



Rebuild and Renew: The Post-Exilic Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Participant Handouts

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

If you are working with a class or small group, feel free to duplicate the following handouts at no additional charge. If you'd like to print 8-1/2" x 11" or A4 size pages, you can download the free Participant Guide handout sheets at:

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Discussion Questions

You'll typically find 4 or 5 questions for each lesson. Each question may include several sub-questions. These are designed to get group members engaged in discussion of the key points of the passage. If you're running short of time, feel free to skip questions or portions of questions.

Suggestions for Classes and Groups

Individuals who are studying online can probably complete one full lesson per week, though they'll need to be diligent to do so. But some of the chapters just have too much material for a one hour class discussion. Feel free to arrange the lessons any way that works best for your group.

Because of the length of these handouts – and to keep down the page count so we can keep the book price lower – they are being made available at no cost online.

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Introduction to the Post-Exilic Period

All five of books – Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi -- were written in the Persian Province of Judah (Yehud) during what is known as the Post-Exilic Period (539-430 BC). Here's how they fit with the rest of the Bible.

1. Patriarchs (1800-1500 BC) – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
2. Exodus (1400 BC) – Moses
3. Conquest and Judges (1400-950 BC) – Joshua, Gideon, etc.
4. Monarchy (950 to 587 BC) – Saul, David, Solomon, and the Divided Kingdom
5. Exile (604 to 537 BC) – the Jewish community lives in Babylon
6. **Post-Exilic Period (537 to 430 BC) – rebuilding the temple and walls of Jerusalem. Malachi, last book of the Old Testament, written about 430 BC.**
7. Intertestamental Period (430 BC to 6 BC) – Greeks desecrate temple, Maccabee Rebellion, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans conquer, Herod the Great.
8. Life of Jesus of Nazareth (6 BC to 27 AD)
9. The Early Church (27 AD to 95 AD). Last books of New Testament written about 95 AD.

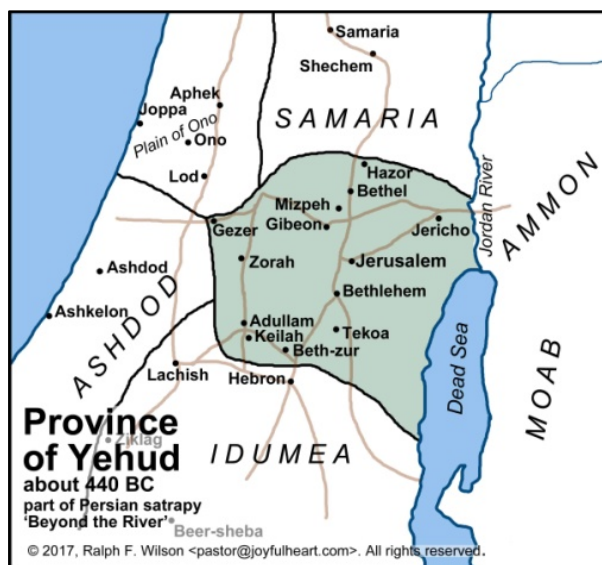
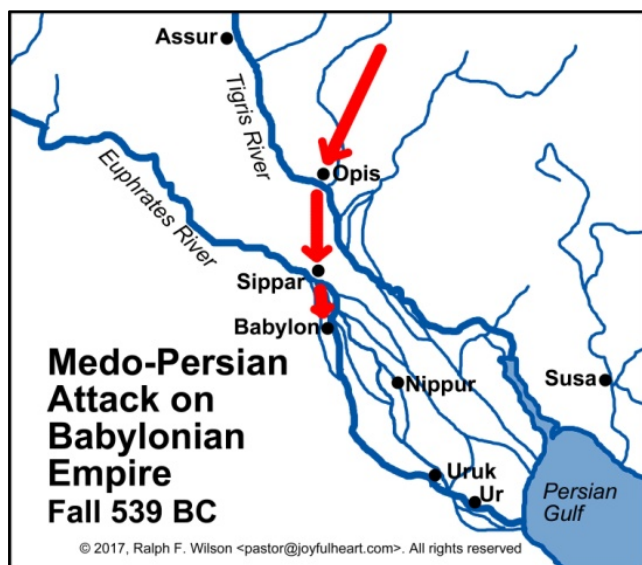
A Quick Guide to the Exiles of Israel and Judah

Assyrian Captivity (began 740 to 722 BC). Assyrians deport leaders and many people from Northern Kingdom of Israel, then displaced peoples from other regions to settle in Israel. Those Israelites that remain retain a kind of Yahweh worship that mixes with worship of pagan gods of the land and of the displaced persons brought by the Assyrians. These are the Samaritans.

Babylonian Captivity (began 604-587 BC). Three deportations from Kingdom of Judah in 604 BC, 597 BC, and finally in 587 BC, when Jerusalem is destroyed and all the leaders exiled, leaving only the poorest in the land.

Rise of the Medo-Persian Empire. Cyrus, King of Persia (Cyrus II to historians), is known as Cyrus the Great because he is the founder of the Achaemenid Empire. (For more details see Appendix 4. The Medo-Persian Empire.)





Main Characters of Ezra and Nehemiah

It's easy to be confused with all the names you encounter in Ezra and Nehemiah. Here's a synopsis of these names and where they are referred to. Be aware that many of the names occurring in lists of returning exiles and workers on the wall are common names. Don't assume that these are all the same people.

Ashdod, men of, enemies, in Persian province of Ashdod on the coast.

Artaxerxes I, king of Persia, 464-424 BC, sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem (Ezra 4:7; 7:11-12; Nehemiah 2:1; 5:14)

Ahasuerus or Xerxes I, king of Persia (486-465 BC, Ezra 4:6; Esther)

Bilshan (Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7), leading man in return.

Bishlam, enemy (Ez 4:7)

Cyrus, king of Persia, 559-530 BC, conquers Babylon, releases Jews to return (Ez 1:1)

Darius II, king of Persia, 424-405, allows construction to continue (Ez 5:5, 6; 4:24)

Eliashib the high priest, rebuilt Sheep Gate (Neh 3:1; 13:4-5, 28)

Ezra, son of Seraiah, the priest, scribe, teacher of the Law, leader (Ez 7:1, 6, 11, 12; etc.)

Geshem the Arab, enemy official (Neh 2:19; 6:1, 2, 6)

Haggai the prophet, prophesies up to completion of the temple in 520 BC (Ez 5:1; 6:14)

Hanani, Nehemiah's brother, informs of situation in Jerusalem, trusted with Jerusalem's security (Neh 1:2; 7:2)

Hananiah, commander of citadel of Jerusalem (Neh 7:2)

Jahzeiah, son of Tikvah, opposed putting away foreign wives (Ez 10:15)

Jeshua, son of Jozadak, priest and leader in the return (Ez 5:2; 2:2; 3:2, 8, 9; 4:3)

Jonathan, son of Asahel, opposed putting away foreign wives (Ez 10:15)

Jozabad, son of Jeshua, Levite; had foreign wife (Ez 8:33; 10:23)

Meremoth, son of Uriah the priest, son of Meshezabel (Ez 8:33; Ne 3:4)

Meshallam, opposed putting away foreign wives (Ez 10:15; Neh 8:4)

Meshallam, son of Berekiah, father-in-law to Tobiah's daughter (Neh 3:4; 6:18)

Mithredath, the [Persian ?] treasurer (Ez 1:8)

Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah, **cupbearer to Artaxerxes, governor of Yehud** (Ez 2:2; Neh 1:1 etc.)

Rehum, the commanding officer, enemy (4:8, 9, 17, 23)

Sanballat the Horonite, enemy official (2:10, 19; 4:1, 7; 6:1, 2, 5, 12, 14; 13:28)

Shabbethai the Levite, opposed putting away foreign wives (Ez 10:15)

Shecaniah, son of Jehiel, married foreign women (Ez 10:2)

Shecaniah, son of Arah, father-in-law of Tobiah (Neh 6:18)

Shemaiah son of Delaiah, paid by Tobiah and Sanballat to urge Nehemiah to hide in the temple (Neh 6:10)

Sherebiah, capable man, Levite, carried silver and gold articles (Ez 8:18, 24)

Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah (Ez 1:8, 11)

Shethar-Bozenai, official of Trans-Euphrates (Ez 5:3, 6; 6:6, 13)

Shimshai, the secretary, enemy (4:8, 9, 17, 23)

Tabeel, enemy (Ez 4:7)

Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates (Ez 5:3, 6; 6:6, 13)

Tobiah the Ammonite, enemy official (2:10, 19; 4:3, 7; 6:1, 12, 14, 17, 19; 13:4, 7, 8)

Xerxes I, or Ahasuerus, king of Persia (Ezra 4:6)

Zechariah the prophet, descendant of Iddo (Ez 5:1; 6:14; Neh 8:4)

Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, **grandson of king Jeconiah of Judah** (Ez 5:2; 2:2; 3:2, 8; 4:2, 3)

1. Returning to Rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1-6)

The Jewish Community in Babylon

The exiled Jews are settled together in Babylonia in an area along the Chebar (or Kebar) canal. Psalm 137 comes from this period: "By the rivers of Babylon..."

Jeremiah had prophesied that the exile would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12), but most have forgotten. All of a sudden, Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians in 539 BC. Overnight, the vast Babylonian Empire is under the control of Cyrus the Great.

