

PART 1 – HISTORY OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE AND THE JEWISH EXILE:

- 1) **Introduction** – Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah were written with the context of God's people having returned to Jerusalem. God's unfaithful people have lived as slaves in exile for 70 years. This emerging from Persia was seen as being similar to the Exodus from Egypt with one major difference – in Egypt, God powerfully removed his people against Pharaoh's wishes; while in Persia, God moved the king's heart to not only release God's people but to also fund the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This is an important development of God's Grace... where God had hardened Pharaoh's heart to create a Jewish nation, He softened Cyrus' heart to create two nations not only open to but disposed to hear and obey God. This hopeful beginning is the essence behind the Historical-Prophetic writings of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and also Esther.

- 2) **The Historical Chronology** following the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and the resultant Jewish exile is as follows:
 - a) 559 BC – Cyrus became ruler of the Persians in the Capital city of Anshan.
 - b) 550 BC – Cyrus defeated Astyages king of Media in his capital city of Ecbatana, thus inheriting the Median Empire and founding the Achaemenid Empire.
 - c) 547 BC – Cyrus captured Sardis defeating the land of Lydian and its king, Croesus.
 - d) 539 BC – Cyrus captured Babylon where Belshazzar ruled the Neo-Babylonian Empire on behalf of Nabonidus.
 - e) 525 – Cambyses conquered Egypt.
 - f) 490 BC – Athens defeated the Persians at Marathon.
 - g) 480 BC – Greeks defeated the Persian fleet of Xerxes at Salamis and further defeats Plataea and Mycale in 479 BC.
 - h) 334 BC – Alexander the Great defeated the Persians under Darius III at Gaugamela, after earlier defeats at Granicus in 334 BC and Issus in 333 BC.
 - i) 323 BC – Alexander the Great died in Babylon.
 - j) The Persian Empire was the last empire of the Ancient Near East.

- 3) **Rulers of Persia** – The Achaemenid Kings traced their descent from Achaemenes, though Cyrus founded the Achaemenid Empire:
 - a) 539-530 BC – Cyrus the Great
 - b) 530 -522 BC – Cambyses
 - c) 521-486 BC – Darius I Hystaspes – another great leader, who lost the battle for Athens to the Greeks.
 - d) 486-465 BC – Xerxes Ahasuerus – also pursued Greece but was push back in failure.
 - e) Artaxerxes I Longimanus
 - f) 423-404 BC – Darius II Nothus

- g) 404-359 BC – Artaxerxes II Mnemon
- h) 358-338 BC – Artaxerxes III Ochus
- i) 337-336 BC – Arses
- j) 335-331 BC – Darius III Codomannus
- k) 334 BC – Alexander the Great launched a campaign against all the Ancient Near East cultures in succession. He pushed forward all the way to Afghanistan and effectively closed out the Persian Empire which was replaced by Greek Culture or Hellenism.

4) Important Cities of the Persian Empire:

- a) Pasargadae – Cyrus’ new capital built on the site of where he defeated Astyages of Media.
- b) Babylon
- c) Susa – one of the earliest cities in the Ancient Near East founded in 3,900 BC. Located at the strategic junction of the Mesopotamian and Iranian plateau. Became the capital of Elam that was destroyed by Assurbanipal in 646 BC. Darius I rebuilt Susa as the new capital of the Persian Empire at the terminus of the royal-road of Sardis-Susa. Captured by Alexander the Great in 331 BC.
- d) Ecbatana [Hamadan] was the capital of Media and the summer capital of the Persians.
- e) Persepolis – Darius I built several palaces at this city, whose use was continued by Xerxes and Artaxerxes I. The name came from the word “*Peresdiso*” from which we have the English word “Paradise.” A *Peresdiso* was a walled enclosure of a pleasure garden, with exotic plants and flowers, canals and ponds. This enclosed the “Kings Chamber” which was a massive structure supported by columns and roofed over being as much as 60 feet high, with expansive views to the surrounding *Peresdiso*.

- 5) Governmental Administration and Rule – when these empires grew and covered vast areas effective management of them was imperative. Darius divided the empire into 20 “*Satrapies*” [or jurisdictions] each headed by a *Satrap* [or governor]. Darius far flung empire was linked by an effective system of horse mounted messengers known as *Pirradazis*, an ancient near east version of the “Pony Express that the United States put in play prior to the stagecoach and train eras.

