who had sought to stop the building of the walls, even threatening them with death. Yet this man, who might have been in line for the high priesthood, had defiled himself. Once again violating a law that priests could only marry the virgin daughter of those in Israel. He carefully sifted the things in their lives and "removed everything that was pagan.

And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. 29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. 30 Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, 31 and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good! Neh. 13:28-31

The book of Nehemiah ends with his desire that God will remember his acts of faithfulness and restore goodness to him. Like Jesus said, this man was laying up for himself treasures in heaven.

Malachi

A Final Portrait of Israel

Introduction:

While most of our studies have been with a single Bible character, and most of the prophet studies have focused on the author, Malachi is different. While there is not a single word about the life of its author, there is a clear picture of Israel. A picture so clear that it is important that we consider it. This is our last snapshot of Israel until John the Baptist begins his work. From the things we learn from Jesus and John's condemnations things did not change much in the four hundred years that separate them.

Date Written

The date of composition is determined by circumstantial evidence found in the book and it is based on a comparison of the writings of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai. Though it doesn't give us an exact date, it is at least enough to place it at the end of the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

For example, when God condemned the quality of their animal sacrifices, He told them to give it their "governor" to see if he would be pleased with it.

*And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your **governor**! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the Lord of hosts. Mal 1:8*

While this term goes back to the times of Solomon, it is only in Haggai (of Zerubbabel Hag. 1:1, 14) and Nehemiah (of Nehemiah Neh. 5:14-15) that Israel is said to be ruled by them.

peḡâ A masculine noun meaning *a governor, a captain*. The primary meaning of this word is that of a *lord over a given district or territory*. It signified an office that is appointed and not received by virtue of birth or other right. It was **generally used of the leader of the Jewish nation after the exile (Neh 12:26; Hag 1:14; Mal 1:8)**; but in other places it was used of a deputy bureaucrat in any given location (Est 8:9; Jer 51:23); or a military leader (1 Kings 20:24). (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:6346)

This would rule out any time prior to after the captivity, since they were always ruled by a king until then. This narrows it down to a time after their return in 538. Yet there are other factors that seem to place it at about the time of Nehemiah's second return to Jerusalem

The majority of scholars ... have placed Malachi ca. 460 B.C., before the time of Ezra. The **two main supports** for this view are that Malachi must be **before Ezra and Nehemiah, since Malachi never mentioned their work in his book**, and that Malachi's tithing (Deut 14:22-29) and offering laws (Deut 15:1; 17:1) and use of Levites and priests as synonyms (Deut 21:5) indicate that **he relied on Deuteronomy** and preceded the "priestly writings. . . ."

Other scholars, ... have placed Malachi **between, during, or shortly after Nehemiah's visit to Jerusalem** ... The backbone of proof is **the existence of identical abuses in Nehemiah and Malachi (tithes in Mal 3:8-10 and Neh 13:10-14; mixed marriages in Mal 2:11 and Neh 13:23; social ills in Mal 3:5 and Neh 5:1-13)**. Additional support for this view includes, first, Malachi's and Nehemiah's presupposition that the law was in force (thus after Ezra), and, second, the need for temple funds, which does not fit the period of Ezra when the cost of the temple was met from the royal treasury (Ezra 7:15-17,20-24). (ISBE - "Malachi")

With all this to guide us, there is no doubt that Malachi began his work some time the return of Ezra. With the similarities between the problems faced by Nehemiah and those condemned by Malachi, it is probable that his words were spoken at some time near that time. But when all is assessed, it is impossible to date it more accurately than this. We are safe to conclude it was written sometime between 460 to 400, as the vast majority of those who have studied the book place it within these two dates.

Contents

The book flows as a dialogue between God and His people. God makes an accusation, allows them to make an objection, then He revealed exactly how they have sinned. The book flows from one

rebuke to another, revealing their lack of faith and trust in God along with their worldly and ungodly character. Even God's charges bring no godly sorrow or repentance but only the defiance of a worldly sorrow that questions everything He says and forces Him to prove each accusation. The don't believe God loves them and are defiling His altar and despising his name. They are bored with His worship and are treating

"I have loved you," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'" 1:2

"You offer defiled food on My altar, But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?'" 1:7

"you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'" 1:6

"But you profane it, In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' 13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the Lord of hosts. 1:12-13

You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. 14 Yet you say, "For what reason?" 2:13-14

You have wearied the Lord with your words; Yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?" 2:17

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?'" 3:8-9

"Your words have been harsh against Me," Says the Lord, "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?'" 3:13-15

I Have Loved You

The discouragement of living under the burden of foreign power had led them to believe that God no longer loved them. The events in their lives from the time of the captivity to the present moment had actually been of their own doing, but it is easier to blame someone else than to accept responsibility. A careful assessment of their conduct as revealed in Malachi makes it clear that God had not been allowed to bless them due to their sinful behavior.

God used the history of both Jacob and Esau as an illustration of how He had revealed His love for Israel. Esau's present condition was far worse than that of Israel. They had been removed as a nation and would never rise again.

The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. 2 "I have loved you," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? "Says the Lord." Yet Jacob I have loved; 3 But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness." 4 Even though Edom has said, "We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places," Thus says the Lord of hosts: "They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. 5 Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, 'The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'

But because of God's promises to Abraham and Isaac that had been continued through Jacob and his sons, God would never remove His love from them. These covenants could never be forgotten. This was Isaiah's point. They were facing similar circumstances, and God revealed to them that if it had not been for those covenant promises that led Him to keep a remnant, Israel would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Your country is desolate, Your cities are burned with fire; Strangers devour your land in your presence; And it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. 8 So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, As a hut in a garden of cucumbers, As a besieged city. 9 Unless the Lord of hosts Had left to us a very small remnant, We would have become like Sodom, We would have been made like Gomorrah. Isa 1:7-9

The same is true today. While God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, this is only a love of seeking what is best. It is a love of hope that cannot reach fruition without a decision on the part of each sinner. Only after we enter into the same covenant that Abraham entered can the true love of God be bestowed upon us.

Vain Worship

The next section covers 1:6-14; 2:1-9. Its theme is proper honor and reverence to God. He is both a

Father and a Master. Since both these terms come from the secular realm, God asks two probing questions. A son and a servant both give honor and reverence. But though they called God both these terms, they were empty of any power. They did not honor or reverence him.

*“A son honors his father, And a servant his master. **If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence?** Mal. 1:6”*

Like most issues with lack of reverence it begins with the leaders and trickles down to the rest. God therefore condemns the priests who are responsible for this lack of honor and reverence. They are actually acting in a manner to show contempt and despising of God’s name. It is important to note what they had done that had led God to this conclusion.

*Says the Lord of hosts **To you priests who despise My name.** Mal. 1:6*

When they ask God how they had done this, God responded with many different concrete reasons that would reveal the truth of the charge. As God revealed them one by one it is clearly impossible to refute this charge.

What is important about these charges is their applicability to the religious world of our own day. So many of the things God condemned here are still being practiced today.

You have Despised My Name

Those who respect and hold in reverence God’s name and person will show it in everything they do. Every command God gives will be carefully assessed and submitted to with reverence, respect and awe. But these people showed none of these in the manner they were keeping His commands.

Their Offerings Reflected their Disdain.

They were offering the blind, lame and sick in their sacrifices. God had forbidden such sacrifices, but for these people, using what cost them nothing and they wanted to rid themselves of was their way of doing something they didn’t want to do by giving something they didn’t need.

God strips away all excuses when He asked if they could give such animals to their governor. Obviously if they tried that with him, he would immediately condemn them for giving worthless animals to him. Just as they would get no favor from the governor, they would get nothing from God.

*Yet you say, ‘**In what way have we despised Your name?**’ 7 “You offer **defiled food on My altar, But say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’ By saying, ‘The table of the Lord is contemptible.’** 8 And when **you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?**” Says the Lord of hosts. Mal. 1:6-8*

We see the same thing today when we watch how people fulfill God’s commands to worship Him. While Jesus made it clear that we must worship in spirit and truth, most in the world are not interested in doing things His way. They will come to worship, but will do their own pleasure. They will turn it into a grand opportunity for entertainment. They will remove the Lord’s supper, add instruments of music and bands to jazz things up. They refuse to hear God’s word plainly proclaimed, so wonderful stories and plays are given to them.

Shut the Doors

How could anyone think that such conduct would bring favor to Him? Such worship is so worthless to God that He wishes someone would close the doors and let the altar fire go out, because He will accept nothing from people who mistreat and abuse Him like this.

*“But now **entreat God’s favor, That He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, Will He accept you favorably?**” Says the Lord of hosts. 10 “Who is there even among you **who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,** “Says the Lord of hosts, **“Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.”** Mal. 1:9-10*

This was not the first time God had condemned those who called themselves His people for similar conduct. Again these words are so applicable to so many today

*16 **But to the wicked** God says: **“What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth,** 17 **Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you?** 18 **When you saw***

a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. ... 21 These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes. Ps 50:16-18

Yet God prophesies that things will be different under His new covenant. Those among the Gentiles (a time stamp for the new covenant), who truly come to God will never act like this. God's name will be deemed great at that time when everything will be done exactly as God has asked for. Any modifications to God's Name, Will, and Word will be seen as manifesting the same contempt shown here.

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations,"Says the Lord of hosts.

God's Commands are Contemptible and a Weariness

God revealed that any attitude but submission and reference to any of His commands on worship reflects an attitude of contempt toward Him. The pitiful offerings they were bringing reflected this. Not only contempt, but a clear indication that they considered it to be a waste of their time. This was clearly reflected in the type of offerings they were bringing.

"But you profane it, In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' 13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it, "Says the Lord of hosts."And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the Lord. 14 "But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished — For I am a great King, "Says the Lord of hosts, "And My name is to be feared among the nations.

Each translation captures the attitude these people had toward the worship God had asked them to bring. As we witness the changes in today's worship, what else can we conclude but that some feel the same way about God's commands today?

Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, ASV

'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it, NKJV

'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously, NIV;

'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, ESV

My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it, NASB

"Two songs (Eph. 5:10) and a prayer (1Tim. 2:1-7), a song, the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7) and giving (1Cor. 16:2), another song, a sermon (2Tim. 4:1-5) and an invitation song." How boring it is to have to do this week after week after week. Yet these are the commands God has given to worship Him in spirit and truth. When can God's commands become boring and a burden? How can God's people sneer, snuff, disdainfully and contemptuously snort at them? The answer is right here. They don't honor and reverence God's name.