Cyrus Helps the Exiles to Return (Ezra 1)

Cyrus's Proclamation (Ezra 1:2-4)

Religious Policy of the Persian Empire

The Assyrians, and the Babylonians after them, destroy the temples of their adversaries. But the Persians are different. Though they have their own gods, they are polytheists. Their attitude is that having more gods on their side, who are favorable to them and to their rule, is a good thing, and helped rebuild them.

Isaiah prophesies hundreds of years before this era about Cyrus and even refers to him by name (Isaiah 44:28; 45:13). (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1).

Q1. (Ezra 1:5-6) Why did only some return to Jerusalem when given the opportunity? What are the likely characteristics of those who return vs. those who stay behind in Babylon? Why do only some answer Jesus' call to follow him on his journey to a radically different kind of lifestyle and mission? What are the characteristics of true disciples?

Rebuilding the Altar (Ezra 3:1-6)

Beginning the Restoration of the Temple (Ezra 3:6-13)

Rather than seeing the *foundation* completed here, it's probably more accurate to see the work of restoration begun, in the sense of "to build." Ezra 3:6ff describes the *beginning* of the work in 537 BC, which quickly fell into activity. In Haggai 2:18, 17 years later in 520 BC, the same word is used to describe the *resumption* of building, not recompleting the foundation.

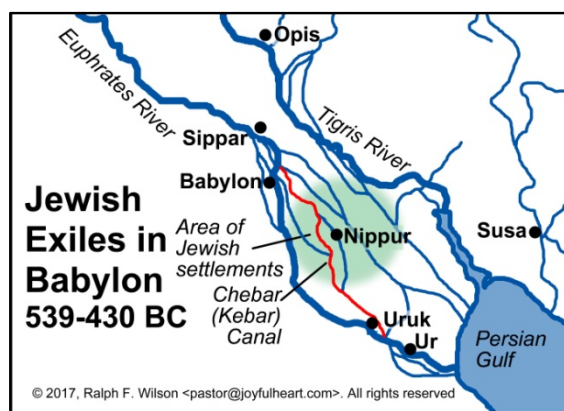
Celebration and Mourning (Ezra 3:10-13)

Q2. (Ezra 3) Rebuilding the temple in order to restore worship is the point of all this work. Is your personal worship what it should be? What foundations do you need to lay again in your personal restoration and revival of faith?

Opposition to the Rebuilding (Ezra 4:1-5, 24)

Samaritan Syncretism

Q3. (Ezra 4:1-3) Sometimes uncommitted people try to co-opt true worship for their own ends, as did the enemies of the Jews. What is the danger of letting people without a deep heart commitment and



Probable location of the Chebar Canal near Nippur. Since 539 BC, the Persian Gulf has silted up, extending the outlet of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers into the Gulf by many miles..

close walk with God redesign the church's image in the community? Redesign worship? Redesign the preaching? How can we be innovative and still be faithful to God's heart?

Later Opposition under Xerxes and Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:6-24, see Lesson 6)

Tattenai's Letter to Darius (Ezra 5)

The Decree of Darius (Ezra 6:1-12)

1. The Jewish governor has authority to rebuild the temple.
2. The workmen are to be paid from the royal revenue.
3. They are to be given animals for sacrifice.
4. Anyone who opposes the edict is cursed.
5. Darius, the current king commands, "Let it be done with all diligence." (Ezra 6:12)

Completion and Dedication of the Temple, March 515 BC (Ezra 6:13-18)

Q4. (Ezra 6:1-12) When faced with "insurmountable odds," why do we give up so easily? What are the characteristics of a disciple who retains a robust faith in the God of amazing breakthroughs and impossible solutions?

The Passover (Ezra 6:19, 22)

Purification and Separation (Ezra 6:20-21)

Q5. (Ezra 6:20-21) What do repentance and separation from the sins of our culture look like for a disciple today? How should we prepare ourselves to worship Jesus in the Lord's Supper? How should we prepare to serve him with purity day by day?

Lessons for Disciples

Ezra 1-6 provides a number of lessons for disciples to ponder.

1. God can raise up rulers, even non-Christian rulers, and then "stir their spirit" to carry out his plans. Cyrus was one of these God had chosen long before (Isaiah 45:13; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1). We need to pray for our civil leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-4).
2. The many Jews who remained in Babylon symbolize perhaps a tendency in us to become too comfortable to radically serve God any longer. We must never become too comfortable, or too tired, or too complacent to follow Jesus wherever he leads us, at whatever personal cost may be required.
3. Rebuilding the altar and laying again the foundation (Ezra 3) speak of a strong desire on the part of the Israelites to restore worship to what it should be. Is your personal worship what it should be? What foundations do you need to lay again in your personal restoration and revival of faith?
4. Whenever you seek to do Kingdom work, you can expect opposition from enemies, who are ultimately motivated and energized by Satan (Ezra 4). Sometimes we experience temporary setbacks in our spiritual warfare. This shouldn't surprise us.
5. Sometimes uncommitted people try to co-opt true worship for their own ends, as did the enemies of the Jews (Ezra 4:1-3) There is a desire for us to make church "attractive" to our community and accessible to seekers. This can be good. However, what can happen is that "the show" and "feel-good" preaching, replace authentic worship and careful teaching of the Word. If we allow the uncommitted to "build with us," it may not result in something that is God-centered any longer.

6. God uses gifted men and women to stir up his people and call them to return to the central tasks of our faith, as God used the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to energize the people to complete the temple (Ezra 5:1-2)
7. We should not give up when times are hard. God is well-able to bring amazing break-throughs, such as Darius's reinforcement of Cyrus's original decree, resulting in full funding and renewed energy to complete the task of rebuilding God's house (Ezra 6:1-12).
8. God calls us to repentance and separation from the sins of our culture (Ezra 6:20-21), both to prepare ourselves to worship him in the Lord's Supper, and to serve him with purity day by day.

2. Realigning Priorities (Haggai 1-2)

Haggai the Prophet (Haggai 1:1a)

Zerubbabel and Joshua (Haggai 1:1b)

Zerubbabel is of royal blood: a descendant of David, son of Shealtiel, and grandson of Jehoiachin, one of Judah's last kings. He is governor of Yehud (post-exilic Judah). In addition to references in Ezra and Nehemiah, he is also mentioned in both Haggai 1:1-2:9 and Zechariah 4:6-10. Zerubbabel name means "seed of Babylon" or "descendant of Babylon."

Jeshua (or Joshua), son of Jozadak, is high priest in the early days of the return. He is mentioned in Ezra, Nehemiah, as well as by the prophets in Haggai and Zechariah. His sons are also prominent, though two of his sons are censured later for marrying foreign women (Ezra 10:18). Jeshua's name means "Yah(weh) saves." He is named after Joshua, Moses' successor. In the New Testament, Jesus bears this name also (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is the Greek form of Hebrew Joshua.

The Word of the Lord – Prophecy

"The word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai...." (Haggai 1:1a)

This phrase, "the word of the Lord came..." is a standard formula that identifies a prophetic revelation by the Holy Spirit. Prophets are also seen in the New Testament: John the Baptist, Agabus (Acts 11:27; 21:10-11), members of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:27; 13:1), and the daughters of Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:9). In addition, people who have just received the Holy Spirit might prophesy (Acts 2; 19:6), as well as members of the congregation (1 Corinthians 14).

Dating the Prophecies

| Year ¹ | | Reign of Darius | Text | Synopsis |
|-------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|-------------|--|
| 520 BC | Aug 29 | Day 1, month 6 | Hag 1:1-11 | Haggai's Prophecies 1 and 2 |
| 520 | Sep 21 | Day 24, month 6 | Hag 1:12-15 | Restoration of the temple resumes 23 days later |
| 520 | Oct 17 | Day 21, month 7 | Hag 2:1-9 | Haggai's Prophecy 3 |
| 520 | Nov | month 8 | Zech 1:1-6 | Zechariah begins to prophesy |
| 520 | Dec 18 | Day 24, month 9 | Hag 2:10 | Haggai's Prophecy 4 |
| 520 | Dec 18 | Day 24, month 9 | Hag 2:20 | Haggai's Prophecy 5 (later the same day) |
| 519 | Feb 15 | Day 24, month 11 | Zech 1:7 | Zechariah's Prophecy 2 |
| 518 | Dec 7 | 4th year, month 9, day 4 | Zech 7:1 | Zechariah's Later visions. |
| 515 | Mar 12 | 6th year, month of Adar, day 3 | Ezra 6:15 | Temple completed |
| c. 460 – 430 | undated | | Malachi | Malachi's prophecies |

Prophecy 1. A Call to Build the House of the Lord (Haggai 1)

The Result of God Withholding Blessing (Haggai 1:5-11)

¹ John Kessler, "Haggai, Book of," DOTP, p. 303; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 29. Based on the evidence of over 100 Babylonian texts and new moon data from astronomical calculations it is possible to synchronize the old lunar calendar with the Julian calendar accurate to within one day.

Q1. (Haggai 1:8) God wishes to “take pleasure” in the temple, but the people have stopped working on the project. When is God displeased with you? When does he “take pleasure” in you? What is keeping you from serving him deliberately and joyfully?

Q2. (Haggai 1:6, 9-11) God sometimes disciplines us through hardships and circumstances (Hebrews 12:7-11). Sometimes through us not having all that we need. What is such discipline intended to do in our lives? Are you experiencing hardship? What is God trying to say to you in the midst of it?

