



YOU CAN UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

**THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD:
EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER**

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PROFESSOR OF HERMENEUTICS
(BIBLE INTERPRETATION)

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BRIEF EXPLANATIONS OF THE TECHNICAL RESOURCES USED IN THIS OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY SERIES

I. Lexical

There are several excellent lexicons available for ancient Hebrew.

- A. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. It is based on the German lexicon by William Gesenius. It is known by the abbreviation BDB.
- B. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, translated by M. E. J. Richardson. It is known by the abbreviation KB.
- C. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* by William L. Holladay and is based on the above German lexicon.
- D. A new five volume theological word study entitled *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, edited by Willem A. Van Gemeren. It is known by the abbreviation NIDOTTE.

Where there is significant lexical variety, I have shown several English translations (NASB, NKJV, NRSV, TEV, NJB) from both “word-for-word” and “dynamic equivalent” translations (cf. Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, pp. 28-44).

II. Grammatical

The grammatical identification is usually based on John Joseph Owens’ *Analytical Key to the Old Testament* in four volumes. This is cross checked with Benjamin Davidson’s *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

Another helpful resource for grammatical and syntactical features which is used in most of the OT volumes of “You Can Understand the Bible” Series is “The Helps for Translators Series” from the United Bible Societies. They are entitled “A Handbook on _____.”

III. Textual

I am committed to the inspiration of the consonantal Hebrew text (not the Masoretic vowel points and comments). As in all hand-copied, ancient texts, there are some questionable passages. This is usually because of the following:

- A. *hapax legomenon* (words used only once in the Hebrew OT)
- B. idiomatic terms (words and phrases whose literal meanings have been lost)
- C. historical uncertainties (our lack of information about the ancient world)
- D. the poly-semitic semantic field of Hebrew’s limited vocabulary
- E. problems associated with later scribes hand-copying ancient Hebrew texts
- F. Hebrew scribes trained in Egypt who felt free to update the texts they copied to make them complete and understandable to their day (NIDOTTE pp. 52-54).

There are several sources of Hebrew words and texts outside the Masoretic textual tradition.

1. The Samaritan Pentateuch
2. The Dead Sea Scrolls
3. Some later coins, letters, and ostraca (broken pieces of unfired pottery used for writing)

But for the most part, there are no manuscript families in the OT like those in the Greek NT manuscripts. For a good brief article on the textual reliability of the Masoretic Text (A.D. 900's) see “The Reliability of the Old Testament Text” by Bruce K. Waltke in the NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 51-67.

The Hebrew text used is *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* from the German Bible Society, 1997, which is based on the Leningrad Codex (A.D. 1009). Occasionally, the ancient versions (Greek Septuagint, Aramaic Targums, Syriac Peshitta, and Latin Vulgate) are consulted if the Hebrew is ambiguous or obviously confused.

BRIEF DEFINITIONS OF HEBREW VERBAL FORMS WHICH IMPACT EXEGESIS

I. Brief Historical Development of Hebrew

Hebrew is part of the Shemitic (Semitic) family of southwest Asian language. The name (given by modern scholars) comes from Noah's son, Shem (cf. Gen. 5:32; 6:10). Shem's descendants are listed in Gen. 10:21-31 as Arabs, Hebrews, Syrians, Arameans, and Assyrians. In reality some Semitic languages are used by nations listed in Ham's line (cf. Gen. 10:6-14), Canaan, Phoenicia, and Ethiopia.

Hebrew is part of the northwest group of these Semitic languages. Modern scholars have samples of this ancient language group from:

- A. Amorite (*Mari Tablets* from 18th century B.C. in Akkadian)
- B. Canaanite (*Ras Shamra Tablets* from 15th century in Ugaritic)
- C. Canaanite (*Amarna Letters* from 14th century in Canaanite Akkadian)
- D. Phoenician (Hebrew uses Phoenician alphabet)
- E. Moabite (Mesha stone, 840 B.C.)
- F. Aramaic (official language of the Persian Empire used in Gen. 31:47 [2 words]; Jer. 10:11; Dan. 2:4-6; 7:28; Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26 and spoken by Jews in the first century in Palestine)

The Hebrew language is called "the lip of Canaan" in Isa. 19:18. It was first called "Hebrew" in the prologue of Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Ben Sira) about 180 B.C. (and some other early places, cf. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, pp. 205ff). It is most closely related to Moabite and the language used at Ugarit. Examples of ancient Hebrew found outside the Bible are

1. the Gezer calendar, 925 B.C. (a school boy's writing)
2. the Siloam Inscription, 705 B.C. (tunnel writings)
3. Samaritan Ostraca, 770 B.C. (tax records on broken pottery)
4. Lachish letters, 587 B.C. (war communications)
5. Maccabean coins and seals
6. some Dead Sea Scroll texts
7. numerous inscriptions (cf. "Languages [Hebrew]," ABD 4:203ff)

It, like all Semitic languages, is characterized by words made up of three consonants (tri-consonantal root). It is an inflexed language. The three-root consonants carry the basic word meaning, while prefixed, suffixed, or internal additions show the syntactical function (later vowels, cf. Sue Green, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew*, pp. 46-49).

Hebrew vocabulary demonstrates a difference between prose and poetry. Word meanings are connected to folk etymologies (not linguistic origins). Word plays and sound plays are very common (*paronomasia*).

II. Aspects of Predication

A. VERBS

The normal expected word order is VERB, PRONOUN, SUBJECT (with modifiers), OBJECT (with modifiers). The basic non-flagged VERB is the *Qal*, PERFECT, MASCULINE, SINGULAR form. It is how Hebrew and Aramaic lexicons are arranged.

VERBS are inflected to show

1. number—singular, plural, dual
 2. gender—masculine and feminine (no neuter)
 3. mood—indicative, subjunctive, imperative (relation of the action to reality)
 4. tense (aspect)
 - a. PERFECT, which denotes completed, in the sense of the beginning, continuing, and concluding, of an action. Usually this form was used of past action, the thing has occurred. J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, says
“The single whole described by a perfect is also considered as certain. An imperfect may picture a state as possible or desired or expected, but a perfect sees it as actual, real, and sure” (p. 36).
S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*, describes it as,
“The perfect is employed to indicate actions the accomplishment of which lies indeed in the future, but is regarded as dependant upon such an unalterable determination of the will that it may be spoken of as having actually taken place: thus a resolution, promise, or decree, especially of Divine one, is frequently announced in the perfect tense” (p. 17, e.g., the prophetic perfect).
Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition*, defines this verbal form as
“views a situation from the outside, as a whole. As such it expresses a simple fact, whether it be an action or state (including state of being or mind). When used of actions, it often views the action as complete from the rhetorical standpoint of the speaker or narrator (whether it is or is not complete in fact or reality is not the point). The perfect can pertain to an action/state in the past, present or future. As noted above, time frame, which influences how one translates the perfect into a tense-oriented language like English, must be determined from the context” (p. 86).
 - b. IMPERFECT, which denotes an action in progress (incomplete, repetitive, continual, or contingent), often movement toward a goal. Usually this form was used of Present and Future action.
J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, says
“All IMPERFECTS represent incomplete states. They are either repeated or developing or contingent. In other words, or partially developed, or partially assured. In all cases they are partial in some sense, i.e., incomplete” (p. 55).
Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition*, says
“It is difficult to reduce the essence of the imperfect to a single concept, for it encompasses both aspect and mood. Sometimes the imperfect is used in an indicative manner and makes an objective statement. At other times it views an action more subjectively, as hypothetical, contingent, possible, and so on” (p. 89).
 - c. The added *waw*, which links the VERB to the action of the previous VERB(s).
 - d. IMPERATIVE, which is based on the volition of the speaker and potential action by the hearer.
 - e. In ancient Hebrew only the larger context can determine the authorial-intended time orientations.
- B. The seven major inflected forms and their basic meaning. In reality these forms work in conjunction with each other in a context and must not be isolated.
1. *Qal (Kal)*, the most common and basic of all the forms. It denotes simple action or a state of being. There is no causation or specification implied.

2. *Niphal*, the second most common form. It is usually PASSIVE, but this form also functions as reciprocal and reflexive. It also has no causation or specification implied.
3. *Piel*, this form is active and expresses the bringing about of an action into a state of being. The basic meaning of the *Qal* stem is developed or extended into a state of being.
4. *Pual*, this is the PASSIVE counterpart to the *Piel*. It is often expressed by a PARTICIPLE.
5. *Hithpael*, which is the reflexive or reciprocal stem. It expresses iterative or durative action to the *Piel* stem. The rare PASSIVE form is called *Hothpael*.
6. *Hiphil*, the active form of the causative stem in contrast to *Piel*. It can have a permissive aspect, but usually refers to the cause of an event. Ernst Jenni, a German Hebrew grammarian, believed that the *Piel* denoted something coming into a state of being, while *Hiphil* showed how it happened.
7. *Hophal*, the PASSIVE counterpart to the *Hiphil*. These last two stems are the least used of the seven stems.

Much of this information comes from *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, by Bruce K. Walke and M. O'Connor, pp. 343-452.

Agency and causation chart. One key in understanding the Hebrew VERB system is to see it as a pattern of VOICE relationships. Some stems are in contrast to other stems (i.e., *Qal* - *Niphal*; *Piel* - *Hiphil*)

The chart below tries to visualize the basic function of the VERB stems as to causation.

VOICE or Subject	No Secondary Agency	An Active Secondary Agency	A Passive Secondary Agency
ACTIVE	<i>Qal</i>	<i>Hiphil</i>	<i>Piel</i>
MIDDLE PASSIVE	<i>Niphal</i>	<i>Hophal</i>	<i>Pual</i>
REFLEXIVE/ RECIPROCAL	<i>Niphal</i>	<i>Hiphil</i>	<i>Hithpael</i>

This chart is taken from the excellent discussion of the VERBAL system in light of new Akkadian research (cf. Bruce K. Waltke, M. O'Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp.354-359).

R. H. Kennett, *A Short Account of the Hebrew Tenses*, has provided a needed warning.

"I have commonly found in teaching, that a student's chief difficulty in the Hebrew verbs is to grasp the meaning which they conveyed to the minds of the Hebrews themselves; that is to say, there is a tendency to assign as equivalents to each of the Hebrew Tenses a certain number of Latin or English forms by which that particular Tense may commonly be translated. The result is a failure to perceive many of these fine shades of meaning, which give such life and vigor to the language of the Old Testament.

The difficulty in the use of the Hebrew verbs lies solely in the point of view, so absolutely different from our own, from which the Hebrews regarded an action; the *time*, which with us is the first consideration, as the very word, 'tense' shows, being to them a matter of secondary importance. It is, therefore, essential that a student should clearly grasp, not so much the Latin or English forms which may be used in translating each of the Hebrew Tenses, but rather the aspect of each action, as it presented itself to a Hebrew's mind.

The name 'tenses' as applied to Hebrew verbs is misleading. The so-called Hebrew 'tenses' do not express the *time* but merely the *state* of an action. Indeed were it not for

the confusion that would arise through the application of the term ‘state’ to both nouns and verbs, ‘states’ would be a far better designation than ‘tenses.’ It must always be borne in mind that it is impossible to translate a Hebrew verb into English without employing a limitation (vix. of time) which is entirely absent in the Hebrew. The ancient Hebrews never thought of an action as past, present, or future, but simply as *perfect*, i.e., complete, or *imperfect*, i.e., as in course of development. When we say that a certain Hebrew tense corresponds to a Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future in English, we do not mean that the Hebrews thought of it as Perfect, Pluperfect, or Future, but merely that it must be so translated in English. The *time* of an action the Hebrews did not attempt to express by any verbal form” (preface and p. 1).

For a second good warning, Sue Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew*, reminds us,

“There is no way of knowing whether modern scholars’ reconstruction of semantic fields and sense relations in an ancient dead language are merely a reflection of their own intuition, or their own native language, or whether those fields existed in Classical Hebrew” (p. 128).

C. MOODS (Modes)

1. It happened, is happening (INDICATIVE), usually uses PERFECT tense or PARTICIPLES (all PARTICIPLES are INDICATIVE).
2. It will happen, could happen (SUBJUNCTIVE)
 - a. uses a marked IMPERFECT tense
 - (1) COHORTATIVE (added h), first person IMPERFECT form which normally expresses a wish, a request, or self-encouragement (i.e., actions willed by the speaker)
 - (2) JUSSIVE (internal changes), third person IMPERFECT (can be second person in negated sentences) which normally expresses a request, a permission, an admonition, or advice
 - b. uses a PERFECT tense with *lu* or *lule*
These constructions are similar to SECOND CLASS CONDITIONAL sentences in Koine Greek. A false statement (protasis) results in a false conclusion (apodosis).
 - c. uses an IMPERFECT tense and *lu*
Context and *lu*, as well as a future orientation, mark this SUBJUNCTIVE usage. Some examples from J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament* are Gen. 13:16; Deut. 1:12; I Kgs. 13:8; Ps. 24:3; Isa. 1:18 (cf. Pp. 76-77).

- D. *Waw* - Conversive/consecutive/relative. This uniquely Hebrew (Canaanite) syntactical feature has caused great confusion through the years. It is used in a variety of ways often based on genre. The reason for the confusion is that early scholars were European and tried to interpret in light of their own native languages. When this proved difficult they blamed the problem on Hebrew being a “supposed” ancient, archaic language. European languages are TENSE (time) based VERBS. Some of the variety and grammatical implications were specified by the letter WAW being added to the PERFECT or IMPERFECT VERB stems. This altered the way the action was viewed.
1. In historical narrative the VERBS are linked together in a chain with a standard pattern.
 2. The *waw* prefix showed a specific relationship with the previous VERB(s).
 3. The larger context is always the key to understanding the VERB chain. Semitic VERBS cannot be analyzed in isolation.

J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*, notes the distinctive of Hebrew in its use of the *waw* before PERFECTS and IMPERFECTS (pp. 52-53). As the basic idea of the PERFECT is past, the addition of *waw* often projects it into a future time aspect. This is also true

of the IMPERFECT whose basic idea is present or future; the addition of *waw* places it into the past. It is this unusual time shift which explains the *waw*'s addition, not a change in the basic meaning of the tense itself. The *waw* PERFECTS work well with prophecy, while the *waw* IMPERFECTS work well with narratives (pp. 54, 68).

Watts continues his definition

“As a fundamental distinction between *waw* conjunctive and *waw* consecutive, the following interpretations are offered:

1. *Waw* conjunctive appears always to indicate a parallel.
2. *Waw* consecutive appears always to indicate a sequence. It is the only form of *waw* used with consecutive imperfects. The relation between the imperfects linked by it may be temporal sequence, logical consequence, logical cause, or logical contrast. In all cases there is a sequence” (p. 103).

E. INFINITIVE - There are two kinds of INFINITIVES

1. INFINITIVE ABSOLUTES, which are “strong, independent, striking expressions used for dramatic effect. . .as a subject, it often has no written verb, the verb ‘to be’ being understood, of course, but the word standing dramatically alone” J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Hebrew Old Testament*” (p. 92).
2. INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT, which are “related grammatically to the sentence by prepositions, possessive pronouns, and the construct relationship” (p. 91).
J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew*, describes the construct state as “When two (or more) words are so closely united that together they constitute one compound idea, the dependent word (or words) is (are) said to be in the construct state” (p. 44).

F. INTERROGATIVES

1. They always appear first in the sentence.
2. Interpretive significance
 - a. *ha* - does not expect a response
 - b. *halo* - the author expects a “yes” answer

NEGATIVES

1. They always appear before the words they negate.
2. Most common negation is *lo*'.
3. The term *'al* has a contingent connotation and is used with COHORTATIVES and JUSSIVES.
4. The term *lebhilit*, meaning “in order that. . .not,” is used with INFINITIVES.
5. The term *'en* is used with PARTICIPLES.

G. CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

1. There are four kinds of conditional sentences which basically are paralleled in Koine Greek.
 - a. something assumed to be happening or thought of as fulfilled (FIRST CLASS in Greek)
 - b. something contrary to fact whose fulfillment is impossible (SECOND CLASS)
 - c. something which is possible or ever probable (THIRD CLASS)
 - d. something which is less probable, therefore, the fulfillment is dubious (FOURTH CLASS)
2. GRAMMATICAL MARKERS
 - a. the assumed to be true or real condition always uses an INDICATIVE PERFECT or PARTICIPLE and usually the protasis is introduced by
 - (1) *'im*

- (2) *ki* (or *'asher*)
- (3) *hin* or *hinneh*
- b. the contrary to fact condition always uses a PERFECT aspect VERB or a PARTICIPLE with the introductory PARTICLE *lu* or *lule*
- c. the more probably condition always used IMPERFECT VERB or PARTICIPLES in the protasis, usually *'im* or *ki* are used as introductory PARTICLES
- d. the less probable condition uses IMPERFECT SUBJUNCTIVES in the protasis and always uses *'im* as an introductory PARTICLE

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS COMMENTARY

AB	Anchor Bible Commentaries, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols.), ed. David Noel Freedman
AKOT	<i>Analytical Key to the Old Testament</i> by John Joseph Owens
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> , James B. Pritchard
BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> (4 vols.), ed. George A. Buttrick
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> (5 vols.), ed. James Orr
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JPSOA	<i>The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation</i> (The Jewish Publication Society of America)
KB	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner
LAM	<i>The Holy Bible From Ancient Eastern Manuscripts</i> (the Peshitta) by George M. Lamsa
LXX	<i>Septuagint</i> (Greek-English) by Zondervan, 1970
MOF	<i>A New Translation of the Bible</i> by James Moffatt
MT	<i>Masoretic Hebrew Text</i>
NAB	New American Bible Text
NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
NEB	<i>New English Bible</i>
NET	<i>NET Bible: New English Translation</i> , Second Beta Edition
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Bible</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> (5 vols.), ed. Willem A. VanGemeren
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>

NJB	<i>New Jerusalem Bible</i>
OTPG	<i>Old Testament Passing Guide</i> by Todd S. Beall, William A. Banks and Colin Smith
REB	<i>Revised English Bible</i>
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
SEPT	<i>The Septuagint (Greek-English)</i> by Zondervan, 1970
TEV	<i>Today's English Version</i> from United Bible Societies
YLT	<i>Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Robert Young
ZPBE	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia</i> (5 vols.), ed. Merrill C. Tenney

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR: HOW CAN THIS COMMENTARY HELP YOU?

Biblical interpretation is a rational and spiritual process that attempts to understand an ancient inspired writer in such a way that the message from God may be understood and applied in our day.

The spiritual process is crucial but difficult to define. It does involve a yieldedness and openness to God. There must be a hunger (1) for Him, (2) to know Him, and (3) to serve Him. This process involves prayer, confession, and the willingness for lifestyle change. The Spirit is crucial in the interpretive process, but why sincere, godly Christians understand the Bible differently is a mystery.

The rational process is easier to describe. We must be consistent and fair to the text and not be influenced by our personal, cultural, or denominational biases. We are all historically conditioned. None of us are objective, neutral interpreters. This commentary offers a careful rational process containing three interpretive principles structured to help us overcome our biases.

First Principle

The first principle is to note the historical setting in which a biblical book was written and the particular historical occasion for its authorship. The original author had a purpose and a message to communicate. The text cannot mean something to us that it never meant to the original, ancient, inspired author. His intent—not our historical, emotional, cultural, personal, or denominational need—is the key. Application is an integral partner to interpretation, but proper interpretation must always precede application. It must be reiterated that every biblical text has one and only one meaning. This meaning is what the original biblical author intended through the Spirit's leadership to communicate to his day. This one meaning may have many possible applications to different cultures and situations. These applications must be linked to the central truth of the original author. For this reason, this study guide commentary is designed to provide an introduction to each book of the Bible.

Second Principle

The second principle is to identify the literary units. Every biblical book is a unified document. Interpreters have no right to isolate one aspect of truth by excluding others. Therefore, we must strive to understand the purpose of the whole biblical book before we interpret the individual literary units. The individual parts—chapters, paragraphs, or verses—cannot mean what the whole unit does not mean. Interpretation must move from a deductive approach of the whole to an inductive approach to the parts. Therefore, this study guide commentary is designed to help the student analyze the structure of each literary unit by paragraphs. Paragraph and chapter divisions are not inspired, but they do aid us in identifying thought units.

Interpreting at a paragraph level—not sentence, clause, phrase, or word level—is the key in following the biblical author's intended meaning. Paragraphs are based on a unified topic, often called the theme or topical sentence. Every word, phrase, clause, and sentence in the paragraph relates somehow to this unified theme. They limit it, expand it, explain it, and/or question it. A real key to proper interpretation is to follow the original author's thought on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis through the individual literary units that make up the biblical book. This study guide commentary is designed to help the student do that by comparing modern English translations. These translations have been selected because they employ different translation theories:

1. The United Bible Society's Greek text is the revised fourth edition (UBS⁴). This text was paragraphed by modern textual scholars.

2. The New King James Version (NKJV) is a word-for-word literal translation based on the Greek manuscript tradition known as the Textus Receptus. Its paragraph divisions are longer than the other translations. These longer units help the student to see the unified topics.
3. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is a modified word-for-word translation. It forms a midpoint between the following two modern versions. Its paragraph divisions are quite helpful in identifying subjects.
4. The Today's English Version (TEV) is a dynamic equivalent translation published by the United Bible Society. It attempts to translate the Bible in such a way that a modern English reader or speaker can understand the meaning of the Greek text. Often, especially in the Gospels, it divides paragraphs by speaker rather than by subject, in the same way as the NIV. For the interpreter's purposes, this is not helpful. It is interesting to note that both the UBS⁴ and TEV are published by the same entity, yet their paragraphing differs.
5. The Jerusalem Bible (JB) is a dynamic equivalent translation based on a French Catholic translation. It is very helpful in comparing the paragraphing from a European perspective.
6. The printed text is the 1995 Updated New American Standard Bible (NASB), which is a word for word translation. The verse by verse comments follow this paragraphing.

Third Principle

The third principle is to read the Bible in different translations in order to grasp the widest possible range of meaning (semantic field) that biblical words or phrases may have. Often a Greek phrase or word can be understood in several ways. These different translations bring out these options and help to identify and explain the Greek manuscript variations. These do not affect doctrine, but they do help us to try to get back to the original text penned by an inspired ancient writer.

Fourth Principle

The fourth principle is to note the literary genre. Original inspired authors chose to record their messages in different forms (e.g., historical narrative, historical drama, poetry, prophecy, gospel [parable], letter, apocalyptic). These different forms have special keys to interpretation (see Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* or Robert Stein, *Playing by the Rules*).

This commentary offers a quick way for the student to check his interpretations. It is not meant to be definitive, but rather informative and thought-provoking. Often, other possible interpretations help us not be so parochial, dogmatic, and denominational. Interpreters need to have a larger range of interpretive options to recognize how ambiguous the ancient text can be. It is shocking how little agreement there is among Christians who claim the Bible as their source of truth.

These principles have helped me to overcome much of my historical conditioning by forcing me to struggle with the ancient text. My hope is that it will be a blessing to you as well.

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East Texas Baptist University
June 27, 1996

A GUIDE TO GOOD BIBLE READING: A PERSONAL SEARCH FOR VERIFIABLE TRUTH

Can we know truth? Where is it found? Can we logically verify it? Is there an ultimate authority? Are there absolutes which can guide our lives, our world? Is there meaning to life? Why are we here? Where are we going? These questions—questions that all rational people contemplate—have haunted the human intellect since the beginning of time (Eccl. 1:13-18; 3:9-11). I can remember my personal search for an integrating center for my life. I became a believer in Christ at a young age, based primarily on the witness of significant others in my family. As I grew to adulthood, questions about myself and my world also grew. Simple cultural and religious clichés did not bring meaning to the experiences I read about or encountered. It was a time of confusion, searching, longing, and often a feeling of hopelessness in the face of the insensitive, hard world in which I lived.

Many claimed to have answers to these ultimate questions, but after research and reflection I found that their answers were based upon (1) personal philosophies, (2) ancient myths, (3) personal experiences, or (4) psychological projections. I needed some degree of verification, some evidence, some rationality on which to base my world-view, my integrating center, my reason to live.

I found these in my study of the Bible. I began to search for evidence of its trustworthiness, which I found in (1) the historical reliability of the Bible as confirmed by archaeology, (2) the accuracy of the prophecies of the Old Testament, (3) the unity of the Bible message over the sixteen hundred years of its production, and (4) the personal testimonies of people whose lives had been permanently changed by contact with the Bible. Christianity, as a unified system of faith and belief, has the ability to deal with complex questions of human life. Not only did this provide a rational framework, but the experiential aspect of biblical faith brought me emotional joy and stability.

I thought that I had found the integrating center for my life—Christ, as understood through the Scriptures. It was a heady experience, an emotional release. However, I can still remember the shock and pain when it began to dawn on me how many different interpretations of this book were advocated, sometimes even within the same churches and schools of thought. Affirming the inspiration and trustworthiness of the Bible was not the end, but only the beginning. How do I verify or reject the varied and conflicting interpretations of the many difficult passages in Scripture by those who were claiming its authority and trustworthiness?

This task became my life's goal and pilgrimage of faith. I knew that my faith in Christ had (1) brought me great peace and joy. My mind longed for some absolutes in the midst of the relativity of my culture (post-modernity); (2) the dogmatism of conflicting religious systems (world religions); and (3) denominational arrogance. In my search for valid approaches to the interpretation of ancient literature, I was surprised to discover my own historical, cultural, denominational and experiential biases. I had often read the Bible simply to reinforce my own views. I used it as a source of dogma to attack others while reaffirming my own insecurities and inadequacies. How painful this realization was to me!

Although I can never be totally objective, I can become a better reader of the Bible. I can limit my biases by identifying them and acknowledging their presence. I am not yet free of them, but I have confronted my own weaknesses. The interpreter is often the worst enemy of good Bible reading!

Let me list some of the presuppositions I bring to my study of the Bible so that you, the reader, may examine them along with me:

I. Presuppositions

- A. I believe the Bible is the sole inspired self-revelation of the one true God. Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of the intent of the original divine author (the Spirit) through a human writer in a specific historical setting.

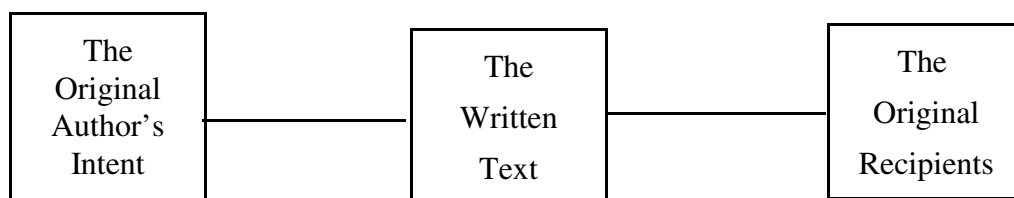
- B. I believe the Bible was written for the common person—for all people! God accommodated Himself to speak to us clearly within a historical and cultural context. God does not hide truth—He wants us to understand! Therefore, it must be interpreted in light of its day, not ours. The Bible should not mean to us what it never meant to those who first read or heard it. It is understandable by the average human mind and uses normal human communication forms and techniques.
- C. I believe the Bible has a unified message and purpose. It does not contradict itself, though it does contain difficult and paradoxical passages. Thus, the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself.
- D. I believe that every passage (excluding prophecies) has one and only one meaning based on the intent of the original, inspired author. Although we can never be absolutely certain we know the original author’s intent, many indicators point in its direction:
 1. the genre (literary type) chosen to express the message
 2. the historical setting and/or specific occasion that elicited the writing
 3. the literary context of the entire book as well as each literary unit
 4. the textual design (outline) of the literary units as they relate to the whole message
 5. the specific grammatical features employed to communicate the message
 6. the words chosen to present the message
 7. parallel passages

The study of each of these areas becomes the object of our study of a passage. Before I explain my methodology for good Bible reading, let me delineate some of the inappropriate methods being used today that have caused so much diversity of interpretation, and that consequently should be avoided:

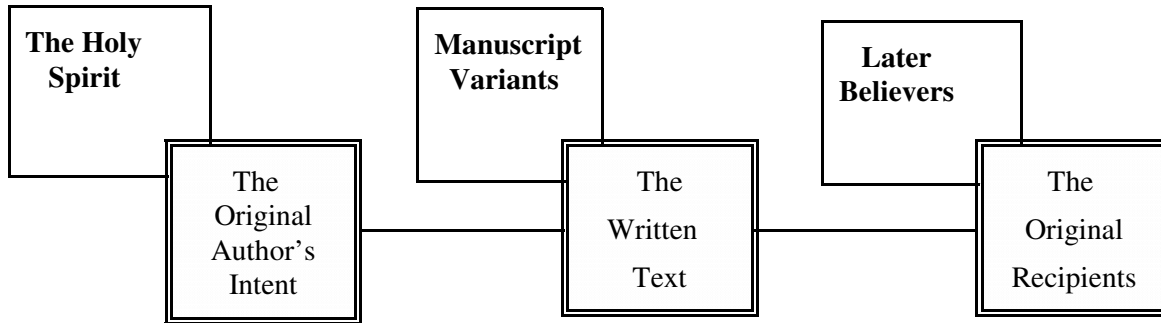
II. Inappropriate Methods

- A. Ignoring the literary context of the books of the Bible and using every sentence, clause, or even individual words as statements of truth unrelated to the author’s intent or the larger context. This is often called “proof-texting.”
- B. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by substituting a supposed historical setting that has little or no support from the text itself.
- C. Ignoring the historical setting of the books and reading it as the morning hometown newspaper written primarily to modern individual Christians.
- D. Ignoring the historical setting of the books by allegorizing the text into a philosophical/theological message totally unrelated to the first hearers and the original author’s intent.
- E. Ignoring the original message by substituting one’s own system of theology, pet doctrine, or contemporary issue unrelated to the original author’s purpose and stated message. This phenomenon often follows the initial reading of the Bible as a means of establishing a speaker’s authority. This is often referred to as “reader response” (“what-the-text-means-to-me” interpretation).

At least three related components may be found in all written human communication:



In the past, different reading techniques have focused on one of the three components, but to truly affirm the unique inspiration of the Bible, a modified diagram is more appropriate:



In truth all three components must be included in the interpretive process. For the purpose of verification, my interpretation focuses on the first two components: the original author and the text. I am probably reacting to the abuses I have observed (1) allegorizing or spiritualizing texts and (2) “reader response” interpretation (what-it-means-to-me). Abuse may occur at each stage. We must always check our motives, biases, techniques, and applications, but how do we check them if there are no boundaries to interpretations, no limits, no criteria? This is where authorial intent and textual structure provide me with some criteria for limiting the scope of possible valid interpretations.

In light of these inappropriate reading techniques, what are some possible approaches to good Bible reading and interpretation which offer a degree of verification and consistency?

III. Possible Approaches to Good Bible Reading

At this point I am not discussing the unique techniques of interpreting specific genres but general hermeneutical principles valid for all types of biblical texts. A good book for genre-specific approaches is *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, published by Zondervan.

My methodology focuses initially on the reader allowing the Holy Spirit to illumine the Bible through four personal reading cycles. This makes the Spirit, the text, and the reader primary, not secondary. This also protects the reader from being unduly influenced by commentators. I have heard it said: “The Bible throws a lot of light on commentaries.” This is not meant to be a depreciating comment about study aids, but rather a plea for an appropriate timing for their use.

We must be able to support our interpretations from the text itself. Five areas provide at least limited verification:

1. the original author's
 - a. historical setting
 - b. literary context
2. the original author's choice of
 - a. grammatical structures (syntax)
 - b. contemporary work usage
 - c. genre
3. our understanding of appropriate
 - a. relevant parallel passages

We need to be able to provide the reasons and logic behind our interpretations. The Bible is our only source for faith and practice. Sadly, Christians often disagree about what it teaches or affirms. It is self-

defeating to claim inspiration for the Bible and then for believers not to be able to agree on what it teaches and requires!

The four reading cycles are designed to provide the following interpretive insights:

- A. The first reading cycle
 1. Read the book in a single sitting. Read it again in a different translation, hopefully from a different translation theory
 - a. word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
 - b. dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
 - c. paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
 2. Look for the central purpose of the entire writing. Identify its theme.
 3. Isolate (if possible) a literary unit, a chapter, a paragraph or a sentence which clearly expresses this central purpose or theme.
 4. Identify the predominant literary genre
 - a. Old Testament
 - (1) Hebrew narrative
 - (2) Hebrew poetry (wisdom literature, psalm)
 - (3) Hebrew prophecy (prose, poetry)
 - (4) Law codes
 - b. New Testament
 - (1) Narratives (Gospels, Acts)
 - (2) Parables (Gospels)
 - (3) Letters/epistles
 - (4) Apocalyptic literature
- B. The second reading cycle
 1. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify major topics or subjects.
 2. Outline the major topics and briefly state their contents in a simple statement.
 3. Check your purpose statement and broad outline with study aids.
- C. The third reading cycle
 1. Read the entire book again, seeking to identify the historical setting and specific occasion for the writing from the Bible book itself.
 2. List the historical items that are mentioned in the Bible book
 - a. the author
 - b. the date
 - c. the recipients
 - d. the specific reason for writing
 - e. aspects of the cultural setting that relate to the purpose of the writing
 - f. references to historical people and events
 3. Expand your outline to paragraph level for that part of the biblical book you are interpreting. Always identify and outline the literary unit. This may be several chapters or paragraphs. This enables you to follow the original author's logic and textual design.
 4. Check your historical setting by using study aids.
- D. The fourth reading cycle
 1. Read the specific literary unit again in several translations
 - a. word-for-word (NKJV, NASB, NRSV)
 - b. dynamic equivalent (TEV, JB)
 - c. paraphrase (Living Bible, Amplified Bible)
 2. Look for literary or grammatical structures
 - a. repeated phrases, Eph. 1:6,12,13

- b. repeated grammatical structures, Rom. 8:31
- c. contrasting concepts
- 3. List the following items
 - a. significant terms
 - b. unusual terms
 - c. important grammatical structures
 - d. particularly difficult words, clauses, and sentences
- 4. Look for relevant parallel passages
 - a. look for the clearest teaching passage on your subject using
 - (1) “systematic theology” books
 - (2) reference Bibles
 - (3) concordances
 - b. Look for a possible paradoxical pair within your subject. Many biblical truths are presented in dialectical pairs; many denominational conflicts come from proof-texting half of a biblical tension. All of the Bible is inspired, and we must seek out its complete message in order to provide a Scriptural balance to our interpretation.
 - c. Look for parallels within the same book, same author or same genre; the Bible is its own best interpreter because it has one author, the Spirit.
- 5. Use study aids to check your observations of historical setting and occasion
 - a. study Bibles
 - b. Bible encyclopedias, handbooks and dictionaries
 - c. Bible introductions
 - d. Bible commentaries (at this point in your study, allow the believing community, past and present, to aid and correct your personal study.)

IV. Application of Bible interpretation

At this point we turn to application. You have taken the time to understand the text in its original setting; now you must apply it to your life, your culture. I define biblical authority as “understanding what the original biblical author was saying to his day and applying that truth to our day.”

Application must follow interpretation of the original author’s intent both in time and logic. We cannot apply a Bible passage to our own day until we know what it was saying to its day! A Bible passage should not mean what it never meant!

Your detailed outline, to paragraph level (reading cycle #3), will be your guide. Application should be made at paragraph level, not word level. Words have meaning only in context; clauses have meaning only in context; sentences have meaning only in context. The only inspired person involved in the interpretive process is the original author. We only follow his lead by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But illumination is not inspiration. To say “thus saith the Lord,” we must abide by the original author’s intent. Application must relate specifically to the general intent of the whole writing, the specific literary unit and paragraph level thought development.

Do not let the issues of our day interpret the Bible; let the Bible speak! This may require us to draw principles from the text. This is valid if the text supports a principle. Unfortunately, many times our principles are just that, “our” principles—not the text’s principles.

In applying the Bible, it is important to remember that (except in prophecy) one and only one meaning is valid for a particular Bible text. That meaning is related to the intent of the original author as he addressed a crisis or need in his day. Many possible applications may be derived from this one meaning. The application will be based on the recipients’ needs but must be related to the original author’s meaning.

V. The Spiritual Aspect of Interpretation

So far I have discussed the logical and textual process involved in interpretation and application. Now let me discuss briefly the spiritual aspect of interpretation. The following checklist has been helpful for me:

- A. Pray for the Spirit's help (cf. I Cor. 1:26-2:16).
- B. Pray for personal forgiveness and cleansing from known sin (cf. I John 1:9).
- C. Pray for a greater desire to know God (cf. Ps. 19:7-14; 42:1ff.; 119:1ff).
- D. Apply any new insight immediately to your own life.
- E. Remain humble and teachable.

It is so hard to keep the balance between the logical process and the spiritual leadership of the Holy Spirit. The following quotes have helped me balance the two:

- A. from James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting*, pp. 17-18:

“The illumination comes to the minds of God’s people—not just to the spiritual elite. There is no guru class in biblical Christianity, no illuminati, no people through whom all proper interpretation must come. And so, while the Holy Spirit gives special gifts of wisdom, knowledge and spiritual discernment, He does not assign these gifted Christians to be the only authoritative interpreters of His Word. It is up to each of His people to learn, to judge and to discern by reference to the Bible which stands as the authority even to those to whom God has given special abilities. To summarize, the assumption I am making throughout the entire book is that the Bible is God’s true revelation to all humanity, that it is our ultimate authority on all matters about which it speaks, that it is not a total mystery but can be adequately understood by ordinary people in every culture.”

- B. on Kierkegaard, found in Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 75:

According to Kierkegaard the grammatical, lexical, and historical study of the Bible was necessary but preliminary to the true reading of the Bible. “To read the Bible *as God’s word* one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God’s Word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the Word of God.”

- C. H. H. Rowley in *The Relevance of the Bible*, p. 19:

“No merely intellectual understanding of the Bible, however complete, can possess all its treasures. It does not despise such understanding, for it is essential to a complete understanding. But it must lead to a spiritual understanding of the spiritual treasures of this book if it is to be complete. And for that spiritual understanding something more than intellectual alertness is necessary. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the Bible student needs an attitude of spiritual receptivity, an eagerness to find God that he may yield himself to Him, if he is to pass beyond his scientific study unto the richer inheritance of this greatest of all books.”

VI. This Commentary’s Method

The *Study Guide Commentary* is designed to aid your interpretive procedures in the following ways:

- A. A brief historical outline introduces each book. After you have done “reading cycle #3” check this information.
- B. Contextual insights are found at the beginning of each chapter. This will help you see how the literary unit is structured.
- C. At the beginning of each chapter or major literary unit the paragraph divisions and their descriptive captions are provided from several modern translations:
 1. The United Bible Society Greek text, fourth edition revised(UBS⁴)

2. The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update (NASB)
3. The New King James Version (NKJV)
4. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
5. Today's English Version (TEV)
6. The Jerusalem Bible (JB)

Paragraph divisions are not inspired. They must be ascertained from the context. By comparing several modern translations from differing translation theories and theological perspectives, we are able to analyze the supposed structure of the original author's thought. Each paragraph has one major truth. This has been called "the topic sentence" or "the central idea of the text." This unifying thought is the key to proper historical, grammatical interpretation. One should never interpret, preach or teach on less than a paragraph! Also remember that each paragraph is related to its surrounding paragraphs. This is why a paragraph level outline of the entire book is so important. We must be able to follow the logical flow of the subject being addressed by the original inspired author.

- D. Bob's notes follow a verse-by-verse approach to interpretation. This forces us to follow the original author's thought. The notes provide information from several areas:
 1. literary context
 2. historical, cultural insights
 3. grammatical information
 4. word studies
 5. relevant parallel passages
- E. At certain points in the commentary, the printed text of the New American Standard Version (1995 update) will be supplemented by the translations of several other modern versions:
 1. The New King James Version (NKJV), which follows the textual manuscripts of the "Textus Receptus."
 2. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is a word-for-word revision from the National Council of Churches of the Revised Standard Version.
 3. The Today's English Version (TEV), which is a dynamic equivalent translation from the American Bible Society.
 4. The Jerusalem Bible (JB), which is an English translation based on a French Catholic dynamic equivalent translation.
- F. For those who do not read Greek, comparing English translations can help in identifying problems in the text:
 1. manuscript variations
 2. alternate word meanings
 3. grammatically difficult texts and structure
 4. ambiguous texts

Although the English translations cannot solve these problems, they do target them as places for deeper and more thorough study.
- G. At the close of each chapter relevant discussion questions are provided which attempt to target the major interpretive issues of that chapter.

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. Ezra - Nehemiah was one book in the early Hebrew text (MT) and in the early copies of the Septuagint (from the Uncial manuscripts \aleph , A, & B). *Baba Bathra* 15a. called both books Ezra.
 - 1. This is unusual because it is obvious they both contain the same genealogical list: Ezra 2:2-16 and Neh. 7:6-63.
 - 2. Because the lists, though slightly different, are basically the same, the implication is that these were originally two books.
 - 3. This is confirmed by the use of “I” sections in both Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah.
- B. They were possibly combined because the ministry of Ezra (Ezra 7-10) is continued in Neh. 8-10.
- C. The titles of Ezra and Nehemiah vary between the ancient translations:

Septuagint (Greek)	Vulgate (Latin)	Wycliffe & Coverdale (Old English)	Modern English
Esdras B (Beta) Esdras C (Gamma) Esdras A (Alpha) Esdras (Delta)	Esdras I Esdras II Esdras III Esdras IV	I Esdras II Esdras ----- -----	Ezra Nehemiah I Esdras (Apocrypha) II Esdras (Pseudepigrapha - Ezra Apocalypse, sometimes called IV Ezra)

- D. The first Hebrew text to split these books was the A.D. 1448 edition of the MT.

II. CANONIZATION

- A. The book of Ezra is part of the third division of the Hebrew canon called the “Writings” (*kethubim*).
- B. In the MT it was placed before Chronicles. This was an unusual arrangement. The chronological order should be Chronicles, then Ezra/Nehemiah. There are several theories which try to explain this order.
 - 1. It comes before “Chronicles,” which is surprising since historically/chronologically it is subsequent to the historical account of Chronicles. Some have tried to explain this.
 - a. Chronicles is a summary of the time from Adam to Cyrus.
 - b. Ezra-Nehemiah was accepted as canonical before Chronicles.
 - c. Chronicles is placed last because the Jews wanted the canon to end on a positive note (i.e., decree of Cyrus).
 - 2. No one really knows the criteria or rationality of the formation of “the Writings” section of the Hebrew canon.

III. GENRE

- A. It is historical narrative in straight forward prose.

- B. It includes many quotes from official documents.
 1. Persian (Aramaic, cf. 4:7b-6:18; 7:12-26)
 2. Jewish (Hebrew)

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. *Baba Bathra* 15a-16a says that Ezra wrote his book, but this does not imply that he wrote Nehemiah also. As a matter of fact, other Jewish sources (Gemara) say Nehemiah finished the unified composite of Ezra - Nehemiah. The MT's endnotes (finalized in the A.D. 900's) are found only at the end of Nehemiah.
- B. Josephus (A.D. 37-100), in his *Contra Apion* 1.8, and Melito of Sardis (A.D. 160-170,177), quoted by Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 4.26, both assert Ezra's authorship.
- C. The part of Ezra that deals with Ezra the scribe's life (chapters 7-10) is written in the first person, 9:27-28; 8:1-34; 9:1-15. Ezra was a priest of the line of Zadok (cf. 7:1-5) and a scribe (cf. 7:6-7) at the Persian court of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.).
- D. There is much literary similarity between Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.
 1. The close of II Chr. 36:22-23 is almost exactly like Ezra 1:1-4 in Hebrew.
 2. They both have the same theological perspective.
 - a. focus on the temple and its priesthood (especially lists of Levites)
 - b. extensive use of statistical records and genealogies
 3. Their vocabulary (e.g., "singer," "gatekeeper" and "temple servant") and literary style are similar.
 4. Both use a later form of Hebrew script.
 5. However, it must also be stated that there are notable differences (cf. Sara Japhet, *Vetus Testamentus* 18 (1968):330-371).
 - a. in the spelling of royal names
 - b. Ezra and Nehemiah focus on the covenant with Moses, while I & II Chronicles focus on the covenant with David
 6. The book of the Talmud which gives traditional Jewish views of the authorship of OT books (*Baba Bathra* 15a-16a) states that Ezra also wrote Chronicles. This view has been followed by W. F. Albright, John Bright, E. J. Young, and G. L. Archer. However, it is just possible that the similar close to Chronicles and the opening to Ezra was an intentional literary design to show that Ezra-Nehemiah continue the history begun in I & II Chronicles.
- E. Origen (A.D. 185-253), the Christian scholar of Alexandria, was the first to divide the book into the separate books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Jerome did the same in his Latin Vulgate.
- F. The first Hebrew manuscript to divide the book was in A.D. 1448. Apparently by this time the Jewish mystical desire to have only 22 books in the OT to match the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which had been so popular, had passed.
- G. The author/compiler used many sources.
 1. list of vessels from YHWH's temple that were in Babylon, 1:9-11; 7:19-20 (Persian)
 2. list of returning exiles, 2:1-70 (Persian or Jewish)
 3. the genealogy of Ezra, 7:1-5 (Jewish)

4. heads of clans, 8:1-20 (Jewish)
5. list of those involved in mixed marriages, 10:18-43 (Jewish)

H. Ezra has a primary status in rabbinical Judaism because it is he who brought and taught the writings of Moses to the restored Judah. He is also said to have instituted “the Great Synagogue,” which later became the Sanhedrin. This one quote shows how highly he was thought of, “Ezra was sufficiently worthy that the Torah could have been given through him if Moses had not preceded him” (Sanj. 4.4).