Corruption of the Priesthood

The priesthood of Levi began after the children of Israel made the golden calf. Throughout the history of the priesthood there were good priests and very wicked priests. During the time of Samuel and Eli. The two sides of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were very wicked we also see the wickedness of the of the priesthood during the times of Jeremiah. There were also very good high priests as God points out in this section of scripture. Within this passage in Malachi the distinction between a good priest and an evil priest is clearly described.

God begins with a commandment which they were not heeding and which He knew, that after He gave it to them, would still not heed. Because He knew they would not take it to heart, He told them He had already cursed them.

"And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. 2 If you will not hear, And if you will not take it to heart, To give glory to My name, "Says the Lord of hosts, "I will send a curse upon you, And I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, Because you do not take it to heart. Mal. 2:1-2

The nature of the curse was a total loss of honor both for them and the sacrifices that they were offering. God threatened to take them all away together. But God also gave a promise for the future. The covenant with Levi will continue after the Messiah begins His reign. This promise and prophesy

is mentioned several times in the OT Scripture as we can see from the passage in Jeremiah and also one here in Malachi. (see below).

“Behold, I will rebuke your descendants And spread refuse on your faces, The refuse of your solemn feasts; And one will take you away with it. 4 Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, That My covenant with Levi may continue, “Says the Lord of hosts. Mal. 2:3-4

‘In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 16 In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ 17 “For thus says the Lord: ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; 18 nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually.’” Jer 33:15-18

And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts. 2 “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire. And like launderers’ soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. Mal 3:1-3

Standard they were Violating

God now reveals the true nature of a godly priesthood. First, they must fear Him and show Him the awe and reverence due to Him. Jesus captured as enjoyed John 4:24-25. God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. This was the same mistake made by Nadab and Abihu.

*Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and **offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them.** 2 So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. 3 And Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord spoke, saying: **‘By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people** Lev. 10:1-3*

The second thing God demanded in his priesthood was that the law of truth was in his mouth. There’s no excuse for any faithful priest to be ignorant of the law his God. With the law of God in his mouth, there would be no injustice in his words. In such a circumstance many will be turned away from iniquity.

“My covenant was with him, one of life and peace, And I gave them to him that he might fear Me; So he feared Me And was reverent before My name. 6 The law of truth was in his mouth, And injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned many away from iniquity. Mal. 2:1-10

God continues his rebuke of their ignorance by stating one of the fundamental responsibilities of the priesthood wants to keep knowledge. In the book of Hosea a god told them there by people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. 7 “The more they increased, The more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame. 8 They eat up the sin of My people; They set their heart on their iniquity. 9 And it shall be: like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, And reward them for their deeds. Hos. 4:6-9

These priests were very different. Because they had departed from the way, they have led many of those who were hearing them stumble at the law. We see the same thing in the new testament with the condemnations of the false teachers. Another portion of the curse is that god has made them contemptible. We don’t know if it was those who were hearing down or just his own plan to destroy them. His final condemnation centers on them not keeping his ways and showing partiality concerning the law.

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. 3 Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; **He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.**” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Isa. 2:2-3*

Thus says the Lord: “Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ Jer. 6:16

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. 22 For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. 23 But **this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’** 24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. Jer. 7:21-25

“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. 8 But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, “Says the Lord of hosts. 9 “Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base Before all the people, Because you have not kept My ways But have shown partiality in the law.” Mal. 2:1-10

Mixed Marriages

This next section revealed God’s contending with Israel over their marriages. Ignoring God’s marriage commands, they had begun to marry the people of the land which God had forbidden. As Ezra had pointed out, they were in danger of intermixing the seed of Abraham, and ruining God’s promises. Obviously, God not let this happen but their lack of concern was a terrible indictment of their faith. The best commentary on this verse is seen in what Ezra found at his arrival and what Nehemiah found after his second return to Jerusalem.

“The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of those lands. Ezra 9:1-2

In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. 25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. 27 Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?” Neh. 13:23-27

Malachi’s words here express a similar condemnation. As pointed out in the introduction, it is entirely possible that Malachi is speaking of one of these events. While “we have one father and one God,” the people they are now marrying did not! By “marrying the daughter of a foreign god,” they were violating the covenant God had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that through their seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. If the seed was intermixed there would be no way to know if they were of the seed of Abraham.

In doing this, Judah had dealt treacherously with that covenant. They were in danger of destroying that covenant by mixing the holy seed. This was truly an abomination. While the NKV ties the abomination to “the holy institution which He loves,” none of the other translations so translate it. The more literal translation is “the holiness of Jehovah which he loves” (ASV). The noun holy is a broad term. It is used over 100 times of God, places associated with God or things connected to God.

qodesh (ko'-desh); ... apartness, holiness, sacredness, separateness (1) used of God; (2) used of places; (3) used of things ... (BDB Hebrew Lexicon OT:6944)

qodesh (ko'-desh); ... A masculine noun meaning a holy thing, holiness, and sacredness. The word indicates something consecrated and set aside for sacred use only; it was not to be put into common use, for if it was, it became profaned and common (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT:6944)

Since it can be speaking of God, or places or things connected with God and the noun stands alone without identifying which of the three, translators and commentators struggle with what holy or sanctified thing is under consideration. Some think it is God, others the holy nation of Israel, others the temple, and others the holy institution of marriage.

Judah hath profaned the holiness of Jehovah which he loveth - ASV

Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves - NAS

Judah has profaned The Lord's holy institution which He loves - NKJ

It is actually impossible to choose between them, and actually, they are all true. Anyone who violates this holiness deserves to be cut off from the tents of Israel.

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another By profaning the covenant of the fathers? 11 Judah has dealt treacherously, And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, For Judah has profaned The Lord's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob The man who does this, being awake and aware, Yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts! Mal 2:10-12

Summing up God's charges against them:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 we all have one father | 5 Judah had dealt treacherously |
| 2 one God created us | 6 profane the covenant of the fathers |
| 3 we deal treacherously - each another | 7 abomination committed in Israel/Jerusalem |
| 4 Married the daughter of a foreign god | 8 profaned the Lord's holy institution He loves
(profaned the sanctuary ... the holiness ...) |

May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob The man who does this, **being awake and aware**, Yet **who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!**

Malachi - 3

Review:

The “*first thing*” they had done was to “*deal treacherously with one another,*” “*profane the covenant of the fathers,*” by “*marrying the daughter of a foreign god.*” This first sin was clearly something that stood alone. By intermarrying with the idolatrous women of the land they had dealt treacherously and profaned the covenant. This was an abomination!

The Second Thing You Do

Perhaps the most important consideration is whether the first and second things are linked. Does the second only happen as a result of the first, or are they both being done at the same time by different people? Both are possible, but which one is more scriptural? If they were only linked, then the sin would only occur if they were both done. Does this mean that only if one first divorces his wife and marries the daughter of a foreign god does it become an abomination? Obviously not! Regardless of their previous marriage state it would be treachery against the covenant.

Nehemiah made this clear: “*You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves.*” (Neh. 13:25). The daughters and sons were not divorced, but they were. So **both those who first divorced their wives and those who had never been divorced were condemned.** The sin of marrying pagan women was therefore not directly linked to first divorcing the wife of one’s youth, since it would be a sin either way.

What about the divorce itself? Would the treachery of divorce only exist if they went on to marry a foreign woman or only divorced to marry a foreign woman? When the Pharisees asked Jesus a similar question He made it clear that the same problem identified here by Malachi was already revealed by God.

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" 4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." Mt. 19:3-6

From the beginning, God had made them one flesh and what God joined man should not separate. When they did so, the very events described here. For these reasons, it seems obvious that these are two separate sins and that either of them would bring this condemnation. Although they are both sins involving marriage, they are not linked in any other way. These are two distinct sins. Some had done the one, others the second, while others had done both.

*And this is **the second thing you do:** Mal. 2:13*

You Cover the Altar with Tears

The altar was covered with tears by the forsaken wife who had been divorced and now had no means of support and no love, protection or comfort. The treachery and violence of this act is found in the terrible things it created and set into being. When a man and a woman marry and God joins them together, both sides of this covenant should have the comfort that it will continue as long as they both live. The expectation of being cared for and protected had endured through the years, but now, they had been cast aside and left desolate. What tears of agony and bitterness when a wife is left desolate in this manner. It is as cruel as any act of violence could be.

You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. 14 Yet you say, "For what reason? "Because the Lord has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. Mal. 2:13-14

Because of all this, God refused to accept their offerings. Peter echoed that sentiment when he warned husbands. If a husband doesn’t dwell with their wives according to knowledge and treat them as the weaker vessel, their prayers would be cut off and no longer heard.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. 1Pet. 3:7

Did He not Make them One

There are many different interpretations of this passage because of the ambiguity of the grammar. After assessing all the versions, several things stand out.

*But did He not **make them one**, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And **why one**? He seeks **godly offspring**. Therefore **take heed to your spirit**, And **let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth**. Mal. 2:15 NKJV*

*But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while **he was seeking a godly offspring**? **Take heed then to your spirit, let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth**. NAS*

*Did he not **make them one**, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And **what was the one God seeking**? **Godly offspring**. So **guard yourselves in your spirit let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth** ESV*

*And did he not **make one**, although he had the residue of the Spirit? And **wherefore one**? He sought a **godly seed**. Therefore **take heed to your spirit let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth**. ASV*

Although the translations do differ in some ways, several things are the same in all of them.

1. God **makes them one** in every marriage.
2. **Why** did He make them one.
3. He was **seeking godly offspring**.
4. **Take heed** and guard yourselves in **your spirit**.
5. **Do not deal treacherously** or **be faithless** to the wife of your youth.

After looking carefully at all the translations, it is clear that these are the conclusions every husband and wife must consider. When married, God joined us together. He did that so that we could give Him godly offspring. Aren't those two things important enough for each of us to take heed to our spirit and do everything necessary to be certain that a divorce never occurs? God's conclusion is clear: **Do not deal treacherously or be faithless to the wife of your youth**.