PART 2 – EZRA-NEHEMIAH:

- 1) Introduction – Ezra-Nehemiah are one scroll or book in the Hebrew Bible, just like Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are one book. Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah were written as the exile was coming to a close and God’s people were returning to the land. The Scripture that most motivated these writings was the Book of Deuteronomy written by Moses just

prior to God's people taking possession of the Land He promised them. The sense of a hopeful future provided by God permeates Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.

- a) The Book of Chronicles correctly precedes Ezra-Nehemiah as it describes events that occurred prior to Ezra-Nehemiah... although there is good evidence that the latter was probably written soon afterward.
- b) Ezra was a committed follower and teacher of the Law, and his focus on the Temple suggests he may have been a priest and certainly a prophet. Ezra's passion was to see God's people restore proper faith in the Land and at the Temple.
- c) Ezra likely wrote the book bearing his name and started Nehemiah, though Nehemiah likely finished the latter. There are differences in writing style and theology that indicate both Ezra and Nehemiah were involved both in the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple and in the documentation in the scroll bearing both their names.
 - i) The language used was primarily Aramaic with Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26 most likely being a report back to Cyrus.
 - ii) Regarding these texts, Zondervan's NIV Expository Commentary states life in exile had been a normalizing experience for the Jews:
 - (1) During this time some limited forms of worship were continued in the ruined area of the temple in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 41:5). The Scriptures themselves pass over developments in Palestine and stress the contribution of the returning exiles from Babylonia.
 - (2) In light of the fact that the intellectual and spiritual leaders were the ones who were deported, the Scriptures were preserved and new writings reflected the changed historical situation... their "New Normal."
 - (3) Judging from earlier Assyrian reliefs and texts, the men typically were marched in chains, with the women and children bearing sacks of their bare possessions on wagons as they made their way to Mesopotamia. This experience forcibly demonstrated their changed status as slaves to the empire. However, the exiled Judean king (Jehoiachin) was maintained at the Babylonian court and provided with regular rations (2 Kings 25:29-30).
 - (4) After several years of hardship, the exiles made the necessary adjustments and even prospered in exile (Jeremiah 29:4-5). They were settled in various communities on the Kebar River near Nippur, sixty miles southeast of Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1-3; cf. Ezra 2:59-Nehemiah 7:61). When the exiles returned to Jerusalem, they brought with them numerous servants and animals and were able to make contributions for the sacred services (Ezra 2:65-69; 8:26; Nehemiah 7:67-72).
 - (5) During the 70-year exile and with the birth of a second and a third generation in captivity, many Jews had established roots in Mesopotamia and wanted to

remain there. The spiritual life of the Jewish community in Mesopotamia is documented by Ezekiel, who was in exile either after 597 or 586. Ezekiel 8:1 refers to the prophet "sitting in my house and the elders of Judah were sitting before me" (cf. Ezekiel 3:15; 14:1; 20:1; 24:18; 33:30-33).

- (6) Deprived of the temple, the exiles laid great stress on the observation of the Sabbath, on the laws of purity, and on prayer and fasting. It has often been suggested that the development of "*Synagogues*" began in Mesopotamia during the Exile (Nehemiah 8:18). The trials of the Exile purified and strengthened the faith of the Jews and cured them of idolatry. [Not unlike the forty years of the Exodus in the Sinai had purged Egyptian Paganism from the Jews.]
- (7) The exiles who chose to return to Judah found their territory much diminished. The tiny enclave of Judah was surrounded by antagonistic neighbors. North of Bethel was the province of Samaria [what had been the northern kingdom of Israel]. South of Beth-Zur, Judean territory had been overrun by Idumaeans (cf. on Ezra 2:22-35). The eastern boundary followed the Jordan River, and the western boundary the Shephelah (low hills). The Philistine coast had been apportioned to Phoenician settlers. The Persians did make Judah an autonomous province with the right to mint its own coins.

2) Exile Chronology:

- a) Fall of Jerusalem – 587 BC.
- b) Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon – 539 BC.
- c) Cyrus' decree sending Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel to Jerusalem – 538 BC.
- d) Haggai and Zechariah exhort the people to resume building the Temple – 520 BC.
- e) Temple completed – 516 BC.
- f) Ezra returns to Jerusalem – 458 BC.
- g) Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem – 445 BC.
- h) Nehemiah returns to Artaxerxes – 433 BC.