Prophecy 2. Belief and Obedience (Haggai 1:12-15)

Prophecy 3. The Promised Glory of the New House (Haggai 2:1-9)

Be Strong and Work (Haggai 2:4-5)

Q3. (Haggai 2:1-5) Discouragement is a common experience. What command does God give Joshua the high priest? What assurance does he give? To deal with your own times of discouragement, what would God’s command and assurance be for you? How would you implement them?

Shaking and Glory (Haggai 2:6-9)

Prophecy 4. You Are Defiled. Repent. (Haggai 2:10-19)

A Defiled People (Haggai 2:10-14)

Conveying Holiness and Defilement (Haggai 2:12-13)

You Are Defiled (Haggai 2:14)

Q4. (Haggai 2:10-14) What kinds of things defile a disciple today? What is the danger of acting as if doing church work somehow makes us holy by association? How does a believer deal with spiritual defilement and sin?

With Repentance Comes God’s Blessing (Haggai 2:15-19)

Prophecy 5. Zerubbabel: the Lord’s Signet Ring (Haggai 2:20-23)

Q5. (Haggai 2:20-23) In what way is Haggai’s image of Zerubbabel being God’s signet intended to encourage Zerubbabel? What is the power of a leader’s signet? How does listening to God’s Spirit make you effective as his agent? In what ways are you authorized to speak and act for Jesus?

Lessons for Disciples

Haggai’s prophecy offers a number of principles for disciples.

1. We may justify to ourselves and one another our neglect to do what God has called us to do. But our rationalization does not impress God (Haggai 1:2-4).
2. Our disobedience can result in God’s discipline, or in God withholding his blessing (Haggai 1:5-6, 9-11).
3. God takes pleasure in us – and in his House – when we obey him. We should seek his pleasure, not our own (Haggai 1:8).

4. God “stirs up the spirit” of people (that is, brings additional motivation) to obey God, sometimes through prophecy, and sometimes through other means (Haggai 1:14; 2 Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1).
5. Discouragement is commonplace. God commands us to “be strong and work,” to take courage and not to fear. And to realize that God is with us. Courage and obedience are the earmarks of a disciple (Haggai 2:1-5).
6. We can be defiled by participating in the unclean practices of the world. Contact with holy things (such as church work) does not make us holy. We are cleansed only through repentance, confession, and faith that God forgives us (Haggai 2:10-14)
7. We do what God calls us to do, but the results are in his hands. Our work may seem small and unimpressive, but God can make it great (Haggai 2:1-9; Ezra 3:11-13; Zechariah 4:10).
8. Repentance and obedience change things. As we follow Jesus we can expect to see his blessings, both spiritually and materially (Haggai 2:15-19).
9. Just as Zerubbabel is encouraged by the assurance that he is God’s signet ring, executing God’s orders with God’s own authority, so we today can act and speak with God’s own authority, with Jesus’ own words of love and power, as we listen to him (Haggai 2:20-23).

3. Encouragement for the Builders (Zechariah 1-6)

Zechariah the Prophet (Zechariah 1:1)

- A **prophet**, one who receives the word of the Lord to share with the people.
- A **contemporary of Haggai**. Haggai begins prophesying on August 29, 520 BC. Zechariah begins to prophesy in November 520, and while Haggai's ministry seems to end in 520 BC, Zechariah's ministry extends to about 515 BC and perhaps beyond.
- Grandson of Iddo, who is probably the head of a priestly family, mentioned in Nehemiah 12:4. If it is the same Iddo, then Zechariah is a **priest-prophet**.

A Call to Return to the Lord (Zechariah 1:2-6)

Q1. (Zechariah 1:3) Why is a message of repentance from sin such an important part of the Gospel? What happens when we remove repentance from the core message of Jesus? Why do you think God wants you to repent of all known sin?

The Night Visions, February 15, 519 BC (Zechariah 1:7-6:15)

These Night Visions consist of eight symbolic words from God, designed to encourage the people and their leaders to rebuild the temple.

1. A Man Among the Myrtle Trees (Zechariah 1:8-17)
2. Four Horns and Four Craftsmen (Zechariah 1:18-21)
3. A Man with a Measuring Line (Zechariah 2)
4. Clean Garments for the High Priest (Zechariah 3)
5. The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees (Zechariah 4)
6. The Flying Scroll (Zechariah 5:1-4)
7. The Woman in the Basket (Zechariah 5:5-11)
8. Four Chariots (Zechariah 6)

Apocalyptic

Zechariah belongs to the genre of prophecy termed "apocalyptic," along with Daniel and parts of Ezekiel. Then a whole body of Jewish literature sprang up between 200 BC and 100 AD in imitation of Daniel. Apocalyptic literature is full of symbols that are seen in dreams and visions, such as rich symbolism in the Book of Revelation. Another characteristic of apocalyptic prophecy is a deterministic view – that history must run its course, but the end is predetermined by God. The end of history will be a violent in-breaking by God to establish his kingdom.

Vision 1. Man Among the Myrtle Trees (Zechariah 1:8-17)

Vision 2. Four Horns and Four Craftsmen (Zechariah 1:18-21)

Vision 3. Man with a Measuring Line (Zechariah 2)

Be Still before the Lord (Zechariah 2:13a)

Q2. (Zechariah 2:13) Why, in this passage, do you think the prophet calls all mankind to be still before him? In the context of God aroused to protect his people from attack, why is silence appropriate? For the enemy of God, what does silence represent? For the believer, what does silence before God represent?

Vision 4. Clean Garments for the High Priest (Zechariah 3)**A Brand Plucked from the Fire (Zechariah 3:2b)**

Q3. (Zechariah 3:1-7) What do Joshua's filthy clothes represent? How does God deal with this? What message is this prophecy intended to convey to Joshua the High Priest? How might this message apply to Christian leaders who have sinned?

My Servant, the Branch (Zechariah 3:8-10)

The Branch springing up from David's line is a recognized messianic figure, Isaiah 11:1; 4:2; 53:2a; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Psalm 132:17; Ezekiel 29:21.

The 7-Faceted Stone (Zechariah 3:9a)

Stone is used several times in the Old Testament as a messianic title – and quoted in the New Testament (Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; Daniel 2:34). The image of sitting “under his vine and fig tree” means to enjoy peace and prosperity in the messianic age (1 King 4:25; Isaiah 36:16; Hosea 2:18; Micah 4:4).

Removing Sin in a Single Day (Zechariah 3:9d)

See Mark 10:45; Isaiah 53:12b; John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; Zechariah 13:1.

Vision 5. The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees (Zechariah 4)**Zerubbabel to Complete the Temple (Zechariah 4:7b-9)****Despising the Day of Small Things (Zechariah 4:10a)**

Q4. (Zechariah 4:1-10) Why do we so easily fall into the trap of trying to do God's work with our own strength? What does it mean, “Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit”? How might you apply this truth to your life?

Two Olive Trees and Golden Pipes (Zechariah 4:10b-13)**Visions 6 The Flying Scroll (Zechariah 5:1-4)****Vision 7. The Woman in the Basket (Zechariah 5:5-11)****Vision 8. Four Chariots (Zechariah 6:1-8)****The Coronation of Joshua (Zechariah 6:9-15)****Lessons for Disciples**

1. The way to God begins with repentance – away from evil and toward God. Otherwise, the consequences of our sin will overtake us (Zechariah 1:3-6).
2. The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple – indeed all things – comes through God's choice and grace (Zechariah 1:7-17).
3. God is our protector. We can trust him to deal with our enemies (Zechariah 1:18-21).
4. God has chosen to live in the midst of his people – but has extended to all the invitation to be part his people. The modern expression of this is God living in the midst of his gathered people, the church (Zechariah 2:1-12).
5. Sometimes the only appropriate response to God is stillness and awe (Zechariah 2:13).

6. We are unworthy to stand before God and touch holy things. But he desires to cleanse us and clothe us with his righteousness. This is all by his grace, not because we deserve it (Zechariah 3:1-7).
7. In Zechariah's prophecy we see the Messiah represented by titles such as The Branch, and the Stone, and the One who removes sin from the land in a single day – the day he died for our sins on the cross (Zechariah 3:8-9).
8. God's work doesn't need man's power and might; rather it requires people of faith who will rely on the might and power of the Spirit (Zechariah 4:6-7a).
9. We must not be discouraged by "the day of small things." Rather, we trust God to increase what he has begun (Zechariah 4:10a).
10. God chooses anointed men and women to build his Kingdom. Not perfect men and women, but those who will stand as channels of his anointing, his Spirit, and his power (Zechariah 4:1-14).
11. God expects us to keep His commandments. If people persist in disobedience, rather than turn in repentance, their destiny is terrible – banishment from the presence of God and destruction (Zechariah 5:1-4).
12. Temptation to wickedness is present; our only hope is God's cleansing and removing wickedness far from us (Zechariah 5:5-11).
13. God is sovereign over all the earth; nothing is hidden from him (Zechariah 6:1-8).
14. The crowning of Joshua the high priest symbolizes Jesus Christ, our Messiah, who holds in himself two roles: Priest and King.

4. Prophecies of the Messiah (Zechariah 7-14)

Prophecy 1. Justice and Mercy, Not Fasting (Zechariah 7)

This prophecy is dated December 7, 518 BC.

Worship that Pleases Us – not God (Zechariah 7:4-7)

See Isaiah 58:3b; 29:13; 1:13.