God Hates Divorce

This too stands alone. Whether the divorce is to marry a foreign woman, or to fulfill some other selfish lust, God hates it. It destroys His final act of creation in making Eve one with Adam. Adam's words make it very clear that when Eve was created one with him, it was also passed down to all their male and female posterity.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. 22 Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. 23 And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. Gen. 2:21-24

Thus when this God-made bond is broken, it is an act of treachery and violence that harms both the wife and the children, it rips out the most basic ties that maintain unity and spirituality.

For all these reasons, each individual must carefully monitor their spirit. They must be acutely aware of their feelings and motives. When they see things leading toward a breakdown in the marriage, everything else must stop and the marriage must be saved. As an act of treachery and violence, it must take the highest priority. Under no circumstances can either party allow things to reach a point where either divorce or adultery is possible.

"For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence, Says the Lord of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously." Mal. 2:16

You Have Wearied the Lord

The conduct that God described up to this point in the book as well as in the words revealed here have "wearied" God.

yaga` — to toil, to labor, to grow weary, to be weary ... to cause to go toilsomely” (BDB Hebrew Lexicon OT:3021)

God revealed that when His people say that those who are doing evil (as it has been identified in the Scriptures) are actually good in His eyes, it caused Him to grow weary in His work with them. Like before the flood when God was grieved and was sorry He had made man.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. Gen 6:5-7

These people were also wicked, and their wickedness had left God feeling weary. Here God is more specific. They were saying that God delighted in those His word condemned! God wanted them to know that this was a great burden to Him. Added to this is the additional burden of their complaints to God. Why aren't you here taking care of the problems we are facing. We want God of Justice to act and restore justice for us. Where is He? Yet the truth is that if God were to actually do this they would be completely destroyed. What do you do with people like this? How can you help them when they are so evil and corrupt that you can't even reason with them?

*You have **wearied** the Lord with your words; Yet you say, “In what way have we **wearied** Him?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them; or where is the God of justice? Mal. 2:17*

Using the same word, Isaiah revealed that God could never be wearied regardless of the work that needed to be done to help Israel be saved. Though they might think that this weariness was the reason why God was not doing what He promised, the truth is exactly the opposite. God would never be wearied in working for and helping Israel. He can't be wearied and neither can those who wait for him (serve Him faithfully).

*Why do you say, O Jacob, And speak, O Israel: “My way is hidden from the Lord, And my just claim is passed over by my God”? 28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, **The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is WEARY.** His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the **youths shall faint and be WEARY,** And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But **those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be WEARY,** They shall walk and not faint. Isa 40:27-31*

Yet Israel had accomplished the impossible by their wicked rebellion that refused to be corrected. God revealed to them that His expectation had been that when He formed Israel and blessed them far beyond what they deserved, that they would serve Him and praise Him with great zeal. What He found instead is that they soon became “exhausted and wearied” in doing “all” the things that God had asked of them. For eternal salvation and great blessings, God had asked in return that they bring sheep and honor Him with sacrifices. But that was too hard for them and they simply just refused to do it. Though God has sought to motivate them, no matter how He pleaded and commanded, He could not cause them to do it.

In fact, Israel's rebellion and stubborn disobedience had finally wearied God. He was worn out carrying their sins and iniquities they refused to repent of.

*This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise. 22 “But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; And **you have been WEARY of Me,** O Israel. 23 You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings, Nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not caused you to serve with grain offerings, **Nor WEARIED you with incense.** 24 You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, Nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices; But **you have burdened Me with your sins, You have WEARIED Me with your iniquities.** Isa 43:21-24*

So often in the history of Israel, God was faced with this. What must He think of the denominational world of Christianity in the world today. They are doing everything that wearied God here. We must rise above all this.

God will Send His Messenger

This messenger is John the Baptist. Gabriel himself told Zacharias that this Scripture applied to him.

As we look at both passages in Malachi, we see the following prophetic description:

"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the Lord of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. Mal. 3:1-3

*"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. 5 **Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.** 6 **And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers,** Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." Mal. 4:4-5*

Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord

he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers

When Gabriel was sent to Zacharias in the temple, he spoke of John as the one who would

go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah,

he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers

*But **the angel said to him,** "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 **And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** 18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." 19 And the angel answered and said to him, "**I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God,** and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. Lk. 1:13-19*

Jesus also used this passage to identify John the Baptist as this messenger.

*"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there **has not risen one greater than John the Baptist;** but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 **And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.** 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Mt. 11:11-15*

*10 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "**Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?**" 11 Jesus answered and said to them, "**Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. 12 But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished.** Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." 13 **Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.** Mt.17:10-13*

Return to Me and I will Return to You

Even to this day, those in error cannot see their own error. As there were then, so there are today. Many of the ordinances of Jesus have also been set aside today. If we could only get all those who call themselves Christians to return to the Lord and accept His ordinance of baptism, yet even to this day they say the same as those in the time of Malachi. How can we return. We have accepted "faith only," and nothing you can say will get us to accept that ordinance. Show them Noah's ark (1Pet. 3:21), Moses through the Red Sea (1Cor. 10:1-3), Jesus death burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-5; Col. 3:11-13), Peter's commands(Acts 2:38; 10:47-48) yet they still say how can we return?

*"For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7 Yet from the days of your fathers **You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,**" Says the Lord of hosts." **But you said,'In what way shall we return?'** Mal. 3:4-8*

Will a Man Rob God

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. 10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this, "Says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. 11 "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the Lord of hosts; 12 And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the Lord of hosts. Mal. 3:8-12

"Your words have been harsh against Me, "Says the Lord, "Yet you say, What have we spoken against You?' 14 You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the Lord of hosts? 15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.'" Mal. 3:13-15

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name. 17 "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him." 18 Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him. Mal. 3:16-18

Prophecy - 1 - Nations

One of the most intriguing passages regarding how God works with the nations is found in Paul's sermon in Athens.

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has **determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; Acts 17:26-27***

God determined when they would begin and end (*pre-appointed times*). He also chose how large and powerful they would become (*boundaries of their dwellings*) He worked in all the nations so "*they should seek the Lord.*" God's purpose in working with the nations is the same as that for each individual. We are to pray all men and for kings and all in authority, because God wants all men to be saved.

*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 **for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth 1Tim. 2:1-4***

God also wants us to understand that the reasons nations come and go is because God wants no one to perish, but all to come to repentance. When it seems (as it did to Habbakuk) that God is somehow slack in His actions, we have to stop and reflect that this is the longsuffering of God not willing for any to perish.

*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 **The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 2Pet. 3:8-9***

God uses both individuals and nations in His desire that all men to be saved, no one perish, all come to a knowledge of the truth, and come to repentance. All of this is inferred in Paul's statement that it is all "*in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him.*"

The Parable of the Potter

Just as God judges each individual based on the things done in the body whether good or evil (2Cor 5:10), He also does with nations. God revealed to Jeremiah that just as the free will of man leads to how God will deal with each individual, so also the freewill of the collective individuals that make up a nation also determine how God will deal with them. When a nation is good, God determines to bless them and when they are evil His righteous judgment will bring a curse on them.

*The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! 7 **The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. Jer. 18:1-10***

This is what made the preaching of the prophets so important. Repentance changed everything. God would bless any nation that repented and would destroy any nation that would not. Most of the prophecies found in the Old Testament are not Messianic. They are prophecies of God's assessment of a nation and what the future held for them. Most of the time these prophecies were made against the divided nations of Israel and Judah. But entire books as well as chapters in other books are dedicated to the warnings to other nations that they too were in peril.

Noah to the Ancient World

Even before there were any nations, God was using the principles that are set forth in Jeremiah's

“parable of the potter.” God was aware of the universal nature of the evil at that time. Every description is a superlative “great,” “every,” “only,” “corrupt” and “filled.”

WICKEDNESS was **GREAT in the earth**

EVERY INTENT OF THE THOUGHTS of his heart

ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY.

The earth **CORRUPT** before God

earth was **FILLED with VIOLENCE**

*Then the Lord saw that **the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.** 6 And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Gen. 6:5-8*

***The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.** 12 So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, "**The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.** Gen 6:11-13*

God chose to deal with this on a **universal level**. This was no longer simply an individual problem, but a global one. Even though there were multitudes of individuals they were all acting collectively and therefore were deal with collectively.

God sent a prophet to give them an opportunity to repent globally, but also gave each individual the opportunity to repent. Peter called Noah “a preacher of righteousness.” Both his preaching and the building of the ark (a sign similar to that of Jonah) were a warning of impending doom, which both collectively and individually they chose to ignore.

did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; 2Pet. 2:5-6

The entire time the ark was being built was a time of longsuffering in which God tolerated their wickedness and each day gave them the opportunity to repentant be forgiven. But that longsuffering ended when the ark was completed and after all the animals and Noah’s family entered, God closed the door.

who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 1Pet. 3:18-21

Their preappointed time came to an end when the ark was prepared and God closed the door to grace, mercy and forgiveness.

*7 So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. ... 13 On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and **Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark** — ... **16 and the Lord shut him in.** Gen. 7:7, 13, 16*

The Beginning of Nations

The beginning of nations developed because man once again did something that God saw as rebellion. We don’t know exactly what it was. God had told Noah to fill the earth and they did not want to be scattered over the earth. But from the context it seems like there was something more. A pride of life, or a seed that God saw leading to the same outcome of evil. For that reason God changed their languages and scattered them over all the earth.

*1 Now the **whole earth had one language and one speech.** ... 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, **and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.** 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there **the***

Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. Gen. 11:1; 4-9

This is one of the ways that God could fulfill His promise to never destroy the entire earth in a flood again. From that point on, God would use one nation against another and never need to destroy the all at one time again.

Abraham — A Great Nation

Soon after the nations went their own ways, They again turned to corrupt ways. It appears that though Romans is not speaking exclusively of this event, it was the first of the many times it has happened since.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For **since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. Rom. 1:18-25***

By the time Abraham was born, every indication is that the nations around him were exactly as described in Romans. They were worshipping and serving the creature and bowing to idols. Sodom and Gomorrah were already far given into uncleanness as also the seven nations of Canaan. God called Abram and gave him to promise to become a great nation.

*Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 **I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** Gen. 12:1-3*

When God called Abram He also promised to bring the seed promised to Eve. Even though this new nation was only in its infancy with the promised seed (Isaac) yet unborn, God was already speaking of what he had made Abraham: The father of man nations.

*Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all 17 (as it is written, "**I have made you a father of many nations**") in the presence of Him whom he believed — God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; Rom. 4:16-18*

Abraham – Seven Nations of Canaan, Egypt, Sodom and Gomorrah

God then revealed to Abram, how He would use other nations to facilitate these plans. He revealed that Abraham's descendants would be in the nation of Egypt for 400 years. God had so clear a picture of what was going to occur that He could speak things there were not as though they were. He knew that Egypt would oppress and afflict the descendants of Abraham. He knew as He judged Egypt with the 10 plagues that they would not repent when of these judgments. He also revealed that it would take 400 years for these things to come to pass and the iniquity of the seven nations of Canaan be complete to that Israel could dispossess them.

*Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that **your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.**" Gen. 15:13-16*

God then revealed to Abraham that He could and would still use natural catastrophes to bring some nations to an end. The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah were crying out to God to be dealt with. God made it clear nothing would be done until a careful assessment is made, and Abraham sought

to move God to mercy by his prayers.

And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, 18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." 20 And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." Gen. 18:17-21

The remainder of the Old Testament is the development of these plans. Plans we would know nothing about except that He revealed them through the prophets.

Surely the Lord God does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.
Amos 3:7

Everything we know about God's plans and works is revealed by these men in the prophets. The Old Testament is therefore no only an unfolding of the scheme of redemption, but also the unveiling of God's working with nations and individuals.

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Rom. 15:4

Prophecy - Nations- 2

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has **determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings**, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; Acts 17:26-27*

God Rules in the Kingdoms of Men

As we draw some conclusions based on the above, we learn that God determined when a nation would begin and when it would end(**preappointed times**). Not only that but also how large or small that nation would become(**boundaries of their dwellings**).

Not only does the Holy Spirit through Paul sum this up with there is “no authority” in existence “except from God” and the “authorities that do exist are appointed by God,” but also adds another dimension. These nations are designed by God to be an ever present reminder of His wrath on those who do evil. They are God’s ministers (*diakonos* -deacon) to execute wrath on all who practice evil.

*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For **there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.** 2 Therefore **whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves....** 4 **For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.** Rom. 13:1-4*

Although we know there is time and chance in the world today (Ecc. 9:11), we are also told “He rules over the nations” and “rules in the kingdom of men.” He gives the rule and power to whomever He wishes. Again, as Paul revealed in Athens, All of this is done to save as many as possible and help as many as possible to find Him.

God used Nebuchadnezzar to teach all the living to understand these things. God truly rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He chooses.

*'This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, **In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.'** Dan 4:15*

God had expected his son Belshazzar to understand these truths as he had so clearly learned them. But since Belshazzar ignored them God gave a much sterner lesson, one we would all do well to consider. God brought the Babylon kingdom to an end that very night (God foreknowledge and providence in action — It was already set up before it occurred).

*They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, **till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.** 22 "But you his son, **Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.** 23 And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. ... Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. 25 "And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26 This is the interpretation of each word. Mene: **God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it;** 27 Tekel: **You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting;** 28 Peres: **Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.**" Dan. 5:21-23*

Not only did God know that it was going to the Medes and Persians, but He had already named its first king, Cyrus as His shepherd who would be the one who would free God’s people from Babylon and allow them to rebuild the Temple. God names Cyrus through His prophet Isaiah more than 150 years before the events occurred. In His naming God says a lot about the things we have been discussing in this class. It is God who will open the gates and give him Babylon. This was done so that Cyrus would know and all of us who have faith would know that God does rule in the kingdoms of men. Yet so much more:

"That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; 7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things."

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.'" 45 "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. 5 I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; 7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things.' Isa. 44:28; 45:1-7

This is the basic framework for all the nations. It will continue until the end of the age, since nothing has changed. God still wants all to grope after and find him. He wants all men to be saved and none to perish. For all these reasons, God is still working in the nations today.

The Prophets Reveal God's Work among the Nations

Surely the Lord God does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.
Amos 3:7

Everything we know about God's plans and works is revealed by these prophets. The Old Testament is therefore not only an unfolding of the scheme of redemption, but also the unveiling of how God works with the nations.

God revealed to Moses the meaning of His words to Abram about the Amorites.

According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances. 4 You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the Lord your God. 5 You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord. Lev. 18:3-5

God then revealed the "doings of the land of Egypt" and the "doings of the land of Canaan." Every form of incest in the family, along with adultery, the sacrifice of children and either a man or a woman have sex with a beast.

'Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. 25 For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. 26 You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you 27 (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), 28 lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. 29 For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Lev. 18:3-5; 24-29

The second critical thing God is aware of is the taking of human life. Two things seem to be important in the initial passage. First, God demands a reckoning for every murder. Whether man or beast, it must be dealt with. The only way for it to be dealt with is "by man his blood shall be shed;" This is a direct command for capital punishment. When murder occurs the only reckoning God will accept is the death of the murderer by the hands of man.

"Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God he made man. Gen. 9:5-6

Moses' takes this command and explains how this applies to the nations. Blood defiles the land. As with Abel, that blood cries out from the ground, and God can hear that cry. The only way to deal with that cry of defilement is by capital punishment.

'So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. 34 'Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.'" Num. 35:33-34

These are the basic principles God has given us through the prophets. When we add to this the reasons for the destruction of the ancient world (violence, every thought evil) and Sodom and Gomorrah we have a clear picture of what God looks at when He makes His decisions.

Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had **pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.** 50 And **they were haughty and committed abomination before Me;** therefore I took them away as I saw fit. Ezek. 16:49-50

as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having **given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh,** are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Jude 7

As God's Chosen Nation the Standards were Higher

Since Israel was the vehicle for God's eternal purpose they are a special case. They are God's holy nation set apart for His service. They were given the same rules as all other nations, with the addition of the Law of Moses that was designed to keep them separate until the seed should come. God sternly warned them that of whom much is given much is expected.

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. Deut. 28:1-2

15 **"But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ... 25 "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth. ... 33 A nation whom you have not known shall eat the fruit of your land and the produce of your labor, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually. 34 So you shall be driven mad because of the sight which your eyes see. ... The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young.** Deut. 28:15, 25, 33-34 49-50

Although they just wanted to be given up and become like the other nations, God told them that that would never be.

What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, 'We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.' Ezek. 20:32

Prophecy - Nations- 3

*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has **determined** their **preappointed times** and **the boundaries of their dwellings**, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; Acts 17:26-27*

God Rules in the Kingdoms of Men

As we draw some conclusions based on the above, we learn that God determined when a nation would begin and when it would end(**preappointed times**). Not only that but also how large or small that nation would become(**boundaries of their dwellings**).

Not only does the Holy Spirit through Paul sum this up with there is “no authority” in existence “except from God” and the “authorities that do exist are appointed by God,” but also adds another dimension. These nations are designed by God to be an ever present reminder of His wrath on those who do evil. They are God’s ministers (*diakonos* -deacon) to execute wrath on all who practice evil.

*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For **there is no authority except from God**, and **the authorities that exist are appointed by God**. 2 Therefore **whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God**, and **those who resist will bring judgment on themselves**.... 4 For **he is God's minister to you for good**. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for **he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil**. Rom. 13:1-4*

Judges in Israel - The Cycle that Plagued Israel until Babylon

Within one generation after the death of Joshua, the cycle which would characterize Israel’s service to God until the Babylonian Captivity. The faithfulness of their fathers gave way to their own apostasy. God’s anger led to raising up a nation as an adversary who would oppress Israel until they repented. Then Lord then raised up a judge who would deliver them, but when the judge died they would revert and worship idols again.

*10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, **another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel**. 11 Then **the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals**; ... 14 **And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel**. So **He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them**; and ... when **the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge**; ... **it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them**. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way. Judg 2:10-19*

During the days of the judges, God used those who were not driven out by Israel and other nations surrounding them to conquer and oppress them. The purpose of these nations: **(this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it)**, God needed His people to know about war.

***Now these are the nations which the Lord left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan** 2 **(this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it)**, 3 namely, **five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites** who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. 4 And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. Judg. 3:1-4*

The Rise of the Kings

The shift from judges to prophets happened with their rebellion of asking for a king. This was why Samuel is considered the last judge and the first prophet. When they asked for the king, they wanted the king to be the one to judge them.

*Now it came to pass **when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel**. 2 The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. 3 But **his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice**. 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and said to him, **"Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us***

like all the nations." 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." 1 Sam 8:1-6

Samuel saw this as the direct application of their request. They did not come to complain about the wickedness and ask for them to be removed and wait for God to select the next judge. Instead they wanted a king of their own choosing to be the judge over them. His cry to God is not revealed but God's answer reveals it. "*They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me.*" God rightly saw this as a rejection of His order and plan. Prior to this God chose the judge. When they were needed and who they were was in His hands. Now these people want to change that order. They are rejecting God just as surely as men do today when they replace "*elders in every church*" and Jesus the chief shepherd, with a central headquarters and a man on earth doing what only Jesus was chosen to do. God concludes by adding that this request was in the same mode as they had done ever since they left Egypt. Korah sought to replace Moses and God showed His displeasure. They have now done the same to Samuel.

So Samuel prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.** 8 **According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day — with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods — so they are doing to you also.** 1 Sam 8:6-9

Before God revealed Saul to Israel, and just before Saul's coronation, Samuel again spoke of the terrible consequence of asking for a king. Yet the people refused to repent.

"Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all kingdoms and from those who oppressed you.' 19 **But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you from all your adversities and your tribulations; and you have said to Him, 'No, set a king over us!'** 1Sam 10:18-19

Is today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking a king for yourselves." 1Sam 12:17

Many years later the full damage of this decision was spoken by God. After they chose this king, there were three kings (Saul, David, and Solomon), who reigned over a united Israel. Solomon's treachery revealed the folly of replacing God with a king. Then God chose Jeroboam who "drove Israel from serving God.

At the end of the 10 tribes, God spoke of this moment. He reminds them that God truly is the only King. When they spoke to their judges (Samuel) about wanting a king, God gave it to them in their anger and now after all the terrible things their king had done he took them away in His wrath.