V. DATE

- A. Ezra was a priest of the line of Zadok (7:1-5) and a scribe (7:6-7) in the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.):
 1. Ezra came to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, 458 B.C., as the political/religious leader (7:8), with a third wave of returning Jewish exiles (7-10).
 2. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I, 445 B.C., as the Persian governor.
- B. It seems that the genealogies of Ezra/Nehemiah place the author or compiler at the end of the 5th century B.C.:
 1. this is assuming that I Chr. 3:15-24 lists four generations after Zerubbabel, not six:
 2. this is assuming that Jaddua of Neh. 12:10-11 was:
 - a. not the same as Jaddua whom Josephus puts in the time of Alexander the Great (336- 323 B.C.)
 - b. or that this genealogy was added by an editor, after the original was written, to upgrade the information (typical of Egyptian scribes)
 - c. or that he was very young in Nehemiah’s day and lived to a very old age in Alexander’s day
- C. This would put the authorship of these related biblical histories at about:
 1. 440 B.C. for Ezra
 2. 430 B.C. for Nehemiah
 3. 400 B.C. for Chronicles

VI. SOURCES CORROBORATING HISTORICAL SETTING

- A. The form of documents in Ezra follows the pattern and style of the official documents of the Persian period:
 1. decree of Cyrus (Hebrew translation), 1:2-4 (about the Jews returning to Jerusalem and the temple)
 2. legal charges by Rehum to Artaxerxes I, 4:7-16 (about royal permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem)
 3. response of Artaxerxes I, 4:17-22
 4. legal charges by Tattenai to Darius I, 5:6-17
 5. Darius I’s response (about the temple)
 6. Artaxerxes I’s decree to Ezra, 7:12-26

- B. The Elephantine Papyri (a letter from Jewish mercenaries on an island in the Nile to the priests in Jerusalem) in 408 B.C. establishes the historicity of Ezra/Nehemiah by mentioning Sanballat (*Sin-Uballit* in Babylonia, cf. Neh. 2:10,19; 4:1). The letter also exhibits the typical style of Imperial Aramaic correspondence.
- C. Several silver bowls which were found at Succoth were inscribed “to Geshem’s son Qainu,” also confirm the historicity of Geshem the Arab in Ezra/Nehemiah, who ruled the kingdom of Kedar (cf. Neh. 2:19; 6:1,6).

VII. LITERARY UNITS (context)

- A. The early returns to Jerusalem, 1:1-2:70
 - 1. In Cyrus’ reign (550-530 B.C.) Sheshbazzar was appointed governor (cf. 5:14). He was a prince of Judah (cf. 1:8), possibly Jehoiachin’s son or relative. He returned to Jerusalem with the Temple treasures (cf. 1:1-11). He “laid the foundation” of the Temple, but could not finish it (cf. 5:13-17).
 - 2. In Cyrus’ and Darius I’s reigns (522-486 B.C., cf. 4:5) Zerubbabel, also of the line of David, was appointed governor. He returned along with Joshua (or Jeshua) of the line of the last High Priest, to Jerusalem (cf. 2:2,36-39).
- B. The reestablishment of the Mosaic worship of YHWH in Jerusalem by Zerubbabel and Joshua (cf. 3:1-6:22).
 - 1. Feast of Booths and regular sacrifices reinstated (cf. 3:1-13).
 - 2. There were political problems with the surrounding provinces about finishing the building projects in Jerusalem (cf. 4:1-24):
 - a. the temple (cf. 1-5, 24)
 - b. the walls of Jerusalem (cf. 6-23)
 - 3. Prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) encouraged the rebuilding of the temple, but the leaders had to wait for official Persian approval (cf. 5:1-17).
 - 4. Cyrus’ decree was found and official permission given to rebuild the Temple (cf. 6:1-22).
- C. The third wave of returnees under Ezra the Scribe (cf. 7:1-10:44)
 - 1. Ezra’s genealogy and the return to Jerusalem (cf. 7:1-10)
 - 2. Artaxerxes I’s letter to Ezra (cf. 7:11-26) and his prayer of thanks (cf. 7:27-28)
 - 3. the return (cf. 8:1-36)
 - 4. the problem of mixed marriages (cf. 9:1-10:44)

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. Ezra/Nehemiah continues the history of the post-exilic Persian Period, where II Chronicles ends.
- B. It shows the racial validity (seed of Abraham) of the returning exiles by the following:
 - 1. the extensive tribal genealogies
 - 2. the extensive Levitical lists
 - 3. the religious exclusivism of the returnees in relation to the offer of help by the surrounding Persian provinces who were a mixture of YHWHism and paganism.

- C. God has reestablished the Covenant with the descendants of the Patriarchs. However, this is not the New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34 (Ezek. 36:22-38). Both Ezra and Nehemiah document reoccurrence of the same sins that caused the exiles! God's continuing love and faithfulness to His promises is highlighted, but the continual inability of fallen humanity, even the covenant people, to love and obey god is also highlighted!
- D. It shows the development of a new pattern of worship which focuses on the local synagogue and scribes. This, of course, was not to the exclusion of temple worship in Jerusalem.
- E. Ezra as a person is a great example of spiritual leadership to be emulated.

EZRA 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS*

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
End of the Babylonian Captivity	Cyrus' Decree	Cyrus Commands the Jews to Return	The Return of the Exiles
1:1-4	1:1-4	1:1-4	1:1-4
	Gifts for Refurnishing the Temple		
1:5-11	1:5-11	1:5-6	1:5-6
		1:7-10	1:7-11
		1:11	

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

* Although they are not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author’s intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized the paragraphs. Every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own distinct way. As you read the text, ask yourself which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions.

In every chapter we must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs), then compare our understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author’s intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility of applying the inspired truth to their day and their lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in Appendices One, Two, and Three.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1

¹Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it in writing, saying,*

1:1 “in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia” The close of II Chr. 36:22-23 is similar to the opening of Ezra. Some scholars assert that the lexical and syntactical style suggests one author. However, it may simply be a way of showing that Ezra-Nehemiah continues the history of Chronicles.

SPECIAL TOPIC: MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE: SURVEY OF THE RISE OF CYRUS II (ISA. 41:2,25; 44:28-45:7; 46:11; 48:15)

- A. 625-585 - Cyaxares was the king of Media that helped Babylon defeat Assyria.
- B. 585-550 - Astyages was king of Media, Ecbatana was the capital). Cyrus II was his grandson by Cambyses I (600-559, Persian) and Mandane (daughter of Astyages, Median).
- C. 550-530 - Cyrus II of Ansham (eastern Elam) was a vassal king who revolted:
 1. Nabonidus, the Babylonian king, supported Cyrus.
 2. Astyages' General Harpagus led his army to join Cyrus' revolt.
 3. Cyrus II dethroned Astyages.
 4. Nabonidus, in order to restore a balance of power, made an alliance with:
 - a. Egypt
 - b. Croesus, King of Lydia (Asia Minor)
 5. 547 - Cyrus II marched against Sardis (capital of Lydia) and it fell in 546 B.C.
 6. 539 - In mid-October the generals Ugbaru and Gobryas, both of Gutium, with Cyrus' army took Babylon without resistance. Ugbaru was made governor, but died of war wounds within weeks, then Gobryas was made governor of Babylon.
 7. 539 - In late October Cyrus II “the Great” personally entered as liberator. His policy of kindness to national groups reversed years of deportation as a national policy.
 8. 538 - Jews and others of the Cyrus Cylinder were allowed to return home and rebuild their native temples (cf. II Chr. 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1-4). He also restored the vessels from YHWH's temple which Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Marduk's temple in Babylon (cf. Ezra 1:7-11; 6:5).
 9. 530 - Cyrus' son, Cambyses II, succeeded him briefly as co-regent, but later the same year Cyrus died while on a military campaign.

▣ **“in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah”** This refers to Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy-year captivity (cf. Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10; 50:18-19). It is hard to find an exact 70 year time-frame unless one adds (1) from the time of King Jehoiakim or (2) from the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 B.C. to the rebuilding of the second temple in 516 B.C. However, it is possible that the number 70 refers to a round number or the expected life span of an individual.

▣ **“the stirred up the spirit of Cyrus”** This VERB (BDB 734 I, KB 802, *Hiphil* PERFECT, cf. John Joseph Owens, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament*, vol. 3, p. 1, and Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs [ed], of William Gesenius' *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*) also occurs

in v. 5, where the stirs up the exiles to return home. The major thrust of this recurrent theme is that God is in control of history—all history, by arousing humans to action (cf. 6:22; I Chr. 5:26; II Chr. 21:16; 36:22; Isa. 13:17; Jer. 51:1,11; Hag. 1:14)!

Cyrus seems to have had a unique concern for the Jews. Many commentators believe this was because Daniel, who lived into Cyrus' reign (cf. Dan. 10:1), showed him his name and the prophecies of Isaiah (cf. 41:2,25; 44:28-45:7,12-13; 46:11; 48:15), which relates to YHWH calling "one from the east" to do His bidding of allowing His people to return to Judah and rebuild His temple. Josephus, *Antiq.* 11.1, says that the Jews showed Cyrus the text, Isa. 44:28.

Cyrus' knowledge of Isaiah's prophecies may be the source of his words in v. 2. The same word, "stirred up" or "aroused" (BDB 734), is used in Isa. 41:2,25; 45:13. Daniel himself was concerned about the rebuilding of YHWH's temple (cf. Dan. 9).

▣ **"and also put it into writing saying"** Cyrus' decree (538 B.C.) that all of the exiled people groups could return to their native lands (Cyrus Cylinder, cf. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* by J. B. Pritchard, pp. 315-316) and re-establish their religious traditions was an attempt to assure loyalty and to try to appease the gods for his reign.

The term "writing" (BDB 508) is a technical term for written posters. It is possible that the Hebrew account of Cyrus' decree in chapter 1 was spoken (i.e., "he sent a proclamation," BDB 876) as well as posted notices (i.e., "put it in writing") throughout the Empire. The Aramaic in 6:3-5 was the official written document put in the archives.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:2-4

²"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'"

1:2 "The LORD" See Special Topic at Neh. 1:4.

▣ **"The LORD, the God of Heaven"** This title for the universal God of creation was first used by Abraham in Gen. 24:3,7 and later by Jonah (1:9). It was a Persian title used of the Zoroastrian, good high-god, Ahura-Mazda (Ormuzd), but in this context it was obviously influenced by Jewish usages referring to YHWH. This proclamation is Jewish, but I believe that this can be explained by (1) the prophecies of Isaiah shown to Cyrus by Daniel and (2) Jewish consultation in writing this edict concerning YHWH.

▣ **"has given me all of the kingdoms of the earth"** The VERB (BDB 678, KB 733) is a *Qal* PERFECT. From the Cyrus Cylinder (ANET p. 315-16), it is known that Cyrus used religion as a political tool to instill loyalty of that people group. The thing he did for the Jews in the name of their God, he did for all the exiled peoples in the names of their gods. Cyrus' personal beliefs are not the issue.

Marduk is the high-god of the Babylonian pantheon, also called *Bel* (lord). He was the patron god of the city of Babylon. Cyrus consolidated his reign over the ancient Near East by appeasing each and every people group.

The reason Cyrus took the capital of Babylon without a fight was because the last neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus, became infatuated with the moon god, Zin, who was worshiped in Ur and Haran. His mother was Zin's high priestess at Tema. Nabonidus was absent from Babylon for over ten years on military

campaigns near Tema (i.e., Egypt). The priests of Marduk at Babylon saw Cyrus as a liberator and faithful follower of Marduk.

▣ **“He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem”** This VERB (BDB 823, KB 955, *Qal* PERFECT) is used regularly of God appointing someone to a divine task (cf. Num. 27:16; II Chr. 23:14).

Cyrus’ understanding of a divine task may have come from his knowledge of Isaiah’s prophecies (cf. Isa. 41:2,25; 44:28-45:7,12-13; 46:11; 48:15).

1:3 “whoever” Cyrus allowed any and all Jews to return. History tells us about 50,000 did. The question is how many were left in Babylon? Did the majority of Jews return? Ancient records show that large numbers of Jewish people remained in many cities of Babylon. The ones who returned were the most zealous for their ancestral faith!

▣ **“may his God be with him”** This is the first of three *Qal* JUSSIVES:

1. “May his God be with him” (BDB 224, KB 243)
2. “Let him go up to Jerusalem” (BDB 748, KB 828)
3. “Rebuild the house of the LORD” (BDB 124, KB 139)

This phrase may give a hint as to (1) how difficult it was to leave a settled lifestyle and travel a long and dangerous route to Judah or (2) the character of Cyrus himself, to whom all ancient historians refer in gracious, positive ways.

▣ **“the house of the LORD”** This phrase refers to the temple of YHWH on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem.

▣ **“He is the God who is in Jerusalem”** The ancient Near Eastern people believed that every nation had a god and that god was limited to the national boundaries. This concept is seen in the story of Naaman, the Syrian general wanting soil from Israel on which to worship YHWH (cf. II Kgs. 5:17). The Jews were surprised that YHWH left the temple and traveled east to be with the Jewish exiles in Babylon (cf. Ezek. 10:18; 11:23-25).

Cyrus, in v. 2, proclaims YHWH as the God of all the earth, but his comment in v. 3 shows he still saw Him as Israel’s deity only!

This phrase could be a parenthesis “(He is God!) which is in Jerusalem,” cf. Rotherham’s *Emphasized Bible*, p. 469). By dividing the phrase this way, it emphasizes monotheism!

1:4 “every survivor” In this context God chooses only some (those with a faithful zeal) of the remnant (survivors of the Exile) to return to Judah. As we have seen before in this chapter, themes from Israel’s past recur (v. 6). God is reducing the numbers so that He can show His power, provision, and care (e.g., Gideon, Jdgs. 6-7).

SPECIAL TOPIC: “THE FAITHFUL REMNANT”

The OT concept of “a faithful remnant” is a recurrent theme of the Prophets (mostly in the eighth century prophets and Jeremiah). It is used in three senses:

1. those who survived the Exile (e.g., Isa. 10:20-23; 17:4-6; 37:31-32; Jer. 42:15,19; 44:12,14,28; Amos 1:8)
2. those who remain faithful to YHWH (e.g., Isa. 4:1-5; 11:11,16; 28:5; Joel 2:32; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 2:12-13; 4:6-7; 5:7-9; 7:18-20)
3. those who are a part of the eschatological renewal and recreation (e.g., Amos 9:11-15)

☐ **“at whatever place he may live”** All the Jewish people were allowed by Cyrus’ edict in 538 B.C. to return home, those who were exiled by Assyria (722 B.C.) and those who were exiled by Babylon (605, 596, 586, 582 B.C.). We know from history that many of the southern tribes of Judah returned (Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, and most of Levi), but only a few from the northern tribes of Israel, which had been exiled to Media.

☐ **“let the men of that place support him”** The support for the return trip was supplied by neighbors and kin. These same ones, along with the Persian treasury, helped rebuild the temple.

There is a parallel between the Egyptians of the Exodus giving gold and silver and treasure to the departing Jews to help them build their tabernacle (cf. Exod. 12:35-36). Isaiah depicts the return from exile as a new exodus (e.g., Isa. 41:17-18; 43:14-17; 48:20-21).

This fits the prediction of Haggai 2:7-8 that God will allow and motivate the nations to supply His temple’s needs!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:5-11

⁵Then the heads of fathers’ households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. ⁶All those about them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with cattle and with valuables, aside from all that was given as a freewill offering. ⁷Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods; ⁸and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. ⁹Now this was their number: 30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 duplicates; ¹⁰30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second kind and 1,000 other articles. ¹¹All the articles of gold and silver numbered 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

1:5 “then the heads of the fathers of the households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites” This is a list of the three major groups (tribes) that made up the southern kingdom, Judah, after the political split in 922 B.C., which was caused by Rehoboam’s arrogance (cf. I Kgs. 12).

The only tribal group missing in this list is Simeon, which was incorporated into Judah very early. Most of the tribe of Levi (i.e., priests and Levites) stayed with the southern kingdom because of the temple in Jerusalem.

☐ **“everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up”** This is the same VERB (BDB 734 I, KB 802, *Hiphil* PERFECT) as in 1:1. God motivated Cyrus to do His will and He motivates His people to do His will. However, there is also a necessary covenantal response from each individual. We know from history that not all of these tribal groups returned. God opens hearts to respond to Him!

The Hebrew term *ruach* (spirit, BDB 924) has a very wide semantic field (BDB 924-926, KB 1197). In this context it refers to the human person, his thought, and volitional processes.

1:6 “encouraged them” This is a Semitic idiom, “strengthen their hands.” Here it obviously refers to valuable gifts both for the temple in Jerusalem and to help those who are returning to make the trip.

☐ **“a freewill offering”** God’s people had responded to give to the tabernacle in Exod. 35:29 from the spoils they were given by the Egyptians. Here neighbors and fellow Jews give to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. This may fit Hag. 2:6-7.

1:7 “King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put into the house of his gods” These articles would include cups,

censers, and sacrificial paraphernalia (cf. vv. 9-11). These articles are mentioned in Jer. 52:17-19; II Chr. 36:10. They were placed in the temple of Marduk in the city of Babylon. When one compares II Kgs. 24:13 with Dan. 5:2-4, there seems to be a contradiction. However, it seems that the large articles of metal were cut up to make them easier to transport, but the smaller ones such as cups, bowls, and spoons were kept intact.

1:8 “Mithredath” This was the name of the treasurer of the city of Babylon. His name (BDB 609) reflects the Persian sun god, Mithras. This was a common name (“given to Mithras” or “Mithras has given”) and another person by the same name occurs in 4:7.

▣ **“Sheshbazzar”** His Babylonian name (BDB 1058) means “may _____ protect the father.” The blank may refer to the moon god (Zin/Sin) or the sun good (Shashu/Shamash). There has been much discussion about this man’s relationship to Zerubbabel, who is mentioned in 2:2 as bringing the exiles back to Jerusalem. Some see him as the first Persian-appointed governor and the uncle of Zerubbabel (cf. I Chr. 3:18, “Shenazzar” or “Shenabazar” is the fourth son of exiled king Jeconiah [Jehoiachin]; Zerubbabel’s father is Shealtiel, the first son, cf. Ezra 3:2). In my opinion they are sequential governors (cf. I Esdras 6:18), but this is speculation.

▣ **“prince of Judah”** The term “prince” (BDB 672 I) means “one lifted up” or “chief.” It does not necessarily imply that he is of the royal line (tribe of Judah, Gen. 49:10; line of Jesse, Isa. 11:1; and family of David, II Sam. 7). He is called “governor” in Ezra 5:14-16, while Zerubbabel is called “governor” in Hag. 1:1.

1:9

NASB “30 gold dishes”

NKJV “thirty gold platters”

NRSV “gold basins, thirty”

TEV “gold bowls for offerings - 30”

NJB “thirty gold dishes”

This term (BDB 173) refers to a basin or basket. *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 1, p. 256, calls it a dish or pan. *The Anchor Bible Commentary*, vol. 14, calls it “a small dish or other container,” p. 5. The term is used only in this verse in the Bible and is uncertain as all the various guesses from the ancient versions show.

▣

NASB “1,000 silver dishes”

NKJV “one thousand silver platters”

NRSV “silver basins, one thousand”

TEV “silver bowls for offerings - 1,000”

NJB “one thousand silver dishes”

This term (BDB 173) is the same word as the above items except the ones above were made of gold; these were made of silver. In the tabernacle the different types of valuable metals were used to designate degrees of holiness. Gold was used in the Holy of Holies, but silver in the Holy Place and bronze in other parts of the tabernacle. If this remains true then these different metal vessels may have specialized usages. No bronze vessels are mentioned in the list.

▣

NASB “29 duplicates”

NKJV “twenty-nine knives”

NRSV “knives, twenty-nine”

TEV “other bowls - 29”

NJB “twenty-nine repaired”

This term (BDB 32) may denote a ritual cutting instrument because it may be related to the VERB “to cut through.” In I Esdras 2:13, which contains a list of vessels closer to the number mentioned in v. 11, these are called “censers.” The Septuagint translated it as “changes of clothing” (priestly garments).

1:10 “bowls of a second kind” Some lexicons think the word comes from the root, “double” (i.e., “of a second kind”) and refers to bowls that matched each other (cf. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 1138).

1:11 “five thousand four hundred” If one adds all of these items listed in vv. 9-11, they do not equal even half of this amount. This list was just a summary or there were many small unlisted items such as spoons. The non-canonical book of I Esdras 2:13-15 gives a list that has many more items listed.

Many of the larger items of gold in the temple were cut up in order to be transported to Babylon (cf. II Kgs. 24:13).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Did Cyrus know about Jewish prophecy?
2. Why does Cyrus’ decree sound so Jewish?
3. Did God’s Spirit stir all the Jews to return to Judah or just some?
4. How are Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel related?
5. Did Nebuchadnezzar keep only the articles from the Jewish temple or from all the temples that he conquered?

EZRA 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	TEV	NJB
The Captives Who Returned to Jerusalem	A Census of the First Return	The List of Those Who Returned from Exile	List of the First Exiles to Return
2:1-39	2:1-2a	2:1-2a	2:1-2a
	2:2b-35	2:2b-20	2:2b-35
		2:21-35	
	2:36-39	2:36-39	2:36-39
2:40	2:40-42	2:40-42	2:40-42
2:41			
2:42			
2:43-54	2:43-54	2:43-54	2:43-54
2:55-58	2:55-57	2:55-57	2:55-58
	2:58	2:58	
2:59-63	2:59-63	2:59-60	2:59-63
		2:61-63	
2:64-67	2:64-67	2:64-67	2:64-67
2:68-70	2:68-69	2:68-69	2:68-69
	2:70	2:70	2:70

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-2a

¹Now these are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city. ²These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah.

2:1 “Now these are the people of the province” The same list in Neh. 7:7 has twelve names listed (possibly symbolic of the twelve tribes returning). It was very important for the Jews who returned from the Exile to be able to prove their lineage. Their Jewish lineage involved inheritance rights in Judah (“each to his city”) as well as covenant renewal promises from YHWH.

2:2 “Zerubbabel” This name (BDB 279) means “begotten in Babel” or “offspring of Babel” from the root, “sowing” (BDB 283), or NIDOTTE, “shoot of Babylon,” v. 4, p. 1312. Apparently this man was a grandson of Jehochin, the exiled king of Judah (cf. I Chr. 3:19). He led the second wave of returnees to Judah.

▣ **“Jeshua”** This name (BDB 221) means “YHWH is salvation,” “YHWH brings salvation” or “salvation is of YHWH.” The names Jeshua (Aramaic), Joshua (Hebrew, cf. Hag. 1:1) and Jesus are exactly the same word combination (cf. Matt. 1:21). He is also a relative of Ezra (i.e., the tribe of Levi, family of priests, cf. 7:1-5).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:2b-35

^{2b}The number of the men of the people of Israel:

³ the sons of Parosh, 2,172;

⁴ the sons of Shephatiah, 372;

⁵ the sons of Arah, 775;

⁶ the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua *and* Joab, 2,812;

⁷ the sons of Elam, 1,254;

⁸ the sons of Zattu, 945;

⁹ the sons of Zaccai, 760;

¹⁰ the sons of Bani, 642;

¹¹ the sons of Bebai, 623;

¹² the sons of Azgad, 1,222;

¹³ the sons of Adonikam, 666;

¹⁴ the sons of Bigvai, 2,056;

¹⁵ the sons of Adin, 454;

¹⁶ the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, 98;

¹⁷ the sons of Bezai, 323;

¹⁸ the sons of Jorah, 112;

¹⁹ the sons of Hashum, 223;

²⁰ the sons of Gibbar, 95;

²¹ the men of Bethlehem, 123;

²² the men of Netophah, 56;

- ²³ the men of Anathoth, 128;
- ²⁴ the sons of Azmaveth, 42;
- ²⁵ the sons of Kiriath-arim, Chephirah and Beeroth, 743;
- ²⁶ the sons of Ramah and Geba, 621;
- ²⁷ the men of Michmas, 122;
- ²⁸ the men of Bethel and Ai, 223;
- ²⁹ the sons of Nebo, 52;
- ³⁰ the sons of Magbish, 156;
- ³¹ the sons of the other Elam, 1,254;
- ³² the sons of Harim, 320;
- ³³ the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 725;
- ³⁴ the men of Jericho, 345;
- ³⁵ the sons of Senaah, 3,630.

▣ **“Nehemiah”** This is not the cup bearer of Artaxerxes who later built the wall of Jerusalem. This man was a leader who returned with Zerubbabel in the second wave of returnees. The name (BDB 637) means “YHWH(iah) is comfort.”

▣ **“Seraiah”** This was the name of the High Priest in Jerusalem who was killed when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple (cf. II Kgs. 25:18; Jer. 52:24).

The person listed here is a Levite or priest who returned with Zerubbabel. The name (BDB 976) means “YHWH(iah) persisteth.” Robert Young’s *Concordance*, p. 861, and *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 606, has the meaning as “YHWH is Prince.” The parallel in Neh. 7:7 has Azariah.

▣ **“Reelaiah”** This leader appears only here, as is true of the vast majority of these names. He was born in exile. His name means “YHWH(iah) causes trembling or reeling” (BDB 947). The parallel in Neh. 7:7 has Raamiah.

▣ **“Mordecai”** This is not Esther’s relative during Xerxes I’s reign. This was another leader who returned with Zerubbabel from Babylon. His name’s meaning is uncertain, but seems to be from the god Marduk (BDB 598).

▣ **“Bilshan”** This returning leader’s name may be from the root “to search” (Young’s *Concordance*) or “to inquire” (BDB 119). Nothing else is known of him.

▣ **“Mispar”** This returning leader is called Mispereth in Neh. 7:7. The name is related to the Hebrew term “to write” and may mean “scribe” (BDB 709, Young’s *Concordance*, p. 664).

▣ **“Bigvai”** This returning leader is also mentioned in Ezra 2:14; 8:14 and Neh. 7:7,19; 10:16. His family was active in post-exilic Jerusalem. The rabbis think he was governor of the province of Judah from 410-407 B.C., but this would make him far too old to have returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. His name comes from the Sanskrit root “to be happy” (BDB 94).

▣ **“Rehum”** The returning leader is called Nehum in Neh. 7:7. The same name is (1) that of a Levite who helped organize the repair of Jerusalem’s walls in Neh. 3:17 and (2) listed as a priest in Neh. 12:3. The name seems to be related to the Hebrew term for “soft,” “gentle,” or “compassionate” (BDB 933).

▣ **“Baanah”** This returning leader forms the conclusion of a list of twelve in Neh. 7, but only eleven in Ezra 2. His name may mean “son of grief” or “son of distress” (BDB 128). A similar name is found in Neh. 3:4 of a man who helped repair the Fish Gate of Jerusalem. It also appears later in Neh. 10:17.

▣ **“the number of the men of the people of Israel”** This listing is similar to Neh. 7. In vv. 3-20 we deal with the genealogy of the returnees; in vv. 21-35 we deal with the genealogy of the people in relation to their geographical place of family origin before the Exile. In vv. 36-58 we deal with the personnel of the temple, and in vv. 59-63 we deal with those who cannot serve as priests because they cannot document their genealogy.

There are several differences between this list and the list in Neh. 7, but also overwhelming similarity. Ezra and Nehemiah seem to have both worked from official lists, whether composed by Persian officials or Jewish scribes is uncertain, but apparently two distinct forms of the same list existed. Possibly later scribes updated either Ezra’s or Nehemiah’s copy. It is also possible that the differences reflect scribal errors in copying the lists over time (NET Bible, p. 712).

2:6 “Pahath-moab” This name can mean

1. governor of Moab (Young’s Concordance)
2. pit-Moab (BDB 809, “pit” can refer to calamity, cf. Jer. 48:43-44; Isa. 24:17), referring to exile.

Both the Anchor Bible (vol. 14, pp. 12-13) and *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (vol. 4, p. 608) state that it refers to transjordan Jews exiled by Tiglath-pilser III.

The Anchor Bible cites I Chr. 5:26, while *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* cites I Chr. 5:3-8.

2:20 “Gibar” In Nehemiah 7:25 we have the word “Gibeon,” which seems to begin a list of cities (cf. vv. 21-35). Gibeon was a Levitical city in the tribal allocation of Benjamin (cf. Josh. 18:25).

2:22 “Netophah” This is a city south of Jerusalem near Bethlehem, apparently settled by Levites (cf. I Chr. 9:14,16). Men from this village are mentioned several times in the OT (cf. II Sam. 23:28,29; II Kgs. 25:23; I Chr. 2:54; 9:16; 11:30; 27:13,15; Jer. 40:8; Neh. 7:26).

2:23 Other Benjaminite cities in this list are

1. Anathoth (a Levitical city, also Jeremiah’s home town), v. 23
2. Ramah (cf. Neh. 7:30), v. 26
3. Geba (a Levitical city also spelled Gabe, cf. Josh. 21:17), v. 26
4. Michmas (the name means “place of Chemosh”), v. 27
5. Bethel, v. 28
6. Ai (close to Bethel), v. 28
7. Jericho, v. 34

2:25 “Kiriath-arim” In Neh. 7:29 it is listed as “Kiriath Jearim,” which is a city northwest of Jerusalem.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:36-39

³⁶**The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973;**

³⁷**the sons of Immer, 1,052;**

³⁸**the sons of Pashhur, 1,247;**

³⁹**the sons of Harim, 1,017.**

2:36 “the priest” Verses 36 through 58 are a series of temple workers mentioned in order of their importance: priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the temple servants, and special servants.

▣ Three of the families of priests listed go back to the names of priests in David's day (cf. I Chr. 24).

1. Jedaiah (family of Joshua, the first post-exilic High Priest, cf. I Chr. 9:10; Neh. 7:39)
2. Immer (cf. Jer. 20:1)
3. Harim (cf. 10:21; Neh. 3:11)

David had twenty-four groups of priests (cf. I Chr. 24:7-19), but only four of them returned. Pashhur is mentioned in I Chr. 9:12; Ezek. 2:38; 10:22; Neh. 7:41; 11:12.

2:38 "Pashhur" He is of the line of Zadok from Jedaiah (cf. I Chr. 9:10-12).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:40-42

⁴⁰**The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74.**

⁴¹**The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128.**

⁴²**The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hittite, the sons of Shobai, in all 139.**

2:40 "the Levites" It needs to be remembered that all priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests. Only the descendants of the family of Aaron performed the sacrificial chores. The other Levites were to be helpers of the priests and teachers of the Law. Notice how few Levites (74) returned in comparison to priests (973). Possibly fewer of them were exiled or temple service for them was too physical and strenuous.

2:41 "the singers: the sons of Asaph" From the time of David, we know that there were three groups of Levitical singers: Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun (cf. I Kgs. 25:1-8; I Chr. 25:1-8). We do not know what happened to the other two groups.

2:42 "the gatekeepers" These specialized temple workers are mentioned in I Chr. 9:17-27; 26:1-19. Their duties are delineated in I Chr. 9:26-27. Sometimes they are called Levites (cf. I Chr. 9:26; II Chr. 23:4; Neh. 12:25), but other times they seem to be listed as a separate, yet related, group (cf. II Chr. 8:14; 35:15; Neh. 12:25).

▣ **"Shallum"** This chief of the gatekeepers (cf. I Chr. 9:17) is also called

1. Meshelemiah, v. 21
2. Shelemiah, 26:14
3. Meshullam, Neh. 12:25

This variety shows

1. they had several names or nicknames
2. the list is so easily corrupted in copying
3. often titles or occupations become names

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:43-54

⁴³**The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,**

⁴⁴**the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon,**

⁴⁵**the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub,**

⁴⁶**the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmal, the sons of Hanan,**

⁴⁷**the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah,**

⁴⁸**the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam,**

⁴⁹**the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai,**

⁵⁰ the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephisim,
⁵¹ the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,
⁵² the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,
⁵³ the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,
⁵⁴ the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatipha.

2:43,58,70 “the temple servants” *Nethinim* means, “the given ones” (BDB 682). This term was used for the Levites being given by God to serve the temple to help the priests in Num. 3:9; 8:16; 16:19, but here this group apparently were descendants of Canaanite slaves who were used for service in the temple. This is because of the unusual non-Jewish names. This use of captured people was not uncommon in David’s day (cf. II Sam. 15:18-22). The Gibeonites, who tricked Joshua during the conquest, fall into the same kind of category (cf. Josh. 9:27). It also appears that Ezekiel speaks to this group in Ezek. 44:6-31.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:55-57

⁵⁵The sons of Solomon’s servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Hassophereth, the sons of Peruda,
⁵⁶ the sons of Jaalah, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,
⁵⁷ the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Ami.

2:55 “the sons of Solomon’s servants” As David used captured Canaanites as temple slaves (cf. II Sam. 15:18-22), so too, Solomon used Canaanites as forced labor (cf. I Kgs. 9:20-21).

▣ **“Hassophereth”** This may be a proper name based on the root, “to write” (BDB 708) or a guild of scribes (cf. I Chr. 2:55, “the family of scribes”). The form is FEMININE, but used with MASCULINE words (cf. Pochereth-hazzebaim of v. 57); therefore, it is like Qoheleth of Ecclesiastes, which is a title or office and not a proper name.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:58

⁵⁸All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon’s servants were 392.

2:58 Solomon’s servants are also mentioned in Neh. 7:60; 11:3, but nowhere else in the OT.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:59-63

⁵⁹Now these are those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan *and* Immer, but they were not able to give evidence of their fathers’ households and their descendants, whether they were of Israel: ⁶⁰the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, **652**. ⁶¹Of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and he was called by their name. ⁶²These searched *among* their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and *were excluded* from the priesthood. ⁶³The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

2:59 “Tel-melah” The term “tel” meant a hill of ruins on which another city was built. The name means “hill of salt” (BDB 1068), which could denote a cultural way of cursing a defeated city (“sowed it with salt” so that nothing would grow, cf. Jdgs. 9:45) or a geographical place where salt is located (e.g., “Salt Sea”).

This may refer to Thelma of Ptolemy (cf. *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 18) located in lower Babylon near the Persian Gulf.

▣ **“Tel-harsha”** This is another city in Babylon.

2:61 “the sons of Hakkoz” It is possible when one compares Ezra 8:33 (“Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest”) with Neh. 3:4 (“Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz,” also v. 21) that this man’s claims to priestly lineage may have been substantiated.

▣ **“Barzillai the Gileadite”** This clan leader helped King David as he fled from Absalom (cf. II Sam. 17:27-29). David later tried to reward him for his service and friendship (cf. II Sam. 19:31-39).

2:63 “governor” This Persian term, *Tirshatha* (BDB 1077) may mean “the feared,” an idiom for government office. It is used of Nehemiah in Neh. 8:9 and 10:1. Sheshbazzar is called “governor” by a different name, *Peha*, which is an Assyrian term (BDB 1108) used in 5:36,14; 6:6,7,13; Dan. 3:2,3,27; 6:8; and Haggai 1:1,14; 2:2,21. Both refer to the same office unless Sheshbazzar was subject to the satrap of Samaria.

▣
NASB, NKJV **“most holy things”**
NRSV **“most holy food”**
TEV **“the food offered to God”**
NJB **“the consecrated food”**

This refers to the priests’ part of sacrifices.

▣ **“Urim and Thummim”** This refers to the special, but unknown, means of knowing God’s will. It was kept in the ephod of the High Priest (cf. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; I Sam. 28:6). They apparently had been lost or were unused for some reason (cf. Exod. 28:30; Num. 27:21).

For a good brief discussion of the current theories as to what they were and how they worked, see *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (NIDOTTE), vol. 1, pp. 329-330.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:64-67

⁶⁴The whole assembly numbered 42,360, ⁶⁵besides their male and female servants who numbered 7,337; and they had 200 singing men and women. ⁶⁶Their horses were 736; their mules, 245; ⁶⁷their camels, 435; *their* donkeys, 6,720.

2:64 “the whole assembly numbered 42,360” This total is the same in Ezra 2, Neh. 7, and the apocryphal book of I Esdras.. However, when you add the number of individuals in the different lists, they are different: Ezra, 29,818; Nehemiah, 31,089 and I Esdras, 33,950.

2:65 “200 singing men and women” This refers to secular musical entertainment (cf. II Sam. 19:35; Eccl. 2:8; Ezek. 26:13).

2:66-67 This list of domestic animals may relate to 1:6 (cf. vv. 68-69).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:68-69

⁶⁸Some of the heads of fathers’ *households*, when they arrived at the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for the house of God to restore it on its foundation. ⁶⁹According to

their ability they gave to the treasury for the work 61,000 gold drachmas and 5,000 silver minas and 100 priestly garments.

2:68 “offered willingly” See note at 1:6.

2:69 “According to their ability they gave” This becomes a Pauline principle (cf. Acts 11:29; I Cor. 16:12; II Cor. 8:3,11). The heart, not a percentage, is the key in giving.

▣ **“drachmas”** This is a weight of valuable metal serving as a set unit. Here it is spelled *daric* (alternative form is in I Chr. 29:7), later it will become *drachma* (Greek word). It is a loan word from a Semitic root earlier than Hebrew. See Special Topic at 7:22.

▣ **“minas”** The term (BDB 584) means “a part” or “to count.” This weight of valuable metal took 50 (cf. Ezek. 45:12) or 60 to make a shekel. See Special Topic at 7:22.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:70

⁷⁰Now the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

2:70 This three-fold division of the people (priests, Levites, the people [other tribes]) is consistent throughout the book. The other three groups (singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants) designate both Jews and foreign servants who serve the cultus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Cyrus let the children of Israel return to Judah?
2. Why are the Persian decrees so Jewish (cf. chapters 1 and 6)?
3. What is the relationship between Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel?
4. Why is such a detailed register of returnees made in chapter 2 and what is its relationship to chapter 7 and Nehemiah 7?
5. List the temple workers and describe their functions.
6. Is 3:6 in contradiction to 5:16?
7. How many different returns to Jerusalem were there and under whom?

EZRA 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Worship Restored at Jerusalem 3:1-7	Rebuilding the Temple 3:1-7	Worship Begins Again 3:1-6	Resumption of the Sacrificial Liturgy 3:1-6
Restoration of the Temple Begins 3:8-11	3:8-9 3:10-13	The Rebuilding of the Temple Begins 3:7-9 3:10-13	3:7-13
3:12-13			

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-7

¹Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. ²Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. ³So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. ⁴They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and *offered* the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the

ordinance, as each day required;⁵ and afterward *there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD.* ⁶From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid. ⁷Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

3:1 “the seventh month” This is the month of Tishri in the Hebrew calendar (previously named Ethanim, cf. I Kgs. 8:2), which corresponds to our September/October. This was the month of three major annual feast days. On the first of the month was the Feast of Trumpets, on the tenth of the month was the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16), and on the 15th through the 22nd was the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (cf. Lev. 23:23-44; Num. 29:1-40).

SPECIAL TOPIC: ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CALENDARS

Canaanite (I Kgs. 6:1,37-38; 8:2)	Sumerian - Babylonian (Nippur Calendar)	Hebrew (Gezer Calendar)	Modern Equivalents
Abib (“greenheads” of barley)	Nisanu	Nisan	March - April
Zin (spring brilliance)	Ayaru	Iyyar	April - May
	Simanu	Sivan	May - June
	Du-uzu	Tammuz	June - July
	Abu	Ab	July - August
	Ululu	Elul	Aug. - Sept.
Ethanim (permanent water sources)	Teshritu	Tishri	Sept. - Oct.
Bul (rains on produce)	Arah-samna	Marcheshvan	Oct. - Nov.
	Kislimu	Chislev	Nov. - Dec.
	Tebitu	Tebeth	Dec. - Jan.
	Shabatu	Shebat	Jan. - Feb.

▣ **“gathered together as one man”** This VERB is a *Niphal* IMPERFECT. The phrase is a Hebrew idiom for unity of mind and heart (cf. Neh. 7:72b-8:1 and also Jdgs. 20:1,8,11). This assembly included women and children. The community unity can be seen in v. 9.

3:2 “Jeshua the son of Jozadak” See note at 2:2. The father’s name (cf. 3:2,8; 5:2; 10:18; Neh. 12:26) is spelled Jehozadak in I Chr. 6:14,15; Hag. 1:1,12,14; 2:2,4; Zech. 6:11.

Jeshua is never called High Priest in Ezra or Nehemiah, but he is in Hag. 1:1,14 and Zech. 3:1,8; 6:11.

▣ **“Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel”** See note at 2:2.

▣ **“built the altar”** This is a *Qal* IMPERFECT (BDB 124, KB 139). The returnees wanted to reinstitute the Mosaic rituals and procedures as much as possible. With the sacrificial altar they could begin the feast/rest/fast days of Lev. 23 and Num. 29.

This altar was covered in bronze (cf. Exod. 27:1-8; 38:1-7), which the Babylonians had removed. The inner structure of the altar remained. This was repaired and placed back in its original place.

▣ **“the man of God”** This is literally “ish” of *Elohim*. This phrase is used in the OT 76 times to describe God’s faithful servants. The order of frequency is as follows:

1. Elisha
2. Elijah
3. Moses (cf. Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; Ps. 90:1; I Chr. 23:14; II Chr. 30:16; Ezra 3:2)
4. Samuel
5. David
6. Shemiah
7. Hanan
8. anonymous (29 times)

3:3 “So they set up the altar on its foundation” It is possible that the sacrificial altar was placed on a raised platform. Therefore, v. 2 refers to the altar itself and v. 3 to the platform (*bama*).

▣ **“they were terrified because of the peoples of the land”** This either refers to (1) the Jews who stayed in Palestine and resented the newcomers rebuilding or (2) Sanballat and Tobiah and their political and/or legal resistance to the rebuilding of the temple (cf. 4:4). In this context option #2 fits best.

The phrase “the people of the land” (singular) originally referred to the landed nobility (pre-exiled, cf. II Kgs. 24:15), but it came to refer to the poor people of the land (post-exile, cf. II Kgs. 24:14); however, in this context it is plural and must refer to all the people groups in the Persian province called Beyond the River (i.e., Palestine and Lebanon).

▣ **“burnt offerings morning and evening”** This refers to “the Continual” (cf. v. 5). Two lambs offered every day at 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. (cf. Exod. 29:38-46; Num. 28:1-8).

3:4 “they celebrated the feast of booths as it is written” This annual feast is mentioned several times in Moses’ writings (cf. Exod. 23:16; 34:32; Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43; Num. 19:12-38; Deut. 16:13-17). Its procedures are spelled out in great detail.

Much of the timing and procedures of these Jews in re-initiating the sacrifice system follows Solomon’s timing (cf. II Chr. 7) and procedures of building the temple (cf. II Chr. 2-4, see note at 3:10). They want to legitimize themselves as the true Israel, the true covenant people of God.

SPECIAL TOPIC: FEASTS OF ISRAEL

- I. Mosaic Annual Feasts (cf. Exod. 23:14-17; Lev. 23; Num 28; Deut. 16)
 - A. All male Jews were required to attend three annual feasts (cf. Exod. 23:14,17; 34:23) if possible.
 - B. These feasts had agricultural, as well as national significance.
 - C. Each was a day of rest, worship, and community fellowship.

D. The three required annual feasts

1. Passover (cf. Exod. 12:1-14,21-28; Lev. 23:4-14; Num. 28:16-25; Deut. 16:1-8)
 - a. thanksgiving and dedication of the barley harvest
 - b. commemorates the Exodus
 - c. it was followed by an eight day Feast of Unleavened Bread (cf. Exod. 12:15-20; 34:18-20)
2. Pentecost (Feast of Weeks, cf. Exod. 23:16; 34:22)
 - a. thanksgiving and dedication of the wheat harvest
 - b. commemorates the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai by rabbinical reckoning
 - c. See Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26-31
3. Tabernacles/Booths/Huts (Succoth)
 - a. thanksgiving for the general harvest
 - b. commemorates the beginning of the wilderness wandering period
 - c. see Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:34-44; Deut. 16:13-17
 - d. it was followed by an eight day feast (cf. Lev. 23:36; Num. 29:35-38)

E. Other annual feasts

1. New Year Celebration (Rosh Hashanah)
 - a. see Lev. 23:23-25; Num. 29:1-6
 - b. this day of rest and sacrifice was held on the first day of Tishri
 - c. the feast aspect of this day, so common in the NT era, is unspecified in the Torah
2. Day of Atonement - “day of covering” or Yom Kippur (the only fast day)
 - a. a day of rest, fasting, and repentance
 - b. a ritual for the removal of corporate uncleanness (tabernacle, priests, and people)
 - c. see Exod. 30:10; Lev. 16; 23:26-32; 25:9; Num. 29:7-11
 - d. it is difficult to pin down when this feast was re-instituted after the Exile

II. Other Mosaic Feast Days

A. the Sabbath

1. weekly day of rest and worship
2. see Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 16:22-30; 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-16; Lev. 23:1-3; Num. 28:9-10

B. Sabbath Year

1. every seventh year the land rested (no sowing)
2. see Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7; Deut. 15:1
3. it signified that YHWH owned the land and gave it to Israel
4. all slaves were set free (cf. Exod. 21:2-6) and all debts were forgiven (cf. Deut. 15:1-6)

C. Jubilee Year

1. every seventh Sabbath year (i.e., 50th year)
2. see Lev. 25:8-18; 27:17-24
release of debt and returning of land, freeing of slaves (cf. Lev. 25:10,13, very similar to Sabbath Year)
4. its inauguration is never recorded

D. New Moon

1. special offerings and a day of rest
2. see Num. 10:10; 28:11-15
3. possibly commemorated the setting up of the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 40:2,17)
4. Jewish calendar is based on lunar cycles

III. These rituals and regulations show a development over time. These feasts and fasts may have had a beginning in pagan calendars, but developed into uniquely Jewish praise and devotion to YHWH. Nature (seasonal), agricultural (planting, rain, and harvest), and national events (Exodus, giving of the Law, etc.) combined to highlight certain times of the year for worship.

3:5 “new moons” The Hebrew calendar was based on the lunar cycle for its months and the solar cycle for its years (seasons). The phases of the moon marked the beginning of months. The New Moon festival is often mentioned in a list of feast/rest days. It is described briefly in Lev. 23:24-25 (“first of the month”); Num. 28:11-15 and mentioned in I Samuel 20, but it seems to have become more popular after the exile (cf. I Chr. 23:31; II Chr. 2:4; 8:13; Ezra 3:5; Neh. 10:30).

▣ **“all the fixed festivals”** See Lev. 23 and Num. 29.

▣ **“a freewill offering”** These could be offered at any time (e.g., peace offerings, cf. Lev. 3:1-17; 7:13-34).