3) Themes – from Zondervan's NIV Archaeological Study Bible:

- a) Two main themes dominate Ezra:
 - i) God's Sovereignty – God is shown as being sovereign over all peoples and kings of the earth. God controls history and orchestrates events and outcome to fulfill His own purposes in the unfolding of redemptive history. Destruction and exile are a means to an end for God in reconnecting the people and their faith.
 - ii) Restoration – Ezra describes the restoration of the Temple – 1:1; 6:22; 7:6,27 as well as the spiritual, moral-ethical, and social mores of the community – 9:1-10:44.

b) Three main themes dominate Nehemiah:

- i) Renewal** – rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem went hand-in-hand with renewal of the Mosaic Covenant, and the personal renewal of faith in God. After all their failures, a hopeful future now lay before God’s people in the Land as promised to Abraham and Moses... the call was to be reunited in faith to their God.
- ii) Prayer** – Nehemiah was a man of prayer and demonstrated leadership in reestablishing proper prayer life in the people.
- iii) Opposition** – the call and acts of renewal were initially met with opposition but was overcome with persistence and God’s intervention.

- 4) Comparison of Annual Calendars** – because the ancients were dependent upon agriculture, their calendars were typically a Spring-Planting – Fall-Harvest seasonal calendar and religious feasts usually accompanied this cycle. The Hebrew calendar is a lunar calendar based on a 365-day year, with the first month of the calendar being Spring or March-April, and with a 24-hour day cycle that begins at sundown. Some Ancient Near Eastern cultures actually had two New-Years... one starting in the Spring-planting cycle and the other starting in the Fall-harvest cycle. These differences obviously make reconciling seasons and years challenging... no less challenging than reconciling languages and meaning. The following is a name comparison of the 12 months in three cultures:

<u>Babylonian</u>	<u>Jewish</u>	<u>Julian</u>
Nisanu	Nisan	March-April
Aiaru	Iyyar	April-May
Simanu	Sivan	May-June
Duzu	Tammuz	June-July
Abu	Ab	July-August
Ululu	Elul	August-September
Tashritu	Tishri	September-October
Arahsamnu	Marhesvan	October-November
Kislimu	Kislev	November-December
Tebet	Tebeth	December-January
Shabatu	Shebat	January-February
Addaru	Adar	February-March

5) Structure and Discussion of Content:

a) Rebuilding the Temple – Ezra 1-6

i) The Exiles Return – 1-2

- (1) Cyrus’ Decree** – was issued in 538 BC fulfilling God’s prophecy through Jeremiah about returning to the Land after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-2) and 2 Chronicles 7:14 – “If My people who are called by My name humble themselves

and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

- (2) Cyrus the Great was a Persian King who is used as God’s chosen servant to realign God’s people as was done during the Exile in Egypt (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1, 13). Interesting that Zoroastrian Mono-Theism rose to prominence at this time. Zoroaster preached that God was locked in a deadly battle against evil, thus promoting religious harmony among the nations made sense to Cyrus. From a policy position, it was reasonable to understand that happy and content people were easier to rule.
 - (3) The Cyrus Cylinder [<http://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/persia/cyrus-cylinder.html>] discovered in excavations in 1879 and dated to 539-538 BC, it is written a declaration in [Akkadian cuneiform script](#) in the name of the Persian Empire’s Achaemenid king [Cyrus the Great](#) that validates the history presented in the Bible.
- ii) Preparations for Rebuilding – 1:5-11
- (1) God moved in the hearts of many to return to the Land to rebuild the Temple.
 - (2) God moved in Cyrus the Great to appoint “Sheshbazzar” which means “prince of Judah” as governor of the province. Sheshbazzar was the Empire’s Official and accompanied Zerubbabel the unofficial Jewish leader of the Davidic lineage. Judea was a small province and part of the Satrapy “beyond the Trans-Euphrates River.”
 - (3) The people were sent out with gold and silver... sounds like a second Exodus when the Hebrews were sent away with gold and silver from Egypt.
- iii) List of Prominent Returnees – 2
- (1) Years later Nehemiah found this list in the official Hebrew genealogical records (Nehemiah 7).
 - (2) The list provides a symbolic 12 that furthers the idea of a second Exodus led by Zerubbabel, the grandson of king Jehoiachin – 2:2a lists eleven but Nehemiah 7:7 lists twelve.
 - (3) The laity are listed by family name 2:3-20, and by hometown 2:21-35.
 - (4) People of unproven ancestry – 2:59-60, and priests – 2:61-63. All the others had official tribal ancestry records.
- iv) Rebuilding of the Temple – 3-6
- (1) Altar Restored – Sacrifices Resumed for first time since 587 BC – 3:1-6.
 - (2) Rebuilding of the Temple – 3:7-6:22
 - (a) 3:7-13 - Building commenced with many parallels to Solomon’s and Zerubbabel’s Temple projects. Priests and Levites praised God, but the

people had a mixed response – the younger folks rejoiced, but the older folks having seen the old Temple wept.