Q1. (Zechariah 7:4-6) In what ways have we Christians tended to make worship about us, rather than about God? How should we evaluate our churches and our worship patterns? What can we do to make our personal worship a matter of the heart, and not just rote readings and prayer?

Ethical Righteousness (Zechariah 7:8-10)

Positive Attributes: Justice, Mercy, and Compassion (Zechariah 7:9)

Negative Commands: Don't Oppress the Powerless (Zechariah 7:10a)

The Fruit of Rebellious Hearts (Zechariah 7:11-14)

Prophecy 2. The Lord Promises to Bless Jerusalem (Zechariah 8-11)

Ethical Commands (Zechariah 8:16-17)

Zechariah 7:9-10

Administer true justice (7:9a).

Show mercy and compassion to one another (7:9b).

Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor (7:10a).

Let none of you devise evil against another in your heart (7:10b, ESV).

Zechariah 8:16-17

Speak the truth to each other (8:16a).

Render true and sound judgment in your courts (8:16b).

Do not plot evil against your neighbor (8:17a).

Do not love to swear falsely (8:17b).

Q2. (Zechariah 7:9-10; 8:16-17) What does it look like to operate from a policy of mercy and compassion? God commands justice for the poor and oppressed in our culture. How can we be sure that the poor are treated justly in our courts? How do you treat aliens in your country, sojourners from another land? Why is speaking truthfully with others so important to God?

Happy Feasts (Zechariah 8:18-19)

The Gentiles Come to Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:20-23)

Judgment on Israel's Enemies (Zechariah 9:1-8)

The Coming of Zion's King (Zechariah 9:9-10)

Jubilation and Prosperity for God's Flock (Zechariah 9:11-17)

The Lord Will Care for Judah (Zechariah 10-11)

Prophecy 3. The Two Shepherds (Zechariah 11:4-17)**The Detested Shepherd (Zechariah 11:7-9)****Breaking the Staff Called Favor and 30 Pieces of Silver (Zechariah 11:10-14)****Breaking the Staff of Union (Zechariah 11:14)****The Foolish, Worthless Shepherd (Zechariah 11:15-17)**

Q3. (Zechariah 11:4-17) Why is God so condemnatory towards shepherds or leaders who take advantage of their office and exploit the people? What is Jesus' standard for leaders (Mark 10:42-45). What would it look like in government if we followed Jesus' standard? What would it look like in your workplace? In your church? In your home?

Prophecy 4. The Great Battle and New Jerusalem (Zechariah 12-14)**Mourning for the One they Have Pierced (Zechariah 12:10)****A Fountain to Cleanse from Sin (Zechariah 13:1)****Strike the Shepherd (Zechariah 13:7)**

Q4. (Zechariah 12-13) Paul was broken-hearted for his countrymen the Jews, who had rejected the Messiah. We should be too. When do you think the prophecy will be fulfilled that says, "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn...?" (Zechariah 12:10). Concerning the fountain that cleanses from sin and impurity (Zechariah 13:1), has that been fulfilled, or will it be future? Why will it please God so much when all the Jews finally believe in Jesus?

The Lord Comes and Reigns (Zechariah 14)**Lessons for Disciples**

1. Rather than mere outward worship, God desires a repentant and humble heart that worships him in spirit and in truth. Too often, our worship is evaluated by what it does for us (makes us feel good, feeds us, etc.). Rather, worship needs to be towards God, and evaluated by how we come before him with humility and sincerity of heart. Our goal is to please God, not ourselves (Zechariah 7:4-7).
2. God calls us to ethical righteousness – true justice for the weakest in our society and an attitude of mercy and compassion rather than exploitation (Zechariah 7:8-10; 8:16-17).
3. Even when we are not under oath, we are also called to truthful speech with one another (Zechariah 8:16-17), rather than deceit.
4. We are to carry God's word to the Gentiles, those who don't know Jesus. As a result, they will begin to flow towards Jerusalem – an End Time prophecy and a theme of both Old and New Testaments (Zechariah 8:20-23).
5. As the King enters Jerusalem gently and humbly, riding on a donkey, so we are to exhibit a character of gentleness and humility (Zechariah 9:9-10).
6. God is concerned about leaders protecting his people from oppression, rather than oppressing them (Zechariah 10-11). We are not to be leaders who domineer over people, but to serve them.
7. Zechariah contains a number of prophecies of the Messiah, which are fulfilled in Jesus, encouraging us that God keeps his word, even if it doesn't find fulfillment in our lifetimes (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1, 7).

8. Zechariah reminds us of the New Testament prophecies of the Last Day – of battles, of judgments, and of the final place of peace in the New Heavens and the New Earth, themes that are echoed in the final chapters of Revelation (Zechariah 14:8-9).

5. Confession and Repentance (Ezra 7-10)

Ezra the Priest, Scribe, and Administrator (Ezra 7:1-10)

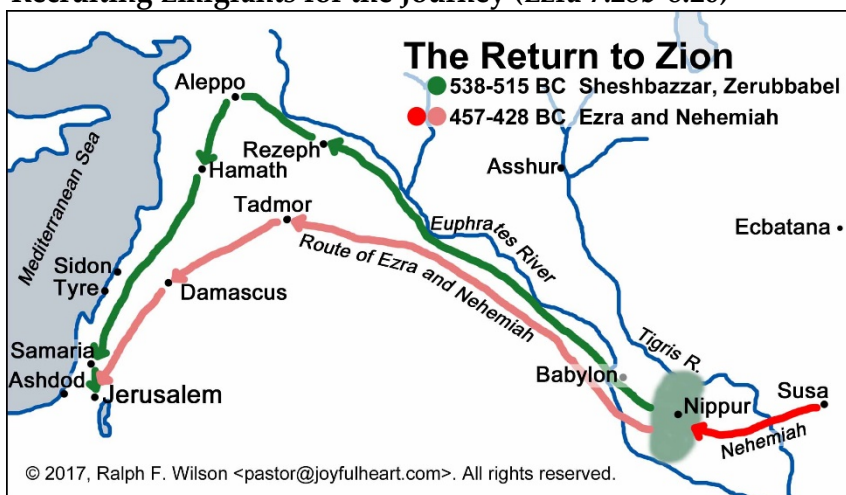
1. Priest
2. Babylonian birth
3. Scribe
4. Courageous Leader
5. Person of Faith
6. Civil Administrator

Ezra Comes to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7)

King Artaxerxes' Letter to Ezra (Ezra 7:11-28)

1. **Emigration** (verse 13)
2. **Official inquiry** (verse 14)
3. **Transmit money** (verses 15-19)
4. **Royal treasury** (verses 19-22)
5. **Prayer**
6. **Waiver of taxation** (verse 24)
7. **Governance** (verses 25-26)

Recruiting Emigrants for the Journey (Ezra 7:28b-8:20)



Route of the Return

Fasting and Prayer at the Ahava Canal (Ezra 8:21-23)

Q1. (Ezra 8:21-23) Why does Ezra call the people to fast? Does fasting compel God to answer our prayers? What does fasting accomplish in us?

Measures to Protect from Embezzlement (Ezra 8:24-30, 33-34)

Q2. (Ezra 8:24-30, 33-34) Why does Ezra weigh out the gold and silver vessels when he entrusts them to individuals, and weigh them again when they are delivered to the temple? Is this an act of distrust? If not, why are steps to prevent embezzlement good for Christian organizations?

Safe Journey (Ezra 8:15-36)

Intermarriage between Faiths (Ezra 9)

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Spiritual Purity

“Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.” (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)

Ezra’s Reaction (Ezra 9:3-4)

Q3. (Ezra 9:3-4) How does Ezra react when he hears of the sin of intermarriage? Does he react for show? Does he over-react? Why does he grieve over the sins of the people? What is wrong with us if we don’t grieve over the sins of God’s people?

Ezra’s Prayer Posture (Ezra 9:5-6a)

- **“Praying”** is *pālal*, “intervene, interpose, pray,” used especially of intercessory prayer, where one person pleads before God on behalf of others.
- **“Confessing”** is *yādā*, “to confess,” to convey the acknowledgment or confession of sin, individually or nationally.
- **“Weeping”** is *bākā*, “to weep by reason of joy or sorrow, the latter including lament, complaint, remorse or repentance.” It is the natural and spontaneous expression of strong emotion. This is the weeping of repentance at having offended God. In the Near East culture it is probably accompanied by loud wailing.
- **“Throwing himself down”** is *nāpal*, “fall, lie, be cast down.” I picture this as Ezra’s initial reaction to the news. He falls immediately to the ground before the temple and kneeling, begins to pray, confess, and wail for Israel’s sins.

Ezra’s Corporate Confession (Ezra 9:6b-7)

The People’s Response (Ezra 10:1-6)

Q4. (Ezra 10:2-4) Do you think Shecaniah’s solution to the people’s sin of intermarriage was from God? Can you think of any other examples in the Bible of prophetic “words of wisdom” directing God’s people at crisis points? How do the people respond to Shecaniah’s radical solution? How does Ezra implement it?

Implementing the Oath (Ezra 10:7-44)

The Morality of Putting Away Non-Jewish Wives and Children

Lessons for Disciples

1. Ezra exercises gifts as a priest, as a teacher and scribe, as a recruiter, as a leader, as a man of faith, and as a civil administrator. Multi-gifted people like him can be used powerfully in the Kingdom of God. Are you one of these? Perhaps you can encourage someone you know like this to use his or her gifts to serve God.
2. Ezra calls people to fast, especially when they face a crisis. Fasting helps us humble ourselves before God, so we are more able to hear him when he speaks, and obey him when the path is clear. It helps us understand our complete reliance upon God (Ezra 8:21).
3. Ezra lives out his testimony about his faith. Since he has boasted about God’s greatness to Artaxerxes, he doesn’t feel he can ask for an armed escort, so he seeks God earnestly for help, and God hears. People have to see us practice what we preach (Ezra 8:21-23).