3:6 “but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid” This Hebrew VERB (BDB 413, KB 417, *Pual* PERFECT) has a wide range of meaning (i.e., establish, found, fix, or restore, cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 474-475), which seems to solve the contradiction between here (also v. 10) and 5:16 (Aramaic VERB, BDB 1095, *Peal* PERFECT). For the wide meaning of this word see (1) “restored,” II Chr. 24:12ff and (2) “was laid” or “established” (in the sense of continued, not just begun, cf. Kidner, *Tyndale Commentary Series*, p. 140), Hag. 2:18.

R. K. Harrison, *Introduction To The Old Testament*, pp. 1139-1140,

“According to Ezra 4:24 and 5:1ff., work commenced in the second year of Dairus, whereas in Ezra 3:8ff. and 5:16 it is said to have occurred in the reign of Cyrus. This objection rests entirely upon a misunderstanding of the text. The rebuilding of the Temple did in fact commence in the days of Cyrus (Ez. 3:8ff.; 5:16), but when opposition to the project arose (Ez. 4:1ff.), the work was delayed, and in the end it ceased until the time of Darius (Ez. 4:24), the interval thus occasioned being the principal cause why Haggai and Zechariah were sent to stimulate the people into activity (Ez. 5:1ff.). Haggai clearly implies that some preliminary work had been done at the site (Hag. 1:4,9,14), while for his part Ezra (Ez. 5:16) does not state that the task had been pursued smoothly and without interruption since its inception.”

3:7 The payment of these workmen is similar to the account paid for the construction of Solomon’s temple in II Chr. 2:9-10,15-16. Much of the second temple was patterned after Solomon’s temple, but on a much smaller scale.

▣ **“Joppa”** This was the seaport for Jerusalem. It was about 35 miles northwest of the city. It was the only natural harbor on this part of the Mediterranean coast.

▣ **“according to the permission they had from Cyrus”** This had become the legal issue of the challenge from Samaria. Cyrus’ edict is recorded twice, once in Hebrew in chapter 1 and once in Aramaic in chapter 6.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:8-9

⁸Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began *the work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. ⁹Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers stood united *with* Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah *and* the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

3:8 “the second month” This was the same month when Solomon started building his temple (cf. I Kgs. 6:1; II Chr. 3:2).

▣ **“appointed the Levites from twenty years and older”** In Moses’ day all of the people who were skilled worked on the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 35:10; 36:4,8), but Solomon used only Levites (cf. I Chr. 23:4,24,27) from twenty years old and upward. Ritual service in the temple was limited to priests who were between thirty and fifty years old (cf. Num. 4:3) or starting at twenty-five (cf. Num. 8:24) and later changed to twenty, cf. II Chr. 31:17.

For a good discussion of the changing age range see *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, p. 164.

3:9

NASB, NKJV “Judah”

NSRV, TEV,

NJB “Hodaviah”

These are probably the same name but are translated in different ways (cf. 2:40). However, because the next mentioned name, Henadad (“Hadad is gracious”) had pagan associations, it was possibly changed to Hodaviah. However, the name Henadad appears three times in Nehemiah (cf. 3:18,24; 10:9), as well as the name Hodevah (cf. Neh. 7:43).

There are several names which have the same three consonants (hdh).

1. Judah - person and tribe
2. Hodaviah - a royal descendant of Judah, I Chr. 3:24
3. Hodaviah - a chief of the tribe of Manasseh, I Chr. 5:24
4. Hodaviah - a descendant of Benjamin, I Chr. 9:7
5. Hodaviah - a Levitical family of the post exilic period, Ezra 2:40 (Hodevah in Neh. 7:43)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:10-13

¹⁰Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of King David of Israel. ¹¹And they sang praising and giving thanks to the LORD, *saying*, “for He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.” And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹²Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ *households*, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy; ¹³so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

3:10 “the builders had laid the foundation” See note at 5:16.

▣ **“trumpets”** These were silver trumpets (BDB 348) like those of Num. 10:2, which were used at festival occasions by the priests (cf. Num. 10:8; 31:6; Josh. 6:4; I Chr. 15:24; 16:6; II Chr. 5:12).

▣ **“symbols”** This musical instrument (BDB 853) is mentioned several times in the OT (cf. I Chr. 15:16, 19; 16:5; 25:1-6; II Chr. 7:6).

▣ **“according to the directions of King David of Israel”** This phrase is theologically parallel to “as is written in the law of Moses, the man of God,” v. 2 and “as it is written,” v. 4. They both reflect the mentality of the returning Jews in wanting to act in conformity to God’s word like His covenant people of old and their appointed leaders (i.e., Moses and David). These returnees see themselves as the legitimate covenant people (cf. v. 11)!

The specific reference is to David’s organization of the Levites (cf. I Chr. 24-25; II Chr. 29:25-30).

3:11 “For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever” This phrase was first used by David in I Chr. 16:34,41. Later it was incorporated into the Psalms: 106:1; 107:1; 118:1,29; and 136:1. It was used by Solomon in his dedication of the temple in II Chr. 5:13 and 7:3. Part of it occurs in a Levitical praise text spoken before King Jehoshaphat in II Chr. 20:21.

For a good discussion of the Hebrew word *hesed* see NIDOTTE, vol. 2, pp. 211-218.

SPECIAL TOPIC: ’OLAM

This is the very common (used over 400 times) term *’olam* (BDB 761, KB 798). It is used of duration of time in several senses, each of which must be linked to the nature of the thing to which it refers.

A. Time past (examples only)

1. “heroes of old,” Gen 6:4
2. “mountains and hills,” Gen. 49:21
3. “generations of old,” Deut. 32:7
4. “forefather,” Josh 24:2
5. “days of old,” Isa. 51:9

B. Continual for a lifetime (examples only)

1. “believe in you forever” (i.e., Moses), Exod. 19:9
2. “slave forever,” Exod. 21:6; Deut. 15:17; I Sam. 27:12
3. “all your days,” Deut. 23:6
4. Samuel “stay there forever,” I Sam. 1:22
5. King “live forever,” I Kgs. 1:21; Neh. 2:3; Ps. 21:4
6. “bless the Lord forever,” Ps. 115:18; 145:1-2
7. “sing forever,” Ps. 89:1; 115:18; 145:1-2
8. “pregnant forever (metaphor), Jer. 20:17
9. possibly Prov. 10:25

C. Continual existence (but with obvious limitations)

1. humans live forever, Gen. 3:22
2. the earth, Ps. 78:69; 104:5; 148:6; Eccl. 1:4 versus II Pet. 3:10
3. Aaronic priesthood, Exod. 29:9; 40:15 versus I Sam. 2:30
4. the Sabbath, Exod. 31:16-17
5. the feast days, Exod. 12:14,17,24; Lev. 16:29,31,24; 23:14,21,41
6. circumcision, Gen. 17:13 versus Rom. 2:28-29

7. the land of promise, Gen. 13:15; 17:18; 48:4; Exod. 32:13 versus Exiles
8. ruined cities, Isa. 25:2; 32:14; 34:10

D. Conditional Covenants

1. Abraham, Gen. 17:7,8,13,19
2. Israel, Deut. 5:29; 12:28
3. David, II Sam. 7:13,16,25,29; Ps. 89:2,4
4. Israel, Jdgs. 2:1 (cf. Gal. 3)

E. Unconditional Covenants

1. Noah, Gen. 9:12,16
2. New Covenant, Isa. 55:3; Jer. 32:40; 50:5 (i.e., Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-30)

F. God Himself

1. His existence, Gen. 21:33; Deut. 32:40; Ps. 90:2; 93:2; Isa. 40:28; Dan. 12:7
2. His name, Exod. 3:15; Ps. 135:13
3. His reign, Exod. 15:18; Ps. 45:6; 66:7; Jer. 10:10; Micah 4:7
4. His word, Ps. 119:89,160; Isa. 40:8; 59:21
5. His lovingkindness, Ps. 25:6; 89:2; 103:17; 118:1-4,29; Jer. 33:11

G. His Messiah

1. His name, Ps. 72:17,19
2. Blessed forever, Ps. 45:2,17; 89:52
3. reign, Ps. 89:36,37; Isa. 9:7
4. priest, Ps. 110:4
5. pre-existence, Micah 5:2

H. New Age life

1. everlasting life, Dan. 12:2
2. everlasting contempt, Dan. 12:2
3. no more tears, Isa. 65:19 (Rev. 21:4)
4. no sun, Isa. 60:19-20 (Rev. 21:23)

Note how many different English words are used to translate this Hebrew word in the NIV

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1. forever | 10. permanent |
| 2. old, of old | 11. any time |
| 3. everlasting | 12. ancient, ancient times |
| 4. eternal | 13. endless |
| 5. lasting | 14. forevermore |
| 6. always | 15. to the very end |
| 7. for life | 16. a long time |
| 8. continue | 17. long ago |
| 9. regular | |

▣ **“the LORD. . .His lovingkindness”** These are the two special terms for the covenant God. The term “the LORD” = YHWH (BDB 217, KB 394), which is a form of the VERB “to be” (cf. Exod. 3:14). It is the covenant name for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Neh. 1:4.

The theological use of the word “lovingkindness” (BDB 338, KB 336 II, NKJV, “mercy”; NRSV, “steadfast love”; NJB, “faithful love”) speaks of God’s covenant love and fidelity. It denotes an aspect of His character—loving faithfulness and trustworthiness. See Special Topic: *Hesed* at Neh. 13:14.

3:12 It seems that the climax of this chapter is reached in v. 11, but vv. 12-13 show the anticlimax for those who personally saw Solomon’s Temple. This may have been part of the problem of apathy which plagued these returnees. This same thing recurs at the dedication of the temple in 520 B.C. (cf. Haggai 2:3ff; Zech. 4:10).

These two verses (11, 12) are the strongest argument for identifying Sheshbazzar of chapter 1 with Zerubbabel of chapter 2. There would be many more older people alive in the 530’s than in 516 B.C.

The question has always been about when the second temple was begun and by whom. I still believe that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel are two distinct persons. Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the temple, but did not finish it, while Zerubbabel completed it along with Jeshua, the High Priest, with the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah (520-519 B.C.). Haggai 1:4 states that the temple was still in ruins in 520 B.C.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How is the genealogy of chapter 2 related to that of chapter 7?
2. List the different types of temple workers and explain their duties.
3. Does 3:6 contradict 5:16? Why or why not?
4. How many times did Jews return to Judah and under whose leadership?

EZRA 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Resistance to Rebuilding the Temple 4:1-5	Opposition to the Rebuilding of the Temple 4:1-3 4:4-5	Opposition to the Rebuilding of the Temple 4:1-2 4:3 4:4-5	Opposition from the Samaritans: Their Tactics Under Cyrus 4:1-5
Rebuilding of Jerusalem Opposed 4:6-16	4:6 Opposition to the Rebuilding of the City 4:7-16	Opposition to the Rebuilding of Jerusalem 4:6 4:7 4:8-16	Samaritan Tactics under Xerxes and Artaxerxes 4:6 4:7 4:8-10 4:11-16
4:17-22	4:17-22	4:17-22	4:17 4:18-22
4:23	4:23	4:23	4:23
4:24	The Rebuilding Continued (4:24-6:22)	Work on the Temple Begins Again (4:24-5:17)	The Rebuilding of the Temple (4:24-5:5 [520-515 B.C.])

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:1-3

¹Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, ²they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." ³But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us."

4:1 "the enemies" There was a delay from the starting of the temple in 536 B.C. to the completion in 516 B.C. Ezra explains that the delay was because of Judah's enemies (the surrounding people groups), while the prophet Haggai explains that it was because of Jewish apathy. The presence of opposition is foreshadowed in 3:3.

▣ **"Judah and Benjamin"** There were thirteen tribes. When they split in 922 B.C., ten tribes went with the northern group and three (really four if one counts the Levites) stayed with the southern group. Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, and most of Levi made up Judah.

This phrase was used often in the historical books of Kings and Chronicles to refer to the southern kingdom. In this context it implies that most of the Jews who returned were from the Babylonian exiles (i.e., 605, 597, 586, 582 B.C.). The northern tribes, exiled by Assyria in 722 B.C., were deported to Media and the vast majority of them never returned to Palestine.

▣ **"the people of the exile"** This is the descriptive title for the returning Jews. It implies that some of the opposition came not only from the half-Jewish descendants of the remaining Jews who had intermarried with pagan immigrants, but also possibly from Jews who were never exiled and had not intermarried. The returning Jews had a fervor for YHWH which came across as an elitism. They wanted no hint of paganism or idolatry, which had cost them their land, their freedom, and their worship! They also wanted no part of the indigenous Jewish leadership.

4:2 "approached Zerubbabel" The VERB (BDB 620, KB 670) is a *Qal* IMPERFECT. It is surprising with the significance of Jeshua so prominent in chapter 3 (cf. vv. 2,9) that Zerubbabel would be approached here in this chapter. Probably it was because he represented the legal authority of the Persian government. I Esdras 5:68 has "and Jeshua" here (cf. R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 40).

▣ **"Let us build with you"** This VERB (BDB 124, KB 139) is a *Qal* IMPERFECT, used in a COHORTATIVE sense.

▣ **"and the heads of fathers' households"** The aspect of clanism is prominent in the list of people in chapter 2. Leadership was a shared experience among the returnees. This matches the "elders" of Moses' wilderness wandering period (cf. Exod. 18:13-27).

Notice that all three leadership spheres are mentioned in v. 3:

1. Zerubbabel - political
2. Jeshua - religious
3. heads of father's households - traditional tribal (clan)

▣ **“for we have been sacrificing to Him”** The VERB (BDB 256, KB 261) is a *Qal* PARTICIPLE. The Jews of the Exile had ceased to sacrifice because of the Mosaic restrictions (Deuteronomy) about sacrifice away from the central sanctuary. The very fact that these people continued to sacrifice showed they were not in conformity to the Pentateuchal guidelines.

▣ **“since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria”** This is a statement from the Samaritan leaders. They had been exiled by the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C. This particular Assyrian king’s military exploits are not known to us, but he reigned from 681 to 669 B.C. It is obvious that these Samaritans were claiming to be YHWHists (cf. II Kgs. 17:24-41), but the Aramaic documents from the Elephantine Papyri show us their syncretic tendencies.

4:3

NASB **“You have nothing in common with us”**

NKJV **“You may do nothing with us”**

NRSV **“You shall have no part with us”**

TEV **“We don’t need your help”**

NJB **“It is out of the question that you should join us”**

Young’s *Literal Translation of the Bible* has “not for you, and for us.” This terse reply was a forceful way to reject the request (cf. Jdgs. 11:12; II Sam. 16:10; 19:22; I Kgs. 17:18; Mark 1:24; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28; John 2:4).

▣

NASB **“we ourselves will together build”**

NKJV, NRSV **“we alone will build”**

TEV **“we will build it ourselves”**

NJB **“we shall build. . .on our own”**

The key word is *yhd* (BDB 403), which denotes unity (cf. 3:1). The building itself had a community aspect. It was a task that in and of itself brought and established a sense of identity.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:4-5

**⁴Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building,
⁵and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.**

4:4 “the people of the land” Before the Exile this term referred to the landed nobility (JB notes, p. 573, says it refers to “those with landed property,” cf. II Kgs. 23:30,35). After the Exile it referred to the poorest people of the land (cf. II Kgs. 25:12; Jer. 39:10; 40:7; 52:16). Here, in this context, it seems to refer to the people of the Persian province known as “the land Beyond the River” (i.e., Palestine and Lebanon). In Ezra it refers to the descendants of Jews and pagans (who were imported by Assyria) who had a partial knowledge of YHWH (cf. Ezra 10:2,11; Neh. 10:31). From vv. 4-5 one would surmise that this term refers to the Persian governmental leadership of the province located in Samaria.

▣ **“discouraged the people of Judah”** This is literally “letting drop the hands” (BDB 951, KB 1276, *Peel* PARTICIPLE, cf. Jer. 38:4). It is an idiom for losing heart or energy (cf. II Chr. 15:7; Jer. 38:4).

▣ **“frightened them”** This is another *Peel* PARTICIPLE, which is used only here in the OT (BDB 117, KB 132). Apparently they mocked their ability, resources, and authority (cf. v. 5).

4:5 “hired counselors against them” This would have involved a period from 536 B.C. to sometime in Darius I’s reign (522-486 B.C.). It was a consistent, sustained, political strategy!

Again the time element is problematic. Does this imply that the actions of Zerubbabel and Jeshua started in Cyrus’ day? If so, it seems that Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel must be the same person who began the temple in 536 B.C. (cf. 5:16) because if they are separate governors then a date of 520 B.C. (Haggai prophecies) fits Zerubbabel’s day better. Does this imply that there was legal opposition which started in Sheshbazzar’s day, but was continued and reinforced until Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the heads of families’ response in v. 3?

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:6

⁶Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

4:6 “now in the reign of Ahasuerus” This chapter is very confusing unless one sees the Jewish mentality behind its structure. It is not in chronological order. Verses 6-23 are a parenthesis which deals with a period of Samaritan opposition over many years covering not only the rebuilding of the second temple but the finishing of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah.

▣ **“Ahasuerus”** Historians assert that this is the Hebrew name for Esther’s husband, who is known by his Greek name as Xerxes I, who was the son of Darius I. He reigned from 486 B.C. to 464 B.C. Notice that from Zerubbabel’s time (about 520 B.C., cf. v. 24) we have moved into the future (as we had moved into the past in v. 5) to show consistent opposition to the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem by the inhabitants of the Province Beyond the River.

SPECIAL TOPIC: BRIEF OUTLINE OF HISTORICAL ALLUSIONS TO PERSIAN KINGS

- A. The rebuilding of the temple as approved and subsidized by Cyrus II, vv. 1-5
- B. Letter of accusation from the leaders of the Province Beyond the River to Ahasuerus about rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem (Xerxes I, 486-465 B.C.), v. 6
- C. Letter of accusation from the leaders of the Province Beyond the River to Artaxerxes (I Longimanus, 465-424 B.C.) about rebuilding of the walls of the city of Jerusalem, vv. 7-23.

It is possible to see v. 7 as separate from v. 8 because the names are different (cf. Kidner, *Tyndale Commentary Series*, p. 51). If so it marks a separate legal attempt. However, it could be that simply different officials are involved.

- D. Darius I (Hystaspes, 523-486 B.C.), which was the time of Haggai and Zechariah, is mentioned specifically in vv. 5b and 24. The temple was started in about 520 and finished in 516 B.C.
- E. This chapter is a summary of the opposition (both to the temple and the walls of Jerusalem) from the local people group to the returning Jews rebuilding.
 - 1. Verses 1-5,24 refer to the temple
 - 2. Verses 6-23 refer to the walls of Jerusalem

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:7-11a

⁷And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic. ⁸Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King

Artaxerxes, as follows—⁹then wrote Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their colleagues, the judges and the lesser governors, the officials, the secretaries, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa, that is, the Elamites,¹⁰and the rest of the nations which the great and honorable Osnappar deported and settled in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the region beyond the River. Now ¹¹this is the copy of the letter which they sent to him:

4:7 “Artaxerxes, king of Persia” Artaxerxes was the successor of Xerxes I and reigned from 464 to 423 B.C. It was during his reign that Ezra (Ezra 7-10) and Nehemiah (the book of Nehemiah) lived and worked.

▣ **“Bishlam”** Most English translations consider this a proper name (BDB 133), but the NJB, NAB, and REV do not. The Septuagint understands the word as literally “in peace,” meaning “in agreement with” or “with the approval of.” The Anchor Bible, vol. 14, p. 32, says it means “concerning Jerusalem” or “on the Jerusalem affair.”

▣ **“Midhredath”** See note at 1:8. This is a different person than the man by the same name in Babylon.

▣ **“written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic”** It must be remembered that the Persians spoke Persian, but used Aramaic as the official language of the empire because of the wide variety of languages in the ancient Near East. Aramaic is a Semitic language which was used by the Assyrians.

4:8 “Rehum the commander” This would have been the highest ranking Persian official in this list who dictated the letter.

▣ **“Shimshai the scribe”** We learn from Herodotus (*Hist.* 3.128) that each Persian satrap had a special scribe appointed by the Persian king to keep tabs on them.

▣ **“wrote”** This begins the Aramaic section (cf. 4:8 through 6:18). Much of Ezra is made up of official documents translated into the text. I believe that there are three different letters referred to in this section. There is one in verses 6, 7, and 8.

4:9 “their colleagues, the judges and the lesser governors, the officials, the secretaries” These terms are all uncertain, but possibly relate to levels of governmental officials in Samaria or the Province Beyond the River.

It is possible that these are the personal names of people from the exiled people groups (from Erech, Babylon; from Susa, Elamites, cf. the Qere of the MT, also see Oxford Study Bible and *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 632-33 footnote #9).

The implication of the list is that everyone agreed with the accusations and complaints against the newly returned Jews.

▣ **“the men of Erech”** Erech was a major city of the Sumerians (cf. Gen. 10:10). The people of Samaria are describing themselves according to the geographical location from which they originally came. This is the first of a series of geographical groups which made up the returnees (cf. v. 10) to the Province Beyond the River (cf. v. 11b).

4:10 “Osnappar” This probably refers to Ashurbanipal, who was the son of Esarhaddon (681-609 B.C., cf. v. 2). He reigned from 669 to 627 B.C. This last great king of Assyria completed the deportations begun by his father. This may refer to the deportation of Shusha (Susa) in 645 B.C. to the area of Samaria.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:11b-16

^{11b}”To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the men in the region beyond the River, and now ¹²let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. ¹³”Now let it be known to the king, that if that city is rebuilt and the walls are finished, they will not pay tribute, custom or toll, and it will damage the revenue of the kings. ¹⁴Now because we are in the service of the palace, and it is not fitting for us to see the king’s dishonor, therefore we have sent and informed the king, ¹⁵so that a search may be made in the record books of your fathers. And you will discover in the record books and learn that that city is a rebellious city and damaging to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in past days; therefore that city was laid waste. ¹⁶We inform the king that if that city is rebuilt and the walls finished, as a result you will have no possession in *the province beyond the River.*”

4:11b The message to Artaxerxes (Artaxerxes I Longimanus, 465-424 B.C.), the Persian king (cf. v. 7), begins here and runs through v. 16.

4:12 “let it be known to the king” The two VERBS in this verse and vv. 13,22, and 5:8 are the same.

1. “known” (BDB 1095), *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE
2. “be” (BDB 1089) *Peal* IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense

▣ **“finishing the walls”** It is obvious that we have jumped from the finishing of the temple (cf. Ezra 1-5) to the finishing of the walls (cf vv. 16,21; Ezra 7-10, and Nehemiah).

4:13-16 The Samaritans’ accusation was based on three things: (1) they will not pay taxes; (2) they have rebelled in the past; and (3) they will rebel again and take away the Province Beyond the River.

4:13 “will damage the revenue of the kings” This Aramaic VERB (BDB 1102, *Haphel* IMPERFECT) is used several times in the OT, here in reference to a Persian king (cf. 4:15,22; Dan. 6:2), as is the related Hebrew VERB (BDB 634, cf. Esth. 7:4).

There seem to be three consequences in the letter allowing the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

1. loss of tax revenue
2. loss of face (reputation)
3. loss of land (the Jews once controlled Palestine and they would try to do it again)

▣ **“of the kings”** This PLURAL refers to future kings of the Persian Empire or is an example of the Hebrew grammatical feature called the PLURAL OF MAJESTY.

4:13 “we are in the service of the place” This is literally “we eat the salt of the palace,” which was a Near Eastern metaphor for friendship and association (BDB 1100). Possibly this is a reference to a vow symbolized by eating salt.

▣ **“the king’s dishonor”** The term “dishonor” (BDB 1100) is literally “nakedness,” which became a metaphor for shame or dishonor.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:17-22

¹⁷Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and in the rest of *the provinces beyond the River*: “Peace. And now ¹⁸the document which you sent to us has been translated and read before me. ¹⁹A decree has been

issued by me, and a search has been made and it has been discovered that that city has risen up against the kings in past days, that rebellion and revolt have been perpetrated in it, ²⁰that mighty kings have ruled over Jerusalem, governing all *the provinces* beyond the River, and that tribute, custom and toll were paid to them. ²¹So, now issue a decree to make these men stop work, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me. ²²Beware of being negligent in carrying out this matter; why should damage increase to the detriment of the kings?"

4:20 This is a purposeful overstatement which continues the provocative flavor of this letter. Neither David nor Solomon ruled over the entire area west of the Euphrates River (but Solomon was close to doing so).

4:21 It is surprising that Artaxerxes responded positively to these letters (i.e., v. 7 & vv. 8-16), since he is the very one who allowed Ezra to return and bring others with him and also responded so positively to Nehemiah's request to go and rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:23

²³Then as soon as the copy of King Artaxerxes' document was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their colleagues, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and stopped them by force of arms.

4:23 "stopped them by force of arms" From Nehemiah 1:3 it seems that the Samaritans not only stopped them, but destroyed the work they had done (cf. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1677). However, this possibly refers to the rubble remaining from the destruction of Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 B.C.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:24

²⁴Then work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased, and it was stopped until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

4:24 This relates to verse 5. The temple commissioned by Cyrus was completed under Darius I. It must be remembered that vv. 6-23 is a historical parenthesis describing the continual opposition of the Samaritans throughout the rebuilding period of the temple (Ezra 1-5) and the city (Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah).

▣ **"Darius I"** This is not the Darius of the book of Daniel (cf. 5:31; 6:1-27). This is Darius I Hystaspes, the Persian ruler from 522 to 486 B.C.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is the chronology of this chapter so confusing?
2. Why were the returning Jews unhappy with the locals claiming to have been sacrificing to YHWH?
3. List the kings and their nationality mentioned in chapter 4.

EZRA 5

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
	The Rebuilding Continued (4:23-6:22)	Work on the Temple Begins Again (4:24-5:17)	The Rebuilding of the Temple [520-515 B.C.] (4:24-5:5)
	4:23-5:2		
Restoration of the Temple Resumed	4:24-5:2	4:24-5:2	4:24-5:2
5:1-5			
	5:3-5	5:3-17	5:3-5
			The Governor's Letter to King Darius
5:6-17	5:6-17		5:6-17

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:1-2

¹When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, ²then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

5:1 “Haggai” See Special Topic below.

SPECIAL TOPIC: HAGGAI (TAKEN FROM DR. UTLEY’S OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY)

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. Named after its speaker
- B. His name means “Festival.” The *yod* or “I” at the end may be an abbreviation for YHWH; if so, “festival of YHWH” (cf. I Chr. 6:30) or the PRONOUN “my,” which would also refer to YHWH.

II. CANONIZATION

- A. This book is part of the “latter prophets” (*Ecclesiasticus* 49:10).
- B. It is part of “the Twelve,” a grouping of minor prophets (*Baba Bathra* 14b):
 - 1. like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, they fit on one scroll.
 - 2. they represent the twelve tribes or the symbolic number of organization.
 - 3. they reflect the traditional view of the book’s chronology.
- C. The order of “the Twelve” or Minor Prophets has been linked by many scholars to a chronological sequence. It is obvious that Haggai and Zechariah are paired historically.

III. GENRE

- A. This is a series of four or five sermons (1:13).
- B. It is not poetic.

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. Haggai is mentioned in Ezra 5:1; 6:14, and Zech. 8:9, where he is linked with Zechariah. He was probably a returnee from Exile.
- B. He is also mentioned in I Esdras 6:1; 7:3 and II Esdras 1:40. *Ecclesiasticus* 49:11 is a quote from Haggai 2:23.
- C. Jerome says that he was a priest, but this is a misunderstanding derived from 2:10-19.
- D. Ewald and Pusey suggest that 2:3 implies that he saw Solomon’s Temple, which would make him 70 or 80 years old.
- E. Cyril of Alexandria mentions a general opinion in his day that he was an angel. This is from a misunderstanding of the Hebrew term “messenger” in 1:13.
- F. The LXX attributes several Psalms to Haggai and Zechariah: 112, 126, 127, 137, 146-149.
- G. all of Haggai’s four sermons are recorded in the third person which implies
 - 1. a common literary technique
 - 2. a scribe or editor.

V. DATE

- A. Haggai was a post-exilic prophet along with Zechariah, his contemporary.
- B. The book is dated from the first day of the sixth month (1:1) until the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (2:10,20) of the second year of Darius I Hystaspes (521-486 B.C.). Therefore, the date is 520 B.C. This was four years before the second Temple was finished in 516 B.C., and fulfills the prophecy of Jeremiah regarding the seventy years of exile, which began in 586 B.C.

VI. CHRONOLOGY OF THE PERIOD (taken from *The Minor Prophets* by Dr. Theo Laetsch, published by Concordia, p. 385).

Darius' Regnal Year	Year B.C.	Month	Day	Text	Content	
2	520	Sept/Oct	6			
			1	Hag. 1:1-11	Haggai rouses the people into activity	
			24	Hag. 1:12-15	The people begin to build	
			7			
		Oct/Nov	1	Hag. 2:1-9	The latter glory of God's Temple	
			8			
		Nov/Dec	?	Zech. 1:1-6	Zechariah begins to prophesy	
			9			
		Dec/Jan	24		Hag. 2:10-19	God will begin to bless
					Hag. 2:20-23	Messiah's kingdom established after overthrow of world powers
	519		11			
		Feb/Mar	24	Zech. 1:7-6:8	Zechariah's night visions	
4	518		9			
		Dec/Jan	4	Zech. 7, 8	Repentance urged; blessing promised	
6	516	Mar/Apr	12			
			3	Ezra 6:15	Dedication of Temple	
		?		Zech. 9-14	After dedication of Temple	

VII. LITERARY UNITS—It is outlined by the prophet's sermons

- A. First Sermon, 1:1-11, Rebuild the Temple!
- B. The leaders and people respond, 1:12-15.
- C. Second Sermon, 2:1-9, The Temple size is not the issue!
- D. Third Sermon, 2:10-19, God's blessings will flow if the people obey and rebuild the Temple.
- E. Fourth Sermon, 2:20-23, The universal reign of the Messiah foreshadowed in Zerubbabel.

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. The book focuses on the rebuilding of the Second Temple, which had been neglected several years earlier.
 1. Ezra 5:16 (1st year, under Sheshbazzar)
 2. Ezra 3:8-13 (2nd year, under Zerubbabel)
- B. God's promises of immediate physical blessings and future Messianic blessings are linked to the rebuilding of the Temple (restoration of Mosaic Covenant).
- C. The size and majesty of the Temple was not the issue, rather its presence. God's presence, which it symbolized, was the true glory!

▣ "Zechariah the son of Iddo" See Special Topic following.

SPECIAL TOPIC: ZECHARIAH

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. It is named after the prophet.

- B. His name meant “YHWH remembers,” “remembered by YHWH,” or “YHWH has remembered.” His name implied that YHWH was still with the Jews and had restored the covenant.

II. CANONIZATION

- A. This book is part of the “latter prophets” (*Ecclesiasticus* 49:10).
- B. It is part of “the Twelve,” a grouping of minor prophets (*Baba Bathra* 14b):
 - 1. like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, they fit on one scroll.
 - 2. they represent the twelve tribes or the symbolic number of organization.
 - 3. they reflect traditional view of the books chronology.
- C. The order of “the Twelve” or Minor Prophets has been linked by many scholars to a chronological sequence. It is obvious that Haggai and Zechariah form a historical pair.

III. GENRE

- A. This book is an example of apocalyptic literature:
 - 1. Chapters 1-8 are basically prose.
 - 2. Chapters 9-14 are basically poetry.
- B. This genre was unique to the Jews. It was often used in tension-filled times to express the conviction that God is in control of history and would bring deliverance to His people.
- C. It was characterized by
 - 1. a strong sense of the universal sovereignty of God
 - 2. a struggle between good and evil in this age
 - 3. use of secret code words
 - 4. use of colors
 - 5. use of numbers
 - 6. use of animals, sometimes animals/humans
 - 7. God communicates His revelation by means of dreams or visions usually through angelic mediation
 - 8. primarily focuses on the future
- D. Some other examples are
 - 1. Old Testament
 - a. Daniel 7-12
 - b. Ezekiel 37-48 (?)
 - 2. New Testament
 - a. Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, II Thess. 2
 - b. Revelation
 - 3. non-canonical
 - a. I Enoch
 - b. IV Ezra (Esdras)
 - c. II Baruch
- E. Jerome calls Zechariah the most obscure book in the OT. Yet, it is alluded to extensively in the NT:
 - 1. chapters 1-8 in the book of Revelation.

2. chapters 9-14 in the Gospels.

- F. These visions are difficult to interpret but if we keep the historical setting in mind they must relate to the rebuilding of the Temple in post-exilic Jerusalem. They are focusing on a new day of forgiveness and the coming of the Messiah.

IV. AUTHOR

- A. Zechariah was a very common Hebrew name. It was spelled two ways: Zechariah or Zachariah. There are 27 people in the OT who spell it with an “e” and 2 who spell it with an “a.”
- B. Chapter 1:1 says that he is a priest (cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:4,16). Why Berechiah, who is mentioned in 1:1 but was omitted in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 is uncertain. This would make Zechariah an early post-exilic prophet like Haggai and Malachi, and possibly Obadiah and Joel.
- C. Many modern scholars deny the unity of Zechariah. This is because chapters 1-8 are so different from chapters 9-14. In chapters 1-8 the prophet is named and the historical dates are given. The setting is obviously post-exilic. This section is alluded to extensively by John in his book of the Revelation. However, chapters 9-14 are undated. There is no prophet named. The historical setting is eschatological. This section is alluded to most often in the Gospels.

In Matt. 27:9 Jesus attributes a quote to Jeremiah which is from Zech. 11:12-13. This was the beginning of the trend toward denying authorship of chapters 9-14 to Zechariah. However, even the Dead Sea Scrolls have Zechariah as a unity. There are several internal items which point to a unity:

1. the use of the number “two” - 4:3; 5:9; 6:1; 11:7; 13:8,
2. the use of the VOCATIVE - 2:7,10; 3:2,8; 4:7; 9:9,13; 11:1-2; 13:7,
3. the use of the phrase “from passing and from returning” which is unique to Zechariah - 7:14; 9:8,
4. the repeated use of “saith the Lord” - used 16 times,
5. the *qal* form of “to dwell” - 2:8; 7:7; 12:6; 14:10.

(These are taken from R.K. Harrison’s *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.954.) For further discussion of the unity of the book (cf. E. J. Young’s *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p.280).

- D. The fact that Zechariah is made up of a historical and future section should not be surprising. We have seen this pattern before:
1. Isaiah 1-39 and 40-66
 2. Ezekiel 1-29 and 30-48
 3. Daniel 1-6 and 7-12
- E. A new *Old Testament Introduction* by Andrew Hill and John Walton on p. 421 outlines both divisions by a series of chiasmic parallelism (a, b, b, a or a, b, c, b, a). This consistent literary technique gives future evidence of one author.

V. DATE

- A. Zechariah 1:1 states that the prophet began his ministry in the 2nd year of the 8th month of the reign of Darius I (522-486 B.C.). Most scholars assert that this is Darius I Hystrapes who took over the kingdom of Persia after Cambyses II (530-522), Cyrus II’s son, died in 522 B.C. Darius was a general of the Persian Army.
- B. This would make the date 519 or 520 B.C. (2 months after Haggai). He preached about two years (cf. 1:1,7; 7:1).

IV. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. The major purpose of the book is the encouraging of the returned Jews to rebuild the Temple. This was started by Sheshbazzar, Ezra 1:8; 5:16, but had not been continued under Zerubbabel. The Temple had been neglected for several years. Haggai asserts that this is because of the apathy of the people while Ezra implies that it was the political maneuvers of the surrounding provinces, especially Samaria.
- B. This book is very Messianic. Many of the prophecies about Jesus' life came from chaps. 9-14:
 - 1. king is humble and riding on the foal of a donkey, 9:9,
 - 2. sold for thirty shekels of silver, the price of a slave, and a potter's field as Judas's burial place, 11:13,
 - 3. emphasis on descendant from David, 12:4-9,
 - 4. "they will look on Me whom they have pierced..." 12:10.
- C. The universal love and reign of God is seen in 2:11; 8:20-23; 14:9,16. But in chapters 9-14 the universal rebellion of all peoples is stressed, 12:3 & 14:2 (Ps. 2).

▣ **“prophesied”** This VERB (BDB 612) is a *Hithpael* PERFECT. It implies the supernatural presence and power of the Spirit of God (cf. Num. 11:25-27; I Sam. 10; 19).

SPECIAL TOPIC: OT PROPHECY

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Opening Statements:

- 1. The believing community does not agree on how to interpret prophecy. Other truths have been established as to an orthodox position throughout the centuries, but not this one.
- 2. There are several well defined stages of OT prophecy:
 - a. premonarchial:
 - (1) individuals called prophets
 - (a) Abraham - Gen. 20:7
 - (b) Moses - Num. 12:6-8; Deut. 18:15; 34:10
 - (c) Aaron - Exod. 7:1 (spokesman for Moses)
 - (d) Miriam - Exod. 15:20
 - (e) Medad and Eldad - Num. 11:24-30
 - (f) Deborah - Jdgs. 4:4
 - (g) unnamed - Jdgs. 6:7-10
 - (h) Samuel - I Sam. 3:20
 - (2) references to prophets as a group - Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22
 - (3) prophetic group or guild - I Sam. 10:5-13; 19:20; I Kgs. 20:35,41; 22:6,10-13; II Kgs. 2:3,7; 4:1,38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.
 - (4) Messiah called prophet - Deut. 18:15-18
 - b. non-writing monarchial (they address the king):
 - (1) Gad - I Sam. 22:5; II Sam. 24:11; I Chr. 29:29
 - (2) Nathan - II Sam. 7:2; 12:25; I Kgs. 1:22
 - (3) Ahijah - I Kgs. 11:29

- (4) Jehu - I Kgs. 16:1,7,12
- (5) unnamed - I Kgs. 18:4,13; 20:13,22
- (6) Elijah - I Kgs. 18-II Kgs. 2
- (7) Milcaiah - I Kgs. 22
- (8) Elisha - II Kgs. 2:8,13

c. classical writing prophets (they address the nation as well as the king): Isaiah-Malachi (except Daniel)

B. Biblical Terms

1. *Ro'eh* = "seer," I Sam. 9:9. This reference itself shows the transition to the term *Nabi*. *Ro'eh* is from the general term "to see." This person understood God's ways and plans and was consulted to ascertain God's will in a matter.
2. *Hozeh* = "seer," II Sam. 24:11. It is basically a synonym of *Ro'eh*. It is from a rarer term "to see." The participled form is used most often to refer to prophets (i.e., "to behold").
3. *Nabi* = "prophet," cognate of Akkadian verb *Nabu* = "to call" and Arabic *Naba'a* = "to announce." This is the most common term in the Old Testament to designate a prophet. It is used over 300 times. The exact etymology is uncertain but "to call" at present seems the best option. Possibly the best understanding comes from YHWH's description of Moses' relationship to Pharaoh through Aaron (cf. Exod. 4:10-16; 7:1; Deut. 5:5. A prophet is someone who speaks for God to His people (Amos 3:8; Jer. 1:7,17; Ezek. 3:4.)
4. All three terms are used of the prophet's office in I Chr. 29:29; Samuel - *Ro'eh*; Nathan - *Nabi'* and Gad - *Hozeh*.
5. The phrase, *'ish ha - 'elohim*, "Man of God," is also a broader designation for a speaker for God. It is used some 76 times in the OT in the sense of "prophet."
6. The term "prophet" is Greek in origin. It comes from: (1) pro = "before" or "for" and (2) phemi = "to speak."

II. DEFINITION OF PROPHECY

- A. The term "prophecy" had a wider semantic field in Hebrew than in English. The history books of Joshua through Kings (except Ruth) are labeled by the Jews as "the former prophets." Both Abraham (Gen. 20:7; Ps. 105:5) and Moses (Deut. 18:18) are designated as prophets (also Miriam, Exod. 15:20). Therefore, beware of an assumed English definition!
- B. "Propheticism may legitimately be defined as that understanding of history which accepts meaning only in terms of divine concern, divine purpose, divine participation," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, p. 896.
- C. "The prophet is neither a philosopher nor a systematic theologian, but a covenant mediator who delivers the word of God to His people in order to shape their future by reforming their present, "Prophets and Prophecy," *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 13 p. 1152.

III. PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

- A. Prophecy is a way for God to speak to His people, providing guidance in their current setting and hope in His control of their lives and world events. Their message was basically corporate. It is meant to rebuke, encourage, engender faith and repentance, and inform God's people about Himself and His plans. They hold God's people to fidelity to God's covenants. To this must be added that often it is used to clearly reveal God's choice of a spokesman (Deut. 13:1-3; 18:20-22). This, taken ultimately, would refer to the Messiah.
- B. Often, the prophet took a historical or theological crisis of his day and projected this into an eschatological setting. This end time view of history is unique in Israel and its sense of divine election and covenant promises.

- C. The office of prophet seems to balance (Jer. 18:18) and usurp the office of High Priest as a way to know God's will. The Urim and Thummim transcend into a verbal message from God's spokesman. The office of prophet seems to also have passed away in Israel after Malachi. It does not reappear until 400 years later with John the Baptist. It is uncertain how the New Testament gift of "prophecy" relates to the Old Testament. New Testament prophets (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1; 14:29,32,37; 15:32; I Cor. 12:10,28-29; Eph. 4:11) are not revealers of new revelation or Scripture, but forth-tellers and foretellers of God's will in covenant situations.
- D. Prophecy is not exclusively or primarily predictive in nature. Prediction is one way to confirm his office and his message, but it must be noted "less than 2% of OT prophecy is Messianic. Less than 5% specifically describes the New Covenant Age. Less than 1% concerns events yet to come." (Fee & Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, p. 166)
- E. Prophets represent God to the people while Priests represent the people to God. This is a general statement. There are exceptions like Habakkuk, who addresses questions to God.
- F. One reason it is difficult to understand the prophets is because we do not know how their books were structured. They are not chronological. They seem to be thematic but not always the way one would expect. Often there is no obvious historical setting, timeframe or clear division between oracles. These books are difficult: (1) to read through in one sitting; (2) to outline by topic; and (3) to ascertain the central truth or authorial intent in each oracle.

IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF PROPHECY

- A. In the Old Testament there seems to be a development of the concept of "prophet" and "prophecy." In early Israel there developed a fellowship of prophets, led by a strong charismatic leader such as Elijah or Elisha. Sometimes the phrase, "the sons of the prophets," was used to designate this group (II Kgs. 2). The prophets were characterized by forms of ecstasy (I Sam. 10:10-13; 19:18-24).
- B. However, this period passed rapidly into individuals prophets. There were those prophets (both true and false) who identified with the King, and lived at the palace (Gad, Nathan). Also, there were those who were independent, sometimes totally unconnected with the status quo of Israeli society (Amos). They are both male and female (II Kgs. 22:14.)
- C. The prophet was often a revealer of the future, conditioned on man's immediate response. Often the prophet's task was an unfolding of God's universal plan for His creation which is not affected by human response. This universal eschatological plan is unique among the prophets of the ancient Near East. Prediction and Covenant fidelity are twin foci of the prophetic messages (cf. Fee and Stuart, p. 150). This implies that the prophets are primarily corporate in focus. They usually, but not exclusively, address the nation.
- D. Most prophetic material was orally presented. It was later combined by means of theme, chronology or other patterns of Near Eastern Literature which are lost to us. Because it was oral it is not as structured as written prose. This makes the books difficult to read straight through and difficult to understand without a specific historical setting.
- E. The prophets use several patterns to convey their messages:
 1. Court Scene - God takes His people to court, often it is a divorce case where YHWH rejects his wife (Israel) for her unfaithfulness (Hosea 4; Micah 6).
 2. Funeral dirge - the special meter of this type of message and its characteristic "woe" sets it apart as a special form (Isaiah 5; Habakkuk 2).
 3. Covenant Blessing Pronouncement - the conditional nature of the Covenant is emphasized and the consequences, both positively and negatively, are spelled out for the future (Deut. 27-28).

V. HELPFUL GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING PROPHECY

- A. Find the intent of the original prophet (editor) by noting the historical setting and the literary context of each oracle. Usually it will involve Israel breaking the Mosaic Covenant in some way.
- B. Read and interpret the whole oracle, not just a part; outline it as to content. See how it relates to surrounding oracles. Try to outline the whole book.
- C. Assume a literal interpretation of the passage until something in the text itself points you to figurative usage; then put the figurative language into prose.
- D. Analyze symbolic action in light of historical setting and parallel passages. Be sure to remember this Ancient Near Eastern literature is not western or modern literature.
- E. Treat prediction with care:
 1. Are they exclusively for the author's day?
 2. Were they subsequently fulfilled in Israel's history?
 3. Are they yet future events?
 4. Do they have a contemporary fulfillment and yet a future fulfillment?
 5. Allow the authors of the Bible, not modern authors, to guide your answers.
- F. Special concerns
 1. Is the prediction qualified by conditional response?
 2. Is it certain to whom the prophecy is addressed (and why)?
 3. Is there a possibility both Biblically and/or historically for multiple fulfillment?
 4. The NT authors under inspiration were able to see the Messiah in many places in the OT that are not obvious to us. They seem to use typology or word play. Since we are not inspired we best leave this approach to them.

VI. HELPFUL BOOKS

- A. *A Guide to Biblical Prophecy* by Carl E. Amending and W. Ward Basque
- B. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
- C. *My Servants the Prophets* by Edward J. Young
- D. *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* by D. Brent Sandy
- E. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4, pp. 1067-1078

▣ **“in the name of the God of Israel who was over them”** The purpose of this phrase is to verify a renewed covenant relationship between the returning Israelites and the God of Israel.

5:2 “Zerubbabel” For a good discussion of the theories about the relationship of Sheshbazzar to Zerubbabel see *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* by Gleason L. Archer, pp. 216-219.

▣ **“Jeshua”** See notes at 2:2.

▣ **“arose”** This Aramaic VERB (BDB 1110; KB 1086, *Peal* PERFECT) is used in the sense of “arise out of inactivity.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:3-5

³At that time Tattenai, the governor of *the province* beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues came to them and spoke to them thus, “Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?” ⁴Then we told them accordingly what the names of the men were who

were reconstructing this building. ⁵But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report could come to Darius, and then a written reply be returned concerning it.