"O Israel, you are destroyed, But your help is from Me. 10 I will be your King; Where is any other, That he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, 'Give me a king and princes'? 11 I gave you a king in My anger, And took him away in My wrath. Hos 13:9-11

As God summed up the entire history of the 10 tribes it is directly attributed to their kings. Because of the wickedness of Solomon, God sought to help them by giving them another king. But that king "drove Israel from following the Lord." They never recovered from the influence of this evil king who set up calves and changed the worship of God. This is the danger of all central power structures to God's people. Only Jesus and God can be trusted to lead in this manner. Every time another form of government is sought the next step by those in power is to "drive them from following God" through their creeds that direct all the followers to do what is contrary to God's teaching.

And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. 21 For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them commit a great sin. 22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, 23 until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day. 2 Kings 17:20-23

The Prophets

There have always been prophets. The term was first used of Abraham and then Moses, but Jesus

took the prophets all the way back to Abel and Jude to Enoch.

*that the **blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world** may be required of this generation, 51 **from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah** who perished between the altar and the temple. Luke 11:50-51*

*Now **Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied** about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, 15 to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." Jude 14-15*

Vine gives us a comprehensive description of prophets as the "mouths" of God who spoke for Him.

"*nabi*" represents "prophet," whether a true or false prophet (cf. Deut 13:1-5). True prophets were mouthpieces of the true God. In 1 Chron 29:29 three words are used for "prophet": "Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the Book of Samuel the Seer [*ro^oeh*] and in the Book of Nathan the Prophet [*nabi*"], and in the Book of Gad the Seer [*chozeh*]." The words translated "seer" emphasize the means by which the "prophet" communicated with God but do not identify the men as anything different from prophets (cf. 1 Sam 9:9).

The second occurrence of *nabi* establishes its meaning: "And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet" Ex 7:1. The background of this statement is Ex 4:10-16, where Moses argued his inability to speak clearly. Hence, he could not go before Pharaoh as God's spokesman. God promised to appoint Aaron (Moses' brother) to be the speaker: "And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God" Ex 4:16. Ex 7:1 expresses the same idea in different words. It is clear that the word "prophet" is equal to one who speaks for another, or his mouth. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words OT: 5030

With the advent of the kings, those who were sent to God to speak to the kings or the people about their behavior were all identified as prophets. Nathan was the prophet who worked with David and Abijah was sent at the end of Solomon's reign to work with Jeroboam. These spokesmen were sent to bring God's message of good or evil to those to whom God sent them.

Nathan - 2 Sam 7:2

Elijah - 1 Kings 18:26

Gad - 1 Sam 22:5

Micaiah - 1 Kings 22:7-8

Ahijah - 1 Kings 11:29

Elisha - 2 Kings 5:8

During the reign of Ahab with Jezebel as his queen, God chose Elijah to come and reveal to him the consequences of his wicked actions. He appears to tell him that God has chosen to withhold the rain from Israel. God has sent him to reveal to Ahab that rain can only come at the word of this prophet so he must heed him if he wants rain. This culminated in the conflict with Jezebel's prophets that ended in their death. When the discouraged Elijah went to Sinai and pleaded with God, He gave him three individuals who would help him. The first was a king in Syria who would be used to help bring down and chasten Ahab's house. The second was the king who would replace this dynasty that began with Omri by killing all the offspring of Ahab and also would kill wicked Jezebel.

*Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, **anoint Hazael as king over Syria. 16 Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.** 1 Kings 19:15-17*

The "Literary" Prophets

This term has been coined by scholars to describe those prophets who wrote books. They are mostly used to describe the 4 major prophets and the 12 minor prophets. While most of these prophets were sent to Judah or Israel, some of them were sent to other nations as well, to reveal God's plans to them.

Major Prophets (5)

Chapters Pages

1. Isaiah	66	61	Many different nations. (Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, etc.)
2. Jeremiah	52	57	Many (Egypt, Babylon, Edom, Syria, Ammon, Moab,
3. Lamentations	5	6	
4. Ezekiel	48	45	Many different nations. (Egypt, Edom, etc.)
5. Daniel	12	15	Many different nations (Medo Persia, Greece Rome)

Minor Prophets (12)

1. Hosea	12	9	(Israel)
2. Joel	3	3.5	(Judah)
3. Amos	9	6.5	(Israel, Damascus, Philistines, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab)
4. Obadiah	1	1	Judah, Israel)
5. Jonah	4	2	(Nineveh)
6. Micah	7	5	(Judah, Isarel)
7. Nahum	3	2	(Nineveh)
8. Habakkuk	3	2.75	(Judah, Babylon)
9. Zephaniah	3	3	(Judah, Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria)
10. Haggai	2	1.5	(Judah)
11. Zechariah	14	8	(Judah)
12. Malachi	4	3	(Judah)

God's Use of the Nations to Fulfill His purpose

The final instrument against Israel was Assyria, which Isaiah the prophet makes clear is the instrument God used to punish Israel.

5 Ho Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation! 6 I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. 7 Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few. 8 For he saith, Are not my princes all of them kings? 9 Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? 10 As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; 11 shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Isa 10:5-11

Yet they would not go unpunished, for though they were doing exactly what God wanted them to do it was not in their heart to do it for God but for their own gods and their own pleasure.

Wherefore it shall come to pass, that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. 13 For he hath said, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I have understanding: and I have removed the bounds of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures, and like a valiant man I have brought down them that sit (on thrones): 14 and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the peoples; and as one gathereth eggs that are forsaken, have I gathered all the earth: and there was none that moved the wing, or that opened the mouth, or chirped. 15 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? shall the saw magnify itself against him that wieldeth it? as if a rod should wield them that lift it up, (or) as if a staff should lift up (him that is) not wood. 16 Therefore will

the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory there shall be kindled a burning like the burning of fire. Isa 10:12-17

Jonah to Nineveh

We must not overlook God's work with nations that were actually extended or helped by these prophets. Nineveh repented at the words of Jonah.

When God sent Jonah to preach to Nineveh, it was a warning to them to repent or be destroyed.

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and **preach to it the message that I tell you.**" 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "**Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!**" Jonah 3:1-4*

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.... 10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. Jon. 3:5, 10

Jesus' Death

What is important to understand is that though God knows these things, they are not fixed because of His knowledge. They are fixed because God knows that no matter how hard He tries to help, it will be to no avail.

Jesus worked as hard as possible to convert and to sway Israel and its leaders to come back to God. It was not a lack of effort that led to this outcome but the hardened hearts of those in that day. All God had to do is allow things to take their natural course and this would be the outcome. Not even the power of John the baptism and Jesus could change it.

him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: Acts 2:23

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Acts 4:27-29

The Prophets Revealed the Love and Righteousness of God

Even though God already knows the outcome, out of love, mercy and righteousness He reveals it to them anyway.

And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. 2Chr. 36:15-16

Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. 26 Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. 27 "Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you. Jer. 7:25-27

Every prophecy in the Old Testament, both to Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations were a sincere invitation by God to forsake their ways and return to Him for blessings. While many failed, some succeeded, but the outcome was always in the hands of those who received the message.

We see God's feelings when He spoke to Jonah. Although the souls of men and the eternal purpose of God are of the highest consideration, God also cares about the affects his judgments have on those who are innocent.

But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left — and much livestock?" Jonah 4:10-11

Thus one of the primary purposes of the prophets was to bring Israel back to repentance and to

warn the nations around them of their peril.

Yet **Jehovah testified** unto Israel, and unto Judah, **by every prophet, and every seer**, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, **2 Kings 17:13-16**

Yet **he sent prophets to them**, to **bring them again** unto Jehovah; and **they testified against them**: but they would not give ear. **2 Chr 24:17-19**

they were disobedient, ... and slew thy prophets that **testified against them to turn them again unto thee**, and they wrought great provocations. **Neh 9:26**

Yet many years didst thou bear with them, and **testified against them by thy Spirit through thy prophets**: yet would they not give ear: **Neh 9:30-31**

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, **I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them**: yet they hearkened not unto me, **Jer 7:25-27; 25:3-7; 26:4-6**

The **prophets that have been before me** and before thee of old **prophesied against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence**. **Jer 28:8; 44:4-7**

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away. **5 Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets**; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are (as) the light that goeth forth. **6** for I desire goodness, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings. **Hosea 6:4-6**

The Prophets in God's Eternal Purpose

The Bible opens with the simple fact of creation. God doing exactly as he planned and each day ending: *"it was good."* Everything in this creation began with flawless perfection, exactly as God desired. But when man exercised his free will and ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was like breaking a priceless object of china. All was shattered, ruined and vanity (Ecc 1:1-11; 13-15).

From the perspective of Adam and Eve there was nothing left but to sweep up the pieces, throw them into the trash and begin again. They had no answers. There was no wisdom or power within them to fix what they had done. But God's *"ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts"* (Isa 55:8-9). Often man has no answer and is ready to give up. *"When the vessel that he made of the clay was marred ... he made it again another vessel."* (Jer 18:4). Surely God could simply send Adam and Eve to chains of darkness and begin again with another man and another woman. His flawless creation uncursed and prepared for others more worthy than they. God had done this with angels, for *"God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment, kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."* (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6)

But he did not! He chose instead to begin the plan he had already devised long before. At the moment, when all was lost and broken, God began to reveal the *"manifold wisdom"* of his *"eternal purpose"* *"which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Eph 3:10-11). He told the serpent (Satan) that the woman's seed would *"bruise your head."* Later he gave more insight to Abraham promising, *"in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."* (Gen 22:18). Scripture was designed to reveal, prepare, and complete this eternal purpose.

God knew that *"through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned,"* and *"through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners."* But he had already prepared the solution: *"through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life."* and *"through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous."* (Rom 5:12, 18-19).

No wonder Paul was so moved with amazement as he ended his theme of justification and righteousness through faith in Christ.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" Rom 11:33

THINK OF IT! It was not after Adam and Eve ate of the tree. It was before Adam and Eve were even created and placed in the garden, and before they were even warned about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God's eternal purpose and plan for the salvation of all sinners was made before he ever said *"Let their be light!"* He loved us before we were created and planned to pay the cost of our forgiveness before we sinned!

This sounds hard to believe and if we have never seen this or thought of it before it certainly needs more proof than what has been cited up to now. But God has supplied us with abundant proof. He wants us to know this to understand the depth of his love and the power of his forgiveness.