4. It is wise for churches and Christian groups to take steps to avoid the temptation to embezzle money (Ezra 8:24-30, 33-34).
5. We must take sin seriously. Sin in the body of Christ (or in our own lives) should cause deep grief within us (Ezra 9:3-4).
6. We are free to pray with a posture that is appropriate to the prayer. Ezra prayed on his knees with hands spread out to God, head bowed (Ezra 9:5-6).
7. When we pray for a people of whom we are part, we shouldn't confess *their* sins, but confess *our* sins. Ezra intercedes as a mediator, a priest, between his people and God (Ezra 9:6-7). While in the New Testament all are priests (1 Peter 2:5), there is still a need for some to lead the group in prayer and confession before God.
8. Ezra's sincere and earnest prayer sparks a spontaneous revival among his hearers (Ezra 10:1). Revival and renewal often begin with the example of others. People imitate us as we imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).
9. The Holy Spirit moves one of the assembly to offer a solution to the community's problem of intermarriage (Ezra 10:2-4). When we seek God together, he can bring his answer through any who are open to his voice – and we must be humble enough to receive it.
10. Ezra used oaths to hold people to their commitments. In our day, leaders can use formal promises to serve the same function (Ezra 10:5).
11. Life is complicated. Instead of implementing an across-the-board rule, Ezra and his team met with each head-of-household individually to talk about his situation and help him figure out how best to implement separation from his wife and children. It is a good leadership example to follow in working with individuals personally (Ezra 10:16-17).
12. Intermarriage with unbelievers weakens our own lives and witness – and weakens the Christian community of which we are part. We Christians are forbidden to marry non-believers. But if we are now married to a non-believer, we must not divorce them if they want to live with us (Ezra 9-10; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, 39).

6. Nehemiah's Prayer (Nehemiah 1:1-2:8)

Nehemiah, the King's Cupbearer (Nehemiah 1:1)

Petitions to Xerxes and Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:7-23)

In Lesson 1, we skipped Ezra 4:7-23 because it had been inserted out of chronological order among passages discussing the return and rebuilding of the temple (538 to 515 BC). These verses include letters sent by the enemies of the Jews to two successive Persian Kings – first to Xerxes (486-465 BC) and then to Artaxerxes (465-424 BC).

| | |
|------------|--|
| 538 BC | The rebuilding begins |
| 520 BC | The rebuilding resumes after an 18-year hiatus |
| 486-465 BC | Letter to Xerxes, the Persian emperor who reigned 486-465 BC. He is the King Ahasuerus known from the story of Esther. |
| 460-454 BC | Artaxerxes I (reigned 465-424 BC) at war in Egypt against Pharaoh Inaros II and Greek allies to put down serious revolt against Persian domination. |
| 458 BC | Ezra receives authorization from Artaxerxes I authorizing him to take money and people to Jerusalem (Ezra 7). |
| 457-445 BC | Enemies' letter to Artaxerxes, presumably after Ezra's initial mission, in which Artaxerxes countermands his support of the Jews under Ezra. |
| 449 BC | Peace of Callias between Persia and the Greek city-states (Athens, etc.) that have been their opponents in the Mediterranean. |
| 445 BC | Nehemiah serves as cupbearer to Artaxerxes I, and in Nov/Dec 445 BC goes to Jerusalem to repair its walls (Nehemiah 1:1) with renewed authorization from Artaxerxes. |

Deeply Moved (Nehemiah 1:4)

Great and Awesome God (Nehemiah 1:5-6a)

Q1. (Nehemiah 1:1-6) Why does Nehemiah pray day and night for four months? Why does he fast and weep? Isn't that excessive?

Confession of Sins (Nehemiah 1:6b-7)

Reciting God's Promise to Moses (Nehemiah 1:8-9)

The Curse of Scattering (Nehemiah 1:8)

The Blessings of Obedience (Nehemiah 1:9a)

The Promise of Gathering (Nehemiah 1:9b)

The Dwelling Place of Your Name (Nehemiah 1:9b)

The Prayer of Your Servants (Nehemiah 1:10-11)

Q2. (Nehemiah 1:7-11) What is the basis of Nehemiah's appeal? How does he argue his case before God? What do we learn from this about intercession?

Nehemiah's Two Petitions (Nehemiah 1:11)

The Danger of Nehemiah's Request, Parallels with Esther (Esther 4:13-16)

Q3. (Nehemiah 1:11) In what way does Nehemiah's situation compare to Esther's? Why does God place his people in strategic positions today in the community, in business, in the military, in government? What responsibilities do we have to God that can cause danger to our positions and our lives? Has this ever happened to you? How do you pray in situations like this?

In the Presence of the King (Nehemiah 2:1-4)

An Arrow Prayer (Nehemiah 2:4)

Q4. (Nehemiah 2:4) What danger is Nehemiah in? Why does he pray quickly and silently before he answers the king? How does this quick "arrow prayer" relate to the four months of prayer he has just finished?

Request to Rebuild the City (Nehemiah 2:5-6)

Request for Protection, Letters of Introduction, and Resources (Nehemiah 2:7-8)

Lessons for Disciples

1. God can bring about reversal of the policies of superpowers to accomplish his purposes.
2. God has put on Nehemiah's heart the plight of his people. We can't solve the problems of every needy person in the world, but we are part of the solution for some. God will put some needs on our hearts. Sometimes we will feel God's sorrow and anguish for others and it may affect us deeply like it did Nehemiah – with weeping, sorrow, loss of appetite, fasting, humbling, and prayer.
3. Sometimes God sovereignly places us where we uniquely can help. He expects us to do our part where we're called.
4. As did Daniel, Nehemiah confesses the people's sins as his own.
5. Nehemiah appeals to God on the basis of his promises – in this case to restore his people to Jerusalem.
6. Nehemiah appeals to God on the basis of God's own Name and reputation.
7. Nehemiah appeals to God as a master on the basis of the needs of his servants.
8. Nehemiah prays for four months until it is time to bring the matter to the king. We must be patient in prayer and sensitive to the Lord's leading.
9. Nehemiah prays both at length in private and in brief spurts as the crisis unfolds.
10. Nehemiah acts on the basis of his prayer, willing to put himself in personal danger in order to see God's will accomplished.

7. Restoring the Wall (Nehemiah 2:9-7:73)

Consternation among Judah's Enemies (Nehemiah 2:9-10)

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls (Nehemiah 2:11-16)

Nehemiah Reveals His Plan (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

Nehemiah explains:

1. Enemies
2. Leadership
3. Materials
4. Labor

Enemy Reactions (Nehemiah 2:19-20)

Which Walls Were Rebuilt in Nehemiah's Time?

Builders of the Wall (Nehemiah 3)

Rebuilding the Gates

A gate system would have a beam that supports the masonry above the gate opening. A pair of doors swing on projections that fit into sockets in the sill and lintel. The gates are made of heavy planks, perhaps plated with metal to keep them from burning (Psalm 107:16; Isaiah 45:2). The gate is locked at night with one or two large bars that are fitted into clamps on the doors. Above each gate are towers where defenders can rain down arrows, rocks, and perhaps fire upon attackers.

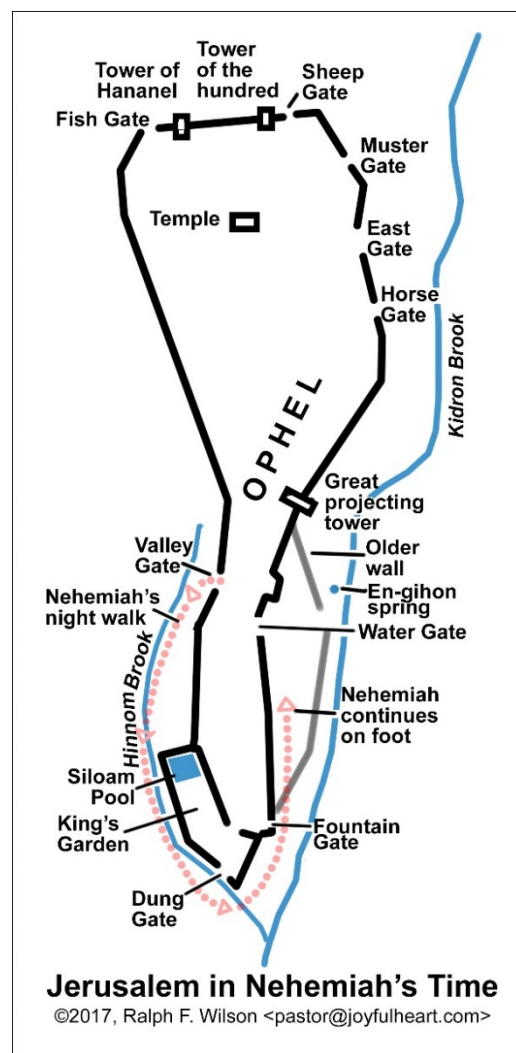
Project Management

1. Assessing the task (2:11-16).
2. Communicating his vision of the completed wall (Nehemiah 6:17-19)
3. Dividing the task into manageable sections.
4. Recruiting leaders for each section, 41 in all.
5. Gathering materials
6. Training and Direction
7. Building a Management Team
8. Ongoing management of people and problems
9. Security (4:16-21)

Why try to build the wall all at once rather than in pieces, one at a time?