5:3 “Tattenai, the governor” This seems to be a technical name (BDB 1108, KB 1955) for the governor of the Persian province west of the Euphrates River (cf. TEV). It is uncertain if he was the satrap of this province (cf. 8:36) or a lesser official appointed by the king (cf. II Kgs. 18:24; Dan. 3:2; Neh. 2:7,9).

The reason for the ambiguity of the term for governmental officials is that during Darius I’s reign he reorganized the Persian Empire from 522 regions into 20 (Herodotus 3:89). This reorganization and simplification was based on race and geography.

Both Zerubbabel (cf. Hag. 1:1,14; 2:2,21) and Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 12:26) are also called by this term (i.e., “governor of Judah”).

▣ **“Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple”** Either our text leaves out some of the dialogue (cf. TEV) or the Jews purposefully did not answer this question but instead gave the name of the builders (the LXX and Peshitta have “they said,” rather than the MT’s “we said”). This is surprising since the book of Ezra records the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem twice, once in Hebrew (1:1-4) and once in Aramaic (6:1-5).

Verse 10 shows the purpose of the Persian leader’s second question. It was for the purpose of intimidation and fear directed towards the Jewish leadership (i.e., “head,” BDB 1112).

▣

NASB “to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure”

NKJV “to build this temple and finish this wall”

NRSV “to build this house and to finish this structure”

TEV “to build this Temple and equip it”

NJB “to rebuild this temple and complete this structure”

It is obvious from the above translations that the Aramaic term “structure” (BDB 1083, KB 1827) is ambiguous, but the general sense is clear.

5:5 “the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews” This is an anthropomorphic idiom for God’s attentive presence and care (cf. Ps. 32:8; 33:18; 34:15; Job 36:7; I Pet. 3:12). A similar idiom is used in 7:6,28 (i.e., “the hand of the LORD”).

God does not have a human body, but mankind’s only vocabulary is related to the physical aspects of creation.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN LANGUAGE

A. Our language is finite and, therefore, not exhaustive.

1. anthropomorphism (God described in human terms)

a. God with a human body

(1) walking, Gen. 3:8; 18:33; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:14

(2) eyes, Gen. 6:8; Exod. 33:17

(3) man on a throne, Isa. 6:1; Dan. 7:9

b. God as female

(1) Gen. 1:2, Spirit as female bird

(2) Gen. 17:1 (*El Shaddai*)

- (3) Deut. 32:18, God as mother
- (4) Exod. 19:4, God as mother eagle
- (5) Isa. 49:14-15; 66:9-13 (and possibly Hos. 11:4), God as a nursing mother
- c. God as advocating lying, I Kg. 22:19-23
- d. NT examples of “God’s right hand,” Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 13:1; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; I Pet. 3:22
- 2. Human titles used to describe God
 - a. Shepherd, Ps. 23
 - b. Father, Isa. 63:16; Ps. 103:13
 - c. *Go’el*, Kinsman redeemer, Exod. 6:6
 - d. Lover/husband, Hos. 1-3
 - e. Parent, father, and mother, Hos. 11:3-4
- 3. Physical objects used to describe God
 - a. Rock, Ps. 18
 - b. Fortress and stronghold, Ps. 18
 - c. Shield, Gen. 15:1; Ps. 18
 - d. Horn of salvation, Ps. 18
 - e. Tree, Hos. 14:8
- B. Language is part of the image of God in mankind, but sin has affected all aspects of our existence, including language.
- C. God is faithful and communicates to us adequately, if not exhaustively, knowledge about Himself. This is usually in the form of negation, analogy, or metaphor.

▣ **“elders”** The Septuagint has “captivity,” which reflects a different way to interpret the Hebrew consonantal text. Elders were central in the leadership structure of Moses’ day (e.g., Exod. 18:13-27) as well as the pre-monarchical period. During the Monarchy their leadership was on a tribal and local level, not national. The post-exilic period restored their place of central leadership.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:6-17

⁶*This is the copy of the letter which Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and his colleagues the officials, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king.* ⁷They sent a report to him in which it was written thus: “To Darius the king, all peace. ⁸Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is being built with huge stones, and beams are being laid in the walls; and this work is going on with great care and is succeeding in their hands. ⁹Then we asked those elders and said to them thus, ‘Who issued you a decree to rebuild this temple and to finish this structure?’ ¹⁰We also asked them their names so as to inform you, and that we might write down the names of the men who were at their head. ¹¹Thus they answered us, saying, ‘We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. ¹²But because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, *who* destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon. ¹³However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. ¹⁴Also the gold and silver utensils of the house of God which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, and brought them to the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon and they were given to one whose name was

Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor. ¹⁵He said to him, “Take these utensils, go *and* deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem and let the house of God be rebuilt in its place.” ¹⁶Then that Sheshbazzar came *and* laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not yet completed.’ ¹⁷Now if it pleases the king, let a search be conducted in the king’s treasure house, which is there in Babylon, if it be that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to rebuild this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send to us his decision concerning this *matter*.”

5:6 “Shethar-bozenai” This word (BDB 1117, KB 2003) can be a proper name (most English translations) or a title (“empire-delivering,” cf. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1677). It always appears in conjunction with Tattenai, the governor (cf. 5:3,6; 6:6,13).



NASB, NJB,

JPSOA “the officials”

NKJV “the Persians”

NRSV “the envoys”

TEV “fellow officials” (v. 3)

This word (BDB 1082, KB 1822) is given three possible meanings.

1. a general name for a people group (i.e., Persian, cf. Dan. 6:28)
2. a title (i.e., lesser governor, cf. 4:9)
3. a proper name

☐ **“all peace”** This must be a Persian idiom (cf. Dan. 4:1). The word “peace” (BDB 1116) means “prosperity” or “welfare” (cf. Dan. 6:26).

5:8 “the house of the great God” Even though the purpose of this report is negative, these Persian leaders know that the administration is tolerant to national gods. Therefore, they use the ADJECTIVE “great” in connection to YHWH. This is political correctness, not devotion or faith!



NASB “huge stones”

NKJV “heavy stones”

NRSV “hewn stones”

TEV “large stone blocks”

NJB “large stones”

Literally the Aramaic has “rolling stones” (BDB 1078, 1086), which may denote (1) the method of their transportation to the construction site (i.e., on rollers or logs) or (2) how they were polished (i.e., expensive stones). These large stones may have caused the Persian officials concerns that something more than a small temple was being constructed at their government’s expense.

☐ **“and beams”** This was a common construction technique of the ancient Near East, which was also used in constructing Solomon’s temple (e.g., I Kgs. 6:36). Some speculate that it was a way to guard against earthquake damage (cf. Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Commentary Series*, p. 55)

5:11 “the God of heaven and earth” This is a Persian title for deity (as is “God of heaven”). The Jews borrowed the titles used by the Persian Zoroastrians for their high god (*Ahura Mazda*) and applied them to YHWH.

▣ **“a great king of Israel”** This refers to Solomon (cf. I Kgs. 6).

5:12 This is the theological understanding of why YHWH allowed Israel and Judah to be defeated and exiled. In the ancient world nations warred on behalf of their god, under his/her protection and power, therefore, a military defeat reflected on the potency of the deities involved. However, in the case of the Israelites, it was their sin and rebellion which allowed their defeat!

5:13-16 This is a review of chapter 1.

5:13 “King Cyrus issued a decree” Cyrus changed the policy of both the Assyrians and Babylonians by allowing all the exiled peoples to return to their homeland and rebuild their national temples. This was both for political and religious reasons. He assumed that the people groups of the ancient Near East would be grateful and pray for him and his successors. See Special Topic: The Rise of Cyrus at 1:1.

5:14 “the temple of Babylon” Originally each city of Babylon had their own deity. As Babylon (the city) became the capital, its deity (*Marduk*), became the national deity.

▣ **“Sheshbazzar”** This refers to the Judean leader of the first return in chapter 1, while Zerubbabel is not mentioned until chapter 2. Both are of the royal line of Judah.

▣ **“in its place”** The site of the temple was crucial in establishing continuity between the Patriarchs and the new covenant community (cf. Gen. 22:2,4,14; II Sam. 24:15-25; II Chr. 3:1; 7:1ff).

5:15 This verse has a series of commands.

1. “take” (BDB 1103), *Peal* IMPERATIVE
2. “go” (BDB 1079), *Peal* IMPERATIVE
3. “deposit” (BDB 1102), *Aphel* IMPERATIVE
4. “let the house of God be rebuilt” (BDB 1084), *Hithpael* IMPERFECT used in JUSSIVE sense

5:16 “Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem” It seems that this man cleared off the rubble and found the original foundations, but the temple itself was not rebuilt until the second return under Zerubbabel and Jeshua (cf. Haggai and Zechariah).

▣ **“and from then until now it has been under construction and it is not yet completed”** This may be a comment by Tattenai or a summary statement provided by the Jews themselves. The temple was started soon after 538 B.C. (Cyrus’ decree) by Sheshbazzar (cf. 5:16), but lapsed the project into inactivity until the time of Zerubbabel and Haggai/Zechariah about 519-520 B.C. (cf. 4:24-6:22). See Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 2, pp. 323-324).

5:17 “Let a search be conducted” The VERB (BDB 1085) is a *Hithpael* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How are the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, connected to Zerubbabel?
2. Explain the difference between the two questions in v. 3 (cf. v. 9).
3. Why is v. 12 so theologically significant?
4. Why is Sheshbazzar mentioned again in this chapter?
5. Explain the phrase “laid the foundation.”

EZRA 6

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Decree of Darius 6:1-5	6:1-5	Emperor Cyrus' Order is Rediscovered 6:1-5	King Darius Replies 6:1-5
6:6-12	6:6-12	Emperor Darius Orders the Work to Continue 6:6-12	6:6-12
The Temple Completed and Dedicated 6:13-18	6:13-15 6:16-18	The Temple is Dedicated 6:13-18	The Temple is Complete 6:13-18
The Passover Celebrated 6:19-22	6:19-22	The Passover 6:19-22	The Passover of 515 B.C. 6:19-22

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:1-5

¹Then King Darius issued a decree, and search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. ²In Ecbatana in the fortress, which is in the province of Media, a scroll was found and there was written in it as follows: “Memorandum—³In the first year of King Cyrus, Cyrus

the king issued a decree: *‘Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered, be rebuilt and let its foundations be retained, its height being 60 cubits and its width 60 cubits; ⁴with three layers of huge stones and one layer of timbers. And let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. ⁵Also let the gold and silver utensils of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be returned and brought to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; and you shall put *them* in the house of God.’*”

6:1 “King Darius I” This Persian ruler reigned from 522 to 486 B.C. He was a very strong and effective ruler.

▣ **“archives”** This is literally “house of texts.” At this point in time, they would include cuneiforms, tablets, and papyrus and/or leather scrolls (cf v. 2). These special buildings (temples) were usually the storage places of treasures as well as official documents.

6:2 “Ecbatana in the fortress” This name means “place of gathering” (BDB 1079). Xenophon, in his *Cyropaedia*, 8.6.22, says that Cyrus lived in the city of Babylon (capital of Babylon) in the winter, in the city of Susa (also called Sushan, capital of Elam) in the spring, and the city of Ecbatana (capital of Media) in the summer. We learn from other historical evidence that Cyrus II stayed in Ecbatana during his first year of reign and this is where the documents concerning the Jews and other peoples’ repatriations were found. This is archaeological confirmation of the historicity of these historical records.

The word “fortress” (BDB 1084) can mean (1) a castle; (2) a temple (cf. I Chr. 29:1,19; Neh. 2:8); or (3) a fort (Akkadian).

▣

NASB, NJB **“memorandum”**

NKJV **“written thus”**

NRSV **“A record”**

TEV **“record”**

Davidson, *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. CL, says it is from a Chaldean (Babylonian) root “to record” or “to remember,” therefore, a memorandum (BDB 1088, KB 1853).

6:3 “Cyrus the king issued a decree” This occurred in 538 B.C. It is recorded in Hebrew in chapter 1, in Aramaic here in chapter 6. Some scholars think that chapter 1 was the verbal decree and chapter 6 was the written decree for the Archives. This seems possible because the Jews did not have written documentation for their claims concerning the decree of Cyrus.

The historicity of this decree is confirmed by a similarly written Persian decree addressing the request for the rebuilding of an Elephantine Jewish worship center in Egypt.

▣ **“be rebuilt”** This VERB (BDB 1084) is a *Hithpael* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense.

▣ **“its height being 60 cubits and its width 60 cubits”** The size was specific to keep the cost of construction within limits. Cyrus let all the people groups exiled by Assyria and Babylon return home and rebuild their national temples, therefore, cost was a factor (cf. v. 4).

It is just possible that the 60 cubits was meant to parallel Solomon’s temple (“its foundations be retained,” v. 3, cf. I Kgs. 6:2). Several aspects of the rebuilding effort mimic Solomon’s temple (i.e., length - 60 cubits, width - 20 cubits, and height - 30 cubits). If this is true then the “20 cubit width” found in the Peshitta may be accurate. The MT also has a variant as to the height of the temple, “60 cubits seems inappropriate (unless one assumes the 120 cubits of II Chr. 3:4 to refer to the temple itself). Also notice the MT does not record the length at all. Some textual confusion has occurred.

▣ **“cubit”** The ancients used parts of the human body for measurement. The people of the ancient Near East used the following:

1. width between the outstretched arms
2. length from elbow to middle finger (cubit)
3. width from outstretched thumb to little finger (span)
4. length between all four fingers of a closed hand (handbreadth)

The cubit (BDB 52, KB 61) was not completely standardized, but there were two basic lengths:

- a. normal male’s elbow to middle finger (about 18 inches, cf. Deut. 3:11)
- b. royal cubit was a bit longer (about 20 inches, cf. II Chr. 3:3; Ezek. 40:5; 43:13)

6:4 “huge stones” This does not refer to the huge stones of Solomon’s Temple, but to stones so large that they had to be rolled. See note at 5:8.

▣ **“one layer of timbers”** The Aramaic term “new” (*hdt*, BDB 1092) is probably a scribal variant for “one” (*hd*, BDB 1079, cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 30). This involves the change of one Hebrew letter and seems to fit the archaeological evidence of the architecture involved in the temples of this period and this locality (e.g., 5:8; I Kgs. 6:36; 7:12). This design may have been to help prevent earthquake damage or collapse.

However, the Septuagint and many scholars believe this refers to “stories” (vertical), not sections of walls (horizontal). The term “layer” is uncertain (BDB 1102). If it does refer to “stories” then another affinity to Solomon’s temple is mimicked (Solomon’s temple had several stories). This would then denote three of stone and one of wood, which would make it taller and longer (cf. v. 3, i.e., 60 cubits vs. 30 cubits) than Solomon’s temple! But this does not fit 3:12-13; Haggai 2:1; and Zech. 4:10. It is better to relate it to the cultural period of architectural design of earthquake resistant walls.

▣ **“let the cost be paid from the royal treasury”** The VERB (BDB 1095) is a *Hithpael* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense.

6:5 There is another series of commands.

1. “be returned” (BDB 1117) *Haphel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense.
2. “brought” (BDB 1090, “go”) *Peal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense.
3. “put” (BDB 1102, “deposit”) *Aphel* IMPERFECT possibly also used in a JUSSIVE sense.

▣ These utensils are described in Exod. 25:29 (cf. I Kgs. 7:50); Num. 7; and II Kgs. 25:13-16. They are discussed in Ezra 1 as being returned by the Persian government to Sheshbazzar to take back to the temple in Jerusalem.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:6-12

6“Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of *the province* beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai and your colleagues, the officials of *the provinces* beyond the River, keep away from there. **7**Leave this work on the house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. **8**Moreover, I issue a decree concerning what you are to do for these elders of Judah in the rebuilding of this house of God: the full cost is to be paid to these people from the royal treasury out of the taxes of *the provinces* beyond the River, and that without delay. **9**Whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs for a burnt offering to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and anointing oil, as the priests in Jerusalem request, it is to be given to them daily without fail, **10**that they may offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons. **11**And I issued a decree that any man who violates this edict, a timber shall be drawn from his house and he shall be impaled on it and his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this. **12**May the God who has caused His name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who attempts to change

it, so as to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued *this* decree, let it be carried out with all diligence!”

6:6 For information on these people and their governmental offices see 5:3.



NASB, NJB “keep away from there”
NKJV “keep yourselves far from there”
NRSV “keep away”
TEV “stay away from the Temple”

This phrase is literally “far be from there.” It is an Aramaic legal idiom also found in Egyptian papyri of this period (cf. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 643). The VERB (BB 1089, KB 1858) is a *Peal* IMPERATIVE PLURAL. The command is both physical and mental (BDB 113, “keep aloof”). It may be an Aramaic legal idiom (*Anchor Bible*, vol. 14, p. 50).

Notice that the Persian leaders who officially initiated the inquiry are now commanded to

1. stop hindering the work and stay away (v. 7)
2. pay for the work (without delay, v. 8)
3. provide the necessary sacrificial animals and other items the priests needed for annual as well as daily offerings (cf. v 9).

6:7 “Leave this work. . .alone” This is another *Peal* IMPERATIVE (BDB 1114).

▣ “rebuild” This VERB (BDB 1084) is a *Peal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense.

▣ “on its site” See note at 5:15. Apparently the use of ancient foundations was a Near Eastern way of showing continuity with previous generations.

6:8 Darius is following Cyrus’ decree by funding the project from the Persian royal treasury.

6:9 “whatever is needed, both young bulls, rams, and lambs for a burnt offering” Obviously the Persian Archives received information from the Jews because they knew exactly the type of sacrifices which needed to be offered (cf. Exod. 29:38ff; Lev. 2:1; Num. 28:11ff). From other archaeological finds it is clear that the Persians made the effort to know the regulations and cultus of the religions of their empire.

▣ “salt” Salt was to be a part of every sacrifice (cf. Lev. 2:13; Num. 18:19; Ezek. 43:24). Salt was a cultural sign and symbol of a covenant (cf. II Chr. 13:5). It was an idiom of fellowship and loyalty (cf. Ezra 4:14).

6:10 “may be acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons” This “acceptable sacrifices” (BDB 1102, cf. Dan. 2:46) is a Hebrew (BDB 629) idiom, “soothing aroma” (e.g., Gen. 8:21; Exod. 29:18,25,41; Lev. 1:9,13,17; 26:31), which denoted an acceptable offering that corresponded to YHWH’s specifications, directions, as well as the proper motive.

This fits in perfectly with the Persian religious world-view as we understand it from Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, and later, Artaxerxes. Although they were Zoroastrians they sought the good will of the national gods of the ancient Near East by repatriating their peoples, rebuilding their temples, and by making sure the regular sacrifices were done appropriately. Their actions had more to do with self-interest and superstition than religious zeal.

6:11 This verse has three IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE (command) sense (v. 12; 7:21 also have 2 IMPERFECTS used in the same way). This royal threat was serious!

▣ **“impaled”** This can mean impaled (*Hithpael* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense, NASB, NRSV, TEV, NJB), crucified (BDB 1099, KB 1913, ASV), hanged (NKJV, cf. I Esdras 6:32), or flogged (REB). Whatever the exact meaning, it was a public display of capital punishment used as a deterrent (cf. Gen. 40:22; 41:13; Deut. 21:23; Dan.2:5;3:29).

Verse 11 is typical of the curse formulas used to insure compliance to royal edicts.

▣ **“his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this”** The Septuagint, I Esdras 6:32, and JPSOA have “forfeit.” However, the rabbinical understanding is reflected in the Aramaic Targums, which translate this as “dung-hill” (cf. II Kgs. 10:27; Dan. 2:5). Reducing criminals’ homes and possessions to rubbish was a common practice in the ancient Near East to humiliate both the offender and his family. The ultimate cultural insult would be to turn the site of the home into a public latrine.

6:12 “the God who has caused His name to dwell there” This follows the covenant phrasing of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 12:5,11,13-14,18; 26:2; and Exod. 20:24). This became a reference to Mount Moriah in Jerusalem (cf. Gen. 22:2; I Chr. 21:18-27; II Chr. 3:1) where, later, Solomon’s Temple was built.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:13-15

¹³Then Tattenai, the governor of *the province* beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues carried out *the decree* with all diligence, just as King Darius had sent. ¹⁴And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. ¹⁵This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

6:13 As Darius commanded “with all diligence” (BDB 1082, cf. v. 12), these officials responded “with all diligence” (v. 13).

6:14 “Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia” The decrees of Cyrus and Darius dealt with the rebuilding of the temple, while Artaxerxes’ decree dealt with the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. There is a 57 year gap between chapter 6 (temple) and chapter 7 (walls).

▣ **“the Jews were successful in building”** This same VERB (BDB 1109) was used to describe their work in 5:8 before these Persian leaders started their accusations and litigation.

▣ **“according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes”** This is the mystery of divine sovereignty (i.e., Prophets’ message and God’s command) and human free will (decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, as well as the actions of the Jewish leaders). Both God’s will and human will combined to accomplish the task. This is true in every area of life. See Special Topic on Covenant below.

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT

The OT term *berith*, covenant, is not easy to define. There is no matching VERB in Hebrew. All attempts to derive an etymological definition have proved unconvincing. However, the obvious centrality of the concept has forced scholars to examine the word usage to attempt to determine its functional meaning.

Covenant is the means by which the one true God deals with His human creation. The concept of covenant, treaty, or agreement is crucial in understanding the biblical revelation. The tension between God’s

sovereignty and human free-will are clearly seen in the concept of covenant. Some covenants are based exclusively on God's character and actions:

1. creation itself (cf. Gen. 1-2)
2. the call of Abraham (cf. Gen. 12)
3. the covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen. 15)
4. the preservation of and promise to Noah (cf. Gen. 6-9)

However, the very nature of covenant demands a response:

1. by faith Adam must obey God and not eat of the tree in the midst of Eden
2. by faith Abraham must leave his family, follow God, and believe in future descendants
3. by faith Noah must build a huge boat far from water and gather the animals
4. by faith Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt and received specific guidelines for religious and social life with promises of blessings and cursings (cf. Deut. 27-29).

This same tension involving God's relationship to humanity is addressed in the "new covenant." The tension can be clearly seen in comparing Ezek. 18 with Ezek. 36:27-37. Is the covenant based on God's gracious actions or mandated human response? This is the burning issue of the Old Covenant and the New. The goals of both are the same: (1) the restoration of fellowship lost in Gen. 3 and (2) the establishment of a righteous people who reflect God's character.

The new covenant of Jer. 31:31-34 solves the tension by removing human performance as the means of attaining acceptance. God's law becomes an internal desire instead of an external performance. The goal of a godly, righteous people remains the same, but the methodology changes. Fallen mankind proved themselves inadequate to be God's reflected image. The problem was not the covenant, but human sinfulness and weakness (cf. Rom. 7; Gal. 3).

The same tension between OT unconditional and conditional covenants remains in the NT. Salvation is absolutely free in the finished work of Jesus Christ, but it requires repentance and faith (both initially and continually). It is both a legal pronouncement and a call to Christlikeness, an indicative statement of acceptance and an imperative to holiness! Believers are not saved by their performance, but unto obedience (cf. Eph. 2:8-10). Godly living becomes the evidence of salvation, not the means of salvation. This tension is clearly seen in Hebrews.

6:15 "this temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of Darius" This date is mentioned in I Esdras 7:5 and Josephus' *Antiq.* 11.4.7. It would be 516 B.C., exactly seventy years from the destruction of the temple under Nebuchadnezzar II (cf. Jer. 25:9-13).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:16-18

¹⁶And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. ¹⁷They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁸Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

6:16 "and the rest of the exiles" Who could this refer to? Possibly (1) converts to Judaism who were converted while they were also in exile (cf. v. 21). Or (2) it could refer to those Jews who remained in Palestine, but did not participate in pagan or synergistic worship (cf. v. 21).

6:17 “as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats” Although a detailed description of the sacrifices for the dedication is listed (much smaller than Solomon’s dedication, cf. I Kgs. 8:63), the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16) is never mentioned in Ezra or Nehemiah.

▣ **“for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of tribes of Israel”** It was important for the returning Jews (mostly from the southern tribes called Judah) to affirm they represented all the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Most of the northern ten tribes taken into captivity by Assyria (722 B.C., fall of Samaria) never returned to Palestine. Nevertheless these were the covenant people of God. The promises and covenants of YHWH also belonged to them!

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NUMBER TWELVE

Twelve has always been a symbolic number of organization

1. outside the Bible
 - a. twelve signs of the Zodiac
 - b. twelve months of the year
2. in the OT
 - a. the sons of Jacob (the Jewish tribes)
 - b. reflected in
 - (1) twelve pillars of the altar in Exod. 24:4
 - (2) twelve jewels on the high priest’s breastplate (which stand for the tribes) in Exod. 28:21
 - (3) twelve loaves of bread in the holy place of the tabernacle in Lev. 24:5
 - (4) twelve spies sent into Canaan in Num. 13 (one from each tribe)
 - (5) twelve rods (tribal standards) at Korah’s rebellion in Num. 17:2
 - (6) twelve stones of Joshua in Josh. 4:3,9,20
 - (7) twelve administrative districts in Solomon’s administration in I Kgs. 4:7
 - (8) twelve stones of Elijah’s altar to YHWH in I Kgs. 18:31
3. in the NT
 - a. twelve apostles chosen
 - b. twelve baskets of bread (one for each Apostle) in Matt. 14:20
 - c. twelve thrones on which NT disciples sit (referring to the 12 tribes of Israel) in Matt. 19:28
 - d. twelve legions of angels to rescue Jesus in Matt. 26:53
 - e. the symbolism of Revelation
 - (1) 24 elders on 24 thrones in 4:4
 - (2) 144,000 (12x12) in 7:4; 14:1,3
 - (3) twelve stars on the woman’s crown in 12:1
 - (4) twelve gates, twelve angels reflecting the twelve tribes in 21:12
 - (5) twelve foundation stones of the new Jerusalem and on them the names of the twelve Apostles in 21:14
 - (6) twelve thousand stadia in 21:16 (size of new city, New Jerusalem)
 - (7) wall is 144 cubits in 21:7
 - (8) twelve gates of pearl in 21:21
 - (9) trees in new Jerusalem with twelve kinds of fruit (one for each month) in 22:2

6:18 “the priests of their divisions” The law of Moses stipulated the special tribe of temple servants (i.e., Levi, cf. Num. 3:6; 8:6-22; 18:1-7; I Chr. 6), but it was David who organized them into 24 orders who took turns serving in the temple (cf. I Chr. 23-24; II Chr. 35:4-5). Only four orders returned under Zerubbabel (cf. chapter 2).

▣ **“the book of Moses”** This would have been a way to show the validity of the returning exiles as the people of God! See Special Topic following.

SPECIAL TOPIC: MOSES’ AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH

I. Genesis

- A. The Bible itself does not name the author. Genesis has no “I” sections like Ezra, Nehemiah or “we” sections like Acts.
- B. Jewish tradition:
 1. Ancient Jewish writers say Moses wrote it:
 - a. Ben Sirach, Ecclesiasticus 24:23, written about 185 B.C.
 - b. The *Baba Bathra* 14b, a part of the Talmud
 - c. Philo of Alexandria, Egypt, a Jewish philosopher, writing just before Jesus’ ministry
 - d. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, writing just after Jesus’ ministry.
 2. The Torah is one unified historical account. After Genesis each book begins with the conjunction “and” (except Numbers).
 3. This was a revelation to Moses
 - a. Moses is said to have written:
 - (1) Exodus 17:14
 - (2) Exodus 24:4, 7
 - (3) Exodus 34:27, 28
 - (4) Numbers 33:2
 - (5) Deuteronomy 31:9, 22, 24-26
 - b. God is said to have spoken through Moses:
 - (1) Deuteronomy 5:4-5, 22
 - (2) Deuteronomy 6:1
 - (3) Deuteronomy 10:1
 - c. Moses is said to have spoken the words of the Torah to the people:
 - (1) Deuteronomy 1:1, 3
 - (2) Deuteronomy 5:1
 - (3) Deuteronomy 27:1
 - (4) Deuteronomy 29:2
 - (5) Deuteronomy 31:1, 30
 - (6) Deuteronomy 32:44
 - (7) Deuteronomy 33:1
 4. OT authors attribute it to Moses:
 - a. Joshua 8:31
 - b. II Kings 14:6
 - c. Ezra 6:18

- d. Nehemiah 8:1; 13:1-2
- e. II Chronicles 25:4; 34:12; 35:12
- f. Daniel 9:11
- g. Malachi 4:4

C. Christian tradition

1. Jesus attributes quotes from the Torah to Moses:
 - a. Matthew 8:4; 19:8
 - b. Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:5; 12:26
 - c. Luke 5:14; 16:31; 20:37; 24:27, 44
 - d. John 5:46-47; 7:19, 23
2. Other NT authors attribute quotes from the Torah to Moses:
 - a. Luke 2:22
 - b. Acts 3:22; 13:39; 15:1,15-21; 26:22; 28:23
 - c. Romans 10:5, 19
 - d. I Corinthians 9:9
 - e. II Corinthians 3:15
 - f. Hebrews 10:28
 - g. Revelation 15:3
3. Most early Church Fathers accepted Mosaic authorship. Ireneaus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Tertullian all had questions about Moses' relationship to the current canonical form of Genesis.

D. Modern Scholarship

1. There have obviously been some editorial additions to the Torah (seemingly to make the ancient work more understandable to contemporary readers):
 - a. Genesis 12:6; 13:7; 14:14; 21:34; 32:32; 36:31; 47:11
 - b. Exodus 11:3; 16:36
 - c. Numbers 12:3; 13:22; 15:22-23; 21:14-15; 32:33ff
 - d. Deuteronomy 3:14; 34:6
 - e. Ancient scribes were highly trained and educated. Their techniques differed from country to country:
 - (1) in Mesopotamia they were very careful not to change anything, and even checked their works for accuracy. Here is an ancient Sumerian scribal footnote, ("the work is complete from beginning to end, has been copied, revised, compared, and verified sign by sign" from about 1400 B.C.)
 - (2) in Egypt they freely revised ancient texts to update them for contemporary readers. The scribes at Qumran followed this approach.
2. Scholars of the 19th Century theorized that the Torah is a composite document from many sources over an extended period of time (Graft-Wellhausen). This was based on the following:
 - a. the different names for God,
 - b. apparent doublets in the text,
 - c. the form of the accounts,
 - d. the theology of the accounts.
3. Supposed sources and dates:
 - a. J source (use of YHWH), 950 B.C.

- b. E source (use of Elohim), 850 B.C.
 - c. JE combined, 750 B.C.
 - d. D source (“The Book of the Law,” 22:8, discovered during Josiah’s reform while remodeling the Temple was supposedly the book of Deuteronomy, written by an unknown priest of Josiah’s time to support his reform.), 621 B.C.
 - e. P source (all priestly material especially ritual and procedure), 400 B.C.
 - f. There have obviously been editorial additions to the Torah. The Jews assert that it was:
 - (1) The High Priest at the time of the writing,
 - (2) Jeremiah the Prophet,
 - (3) Ezra the Scribe - IV Esdras says he rewrote it because the originals were destroyed in the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
 - g. However, the J. E. D. P. theory says more about our modern literary theories and categories than evidence from the Torah (R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 495-541 and *Tyndale Commentary Series*, “Leviticus,” pp. 15-25).
 - h. Characteristics of Hebrew Literature
 - (1) Doublets, like Gen. 1 & 2, are common in Hebrew. Usually a general description is given and is then followed by a specific account. This may have been a way to accent truths or help oral memory.
 - (2) The ancient rabbis said the two most common names for God have theological significance:
 - (a) YHWH - the Covenant name for Deity as He relates to Israel as Savior and Redeemer (cf. Ps. 103).
 - (b) Elohim - Deity as Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of all life on earth (cf. Ps. 104).
 - (3) It is common in non-biblical Near Eastern Literature for a variety of styles and vocabulary to occur in unified literary works (Harrison, pp. 522-526).
- E. The evidence from Ancient Near Eastern literature implies that Moses used written cuneiform documents or Mesopotamian style oral traditions to write Genesis. This in no way means to imply a lessening of inspiration but is an attempt to explain the literary phenomenon of the book of Genesis. Beginning in Gen. 37 a marked Egyptian influence of style, form and vocabulary seems to indicate Moses used either literary productions or oral traditions from the Israelites’ days in Egypt. Moses’ formal education was entirely Egyptian! The exact literary formation of the Pentateuch is uncertain. I believe that Moses is the compiler and author of the vast majority of the Pentateuch, though he may have used scribes and/or written and oral traditions. The historicity and trustworthiness of these first few books of the OT is certain.

II. Exodus

- A. The Torah is one unified account. Exodus starts with the conjunction “and.” See lengthy discussion in Genesis outline.
- B. There are several places in Exodus where it says that Moses wrote:
 - 1. 17:14
 - 2. 24:4, 12
 - 3. 34:27, 28
- C. Joshua 8:31 quotes Exodus 20:25 and attributes it to Moses. Jesus quotes Exod. 20:12,17 and attributes it to Moses, Mark 7:10.

III. Numbers

- A. This is the first book of the Torah to name a written source, “The Book of the Wars of *Lord*,” 21:14-15. This clearly shows that Moses did use other written documents.
- B. This book states that Moses could and did record the events of the Wilderness Wandering Period.
- C. Numbers also provides several examples of obvious editorial additions (possibly Joshua or Samuel):
 - 1. 12:1,3
 - 2. 13:22
 - 3. 15:22-23
 - 4. 21:14-15
 - 5. 32:33ff
 - 6. 32:33ff
- D. In most cases Moses is referred to in the third person except in direct quotes. This implies Moses used scribal help in compiling these materials.
- E. It is interesting to notice that Numbers includes two non-Israelite literary productions: (1) the Amorite taunt poem in 21:27-30 (possibly v. 30 was an Israelite addition); and (2) Balaam’s conversations with Balak, King of Moab in 23-24. They do show the use of written or oral material included in the compilation of the book (cf. *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*).

IV. Deuteronomy

- A. Jewish Tradition:
 - 1. Ancient tradition is unanimous that the author was Moses.
 - 2. This is stated in:
 - a. Talmud - Baba Bathra 14b
 - b. Mishnah
 - c. Ben Sirach’s Ecclesiasticus 24:23 (written about 185 B.C.)
 - d. Philo of Alexandria
 - e. Flavius Josephus
 - 3. The Scripture itself:
 - a. Judges 3:4 and Joshua 8:31
 - b. “Moses spoke”:
 - (1) Deut. 1:1, 3
 - (2) Deut. 5:1
 - (3) Deut. 27:1
 - (4) Deut. 29:2
 - (5) Deut. 31:1, 30
 - (6) Deut. 32:44
 - (7) Deut. 33:1
 - c. “YHWH spoke to Moses”:
 - (1) Deut. 5:4-5, 22
 - (2) Deut. 6:1
 - (3) Deut. 10:1

- d. "Moses wrote":
 - (1) Deut. 31:9, 22, 24
 - (2) Exodus 17:14
 - (3) Exodus 24:4, 12
 - (4) Exodus 34:27-28
 - (5) Numbers 33:2
 - e. Jesus quotes from or alludes to Deuteronomy and states "Moses said"/"Moses wrote":
 - (1) Matthew 19:7-9; Mark 10:4-5 - Deut. 24:1-4
 - (2) Mark 7:10 - Deut. 5:16
 - (3) Luke 16:31; 24:27, 44; John 5:46-47; 7:19, 23
 - f. Paul asserts Moses as author:
 - (1) Romans 10:19 - Deut. 32:21
 - (2) I Cor. 9:9 - Deut. 25:4
 - (3) Gal. 3:10 - Deut. 27:26
 - (4) Acts 26:22; 28:23
 - g. Peter asserts Moses as author in his Pentecostal sermon - Acts 3:22
 - h. The author of Hebrews asserts Moses as author - Hebrews 10:28 - Deut. 17:2-6
- B. Modern Scholarship
1. Many of the 18th- and 19th-century theologians, following the Graf-Wellhausen theory of multiple authorship (J.E.D.P.), assert that Deuteronomy was written by a priest/prophet during Josiah's reign in Judah to support his spiritual reform. This would mean that the book was written in Moses' name about 621 B.C.
 2. They base this on
 - a. II Kings 22:8; II Chr. 34:14-15, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD"
 - b. chapter 12 discussed a single site for the Tabernacle and later Temple
 - c. chapter 17 discussed a later king
 - d. it is true that writing a book in the name of a famous person from the past was common in the Ancient Near East and in Jewish circles
 - e. there are similarities of style, vocabulary and grammar between Deut. and Joshua, Kings and Jeremiah
 - f. Deuteronomy records the death of Moses, chapter 34
 - g. there are obvious later editorial additions in the Pentateuch:
 - (1) Deuteronomy 3:14
 - (2) Deuteronomy 34:6
 - h. the sometimes unexplainable variety in the use of the names of deity: El, El Shaddai, Elohim, YHWH, in seemingly unified contexts and historical periods

V. Conclusion

Ancient tradition and archaeology give credible evidence that Moses was the editor/author behind Genesis - Deuteronomy. He may have used oral and written sources also, as well as scribes to produce this biblical literature. It is obvious that later scribes or prophets updated the text for their generations.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:19-22

¹⁹The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month. ²⁰For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, both for their brothers the priests and for themselves. ²¹The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate *the Passover*. ²²And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

6:19 The Aramaic section concludes at 6:18 and the Hebrew resumes until 7:12-26, which again is Aramaic.

6:20 “all of them were pure” This phrase is similar in purpose to 3:1 (i.e., “gathered as one man”), which denotes the unity of the Jews during this difficult but victorious period.

6:21 “all those who had separated themselves” God demanded that His people be different from “the nations” (cf. Deut. 7). They were to love and obey the covenant God of Israel. This “separation” involved those who never compromised with pagan cultures and those who repented and turned from their involvement with pagan culture. Either of these could eat the Passover. God is the compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in covenant loyalty (cf. Neh. 9:17) One!

Israel was meant to disclose YHWH to the world, but she failed (cf. Ezek. 36:22-38). Covenant obedience is crucial!

▣ “to seek the LORD God of Israel” The opposite of “separate from” (6:21) is “to seek” (BDB 205, KB233, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT). Good parallels of the necessity of seeking and the promise of finding are I Chr. 28:9 and II Chr. 7:14. Humans seek and YHWH reveals Himself. He satisfies the human longing and searching for fellowship and intimacy with the God in whose image we were created (cf. Deut. 4:29). However, there are covenant conditions (cf. I Chr. 15:2).

6:22 “the king of Assyria” If literal, this seems to be out of place and unexplainable! This may refer to Cyrus or Darius (cf. Josephus’, *Antiq.* 11.4.8). The Persian king used several titles (i.e., 5:13, Cyrus is called “King of Babylon”). Nehemiah uses this title as a collective term for all the kings of the eighth through fifth centuries in Neh. 9:32.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is there such a delay between the starting of the temple in 538 B.C. and its finishing in 516 B.C.?
2. Why did the Jews object to the Samaritan's help?
3. Why did the Persian king need to have the Aramaic translated?
4. Why is 4:6-23 thought to be a parenthesis?
5. Why is the Day of Atonement never mentioned in the Books of Ezra or Nehemiah?

EZRA 7

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Arrival of Ezra	The History of Ezra (7:1-10:16)	Ezra Arrives in Jerusalem	The Mission and Personality of Ezra
7:1-10	7:1-6	7:1-5 7:6-10	7:1-10
	7:7-10		
The Letter of Artaxerxes to Ezra	The King's Letter	The Document Which the Emperor Artaxerxes Gave to Ezra	The Order of Artaxerxes
7:11-26	7:11-20 7:21-24 7:25-26	7:11-26 Ezra Praises God	7:11-26 Ezra's Journey from Babylonia to Palestine
7:27-28a	7:27-28	7:27-28	7:27-28
7:28b			

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:1-7

¹Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, *there went up* Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah,

²son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub,

³son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth,

⁴son of Zeremiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki,

⁵son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest. **“This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him. ⁷Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.”**

7:1 “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia” The date seems to be 457 B.C. as derived from v. 7 (i.e., “the seventh year”). This means that there was a 57-58 year interval between the end of chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7. Chapter 6 deals with Darius I, who reigned from 522 to 486 B.C., while chapter 7 deals with Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 464 to 423 B.C.

Modern scholarship has split over the chronological relationship between Ezra, Nehemiah, and Artaxerxes I or II. For a good brief summary and evaluation of the three theories see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 193-197. The three theories are:

1. Artaxerxes I sent Ezra in the seventh year, 457 or 458 B.C.
2. Nehemiah precedes Ezra, who came to Jerusalem in 398 B.C., which was the seventh year of Artaxerxes II.
3. The letter (vv. 11-26) is from the 37th year of Artaxerxes I or 428 B.C.

This commentary follows theory #1.

▣ **“Ezra”** Ezra is the great-grandson of Seraiah (high priest who was killed in the fall of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, cf. II Kgs. 25:18-21; Jer. 52:24), who is also the ancestor of Jeshua, the High Priest who returned with Zerubbabel (cf. Chap. 2). Chapters 7-10 describe the personal memoirs of Ezra (cf. Neh. 8, 12). He is not mentioned in the first six chapters.

His name means “help” (BDB 740) and may be a shortened form of Azariah, which means “YHWH has helped” (BDB 741).

▣ **“Hilkiah”** He was High Priest under King Josiah (cf. II Kgs. 22:4-14) and Seraiah was High Priest at the time of the Exile and was killed by Nebuchadnezzar (cf. II Kgs. 25:18).

7:2-5 This is the ancestry of Ezra in an attempt to prove his lineage as a priest. We know from I Chr. 6:3-15 that several names have been left out (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 601). The length of the list denotes Ezra’s importance (especially in later rabbinical Judaism). This clearly shows that the genealogies in the OT cannot be used to arrive at a date for certain events in the Bible (cf. *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 48-50).

7:6 “Ezra went up from Babylon” To the Jews going to Jerusalem was always spoken of as going up. Nehemiah left from the city of Susa; Ezra left from the city of Babylon.

▣ **“a scribe skilled in the law of Moses”** Ezra is an important figure in rabbinical Judaism (cf. II Esdras 14). He is seen as the compiler and editor of the entire OT, as well as the founder of the great synagogue (i.e., Sanhedrin), which historically begins the period of rabbinical Judaism (all sects except the Pharisees were wiped out in the fall of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70).

The term “scribe” (BDB 708) referred to someone who could read and write and who had been trained in a particular area. Here it would refer to Hebrew OT literature and its interpretation (cf. 7:11). The scribes later became the rabbis in Jewish history. One would ask them a question and they would apply the teachings of Scripture to that issue (particularly the writings of Moses).

▣ **“skilled”** This term (BDB 555) means “rapid,” which is a metaphor for proficiency or enthusiasm (cf. Ps. 45:1; Isa. 16:5).

▣ **“which the LORD God of Israel had given”** This VERB (BDB 678, KB733) is *Qal* PERFECT and seems to refer to the law of Moses, but it is equally true that God’s equipping and gifting is also necessary for effective ministry (cf. Dan. 1:17-20).

▣ **“because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him”** This is a recurrent idiom (cf. 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh. 2:8, 18). Ezra’s effectiveness was a combination of his yieldedness to God’s will (cf. V. 10) and God’s call and equipping for ministry.

7:7 There are several groups of people listed.

1. Jews from all the tribes, except Levi (i.e., sons of Israel)
2. Jews from the tribe of Levi
 - a. priests
 - b. Levites
 - c. Levitical singers (cf. I Chr. 15:16)
 - d. Levitical gatekeepers (cf. I Chr. 23:5)
 - e. Levitical temple servants
 - (1) some are Levites
 - (2) some are foreigners captured by Israel and turned into temple servants (i.e., Nethinim, cf. 8:20; Josh. 9:23,27; I Chr. 9:2)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:8-10

⁸He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. ⁹For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. ¹⁰For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

7:8 “in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king” This would be July/August of 457 B.C.

7:9 “on the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem” The journey took approximately 4 months and covered about 900 miles.

▣ **“the good hand of his God was upon him”** Israel used anthropomorphic language to describe their God, though they knew He was spirit (e.g., I Kgs. 8:27) and did not take any physical form (cf. Exod. 20:4). These human metaphors quickly and adequately communicate God’s personhood. God’s hand was a metaphor for His activity in His creation. It is used both positively of God’s presence and blessing as in this verse (cf. Exod. 4:17; 13:3) or for His judgment.

7:10 “Ezra had set his heart” This VERB (BDB 465, KB 464, *Hiphil* PERFECT) means “be resolute,” “be firm,” “be prepared,” “be committed to.” Ezra responded to God’s call and actively allowed God to equip him. This is the covenant concept (See Special Topic: Covenant at 6:14).

1. God’s initiation and provision
2. human faith response

▣ **“to study. . .to practice. . .to teach”** This is a chronologically appropriate order for studying (BDB 205), practicing (BDB 793 I), and then teaching (BDB 540) the truths of God. The first two are *Qal* INFINITIVE

CONSTRUCTS and the last is a *Peel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT. Knowledge brings responsibility (cf. Luke 12:48) to God, to ourselves, and to others!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:11-20

¹¹Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel: ¹²”Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect *peace*. And now ¹³I have issued a decree that any of the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. ¹⁴Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand, ¹⁵and to bring the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶with all the silver and gold which you find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; ¹⁷with this money, therefore, you shall diligently buy bulls, rams and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. ¹⁸Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. ¹⁹Also the utensils which are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. ²⁰The rest of the needs for the house of your God, for which you may have occasion to provide, provide *for it* from the royal treasury.”

7:11 Notice the different ways to identify Ezra:

1. the priest
2. the scribe
3. the one learned in the words of the commandments of the Lord

▣ “the commandments. . .His statutes” The teachings of God go by several names in the OT. A good example is Ps. 19:7-9.

1. the law of the Lord, v. 7
2. the testimony of the Lord, v. 7
3. the precepts of the Lord, v. 8
4. the commandment of the Lord, v. 8
5. the fear of the Lord, v. 9
6. the judgments of the Lord, v. 9

Also notice the number of descriptive phrases used in the acrostic, Psalm 119!

7:12-26 The section (7:12-26) is written in royal Aramaic, which was the diplomatic lingua-franca of the Persian Empire.