Paul told the Romans that his preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ was *"according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested."* (Rom 16:25-26). Most of what God had planned was hidden not only from the creation until the preaching of the gospel. It was before times eternal (i.e. even before the creation). In speaking of parables Jesus quoted one of the prophets. *"I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world"* (Mt 13:35). All that Jesus revealed in his parables was God's eternal purpose. Peter also spoke of this eternal purpose when he said *"him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay."* (Acts 2:23). God revealed these plans hundreds of years before they happened in Isaiah 53.

Paul told Timothy that God *"saved us, and called us with a holy calling, ... according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal"* (2 Tim 1:8-10) The gift of Jesus was not a plan devised after Adam sinned. This gift was given to us *"in Christ before*

times eternal"(i.e before the foundation of the world).

He told Titus that our "*hope of eternal life*" was "*promised before times eternal*" (Titus 1:1-2). Think about that. God's promise of eternal life to those of us who had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God had already been promised before times eternal(i.e before the foundation of the world).

So all these plans and purposes were "*kept in silence,*" "*hidden,*" "*given,*" and "*promised,*" before times eternal.

So what period of time is "*times eternal?*" Though it is impossible to understand how far back into eternity these plans go, Paul revealed that "*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*" (Eph 1:3-5). Thus the plans for the eternal purpose were already complete before the creation. So the plan clearly precedes the events in the first chapter of Genesis. How much further is not something would can understand or need to know.

God's eternal purpose through the church began long before the creation. Though Adam and Eve had no plans beyond the moment they made the wrong choice, God had already thought out all possibilities and prepared for it. The prophets and the gospel are simply the revelation of these plans.

Messianic Prophecies

The most important passage concerned the prophecies concerning Jesus is found in the letters of Peter wrote. He explained that while the prophets in the Old Testament spoke as moved by the Holy Spirit, they did not always understand what they were writing and speaking. Yet Peter makes one thing very clear. The salvation we are now awaiting at the last time is the end of our faith. This is the same salvation that the OT prophets inquired and searched diligently about. It was tied to the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow. Although they wanted to know about these things, it was revealed that the portions of Scripture that they did not understand concerning "*the suffering of Christ and the glories that would follow,*" were not part of their Scriptures or the Old Covenant. These were things that they were ministering to us in the new covenant, and they are the same things "*reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit.*"

5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ... 8 Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls. 10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into. 1Pet. 1:10-12

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:19-21

For many years, I have been cautious about this conclusion, but after further study of other passages in the New Testament it is the only conclusion possible. The prophecies we call Messianic are not part of the Old Covenant, but the New Covenant. These were the things that God "*foretold by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ would suffer.*"

Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled." Acts 3:17-19

When Moses told the people another prophet would rise up like him, he was speaking of the days of Peter and the apostles. This passage is just as much a part of the New Covenant as it foretold the end of the Old.

For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the

people.' Acts 3:22-23

Not only does this include Moses, but all the prophets from Samuel. As Peter later wrote, so now he states that *"all the prophets from Samuel and those who follow, as many have spoken"* what they were writing *"foretold these days."* Hence these same prophets who *"testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow,"* are the ones who foretold of these days.

Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. 25 You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' 26 *To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."* Acts 3:24-25

The Jews and their rulers asked for Jesus to be crucified for two reasons. First, because *"they did not know Him,"* and second because they did not hear *"the voices of the prophets read every Sabbath."*

For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. Acts 13:27

Paul also preached these things both in his letters as well as his sermons in Acts. In Romans he revealed that the gospel was *"promised before through the prophets,"* *"concerning His Son Jesus Christ."*

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, Rom 1:1-4

Not long after writing these words He told Agrippa that all that he was preaching was *"no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come."* So these writings were given as much for us as for them. Specifically, Paul states that these prophets revealed that *"Christ would suffer,"* *"rise from the dead,"* and *"proclaim light"* both to Jews and Gentiles.

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come — 23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." Acts 26:22-23

When Paul went to Rome, and spoke to the Jews there, he *"he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and prophets."* Hence, both the teachings of the kingdom of God and Jesus are clearly found in the writings of the Old Testament.

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. Acts 28:23-25

After His resurrection, Jesus also used *"the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* He revealed that contained with them are *"all things must be fulfilled which were written about Me."* Jesus then *"opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."*

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. 46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:44-48

With all these Scriptures it is evident that the Old Testament prophecies that were written about Jesus, the glories that would follow, His suffering, resurrection, were just as much a part of the Old Testament as the New.

Considering all the places where God's eternal purpose was fully developed and completed before the foundation of the world (Rom. 16:25-26; 2Tim. 1:8-10; Titus 1:1-2; Eph. 1:3-5; 3:10-11).

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. Gal 3:8

Knowing the end from the beginning, God gave the glimpses necessary to allow Paul to say that everything he preached was "*saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come*" (Acts 26:22). God revealed enough to give the shadow and outline of all Paul preached and wrote. These prophets, selected by God, laid the foundation to give those preaching the gospel what they needed to validate their preaching. God revealed enough of his eternal purpose that the apostles only needed to complete the details. Thus the revelation of God's eternal purpose was seamless.

These prophecies gave the scriptural proof needed to convince Israel and save souls. They also revealed enough information for the apostles to make pithy doctrinal points using the prophecies to give the extra information to make it clear. Even today we use these prophecies to gain a clearer perspective and clarify things in the NT. The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is still read today as one of the most comprehensive summations of the life and death of the Messiah. Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Ezekiel 34 offer additional insight about elders working as shepherds. Jesus ascension and reign are seen more clearly after reading Psalm 2 and Daniel 9:7-14. Finally, prophecy is often the foundation for important NT revelation. For example the Hebrew writer used the order of Melchizedek to help us better see our Messiah as a priest reigning on his throne(Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5-7).

We are greatly indebted to these prophets. They give us admonition(1 Cor 10), make us wise unto salvation, and help us be complete unto every good work(2 Tim 3:15-18).

How the OT Prophets were “*ministering to us.*”

Review:

Peter revealed that some of the words of the prophets who lived under the Old Covenant “**prophesied of the grace that would come to you.**” Clearly these writings, though found in the Old Testament Scriptures can be used to further explain and elaborate on the grace we are enjoying today. Though they wanted to better understand this period of time when “**sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow,**” it was revealed to them that the information contained in these prophecies were not designed for those living then. The Spirit revealed to them that it was “**not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things.**” So these prophecies were not a part of the Old Covenant. These writings were written to minister to those of us who live under the New Covenant. The same things they wrote “**now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit.**” The apostles and prophets of the New Covenant were “*reporting*” or preaching the same things these OT prophets had revealed long ago.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into. 1Pet. 1:10-12

When Paul summed up all that he preached as “*saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come*” (Acts 25:22-23), he made it clear that their inspired preaching was simply building upon what God had already revealed to the prophets.

having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come — 23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” Acts 26:22-23

Other Passages that Speak on the Importance of these Writings.

But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Matt 26:56

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the Prophets: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.” 3 “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’” 4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Mark 1:1-5

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began, 71 That we should be saved from our enemies And from the hand of all who hate us, 72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers And to remember His holy covenant, 73 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: Luke 1:70-73

“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” John 1:45

But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Acts 3:18-19

whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3:21-22

Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. Acts 3:24-25

To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. Acts 10:43

And **with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:** Acts 15:15

separated to **the gospel of God** 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, Rom 1:1-2

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, **being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets**, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. Rom 3:21-22

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 **that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior**, 2Pet. 3:1-3

How the Apostles reported “what the Prophets had Prophesied.”

In Peter’s first sermon, he stated that the tongues of fire and the speaking in the languages in which they were born “*is that which hath been spoken through the prophet Joel*,” making it clear that the words of Joel had not been written for them but for us.

Thus “*the last days*” started with this event. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles, he filled all of them and they began to speak with other tongues. This was the answer that the prophets sought and searched diligently to understand. Although it began with the apostles, Peter here revealed that Joel had said He would be poured out on others as well.

But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 ‘*And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. 18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.*’ Acts 2:16-18

Jesus of Nazareth a Man Approved of God ... You Killed

Peter then combined the recent history they all knew so well with the prophecies that had also spoken about these days. Jesus was approved by God by all the miracles He had performed, but they had rejected him, just as Isaiah had warned. Peter summed up Isaiah 53 and the second Psalm with the statement:

being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; Acts 2:23-24

Those who wanted to go back into the the Old Testament need go no further than Isa 53 where this entire event was described.

3 He is **despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.** And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was **despised, and we did not esteem Him.** ... 5 The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ... 8 **For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.** 9 And they made His grave with the wicked — But with the rich at His death, ... 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, **Because He poured out His soul unto death,** And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors. Isa 53:12

More than that, after the first persecution, Peter uses Psalm 2 to show that the entire event had been explained in detail. David, had long ago revealed exactly what was going to occur.

who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord and against His Christ.’ 27 **“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.**’ Acts 4:25-29

Paul later said. That those in Jerusalem and their rulers did not know “*even the voices of the*

Prophets which are read every Sabbath.” The very things they did fulfilled exactly what the prophets had said would happen.

For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28 And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Acts 13:27-28

God Raised Him from the Dead

Peter clearly states that David spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. David was speaking about Jesus when he gave this prophesy in Psalms 16:8-11. *“David says concerning Him.”* This was a clear statement about the Messiah and David knew it when he wrote it. He knew it was not talking about him, so *“foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.”*

For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. ... 27 For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. ... 29 “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. Acts 2:25-32

Not only did David speak about His resurrection, but also spoke clearly about the ascension and glory that was given to Him.

“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, 35 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” Acts 2:34-35

There are other prophecies that further elaborate on this moment.

6 “Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.” 7 “I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’” Ps 2:6-9

13 “I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. 14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed. Dan 7:13-14

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” 2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Ps 110:1-2

The Hebrew writer ties a lot of this together with his own use of these prophecies. He quotes Ps 2 and 45

upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say: “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You”? 8 But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” Heb 1:3-5; 8-9

After healing the lame man, Peter preaches his second sermon, he revealed the events of Jesus death as *“things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets,”* and the remaining time until the second coming are *“the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets that have been from of old.”* He quoted Moses and revealed it was Jesus who was *“A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me. To him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you.”* All who refuse obedience would be *“utterly destroyed from the people.”* Finally, *“all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days”* (Acts 3:12-26).