1. Security.
2. Forestalling appeals

Q1. (Nehemiah 3) Why does Nehemiah need to build the walls quickly? Why does he assign so many teams? What motivates these teams? What kinds of problems would Nehemiah need to solve with so many teams working simultaneously?



Opposition to Rebuilding (Nehemiah 4)

1. **Sanballat the Horonite.** Sanballat leads the Samaritan opposition. According to an Aramaic papyrus from Elephantine, he is governor of the Persian province of Syria. Sanballat I is contemporary with Nehemiah, about 444 BC. Later, the son of Jehoiada marries his daughter (Nehemiah 13:28).
2. **Tobiah the Ammonite official.** Tobiah seems to be of Jewish descent and has close ties to the temple and Jewish nobility. Many influential people are bound to him by oaths (Nehemiah 6:17-19), making him particularly dangerous, since he has a lot to lose from Nehemiah's reforms. He also occupies a chamber in the temple precincts during Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:4-9), threatens military raids against Jerusalem while the walls were being built (Nehemiah 4:7-9), and seeks to lure Nehemiah out of the city to assassinate him (Nehemiah 6:1-3).
3. **Geshem the Arab** seems to be the chief of an Arabian tribe that has settled in the area (Nehemiah 2:19; 6:1-2, 6). His name appears on a silver vessel about 40 years after Nehemiah's time. Apparently, Geshem and his son rule a league of Arabian tribes that have taken control of Moab and Edom, to the south and east of Judah.

Taunts from the Enemies (Nehemiah 4:1-6)

Threat of Attack (Nehemiah 4:7-9)

Discouragement and Fear (Nehemiah 4:10-13)

Reinforcing the Low Points, Encouraging Faith (Nehemiah 4:13-14)

Citizen Soldiers (Nehemiah 4:16-23)

Rebuilding the Walls of Our Lives

2 Corinthians 2:10-11; Ephesians 6:10-13

Q2. (Nehemiah 4) How does Nehemiah respond to his enemies' ridicule? How does Nehemiah respond to military threats? What effect does this have on construction? How does Nehemiah respond to discouragement and fear in the people? How do you respond to discouragement and fear? What "walls" need to be rebuilt in your life to protect you from temptation and sin?

Dealing with Greed and Disregard for the Poor (Nehemiah 5:1-18)

1. Slavery
2. Mortgage Defaults
3. High taxes
4. Lack of compassion

Loans and Usury in Mosaic Law

Exodus 22:25; cf. Leviticus 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 15:7-8; 23:19-20a

Nehemiah:

1. **Buys back Jews sold into slavery to Gentiles** (verses 8-9)
2. **Demands the end of high interest rates** (verse 10)
3. Demands the **return of confiscated lands** to their original owners (verse 11a)
4. Demands the **refund of excessive interest** (verse 11b)
5. **Cuts taxes** required to support the governor (verses 14-19)
6. **Pronounces a curse** on those who don't comply (verse 13a)

Foregoing the Governor's Rights (Nehemiah 5:14-19)

Q3. (Nehemiah 5) Why doesn't Nehemiah wait until he isn't so busy to deal with the complaints of the poor who are being oppressed? What is the chief motivation of their oppressors? How does Nehemiah deal with the issue? Why are church leaders sometimes quicker to deal with the complaints of the wealthy than those of the poor? What motivates these leaders?

A Plan to Assassinate Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:1-9)

A Plot to Lead Nehemiah into Sin (Nehemiah 6:10-14)

Attempt to Compromise Nehemiah's Integrity (Nehemiah 6:13)

Q4. (Nehemiah 6:1-14) Why do Nehemiah's enemies want him to travel away from Jerusalem? Why do his enemies bribe the prophets? How are they hoping to hurt Nehemiah's integrity, will, and authority? How is your enemy trying to make you stumble?

Completion of the Wall in 52 Days (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

Tobiah's Ongoing Influence among the Nobility (Nehemiah 6:17-19)

A Summary of Opposition Tactics

1. False accusations (Nehemiah 2:19; 6:5-9).
2. Ridicule (Nehemiah 4:1-3).
3. Devious attempts to be included in the project so they can subvert it from within (Ezra 4:1-3; Nehemiah 2:20).
4. Appeal to higher authorities to stop the project (Ezra 4:5).
5. Bluffs.
6. Rumors to instill fear (Ezra 4:4; Nehemiah 4:11-12).
7. Temptations to sin in order to undermine moral authority (Nehemiah 6:10-11).
8. False prophecies or supposed "words from God" (Nehemiah 6:12-14).
9. Threats and plots to physically incapacitate Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4:7-8; 6:1-4).
10. Plots to distract his attention (Nehemiah 6:3).
11. Disloyalty among Nehemiah's own team (Nehemiah 6:17-19).

Securing Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:1-3)

List of the Exiles Who Returned (Nehemiah 7:4-73)

Lessons for Disciples

This passage is rich in lessons for modern-day disciples.

1. Nehemiah inspects the wall and prepares his strategy prior to announcing his plans. We learn from this to keep our own counsel (or with a small group of advisors) until our plans are complete. Only then should we share them with the larger group. If we share half-baked plans, it gives our opposition all they need to stop us (Nehemiah 2:11-16). This is especially true of leaders new to an organization.
2. In any great God-inspired work we can expect opposition. Having enemies doesn't mean you're out of God's will; rather, it may even be an indication that you *have* heard from God.
3. Nehemiah involves people in the project who will be motivated by their own self-interest. We need to build coalitions of people to implement projects. This often takes time, but is essential to success (Nehemiah 3).
4. In any God-inspired project we can expect some people in our organizations to be opposed or to refuse to help (Nehemiah 3:5). Don't wait to act until you have complete unanimity; find God's will and then go forward.

5. Prayer should be combined with action, whenever possible. Taking God-guided action, doesn't mean you lack faith in God's ability to answer prayer. Rather, it is a willingness to allow God to use you as part of the answer (Nehemiah 4:9).
6. In any great God-inspired project we can expect discouragement and apprehension among our workers, and will need to deal with it (Nehemiah 4:10-15).
7. Leaders must be willing to adapt their original plans to meet unforeseen circumstances (Nehemiah 4:16-18). German military strategist Helmuth von Moltke (1800-1891) famously said, "No battle plan survives contact with the enemy."
8. Every great God-inspired work needs to take into account security (Nehemiah 4:16-21). Since we are in a spiritual battle, this probably means intercessory prayer teams and the like.
9. Rebuilding Jerusalem's defenses so the enemy cannot control us is analogous to us building up spiritual defenses against Satan's temptations, so he cannot keep us weak (Ephesians 6:10-13).
10. God opposes anything that oppresses the poor – including high interest rates and injustice. We must resist the temptation to greed (unjust gain) at the expense of others (Nehemiah 5:1-18). The underlying issues are injustice and a lack of compassion.
11. Nehemiah uses public shaming to force greedy Jews to change their ways (Nehemiah 5:7-12). This can work if the leader has enough influence, but we must be very careful in adopting this tactic so that it will not backfire.
12. Nehemiah sets an example by foregoing his rights to financial support (Nehemiah 5:14-19), just as does the Apostle Paul centuries later (1 Corinthians 9:3-23). Leaders should set an example of self-sacrifice, not of privileged rights and luxury. Unfortunately, some proponents of the Prosperity Gospel neglect this principle.

8. Repentance and Revival (Nehemiah 8-13)

Ezra Reads the Law (Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18)

Communicating Understanding (Nehemiah 8:7-8)

Understanding, Sorrow, and Repentance (Nehemiah 8:9-11)

Repentance and Joy (Nehemiah 8:9-11)

The Joy of the Lord Is Your Strength (Nehemiah 8:10b)

Celebrate with Great Joy (Nehemiah 8:12)

Q1. (Nehemiah 8:1-12) Why does the reading of Scripture bring such sorrow to the people? Why is Scripture reading so important in personal spiritual revival? What place does the Spirit have in this? What is the relationship between joy and faith in God's compassion and love?

Celebrating the Feast of Booths (Nehemiah 8:13-18)

The Israelites Confess Their Sins (Nehemiah 9:1-37)

A Summary of Israel's History (Nehemiah 9:7-35)

1. God makes a covenant with Abraham (verses 7-8).
2. God delivers Israel from Egypt (verses 9-11).
3. God's provides food, water, and the Law in the wilderness (verses 12-15).
4. Israel sins terribly, but God still forgives (verses 16-18).
5. God's compassion and grace are shown to Israel (verses 19-21).
6. Through God they possess the land of Canaan (verses 22-25).
7. Again Israel sins, but God does not forsake them (verses 26-31).
8. Our hardships are God's just punishments (verses 32-35).