7:12 “king of kings” This is a Semitic superlative regularly describing Mesopotamian kings (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 2:37; Ezek. 26:7), here Artaxerxes I, but the Jews took it and used it of their coming Davidic, anointed king (Messiah, cf. Zech. 14:9; I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). This same kind of superlative is used of YHWH in Deut. 10:17 and Ps. 136:2 (i.e., “God of gods”).

▣

NASB, NKJV	“perfect <i>peace</i> ”
NRSV	“Peace”
TEV	-----
NJB	“greetings”

The TEV has a footnote, “Aramaic has an additional word, the meaning of which is unclear” (p. 419). The Aramaic VERB “complete” (BDB 1086, KB 197) is the *Peal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE, used as an ADJECTIVE, “peace,” which was a way of addressing the king.

7:13 This is the decree that allowed Ezra and other Jews to return (i.e., the third wave). The first group came with Sheshbazzar and the second group with Zerubbabel and Jeshua.

7:14 “his seven counselors” We learn from Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.6.4-5 that Cyrus had seven close counselors. Apparently this was continued (cf. Esther 1:14). Herodotus 3:84 states that these were seven major families who had unrestricted access to the king.

7:15 - 21 Four sources of revenue are defined: (1) free-will gifts from anybody, v. 16; (2) free-will gifts from Jews, v. 16; (3) objects of gold and silver (not the vessels of the temple), v. 19; and (4) the rest of the needs came from the royal treasury from the Province Beyond the River, vv. 20-24 (cf. 6:8-10).

7:17 “grain offering” This Aramaic term (BDB 1101) is literally “gift,” but it is used regularly for “grain offering.” The grain offering is described in Lev. 2. A small part was offered on the altar and the priests were able to eat the rest.

▣ **“drink offering”** The grain offering was to be accompanied by an offering of wine (cf. Exod. 29:40-41; Lev. 23:18; Num. 6:15,17; 15:4-5; 28:5,7; 29:6).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BIBLICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL FERMENTATION) AND ALCOHOLISM (ADDICTION)

I. Biblical Terms

A. Old Testament

1. *Yayin* - This is the general term for wine, which is used 141 times. The etymology is uncertain because it is not from a Hebrew root. It always means fermented fruit juice, usually grape. Some typical passages are Gen. 9:21; Exod. 29:40; Num. 15:5,10.
2. *Tirosh* - This is “new wine.” Because of climatic conditions of the Near East, fermentation started as soon as six hours after extracting the juice. This term refers to wine in the process of fermenting. For some typical passages, see Deut. 12:17; 18:4; Isa. 62:8-9; Hos. 4:11.
3. *Asis* - This is obviously alcoholic beverages (Joel 1:5; Isa. 49:26).
4. *Sekar* - This is the term “strong drink.” The Hebrew root is used in the term “drunk” or “drunkard.” It had something added to it to make it more intoxicating. It is parallel to *yayin* (cf. Prov. 20:1; 31:6; Isa. 28:7).

B. New Testament

1. *Oinos* - the Greek equivalent of *yayin*
2. *Neos oinos* (new wine) - the Greek equivalent of *tirosh* (cf. Mark 2:22).
3. *Gleuchos vinos* (sweet wine, *asis*) - wine in the early stages of fermentation (cf. Acts 2:13).

II. Biblical Usage

A. Old Testament

1. Wine is a gift of God (Gen. 27:28; Ps. 104:14-15; Eccl. 9:7; Hos. 2:8-9; Joel 2:19,24; Amos 9:13; Zech. 10:7).

2. Wine is part of a sacrificial offering (Exod. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:7,10; 28:14; Deut. 14:26; Jdgs. 9:13).
3. Wine is used as medicine (II Sam. 16:2; Prov. 31:6-7).
4. Wine can be a real problem (Noah-Gen. 9:21; Lot-Gen. 19:33,35; Samson-Jdgs. 16:19; Nabal-I Sam. 25:36; Uriah-II Sam. 11:13; Ammon-II Sam. 13:28; Elah-I Kin. 16:9; Benhadad-I Kin. 20:12; Rulers-Amos 6:6; and Ladies-Amos 4).
5. Wine can be abused (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; 31:4-5; Isa. 5:11,22; 19:14; 28:7-8; Hosea 4:11).
6. Wine was prohibited to certain groups (Priests on duty, Lev. 10:9; Ezek. 44:21; Nazarites, Num. 6; and Rulers, Prov. 31:4-5; Isa. 56:11-12; Hosea 7:5).
7. Wine is used in an eschatological setting (Amos 9:13; Joel 3:18; Zech. 9:17).

B. Interbiblical

1. Wine in moderation is helpful (*Ecclesiasticus* 31:27-30).
2. The rabbis say, "Wine is the greatest of all medicine, where wine is lacking, then drugs are needed." (BB 58b).

C. New Testament

1. Jesus changed a large quantity of water into wine (John 2:1-11).
2. Jesus drank wine (Matt. 11:18-19; Luke 7:33-34; 22:17ff).
3. Peter was accused of drunkenness on "new wine" at Pentecost (Acts 2:13).
4. Wine can be used as medicine (Mark 15:23; Luke 10:34; I Tim. 5:23).
5. Leaders are not to be abusers. This does not mean total abstainers (I Tim. 3:3,8; Titus 1:7; 2:3; I Pet. 4:3).
6. Wine used in eschatological settings (Matt. 22:1ff; Rev. 19:9).
7. Drunkenness is deplored (Matt. 24:49; Luke 11:45; 21:34; I Cor. 5:11-13; 6:10; Gal. 5:21; I Pet. 4:3; Rom. 13:13-14).

III. Theological Insight

A. Dialectical tension

1. Wine is a gift from God.
2. Drunkenness is a major problem.
3. Believers in some cultures must limit their freedoms for the sake of the gospel (Matt. 15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23; I Cor. 8-10; Rom. 14:1-15:13).

B. Tendency to go beyond given bounds

1. God is the source of all good things (creation is "very good," Gen. 1:31).
2. Fallen mankind has abused all of God's gifts by taking them beyond God-given bounds.

C. Abuse is in us, not in things. There is nothing evil in the physical creation (cf. Mark 7:18-23; Rom. 14:14,20; I Cor. 10:25-26; I Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:15).

IV. First Century Jewish Culture and Fermentation

- A. Fermentation begins very soon, approximately 6 hours after the grape is crushed especially in hot climates with non-hygienic conditions.
- B. Jewish tradition says that when a slight foam appeared on the surface (sign of fermentation), it is liable to the wine-tithe (*Ma aseroth* 1:7). It was called "new wine" or "sweet wine."
- C. The primary violent fermentation was complete after one week.
- D. The secondary fermentation took about 40 days. At this state it is considered "aged wine" and could be offered on the altar (*Edhuyoth* 6:1).

- E. Wine that had rested on its lees (old wine) was considered good, but it had to be strained well before use.
- F. Wine was considered to be properly aged usually after one year of fermentation. Three years was the longest period of time that wine could be safely stored. It was called “old wine” and had to be diluted with water.
- G. Only in the last 100 years with a sterile environment and chemical additives has fermentation been postponed. The ancient world could not stop the natural process of fermentation.

V. Closing Statements

- A. Be sure your experience, theology, and biblical interpretation do not depreciate Jesus and first century Jewish and/or Christian culture! They were obviously not total abstainers.
- B. I am not advocating the social use of alcohol. However, many have overstated the Bible’s position on this subject and now claim superior righteousness based on a cultural/denominational bias.
- C. For me, Romans 14:1-15:13 and I Corinthians 8-10 have provided insight and guidelines based on love and respect for fellow believers and the spread of the gospel in every culture, not personal freedom or judgmental criticism. If the Bible is the only source for faith and practice, then maybe we must all rethink this issue.
- D. If we push total abstinence as God’s will, what do we imply about Jesus, as well as those modern cultures that regularly use wine (e.g., Europe, Israel, Argentina)?

7:18 This verse implies that the Jewish leadership had some discretion on how to spend the money for the temple and its procedures and festivals. It had to be spent for religious purposes, but exactly how was not specified. The Persian king trusted these religious leaders.

7:19 Mentioning of the utensils here is confusing because they were mentioned first in chapter one as being given to Sheshbazzar during the reign of Cyrus (1:8-11). He returned to Jerusalem and laid the foundation of the temple (cf. 5:16). Then they were given to the next “prince” of Judah (also called governor), Zerubbabel (cf. chapters 2-6), who is said to have completed the temple in the reign of Darius. However, 57 years later in the reign of Artaxerxes I they are mentioned again as if they were not delivered!

Chapters 7-10 focus not on the temple, but on the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:21-24

²¹I, even I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the treasurers who are *in the provinces* beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, may require of you, it shall be done diligently, ²²*even up to 100 talents of silver, 100 kors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt as needed.* ²³Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, so that there will not be wrath against the kingdom of the king and his sons. ²⁴We also inform you that it is not allowed to impose tax, tribute or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Nethinim or servants of this house of God.”

7:21 “it shall be done diligently” This term “diligently” (BDB 1082) is used often in Ezra.

- 1. “this work is going on with great care,” 5:8
- 2. “the full cost is to be paid,” 6:8
- 3. “let it be (the decree) carried out with all diligence,” 6:12
- 4. “carried out *the decree* with all diligence,” 6:13
- 5. “you shall diligently buy bulls,” 7:17
- 6. “it shall be done diligently,” 7:21
- 7. “let the judgment be executed upon him strictly,” 7:26

7:22 “talents. . .kors. . .baths” These ancient measurements are very difficult to define precisely. Talents are a weight of metal, kors are a dry volume, and baths are a liquid volume. This describes a large amount of goods.

SPECIAL TOPIC: ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WEIGHTS AND VOLUMES (METROLOGY)

The weights and measurements used in commerce were crucial in ancient agricultural economy. The Bible urges the Jews to be fair in their dealings with one another (cf. Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16; Prov. 11:1; 16:11; 20:1). The real problem was not only honesty, but the non-standardized terms and systems used in Palestine. It seems that there were two sets of weights; a “light” and a “heavy” of each amount (see *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, p. 831). Also the decimal system (base of 10) of Egypt had been combined with the sexagesimal (base of 6) of Mesopotamia.

Many of the “sizes” and “amounts” used were based on human body parts, animal loads, and farmer’s containers, none of which were standardized. Therefore, the charts are only estimations and are tentative. The easiest way to show weights and measures is on a relational chart.

I. Volume terms used most often

A. Dry measures

1. Homer (BDB 330, possibly a “donkey-load,” BDB 331), e.g., Lev. 27:16; Hosea 3:2
2. Letekh (or letech, BDB 547), cf. Hosea 3:2
3. Ephah (BDB 35), e.g., Exod. 16:36; Lev. 19:36; Ezek. 45:10-11,13,24
4. Se’ah (BDB 684, e.g., Gen. 18:6; I Sam. 25:18; I Kgs. 18:32
5. Omer (BDB 771 II, possibly “a sheaf: [a row of fallen grain], BDB 771 I), e.g., Exod. 16:16,22,36; Lev. 23:10-15
6. ‘Issaron (BDB 798, “a tenth part”), e.g., Exod. 29:40; Lev. 14:21
7. Qav (or Kab, BDB 866), cf. II Kgs. 6:25

B. Liquid Measures

1. Kor (BDB 499), e.g., I Kgs. 5:2,25; Ezek. 45:14
2. Bath (BDB 330, equal to a homer), e.g., II Chr. 2:10; Ezek. 45:10-11,14
3. Hin (BDB 228), e.g., Exod. 29:40; Lev. 19:36; Ezek. 45:24
4. Log (BDB 528), cf. Lev. 14:10,12,15,21,24

C. Chart (taken from Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, p. 201 and *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 16, p. 379.

homer (dry) = kor (liquid)	1							
ephah (dry) = bath (liquid)	10	1						
se’ah (dry)	30	3	1					
hin (liquid)	60	6	2	1				
omer/issaron (dry)	100	10	-	-	1			
qav/kab (dry)	180	18	6	3	-	1		
log (liquid)	720	72	24	12	-	4	1	

II. Weight terms used most often

A. The three most common weights are the talent, the shekel, and the gerah.

1. The largest weight in the OT is the talent. From Exod. 38:25-26 we learn that one talent equals 3,000 shekels (i.e., “Round weight,” BDB 503).

2. The term shekel (BDB 1053, “weight”) is used so often that it is assumed, but not stated in the text. There are several values of shekel mentioned in the OT.
 - a. “commercial standard” (NASB of Gen. 23:16)
 - b. “the shekel of the sanctuary” (NASB of Exod. 30:13)
 - c. “by the king’s weight” (NASB of II Sam. 14:26), also called “royal weight” in the Elephantine papyri.
3. The gerah (BDB 176 II) is valued at 20 per shekel (cf. Exod. 30:13). These ratios vary from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Israel followed the evaluation most common in Canaan (Ugarit)
4. The mina (BDB 584) is valued at either 50 or 60 shekels. This term is found mostly in later OT books (i.e., Ezek. 45:12; Ezra 2:69; Neh. 7:70-71). Ezekiel used the 60 to 1 ratio, while Canaan used the 50 to 1 ratio.
5. The beka (BDB 132, “half a shekel,” cf. Gen. 24:22) is used only twice in the OT (cf. Gen. 24:22; Exod. 38:26) and is valued at one-half a shekel. Its name means “to divide.”

B. Chart

1. Based on Exodus

talent	1		
mina	60	1	
shekel	3,000	50	1
beka	6,000*	100	1

*(gerah, also 6,000 from Exod. 30:13; Lev. 27:25; Num. 3:47; 18:16; Ezek. 45:12)

2. Based on Ezekiel

talent	1				
mina	60	1			
shekel	3,600	60	1		
beka	7,200	120	2	1	
gerah	72,000	1,200	20	10	1

▣ “as needed” This phrase shows that the governmental provision was ongoing and expandable.

7:23 This verse describes the historical and religious atmosphere of the Persian kingdom. We learn that in the year 457 B.C., Egypt revolted against Persia and this may be a plea for divine help. This phrase is characteristic of Cyrus’, Darius’, and Artaxerxes’ desire for the national gods to be placated and supplicated on their behalf.

7:24 This describes the taxation being lifted or prohibited from the servants of the temple. The price of these cultic provisions would have been very costly for the Province Beyond the River because it contained several of these rebuilt national temples.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:25-26

²⁵“You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in *the province* beyond the River, *even* all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them.” ²⁶Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment.”

7:25 This describes Ezra’s appointing (BDB 1101, *Pael* IMPERATIVE) of the provincial Judicial system under Jewish law. The Persians had overall political power in the satraps but allowed local autonomy in areas of religion and customs.

☐ **“the wisdom of your God which is in your hand”** The “wisdom of your God” parallels “the law of your God which is in your hand” (v. 14). This strongly implies that Ezra had a complete copy of the writings of Moses (i.e., Torah, Gen. - Deut., cf. 3:2; 6:18; 7:6; Neh. 8:1). See Special Topic at 6:18.

7:26 The various consequences of disobedience are spelled out clearly. Notice there is a scale for differing offenses!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:27-28

²⁷**Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put *such a thing* as this in the king’s heart, to adorn the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, ²⁸and has extended lovingkindness to me before the king and his counselors and before all the king’s mighty princes. Thus I was strengthened according to the hand of the LORD my God upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.**

7:27-28 This text reverts to Hebrew and records Ezra’s prayer of thanksgiving to God.

7:27 “Blessed” The term (BDB 138, KB 159, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE) is a metaphorical extension from the word “to kneel.” It can be used for honoring deity, humans, and objects.

☐ **“the God of our fathers”** Ezra’s prayer expresses the covenant renewal theology reflected in all of the post-exilic historical books.

☐ **“who has put *such a thing* as this in the king’s heart”** This phrase is theologically parallel to 6:22. God is in control of world events (also the recurrent theme of Daniel).

☐

NASB “to adorn”

NKJV “to beautify”

NRSV “to glorify”

TEV “to honor in this way”

NJB “to restore beauty”

The Hebrew term (BDB 802, KB 908, *Peel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) may be an intentional allusion to the prophecy of Isa. 60:7,9,13.

7:28 “has extended lovingkindness to me” The VERB (BDB 639, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is anthropomorphic for God’s hand.

The NOUN “lovingkindness” is the special covenantal word *hesed* (BDB 338), which denotes YHWH’s faithfulness and loyalty to His promises. See Special Topic: *Hesed* at Neh. 13:14.

☐ **“his counselors. . .mighty princes”** Ezra was affirmed before the highest leaders of Persia, which may have included the seven special families who made up the advisory council (cf. 7:14; 8:25).

☐ **“I was strengthened”** This VERB (BDB 304, KB 302, *Hithpael* PERFECT) means “to be or grow firm, strong, strengthen.” Ezra was empowered by God to perform his task (cf. Dan. 1:17)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the bible, and the holy spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Define the term "scribe."
2. To what does "the law of Moses" refer?
3. Why is v. 10 so theologically significant?
4. Why does 7:12-26 revert to Aramaic?
5. Explain the theological significance of vv. 27-28.

EZRA 8

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Heads of Families Who Returned With Ezra	A List of Priestly and Lay Clans Who Returned with Ezra	The People Who Returned From Exile	Ezra's Journey from Babylonia to Palestine (7:27-8:36) 7:27-8:1
8:1-14	8:1-14	8:1-14	8:2-14
Servants for the Temple		Ezra Finds Levites for the Temple	
8:15-20	8:15-20	8:15-20	8:15-20
Fasting and Prayer for Protection		Ezra Leads the People in Fasting and Prayer	
8:21-23	8:21-23	8:21-23	8:21-23
Gifts for the Temple		The Gifts for the Temple	
8:24-30	8:24-30	8:24-30	8:24-30
The Return to Jerusalem		The Return to Jerusalem	
8:31-35	8:31-34	8:31-34	8:31-34
	8:35-36	8:35-36	8:35
8:36			8:36

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3, p. viii). Compare your subject divisions with the four translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:1-14

¹Now these are the heads of their fathers' *households* and the genealogical enrollment of those who went up with me from Babylon in the reign of King Artaxerxes: ²of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; ³of the sons of Shecaniah *who* was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah and with him 150 males *who were* in the genealogical list; ⁴of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerariah and 200 males with him; ⁵of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel and 300 males with him; ⁶and of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan and 50 males with him; ⁷and of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah and 70 males with him; ⁸and of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael and 80 males with him; ⁹of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel and 218 males with him; ¹⁰and of the sons of Bani, Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah and 160 males with him; ¹¹and of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai and 28 males with him; ¹²and of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan and 110 males with him; ¹³and of the sons of Adonikam, the last ones, these being their names, Eliphelet, Jeuel and Shemaiah, and 60 males with them; ¹⁴and of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and 70 males with them.

8:1-14 This is a list of those Jewish people who returned from exile in Babylon with Ezra. They are, for the most part, members of the same families who returned under Zerubbabel.

This list begins with two priests and one descendant of the royal line of David. In a sense this parallels Zerubbabel (royal line) and Jeshua (family of Aaronic High Priest). The author is trying to show that both groups of leaders (royal and priestly) were also involved in the third return (first, Sheshbazzar, cf. Ezra 1, under Cyrus; second, Zerubbabel/Jeshua, cf. Ezra 2-6, under Darius and now Ezra, some 57-58 years later, under Artaxerxes I).

8:1 “with me” This shows that Ezra himself is writing or dictating his own experience. Ezra's actions continue in Neh. 7:72-8:18.

“I” sections are present in both Ezra and Nehemiah, which show they are two separate books even though they are combined in Hebrew tradition.

8:2 “the sons of Phinehas, Gershom” Phinehas was a son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron (cf. Exod. 6:25; I Chr. 6:4,50; 9:20; I Esdras 8:2). In this context, we learn that he was the father of Gershom, a priest who returned with Ezra. He was a relative of Ezra (cf. 7:5).

▣ **“the sons of Ithamar, Daniel”** Ithamar was one of the four sons of Aaron (cf. Exod. 6:23). Daniel, one of his descendants, returned with Ezra. Daniel is also listed as a priest in Neh. 10:6. Nothing else is known about him.

Ithamar's descendants', Eli's (cf. I Sam. 2:12-16) and Abiathar's (cf. I Kgs. 2:27) actions caused this family of priests to be depreciated in importance and service. Jeremiah was of this family.

▣ **“the sons of David, Hattush”** After the list of priests, there is a mention of the royal line of Judah, Hattush. He is mentioned in the Davidic genealogy of I Chr. 3 (cf. v. 22) and in the extra-canonical book of I Esdras (8:29).

▣ **“sons of Shecaniah”** This man was a relative of Zerubbabel (also of the royal line of Judah) listed in I Chr. 3:21-22. Because of the recurrent pattern in this context, he may be related to Hattush and not Parosh (cf. Rotherham's Emphasized Bible, p. 475 and The NET Bible, p. 720).

▣ **“Parosh”** This name appears several times in Ezra and Nehemiah as an Israelite family that returned with Zerubbabel. A descendant by the same name was active in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 2:3; 8:3; 10:25; Neh. 3:25; 7:8; 10:14; and I Esdras 8:30).

▣ **“Zechariah”** Several persons by this name are listed in the returnees with Ezra (cf. vv. 3,4,11,16; 10:26). This one was a descendant of Parosh. The NASB is translated in such a way that it implies he is related to Shecaniah, which would make him of the tribe of Judah, but the Hebrew seems to separate this man into another group, not necessarily from any specific tribe.

8:4 “Pahath-moab” This is a leader of the returning Jews who is mentioned several times (cf. Ezra 2:6;8:4; Neh. 3:11; 7:11; 10:14). The name implies that this large clan was from the area of Moab or they served David there (cf. I Sam. 22:3-4). Two thousand eight hundred and twelve of his descendants returned under Zerubbabel and 200 more under Ezra.

8:5 “Zattu” This name is omitted in the Hebrew text, but is included in the Septuagint and I Esdras 8:32. It is also missing in the Peshitta. He is the head of a large family that returned with Zerubbabel (cf. Ezra 2:8; 8:5; Neh. 7:13; I Esdras 8:32). A large number returned with Zerubbabel (i.e., 945 males) and possibly 300 more males with Ezra (cf. I Esdras 8:32).

▣ **“Shecaniah”** I Esdras 8:32 makes him a descendant of Zattu and son of Jahaziel.

8:6 “Adin” This man’s descendants (i.e., Jonathan, Ebed) returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel in 454 (cf. 2:15) and under Ezra 50 more males made the long trip from Babylon to Judah.

8:7 “Elam” This name, like Pahath-moab, may reflect the area to which these Jewish men were exiled (cf. 2:7). There is another group from this area mentioned in 2:31. The first group had 1,254 who returned under Zerubbabel (cf. 2:7; Neh. 7:12; I Esdras 5:12).

In this text a second group returns under Ezra with Athaliah, Jeshaiiah, and 70 males.

8:8 “Shephatiah” This is another family who returned under Zerubbabel with 372 males (cf. 2:4), and later, under Ezra (8:8; I Esdras 8:34) another 81 or 82 (which included Michael and Zebadiah). The parallel non-canonical account in I Esdras puts their numbers as 472 and 71 (cf. I Esd. 5:9).

8:9 “Joab” This family is related to Pahath-moab (cf. 2:6; Neh. 7:11). They returned with 2,812 males under Zerubbabel and 80 plus (Jehiel and Obadiah) with Ezra (8:8).

8:10 “Bani” This family is listed in 2:10 as bringing 642 males back with Zerubbabel (cf. I Esd. 5:12). Nehemiah 7:15, which is a parallel genealogy, has “Binnui” and lists the returning males as 648. Many scholars believe this refers to the same person, which is surely possibly, but the mentioning of both “Bani” and “Binnui” in Ezra 10:38 makes one wonder.

The name is omitted in the Hebrew text and the Peshitta, but is present in the several manuscripts of the Septuagint, as well as I Esdras 8:36.

8:11 “Bebai” This is another family who returned under Zerubbabel with 623 males (cf. 2:11; Neh. 7:16 has 628). Then later under Ezra another 28-29 (cf. 8:11, which includes Zechariah).

8:12 “Azgad” This name means “Gad is strong” (BDB 739) and may reflect a tribal origin. This family returned initially under Zerubbabel with 1,222 males (cf. 2:12; Neh. 7:17; I Esd. 5:13) and then later under Ezra another 110 plus (including Hakkatan and Johanan, cf. 8:12).

8:13 “Adonikam” The name (BDB 12) means “the Lord has arisen.” This family returned under Zerubbabel with 666 or 667 males (Neh. 7:18). They are mentioned again here by three proper names and 60 males as returning under Ezra (cf. I Esd. 5:14; 8:39).

8:13

NASB “the last ones”
NKJV “of the last sons of”
NRSV “those who came later”
TEV “(they returned at a later date)”
NJB “the younger sons”

This possibly means that the whole family returned, some with Zerubbabel, and the rest, at a later time, with Ezra. It is obvious from these English translations that the phrase’s meaning is uncertain. BDB (p. 30) supports the NRSV and TEV’s understanding as an ADJECTIVE of time.

8:14 “Bigvai” This is a significant family that returned with Zerubbabel (cf. 2:2; Neh. 7:7). He is listed in v. 2 and then the number of males who returned is given in v. 14 as 2,056. Two of his sons and 70 males returned with Ezra (8:14; I Esd. 5:14; 8:14, which says they came from Persia).



NASB, NKJV “Zabbud”
NRSV, TEV,
NIV, JPSOA “Zaccur”
NJB, LXX “Azbud”

The NASB follows the Kethiv (written) of the Hebrew text (MT), but NRSV follows the Qere (read) of the MT (and the Peshitta).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:15-20

¹⁵Now I assembled them at the river that runs to Ahava, where we camped for three days; and when I observed the people and the priests, I did not find any Levites there. ¹⁶So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, teachers. ¹⁷I sent them to Iddo the leading man at the place Casiphia; and I told them what to say to Iddo *and* his brothers, the temple servants at the place Casiphia, *that is*, to bring ministers to us for the house of our God. ¹⁸According to the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of insight of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, and his sons and brothers, 18 men; ¹⁹and Hashabiah and Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his brothers and their sons, 20 men; ²⁰and 220 of the temple servants, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, all of them designated by name.

8:15 “Ahava” This is apparently the name of a district, a river, or a city in Babylon where Ezra camped and prepared for his journey to Jerusalem. The location has never been found and the meaning of the name is uncertain (BDB 13).

The non-canonical book of I Esdras calls the river “Thares” (cf. I Esd. 8:41,61).

▣ **“I did not find any Levites there”** There was a good number of priests but they needed more Levites to help them in their temple work. The Levites did the more manual and mundane work of the temple routine. Therefore, they encouraged Ezra to find and recruit more of them.

8:16 “Ariel” This name (BDB 72) means “lion” or “lioness” of God (*El*). It is a cryptic way of referring to Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 29:1,2,7), but here it appears as a proper name, so too, of a man of Moab (cf. II Sam. 23:20; I Chr. 11:22).

▣ **“leading men”** This is the Hebrew term for “head” (BDB 910) PLURAL. It is uncertain if they are priests, tribal leaders, or heads of clans (families).

Names like Zechariah were very common and it is uncertain if the same name in v. 3 refers to the same person as v. 11 or 16. Probably there are three different persons by this name who returned with Ezra.

▣

NASB, TEV “teachers”
NKJV “men of understanding”
NRSV “who were wise”
NJB “judicious men”

The Hebrew VERB (BDB 106, KB 122, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE) means “one with discernment” or “understanding.” It became the title for teachers in later Judaism. In this period the Levites functioned as the teachers, but these two men are not identified as Levites.

8:17 “Casiphia” This word (BDB 494) seems to be a place location in Babylon (but unidentified), either of a large Jewish settlement or a well-known Jewish school. Some scholars even think it could possibly be a Jewish sanctuary similar to the one in Egypt mentioned in the Elephantine papyri.

▣ **“Iddo and his brothers, the temple servants”** Does this verse imply that

1. Iddo was related to the Nethinim (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 3, pp. 203-204)
2. Nethinim refers to non-Jews who were captured foreigners in Israel’s past and now had become temple slaves (cf. V. 20)
3. Nethinim here simply means temple servants (i.e., Levites, cf. vv. 18-19)

8:18 “Mahli” He was a descendant of one of the three sons of Levi (Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, cf. Num. 3:17). Merari’s sons were assigned the task of helping to move the tabernacle (cf. Num. 4:29-33). Mahli was a descendant of Merari (cf. I Chr. 6:47).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:21-23

²¹Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. ²²For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, “The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.” ²³So we fasted and sought our God concerning this *matter*, and He listened to our entreaty.

8:21-23 This is a very personal note which reveals the heart of Ezra. Nehemiah did exactly the opposite (i.e., request troops), but also from a stance of faith (cf. Neh. 2:7-9). It must be remembered that Ezra had a religious purpose and Nehemiah had a political purpose. Ezra’s faith was expressed in (1) words to Artaxerxes and (2) prayers and fasting to God. Witness and action!

It must be remembered that Ezra will take a large amount of precious metal from the king and other Jews (cf. v. 25). The amount was staggering, yet he asked for no protection!

8:21

NASB, NRSV “a safe journey”

NKJV “the right way”

TEV “lead us on our journey”

NJB “for a successful journey”

The literal Hebrew construct is “a straight way” (BDB 202 plus 449). God’s will and teachings are often characterized as a way or path (cf. Ps. 1:1; 119:105; Prov. 4:10-19). The early church was first called “the Way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22 and possibly 18:25,26). Biblical faith is a lifestyle response to God.

The term “straight” is a crucial theological term often used to describe God’s character, but here it is used in its non-theological connotation of a safe or successful trip.

8:22 Ezra’s words to the king are a good example of a proverbial statement structured in poetic antithetical, parallel lines.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:24-30

²⁴Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and with them ten of their brothers; ²⁵and I weighed out to them the silver, the gold and the utensils, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes and all Israel present *there* had offered. ²⁶Thus I weighed into their hands 650 talents of silver, and silver utensils worth 100 talents, and 100 gold talents, ²⁷and 20 gold bowls worth 1, 000 Daric, and two utensils of fine shiny bronze, precious as gold. ²⁸Then I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD, and the utensils are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. ²⁹Watch and keep *them* until you weigh *them* before the leading priests, the Levites and the heads of the fathers’ households of Israel at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.” ³⁰So the priests and the Levites accepted the weighed out silver and gold and the utensils, to bring *them* to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

8:24

NASB, NRSV “set apart”

NKJV “separated”

TEV, NJB “chose”

The Hebrew VERB (BDB 95, KB 110, “to divide,” *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) means to make special note of someone or some thing to serve God. It was used of

1. God selecting Israel, Lev. 20:24; Num. 16:9
2. Moses selecting the Levites, Num. 8:14
3. God selecting the tribe of Levi, Deut. 10:8
4. David selecting the sons of Asaph, Herman, and Jeduthun to be temple musicians, I Chr. 25:1
5. Ezra’s selection to care for the special offerings for the temple (in this text)

It has the connotation of a divinely-led selection of persons for an assigned task.

▣ **“the leading priests”** The NASB (1995 Update) translation uses the English word “leader/leading” several times in this chapter.

1. “leading men,” v. 16 (BDB 106, i.e., “Men of understanding, e.g., Neh. 10:28)
2. “the leading man,” v. 17 (BDB 910, “head” e.g., 8:29)
3. “leading priests,” vv. 24,29 (BDB 987, “officials,” “rulers,” e.g., Ezra 7:28; 8:20,25; 10:8,14)

Also note that Sherebiah seems to be called a priest when Neh. 12:24 calls him a Levite. I Esdras 8:54 shows the distinction by adding “and” before his name in v. 24 (cf. Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Commentary Series*, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” p. 66 and *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 14, p. 67).

8:26 “talents” See Special Topic at 7:22.

8:27

NASB “fine shiny bronze”
NKJV, NRSV “fine polished bronze”
TEV “fine bronze”
NJB “fine burnished copper”

This term (BDB 843, KB 1007) occurs only here in the *hophal* (PARTICIPLE). Its color ranges from yellow to gold.

8:28 “You are holy to the LORD” “Holy” is the Hebrew term *kadosh* (BDB 871, KB 1076, VERB 1072). It has a similar connotation to “set apart” of v. 24 (i.e., set apart for God’s service).

SPECIAL TOPIC: HOLY

- I. Old Testament Usage
 - A. The etymology of the term (*kadosh*) is uncertain, possibly Canaanite. It is possible that part of the root (i.e., *kd*) means “to divide.” This is the source of the popular definition “separated (from Canaanite culture, cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2,21; 26:19) for God’s use.”
 - B. It relates to cultic things, places, times, and persons. It is not used in Genesis, but becomes common in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.
 - C. In the Prophetic literature (esp. Isaiah and Hosea) the personal element previously present, but not emphasized, comes to the fore. It becomes a way of designating the essence of God (cf. Isa. 6:3). God is holy His name representing His character is Holy. His people who are to reveal His character to a needy world are holy (if they obey the covenant in faith).
 - D. God’s mercy and love are inseparable from the theological concepts of covenants, justice, and essential character. Herein is the tension in God toward an unholy, fallen, rebellious humanity. There is a very interesting article on the relationship between God as “merciful” and God as “holy” in Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, pp. 112-113.
- II. The New Testament
 - A. The writers of the NT are Hebrew thinkers (except Luke), but influenced by Koine Greek (i.e., the Septuagint). It is the Greek translation of the OT that controls their vocabulary, not Classical Greek literature, thought, or religion.
 - B. Jesus is holy because He came from God and is like God and He is God (cf. Luke 1:35; 4:34; Acts 3:14; 4:27,30). He is the Holy and Righteous One (cf. Acts 3:14; 22:14). Jesus is holy because He is sinless (cf. John 8:46; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; I Pet. 1:19; 2:22; I John 3:5).
 - C. Because God is holy, His children are to be holy (cf. Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26; Matt. 5:48; I Pet. 1:16). Because Jesus is holy His followers are to be holy (cf. Rom. 8:28-29; II Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 1:4; I Thess. 3:13; 4:3; I Pet. 1:15). Christians are saved to serve in Christlikeness.

8:29 “Watch and keep” These VERBS (BDB 1052, KB 1638 and BDB 1036, KB 1581) are both *Qal* IMPERATIVES. They have similar meanings and are used for emphasis.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:31-34

³¹Then we journeyed from the river Ahava on the twelfth of the first month to go to Jerusalem; and the hand of our God was over us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the

ambushes by the way. ³²Thus we came to Jerusalem and remained there three days. ³³On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the utensils were weighed out in the house of our God into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them *were* the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. ³⁴Everything *was* numbered and weighed, and all the weight was recorded at that time.

8:31 “the hand of our God was over us” See notes at 7:6,9,28; 8:18,22.

8:32 One wonders if these “three days” are related to the three days of fasting and prayer of vv. 15 and 21. Ezra prayed before he left and maybe he also had a time of thanksgiving and prayer when he arrived (cf. vv. 21,25; Neh. 2:11).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:35-36

³⁵The exiles who had come from the captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: 12 bulls for all Israel, 96 rams, 77 lambs, 12 male goats for a sin offering, all as a burnt offering to the LORD. ³⁶Then they delivered the king’s edicts to the king’s satraps and to the governors *in the provinces* beyond the River, and they supported the people and the house of God.

8:35

NASB, NJB “the exiles”
NKJV “the children”
NRSV “the returned exiles”
TEV “those who had returned from exile”

The literal phrase is “sons of exile,” which is the use of “son” to denote a characteristic of a group, which is common in Hebrew. This phrase is repeated several times in Ezra (cf. 4:1; 6:19,20; 8:35; 10:7,16).

▣ “twelve bulls, 96 rams, 77 lambs, 12 male goats” Each of these is divisible by 12 except for the lambs. However, in I Esdras 8:56 (which may be the correct list of names and numbers) it has 72 instead of 77, which may be the correct number. The Jews were very fond of the number 12 and although Ezra does not try to assert that all twelve tribes return, the Jews use this number often. See Special Topic: The Number Twelve at 6:17.

SPECIAL TOPIC: SACRIFICES IN MESOPOTAMIA AND ISRAEL AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

- I. Ritual laws in Mesopotamia
 - A. Sacrifice was primarily a meal offered to a god. The altar was the table of the god where the meal was placed. Beside the altar was the incense brazier which was to attract the god’s attention. There was no ritual implication in the blood. The sword bearer cut the throat of the animal. The food was shared between the gods, the priest-king and the attendants. The offerer received nothing.
 - B. There was no expiatory sacrifice.
 - C. Sickness or pain was punishment from the gods. An animal was brought and destroyed; this acted as a substitute for the offerer.
 - D. Israel’s ritual was different and distinct. It seems to have originated in a person giving back to God part of his labor for necessary food (cf. Gen. 4:1-4; 8:20-22).

II. Ritual laws in Canaan (similar to Israel's)

A. Sources

1. biblical accounts
2. Phoenician literature
3. *Ras Shamra Tablets* from Ugarit concerning Canaanite deities and mythology from about 1400 B.C.

B. Israel's and Canaan's sacrifices are very much alike. However, there is no emphasis placed on the blood of the victim in Canaan sacrifices.

III. Ritual Laws in Egypt

A. Sacrifices were offered but not emphasized

B. The sacrifice was not important but the attitude of the sacrificer was

C. Sacrifices were made to stop the wrath of the gods

D. The offerer hoped for deliverance or forgiveness

IV. Israel's Sacrificial System - Israel's sacrifices were closer to Canaan's although not necessarily related to them at all.

A. Descriptive Phrases

1. Sacrifice was a spontaneous expression of mankind's need for God.
2. The OT laws which regulate sacrifice cannot be said to initiate sacrifice (cf. Gen. 7:8; 8:20).
3. Sacrifice was an offering (animal or grain).
4. Must be an offering that was wholly or partially destroyed upon an altar in homage to God.
5. The altar was the place of sacrifice and symbolized the Divine presence.
6. Sacrifice was an act of external worship (a prayer which was acted out).
7. The definition of sacrifice is "acted prayers" or "ritualized prayers." The significance of ritual and our cultural bias against it is revealed in Gordon J. Wenham (*Tyndale Commentary Series*, "Numbers," p. 25-39). Leviticus and Numbers both contain large amounts of this type of material which shows its importance to Moses and Israel.

B. Sacrifice involved

1. Gifts to God

- a. involve acknowledgment that all of the earth is the Lord's
- b. all that a person has, he owes to God
- c. therefore, it is right that people bring tribute to God
- d. it was a special kind of tribute or gift. It was something that the man needed to sustain his own existence. It was more than just giving something, it was something he needed. It was giving a part of himself to God.
- e. by destroying the gift it cannot be reclaimed
- f. a burnt offering becomes invisible and goes up to God's realm
- g. earlier altars were erected in places where God appeared. The altar came to be looked upon as a holy place, therefore, the offering was brought there.

2. Expressing consecration of one's entire life to God

- a. The burnt offering was one of three voluntary sacrifices.
- b. The entire animal was burnt to express to God deep-felt homage.
- c. This was a very expressive gift to God.

3. Fellowship with God
 - a. communion aspect of sacrifice
 - b. an example would be the peace offering which symbolized God and man in fellowship
 - c. sacrifice was made to obtain or regain this fellowship
4. Expiation of sin
 - a. when man sinned he had to ask God to restore the relationship (covenant) which man had broken
 - b. there was no communal meal with the sin offering because of the broken relationship
 - c. the significance of blood
 - (1) placed on altar for man
 - (2) placed on veil for priest
 - (3) placed on mercy seat for High Priest and the nation (Lev. 16)
 - d. there were two types of sin offerings. The second is called the guilt offering or trespass offering. In it the offender was to restore to his fellow Israelite that which was taken or damaged along with the animal sacrifice.
 - e. there was no sacrifice for premeditated or intentional sin, 4:1, 22, 27; 5:15-18; 22:14

8:36 This verse shows that the political problems documented in chapter 6 have been overcome.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is Ezra's lineage given in such detail?
2. How is Ezra related to Jeshua, High Priest under Zerubbabel?
3. Describe the function of the scribe.
4. List the Persian phrases in this chapter.
5. Define the terms talent, kor and bath from a dictionary of the Bible.
6. List the different servants of the Temple found in verse 24.
7. How is the list of chapter 8 different from the one in chapter 2?

EZRA 9

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Intermarriage with Pagans	The Problem of Mixed Marriages	Ezra Learns of Intermarriage with Non-Jews	The Marriages with Foreigners Dissolved
9:1-4	9:1-4	9:1-6a	9:1-6a
	Ezra's Confession		
9:5-15	9:1-5		
	9:6-9		
		9:6b-9	9:6b-12
	9:10-15	9:10-15	
			9:13-15

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3, p. viii). Compare your subject divisions with the four translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:1-4

¹Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, *those* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. ²For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." ³When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some

of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled. ⁴Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel on account of the unfaithfulness of the exiles gathered to me, and I sat appalled until the evening offering.

9:1 “Now when these things had been completed” This could refer to 8:36, which would explain the four and one-half month period between Ezra’s arrival and these charges. Many scholars have assumed that Neh. 7:73 - 9:37 fits historically between Ezra 8 and 9. However, they seem to be separated in time. Ezra 9:1-15 is also recorded in I Esdras 8:68-90.



NASB “princes”
NKJV, TEV “leaders”
NRSV, NJB “officials”

The Hebrew term (BDB 987) has a wide range of meaning—“chieftain,” “chief,” “ruler,” “official,” “captain,” “priest.” Here it refers to religious leadership (cf. Ezra 8:24,29; 10:5; II Chr. 36:14) or leaders of Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 8:10,14; Neh. 4:10; 10:1; 11:1). Apparently Ezra’s teaching of the Torah had an affect. This is a recurrent theme in both Ezra and Nehemiah.

▣ **“the people of Israel and the priests and the Levites”** This three-fold division of the Jewish returnees is consistent throughout Ezra and Nehemiah.

▣ **“had not separated themselves”** This VERB (BDB 95, KB 110) is a *Niphal* PERFECT (cf. 6:21). Some of the returning Jews married the indigenous population. This was especially problematic because this was the very issue which the Jewish leadership used to reject the help of the surrounding nations in Zerubbabel’s day (cf. 4:1-5). This issue is also dealt with by Nehemiah (cf. Neh. 13:23-29, also note Mal. 2:10-16).

▣ **“the peoples of the land”** The list is Mosaic (cf. Exod. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-4). These nationalities no longer had their identity (except Egypt, Ammon, Moab) in the post-exilic Persian period. However, it shows that Ezra was trying to relate to the Mosaic covenant. This chapter has nothing to do with the issue of interracial marriage, but of religious corruption.

▣ **“abominations”** This term (BDB 1072) denotes a violation of YHWH’s covenant requirements, especially as it related to the fertility practices of the tribes of Canaan (cf. Deut. 18:9; I Kgs. 14:24; II Kgs. 16:3; 21:2; II Chr. 28:3; 33:2; 36:14; Ezra 9:1,11,14 and it is implied in Lev. 18:26,27,29,30; Deut. 18:12; 20:18).

▣ **“Canaanites”** This word (BDB 488) literally meant “to bundle” and came to refer to all the tribes of Palestine (Canaan). Some assert that the term meant “land of purple” (as does Phoenicia) and refers to the making of purple dye from sea shells. Even before this time period one of Ham’s sons was named Canaan. He was cursed by Noah because of his father’s sin (cf. Gen. 9) and became an ancestor of the Canaanites and Phoenicians (this is why this term often means “trader” or “merchant”). This cursing and later, Moses’ warnings to kill all of the Canaanites (e.g., Deut. 7:1-5; 20:17; Ps. 106:34-39), caused this word to become a metaphor of evil, corruption, and abhorrence. These native tribes of Canaan were fertility worshipers (i.e., “their abominations,” cf. v. 1; Gen. 15:16). God knew they would compromise His people, therefore, many of the laws of Leviticus deal with separation from these groups. Now again, God’s people had disobeyed and compromised their faith by marrying pagan women.

▣ **“Hittites”** These were Kanesian-speaking descendants of a people who dominated central Turkey. Their kingdom was centered at Hattusas in Anatolia and was very involved in Mesopotamia and Palestine from 1800-1200 B.C.

▣ **“Jebusites”** These were the inhabitants of Jerusalem until the conquest of David (cf. II Sam. 5:6-10). Remember, Jerusalem was originally called Salem (cf. Gen. 14:18) and later Jebus (e.g., Josh. 18:16,28; Jdgs. 19:10,11). David made it his capital because of the proximity to Mt. Moriah, the place where YHWH caused His name to dwell (i.e., the temple mount).

▣ **“the Ammonites and Moabites”** These were relatives of the Jews, the descendants of Lot, and his own daughters (cf. Gen. 19).

▣ **“Egyptians”** This racial group did not live in Palestine, but in northeast Africa. It must be remembered that Solomon, I Kgs. 3:1, and Joseph, Gen. 41:45, married Egyptians with no hint of condemnation involved. We must balance this chapter with Deut. 21:10-14, which seems to allow foreign marriages. The problem was not foreign marriages, but religious amalgamation or eclecticism.

▣ **“Amorites”** I Esdras 8:69 has “Edomites” (but not Ammonites or Amorites) instead of “Amorites.” In Gen. 15:16, it is a collective term for all of the peoples of Palestine (cf. Gen. 15:16). Sometimes they are referred to collectively as Canaanites or Amorites, but often they are divided into ten groups (Gen. 15:19), seven groups (Deut. 7:1; Josh 3:10; 24:11), six groups (Exod. 3:8), five groups (Exod. 3:17; Num. 13:29), or three groups (Exod. 23:28).

9:2 “for they had taken some of their daughters” It must be remembered that Moses (Exod. 2:21; Num. 12:1, and David, II Sam. 3:3) had foreign wives, as well as Joseph (Gen. 41:50) and Solomon (I Kgs. 7:8). The holy race is not primarily racial, but religious (cf. Jdgs. 3:4-7). The problem was not blood, but faith in YHWH (monotheism).

▣ **“and for their sons”** Arranged marriages were the only cultural option. These returning Jews were putting their male children in danger by divorcing their wives in order to marry Canaanite women within established families.

▣ **“the holy race”** This is an idiom (i.e., “The seed of holiness”) for a people who were meant to reflect God’s character (e.g., Exod. 19:6; Isa. 6:13). There is no special race because all humans are made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). However, in this context it refers to the people group out of which will come the Messiah (i.e., Jews, e.g., Gen. 12:3; 28:14).