(b) 4:1-24 – Opposition arises –

(i) Vs 1-2 – offer of help from enemies of Judah had settled in Samaria and elsewhere in the Trans-Euphrates. These people would later be identified as Samaritans who were of mixed descent even though many continued to worship the One God, while others turned to Paganism and a syncretistic combination of Pagan and Yahweh worship.

(ii) Vs 3 – Zerubbabel rejected their offer.

(iii) Vs 4 – some worked to frustrate the building project. Some counseled the king against the project.

(iv) Vs 5 – This undermining continued through much of Cyrus' reign and into the reign of Darius (521-486 BC).

(v) Vs 6 – Early in Xerxes' reign an accusation was lodged against the effort.

(vi) Vs 7 – in the reign of Artaxerxes a letter was written denouncing the project.

(vii) Vs 8-16 – a second letter was written to Artaxerxes claiming the Jew's intent of rebellion.

(viii) Vs 17-22 – Artaxerxes confirms from the archives that the Jews had a history of rebellion and stops the rebuilding of the walls. Work remained stopped until the second year of Darius reign – 520 BC.

(c) 5:1-2 – the building effort resumes. The word of the Lord had come to Haggai and Zechariah... "It is not by might and not by power but by the Word of the Lord." At this time the Jews were a small population surrounded by a huge sea of opposition from the Persian Empire. They were discouraged but looked to God for their rescue.

(d) 5:3-6:12 – Opposition resumes –

(i) Vs 5:7-17 – Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates sends letter to Darius to search the archives for Cyrus' decree.

(ii) Vs 6:2-12 – Working through the proper channels they find the decree and work is authorized to resume.

(e) 6:13-15 – the Temple is completed... in 515 the Temple is completed in accord with both Divine and human rulers

(f) 6:16-18 – the Temple is dedicated.

(g) 6:19-22 – The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread are celebrated.

b) Ezra's Return – 7:10 – Ezra is a true descendant of Aaron... he is both Priest of Yahweh and Scribe official of the king's court... thus a senior government official of Judah. Ezra is an abbreviation of "Azariah" meaning "God has helped."

- i) **Priest – 7:2-62** – this lengthy genealogy is to establish without question Ezra’s credentials as priest. He is making his case against those who make the claim to be priest but cannot demonstrate their hereditary record to support their claim.
- ii) **Scribe:**
 - (1) **7:6** – He is well versed in the Law of Moses.
 - (2) **7:10** – He has devoted himself to the study, action, and teaching of the Law.
 - (3) **7:11** – He is learned in the commands and decrees of the Lord.
 - (4) **Evolution of the Scribal role:**
 - (a) Before Judah was exiled, the scribe was a secretary... a governmental official.
 - (b) During and after the exile, the scribe was a student and teacher of the Law and preserved the documents of the nation including the Law.
 - (c) In the Herod “second Temple” period the scribes were of great importance along with the Sadducees [Temple magistrates] and Pharisees [Synagogue leaders].
 - (5) Zondervan’s Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible states regarding Ezra and the scribal role:
 - (a) Ezra marked the watershed for the later development of the understanding of “scribe.” Indeed, the transition is already suggested in the Book of Ezra: in the royal decree (7:12-26) “scribe” is used in an administrative sense, but in the narrative (7:6, 11) the term already refers to Ezra as a scribe who, by reason of his learning is capable of interpreting the law for the common people. Moreover, by his priestly lineage (7:6) he symbolized the close connection between the priesthood and this official interpretation of the law which existed until the 2nd century BC. This connection appears to be the continuation of the association between the scribal and cultic functions of an earlier day. By the Persian Emperor’s royal decree, the law of Moses was made civilly binding on Jews living “*Beyond the River*,” meaning West of the Euphrates in the Trans-Euphrates region 7:25ff.). The essential task of interpreting Moses’ law so that it could function in this new civil capacity was given to the priesthood (Ezra) and the Levites (cf. Nehemiah 8:6-9).
 - (b) The New Testament is the last witness to the usage of “scribe” as a scholar and authority on the law. “Scribes” are found in connection both with the priestly party – the Sadducees (e.g., Matthew 2:4; 21:15), and the Pharisees party (cf. Matthew 23) who were the scholars and leaders of what was to become rabbinic Judaism.
- iii) **Artaxerxes Official Letter – 7:12-26** – was written in Aramaic, and was royal authorization to go to Jerusalem and investigate the spiritual state of the people.