17 "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But **those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.** ... 22 For **Moses truly said** to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' 24 Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. 25 You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' 26 To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts 3:17-18; 22-26

After Peter and John were arrested and threatened, they comforted the disciples, reminding them that David (Ps 2) had spoken about the very events they were then experiencing. "The kings of the earth set themselves in array, And the rulers were gathered together, Against the Lord, and against his Anointed: for of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council foreordained to come to pass." (Acts 4:23-31).

Phillip joined the Eunuch using the words of Isaiah 53 and "beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus." (Acts 8:35).

Peter preached to Cornelius saying "to him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins" (10:43).

In Paul's first recorded sermon he said that God raised David to be king of Israel and "of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." All who lived in Jerusalem "because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him." His crucifixion had been foretold by the prophets, "when they had fulfilled all things that were written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb." Through the gospel the apostles "bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers," for "in that he raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure (blessings) of David. Because he saith also in another (psalm), Thou wilt not give Thy Holy One to see corruption." Finally as he concluded the sermon he said, "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets." (Acts 13:23-41)

When the church gathered in Jerusalem to discuss the Gentiles, James said the prophets had already revealed God's will. "Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written..." It was the prophets who were used by "the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old" (Acts 15:14-18).

In his defence before Turtullus and Agrippa Paul summed up his service to God with "so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets" (Acts 24:14), and "I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come," (Acts 26:22).

In his discussion with the Jews in Rome, he was "testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning till evening."

Although they preached to Israel hundreds of years before the birth of the Messiah, all Christians should praise and thank God for the blessings these prophets who ministered to us bring today. In the gospels, Acts, and the epistles their words give the foundation and structure of our faith. The things they foreshadowed and revealed were simply placed in their proper context.

As Peter summed it up, "And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet 1:19-21).

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? 35 or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 36 For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him (be) the glory for ever. Amen.
Rom 11:33-36

How Prophets “ministered to us and “gospel preachers reported it”

Review:

The prophets who lived under the Old Covenant “**prophesied of the grace that would come to you.**” They were describing “**sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.**” These things were given “**not to themselves, but to us they were ministering.**”

It was given to the apostles to complete the process as they were “**now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit.**”

Peter’s 2nd Sermon

After healing the lame man, Peter preached his second sermon. He began with the basic historical facts they all knew, ending with explanation of the healing of the lame man. Which the Sanhedrin later admitted: men? “*For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.* (Acts 4:16).

God glorified His Servant Jesus

You delivered up

You denied in the presence of Pilate

Pilate was determined to let Him go.

You denied the Holy One and the Just

You asked for a murderer be granted to you

You killed the Prince of life

God raised from the dead, — We are witnesses

Peter offers some consolation with their ignorance. Yet now that the gospel being preached, it was all being revealed. **Even the apostles were learning it for the first time.** God was actually fulfilling the things foretold by all the prophets. They needed to repent and be converted for three reasons.

1. *Receive the remission of sins,*
2. *Time of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*
- 3a. *God can send Jesus Christ (His Second Coming)*
- 3b. *Heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things,*
- 3c. *God has spoken by mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*

The last three points are an amazing revelation. They reveal that there was still more that the Old Testament had revealed that was yet to be fulfilled.

17 “Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3:17-21

As Jesus had revealed, heaven and earth cannot pass away (which will occur when Jesus returns (2Pet. 3:10-13).

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Matt 5:17-19

The conversion of the Jews would lead to the conversion of the Gentiles, and the restoration of the tabernacle of David that had fallen down. This prophecy was first spoken by Amos and then clearly applied by James at the Jerusalem conference. It was preached first to them and God expected them to obey it and help fulfill all these things.

“On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old; 12 That they may

possess the remnant of Edom, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,"Says the Lord who does this thing. Amos 9:11-12

James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: 14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 15 And **with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:** 16 'After! this I will return And **will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up;** 17 **So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,** Says the Lord who does all these things.' Acts 15:13-17

Peter then quoted Moses and revealed that it was Jesus who was "a Prophet like me from your brethren." Jesus was the one Moses had made direct reference to. It was Jesus whom they must "hear in all things, whatever He says to you." The apostles had heard these very things from Jesus not long before:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.** 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. Matt 28:18-20

They were in grave danger of violating the very thing Moses had strictly charged against. If they refused to obey, they will be "utterly destroyed from the people."

22 **For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.** 23 **And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'**

Peter concluded by revealing something very similar to what he revealed years later in his letter. All the prophets have foretold of these days. "sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." (1Pet. 1:11). He then reminds them that they are the heirs of the covenant God made with Abraham. This is why God had allowed them to hear the gospel first.

Yes, and **all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.** 25 You are sons of the prophets, and of **the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'** 26 To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Acts 3:22-26

During the trial that followed Peter made another reference to the restoration of all things, and the role God had hoped the Jews would have in all of it. But the leaders had rejected the role, Just as God had foretold.

If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 **This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'** 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:9-12

Peter also returns to this theme in his first letter.

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 **you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "**Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.**" 7 **Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,'** 8 and "**A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.**" They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 **who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.** 1 Peter 2:4-10

The three prophecies Peter refers to are found in Ps. 118:19-26; Isa. 28:16-17 and Hos. 1:6-11

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord, Through which the righteous shall enter. 21 I will praise You, For You have answered me, And have become my salvation. 22 The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. 23 This was the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it. 25 Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. Ps 118:19-26

Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily. 17 Also I will make justice the measuring line, And righteousness the plummet; Isa 28:16-17

And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then God said to him: "**Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, But I will utterly take them away.** ... 8 Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then God said: "**Call his name Lo-Ammi, For you are not My people, And I will not be your God.** 10 '**Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered.** And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, '**You are not My people,**' There it shall be said to them, '**You are sons of the living God.**' 11 Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel Shall be gathered together, And appoint for themselves one head; And they shall come up out of the land, For great will be the day of Jezreel! (Hos. 1:6-11)

After Peter and John were arrested and threatened, they comforted the disciples, reminding them that David(Ps 2) had spoken about the very events they were then experiencing.

"The kings of the earth set themselves in array, And the rulers were gathered together, Against the Lord, and against his Anointed: for of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council foreordained to come to pass." Acts 4:23-31

Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." Ps 2:1-6

Phillip joined the Eunuch using the words of Isaiah 53 and “beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus.” (Acts 8:35).

Peter preached to Cornelius saying “to him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins” (10:43).

In Paul’s first recorded sermon he said that God raised David to be king of Israel and “of this man’s seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.” All who lived in Jerusalem “because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.” His crucifixion had been foretold by the prophets, “when they had fulfilled all things that were written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb.” Through the gospel the apostles “bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers,” for “in that he raised up Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure (blessings) of David. Because he saith also in another (psalm), Thou wilt not give Thy Holy One to see corruption.” Finally as he concluded the sermon he said, “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets.” (Acts 13:23-41)

When the church gathered in Jerusalem to discuss the Gentiles, James said the prophets had already revealed God’s will. “Symeon hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written...” It was the prophets who were used by “the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old” (Acts 15:14-18).

In his defence before Turtullus and Agrippa Paul summed up his service to God with “so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets” (Acts 24:14), and “I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come,” (Acts 26:22).

In his discussion with the Jews in Rome, he was “testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning till evening.”

Although they preached to Israel hundreds of years before the birth of the Messiah, all Christians should praise and thank God for the blessings these prophets who ministered to us bring today. In the gospels, Acts, and the epistles their words give the foundation and structure of our faith. The things they foreshadowed and revealed were simply placed in their proper context.

As Peter summed it up, “And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pet 1:19-21).

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! 34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? 35 or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 36 For of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things. To him (be) the glory for ever. Amen.
Rom 11:33-36

How Prophets “ministered to us & “gospel preachers reported it” (2)

From several passages in the NT, God revealed that His eternal purpose was fully prepared and planned before the creation. God knew everything He was going to do and how man was going to respond to it. It also makes it clear that this eternal purpose was not simply for what we see and understand in this creation, but that it was also intended to accomplish some very important things in God’s creation as well.

*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to **make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things; to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly (places) might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God,** Eph. 3:8-10*

*according to **the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested.** Rom. 16:25-26*

*I will open my mouth in parables; I will **utter things hidden from the foundation of the world** Mt. 13:35*

*Him, being delivered up by **the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,** Acts 2:23*

*For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together **to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.** Acts 4:27-29*

*saved us, and called us with a holy calling, ... **according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal** 2Tim. 1:8-10*

*“In hope of eternal life” was **“promised before times eternal”** Titus 1:1-2*

*“He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**” Eph. 1:3-5*

Hence, the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God were “kept in silence,” “hidden,” “given,” and “promised,” before times eternal. What exactly is meant by the concept of eternal? Though it is impossible to understand how far back into eternity these plans go, Paul revealed that “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:3-5). Thus all the plans for the eternal purpose were already complete before the creation.

Using the formula Peter revealed in the title, we will begin with what the prophet said and then see how those who preach the gospel used them.

*To them it was revealed that, **not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things which angels desire to look into.** 1Pet. 1:10-12*

The Plans for Evangelism

God revealed many things in the prophets that explain how the book of Acts unfolded. James summed all this up in the discussion over how the Gentiles would enter the church in Acts 15.

*And **with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:** 16 'After! this I will return And will **rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up;** 17 **So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,** Says the Lord who does all these things.' 18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works. Acts 15:15-19*

When all these things Come upon you the Blessing and the Curse.

The concept of the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David is first mentioned by Moses. After describing all the blessings God would begin to give them and the curses that would follow upon their disobedience, God revealed what would happen after both Israel (ten tribes taken by Assyria) and Judah (residue taken by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon). After they are driven into all these nations, God made a promise to those who “return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul,” that He would “bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather

you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.”

“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, 2 and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, 3 that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. 4 If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. 5 Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Deut 30:1-6”

Although this had a minor fulfillment when Cyrus sent a small remnant back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, it’s main fulfillment was described in the great commission by Jesus Himself and “was reported by those who preached the gospel to us.”