▣
NASB, NKJV **“intermingled”**
NRSV **“mixed”**
TEV **“become contaminated”**
NJB **“has been contaminated”**

The Hebrew VERB (BDB 786 II, KB 876, *Hithpael* PERFECT) meant to take or give a pledge, which was an idiom of identifying with someone (cf. Ps. 106:35; Prov. 20:19; 24:21).

▣ **“the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness”** The leaders of the returning Jews were the very ones who were acting in such disobedient ways!

The term “unfaithfulness” (BDB 591) means “a treacherous act” or “a breach of interpersonal trust,” usually with God (e.g., Ezra 9:2,4; 10:6; Lev. 5:15; Num. 5:12; Josh. 22:22; I Chr. 9:1; II Chr. 29:19; 33:19). Biblical faith involves (1) personal commitment, (2) covenantal commitment, and (3) faithfulness.

9:3 “I tore my garment” This verse describes a series of Jewish acts of mourning (e.g., v. 5; 10:1,6; Josh. 7:6; II Sam. 1:11-12; II Chr. 34:27; Esth. 4:1; Isa. 36:22; Jer. 41:5). Apparently, Ezra did not know about these foreign marriages and was greatly appalled when he heard about it. His shock and sincerity also moved the exiles to reform their practices.

▣ **“my garment and my robe”** The first term (BDB 93 II, the last entry) simply means the outer piece of clothing. It can refer to common clothing or special clothing.

The second term (BDB 591) denotes a special robe worn by the leading people of society or religion (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 1018). There is a possible word play between these terms and “unfaithfulness” (BDB 591) of v. 2.

▣ **“and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard”** One sign of mourning was the shaving of the head (cf. Job 1:20; Isa. 22:12; Jer. 7:29; 16:6; 41:5; 48:37; Micah 1:16), but Ezra’s grief was so intense he pulled out hair from his head and face. This is the only occurrence of this act in the OT.

▣ **“sat down”** Sitting on the floor was also a sign of mourning (e.g., II Sam. 12:16; 13:31; Neh. 1:4; Isa. 47:1; Ezek. 26:16).

▣

NASB, NRSV “appalled”
NKJV “astonished”
TEV “crushed with grief”
NJB “in honor”

This VERB (BDB 1030, KB 1563, *Poel* PARTICIPLE) means “to be appalled,” “awestruck,” “horrified.” It is used in v. 3 and v. 4. Its use is common in the seventh-century prophets and Daniel. Sin horrifies God and should horrify His people. It brings death and destruction. The Jews should have known this from their recent experience of the exile.

9:4 “everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel” This is a powerful metaphor for God’s faithful people (cf. 10:3; Isa. 66:2,5)!

The term (BDB 353) is used of people being afraid (cf. Jdgs. 7:3), but also of God and those things connected to Him (e.g., Exod. 19:16,18; Deut. 5:23-27).

1. the ark (I Sam. 4:13)
2. His word (Isa. 66:2,5; Ezra 9:4)
3. His commandments (Ezra 10:3)
4. His judgment (Isa. 41:5; Ezek. 26:16,18; 32:10)

▣ **“until the evening offering”** The morning offering was at 9 a.m., the evening offering was 3 p.m. (cf. Exod. 12:6; Dan. 9:21; Acts 3:1). Ezra sat appalled in the company of others sensitive to God and His word all day long. In a sense this is a confession of corporate sin (cf. vv. 5-9), like that of Moses and Daniel.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:5-9

⁵But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God; ⁶and I said, “O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen above

our heads and our guilt has grown even to the heavens. ⁷Since the days of our fathers to this day we *have been* in great guilt, and on account of our iniquities we, our kings *and* our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity and to plunder and to open shame, *as it is* this day. ⁸But now for a brief moment grace has been *shown* from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. ⁹For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem.”

9:5

NASB “humiliation”

NKJV, NRSV “my fasting”

TEV “grieving”

NJB “out of my stupor”

This is the Hebrew term (BDB 777) for humiliation by fasting (cf. 8:21). Ezra had grieved all day with his spiritual companions. This represents sorrow and grief brought on by the knowledge of human sin and rebellion and its possible consequences for the whole group of restored Jews in Judah.

▣ **“I fell on my knees”** The normal stance for Jewish prayer was standing with hands and eyes uplifted. Whenever kneeling or prostration is mentioned in the Bible it signifies intensity (cf. I Kgs. 8:54; II Chr. 6:13; Ps. 95:6; Isa. 45:23; Dan. 6:10).

▣ **“stretched out my hands”** This is literally “with palms up,” which was the normal position for Jewish prayer (cf. Exod. 9:29,33; I Kings 8:22; II Chr. 6:12; Job 11:13; Ps. 28:2; 44:20; 68:31; 88:9; 134:2; 141:2; 143:6; Isa. 1:15).

▣ **“the LORD my God”** This is the covenant title for the deity of Israel (e.g., Gen. 2:4; Deut. 6:4-5). YHWH refers to deity as the covenant-making Savior, while *Elohim* refers to deity as the creator, provider, and sustainer of all life. See Special Topic: The Names for Deity at Neh. 1:4.

9:6 **“I am ashamed. . .for our iniquities”** Here is a unique combination between individual and corporate responsibility. Ezra, as all great OT leaders, identifies himself with a sinning, covenant community (e.g., Dan. 9:4-19; Neh. 9:5-38).

▣ **“ashamed and embarrassed”** The two VERBS (BDB 101, KB 116, *Qal* PERFECT) are often found together in the prophets.

1. Isa. 30:3-5; 41:11; 45:16,17; 50:7; 54:4
2. Jer. 20:11; 22:22; 31:19
3. Ezek. 16:52,54; 36:22

▣ **“our iniquities. . .our guilt”** This is prose, but structured in parallel thought. The sin of these leaders is so big that it reaches heaven (i.e., God takes notice, e.g., Jer. 51:9; Rev. 18:5).

“Risen above our heads” may be an idiom for an overwhelming flood (cf. Ps. 38:4) or a great wall between us and God (cf. Ps. 40:12).

9:7 Ezra recognizes that the very rebellion which had caused the military defeat of the Israelites throughout the years, has returned (cf. Neh. 9). These leaders had not “trembled at the words of God” (cf. v. 4)! They

had flaunted their positions and power. The curses (cf. Deut. 27-29) of mixing with Canaan had manifested again!

Nehemiah gives an historical account of Israel's history in 9:6-35. It was a history of their unfaithfulness, but YHWH's mercy and faithfulness.

▣ **“have been given into the hand of the kings of the land”** Menahem and Pekah (kings of Israel) were given into the hand of Tiglath-Pileser (Assyria); Hoshea was given into the hand of Shalmaneser or Sargon II (Assyria); Manasseh (king of Judah) was given into the hand of Esarhaddon (Assyria); Josiah was given into the hand of Pharaoh Necho II (Egypt); Jehoachin, Jehoakim, Jehoachin, and Zedekiah were given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar II (Babylon).

▣ Again Ezra's prose is poetic and patterned. It is represented in English as a series of INFINITIVES.

1. to the sword
2. to captivity
3. to plunder
4. to open shame

9:8 Notice that the unchanging character of the God of covenant mercy, and not the people's performance, is the key to His people's hope (cf. Ezek. 36:22-38). Yet, obedience is a covenant requirement. In the OT, it was the condition of blessing that fallen mankind could not achieve; in the NT it is a gift of YHWH to which fallen mankind must respond in faithfulness. Obedience is not the basis of covenant hope, but the result of God's merciful character (cf. Jer. 31:31-34, the new covenant). The goal of both the OT and NT is a people who reflect God's character. Obedience is still crucial (cf. Luke 6:46; John 15).

▣ **“to leave us an escaped remnant”** These people were the beginning of God's new covenant people (cf. vv. 13-15). If they wilfully sinned, what would become of the promises of God to the world (cf. v. 9, “in the sight of the kings of Persia”). Remnant terminology and theology is most common in Isaiah (cf. 1:9; 4:3; 10:20-22; 11:11-16; 46:3) and in Amos (1:8; 5:3,15; 9:12). See Special Topic: The Faithful Remnant at 1:4.

▣ **“a peg in His holy place”** This is a metaphor from Israel's nomadic period which describes their new foothold in the Promised Land. It was drawn from putting up secure tents (cf. Isa. 22:23; 33:20; Zech. 10:4). It was also used as an idiom for blessing (cf. Isa. 54:2-3).

▣ **“that our God may”** Ezra prays for two merciful acts of God (these may be parallel, the first is an idiom for the second):

1. enlighten our eyes
2. revive amidst our bondage

This is not what they deserved. They deserved judgment, but because God wants to use them to bless a world (cf. v. 9; Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6) Ezra prays to His compassion and larger redemptive purpose (cf. Isa. 60:1-3,19-20).

9:9 Here Ezra uses contrasting statements to make his theological point.

1. YHWH has not forsaken us (BDB 736, KB 806, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Gen. 24:27; Isa. 49:14; 55:7).
2. YHWH has extended lovingkindness to us (BDB 639, KB 692, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT, cf 7:28).

There are several places in the OT where this word, forsaken (BDB 736), is used in contrasting senses. YHWH has not forsaken or abandoned, but His people have forsaken and abandoned Him (cf. Deut. 31:16-17; II Chr. 12:5; 13:10-11; 15:2; 24:20; and Ezra 9:9-10, taken from NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 365).

▣ **“lovingkindness”** This is the Hebrew NOUN *hesed* (BDB 338). It developed a special connotation as the covenant word which describes God’s loyalty and love to His covenant people. See Special Topic: *Hesed* at Neh. 13:14.

▣ **“to restore its ruins”** This may be an allusion to the restoration prophecy of Isa. 44:24-28 (esp. v. 26).

▣ **“a wall in Judah and Jerusalem”** This is another metaphor and it does not relate directly to the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 2:4-5). The Hebrew term (BDB 154) means “an enclosing wall” or “a rock wall showing ownership”; so this refers to the covenant people being restored to the land of promise, in order that all the world can see the mercy and power of God in fulfilling His covenant promises (e.g., Gen. 15:12-21)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:10-15

¹⁰Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, ¹¹which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from end to end and with their impurity. ¹²So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good *things* of the land and leave *it as* an inheritance to your sons forever.’ ¹³After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt, since You our God have requited *us* less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us an escaped remnant as this, ¹⁴shall we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who commit these abominations? Would You not be angry with us to the point of destruction, until there is no remnant nor any who escape? ¹⁵O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we have been left an escaped remnant, as *it is* this day; behold, we are before You in our guilt, for no one can stand before You because of this.”

9:11 “unclean. . .uncleanness” The term (BDB 622) originally referred to the ceremonial impurity caused by a woman’s monthly menstrual cycle. It came to be a metaphor for “uncleanness” (cf. II Chr. 29:5; Ezek. 7:19-20; Zech. 13:1).

In the Mosaic legislation any fluids which come out of the human body makes one ceremonially unclean, unable to participate in religious and social activities.

▣ **“their abominations”** This usually involves the sin of idolatry (e.g., Lev. 18:3,24-30) and disobedience (e.g., Jer. 7:25-26), which caused the exile in the first place. Now it was starting over again in the same way.

▣ **“from end to end”** This is literally “from mouth unto mouth” (Young’s *Literal Translation of the Bible*, p. 320). The term (BDB 804) is often used in idiomatic phrases:

1. “ask his mouth” (ask personally), Gen. 24:57
2. “mouth of the sword,” Gen. 34:26
3. “mouth to mouth” (face to face), Num. 12:8; II Kgs. 10:21; 21:16; Jer. 32:4; 34:3
4. “with one mouth” (unanimous), Josh. 9:2
5. “mouth to mouth” (devour), Isa. 9:12
6. “mouth to mouth” (resuscitation), II Kgs. 4:34
7. “hand over mouth” (respect), Job 29:9
8. “mouth to mouth” (fill completely), II Kgs. 21:16; Ezra 9:11

(Examples taken from NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 583).

9:11-12 This seems to be a summary statement encompassing insights from Moses (cf. Exod. 23:32-35; 34:10-17; Deut. 7:2-3; 20:10-18) and the Prophets. In Jewish theology only prophets wrote Scripture, so Moses was considered a prophet (cf. Deut. 18:15-22) and more (cf. Num. 12:6-8).

9:12 “never seek their peace or their prosperity” This may be an allusion to Deut. 23:6. The VERB “seek” (BDB 205, KB 233, *Qal* IMPERFECT) may refer to treaties (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 994). Israel’s Mosaic prohibition of any social or religious contact with idolatry (the first two VERBS are *Qal* IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense - “do not give your daughters,” “do not take their daughters,” cf. Exod. 23:32; 34:12) continues!

▣ **“forever”** See Special Topic: *’Olam* (Forever) at 3:11.

9:13 You our God have requited us less than our iniquities deserve” This is an idiomatic way of asserting God’s great love and mercy towards the Jews, but they took advantage of it! They are back in the promised land by God’s forgiveness and restitution, but now they are violating His word again!

The literal idiom is “held back downward” (BDB 362, KB 359 and BDB 641).

9:14 YHWH expresses anger towards an Israel to whom He chose to reveal Himself, so as to reveal Himself to the entire world. Their special knowledge brought great responsibility (cf. Deut. 7:11; 11:16-17; 29:25-29).

9:15 “Thou art righteous” YHWH’s character is exactly opposite of His people’s! He is faithful (cf. v. 9) and righteous, but they are unfaithful (cf. v. 2, even their political and religious leaders) and sinful (cf. vv. 6-7,10,13). See note at v. 9.

▣ **“no one can stand before Thee”** This is the theological summary of the results of human rebellion, both individually and corporately (e.g., Gen. 6:5,11-12,13; Job 4:17; 9:2; 25:4; Jer. 17:9).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the meaning of the phrase “separate themselves from the peoples of the lands”?
2. Why are the tribes of Canaan listed in so many different ways?
3. Were all the tribes of Canaan which are mentioned in v. 1 still in existence in Ezra’s day?
4. How did Ezra’s grief affect his fellow Jews?
5. Explain the relationship between personal confession and corporate confession.

EZRA 10

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Confession of Improper Marriages	Repentance of the People and Divorce of Gentile Wives	The Plan for Ending Mixed Marriages	The Marriages with Foreigners Dissolved (9:1-10:17)
10:1-4	10:1-5	10:1-4	10:1-6
10:5-8	10:6-8	10:5-6	
		10:7-9	10:7-17
10:9-15	10:9-15	10:10-11	
		10:12-15	
10:16-17	10:16-17	10:16-17	
Pagan Wives Put Away		The Men Who Had Foreign Wives	The List of the Guilty
10:18-44	10:18-22	10:18-44	10:18-44
	10:23-24		
	10:25-44		

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section)
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3, p. viii). Compare your subject divisions with the four translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:1-4

¹Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly. ²Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. ³So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. ⁴Arise! For *this* matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act.”

10:1 Note the different VERBS used to describe Ezra’s spiritual attitude toward God (cf. 9:6).

1. “praying” (BDB 813, KB 933, *Hithpael* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT)
2. “making confession” (BDB 392, KB 389, *Hithpael* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT)
3. “weeping” (BDB 113, KB 129, *Qal* PARTICIPLE)
4. “prostrating” (BDB 656, KB 709, *Hithpael* PARTICIPLE)

▣ **“prostrating himself”** This VERB (BDB 656, KB 709 *Hithpael* PARTICIPLE) means to fall down before the Lord (cf. Deut. 9:18,25). The normal physical position for prayer was standing with eyes and hands lifted to heaven. In some occasions kneeling was a way to show intensity (cf. 9:5). Prostration was an even further act of humility.

▣ **“before the house of God”** Apparently, Ezra went to the temple to pray at the time of the evening sacrifice (cf. 9:5).

▣ **“a very large assembly, men, women and children gathered”** The small group that came and reported the sin to Ezra (cf. 9:4) has now swelled to a large group of all age groups (cf. Neh. 8:2). Usually only men above the age of thirteen would have been a part of this kind of group.

One wonders if these particular Jewish women and children had been affected by the taking of foreign wives (cf. Mal. 2:10-16).

▣ **“for the people wept bitterly”** Ezra’s humility and confession sparked a spiritual repentance among the returnees. Whether ignorance or apathy had allowed the sin to develop during these many years is uncertain, but God’s word revealed the covenantal issue.

10:2 “Shecaniah” This was one of the sons of a guilty offender who is listed in 10:26, who had a repentant heart. He acknowledged his family’s sin and that of the returnees.

▣ **“Elam”** The Hebrew text has “eternity,” but most translations, ancient and modern, read the *Qere* “Elam.” The Hebrew words differ only by the second similar Hebrew letter (waw and yod).

▣ **“from the peoples of the land”** In pre-exilic days this referred to the Jewish population, but in this context and period it refers to the population of the Persian province Beyond the River. For a good discussion of the changing meaning of this term see Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, pp. 70-72.

▣ **“yet now there is hope”** Ezra’s teaching ministry and actions had kindled a corporate contrition. YHWH’s promises and merciful character kindled hope (BDB 876) for

1. forgiveness

2. fulfillment of future promises
3. assurance of His personal presence (cf. II Chr. 20:9)

10:3 “now let us make a covenant with our God” This VERB (BDB 503, KB 500, “cut”) is a *Qal IMPERFECT* used in a COHORTATIVE sense. In one way this is a strange statement. They already had a covenant with God. However, possibly through ignorance, these returnees did not know the Torah. With Ezra’s teaching (cf. 7:23), they became aware of their transgression and now wanted a covenant renewal.

▣ **“to put away all the wives and their children”** This was the consequences of their choices. I am sure it was painful for the Jews as well as these members of their families. It is hard for modern westerners who are so influenced by individual rights to understand the corporate nature of the Bible. The health and faithfulness of the “holy seed” was crucial to God’s plan of universal redemption.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RACISM

I. Introduction

- A. This is a universal expression by fallen mankind within his society. This is mankind’s ego, supporting itself on the backs of others. Racism is, in many ways, a modern phenomena, while nationalism (or tribalism) is a more ancient expression.
- B. Nationalism began at Babel (Gen. 11) and was originally related to Noah’s three sons, from whom the so called races developed (Gen. 10). However, it is obvious from Scripture that humanity is from one source (cf. Gen. 1-3; Acts 17:24-26).
- C. Racism is just one of many prejudices. Some others are (1) educational snobbery; (2) socio-economic arrogance; (3) self-righteous religious legalism; and (4) dogmatic political affiliations.

II. Biblical Material

A. Old Testament

1. Gen. 1:27- Mankind, male and female, were made in the image and likeness of God, which makes them unique. It also shows their individual worth and dignity (cf. John 3:16).
2. Gen. 1:11-25 - Records the phrase, “. . .according to its own kind. . .” ten times. This has been used to support racial segregation. However, it is obvious from the context that this refers to animals and plants and not to humanity.
3. Gen. 9:18-27 - This has been used to support racial dominance. It must be remembered that God did not curse Canaan. Noah, his father, cursed him after awakening from a drunken stupor. The Bible never records that God confirmed this oath/curse. Even if He did, this does not affect the black race. Canaan was the father of those who inhabited Palestine and the Egyptian wall art shows they were not black.
4. Josh. 9:23 - This has been used to prove one race will serve another. However, in context, the Gibeonites are of the same racial stock as the Jews.
5. Ezra 9-10 and Neh. 13 - These have often been used in a racial sense, but the context shows that the marriages were condemned, not because of race (they were from the same son of Noah, Genesis 10), but for religious reasons.

B. New Testament

1. The Gospels

- a. Jesus made use of the hatred between the Jews and Samaritans on several instances, which shows that racial hatred is inappropriate.

- (1) the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
 - (2) the woman at the well (John 4:4)
 - (3) the thankful leper (Luke 17:7-19)
 - b. The Gospel is for all humanity
 - (1) John 3:16
 - (2) Luke 24:46-47
 - (3) Hebrews 2:9
 - (4) Revelation 14:6
 - c. The Kingdom will include all humanity
 - (1) Luke 13:29
 - (2) Revelation 5
- 2. Acts
 - a. Acts 10 is a definitive passage on God's universal love and the gospel's universal message.
 - b. Peter was attacked for his actions in Acts 11 and this problem was not resolved until the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 met and came to a solution. The tension between first century Jews and Gentiles was very intense.
- 3. Paul
 - a. There are no barriers in Christ
 - (1) Gal. 3:26-28
 - (2) Eph. 2:11-22
 - (3) Col. 3:11
 - b. God is no respecter of persons
 - (1) Rom. 2:11
 - (2) Eph. 6:9
- 4. Peter and James
 - a. God is no respecter of persons, I Pet. 1:17
 - b. Because God does not show partiality, then neither should His people, James 2:1
- 5. John - One of the strongest statements on the responsibility of believers is found in I John 4:20

III. Conclusion

- A. Racism, or for that matter, prejudice of any kind, is totally inappropriate for God's children. Here is a quote from Henlee Barnette, who spoke at a forum at Glorieta, New Mexico, for the Christian Life Commission in 1964.
 - “Racism is heretical because it is unbiblical and unchristian, not to mention unscientific.”
- B. This problem gives Christians the opportunity to show their Christlike love, forgiveness and understanding to a lost world. Christian refusal in this area shows immaturity and is an opportunity for the evil one to retard the believer's faith, assurance, and growth. It will also act as a barrier to lost people coming to Christ.
- C. What can I do? (This section is taken from a Christian Life Commission tract entitled “Race Relations”).

ON THE PERSONAL LEVEL

- ★ Accept your own responsibility in solving the problems associated with race.
- ★ Through prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with those of other races, strive to rid your life of racial prejudice.
- ★ Express your convictions about race, particularly where those who stir up race hatred are unchallenged.

IN FAMILY LIFE

- ★ Recognize the importance of family influence in the development of attitudes toward other races.
- ★ Seek to develop Christian attitudes by talking over what children and parents hear about the race issue outside the home.
- ★ Parents should be careful to set a Christian example in relating to people of other races.
- ★ Seek opportunities to make family friendships across racial lines.

IN YOUR CHURCH

- ★ By the preaching and teaching of biblical truth relating to race, the congregation can be motivated to set an example for the entire community.
- ★ Be sure that worship, fellowship, and service through the church is open to all, even as the NT churches observed no racial barriers (Eph. 2:11-22; Gal. 3:26-29).

IN DAILY LIFE

- ★ Help to overcome all racial discrimination in the world of work.
- ★ Work through community organizations of all kinds to secure equal rights and opportunities, remembering that it is the race problem which should be attacked, not people. The aim is to promote understanding, not to create bitterness.
- ★ If it seems wise, organize a special committee of concerned citizens for the purpose of opening lines of communication in the community for education of the general public and for specific actions in improving race relations.
- ★ Support legislation and legislators in the passing of laws promoting racial justice and oppose those who exploit prejudice for political gain.
- ★ Commend law enforcement officials for enforcing the laws without discrimination.
- ★ Shun violence, and promote respect for the law, doing everything possible as a Christian citizen to make sure that legal structures do not become tools in the hands of those who would promote discrimination.
- ★ Exemplify the spirit and mind of Christ in all human relationship.

▣ **“according to the counsel of my lord”** The term “lord” is the Hebrew word *adon* (BDB 10), which meant “master,” “owner,” “husband,” or “lord.” Here it refers to Ezra (cf. I Esdras 8:90).

It is PLURAL, which some take as a reference to God (i.e., Vulgate), but it probably is a PLURAL of MAJESTY acknowledging Ezra’s spiritual and political stature.

▣ **“those who tremble at the commandment of God”** See note at 9:4.

▣ **“let it be done according to the law”** The VERB (BDB 793, KB 889) is a *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense. This is the recognition that there were divine guidelines (cf. Deut. 7:1-5); that covenant has requirements (cf. v. 4), as well as benefits.

10:4 “Arise” This VERB (BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) is often used of God arising from His throne for action (cf. Num. 10:35; II Chr. 6:41; Isa. 2:19,21). Here it refers to a metaphor (cf. Jdgs. 4:14) for the returnees to act on their confession and commitment.

▣ **“we will be with you”** This refers to Ezra himself and those who tremble at the word of God (cf. 9:4; 10:3). These sinful leaders must put away their foreign, pagan wives and their children by them.

▣

NASB “be courageous and act”

NKJV “be of good courage and do it”

NRSV “be strong and do it”

TEV “so go ahead and get it done”

NJB “be brave, take action”

These VERBS (BDB 304, KB 302, “be strong” and BDB 793, KB 889, “do”) are both *Qal* IMPERATIVES. The first VERB has a good parallel in Deut. 31:6. This was God’s word to Joshua several times (cf. Josh. 1:6,7,9,18). This admonition to action is reminiscent of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4, “hear and do!”).

A good parallel for the second command is I Chr. 28:10. Put feet to your prayers!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:5-8

⁵Then Ezra rose and made the leading priests, the Levites and all Israel, take oath that they would do according to this proposal; so they took the oath. ⁶Then Ezra rose from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. Although he went there, he did not eat bread nor drink water, for he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles. ⁷They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the exiles, that they should assemble at Jerusalem, ⁸and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the leaders and the elders, all his possessions should be forfeited and he himself excluded from the assembly of the exiles.

10:5 “priests. . .Levites. . .Israel” These were the three levels of Jewish society (cf. 9:1).

▣ **“take oath”** This VERB (BDB 989, KB 1396) is used twice in this verse (*Hiphil* IMPERFECT and *Niphal* IMPERFECT). It means to swear to God as an act of worship (cf. Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Ezek. 16:8). Ezra believed they had a change of heart, but still required that they act on that change both by actions (cf. v. 4) and oath.

10:6 “Jehohanan the son of Eliashib” Many have used this person to assert that Ezra is chronologically after Nehemiah, but both are very common names and we cannot be too dogmatic on the sketchy history of this period.

The name Eliashib can refer to

1. a person who helped Ezra (cf. 10:6; Neh. 12:10,22,23)
2. a Levitical singer who had married a pagan (cf. 10:24)
3. a son of Zattu who had married a pagan (cf. 10:27)

4. a son of Bani who had married a pagan (cf. 10:36)
5. the high priest during Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 3:1,20,21; 13:4,7,28)

The name Jehohanan can refer to

1. a son of Bebai who married a pagan (cf. 10:6)
2. a priest who returned with Zerubbabel (cf. Neh. 12:13)
3. a Levitical singer who participated in the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 12:43)

These are both very common names and they cannot be identified with precision. For a good brief discussion of this issue of chronology, see Derek Kidner, "Ezra and Nehemiah," *Tyndale Commentary Series*, pp. 146-158.

▣ **"he did not eat bread nor drink water"** This was a total fast (cf. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:18; Jonah 3:7). Ezra was very concerned about these acts of unfaithfulness towards YHWH (cf. 9:3-15; 10:1).

10:7 It must be remembered how small the territory that the returnees had been allocated by the Persian court. Only Jerusalem and a small part of the territory of Judah before the exile made up post-exilic Judah. Therefore, it was possible for all the people to come to Jerusalem as Ezra commanded.

10:8

NASB, NRSV,

NJB

"forfeited"

NKJV, TEV

"confiscated"

This is the Hebrew term (BDB 355, KB 353, *Hophal IMPERFECT*) *herem*, which denotes something given to God (cf. Lev. 27:28-29), like Jericho (cf. Deut. 13:12-18; Josh. 6:17-19; 7:1,11,15, "under the ban"). Apparently those who refused to assemble also refused to put away their foreign wives and children, therefore, their property was given to the temple (or the priests, cf. Lev. 27:21) and they personally were excommunicated ("excluded," BDB 95, KB 110, *Niphal IMPERFECT*) from the people of God.

For a good brief discussion of *herem*, see Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, pp. 278-281.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:9-15

⁹So all the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month on the twentieth of the month, and all the people sat in the open square *before* the house of God, trembling because of this matter and the heavy rain. ¹⁰Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. ¹¹Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." ¹²Then all the assembly replied with a loud voice, "That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to *do*. ¹³But there are many people; it is the rainy season and we are not able to stand in the open. Nor can the task be done in one or two days, for we have transgressed greatly in this matter. ¹⁴Let our leaders represent the whole assembly and let all those in our cities who have married foreign wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of each city, until the fierce anger of our God on account of this matter is turned away from us." ¹⁵Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them.

10:9 “the men of Judah and Benjamin” The vast majority of the returnees were from pre-exilic Judah, which was made up of

1. the tribe of Simeon
2. the tribe of Benjamin
3. the tribe of Judah
4. most of the tribe of Levi (priests and Levites)

The northern tribes were taken into exile in 722 B.C. by Assyria and most were assimilated into their exiled lands.

▣ **“the ninth month”** This refers to the month of Kislev which was midwinter, therefore, they were trembling not only from Ezra’s statement but also from the cold brought on by the winter rains. See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars at 3:1.

▣ This verse records eye-witness details of this event. This is Ezra’s journal!

10:10 Ezra calls on them for a public, cultic acknowledgment of their covenant violation (cf. v. 19). This was not the only sin of Israel (i.e., “adding to the guilt of Israel”), but it was a significant sin of God’s people.

10:11 “make confession” This VERB (BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) shows the seriousness and mandatory nature of their confession (this verse has three IMPERATIVES). The Hebrew term “confession” (BDB 392) also means “to give praise to.” Confession was an act of religious worship (cf. Josh. 7:19).

This same Hebrew noun is used in Neh. 12:27,31,38,40 to describe the Levitical choir praising God. It was also used of “thank offerings” (cf. II Chr. 29:31; Ps. 50:14,23; Amos 4:5; Jer. 17:26; 33:1).

10:12

NASB “so it is our duty to do”

NKJV “so we must do”

NRSV “we must do”

TEV “we will do”

NJB “our duty is to do”

Young’s *Literal Translation of the Bible* has “on us to do,” p. 320. The VERB (BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) has been used several times in this context.

1. “let it be done according to the law,” v. 3
2. “be courageous and act,” v. 4
3. “take oath that they would do according to this proposal,” v. 5
4. “make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will,” v. 11
5. “so it is our duty to do,” v. 12
6. “But the exiles did so,” v. 16

The people acknowledged their guilt and agreed to act on Ezra’s proposals. Faith starts in the mind, but must work out into actions (cf. Lev. 26:40-42).

10:13-14 “nor could this task be done in one or two days” These separations involved some investigation. Apparently some of the wives had truly become proselytes and were raising their children in the YHWHistic traditions, while others remained pagan. It is possible that these Hebrew men had put away their Jewish wives (cf. Mal. 2:10-16) in order to marry these foreign wives. This really caused problems with inheritance rights. There were 110 cases investigated in 75 days, but we do not know how many other cases were involved.

10:15 There was not unanimity (four men were opposed, see I Chr. 21:1; Dan. 8:25; 17:14, where the same idiom is used) on this issue, but a clear majority. This is obviously an eye-witness detail.

▣ **“Meshullam”** Of the men listed in this verse nothing else is known. Some try to link Meshullam with a man by the same name who worked on the walls of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 3:4,6), but this was a common name. Notice the number of times people by this name are mentioned in I Chronicles—3:19; 5:13; 8:17; 9:7,8,11,12; and in Nehemiah—3:6; 8:4; 10:7,20; 11:7; 12:13,16,25,33.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:16-17

¹⁶ But the exiles did so. And Ezra the priest selected men *who were heads of fathers' households* for each of their father's *households*, all of them by name. So they convened on the first day of the tenth month to investigate the matter. ¹⁷They finished *investigating* all the men who had married foreign wives by the first day of the first month.

10:16 In spite of opposition, Ezra's proposals were acted on by the heads of the families/clans.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:18-22

¹⁸Among the sons of the priests who had married foreign wives were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah. ¹⁹They pledged to put away their wives, and being guilty, *they offered* a ram of the flock for their offense. ²⁰Of the sons of Immer *there were* Hanani and Zebadiah; ²¹and of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel and Uziah; ²²and of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasah.

10:18-43 If you are interested in a detailed discussion of the etymology of these Hebrew names, a good brief source is *The Expositor's Bible commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 674-676.

10:18 “Among the sons of the priests” The priests had been divided into divisions by David (cf. I Chr. 23); only four of them returned (cf. 2:36-38). Those same four are named here.

▣ **“the sons of Jeshua”** Even the family of the first returning High Priest with Zerubbabel was not exempt from this sin nor was their family's sin covered up. I Esdras 9:19 asserts that Jeshua himself was not involved.

10:19 “they pledged” It literally says, “gave their hand” (BDB 678, KB 733, *Qal* IMPERFECT and 388 construct, cf. II Kgs. 10:15; I Chr. 29:24; II Chr. 30:8; Ezek. 17:18; I Esdras 9:20). This was a cultural gesture of sealing an agreement.

▣ **“being guilty, they offered a lamb”** This refers to the guilt offering of Lev. 5:14-26, which involves unintentional sin. It is not certain whether only the priest offered the sacrifice or if each of the offenders offered the sacrifice.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:23

²³Of Levites *there were* Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer.

10:23-24 These same divisions of the Levites are mentioned in the genealogy of chapter 2 (cf. 2:40-42). No mention is made of any Nethinim (cf. 2:43-54) having taken foreign wives, nor of Solomon's servants (cf. 2:55-59).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:24

²⁴Of the singers *there was* Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem and Uri.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:25-44

²⁵Of Israel, of the sons of Parosh *there were* Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah and Benaiah; ²⁶and of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah; ²⁷and of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad and Aziza; ²⁸and of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai *and* Athlai; ²⁹and of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch and Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal *and* Jeremoth; ³⁰and of the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh; ³¹and of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, ³²Benjamin, Malluch *and* Shemariah; ³³of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh *and* Shimei; ³⁴of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, ³⁵Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, ³⁶Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, ³⁷Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasu, ³⁸Bani, Binnui, Shimei, ³⁹Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, ⁴⁰Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, ⁴¹Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, ⁴²Shallum, Amariah and Joseph. ⁴³Of the sons of Nebo *there were* Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel *and* Benaiah. ⁴⁴All these had married foreign wives, and some of them had wives *by whom* they had children.

10:44 The Hebrew is very difficult. Derek Kidner, "Ezra and Nehemiah" *Tyndale Commentary Series*, p. 72, footnote #2, shows the problem: (1) "and some of them (MASCULINE) were women and they (MASCULINE) appointed sons." (2) Young's *Literal Translation of the Bible*, p. 321, has "and there are of them women - who adopt sons." (3) The Septuagint has "all these had taken strange wives and begotten sons of them." and (4) The Revised Standard Version quotes I Esdras 9:36, "all of these had married foreign women, and they sent them away with (their) children."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. To what incident does 9:1 relate?
2. Why are these ancient tribes, which no longer exist, mentioned in verse 1?
3. How can Ezra's acts be reconciled with Deut. 21:10-14 and the many foreign marriages of Israel's former leaders?
4. Explain the relationship between personal sin and corporate sin in the life of both Israel and the Church.
5. If God hates divorce what does chapter 10 involve and why?

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. Ezra/Nehemiah was one book in the early Hebrew text (MT) and in the early copies of the Septuagint (from the Uncial manuscripts \aleph , A, & B). *Baba Bathra* 15a. called both books Ezra.
 1. This is unusual because it is obvious they both contain the same genealogical list: Ezra 2:2-16 and Neh. 7:6-63.
 2. Because the lists, though slightly different, are basically the same, the implication is that these were originally two books.
 3. This is confirmed by the use of “I” sections in both Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah.
- B. They were possibly combined because the ministry of Ezra (Ezra 7-10) is continued in Neh. 8-10.
- C. The titles of Ezra and Nehemiah vary between the ancient translations:

Septuagint (Greek)	Vulgate (Latin)	Wycliffe & Coverdale (Old English)	Modern English
Esdras B (Beta) Esdras C (Gamma) Esdras A (Alpha) Esdras (Delta)	Esdras I Esdras II Esdras III Esdras IV	I Esdras II Esdras ----- -----	Ezra Nehemiah I Esdras (Apocrypha) II Esdras (Pseudepigrapha - Ezra Apocalypse, sometimes called IV Ezra)

- D. The first Hebrew text to split these books was the A.D. 1448 edition of the MT.

II. CANONIZATION

- A. The book Ezra-Nehemiah is part of the third section of the Hebrew canon called “the Writings.”
- B. It comes before “Chronicles,” which is surprising since historically/chronologically it is subsequent to the historical account of Chronicles. Some have tried to explain this by the following:
 1. Chronicles is a summary from Adam to Cyrus.
 2. Ezra-Nehemiah was accepted as canonical first.
 3. Chronicles is put last because the Jews wanted the canon to end on a positive note (decree of Cyrus).
 4. No one really knows the criteria or rationality of the formation of “the Writings” section of the Hebrew canon.
- C. The first Hebrew edition of the MT to divide them was in A.D. 1448.
- D. However, it is obvious from internal evidence that they were originally two books:
 1. the extensive genealogical list of Ezra 2 is repeated in Neh. 7:6-70. The names are spelled a bit differently;
 2. there are “I” sections in Ezra 7:27-28; 8:1-34; 9:1ff and “I” sections in Nehemiah.
- E. Why were they combined?
 1. They form one history.

2. It has been asserted that the reason that Ezra-Nehemiah was combined in the Hebrew canon was so as to have the number of books in the OT conform to the number of consonants in the Hebrew alphabet (Jewish mysticism). This meant that the following books were combined:
 - a. Judges and Ruth
 - b. I & II Samuel
 - c. I & II Kings
 - d. I & II Chronicles
 - e. Ezra - Nehemiah
 - f. Jeremiah - Lamentations
 - g. the Twelve Minor Prophets
 3. The ministry of Ezra, which begins in Ezra 7-10, is continued in Neh. 8-10.
- F. It is interesting that the early Syrian canon and Theodore of Mopsuestia (a leader of the Antiochean school of interpretation) omitted Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah from their list of inspired books.

III. GENRE

- A. See Ezra IV, D (similarity between Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles)
- B. See Ezra IV, G (use of documents)

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. *Baba Bathra* 15a-16a says that Ezra wrote his book, but this does not imply that he wrote Nehemiah also. As a matter of fact, other Jewish sources (Gemara) say Nehemiah finished the unified composite of Ezra - Nehemiah. The MT's endnotes (finalized in the A.D. 900's) are found only at the end of Nehemiah.
- B. Josephus (A.D. 37-100), in his *Contra Apion* 1.8, and Melito of Sardis (A.D. 160-170,177), quoted by Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 4.26, both assert Ezra's authorship.
- C. The part of Ezra that deals with Ezra the scribe's life (chapters 7-10) is written in the first person, 9:27-28; 8:1-34; 9:1-15. Ezra was a priest of the line of Zadok (cf. 7:1-5) and a scribe (cf. 7:6-7) at the Persian court of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.).
- D. There is much literary similarity between Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.
 1. the close of II Chr. 36:22-23 is almost exactly like Ezra 1:1-4 in Hebrew
 2. they both have the same theological perspective
 - a. focus on the temple and its priesthood (especially lists of Levites)
 - b. extensive use of statistical records and genealogies
 3. their vocabulary (e.g., "singer," "gatekeeper" and "temple servant") and literary style are similar
 4. both use late Hebrew
 5. however, it must also be stated there are notable differences (cf. Sara Japhet, *Vetus Testamentus* 18 (1968):330-371)
 - a. in the spelling of royal names
 - b. Ezra and Nehemiah focus on the covenant with Moses, while I & II Chronicles focus on the covenant with David

6. The book of the Talmud, which gives traditional Jewish views of the authorship of OT books (*Baba Bathra* 15a-16a), states that Ezra also wrote Chronicles. This view has been followed by W. F. Albright, John Bright, E. J. Young, and G. L. Archer. However, it is just possible that the similar close to Chronicles and the opening to Ezra was an intentional literary design to show that Ezra-Nehemiah continue the history begun in I & II Chronicles.
- E. Origen (A.D. 185-253), the Christian scholar of Alexandria, was the first to divide the book into the two books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Jerome did the same in his Latin Vulgate.
 - F. The first Hebrew manuscript to divide the book was in A.D. 1448. Apparently by this time the Jewish mystical desire to have only 22 books in the OT to match the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which had been so popular, had passed.
 - G. The author/compiler used many sources.
 1. list of vessels from YHWH's temple that were in Babylon, 1:9-11; 7:19-20 (Persian)
 2. list of returning exiles, 2:1-70 (Persian or Jewish)
 3. the genealogy of Ezra, 7:1-5 (Jewish)
 4. heads of clans, 8:1-20 (Jewish)
 5. list of those involved in mixed marriages, 10:18-43 (Jewish)

V. DATE

- A. The scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries A.D. believed the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles to have been written in the fourth century B.C. period because
 1. a descendant of Joshua the High Priest who accompanied Zerubbabel on the second return (under Cyrus) was Jaddua; he is listed in Nehemiah 12:10-11, 22
 2. they assert that this Jaddua was mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities*, XI:302-7) as High Priest (351-331 B.C.) at the time of Alexander the Great's invasion of Palestine in 333-332 B.C.
 3. this links up with six generations of Zerubbabel listed in I Chronicles 3:19-24
 4. most of these scholars also advocated the opinion that Ezra returned in the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.), while Nehemiah returned in the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.)
 5. Neh. 12:26,47 show a later editor/compiler
- B. Later 20th century conservative scholars have asserted a date for these three books in the fifth century B.C. period because
 1. the Jaddua of Neh. 12:10-11,22 possibly was
 - a. very young when mentioned and lived an extremely long life. He is not listed as High Priest in Nehemiah
 - b. not the same Jaddua but the grandson by the same name (cf. the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 p. 596-586)
 - c. Josephus has wrongly shortened the Persian Period because the names of Persian rulers are repeated in the fifth and fourth century B.C.
 - (1) Artaxerxes
 - (2) Darius
 2. The genealogy of Zerubbabel in I Chr. 3:19-24 only goes to
 - a. two generations (Young & Harrison)
 - b. four generations

3. There are no historical allusions to the major events that affected Palestine in the fourth century B.C.:
 - a. Alexander the Great's invasion (333-332 B.C.)
 - b. the rebellion that was crushed by Artaxerxes III (358-338 B.C.)
4. It is possible that even if Jaddua is contemporary with Alexander the Great that this list of Levites was added by a later editor of the book trying to bring it up to date (Young). There may be evidence of an editor in the phrase "the days of Nehemiah," Neh. 12:26,47.
5. Ezra and Nehemiah are presented as being together in Jerusalem; not separated by different monarchs:
 - a. reading of the law, Neh. 8:9
 - b. dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, Neh. 12:26,36

VI. SOURCES CORROBORATING HISTORICAL SETTING

- A. The Elephantine Papyri (408 B.C.) lists the names of several of the people mentioned in Ezra/Nehemiah:
 1. Sanballat, governor of Samaria, Neh. 2:10,19; 4:1
 2. Johanan, the grandson of Eliashib the High Priest, Neh. 12:10-11, 22, 23
 3. The specific mentioning of these people confirms that Ezra and Nehemiah lived and functioned during the reign of Artaxerxes I (464-424 B.C.).
- B. Several silver bowls were found at Succoth that were inscribed "to Geshem's son Qainu," which shows the historicity of Geshem the Arab in Ezra/Nehemiah, who ruled the kingdom of Kedar (cf. Neh. 2:19; 6:1,6).
- C. The Samaritan papyri gives us a list of the governors of Samaria from Sanballat the Horonite to the destruction of the city by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. They also show that the events of Neh. 13:28 and the similar events recorded by Josephus during the time of Sanballat III are not the same.
- D. The form of documents in Ezra follows the pattern and style of the official documents of the Persian period.
 1. Decree of Cyrus (Hebrew translation), 1:2-4 (about returning to Jerusalem and the temple)
 2. Legal charges by Rehum to Artaxerxes I, 4:7-16 (about the walls of Jerusalem)
 3. Response of Artaxerxes I, 4:17-22
 4. Legal charges by Tattenai to Darius I, 5:6-17
 5. Darius I's response (about the temple)
 - a. Quote Cyrus' decree, 6:2-5
 - b. Darius' personal response to Tattenai, 6:6-12,13
 6. Artaxerxes I's decree to Ezra, 7:12-16

VII. LITERARY UNITS (context)

- A. Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem (made the city smaller), 1:1-7:73
 1. Introduction in first person, 1:1-2:20
 2. Wall rebuilt in 52 days, 3:1-6:19
 3. Nehemiah's brother, Hanani, put in charge of the city, 7:1-73

- B. The spiritual reforms of Ezra (a continuation of Ezra 7-10), 8:1-10:39
 - 1. Ezra reads the Law and the people respond, 8:1-9:4
 - 2. A review of YHWH's acts on behalf of the Jews, 9:5-31
 - 3. The people bind themselves by oath to worship YHWH and support His Temple, (covenant renewal) 9:32-10:39

- C. The administrative reforms of Nehemiah, 11-13
 - 1. Nehemiah's first return to Jerusalem, 11-12
 - a. establishing the population of Jerusalem, 11:1-36
 - b. lists of priests and Levites, 12:1-26, 44-47
 - c. dedication of the walls of Jerusalem, 12:27-43
 - 2. Nehemiah's second return to Jerusalem, 13:1-31
 - a. covenant violations, 13:1-5
 - b. reforms, 13:6-31
 - (1) Tobiah removed from Temple chambers, 13:4-5, 8-9
 - (2) Temple offerings, 13:10-14
 - (3) mixed marriages, 13:1-3, 23-29
 - (4) provisions for the Temple, 13:30-31

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. This book continues the history which began in Chronicles and Ezra. They document the reestablishment of the Covenant community in the Promised Land.

- B. As Ezra was concerned with the spiritual, covenantal life of the new community, Nehemiah was concerned with
 - 1. the protective wall around the city
 - 2. the administrative aspect of the city
 However, Nehemiah is as "spiritual" and faithful as Ezra. Both trust in YHWH and His presence, power, and plan.

- C. Both Ezra and Nehemiah are concerned with covenant (Mosaic) fidelity. The sins of the people of God, except for idolatry, are continued in the post-exilic community.

- D. In the post-exilic books God is present, but not visually/physically confirmed (i.e., the unseen hand). God's will is seen through decisions of pagan kings and thwarting of local opposition. God's presence is a matter of faith and obedience. His word (Torah) becomes key!