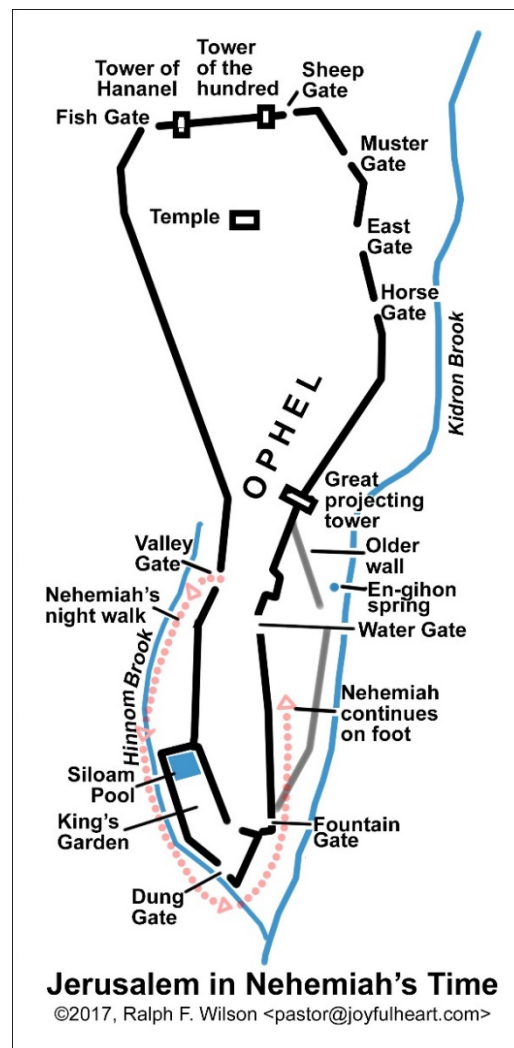
Yahweh, the Gracious and Compassionate God (Nehemiah 9:17)

Q2. (Nehemiah 9:7-35) Why is God's compassion emphasized so strongly in Israel's history? How can God's compassion be present even in times of tough discipline (Hebrews 12:7-11)? How does the compassionate God of the Old Testament relate to Jesus giving himself as a ransom for sinners (Mark 10:45)?

We Are Slaves Today (Nehemiah 9:36-37)

The Agreement of the People (Nehemiah 9:38-10:39)

1. No intermarriage with non-Jews (verse 30; Exodus 34:12-16).
2. No buying or selling on the Sabbath (verse 31a).
3. Letting the land lie fallow in the seventh year (verse 31b, Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 25:4-7, 20-22).



4. Cancelling all debts in the seventh year (verse 31c).
5. Giving a 1/3 shekel tax to maintain the temple and its services (verses 32-33, Exodus 30:11-16).
6. Staffing the temple with priests and Levites, as determined by lot (verse 34a).
7. Bringing wood for the altar, as determined by lot (verse 34b).
8. Bringing firstfruits of crops and fruit trees to the temple (verses 35, 37a).
9. Redeeming firstborn sons, and sacrificing the firstborn of livestock (verse 36).
10. Tithing 1/10th of crops to the Levites to support the Levites and the priesthood (verses 37b-38; Numbers 18:26).

The New Residents of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:1-24)

Jewish Towns and Lists of Priests (Nehemiah 11:25-12:26)

Preparing and Purifying the Singers, Instrumentalists, and Priests (Nehemiah 12:27-30)

Grand Processions on the Wall (Nehemiah 12:31-43)

Rejoicing in the Temple (Nehemiah 12:40-43)

Appointing Storeroom Superintendents (Nehemiah 12:44-47)

The Collapse of a Genuine Revival (Nehemiah 13)

The High Priest's Unfaithfulness (Nehemiah 13:1-5, 7b-9)

Allowing the Enemy into the Center of our Lives

Q3. (Nehemiah 13:1-5, 7-9) Does God set higher standards for leaders than for others? If so, why? What results in the people when leaders become corrupt? How can you keep this from happening to you? If God shows you corruption within, how can you recover from it?

Failure to Support God's House and Its Services (Nehemiah 13:10-14)

Desecrating the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15)

Intermarriage with Non-Jews (Nehemiah 13:23-29)

The Covenant of the Priesthood (Nehemiah 13:29)

All Christians are included in a "priesthood of believers" (1 Peter 2:5). But pastors and church leaders have special spiritual privileges before God – a God-given authority, a higher standard, and obligations of faithfulness (1 Timothy 5:17-20; James 3:1; Luke 12:47-48; 1 Corinthians 4:2; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 3:13).

Nehemiah's Disappointment (Nehemiah 13:30-31)

Q4. (Nehemiah 13:30-31) How should you respond when the people you are ministering to disappoint you? How must you treat them? What must you do to sustain your own faith and spiritual momentum in times of discouragement?

Discipleship Lessons

There are many spiritual lessons in these chapters.

1. Scripture reading – while communicating understanding of what is read – can be effective in bringing personal and corporate revival (Nehemiah 7:73b-8:18).
2. Scripture can cause grief and sorrow that leads to repentance (Nehemiah 7:9).
3. The joy of the Lord is an indicator of our faith in and love for Jesus – and thus is our strength (Nehemiah 8:9-11).
4. God's grace and compassion allow us to exist before him. These flow from his essential character revealed to Moses – "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and

faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exodus 34:6b-7a; Nehemiah 9:17).

5. Signing a covenant can deepen the impression of our decision in us – though the Israelites don’t long enforce and keep the covenants they had sworn to (Nehemiah 9:38-10:39).
6. Grand celebrations, like the celebration at the completion of the wall, remind us of God’s faithfulness (Nehemiah 12:31-43).
7. Leaders like Nehemiah can expect to be disappointed. Unless it is continually reinforced and led forward, a corporate body can atrophy and begin to decline (Nehemiah 13). One of the great challenges of church leaders today is to look forward, not back, to find the new great thing God has for the congregation.
8. God sets a higher standard for leaders, for people use them as a sort of standard of what is expected of them. When leaders like Eliashib the high priest are corrupt, they destroy the standard of holiness for the entire people (Nehemiah 13:1-5, 7b-9).
9. Failure to support the temple through tithes and offerings results in a drastic reduction of ministry (Nehemiah 13:10-14). The same is true of the church.
10. The priesthood is a core part of God’s covenant with his people. To be a priest or Levite is a high calling. Today, it is a high calling to be a pastor, elder, deacon – whatever you call them in your congregation. The church leadership, like the priesthood, needs to be purified from everything “foreign” (Nehemiah 13:29-31)

9. Love, Worship, and Marriage (Malachi 1-2)

Oracle 1. Jacob Loved, Esau Hated (Malachi 1:1-5)

Oracle 2. Sincere Worship (Malachi 1:6-14)

Showing Contempt for God (Malachi 1:6-10)

Attacking God's Reputation (Malachi 1:12-13)

A Curse on Those Who Cheat God (Malachi 1:14)

Q1. (Malachi 1:6-14) How were the people and priests disrespecting God with regard to offering sacrifices? In what ways do we today disrespect God in our attitudes toward worship, in giving to God, and in regard to holy things? What is God saying to you personally as you ponder this?

Admonition for the Priests (Malachi 2:1-9)

The Covenant with Levi (Malachi 2:4-8)

In Defense of Fearing God

Jesus' teaching (Luke 12:5; Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5), the fearsome visions of the Book of Revelation, Paul's writings (2 Corinthians 5:10-11; 1 Timothy 5:20) the warnings of Peter (2 Peter 2:4-22; 3:10-14), and of the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 12:27-30).

Q2. (Malachi 2:5; 1 John 4:18) What does it mean to "fear God" in Old Testament days? Should we "fear God" now, as Christian believers? How does fear of God interface with our love for God? How does our love change the fear?

Teaching Priests (Malachi 2:6)

The Ideal Priest (Malachi 2:6-8)

1. Offering true instruction (verse 6a, 7b).
2. Walking with God in peace and uprightness (verse 6b).
3. Turning many from sin (verse 6c).
4. Serving as messengers of Yahweh (verse 7b).
5. Preserving and guarding knowledge (verse 7a).

Q3. (Malachi 2:1-9) In what ways do church pastors and teachers fall heir to the role of "teaching priests"? Which of the roles of teaching priests do you see as most vital in your situation?

Oracle 3. Judah Unfaithful in Marriage Vows (Malachi 2:10-16)

Breaking God's Covenant (Malachi 2:10)

Marriage with Non-Jewish Women (Malachi 2:11-12)

Breaking the Marriage Covenant by Divorce (Malachi 2:13-16)

1. Marriage is a covenant (Malachi 2:14d).
2. God is Witness to the marriage covenant (Malachi 2:14a).
3. Divorce is a "breaking faith" with your spouse (Malachi 2:14b, 15d, 16d).
4. We are God's property by creation (Malachi 2:15a)
5. God makes husband and wife one in body and spirit (Malachi 2:15a).
6. God's interest in marriage is raising godly offspring (Malachi 2:15b).

7. God hates to see divorce (Malachi 2:16a).
8. God abhors marital violence (Malachi 2:16b).
9. The desire for divorce is a spiritual problem (Malachi 2:15c, 16d).
10. Divorce and marital violence hinder our prayers (Malachi 2:13)

Q4. (Malachi 2:13-16). What does Malachi teach us about marriage in this passage? Which two or three of these truths do you think would most help improve Christian marriages if applied today?