- iv) Ezra's "Doxology" 7:27-9:15 – meaning both the verbal and nominal forms associated with the uttering of praise in general (*doxologia*). Note that Ezra's doxology is in the "first person" form of writing... it is essentially the beginning of Ezra's memoirs.
- v) List of Returnees – 8
 - (1) 1:1-14 – Family heads listed.
 - (2) 21-23 - Fasting at *Ahava Canal* to seek God's protection.
- c) Rebuilding the Community – 9-10
 - i) Problem of Intermarriage – 9
 - (1) Marriage in Scripture is seen as the integration in life-long yoking together of a man and a woman with a common foundation of Spiritual Life, world-view, moral and ethical values, physical life, family life, etc. At the heart of the relationship is the co-dependence of man and woman in their relationship with God and each other. Although Scripture calls this being "one flesh" in Genesis 2:24, marriage is much more than that. It is being yoked together and becoming relationally *one* in every meaningful and tangible way, including inward [personal identity] and outward [world-view].
 - (2) Zondervan's New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words says this about being yoked together – "The yoke is a powerful symbol in the Bible. It refers to a cattle or oxen yoke, which bound two animals to a plow, so they could work in tandem. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul speaks of being 'yoked together with unbelievers.' In such a dissimilar relationship there can be no foundational agreement or harmony, and it is to be avoided. This verdict was prefigured in Old Testament Law, which forbids mating different kinds of animals (Leviticus 19:19) and even plowing with an ox and a donkey together (Deuteronomy 22:10). In the New Testament Paul called his co-laborers in the gospel his 'true yoke-fellows' (Philippians 4:3). For Paul it is inconceivable that any enterprise calling for total unity of heart and purpose can be achieved in mixing believers and unbelievers." This is the context for the problem of intermarrying presented here and elsewhere in Scripture.
 - (3) For more on this important topic go to this article on the AD website - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Maturity/SF%202.3%20-%20Marriage%20and%20Transformation.pdf>
 - ii) 9:1-4 – Leaders approach Ezra on the problem of intermarriage, which he presented as unfaithfulness to God. Note that Ezra pulls out his own hair in debasement – 9:3, while in contrast Nehemiah pulls out the hair of others – Nehemiah 13:25.

- iii) 9:5-15 – Ezra’s Prayer – In verse 9:8 the concept of a ‘remnant’ is particularly meaningful, as God has always preserved some among the large faithless crowd who have held true to Him.
 - (1) Though Ezra is not personally guilty here, he identifies with the people’s sin.
 - (2) Ezra provides an example of leadership in his self-abasement that stuns the people and turns their hearts toward God.
 - iv) 10:1 – The people’s response is grief.
 - v) 10:2 – The people confess their sin.
 - vi) 10:3-17 – The call for renewal of the Covenant in the Land, renounce the Covenant and be cut off from the Land.
 - vii) 10:18-44 – the list of those guilty of intermarriage is astonishing including leaders and Levites. The people are to repent and separate themselves from their sin and renew the covenant with Yahweh.
- d) Nehemiah’s Return – Nehemiah 1:1-7:72
- i) 1:1-3 – Report from Jerusalem – the walls and gates are in ruins. Probably from the damage recorded in Ezra 4. Ne
 - ii) 1:4-11 – Nehemiah’s response:
 - (1) Vs 4 – Wept, mourned, fasted and prayed.
 - (2) Vs 5-7 – First he acknowledges God’s power and faithfulness, and accepts His judgement and takes personal responsibility for Israel’s wickedness.
Nehemiah is a man of prayer:
 - (a) Vs 7 – “Let Your ear be attentive”
 - (b) Vs 8 – “Remember”
 - (c) Vs 11 – “Let Your ear be attentive”
 - (3) Vs 8-11a – Recalled God’s faithfulness and Israel’s iniquity.
 - (4) Vs 11b-c – Nehemiah had a plan when he would approach king Artaxerxes with his cup of wine. Zondervan’s Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible identifies the **Cupbearer** as – An important official sometimes called “butler” who served wine and often food as well to the king. Due to the ever-present possibility of intrigue within the court and the vulnerability of the king eating and drinking, there was the real worry of poisoning. Thus, this position was one of great responsibility and trust: the king literally placed his life in the hands of the cupbearer, thus the officer’s chief responsibility was to guard the king’s person. The first mention of a cupbearer is in the Joseph story (Genesis 40:1) [the KJV and RSV translate this role as “butler”]. The man is there designated “chief butler” (40:2) which indicates that several others supported this position. Cupbearers are also listed among the officers of Solomon (1 Kings 10:5; 2 Chronicles 9:4). The nature of this office allowed close and intimate contact with the king and queen.