NEHEMIAH 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS*

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
	Nehemiah's Memoirs (1:1-7:5)		Nehemiah's Call: His Mission to Judah (1:1-2:10)
Nehemiah's Prayer for His People		Nehemiah's Concern for Jerusalem	
1:1-3	1:1-3	1:1-4a	1:1-4
1:4-11	1:4-11a	1:4b-9	1:5-11a
		1:10-11a	
	1:11b	1:11b	1:11b

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

* Although they are not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized the paragraphs. Every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own distinct way. As you read the text, ask yourself which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions.

In every chapter we must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs), then compare our understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility of applying the inspired truth to their day and their lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in Appendices One, Two, and Three.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1a

¹The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

1:1 “Nehemiah” This brief phrase is a title for the whole book. His name (BDB 637) means, “YHWH comforts.” He was a close counselor (“cup bearer”) to Artaxerxes I, who reigned from 464 to 423 B.C. By request he was sent to Judah to establish order, stability, and protection.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1b-3

^{1b}Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, ²that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. ³They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

▣ **“the month of Chislev”** This is equivalent to our November - December. See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars at Ezra 3:1.

▣ **“twentieth year”** This was 446/445 B.C. Ezra 7:7 shows that Ezra had been in Jerusalem for 13 years.

▣ **“Susa”** This was the ancient capital of Elam. It became the winter palace of Persian kings (cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.6.22). It was the location of the book of Esther (cf. Esth. 1:2). It was earlier called Shushan.

▣

NASB “capitol”

NKJV, NJB “citadel”

NRSV “capital”

TEV “the capital city”

The term (BDB 108) can mean fortress or palace. Usually the capital was both.

1. Susa, Neh. 1:1; Esther 1:2,5; 3:15; Dan. 8:2
2. Ecbatana, Ezra 6:2
3. Jerusalem, Neh. 7:2
4. temple, I Chr. 29:1; Neh. 2:8

1:2 “brothers” The Hebrew word can mean nationality, kinsman, or full brother (cf. 7:2).

▣ **“some men from Judah”** This apparently was an official delegation from the Jewish community seeking help from a relative at the Persian court.

▣ **“concerning the Jews”** Nehemiah asked about how the returnees were doing and about the conditions in Jerusalem.

▣ **“remnant”** See note at Ezra 9:8.

1:3 “in great distress and reproach” This is possibly a reference to the trouble caused by Sanballat of Samaria and Tobiah of Ammon. Both worshiped YHWH, but were shunned by returning Jews (cf. Ezra 4:3; Neh. 2:19, 4:1ff).

The term “distress” (BDB 949) is the common word for “evil,” “misery,” “distress,” and “injury.” These conditions were so surprising to the returning Jews. They were the ones who risked life and wealth to follow God’s lead and return to Judah. They expected covenant prosperity (cf. Deut. 27-29), but they were experiencing calamity (cf. Deut. 31:17,21).

The second term is “reproach” (BDB 357). It refers to shame, disgrace, or reproach, which describes one’s condition.

1. shame of inappropriate sexuality, II Sam. 13:13; Isa. 47:3
2. shame of no children, Gen. 30:23; Isa. 4:1
3. shame of loss of husband, Isa. 54:4
4. shame of famine, Ezek. 36:30
5. shame of accusations, Job 19:5
6. shame of lack of ritual performance (circumcision), Gen. 34:14; Josh. 5:9
7. shame of enemy attack or the continuing results of a past attack (esp. 2:17), Neh. 1:3; 2:17; Lam. 3:30; 5:1; Dan. 11:18

▣ **“the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gate burned with fire”** In the ancient world, this was the calamity of total defenselessness. This refers either to the original destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 B.C. (cf. II Kgs. 25:10) or the destruction of partially reconstructed walls; both positions quote Ezra 4:7-24 (esp. v. 23).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:4-11

⁴When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁶let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. ⁸Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' ¹⁰They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. ¹¹O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man."

1:4 “sat down and wept and mourned. . .fasting and praying” These were four signs of intense mourning in the ancient Near East.

▣ **“for days”** Nehemiah’s mourning, fasting, and praying went on for days. He was a man of prayer.

His lengthy prayer here is to be compared to his very brief prayer of 2:4. There is a time for prolonged prayer and a time for brief prayer. Prayer is a way for humans to show their faith and trust in the faithful, trustworthy God. Prayer is the outward manifestation of a biblical world view and faith!

▣ **“the God of heaven”** This was the Persian Zoroastrian title for Ahura Mazda, but the Jews had taken it and applied it to YHWH. See note at Ezra 1:2. Notice the covenant name in verse 5.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE NAMES FOR DEITY

A. *El*

1. The original meaning of the generic ancient term for deity is uncertain, though many scholars believe it comes from the Akkadian root, “to be strong” or “to be powerful” (cf. Gen. 17:1; Num. 23:19; Deut. 7:21; Ps. 50:1).
2. In the Canaanite pantheon the high god is *El* (Ras Shamra texts)
3. In the Bible *El* is not usually compounded with other terms. These combinations became a way to characterize God.
 - a. *El-Elyon* (God Most High), Gen. 14:18-22; Deut. 32:8; Isa. 14:14
 - b. *El-Roi* (“God who sees” or “God who reveals Himself”), Gen. 16:13
 - c. *El-Shaddai* (“God Almighty” or “God the all Compassionate One” or “God of the mountain”), Gen. 17:1; 35:11; 43:14; 49:25; Exod. 6:3
 - d. *El-Olam* (God Eternal), Gen. 21:33. This term is theologically linked to God’s promise to David, II Sam. 7:13,16
 - e. *El-Berit* (“God of the Covenant”), Jdgs. 9:46
4. *El* is equated with
 - a. YHWH in Ps. 85:8; Isa. 42:5
 - b. *Elohim* in Gen. 46:3; Job 5:8, “I am *El*, the *Elohim* of your father
 - c. *Shaddai* in Gen. 49:25
 - d. “jealousy” in Exod. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15
 - e. “mercy” in Deut. 4:31; Neh. 9:31; “faithful” in Deut. 7:9; 32:4
 - f. “great and awesome” in Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4
 - g. “knowledge” in I Sam. 2:3
 - h. “my strong refuge” in II Sam. 22:33
 - i. “my avenger” in II Sam. 22:48
 - j. “holy one” in Isa. 5:16
 - k. “might” in Isa. 10:21
 - l. “my salvation” in Isa. 12:2
 - m. “great and powerful” in Jer. 32:18
 - n. “retribution: in Jer. 51:56
5. A combination of all the major OT names for God is found in Joshua 22:22 (*El*, *Elohim*, *YHWH*, repeated)

B. *Elyon*

1. Its basic meaning is “high,” “exalted,” or “lifted up” (cf. Gen. 40:17; I Kgs. 9:8; II Kgs. 18:17; Neh. 3:25; Jer. 20:2; 36:10; Ps. 18:13).
2. It is used in a parallel sense to several other names/titles of God.
 - a. *Elohim* - Ps. 47:1-2; 73:11; 107:11
 - b. *YHWH* - Gen. 14:22; II Sam. 22:14
 - c. *El-Shaddai* - Ps. 91:1,9
 - d. *El* - Num. 24:16

- e. *Elah* - used often in Daniel 2-6 and Ezra 4-7, linked with *illair* (Aramaic for “High God” in Dan. 3:26; 4:2; 5:18,21)
- 3. It is often used by non Israelites.
 - a. Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18-22
 - b. Balaam, Num. 24:16
 - c. Moses, speaking of the nations in Deut. 32:8
 - d. Luke’s Gospel in the NT, writing to Gentiles, also uses the Greek equivalent *Hupsistos* (cf. 1:32,35,76; 6:35; 8:28; Acts 7:48; 16:17)
- C. *Elohim* (plural), *Eloah* (singular), used primarily in poetry
 - 1. This term is not found outside the Old Testament.
 - 2. This word can designate the God of Israel or the gods of the nations (cf. Exod. 12:12; 20:3). Abraham’s family were polytheistic (cf. Josh. 24:2).
 - 3. The term *elohim* is also used of other spiritual beings (angels, the demonic) as in Deut. 32:8 (LXX); Ps. 8:5; Job 1:6; 38:7. It can refer to human judges (cf. Exod. 21:6; Ps. 82:6)
 - 4. In the Bible it is the first title/name for deity (cf. Gen. 1:1). It is used exclusively until Gen. 2:4, where it is combined with YHWH. It basically (theologically) refers to God as creator, sustainer, and provider of all life on this planet (cf. Ps. 104). It is synonymous with *El* (cf. Deut. 32:15-19). It can also parallel YHWH as Ps. 14 (*elohim*) is exactly like Ps. 53 (YHWH), except for the change in divine names.
 - 5. Although plural and used of other gods, this term often designates the God of Israel, but usually it has the singular verb to denote the monotheistic usage.
 - 6. This term is found in the mouths of non-Israelites as the name for deity.
 - a. Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18-22
 - b. Balaam, Num. 24:2
 - c. Moses, when speaking of the nations, Deut. 32:8
 - 7. It is strange that a common name for the monotheistic God of Israel is plural! Although there is no certainty, here are the theories.
 - a. Hebrew has many plurals, often used for emphasis. Closely related to this is the later Hebrew grammatical feature called “the plural of majesty,” where the plural is used to magnify a concept.
 - b. This may refer to the angelic council, which God meets with in heaven and that does His bidding (cf. I Kgs. 22:19-23; Job 1:6; Ps. 82:1; 89:5,7).
 - c. It is even possible this reflects the NT revelation of the one God in three persons. In Gen. 1:1 God creates; Gen. 1:2 the Spirit broods and from the NT Jesus is God the Father’s agent in creation (cf. John 1:3,10; Rom. 11:36; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2; 2:10).
- D. YHWH
 - 1. This is the title/name which reflects deity as the covenant making God; God as savior, redeemer! Humans break covenants, but God is loyal to His word, His promise, His covenant (cf. Ps. 103). This title/name is first mentioned in combination with *Elohim* in Gen. 2:4. There are not two creation accounts in Gen. 1-2, but two emphases: (1) God as the creator of the universe (the physical) and (2) God as the special creator of humanity. Genesis 2:4 begins the special revelation about the privileged position and purpose of mankind, as well as the problem of sin and rebellion associated with the unique position.

2. In Gen. 4:26 it is first recorded that, “*men* began to call upon the name of the LORD ” (YHWH). However, Exod. 6:3 implies that early covenant people (the Patriarchs and their families) knew God only as *El-Shaddai*. The name YHWH is explained only one time in Exod. 3:13-16, esp. v. 14. However, the writings of Moses often interpret words by popular word plays, not etymologies (cf. Gen. 17:5; 27:36; 29:13-35). There have been several theories as to the meaning of this name (taken from IDB, vol. 2, pp. 409-11).
 - a. from an Arabic root, “to show fervent love”
 - b. from an Arabic root “to blow” (YHWH as storm God)
 - c. from a Ugartic (Canaanite) root “to speak”
 - d. following a Phoenician inscription, a CAUSATIVE PARTICIPLE meaning “the One who sustains,” or “the One who establishes”
 - e. from the Hebrew *Qal* form “the One who is,” or “the One who is present” (in future sense, “the One who will be”)
 - f. from the Hebrew *Hiphil* form “the One who causes to be”
 - g. from the Hebrew root “to live” (e.g., Gen. 3:20), meaning “the ever living, only living One”
 - h. from the context of Exod. 3:13-16 a play on the IMPERFECT form used in a PERFECT sense, “I shall continue to be what I used to be” or “I shall continue to be what I have always been” (cf. J. Wash Watts, *A Survey of Syntax in the Old Testament*, p. 67
 The full name YHWH is often expressed in abbreviation or possibly an original form
 - (1) *Yah* (e.g., Hallelu - yah)
 - (2) *Yahu* (names, e.g., Isaiah)
 - (3) *Yo* (names, e.g., Joel)
3. In later Judaism this covenant name became so holy (the tetragrammaton) that Jews were afraid to say it lest they break the command of Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11; 6:13. So they substituted the Hebrew term for “owner,” “master,” “husband,” “lord”—*adon* or *adonai* (my lord). When they came to YHWH in their reading of OT texts they pronounced “lord.” This is why YHWH is written LORD in English translations.
4. As with *El*, often YHWH is combined with other terms to emphasize certain characteristics of the Covenant God of Israel. While there are many possible combinations terms, here are some.
 - a. *YHWH - Yireh* (YHWH will provide), Gen. 22:14
 - b. *YHWH - Rophekha* (YHWH is your healer), Exod. 15:26
 - c. *YHWH - Nissi* (YHWH is my banner), Exod. 17:15
 - d. *YHWH - Meqaddishkem* (YHWH the One who sanctifies you), Exod. 31:13
 - e. *YHWH - Shalom* (YHWH is Peace), Jdgs. 6:24
 - f. *YHWH - Sabbaoth* (YHWH of hosts), I Sam. 1:3,11; 4:4; 15:2; often in the Prophets)
 - g. *YHWH - Ro‘I* (YHWH is my shepherd), Ps. 23:1
 - h. *YHWH - Sidqenu* (YHWH is our righteousness), Jer. 23:6
 - i. *YHWH - Shammah* (YHWH is there), Ezek. 48:35

1:5 “I said” Nehemiah’s prayer is similar to Ezra’s in 9:5-15 and Dan. 9:4-19. These prayers focus on God’s character and His people’s sin. God’s people’s hope is in

1. the character of God

2. the eternal redemptive purposes of God
3. the promises/covenants of God



NASB "I beseech Thee"
NKJV, NRSV "O"
TEV, NJB -----

This Hebrew INTERJECTION (BDB 58) introduces strong pleas for help and forgiveness (cf. 1:5,11; Gen. 50:17; Exod. 32:31; II Kgs. 20:3; Ps. 116:4; 118:25; Dan. 9:4; Jonah 1:14; 4:2).

▣ **"the great and awesome God"** The first ADJECTIVE (BDB 152) originally meant to make a strong cord by twisting several cords together. It came to mean "make strong." The Hebrew root is used of God in Neh. 8:6; 9:32; Deut. 3:24; 5:24; 9:26; 11:2; 32:3, which reflects Moses' words in Deut. 1:10; 4:14.

The second term (BDB 431, KB 432, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE) is from the VERB "to fear" or "to revere." It is a characteristic of YHWH Himself or His redemptive actions, often translated "awesome" (cf. 1:5; 4:18; 9:32; Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Neh. 1:5; 4:14; 9:32; Dan. 9:4).

▣ **"who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness"** The first VERB (BDB1036, KB 1581, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) means "to keep," "to watch," "to preserve." The etymology is uncertain, but from cognates it may have originally referred to

1. a watchman (Phoenician)
2. an overseer (Canaanite)
3. wakeful alertness (Aramaic)

The second term *hesed* (BDB 338) is another way of stating the same truth. God is faithful to His covenant promises (cf. Ezra 3:11). See Special Topic: *Hesed* at 13:14. His unchanging character is Israel's hope (cf. Mal. 3:6). However, the Jews had become uncertain about this truth because of the exiles, so Nehemiah reaffirms his confidence that God is faithful to His word. The exile was caused by Jews' unfaithfulness to His word. There is a covenant requirement of obedience!

These two terms appear together in Deut. 7:2,9,12; I Kgs. 8:23; II Chr. 6:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Ps. 89:28,33; Dan. 9:4. They are linked theologically. These are significant and dependable aspects of YHWH's character!

▣ **"to those who love Him and keep His commandments"** Notice the conditional element (i.e., "if...then"), human response is required (cf. Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 7:6-9; 10:12-13; 11:1,22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:15-16,19-20; Josh. 22:5; Jdgs. 5:31; I Kgs. 3:2,3; II Chr. 20:7; Ps. 5:11; 69:36; 103:17-18; 119:132; 145:20; Jer. 2:2,33; Dan. 9:2-3,4; John 14:15,21,23; 15:10; I John 5:3). Divine love involves covenant performance. Love is a choice and an action as well as an emotion (cf. v. 8-9). See Special Topic: Covenant at Ezra 6:14.

1:6 "Let Thy ear...Thine eyes" The first VERB (BDB 224, KB 243) is a *Qal* JUSSIVE (command, cf. v. 11). The second (BDB 834 KB 986) is a *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE. This anthropomorphic language is very common in the Bible (cf. v. 11). From the Bible we know that God is spirit. He has no physical body. However, the only vocabulary we have is physical. We speak of God as if He were a human person, but He is not. He is personal, but not physical. Be careful of literalism in reading these human, earthly, temporal passages about the eternal, spiritual God!

▣ **"Thy servant"** This is an honorific title used for Moses, Joshua, and David. Notice the play between the SINGULAR (Nehemiah) and the PLURAL (the people, cf. vv. 10,11). It is this interplay that allows confessional corporate prayers. It is this interplay that allows one sinless servant to die on behalf of the whole (Isaiah 53).

▣ **“I am praying. . .day and night”** Persistence in prayer is highlighted here (cf. Matt.7:7-8; Luke 18:2-8). Neh. 2:1 shows he prayed almost three months.

▣ **“confessing sins. . .I and my fathers house”** Confession is an important element of prayer (cf. I John 1:9). We are responsible for our individual sins and the sins of our society (cf. II Chr. 29:6; 30:7-9; Isa. 6:5). The term “confessing” (BDB 392) is used of acknowledging sin (cf. 1:6; 9:2-3; Ezra 10:1; Dan. 9:2-3). Nehemiah identified himself with his people’s sin, as did Ezra (9:5-15). This prayer is much like Moses’ in Exod. 32:30-33 or Daniel’s in Dan. 9:4-19.

1:7

NASB, NKJV “We have acted very corruptly”
NRSV “We have offended you deeply”
TEV “We have acted wickedly against you”
NJB “We have acted very wickedly toward you”

This is literally “to act wickedly,” “we acted wickedly toward you” (BDB 287 II, KB 285, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT with *Qal* PERFECT of the same VERB). This form intensifies the meaning of the VERB “to wound,” “to injure” and thereby “to ruin” or “to corrupt.” See the same VERB in *Pual* in Mic. 2:10. What these returnees did should have destroyed the covenant, but God is faithful and forgiving.

▣ **“the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances”** These terms all refer to God’s word through Moses (cf. 1:5,7,9). A good place to see all the terms used to describe God’s law is Ps. 19:7-9 and even more extensively in Ps. 119.

1:8 “Remember” Nehemiah is entreating God to remember (BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal* IMPERATIVE, cf. 4:8; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14,22,29,31) His words to Moses. Moses also called on YHWH to remember His promises to the Patriarchs (e.g., Exod. 32:13; Deut. 9:27). Mankind’s hope is in God’s character, promises, covenants, and word!

▣ **“if you are unfaithful”** The “if” is implied, but is not in the MT. This VERB (BDB 591, KB 612, *Qal* IMPERFECT) implies that they will be unfaithful. There is no “if” in the MT (the assured conditional “if” is present in v. 9). Human disobedience deserves a divine response (cf. Lev. 26:27-45; Deut. 30:1-10). Miracle of miracles, the response is love and forgiveness, not wrath and judgment. The New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 36:22-38 changes the basis of covenant requirements.

▣ **“I will scatter you”** The VERB (BDB 806, KB 718, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) was used to describe exile (cf. Deut. 4:27; 28:64; 29:28). The judgment (cf. Lev. 26:33) we now see in a way for God’s word to be spread among the nations so that they may know and turn to YHWH.

Often the terms “scatter” and “gather” are used together to describe YHWH’s justice and love (cf. 1:8-9; Isa. 11:12; Jer. 23:1-3; Ezek. 11:17; 20:34,41; 28:25; 29:13; 34:12-13).

1:9 “if you return to Me” This is the VERB (BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal* PERFECT) which denotes repentance. Notice that repentance is from sin and to God.

SPECIAL TOPIC: REPENTANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This concept is crucial but difficult to define. Most of us have a definition which comes from our denominational affiliation. However, usually a “set” theological definition is imposed on several Hebrew (and Greek) words which do not specifically imply this “set” definition. It must be remembered that NT

authors (except Luke) were Hebrew thinkers using Koine Greek terms, so the place to start is the Hebrew terms themselves, of which there are primarily two.

1. *nhm* (BDB 636, KB 688)
2. *swb* (BDB 996, KB 1427)

The first, *nhm*, which originally seems to have meant to draw a deep breath, is used in several senses.

- a. “rest” or “comfort” (e.g., Gen. 5:29; 24:67; 27:42; 37:35; 38:12; 50:12; often used in names, cf. II Kgs. 15:14; I Chr. 4:19; Neh. 1:1; 7:7; Nahum 1:1)
- b. “grieved” (e.g., Gen. 6:6,7)
- c. “changed mind” (e.g., Exod. 13:17; 32:12,14; Num. 23:19)
- d. “compassion” (e.g., Deut. 32:36)

Notice that all of these involve deep emotion! Here is the key: deep feelings that lead to action. This change of action is often directed at other persons, but also toward God. It is this change of attitude and action toward God that infuses this term with such theological significance. But here care must be exercised. God is said to “repent” (cf. Gen. 6:6,7; Exod. 32:14; Jdgs. 2:18; I Sam. 15:11,35; Ps. 106:45), but this does not result from sorrow over sin or error, but a literary way of showing God’s compassion and care (cf. Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; Ps. 110:4; Jer. 4:27-28; Ezek.24:14). Due punishment for sin and rebellion is forgiven if the sinner truly turns away from his/her/their sin and turns to God.

This term has a wide semantical field. Context is crucial in determining its intended meaning.

The second term, *swb*, means “to turn” (turn from, turn back, turn to). If it is true that the two covenant requirements are “repentance” and “faith” (e.g., Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:4,15; 2:17; Luke 3:3,8; 5:32; 13:3,5; 15:7; 17:3), then *nhm* refers to the intense feelings of recognizing one’s sin and turning from it, while *swb* would refer to the turning from sin to the turning to God (one example of these two spiritual actions is Amos 4:6-11, “you have not returned to Me” [five times] and Amos 5:4,6,14, “seek Me. . .seek the Lord. . .seek good and not evil”).

The first great example of the power of repentance is David’s sin with Bathsheba (cf. II Sam. 12; Ps. 32, 51). There were continuing consequences for David, his family, and Israel, but David was restored to fellowship with God! Even wicked Manasseh can repent and be forgiven (cf. II Chr. 33:12-13).

Both of these terms are used in parallel in Ps. 90:13. There must be a recognition of sin and a purposeful, personal turning from it, as well as a desire to seek God and His righteousness (cf. Isa. 1:16-20). Repentance has a cognitive aspect, a personal aspect, and a moral aspect. All three are required, both to start a new relationship with God and to maintain the new relationship. The deep emotion of regret turns into an abiding devotion to God and for God!

▣ **“and keep My commandments”** Notice repentance is clearly seen in a change of actions, as well as a change of mind, (cf. v. 5). Obedience is evidence of true repentance.

▣ **“in the most remote part of the heavens”** This is a metaphor for those Jews who were exiled to the farthest place (cf. Deut. 30:4). The heavens here would refer to the rising and setting of the sun (i.e., one end of the earth to the other, cf. Ps. 19:6).

▣ **“I will gather them”** This is the opposite of exile (cf. Deut. 30:4; Isa. 43:6; 48:20; 62:11).

▣ **“the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell”** This is a Deuteronomic phrase. It refers to Jerusalem for the site for the temple (e.g., 12:5,11,14,21; 14:23,24; 16:2,6,11; 26:2). The Ark of the covenant was where YHWH dwelt between the wings of the cherubim.

1:10 “redeem” The VERB *padah* (BDB 804, KB 911, *Qal* PERFECT) means “to purchase,” “to redeem” (cf. Hos. 7:13; Micah 6:4). This is a reference to the Egyptian deliverance (cf. Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 21:8; Micah 6:4).

SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM

I. OLD TESTAMENT

A. There are primarily two Hebrew legal terms which convey this concept.

1. *Ga'al*, which basically means “to free” by means of a price paid. A form of the term *go'el* adds to the concept, a personal intermediary, usually a family member (i.e., kinsman redeemer). This cultural aspect of the right to buy back objects, animals, land (cf. Lev. 25,27), or relatives (cf. Ruth 4:15; Isa. 29:22) is transferred theologically to YHWH’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt (cf. Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Ps. 74:2; 77;15; Jer. 31:11). He becomes “the redeemer” (cf. Job 19:25; Ps. 19:14; 78:35; Prov. 23:1; Isa. 41:14; 43:14; 44:6,24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7,26; 54:5,8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16; Jer. 50:34).
2. *Padah*, which basically means “to deliver” or “to rescue”
 - a. the redemption of the first born, Exod. 13:13,14 and Num. 18:15-17
 - b. Physical redemption is contrasted with spiritual redemption, Ps. 49:7,8,15
 - c. YHWH will redeem Israel from their sin and rebellion, Ps. 130:7-8

B. The theological concept involves three related items:

1. There is a need, a bondage, a forfeiting, an imprisonment.
 - a. physical
 - b. social
 - c. spiritual (cf. Ps. 130:8)
2. A price must be paid for freedom, release, and restoration.
 - a. of the nation, Israel (cf. Deut. 7:8)
 - b. of the individual (cf. Job 19:25-27; 33:28)
3. Someone must act as intermediary and benefactor. In *ga'al* this one is usually a family member or near kin (i.e., *go'el*).
4. YHWH often describes Himself in familial terms.
 - a. father
 - b. husband
 - c. near kin

Redemption was secured through YHWH’s personal agency; a price was paid, and redemption was achieved!

II. NEW TESTAMENT

A. There are several terms used to convey the theological concept.

1. *Agorazō* (cf. I Cor. 6:20; 7:23; II Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:34). This is a commercial term which reflects a price paid for something. We are blood-bought people who do not control our own lives. We belong to Christ.
2. *Exagorazō* (cf. Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). This is also a commercial term. It reflects Jesus’ substitutionary death on our behalf. Jesus bore the “curse” of a performance-based law (i.e., Mosaic Law), which sinful humans could not accomplish. He bore the curse (cf.

Deut. 21:23) for us all! In Jesus, God's justice and love merge into full forgiveness, acceptance, and access!

3. *Luō*, "to set free"
 - a. *Lutron*, "a price paid" (cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). These are powerful words from Jesus' own mouth concerning the purpose of His coming, to be the Savior of the world by paying a sin-debt He did not owe (cf. John 1:29).
 - b. *Lutroō*, "to release"
 - (1) to redeem Israel, Luke 24:21
 - (2) to give Himself to redeem and purify a people, Titus 2:14
 - (3) to be a sinless substitute, I Pet. 1:18-19
 - c. *Lutrōsis*, "redemption, deliverance, or liberation"
 - (1) Zacharias' prophecy about Jesus, Luke 1:68
 - (2) Anna's praise to God for Jesus, Luke 2:38
 - (3) Jesus' better, once offered sacrifice, Heb. 9:12
 4. *Apolytrōsis*
 - a. redemption at the Second Coming (cf. Acts 3:19-21)
 - (1) Luke 21:28
 - (2) Romans 8:23
 - (3) Ephesians 1:14; 4:30
 - (4) Hebrews 9:15
 - b. redemption in Christ's death
 - (1) Romans 3:24
 - (2) I Corinthians 1:30
 - (3) Ephesians 1:7
 - (4) Colossians 1:14
 5. *Antilytron* (cf. I Tim. 2:6). This is a crucial text (as is Titus 2:14), which links release to Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross. He is the one and only acceptable sacrifice; the one who dies for "all" (cf. John 1:29; 3:16-17; 4:42; I Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; II Pet. 3:9; I John 2:2; 4:14).
- B. The theological concept in the NT implies
1. Mankind is enslaved to sin (cf. John 8:34; Rom. 3:10-18; 6:23).
 2. Mankind's bondage to sin has been revealed by the OT Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 3) and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5-7). Human performance has become a death sentence (cf. Col. 2:14).
 3. Jesus, the sinless lamb of God, has come and died in our place (cf. John 1:29; II Cor. 5:21). We have been purchased from sin so that we might serve God (cf. Rom. 6).
 4. By implication both YHWH and Jesus are "near kin" who act on our behalf. This continues the familial metaphors (i.e., father, husband, son, brother, near kin).
 5. Redemption was not a price paid to Satan (i.e., Medieval theology), but the reconciliation of God's word and God's justice with God's love and full provision in Christ. At the cross peace was restored, human rebellion was forgiven, the image of God in mankind is now fully functional again in intimate fellowship!
 6. There is still a future aspect of redemption (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), which involves our resurrection bodies and physical intimacy with the Triune God.

▣ **"by Thy great power and Thy strong hand"** This phrase is also used of YHWH's deliverance of His people from Egypt (cf. Deut. 3:24; 5:24; 9:26,29; 11:2). This deliverance from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan was prophesied in Gen. 15:12-21. For "Thy strong hand" see note at 1:6.

1:11 “O Lord” This is the Hebrew word *adon* (BDB 10), which denotes “owner,” “master,” “husband,” or “lord.” See Special Topic: Names for Deity at 1:4.

▣ **“Thine ears”** See note at 1:6.

▣ **“who delights to revere Thy name”** “Delight” (BDB 343) denotes “have pleasure in” (cf. Mal. 3:1). It describes a valid covenantal response and a true follower of YHWH in I Chr. 28:9 (“and with a willing mind,” BDB 343). It basically describes the direction of the heart. It shows the object of personal desire.

The term “revere” (BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) means “reverential awe and respect” (cf. Exod. 18:21; 20:20; Deut. 4:10; Josh. 4:24; Isa. 29:13). This respect for God is lived out in covenant obedience and worship.

▣ **“Thy name”** In Hebrew thought and theology the name represents the character of the person, so too, God’s names. See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Neh. 1:4.

▣ **“grant him compassion”** The VERB (BDB, 733, KB 678) is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE used as an entreaty for God’s actions. The term “compassion” (BDB 933) is used here in a specialized sense of God working on a socially superior person (here Artaxerxes I) to grant the request of a servant (here Nehemiah, cf. Ps. 146:46; Dan. 1:9).

▣ **“this man”** This refers to Artaxerxes I, who Nehemiah served.

1:11b “cupbearer” This title (BDB 1052 I) means close servant, like a butler. Originally it referred to one who tasted the wine (BDB 1052 II) and food so as to assure it was not poisoned (cf. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1.3.9), but like “eunuch,” it became a general term for close servant (cf. Gen. 40:1,2,9,20,23; 41:9; I Kgs. 10:5; II Chr. 9:4). The Septuagint translates this term as “eunuch.”

NEHEMIAH 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Nehemiah Sent to Judah	Nehemiah's Mission	Nehemiah Goes to Jerusalem	Nehemiah's Call: His Mission to Judah (1:1-2:10)
2:1-8	2:1-8	2:1-2a 2:2b-3 2:4a 2:4b-5 2:6 2:7-8	2:1-6 2:7-8
2:9-10	2:9-10	2:9-10	2:9 2:10
Nehemiah Views the Wall of Jerusalem			The Decision to Rebuild the Walls of Jerusalem
2:11-16	2:11-16	2:11-15 2:16-18a	2:11-16
2:17-20	2:17-20	2:18b 2:19 2:20	2:17-28 2:19-20

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-8

^{1:11b}Now I was the cupbearer to the king. ^{2:1}And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine *was* before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ²So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. ³I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" ⁴Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it." ⁶Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. ⁷And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors *of the provinces* beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me.

2:1 "Nisan" This would have been March - April (cf. Special Topic at Ezra 3:1), three months after Hanani's news. It shows the length of Nehemiah's prayer and fasting.

▣ **"in the twentieth year"** There were two calendars in use by the Jews in this Persian period, which started at different times of the year (Nisan and Tishri). This causes the dates possibly to be off one year.

▣ **"wine"** The Persian kings were known for their drinking parties, yet because of v. 6, "the Queen" being included, this may have been a private meal. See Special Topic at Ezra 7:17.

▣ **"I had not been sad in his presence"** It was a dangerous thing to show personal emotion in the king's presence (cf. v. 2c; Esther 4:2). Possibly Nehemiah planned this encounter!

Notice the parallel between the cupbearer of Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 40:7) and Nehemiah.

2:2 "I was very much afraid" It was inappropriate to bring up personal matters to the King (cf. Esth. 4:2). Also, this same King had ruled against rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem earlier (cf. Ezra 4:23). This shows Nehemiah's faith and fear.

2:3 "Let the king live forever" This VERB (BDB 310, KB 309) is a *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense. This was a common hyperbole of respect and best wishes in addressing Near Eastern monarchs (cf. I Kgs. 1:31; Dan. 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6,21). See Special Topic: 'Olam at Ezra 3:11.

▣ **"father's tombs"** Notice that he never says "Jerusalem." The Persian Kings also buried their fathers.

▣ **"its gates have been consumed by fire"** The Jews had always been supportive of the Persian kings who allowed them to return to Judah. Possibly the Persian Empire needed some military outposts in this region as a buffer against Egypt, which at this time was currently in revolt.

The VERB (BDB 37, KB 46, *Pual* PERFECT) could refer to the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar's army in 586 B.C. (cf. II Kgs. 25:10) or to a more recent destruction of the Jews' attempt to rebuild the walls (cf. Ezra 4:7-24).

2:4 “So I prayed” This instant prayer for wisdom and a favorable hearing from Artaxerxes I is quite a contrast to the three month fasting prayer of 1:4-2:1. Both have their appropriate place.

2:5 Nehemiah is asking for both a personal favor (i.e., send me back to my God’s city to rebuild it. *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense) and a political need (i.e., a walled city with a faithful population in an area of the empire currently in revolt, i.e., Egypt).

2:6 “the Queen” Ctesias (a Greek who lived at the Persian court) tells us that Artaxerxes I had one Queen, whose name was Damaspia (and three concubines).

The rare term “Queen” (BDB 993) is only used here and in Ps. 45:9. The Septuagint translates it as “concubine,” but it has the DEFINITE ARTICLE and even the Septuagint translates it “Queen” in Ps. 45:9.

▣ **“How long will your journey be”** The exact time envisioned by Nehemiah is not stated, but it probably was a short time. As it turned out, from 5:14 and 13:16, he stayed for 12 years. I am sure he returned from time to time to the Persian court.

2:7 “let letters be given me for the governors” This VERB (BDB 678, KB 733) is a *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense. Nehemiah wanted documented authority in light of the opposition of the surrounding regions (i.e., Ammon, Samaria, cf. Ezra 4).

2:8 “the king’s forest” Many assume that this refers to the cedars of Lebanon, but this would have been very expensive lumber for wall and gate timber. It seems to refer to a local royal forest because (1) a Jew is in charge of it (Asaph) and (2) the term used to refer to it is a Persian term for “royal garden,” possibly one of Solomon’s (at Etham, cf. II Kgs. 25:4).

▣ **“the fortress which is by the temple”** This same fortress within the city is mentioned in 7:2. The Jebusites also had a citadel within the walls, which Josephus calls “Baris” (*Antiq.* 15.11.4). In the NT it was a fortress like this next to the temple in which Roman soldiers were garrisoned year round (Fortress Antonio, cf. Acts 21:37; 2:24).

▣ **“because the good hand of my God was on me”** Nehemiah knew the ultimate source was the God of Israel. Nehemiah’s God is the one to be praised (cf. v. 18; Ezra 1:1; 6:14,22; 7:27-28; 9:9). God uses human instrumentality, both Jews and non-Jews, believers and unbelievers, to accomplish His redemptive purposes for all mankind (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:9-10

⁹Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.

2:9 “the king had sent with me officers of the army, and horsemen” Ezra did not ask for an official escort (cf. Ezra 8:22). Nehemiah used all the official clout he could muster. They were both spiritual men, but functioning in different roles (Ezra - political/spiritual leader and Nehemiah - political/administrative leader).

2:10 “Sanballat” This Babylonian name (BDB 702, “May *Sin* [moon goddess] give life,” cf. 2:10,19; 3:33; 4:1; 6:1,2,5,12,14; 13:28). He was governor of the province of Samaria. We know of him both from the

Elephantine papyri and the Samaritan papyri. His children had YHWHistic names. The returning Jews rebuffed his offer of help (cf. Ezra 4:3), which infuriated him.

▣ **“the Horonite”** This means that he was from one of the two Canaanite cities called Beth-horon; both were located in the old tribal allocation of Ephraim (cf. Josh. 10:10-14).

▣ **“Tobiah”** His name means, “YHWH is my good” (BDB 375). He was an Ammonite enemy of Nehemiah and all returning Jews (cf. 2:10,19; 3:35; 4:1; 6:1,12,14,17,19; 13:4,7,8).

▣ **“official”** This is literally “slave,” “servant” (BDB 713). This term became a title of honor and access to the court. It is interesting that who he served is not stated, so he was not a servant of Sanballat, but a person of leadership himself.

It is just possible that he was governor of Ammon as Nehemiah was governor of Judah, both under the satrap of “the Province Beyond the River.” His name occurs in some later lists of leaders of Ammon. If this is so, then these three enemies denoted that the leaders of the regions surrounding Judah were all hostile.

▣ **“it was very displeasing to them”** This is the same term (BDB 949) that was used in v. 3 to describe Nehemiah (cf. 13:8, where Nehemiah throws Tobiah’s personal belongings out of a room in the temple). For other uses in the same sense see Gen. 48:17; I Sam 8:6; 18:8; Isa. 59:15; Jonah 4:1).

Sanballat and Tobiah were still angry (BDB 949, KB 1269, *Qal* IMPERFECT) at their rejection of helping rebuild the temple (cf. Ezra 4:3).

▣ **“the sons of Israel”** In this idiom the term Israel (BDB 975, KB 442) refers to Jacob’s new name after he wrestled with the angel (cf. Gen. 32:28). It can mean

1. *El* persisteth
2. *El* preserveth
3. *El* contendeth

All of the tribes of Israel came from his sons (cf. Gen. 49:3-27; Exod. 1:2-4, Joseph’s two children, Ephraim and Manessah, both became tribes, cf. Gen. 48:8-22).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:11-16

¹¹So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹²And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. ¹³So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. ¹⁴Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. ¹⁶The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work.

2:11 “three days” This was possibly a time of rest or prayer (cf. Ezra 8:15,32).

2:12 This relates Nehemiah’s initial secret inspection of the walls (cf. v. 16).

▣ **“what my God was putting into my mind to do”** Nehemiah believed that YHWH was guiding his thoughts and actions. He was a man of prayer, but also a man of action.

2:13-15 The locations are uncertain. We know from archeology that Nehemiah's walled city was much smaller than David's.

▣ **“inspecting”** This VERB (BDB 960 I, KB 1304, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is often used in the sense of hope (*Peel*), so here it may denote inspection with a view of restoration.

2:14 “but there was no place for my mount to pass” This was because of debris.

2:16 Notice the different groups mentioned. Normally Jews, priests, Levites, and temple servants made up the categories of people, but here

1. the Jews (general population of the returnees)
2. the priests
3. the nobles (tribal/clan leaders, cf. 4:14; 6:17; 13:17; I Kgs. 21:8)
4. the officials (probably governmental appointees)
5. the rest (workers, both slaves and returnees)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:17-20

¹⁷Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach."
¹⁸I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. ¹⁹But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" ²⁰So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

2:17

NASB “the bad situation”

NKJV “the distress”

NRSV “the trouble”

TEV “what trouble”

NJB “what a sorry state”

This is the general term (BDB 948) for evil and its consequences, which is used so often in the OT. Evil had taken its toll on God's special city and temple and the consequences remained!

▣ **“Come, let us rebuild”** The first VERB (BDB 229, KB 246) is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE. The second (BDB 124, KB 139) is a *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a COHORTATIVE sense.

2:18 Nehemiah explained to the Jerusalem leadership how God had opened the heart of the Persian king to allow and support the rebuilding. This combination of God and king spurred them on to vigorous effort (i.e., “they strengthened their hands for good,” BDB 304, *Peel* IMPERFECT).

2:19 Here is a list of the enemies of Nehemiah's rebuilding project.

1. Sanballat the Horonite
2. Tobiah the Ammonite
3. Geshem the Arab

▣ **“they mocked us and despised us”** The first VERB (BDB 541, KB 532, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) is always used in a negative sense (e.g., 4:1; II Chr. 30:10; Job 21:3; Ps 22:7).

The second VERB (BDB 102, KB 117, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “to regard with contempt” (cf. II Chr. 36:16; Esth. 3:6; Ps. 22:6,24; Isa. 53:5).

▣ **“Geshem the Arab”** We know of him from several extra-canonical references. He was a powerful Arab leader, possibly “King of Kedar.” See full note in NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 675-676.

▣ **“are you rebelling against the King”** This was an accusation of treason against Persia (cf. 6:6).

2:20 “The God of heaven will give us success” This is the same term (BDB 852 II, KB 1026, here a *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) used in 1:11 (*Hiphil* IMPERATIVE). NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 804, gives several usages:

1. success to those who know and obey God’s law, Josh. 1:8; I Chr. 22:13; Ps. 1:3
2. success of God’s word to accomplish its task, Isa. 55:11
3. success of the vicarious, substitutionary work of the Suffering Servant, Isa. 53:10
4. success of those who diligently seek God, II Chr. 26:5; Ps. 118:25

All of these reflect the truth of Neh. 2:20, all true success comes from God and is available for those who seek, know, and obey Him!

▣ This was a second painful rejection of the semi-YHWHistic pagans’ help. The first being in Ezra 4:1-5 with the rebuilding of the temple and now with the rebuilding of the walls of the city.

▣ **“no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem”** The first term “portion” (BDB 324) means “no share or interest in,” implying no obligation (e.g., Gen. 31:14; II Sam. 20:1; II Chr. 10:16).

The second term “right” (BDB 842) is used in a rare judicial sense or a legal right to (cf. II Sam. 19:28; NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 749).

The third term “memorial” (BDB 272) means “proof of citizenship” (cf. Esth. 6:1). It can also mean “remembrance of so as to make one part of.”

All three of these, taken together, imply that Nehemiah rejects any past claims they have, any current claim they might make. They have no part with the faithful remnant that returned!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. List the six post-exilic books of the Old Testament.
2. Why is Nehemiah so upset in verse 4?
3. List the elements of Nehemiah’s prayer.
4. What other biblical book does Nehemiah draw so heavily from?

NEHEMIAH 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Rebuilding the Wall	Work on the Wall	Rebuilding the Wall of Jerusalem	How the Walls were Rebuilt
3:1-5	3:1-2	3:1	3:1-8
		3:2a	
		3:2b	
	3:3-5	3:3	
		3:4a	
		3:4b	
		3:4c	
		3:5	
3:6-13	3:6-12	3:6	
		3:7	
		3:8a	
		3:8b	
		3:9	3:9-14
		3:10a	
		3:10b	
		3:11	
	3:13	3:13	
3:14-27	3:14	3:14	
	3:15-27	3:15	3:15-19
		3:16	
		Levites Who Worked on the Wall	
		3:17a	
		3:17b	
		3:17c	
		3:18	
		3:19	
		3:20	3:20-27
		3:21	
		Priests Who Worked on the Wall	
		3:22a	
		3:22b	

		3:23a	
		3:23b	
		3:24	
		3:25a	
		3:25b-26	
		Other Builders	
		3:27	
3:28-32	3:28-32	3:28	3:28-32
		3:29	
		3:30a	
		3:30b	
		3:31	
		3:32	

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii)
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

BACKGROUND

- A. Chapter 3 deals with forty specific segments of the walls of Jerusalem moving in a counterclockwise movement from the Sheep Gate in the northeast corner, close to the pool of Bethesda (cf. John 5:2). A good brief discussion is found in the *Tyndale Commentary*, pp. 84-90. Most of the specific locations are still best guesses.
- B. We know from Kathleen Kenyon’s archaeological work on Jerusalem that this wall was about 2,600 meters if the north wall is not included, and 4,150 meters if it is included. Most of the wall was simply a repair job, while a new Eastern wall was built running along the top of the ridge. This new wall was built in rapid fashion, but was nine feet thick.

- C. Nehemiah secured the help of different groups of society (i.e., businessmen, priests, surrounding cities) to work on the wall which fit their own interests.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:1-2

¹Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred *and* the Tower of Hananel. ²Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

3:1 “Eliashib the high priest” This is the grandson of Jeshua (cf. Ezra 2:2), who was the high priest under Zerubbabel. This shows that the priests and Levites were actively involved in the rebuilding of the wall, especially that portion close to the temple.

▣ **“built”** This Hebrew term (BDB 124) can mean build or rebuild or even repair. It is probable that this was a symbolic act by the priestly leaders to show their personal and energetic support for the building project.

▣ **“the Sheep Gate”** The Sheep Gate seems to be connected with the sacrificial cultus (cf. John 5:2). It was probably the gate closest to where the sacrificial sheep were brought into the temple from Bethlehem.

▣ **“they consecrated it”** The VERB (BDB 872, 1073) is a *Peel* PERFECT. This was a separate consecration of this specific section of the wall done by the priests and Levites, and it is not connected to the general consecration of the whole wall found later in the book of Nehemiah (cf. 12:27-43).

The word “consecration” occurs twice in this verse, but for stylistic (parallel structure) reasons.

▣ **“the Tower of the Hundred *and* the Tower of Hananel”** These may be connected with the fortifications of the north wall closest to the temple. The Tower of the Hundred probably refers to an elite military unit connected to this fortification. The Tower of Hananel is mentioned in a prophecy of restoration in Jer. 31:38.

3:2 “the men of Jericho” There are several groups listed from different cities in Judah. These different groups seem to work on the section of the wall and gate closest to their home city. It is somewhat surprising that the cities of chapter 3 differ from the ones mentioned in 11:25-36. There is no easy explanation for this. We learn from Ezra 2:34 that Jericho was included in the province of Judah during this time.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:3-5

³Now the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. ⁴Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs. ⁵Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters.

3:3 “sons of Hassenaah” Often places take on the names of the people who live there. This Hebrew term is the name of a returning family in Ezra 2:35, but here it has the ARTICLE, which implies a place, possibly a village.

▣ **“the Fish Gate”** This may be another gate on the north wall that connected to a road that led to the Sea of Galilee and/or the city of Tyre (cf. 13:16) because this was the source of most of the fish for Jerusalem.

▣ **“laid its beams”** This might be a Hebrew idiom for finishing the roof (cf. Gen. 19:8; I Kgs. 6:15; II Kgs. 6:5; II Chr. 3:7). The NJB has “they made the framework.”