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. Matt 28:18-20*

***Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.** 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. Mark 16:15-17*

*Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, 47 and that **repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** Luke 24:46-48”*

*you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and **even to the remotest part of the earth** Acts 1:8*

Within these passages we see the fulfillment of Moses words: **“If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.”**

Yet there is more than this in Moses’ words. We also see the plan of salvation unfolded in the words: **“the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”** Jesus’ discussion of baptism is later revealed by Paul to be this **“circumcision of the heart.”**

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, Col 2:11-14

The Second Gathering

Isaiah takes the words of Moses and combines them with the *“tabernacle of David that has fallen”* that James described. At his call, Isaiah asked how long he would preach and God told him it would be until *“As a terebinth tree or as an oak, Whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump.”* (Isa 6:13). He begins by describing the state of the tabernacle of David.

*There shall come forth a **Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.** 2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Isa 11:1-2*

Isaiah then takes all these thoughts and weaves them together. At the time that **“the root comes from the stump of Jesse (Jesus),”** He will be a banner to both the people (Jews) and the Gentiles will also seek Him. It will be in that day **“that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left.”** Again it will be in that day, as described by Jesus in the great commission that God **“will assemble the outcasts of Israel, And**

gather together the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.” That this is a summation of the entire book of Acts is obvious.

And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.” 11 It shall come to pass in that day That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea. 12 He will set up a banner for the nations, And will assemble the outcasts of Israel, And gather together the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth. ... 16 There will be a highway for the remnant of His people Who will be left from Assyria, As it was for Israel In the day that he came up from the land of Egypt. Isa 11:10-12, 16

The words so closely match. Even the highway is described as something that John the Baptist would begin.

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; Isa 40:3-4

A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. Isa 35:8

The Shepherd Will Search for His Sheep

In the midst of condemning the shepherds of Israel who had been responsible for the destruction of the sheep, God returns to this theme, describing the work revealed in Acts as a shepherd seeking for the lost sheep. He begins by promising ***"Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep."*** The book of Acts revealed how ***"I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land."***

'For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. 16 "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." Ezek 34:11-16

A little later in this prophesy, God makes it clear that He is again speaking of the time of the Messiah. All of this will occur when ***"I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them — My servant David."*** Hence at the very moment that Acts began and Jesus became their shepherd and prince, all of these things would occur. There is no other time except in the book of Acts that ***"I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken."***

22 therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them — My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. Ezek 34:11-16

I will Gather My Flock out of all the Countries I have Driven Them

God also used Jeremiah to describe the conditions as they were fulfilled in Acts. He again condemned the shepherds of Israel as Ezekiel had done. This time not only does God promise that: ***"I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds."*** but also revealed that it would be at that same time ***"I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking."*** Even the growth and development of the eldership to shepherd the flock is

described here.

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the Lord. 3 "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. 4 I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the Lord. Jer. 23:1-4

The time date for all these events takes us right back to the words of James, **"I will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up."** God promised that: **"I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper."**

5 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Jer 23:1-8

I will Take you from Among the Nations, Gather you out of All Countries

Ezekiel gives us one more prophecy to tie all these things together. This would not be done for their sake, because they had profaned God's name. It would be done for God's Holy name. He promised: **"I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."** This too is described Hebrews 10:19-24: *"having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. 23 And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord," says the Lord God, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. 24 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 Not for your sake do I do this," says the Lord God, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!" Ezek. 36:22-32

Messianic Prophecies - 5: Prophets Ministering to Us

Introduction: A small portion of the writings of the Old Covenant were not written for those then living. They were placed in the Scriptures for the purpose of giving those who would live under the New Covenant an additional rock upon which to build their faith. Many of these prophecies were accurate descriptions of events that would occur hundreds and even thousands of years in the future. Many of these passages were used by the apostles and prophets in the New Covenant age to give assurance to those hearing their preaching that what they were saying was true. Other prophecies were given to give a clearer understanding to obscure things that would occur in the future. The eternal purpose of God is so infinitely complex that often it takes both pictures, shadows and types to help us understand them.

As the apostles and elders gathered together to discuss the relationship of the Gentiles to the Jews under the New Covenant, it was such an unexpected and amazing thing that many had great difficulty understanding that the law was simply a middle wall of partition and once it was done away, there would no longer be any distinction. To soothe and calm some of the more zealous Jews, James quoted one of them.

*And with this **the words of the prophets agree**, just as it is written: 16 'After! this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things.' 18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works. 19 Therefore I judge that **we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God**, Acts 15:15-20*

The context of Amos is as important as the few passages the James quotes. It began with God's proclamation that the decision to destroy the entire house of Israel had already been made even at this early date. Everything that God had previously condemned in the 10 tribes of Israel was also being done in Judah. So God gives Amos a vision of God standing by the altar in Jerusalem, proclaiming that the temple would be destroyed and all of them destroyed along with it. This is a very accurate picture of what Nebchadnezzar did long after the 10 tribes had been destroyed and removed.

*I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said: "**Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, And break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword. He who flees from them shall not get away, And he who escapes from them shall not be delivered.**" 2 "Though they dig into hell, From there My hand shall take them; Though they climb up to heaven, From there I will bring them down;" Amos 9:1-2*

God continued by revealing that He has had His eyes on the sinful kingdom, just as Moses had revealed:

*"Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; 27 for **I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord, then how much more after my death?**" 28 Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. 29 **For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands.**" Deut. 31:26-29*

The time for judgment was nearing and God was very clear exactly what He would do. Once again, God reveals exactly what the book of Acts was written to reveal. Through the gospel, "as grain is sifted in the sieve, not the smallest grain will fall to the ground."

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, And I will destroy it from the face of the earth; Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," Says the Lord. 9 "For surely I will command, And will sift the house of Israel among all nations, As grain is sifted in a sieve; Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground." Amos 9:8-9

Even as James was speaking the words of fulfillment, a portion he had omitted was also drawing nearer for the second time.

All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, Who say, 'The calamity shall not overtake nor

confront us.' 11 **"On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old; 12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name," Says the Lord who does this thing.** Amos 9:8-11

The fall of that tabernacle was accurately described by Jeremiah as He strictly warned Israel that at that moment their fate was still in their own hands and if they would stop violating the Sabbath, they could keep the tabernacle of David.

"And it shall be, if you heed Me carefully," says the Lord, "to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it, 25 then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever. ... 27 "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."" Jer 17:24-25, 27

Later is Jeremiah, He returns to this moment that came and promises the same thing He did in Amos.

Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, But he shall be saved out of it. 8 'For it shall come to pass in that day, 'Says the Lord of hosts, 'That I will break his yoke from your neck, And will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them. 9 But they shall serve the Lord their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them. 10 'Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob, 'says the Lord, 'Nor be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar, And your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid. 11 For I am with you,' says the Lord, 'to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished.' Jer 30:7-11

The Rod from the Stem of Jesse and Branch from his Roots

Changing the figure from a tabernacle (dwelling place) to a tree that has been cut down, Jesus is depicted as the branch that has grown out of the stump of David to become the tree that would fulfill all of God's promises given to David.

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. 3 His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; 4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. Isa 11:1-5

At the same time that this Branch grows from his roots, He will stand as a banner to the people. At that time two things will happen that completely explain what James is describing. He will be a banner. The Gentiles will seek Him and God will set his hand the second time to call the remnant of his people back to Him.

"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious." 11 It shall come to pass in that day That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time To recover the remnant of His people who are left, From Assyria and Egypt, From Pathros and Cush, From Elam and Shinar, From Hamath and the islands of the sea. Isa. 11:10-11

Jeremiah also described the Messiah as a branch. In this prophesy, God adds a few more details. What had fallen was God's promise about a man being on the throne of David. Israel had forfeited that blessing when they refused to heed Jeremiah regarding the Sabbath. But God would find a better way to fulfill the promise by finding a descendant who would be faithful for all eternity. Once again, God also promises that it will be at that day that all of God's promises to Israel and Judah would be fulfilled. God also introduces something new. The Priests and the Levites would also be restored.

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah: 15 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 16 In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' 17 "For thus says the Lord: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; 18 nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually.'" Jer 33:14-18

God continues this prophesy by comparing it to the covenant God made with day and night. This covenant was tied to the promise God made to Noah after he left the ark and offered a sacrifice to the Lord (Gen. 8:20-22). Just as the covenant could not be broken, neither can the covenant that David would lack a son to reign. That promise had only been suspended because of the wickedness of Israel and His descendants, which God had even made a part of the promise as Solomon had pointed out: that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, "If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul," He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'" (1Kings 2:4).

God again mentions the Levites and priests as His ministers. He will multiply the descendants of David like the sand of the sea. Since this promise is the same one God gave to Abraham, it appears that God's promise to Abraham also came through David. Yet not only through David, but also through Levi. This has created some difficulty for some, but is the only logical conclusion when we look at the passages in the NT.

And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 20 "Thus says the Lord: 'If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, 21 then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. 22 As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.'" Jer 33:19-22

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; 21 and (having) a great priest over the house of God; 22 let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water, Heb 10:19-22

Through him then **let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name. 16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Heb 13:15-16**

We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle. Heb 13:10

unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, 5 ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, **to be a holy priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Pet 2:4-5

But ye are a elect race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for (God's) own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 who in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. 1 Pet 2:9-10

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, (who is) the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; 6 and **he made us (to be) kings, (to be) priests unto his God and Father; to him (be) the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. 7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen. 8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. 9 I John, your brother and partaker with you in tribulation and kingdom and patience (which are) in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Rev 1:4-9**

And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for

thou was slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood (men) of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, 10 and madest them (to be) **unto our God kings and priests**; and they reign upon earth. Rev 5:9-10

Zechariah gives us all there is the picture of the Righteous branch.

8 *Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, You and your companions who sit before you, **For they are a wondrous sign; For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.*** 9 *For behold, the stone That I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,' Says the Lord of hosts, '**And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.*** 10 *In that day,' says the Lord of hosts, '**Everyone will invite his neighbor Under his vine and under his fig tree.**'"* Zech 3:8-10

Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. 12 Then speak to him, saying, '**Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying: "Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord;** 13 *Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both."* 14 *"Now the elaborate crown shall be for a memorial in the temple of the Lord for Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. 15 Even those from afar shall come and build the temple of the Lord. Then you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. And this shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God."* Zech 6:11-15

A more literal explanation was given in Isaiah.

*For **unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given;** And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called **Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*** 7 ***Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever.*** The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. Isa 9:6-7