- iii) 2:1-10 – Not unlike Esther, Nehemiah petitions the king who was favorably disposed and granted the request. These were risky gambits and both Esther and Nehemiah prayed for God to bring about success in their request.
 - (1) Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem with the king's edict guaranteeing materials and labor.
 - (2) Sanballat and the enemies of Israel surrounded them in opposition – Beth-Horan of Samaria to the north, Tobiah the Ammonite to the east, Geshem the Arab [Idumean] to the south.
 - iv) 2:11-7:3 – Rebuilding the Walls.
 - (1) 2:11-18 – Survey and proposal.
 - (2) 2:19-20 – Opposition ridicules Nehemiah.
 - v) 3:1-32 – Nehemiah wisely sets teams of workers on con-current separate tasks to maximize efficiency.
 - vi) 4:1-14 – Ashdod joins the opposition and Jerusalem is now surrounded.
 - vii) 4:15-22 – Building continues and workers are armed in case they need to fight.
 - viii) 5:1-19 – Nehemiah deals with injustice that had been practiced within the community. Oppression of “*usury*” [loan-sharking, extortion moneylending].
 - ix) 6:1-14 – Opposition tries to lure Nehemiah out into the open where he would be vulnerable, but he doesn't take the bait, and avoids the traps. Nehemiah prays that God will remember the treachery of those in opposition.
 - x) 6:15-7:3 – With the walls now completed and the gates secure the opposition lost their confidence as it was apparent God was helping the reconstruction project.
 - xi) 7:1-72 – The city is rebuilt and repopulated, and Nehemiah finds the genealogical record of the first returnees – an inclusio with Ezra 2 indicates the exiles home is complete and they are back.
- e) The Community is Finally and Successfully Rebuilt – 7:73-13:31
- i) 7:73-10:39 – Renewal of the Covenant
 - (1) 7:73b-8:18 – Reading of the Law on the first day of the seventh month... meaning Torah is back at the center of community life.
 - (a) Ezra read Deuteronomy and the Levites instructed the people – 8:1-8.
 - (b) Nehemiah encourages and directs the community in his new role as governor, and the community experiences great joy as they celebrated the feast of tabernacles – 8:9-18.
 - (2) 9:1-37 – Confession of Sin.
 - (a) Vs 1-2 – Personal and familial confessions.
 - (b) Vs 3-5a – Reading the Law and confession in equal measure... indicating a respectful and penitent heart.
 - (c) Vs 5b-37 – Praise:

- (i) For the reunification of God's people.
- (ii) For the renewal of the Law.
- (iii) For the revelation of God's character.
- (iv) Contrasting the character of God and the character of the people.
- (v) For the return to the covenant pledge.
- (3) 10:1-39 – Committing to a binding written agreement:
 - (a) Vs 1-27 – lists those signing the oath.
 - (b) Vs 28-39 – Pledges to keep themselves separate for the surrounding cultures and not neglect God.
- ii) 11:1-12:47 – Dedication of the Wall:
 - (1) 11:1-12:26 – Preparations.
 - (2) 12:27-47 – Dedication with two processions meeting at the Temple.
- iii) 13:1-31 – Nehemiah's reforms:
 - (1) Vs 1-3 – Exclusion of foreigners.
 - (2) Vs 4-9 – Expulsion of Tobiah who had resisted Nehemiah's reforms which are now the center of the community life.
 - (3) Vs 10-14 – Revival of tithing.
 - (4) Vs 15-22 – Restoration of Sabbath Rest.
 - (5) Vs 23-29 – Rebuke of mixed marriages.
 - (6) Vs 30-31 – Summary – note the 4-fold formula "Remember O Lord" vs 14, 22, 28, 29 – listing each good thing Nehemiah has done.
- 6) Conclusion – The saga of Ezra-Nehemiah ends with sweeping changes and a hopeful future, but his plea to "Remember O Lord" seems predictive because the fundamental problem is that the people are incapable of remaining faithful. The Chronicles in contrast to Ezra-Nehemiah focuses on the Faithfulness of God, knowing that God is always faithful and true. This interplay between the faithless nature of the people and the faithful nature of God is what unifies Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.