Lessons for Disciples

1. God loves us, even though we sometimes experience his discipline. Malachi points to how God has blessed Jacob (whom he “loves”), compared to Esau (whom he “hates”). The blessings of God protect us from a great deal that we aren’t even aware of (Malachi 1:1-5).
2. We owe God our respect – which shows in the sincerity by which we worship him (Malachi 1:6-14). To neglect sincere worship actually shows contempt for God.
3. The issue in Malachi’s day was offering diseased or crippled animals on the altar, rather than animals without blemish. Perhaps for us the application is that we must not offer God our second-best. Only our best will do for serving God (Malachi 1:6-14).
4. If we can’t worship God with truth and sincerity, then it’s better to close the church and not even go through the motions of worship (Malachi 1:9-10)
5. Offering our second-best is an offense to God. He is the Great King, not someone we can offend without risk of his curse, and the withholding of his blessings (Malachi 1:14).
6. God has made a covenant with Levi, that is, the priests and Levites have a prominent place in his Covenant, with responsibilities and privileges (Malachi 2:4-5). In our day, pastors and church leaders fill this role.
7. We are required to fear God, that is, to revere him, and be afraid to offend him (Malachi 2:5).
8. The pastors and church leaders of the New Covenant, are heirs of the “teaching priests” of the Old Covenant. We are called to offer true instruction, walk sincerely with God, turn people from sin, serve as messengers of God, and preserve knowledge (Malachi 2:6-7).
9. God expects us to honor marriage by not marrying unbelievers, which he considers breaking faith with God’s covenant (Malachi 2:10-11).
10. From the passage on divorce we learn a number of things about marriage (Malachi 2:14-16).
 - a. Marriage is a covenant (14d).
 - b. God is Witness to this covenant (14a).
 - c. Divorce is “breaking faith” with the covenant you make with your spouse when you marry (14-16).
 - d. We are God’s property by creation – so he sets the rules of marriage (15a).
 - e. God makes husband and wife one in body and spirit (15a).
 - f. God desires us to have godly offspring (15b).
 - g. God hates to see divorce (16a).
 - h. God abhors marital violence (16b).
 - i. The desire for divorce is a spiritual problem (15c, 16d).
 - j. Divorce and marital violence hinder our prayers (13).

10. Justice, Tithing, Purifying, and Judgment (Malachi 3-4)

Oracle 4. Refining, Purifying, and Judgment (Malachi 2:17-3:6)

Day of Judgment (Malachi 2:17-3:6)

Unbelievers said:

1. God is pleased with you whether or not you obey him.
2. God isn't just.

The Two Messengers (Malachi 3:1)

1. The messenger who prepares the way (Luke 1:76; Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13; Isaiah 40:3-5)
2. The messenger of the covenant (Mark 1:15; Luke 22:19-20; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 9:15; Mark 10:45).

Refiner's Fire and Fullers' Soap (Malachi 3:2-5a)

Q1. (Malachi 3:1-5) For what purpose is the Messenger sent to prepare the way? What will the Messenger of the Covenant do? Why do God's people need refining and deep cleaning? How do you sense God wants to refine and cleanse you?

A Witness against Injustice (Malachi 3:5b)

The Immutable, Unchanging God (Malachi 3:6; Psalm 102:27; James 1:17)

God's Faithfulness to His Promises (Deuteronomy 9:5; 2 Timothy 2:11, 13)

Q2. (Malachi 3:6) Why should we rejoice that God doesn't change? We know that God's character doesn't change. But if he is immutable, unchangeable, how can he answer our prayers? Does prayer have any effect?

Oracle 5. Repent of Robbing God in Tithes and Offerings (Malachi 3:7-12)

Repent of Your Laxity and Drifting! (Malachi 3:7)

Robbing God in Tithes and Offerings (Malachi 3:7b-9)

An Invitation to Test Yahweh by Tithing (Malachi 3:10b)

1. Positive – God will provide an abundant blessing.
2. Negative – God will prevent destruction of what they have (Haggai 1:6, 9-11)
3. A reputation of being blessed.

Principles of Stewardship

1. Everything belongs to God (Psalm 24:1)
2. We are stewards, caretakers of what belongs to God (Genesis 2:15; Luke 19:11-29).
3. Tithing is a form of proportional giving.
4. There is a law of spiritual causality in operation.
5. You can't outgive God (Luke 6:38)

How Should We Apply the Principle of Tithing Today?

You might argue that we are the New Israel, but the New Testament is clear that we aren't under the Mosaic Law (Romans 6:14; 7:4-11; Galatians 3:23; 5:18).

1. Generosity towards the poor. Corinthians 8-9
2. Support for Christian leaders (1 Corinthians 9:5-18; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14/

How do we apply the principles in our day?

1. Use the tithe as a guideline, not a law. "To give less under grace than under law is a *disgrace*."
2. The blessings of the tithe are blessings for obedience.
3. Our giving reflects our love for God (Luke 7:47).
4. Our giving should support Christian workers as well as the poor.
5. Cheerful giving is the standard (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Q3. (Malachi 3:8-11) In our passage, why does God call people who neglect to tithe "robbers"? Why does he withhold blessing from those who don't fully tithe? Does the Old Testament law of the tithe obligate Christian believers to tithe? What principles of stewardship can we learn from this passage?

Oracle 6. Judgment of the Righteous and the Wicked (Malachi 3:13-4:6)

Cynicism of Unbelievers towards God (Malachi 3:13-15)

1. Serving God is pointless.
2. Serving God doesn't get me ahead.
3. The proud are those who should be admired or considered happy.
4. Law-breakers come out better than the righteous.
5. Those who defy God aren't punished.

(1 John 2:15-17)

Those Who Fear the Lord (Malachi 3:16-18)

The Book of Remembrance (Malachi 3:16b)

Genesis 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28; Philippians 4:3; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Revelation 13:18; 17:8; 21:27).

Yahweh's Precious People (Malachi 3:17)

The Distinction Will Be Clear (Malachi 3:18)

Q4. (Malachi 3:16-18) In what ways does it encourage us that God keeps a list of those who love him? That he considers us his own private and treasured possession? Do we deserve this? What effect should that knowledge have on us? What does it teach us about grace?

The Day of the Lord (Malachi 4:1)

- **The Day of Judgment** (Matthew 10:15; 11:22, 24; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:7).
- **The Day of the Lord** (Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2).
- **The Day of the Lord Jesus / Christ** (1 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 1:14; Philippians 1:6, 10)
- **The Great Day** (Jude 6).
- **The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord** (Joel 2:31; Malachi 4:5).
- **The Day or That Day** (Malachi 4:1; Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:4; Hebrews 10:25).
- **The Day of Wrath** (Zephaniah 1:15, 18; 2:2-3; Romans 2:5; Revelation 6:17; cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:10).

The Son of Righteousness with Healing in His Wings (Malachi 4:2-3)

The Prophet Elijah – a Brief Reprieve (Malachi 4:5-6). Turning the Hearts (Malachi 4:6)

Lessons for Disciples

1. People who scoff at God, with accusations that he doesn't care, doesn't see, doesn't exist, doesn't reward those who obey him, and doesn't punish evil, have been present for thousands of years (Malachi 2:17).

2. God's answer to the scoffers and unbelievers is to send two messengers: (a) the Messenger who prepares the way (John the Baptist), and (b) the Messenger of the Covenant (Jesus), who will suddenly come to his temple in judgment (Malachi 3:1).
3. The Messenger of the Covenant (Jesus) will come like white hot fire and strong caustic soap to refine his priests and Levites (Malachi 3:2-5).
4. On the Day of Judgment, God will judge all kinds of sinners: sorcerers, adulterers, liars, cheaters, and those who oppress the weak and helpless – all those who have no respect for Yahweh and his commands (Malachi 3:5).
5. God's character doesn't change, he is immutable. As a result, he keeps his promises to the Patriarchs by not destroying their descendants (Malachi 3:6).
6. God calls us to repent, to turn from our sins and turn back to him (Malachi 3:7).
7. God calls the Jews to stop robbing him by neglecting to offer the tithes and offerings to which he is due under the Covenant (Malachi 3:8-9).
8. God invites his people to test him by bringing the full tithe to the temple, and then observing the overwhelming blessings he will bring. These blessings are both positive (abundance) and negative (protection from destruction). (Malachi 3:10-11).
9. Principles of stewardship include:
 - a. Everything belongs to God (Psalm 24:1).
 - b. We are stewards of what belongs to God (Genesis 2:15; Luke 19:11-29).
 - c. Tithing is a form of proportional giving.
 - d. There is a law of spiritual causality in operation: blessings for obedience, curses
 - e. You can't outgive God (Luke 6:38).
10. We apply the principle of tithing through (a) generosity towards the poor, and (b) support for Christian leaders.
11. We apply the principles today in this fashion:
 - a. Use the tithe as a guideline, not a law.
 - b. The blessings of the tithe are blessings for obedience.
 - c. Our giving reflects our love for God (Matthew 6:21).
 - d. Our giving should support Christian workers as well as the poor.
 - e. Cheerful giving is the standard (2 Corinthians 9:7).
12. Malachi challenges the statements of cynics and unbelievers that serving God is pointless and unprofitable, that the proud should be admired, lawbreakers do better than the righteous, and that God doesn't punish the wicked (Malachi 3:13-15).
13. God keeps track of those who fear and love him in a "scroll of remembrance." They are his special personal possession that he treasures greatly (Malachi 3:16-17).
14. On Judgment Day the distinction between the righteous and wicked will be clear (Malachi 3:18).
15. Judgment Day, "the Day of the Lord," will bring fiery punishment for those who don't love God, but blessing and peace to those who trust him (Malachi 4:1-2).
16. God will send someone to come in the spirit of the Prophet Elijah (John the Baptist) before the Day of Judgment, to bring people to repentance and faith (Malachi 4:5-6).