3:4 “Meremoth” This man and his father are both mentioned in Ezra 8:33, which shows a definite historical link between Ezra and Nehemiah. He is also mentioned as helping repair a section of the wall in v. 21.

▣ **“made repairs”** This recurrent term (BDB 304, KB 302, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is used 34 times in vv. 4-32. It strongly implies repairing the old wall as well as constructing the new, shorter wall.

3:5 “the Tekoites” It is surprising that these people are not mentioned in Ezra 2 or Nehemiah 7. Tekoa is about eleven miles south of Jerusalem. Men of this city are mentioned again in v. 27.

▣ **“their nobles did not support the work of their masters”** This shows us that the support for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was not unanimous. These “nobles” (BDB 12 [this is a different word from 2:16]) seem to refer to the rich and landed aristocracy of the city of Tekoa (cf. 10:29). They acted exactly opposite of the High Priest in v. 1.

The “their masters” (BDB 10, *adon*, “Lords”) is unusual. It seems to refer to Nehemiah (i.e., a PLURAL of MAJESTY) or the project foremen of the area (cf. vv. 9,12,16,17,18,19) who were involved in God’s work. Option one seems best in this context.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:6-12

⁶ Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars. ⁷Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, also made repairs for the official seat of the governor of the province beyond the River. ⁸Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. And next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. ⁹Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. ¹⁰Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs. ¹¹Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of Furnaces. ¹²Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters.

3:6 “the Old Gate” The Jerusalem Bible calls this “the Gate of New Quarter” (corruption of Mishneh, cf. Zeph. 1:10), while some translations simply use the Hebrew term *Jeshanah*, which is a village north of Jerusalem (cf. II Chr. 13:19). It was possibly on the northwest corner of the newly enclosed city. The root can also mean “old”) (BDB 445). The Old Gate or Jeshanah Gate is synonymous with the Ephraim Gate of 12:39.

3:7 “the men of Gibeon and Mizpah” These cities were about 4 or 5 miles north of Jerusalem.

▣

NASB “repairs for the official seat of the governor”

NKJV “repaired the residence of the governor”

NRSV “who were under the jurisdiction of the governor”

TEV “built the next section, as far as the residence of the governor”

NJB “repairs for the sake of the governor”

Literally this is “to the throne of the governor.” Since the context is about the wall, this must refer to the wall which was connected to the satrap’s official residence in Jerusalem.

If you take “throne” in the sense of power (NASB 1970 marginal note) then the phrase becomes metaphorical for authority (NET, “jurisdiction”). Why the men in cities just four or five miles away were under another governor’s authority is unexplainable unless the boundaries of Judah were close.

▣ **“the province beyond the River”** This was the official Persian title for the land of Syria and Palestine. The river referred to the Euphrates.

3:8 “the goldsmiths. . .the perfumers” This chapter is divided between those of (1) certain professions, (2) certain cities, and (3) certain families who rebuilt certain sections of the wall. This also shows the presence of commercial guilds at this period in the life of the Jewish nation.

▣

NASB “restored”

NKJV, NRSV “made repairs”

TEV “built”

NJB “renovated”

The BDB 738 II and KB 807 relate this term to the root for “repair” or “restore” from a Ugaritic root. The question remains, “Did the workers build a new wall or repair a damaged one?” The answer is they did both. Part of the old wall was repaired, but another part took a new and shorter route down a commercial street.

The Septuagint understands this term as being from the Hebrew root “to abandon” (BDB 736), therefore, denotes a change in the location of the new wall.

▣ **“the Broad Wall”** This refers to the wall on the west side (cf. 12:38). This same ter (BDB 932) describes the thick wall of the city of Babylon in Jer. 51:58.

3:9

NASB “the official of half the district of Jerusalem”

NKJV “leader of half the district of Jerusalem”

NRSV “rule of half the district of Jerusalem”

TEV “rule of half of the Jerusalem district”

NJB “who was head of one half of the district of Jerusalem”

The term “official” (BDB 978) is the Hebrew *rosh*, which means “chief,” “head,” “official,” “captain,” “prince.” Apparently this was the foreman for a work crew (cf. “made repairs,” vv. 9,12). Persian documents reveal that they used several layers of administrative officials (cf. Vv. 12,16,17,18,19).

The term “district” (BDB 813) means “circle” or “circuit.” *The Rotherhams’ Emphasized Bible* has “ruler of a half-circuit.” This could refer to an area of land around Jerusalem. The term in Assyrian means “a district” and this is how it is consistently used in the OT. Each section of the project was further divided into two work crews with its own foreman.

3:10 “made repairs opposite his house” This is another example that Nehemiah assigned sections of the wall to those who had some personal interest in its repair.

3:11 “Malchijah the son of Harim” The name means “My king is YHWH” (BDB 575). There are several people by this name in the OT. However, it is probable that the same son and father mentioned in Ezra 10:31 is the same person as mentioned here (cf. Maremoth son of Uriah, Ezra 8:33; Neh. 3:4).

▣ **“the Tower of Furnaces”** This is another example of certain professions (i.e., perfumers, bakers) locating in the same area (i.e., “baker’s street,” cf. Jer. 37:21). Apparently the relocated wall ran down a commercial street. Those doing business on that street helped build the wall close to their business.

▣ **“another section”** This shows the partial nature of this listing of repairs because the first section is never mentioned. This same unusual construction is seen in v. 11, 19-21, 24, and 30.

3:12 “Hallohesh” The term or name (BDB 538) occurs only here and means “whisperer.” Some commentators see this as a reference to a family of diviners (cf. Ps. 58:5 and *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 696-697), but this seems impossible at a time of such fervor for the Law of God. The same term is used of “whispering” in prayer in Isa. 26:16.

▣ **“he and his daughters”** It is unusual in this culture that this man’s daughters would help him in manual labor. It is so unusual that it is specifically stated!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:13

¹³Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and a thousand cubits of the wall to the Refuse Gate.

3:13 “Zanoah” This village was located nine miles west of Jerusalem.

▣ **“the Valley Gate”** This is the gate by which Nehemiah started his nightly inspection of the southern walls (west then east, cf. 2:13).

▣ **“a thousand cubits”** A cubit is the distance from a man’s longest finger to his elbow. It ranged from eighteen to twenty inches. This seems to be too long of a section for the men from small towns to repair, so apparently this is only a measurement between the Valley Gate (middle of the western wall leading to the Valley of Hinnom) and the Refuse Gate (southern tip of the wall).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:14

¹⁴Malchijah the son of Rechab, the official of the district of Beth-haccherem repaired the Refuse Gate. He built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars.

3:14 “the district of Beth-haccherem” This was a village close to Tekoa. The name itself (BDB 11) means “house of vineyard.” It is also mentioned in Jer. 6:1, where it is a height to watch for fires about six miles south of Jerusalem. Some commentators think it was the residence of the Persian governor (NIV Study Bible footnote, p. 698).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:15

¹⁵Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the official of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He built it, covered it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and the wall of the Pool of Shelah at the king's garden as far as the steps that descend from the city of David.

3:15 “mizpah” The name (BDB 859) means “watchtower” and is used of several sites in Palestine. This is possibly the one in the tribal allocation of Judah (cf. Josh. 15:38) or the one in Benjamin (cf. Josh. 18:26). The one in Benjamin is the one mentioned most in the OT (location is uncertain, but probably the height five miles north of Jerusalem).

▣ **“covered it”** Apparently the gates had some type of roof. In vv. 3 and 6 “beams” refers to roof beams.

▣ **“the Pool of Shelah at the King’s Garden”** Many believe this to be the Pool of Siloam, which was in the most southern end of the walled city. Its water came from a water channel cut through rock from the Gihom spring outside the walls during Hezekiah’s reign (701 B.C.).

▣ **“the steps that descend from the city of David”** David captured the heights of Jebus (later Jerusalem) and made it his city. It encompassed several hills. The walls were placed on the sides of the hills, part way from the bottom. Later as the city grew a suburb to the north developed outside the wall.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:16-27

¹⁶After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, official of half the district of Beth-zur, made repairs as far as *a point* opposite the tombs of David, and as far as the artificial pool and the house of the mighty men. ¹⁷After him the Levites carried out repairs *under* Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, the official of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. ¹⁸After him their brothers carried out repairs *under* Bavvai the son of Henadad, official of *the other* half of the district of Keilah. ¹⁹Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the official of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the ascent of the armory at the Angle. ²⁰After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the Angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house. ²²After him the priests, the men of the valley, carried out repairs. ²³After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, carried out repairs beside his house. ²⁴After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah as far as the Angle and as far as the corner. ²⁵Palal the son of Uzai *made repairs* in front of the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs. ²⁶The temple servants living in Ophel *made repairs* as far as the front of the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower. ²⁷After them the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great projecting tower and as far as the wall of Ophel.

3:16 “Beth-zur” This (BDB 112 & 813) means the “house of rock,” and it was located fifteen miles south of Jerusalem.

▣ **“a point opposite the tombs of David, and as far as the Artificial Pool, and the House of the Mighty Men”** Since “the tombs of David” is plural, it must refer to his family’s burial tomb(s). The modern location on Mt. Zion is not original. The location of “the house of the mighty men” is uncertain. This may refer to quarters of an elite group of men of David’s army (cf. II Sam. 23:8-39; I Chr. 11:10), also known as the royal body guard (cf. I Kgs. 1:8,10; I Chr. 29:24).

The “Artificial Pool” was created by Hezekiah (cf. II Kgs. 20:20; Neh. 2:14). It served as a source of water under the city’s wall in case of siege.

3:17 “the Levites” The construction and repair referred to is on the southern part of the new city wall. Why Levites would be involved this far from the temple area is uncertain. It probably was the area of their homes (cf. vv. 20-22).

▣ **“Keilah”** This was a village eighteen miles south/southwest of Jerusalem in the Philistine coastal plain (cf. Josh. 15:44).

3:18 “Bavvai the son of Henadad” This is not a Hebrew name. It may be a copyist’s corruption of “Binnui, son of Henadad” of v. 24 and the Peshitta.

3:19,24 “at the Angle” This turn in the walls of Jerusalem is also mentioned in vv. 24, 25, and II Chr. 26:9. It was close to the palace (cf. V. 25; IDB, vol. 1, p. 137). Apparently it ran from Gihon spring to the armory (ZPBE, vol. 1, p. 168). The wall was straight so the term must refer to something on the inside like the corner of a building or open court.

3:20 Zabbai” This is how the MT writes this name, but the note says, read as Zakkai, which is followed by the Peshitta, the Vulgate, and a few Hebrew manuscripts.

▣ **“zealously repaired”** The term translated “zealously” (from the root “to burn”) is unusual because it occurs only here in this list. Was he the only “zealous” worker? The PRONOUN “him” and the ADJECTIVE are spelled almost exactly alike. The BDB (354 thinks it is a copyist’s error [dittography]). This ADJECTIVE is missing in the Septuagint.

▣ **“to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest”** This begins a series of new geographical locations which are connected with personal houses. Many assume that at this point the wall began its new direction along the eastern ridge.

3:22

NASB	“the priests, the men of the valley”
NKJV, Peshitta	“the priests, the men of the plain”
NRSV	“the priests, the men of the surrounding area”
TEV	“priests from the area around Jerusalem”
NJB	“the priests who lived in the district”
LXX	“the priests, the men of Ecchechar”

The memories of the siege of Jerusalem had been passed down through the families who survived. No one wanted to live in the rebuilt city (cf. 11:1-2). These priests who repaired this section lived in the surrounding area.

The term “valley” is literally “the circle” (BDB 503), but here is used in a specialized sense of “a plain” or lowland.

3:25 “the court of the guard” If this is the same location mentioned in Jer. 32:2 it was associated with the palace.

3:26 “the temple servants” See note at Ezra 2:43.

▣ **“Ophel”** this term (BDB 779 I) refers to a filled area on the east between Mt. Zion and Mt. Moriah (cf. II Chr. 27:3; 33:14; Isa. 32:14; Micah 4:8).

▣ **“Water Gate”** The gate on the eastern wall, where the people met to hear Ezra read the law of God (cf. 8:1-8).

3:27 “the Tekoites” See note at 3:5.

▣ **“the great projecting tower”** Apparently, there were two towers by the Water Gate, one noticeably larger.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 3:28-32

²⁸Above the Horse Gate the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house. ²⁹After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house. And after him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, carried out repairs. ³⁰After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters. ³¹After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, carried out repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, in front of the Inspection Gate and as far as the upper room of the corner. ³²Between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants carried out repairs.

3:28 “the Horse Gate” There has been some confusion over this gate because the name seems to refer both to an inner gate (cf. II Kgs. 11:16; II Chr. 23:15), and a walled gate (cf. Jer. 31:40). It was on the east wall close to the temple, next to the East Gate.

3:29 “the keeper of” There were several divisions of gatekeepers. See note at Ezra 2:42.

▣ **“the East Gate”** This is the temple gate mentioned in Ezek. 10:19; 11:1; 40:6, 10. It is the entrance for the coming Messiah. The modern wall of Jerusalem is not original, but was built by the Muslims in the A.D. period. Many Jewish archaeologists tell us that the currently walled up Eastern gate is not exactly the location of the ancient Eastern gate.

3:31

NASB “the Inspection Gate”

NKJV, REV,

NJB, LXX “the Miphkad Gate”

NRSV “the Muster Gate”

The term (BDB 874) means “place of muster” (cf. II Sam. 24:9; I Chr. 21:5), “place of appointment” (cf. II Chr. 31:13), or “guard-house” (cf. Jer. 52:11). It was on the eastern wall, just north of the East Gate.

▣ **“the upper room of the corner”** this refers to the northern most point of the eastern wall, where the wall bent. The next gate on the northern wall was the Sheep Gate (cf. 3:1).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is it so hard to identify these different locations in the city of Jerusalem?
2. Why are the cities mentioned in chapter 3 different from those in chapter 10?

NEHEMIAH 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Wall Defended Against Enemies	Troubles For Builders (4:1-7:5)	Nehemiah Overcomes Opposition to His Work	The Effects of the Jews' Opponents 3:33-37 (follows MT versing)
4:1-3	4:1-5	4:1-2 4:3	
4:4-5		4:4-5	
4:6-9	4:6 4:7-9	4:6 4:7-9	3:38 4:1-2
4:10-12	4:10-14	4:10 4:11-13	4:3-5
4:13-14		4:14-15	4:6-9
4:15-18	4:15-20	4:16-21	4:10-17
4:19-20			
4:21-23	4:21-5:5	4:22-23	

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FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:1-3

¹Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. ²He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy *men* of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?" ³Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* near him and he said, "Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on *it*, he would break their stone wall down!"

4:1 The Masoretic Text continues in vv. 33-35 of chapter 3, while most modern English translation begin 4:1-3 here.

▣ **“Sanballat”** See note at 2:10.

▣ **“he became furious”** This VERB (BDB 354, KB 351, *Qal* IMPERFECT), originally an Aramaic VERB, means “to burn.” It came to be used metaphorically of rage. This same root is translated “zealous” (used in a positive sense) in 3:20.

▣ **“very angry”** This VERB (BDB 494, KB 491) is another *Qal* IMPERFECT intensified with a *Hiphil* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE (BDB 915 I, KB 1176). Both the TEV and the NJB combine these descriptions of Sanballat into one.

▣ **“mocked”** This VERB (BDB 541, KB 532 *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) was also used of Sanballat in 2:19.

▣ **“the Jews”** This term (BDB 397) originally referred to the tribe of Judah and its territorial allocation (cf. Josh. 15) and thereby those who were descendants from Judah, son of Jacob. After the breakup of the United Monarchy (Saul, David, and Solomon) in 922 B.C., it became the designation for the southern kingdom.

Lastly it became a way of referring to all the descendants of the Patriarchs who worship YHWH, especially in Jeremiah (seventh century), Nehemiah, and Esther (post-exilic).

It also became a way of referring to Hebrews (cf. II Kgs. 18:26,28; II Chr. 32:18; Isa. 36:11,13; Neh. 13:24).

4:2

NASB “the wealthy men of Samaria”

NKJV, NRSV “the army of Samaria”

TEV “the Samaritan troops”

NJB “the aristocracy of Samaria”

The Hebrew root (BDB 298) can be understood in two ways:

1. from the phrase “to be strong,” referring to fortifications or military soldiers (#4)
2. from the phrase “to be strong,” used metaphorically of wealth (#3)

What follows in v. 2 in a series of questions meant to ridicule the Jews’ rebuilding plans.

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV “feeble Jews”

TEV “miserable Jews”

NJB “pathetic Jews”

This ADJECTIVE (BDB 51) developed from the VERB (BDB 51, KB 63, *Pulal*), which is used often in the prophets (*Puel*).

1. loss of fertility, Jer. 15:9
2. inhabitants of a defeated land, Isa. 24:4; Hosea 4:3
3. withered fortifications, Jer. 14:2; Lam. 2:8
4. withered fields or harvests, Isa. 16:8; Joel 1:10; Nahum 1:4
5. withered land, Isa. 33:9



NASB “Are they going to restore it for themselves”

NKJV “Will they fortify themselves”

NRSV “Will they restore things”

TEV “Do they intend to rebuild the city”

NJB “Are they going to give up”

Some scholars think that “themselves” is a scribal error for “God.” Then the question is “Will God restore?” But no ancient translation has this wording. This suggestion occurs in the notes of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, p. 1435.

As it is the two Hebrew words seem to refer to the Jews who undertook the building project. It implies they overestimated their ability.

▣ “Can they revive the stones from dusty rubble even the burned ones” The term “revive” (BDB 310, KB 309, *Peel* IMPERFECT) is usually used of living things. Here and in I Chr. 11:8, Jerusalem’s fortifications are personified as being brought back to life and health.

The walls of Jerusalem, which were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, were constructed from white limestone. When this material is burned it loses its strength and hardness and turns to powder.

Not only were the stones brittle, but they were so large it would be difficult to raise them up the ridge to the desired position. Nebuchadnezzar had burned all the gates and modern supports and pulled the stones down into the valley.

4:3 Tobiah (cf. 2:10) continues Sanballat’s mockery by the use of an idiom. Foxes and jackals were animals that might jump on top of a wall. He asserts that the Jews’ construction was so inferior that even this small weight or pressure would collapse it.

Tobiah may have chosen this idiom because of the connotation of jackals with ruined, cursed cities (cf. Ps. 63:10; Lam. 5:18; Ezek. 13:4).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:4-5

⁴ Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.

4:4 The book of Nehemiah highlights Nehemiah’s prayer life. Verses 4-5 are his prayer to God to defend His people and judge their enemies. There are three VERBS (IMPERATIVES) used as entreaties to God.

▣ “Hear” The VERB (BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) means “to hear so as to do.” It is used often in Deuteronomy to encourage the covenant people to covenant faithfulness (cf. Deut. 4:1; 5:1-7; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9). Here Nehemiah calls on God to be faithful to His covenant promises of protection.

▣ **“Return. . .give”** The first VERB (BDB 996, KB 1427) is a *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE. The second (BDB 678, KB 733) is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE. Both are used as supplications to God.

▣ **“despised. . .plunder”** There may be a sound word play between these two terms (BDB 100 & 103).

▣ **“reproach”** The term (BDB 357) means the taunt of an enemy (cf. 5:9). The term is used often in Jeremiah.

Nehemiah asked God to do to them what they want to do to His people (idiom, “on their own heads”). He even asks for their exile!

4:5

NASB, TEV “forgive”

NKJV, NRSV “cover”

NJB “pardon”

This negated VERB is literally “to cover” (*ksh*, BDB 491, KB 487, *Peel* JUSSIVE). The NOUN was used “to hide” or “to conceal.” It is rarely used in the sense of “forgive,” but usually this is reserved for *kpr* (BDB 497). In Jer. 18:23, to which Nehemiah seems to allude, he substitutes *ksh* for *kpr* (see NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 692).

▣ **“iniquity. . .sin”** The first term (BDB 730) means “to bend” or “to twist.” It becomes the metaphor which denotes perversion from God’s law (e.g., Gen. 15:16; Exod. 20:5,6; Lev. 16:22). The terms “right,” “just,” and “straight” are used to describe God’s character and word (see Special Topic: Righteousness following). To deviate from the standard is sin, rebellion.

The second term’s (BDB 308) basic meaning is “to miss the mark.” It implies a violation of God’s law (e.g., Lev. 4:2). This is the most common term for sin in the OT.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Righteousness” is such a crucial topic that a Bible student must make a personal extensive study of the concept.

In the OT, God’s character is described as “just” or “righteous.” The Mesopotamian term itself comes from a river reed which was used as a construction tool to judge the horizontal straightness of walls and fences. God chose the term to be used metaphorically of His own nature. He is the straight edge (ruler) by which all things are evaluated. This concept asserts God’s righteousness as well as His right to judge.

Man was created in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1,3; 9:6). Mankind was created for fellowship with God. All of creation is a stage or backdrop for God and mankind’s interaction. God wanted His highest creation, mankind, to know Him, love Him, serve Him, and be like Him! Mankind’s loyalty was tested (cf. Gen. 3) and the original couple failed the test. This resulted in a disruption of the relationship between God and humanity (cf. Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-21).

God promised to repair and restore the fellowship (cf. Gen. 3:15). He does this through His own will and His own Son. Humans were incapable of restoring the breach (cf. Rom. 1:18-3:20).

After the Fall, God’s first step toward restoration was the concept of covenant based on His invitation and mankind’s repentant, faithful, obedient response. Because of the Fall, humans were incapable of appropriate action (cf. Rom. 3:21-31; Gal. 3). God Himself had to take the initiative to restore covenant-breaking humans. He did this by

1. declaring mankind righteous through the work of Christ (i.e., forensic righteousness).
2. freely giving mankind righteousness through the work of Christ (i.e., imputed righteousness).

3. providing the indwelling Spirit who produces righteousness (i.e., Christlikeness, the restoration of the image of God) in mankind.

However, God requires a covenantal response. God decrees (i.e., freely gives) and provides, but humans must respond and continue to respond in

1. repentance
2. faith
3. lifestyle obedience
4. perseverance

Righteousness, therefore, is a covenantal, reciprocal action between God and His highest creation. Based on the character of God, the work of Christ, and the enabling of the Spirit, to which each individual must personally and continually respond appropriately. The concept is called “justification by faith.” The concept is revealed in the Gospels, but not in these terms. It is primarily defined by Paul, who uses the Greek term “righteousness” in its various forms over 100 times.

Paul, being a trained rabbi, uses the term *dikaiousunē* in its Hebrew sense of the term *SDQ* used in the Septuagint, not from Greek literature. In Greek writings the term is connected to someone who conformed to the expectations of deity and society. In the Hebrew sense it is always structured in covenantal terms. YHWH is a just, ethical, moral God. He wants His people to reflect His character. Redeemed mankind becomes a new creature. This newness results in a new lifestyle of godliness (Roman Catholic focus of justification). Since Israel was a theocracy there was not clear delineation between the secular (society’s norms) and the sacred (God’s will). This distinction is expressed in the Hebrew and Greek terms being translated into English as “justice” (relating to society) and “righteousness” (relating to religion).

The gospel (good news) of Jesus is that fallen mankind has been restored to fellowship with God. This has been accomplished through the Father’s love, mercy, and grace; the Son’s life, death, and resurrection; and the Spirit’s wooing and drawing to the gospel. Justification is a free act of God, but it must issue in godliness (Augustine’s position, which reflects both the Reformation emphasis on the freeness of the gospel and Roman Catholic emphasis on a changed life of love and faithfulness). For Reformers the term “the righteousness of God” is an OBJECTIVE GENITIVE (i.e., the act of making sinful mankind acceptable to God [positional sanctification], which for the Catholic it is a SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE, which is the process of becoming more like God [experiential progressive sanctification]. In reality it is surely both!!)

In my view all of the Bible from Gen. 4 - Rev. 20 is a record of God’s restoring the fellowship of Eden. The Bible starts with God and mankind in fellowship in an earthly setting (cf. Gen. 1-2) and the Bible ends with the same setting (cf. Rev. 21-22). God’s image and purpose will be restored!

To document the above discussions note the following selected NT passages illustrating the Greek word group.

1. God is righteous (often connected to God as Judge)
 - a. Romans 3:26
 - b. II Thessalonians 1:5-6
 - c. II Timothy 4:8
 - d. Revelation 16:5
2. Jesus is righteous
 - a. Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14 (title of Messiah)
 - b. Matthew 27:19
 - c. I John 2:1,29; 3:7
3. God’s will for His creation is righteousness
 - a. Leviticus 19:2

- b. Matthew 5:48 (cf. 5:17-20)
- 4. God's means of providing and producing righteousness
 - a. Romans 3:21-31
 - b. Romans 4
 - c. Romans 5:6-11
 - d. Galatians 3:6-14
 - e. Given by God
 - 1) Romans 3:24; 6:23
 - 2) I Corinthians 1:30
 - 3) Ephesians 2:8-9
 - f. Received by faith
 - 1) Romans 1:17; 3:22,26; 4:3,5,13; 9:30; 10:4,6,10
 - 2) I Corinthians 5:21
 - g. Through acts of the Son
 - 1) Romans 5:21-31
 - 2) II Corinthians 5:21
 - 3) Philippians 2:6-11
- 5. God's will is that His followers be righteous
 - a. Matthew 5:3-48; 7:24-27
 - b. Romans 2:13; 5:1-5; 6:1-23
 - c. I Timothy 6:11
 - d. II Timothy 2:22; 3:16
 - e. I John 3:7
 - f. I Peter 2:24
- 6. God will judge the world by righteousness
 - a. Acts 17:31
 - b. II Timothy 4:8

Righteousness is a characteristic of God, freely given to sinful mankind through Christ. It is

1. a decree of God
2. a gift of God
3. an act of Christ

But it is also a process of becoming righteous that must be vigorously and steadfastly pursued, which will one day be consummated at the Second Coming. Fellowship with God is restored at salvation, but progresses throughout life to become a face-to-face encounter at death or the Parousia!

Here is a good quote to conclude this discussion. It is taken from *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* from IVP.

“Calvin, more so than Luther, emphasizes the relational aspect of the righteousness of God. Luther's view of the righteousness of God seems to contain the aspect of acquittal. Calvin emphasizes the marvelous nature of the communication or imparting of God's righteousness to us” (p. 834).

For me the believer's relationship to God has three aspects:

1. the gospel is a person (the Eastern Church and Calvin's emphasis)

2. the gospel is truth (Augustine's and Luther's emphases)
3. the gospel is a changed life (Catholic emphasis)

They are all true and must be held together for a healthy, sound, biblical Christianity. If any one is over emphasized or depreciated, problems occur.

We must welcome Jesus!

We must believe the gospel!

We must pursue Christlikeness!

▣ **“be blotted out”** Verse 5 starts with two NEGATED parallel lines. The term “blotted out” (BDB 562, KB 567, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) is a metaphor for removing something from one's memory (cf. Jer. 23:18). Nehemiah asks that God not “forgive” or “blot out” the words of the Jews' enemies.



NASB “for they have demoralized the builders”

NKJV “for they have provoked *You* to anger before the builders”

NRSV “for they have hurled insults in the face of the builders”

TEV “for they have insulted us who are building”

NJB “for they have insulted the builders to their face”

The VERB (BDB 494, KB 491, *Hiphil* PERFECT) means “to provoke to anger.” It is often used of provoking God (e.g., II Chr. 28:25, cf. NKJV), but the context demands that it refer to the workmanship of the Jewish volunteer (non-professional builders) labor force.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:6

“So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

4:6 “to half its *height*” The accusation of Tobiah the Ammonite in v. 3 that the walls were of poor quality has been shown to be inaccurate by Kathleen Kenyon's excavation, which shows Nehemiah's wall to have been nine feet thick. However, this verse is somewhat ambiguous (i.e., “joined together all the wall as far as half”). It (BDB 345) could refer to the (1) height (most English translations); (2) length (cf. Peshitta; *Rotherham's Emphasized Bible*, p. 482); (3) width; or (4) simply a metaphor for an unfinished work.

▣ **“the people had a mind to work”** This is literally “a heart.” See Special Topic following.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE HEART

The Greek term *kardia* is used in the Septuagint and NT to reflect the Hebrew term *lēb*. It is used in several ways (cf. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, pp. 403-404).

1. the center of physical life, a metaphor for the person (cf. Acts 14:17; II Cor. 3:2-3; James 5:5)
2. the center of spiritual life (i.e., moral)
 - a. God knows the heart (cf. Luke 16:15; Rom. 8:27; I Cor. 14:25; I Thess. 2:4; Rev. 2:23)
 - b. used of mankind's spiritual life (cf. Matt. 15:18-19; 18:35; Rom. 6:17; I Tim. 1:5; II Tim. 2:22; I Pet. 1:22)

3. the center of the thought life (i.e., intellect, cf. Matt. 13:15; 24:48; Acts 7:23; 16:14; 28:27; Rom. 1:21; 10:6; 16:18; II Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:18; 4:18; James 1:26; II Pet. 1:19; Rev. 18:7; heart is synonymous with mind in II Cor. 3:14-15 and Phil. 4:7)
4. the center of the volition (i.e., will, cf. Acts 5:4; 11:23; I Cor. 4:5; 7:37; II Cor. 9:7)
5. the center of the emotions (cf. Matt. 5:28; Acts 2:26,37; 7:54; 21:13; Rom. 1:24; II Cor. 2:4; 7:3; Eph. 6:22; Phil. 1:7)
6. unique place of the Spirit's activity (cf. Rom. 5:5; II Cor. 1:22; Gal. 4:6 [i.e., Christ in our hearts, Eph. 3:17])
7. The heart is a metaphorical way of referring to the entire person (cf. Matt. 22:37, quoting Deut. 6:5). The thoughts, motives, and actions attributed to the heart fully reveal the type of individual. The OT has some striking usages of the terms
 - a. Gen. 6:6; 8:21, "God was grieved to His heart," also notice Hosea 11:8-9
 - b. Deut. 4:29; 6:5, "with all your heart and all your soul"
 - c. Deut. 10:16, "uncircumcised heart" and Rom. 2:29
 - d. Ezek. 18:31-32, "a new heart"
 - e. Ezek. 36:26, "a new heart" vs. "a heart of stone"

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:7-9

⁷Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. ⁹But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night.

4:7 "Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites" It is unusual that Tobiah is listed with Sanballat and not with the Ammonites (cf. 2:10). Geographically Sanballat (governor of Samaria, capital of ancient Israel) is to the north, the Arabs (then nation of Kedar now a Persian province, cf. 2:19) to the south, the Ammonites (a nation, now a Persian province) to the east, and the Ashdodites (an ancient Philistine city) to the west, which shows that the Jews were completely surrounded by enemies.

▣ **"the repair of the walls"** The term "repair" (BDB 74) is literally "healing." It is used metaphorically of walls here and of the temple in II Chr. 24:13.

▣ **"the breaches began to be closed"** The gaps (cf. 6:1) in the wall from previous attacks were beginning to be repaired. This refers to those parts of the wall that were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar or newer walls destroyed earlier by the surrounding enemies (cf. Ezra 4:23-24).

This phrase shows the work was in progress, but not fully completed.

4:8 The surrounding nations' continued hostility and attempted force of arms violated the edict of Artaxerxes I, given to Nehemiah. For them this was a bold and dangerous political venture.

4:9 "we prayed. . .we set up a guard" Here is a beautiful balancing of faith and practicality. See verses 14 and 20 for the same concept.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:10-14

¹⁰Thus in Judah it was said,
"The strength of the burden bearers is failing,
Yet there is much rubbish;
And we ourselves are unable
To rebuild the wall."

¹¹Our enemies said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work." ¹²When the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times, "They will come up against us from every place where you may turn," ¹³then I stationed *men* in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, the exposed places, and I stationed the people in families with their swords, spears and bows. ¹⁴When I saw *their fear*, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: "Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses."

4:10 This is possibly a song that the laborers sang while doing their work, but it shows the effect that the threats of the surrounding enemies were having on the Jewish laborers.

4:11 This was the threat of a surprise attack.

4:12 "told us ten times" This also shows the degree of fear in the Jewish population. The phrase "ten times" seems to be used quite often in the OT for intensity (cf. Gen. 31:7; Num. 14:22; Job 19:3).

▣ "they will come up against us from every place where you may turn" This may be an allusion to v. 7 in that the enemies listed were from different compass directions (cf. note at 4:7). It implies a coordinated attack by all these groups.

The notes of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, p. 1436, suggests "every scheme," which involves a textual emendation. They also suggest that the next to last word of the sentence "you turn" should be emended to "they were plotting" (cf. NET Bible, p. 729).

4:13

NASB	"the exposed places"
NKJV	"at the openings"
NRSV	"in open places"
TEV	"where it was unfinished"
NJB	"at the point where it was lowest"

The term (BDB 850) is uncertain. The usual meaning is "shining," "glaring," "surface," but here that does not fit, unless one adopts NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 796, where it describes this place as barren due to exposure to the sun. Brown, Driver, and Briggs suggest "in glaring, bare places" (cf. JPSOA translation). At times like this we must remember the hermeneutical maxim, "context determines meaning." Therefore, I think NASB and NJB have the best option. Not openings in the wall, but low places where the enemy could see behind the wall and attempt to ascertain troop strength and location.

Another possibility is that the villagers surrounding Jerusalem had been intimidated (cf. v. 12) so the workers from these areas brought their families into Jerusalem. Nehemiah settled them in the bare areas. If this is true this text does not refer to soldiers attempting to show the strength of their numbers, but the location of the resettled villagers. Nehemiah positioned his troops so that they could be easily seen by the surrounding enemies who were looking from the high points outside the walls.

4:14 “remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers” Notice the dual (covenant) emphases of trust in God and the preparation for battle! This is exactly the truth also expressed in vv. 19 and 20.

This description of God occurs many times in the OT and several times in Nehemiah (cf. 1:5; 4:14; 9:32). See note at 1:5.

▣ **“Do not be afraid of them”** This VERB (BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) is used often by God or those who speak for Him to reassure His people of His presence and power against their enemies (e.g., Gen. 15:1; 26:24; 46:3; Exod. 14:13; Num. 14:19; 21:34; Deut. 1:21,29; 3:2,22; 7:18; 20:1,3; Josh. 8:1; 10:2,25).

This same root (BDB 431) is used in describing God as “awesome” (cf. 1:5; 4:14; 9:32). Therefore, appropriate fear/respect is due God, but those who serve Him should not have fear or respect for those who attack them and their God.

▣ **“remember the Lord”** The VERB (BDB 431, KB 422) is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE.

▣ **“fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses”** The VERB (BDB 269, KB 269) is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE. Although God is not specifically mentioned He is surely implied (cf. II Sam. 10:12).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:15-20

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. ¹⁶From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains *were* behind the whole house of Judah. ¹⁷Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took *their* load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. ¹⁸As for the builders, each *wore* his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter *stood* near me. ¹⁹I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. ²⁰At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

4:15 The battle was God’s! He was and is in control. His people must act in faith! As when God defeated the Canaanites, Israel had to prepare for battle, so too, here.

4:16 “my servants” There has been much discussion by commentators whether this refers to (1) the Jews (cf. v. 21), (2) Nehemiah’s special Persian helpers (cf. NJB), or (3) his relatives (cf. 4:21; 5:10,16). It seems that all three are referred to in v. 23.

▣ **“the captains were behind the whole house of Judah”** The term “captain” (BDB 978) is the general term for “chief,” “official,” “leader,” or “prince.” It is contextually impossible to tell to what group this refers.

The Hebrew Construct can be literal—they stood behind the wall and guarded the workers, or metaphorical—they supported the effort.

4:17-18 This shows the labor force’s precautions and preparations.

4:18 “while the trumpeter stood near me” The context (vv. 17-20) seems to imply that there was one trumpeter (singular) who followed Nehemiah (cf. TEV, NJB), but the Peshitta and Josephus in his *Antiq.*

11.5.8 seems to surmise that there were several trumpeters stationed around the circumference of the city, which seems to be more practical.

The trumpet was a shofar or ram's horn (Assyrian origin, wild goat). It was used for military and religious occasions. In later Judaism it had to be the left horn. It was soaked in water and stretched into a long spiral.

4:20 “Our God will fight for us” This is covenant language (cf. Exod. 14:14; Deut. 1:30; 3:22; 20:4; Josh. 10:14,42). YHWH was on their side. They were His special people.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 4:21-23

²¹ So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared.
²² At that time I also said to the people, "Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day." ²³ So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon *even* to the water.

4:21 “spears” This was a prized weapon during the United Monarchy, but during the Post exilic period it was the standard weapon of choice. It was not used as a thrown (i.e., javelin, which was shorter and lighter) weapon but as a thrusting weapon. It is linked with sword and bow in vv. 13, 16, but stands alone here as the basic weapon.

4:22 No one went home. They worked and slept at the wall.

4:23

NASB “each took his weapon *even* to the water”

NKJV “*except that everyone took them off for washing*”

NRSV “each kept his weapon in his right hand”

TEV “we all kept our weapons at hand”

NJB “each one kept his spear in his right hand”

The Hebrew literally is “each, his weapon, the waters.” The translations which use “right hand” (NRSV, TEV, NJB) require a textual emendation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why were the surrounding Persian governmental entities so against the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem?
2. How are verses 9, 14, and 20 to be interpreted, and what does it mean for our walk of faith?

NEHEMIAH 5

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
	4:21-5:5		
Nehemiah Deals with Opposition		Oppression of the Poor	The Social Problems of Nehemiah, He Vindicates His Administration
5:1-5		5:1-2	5:1-5
		5:3	
		5:4-5	
5:6-13	5:6-13	5:6-7a	5:6-13
		5:7b-8	
		5:9-11	
		5:12a	
		5:12b-13a	
		5:13b	
The Generosity of Nehemiah		Nehemiah's Unselfishness	
5:14-18	5:14-19	5:14-18	5:14-16
			5:17-18
5:19		5:19	5:19

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:1-5

¹Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. ²For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live." ³There were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine." ⁴Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax *on* our fields and our vineyards. ⁵Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

5:1 "there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers" The term "outcry" (BDB 858) is used often of an outcry heard by God (e.g., Exod. 3:7,9; 22:23; I Sam. 9:16; Job 27:9; 34:28; Isa. 5:7; Zeph. 1:10). Often this is in a legal sense (cf. The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1694). Notice the legal term "control" in v. 7.

The rich Jews were exploiting the circumstances of the rebuilding of the walls to gouge their Hebrew brothers (cf. v. 7). This was a serious problem which was undermining the economic and military stability of the new nation.

5:2 for there were those who said Their statement has two COHORTATIVES and an IMPERFECT used as a COHORTATIVE. There were three main complaints: (1) the physical needs of a large population during a famine (cf. v. 3); (2) they had mortgaged their property for food (the necessities of life); and (3) they had to borrow money to pay the king's tax (cf. Ezra 4:13). The problem was not usury (Jews loaning money to Jews and charging interest, cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36), but that the rich Jews were demanding a pledge (a physical guarantee) until the loan was paid. This meant a forfeiture of property.

5:3 "we are mortgaging" This VERB (BDB 786, KB 876 *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) means "to give in pledge." The common people were being forced to use their ancestral land, even their homes, as surety for a loan.

5:4 "the king's tax" If food was not the need then governmental revenue was. Persia expected revenue from her provinces (cf. Ezra 4:13) and assessed a land tax.

5:5 "we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves" The writings of Moses allowed Jews in debt to sell themselves as servants, but not slaves (cf. Exod. 21:2-6; Lev. 25:39-43; Deut. 15:12-18).

Debtors also were forced to use their children as payment to creditors (e.g., Exod. 21:7-11; II Kgs. 4:1).



NASB "forced into bondage"
NKJV "are brought into slavery"
NRSV "have been ravished"
TEV, NJB "have already been sold as slaves"

This VERB (BDB 461, KB 460, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE) means "subdue" (cf. Gen. 1:28), but can mean "assault" (e.g., Esth. 7:8). The context already mentioned "slavery," so this is an intensified attack against selected young women (implication is that they were turned into sex slaves). Brown, Driver, and Briggs (p. 461, VERB *kbs* #2) says that this term is related to 'gh (cf. Ezek. 23:11).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:6-13

⁶Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. ⁷I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. ⁸I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. ⁹Again I said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? ¹⁰And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury. ¹¹Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them." ¹²Then they said, "We will give *it* back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say." So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. ¹³I also shook out the front of my garment and said, "Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" And they praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise.

5:6 “outcry” This is a different term (BDB 277) from v. 1, but it is related (cf. 9:9). Nehemiah was extremely angry at these accusations and exploitations by the wealthy Jews. He himself was a wealthy Jew, but he did not take advantage (cf. 10,14-19).

5:7 “I consulted with myself” If *mlk* is taken in its Aramaic sense (cf. Dan. 4:24) then this is an idiom for “thought carefully” (BDB 576 III, KB 591, *Niphal* IMPERFECT); if in the Hebrew sense of *mlk* then “I controlled my feelings” (BDB 573 II, cf. REB).



NASB “contended”
NKJV “rebuked”
NRSV “brought charges”
TEV “denounced”
NJB “reprimanded”

This term (BDB 936, KB 1224, *Qal* IMPERFECT) can mean (1) bring a legal case against; (2) agitate the mind (Aramaic); or (3) cry, shout (Syriac). In this context #1 fits best (cf. NASB, NRSV).



NASB, NKJV,
NIV “exacting usury”
NRSV “taking interest”
TEV “oppressing”
NJB “imposing a burden”
NET “seizing the collateral”
JPSOA “pressing claims on loans”

The term *ms'* (BDB 673), usually translated “usury,” is used only in Nehemiah (cf. 5:7,10; 10:32). A closely related term, *ms'h* (BDB 673) is used several times in the OT for a pledge or security for a loan (e.g., Deut. 24:10). The question is then, does this context refer to (1) charging interest to fellow Jews, which is a violation of Mosaic law (cf. Exod. 22:25-27; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:19-20; 24:10-13) or (2) quickly seizing the pledge of the poor and defaulting the loan?

▣ **“I held a great assembly against them”** Nehemiah called a “town meeting” to settle (legal setting, “content”) a community issue (cf. v. 3). He could have made a decision administratively, but hoped that the fear of God would cause true repentance and reform.

5:8 “redeemed” This term (BDB 888, KB 1111, *Qal* PERFECT) speaks of buying someone back from slavery or helplessness. Nehemiah admits that he was redeeming Jews from foreign bondage (cf. Lev. 25:48), but the horrendous setting of chapter 5 is that Jews were forcing their brothers into bondage! See Special Topic: Redeem/Ransom at Neh. 1:10.

5:9 “walk” “Walk” (BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is a biblical idiom for lifestyle faith. It develops from the concept of God’s word as a path to follow (e.g., Ps. 1:1; 119:101,105; Prov. 1:15; 4:14). The first title for the church in Acts was “the Way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22; and possibly 18:2-26).

▣ **“in the fear of God”** One’s knowledge of God must issue in an awesome respect for Him. To know Him and then act inappropriately (the actions of God’s people reflect on the character of God Himself) is a serious violation of revelation (cf. Luke 12:48).

▣ **“the reproach of the nations, our enemies”** These wealthy Jews were playing into the hand of Israel’s enemies (cf. 4:4). This was either (1) a known plot to undermine the new political structure set up by Nehemiah or (2) greed. Their reaction (cf. vv. 11-12) shows #2 is correct.

5:10 Nehemiah and those associated with him are acting in exactly the opposite way from these wealthy, elite business men.

▣ **“my servants”** Literally this is the term (BDB 654) “boy,” “lad,” or “youth,” but it is used regularly of servants (cf. 4:16,22,23; 5:10,15,16; 6:5; 13:19; Esth. 2:2; 3:13; 6:3,5).

▣ **“Please, let us leave off this usury”** This is a *Qal* COHORTATIVE. This may refer to (1) loaning money with interest (cf. v. 11) or (2) confiscation of pledges (cf. v. 7), which was legal, but was being abused at this point (cf. Exod. 22:25-27; Deut. 23:19-20). Because they could does not mean they should!

5:11 “Please, give back to them this very day their fields” The VERB (BDB 996, KB 1427, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE) is often used for repentance (i.e., “turn back”), but here for “return” (cf. v. 12). Nehemiah was trying to embarrass these rich Jews in the presence of the assembled group to do that which was morally right. In a sense this was an enactment of Jubilee freedom (cf. Lev. 25:10). He is using himself and his associates as an example.

▣
NASB, NKJV **“the hundredth part of the money”**
NRSV **“and the interest on the money”**
TEV
NJB **“cancel the claim”**

This is a difficult Hebrew phrase. Some think it means (1) a scribal error for the word “loan”; (2) a reference to a monthly percent of interest being charged; or (3) the wealthy lenders were to give not only the land back, but the means by which the poor could live until the next crop was harvested.

5:12 “took an oath” The VERB (BDB 989, KB 1396, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) is always used of humans swearing to God. Nehemiah did not trust these wealthy Jews, but he demanded that they take an oath in God’s name. What they said they would do (BDB 793 I, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERFECT), they now swore they

would do (BDB 793 I, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT). This was connected with a curse if they did not perform what they promised. The curse of v. 13 (i.e., shaking out one's garment [cf. Acts 18:6], which is a play on "shake out" used twice of Nehemiah and God) is an acted out curse of emptiness and poverty.

5:13 "This may God shake out. . .even thus may he be shaken out" These are both IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense seeking God's judgment for those who violate their pledge.

▣ **"Amen"** "Amen" (BDB 53) is a form of the OT word for "faith" (cf. Hab. 2:4). The root's original etymology meant "to be firm" or "to be sure." It primarily refers to the trustworthiness of God. The term developed in Jewish usage into an affirmation like we use it today and as it is used here (cf. Num. 5:22; Deut. 27:26).

SPECIAL TOPIC: AMEN

I. OLD TESTAMENT

- A. The term "Amen" is from a Hebrew word for truth (*emeth*) or truthfulness (*emun, emunah*) and faith or faithfulness.
- B. Its etymology is from a person's physical stable stance (BDB 52-54). The opposite would be one who is unstable, slipping (cf. Deut. 28:64-67; Ps. 40:2; 73:18; Jer. 23:12) or stumbling (cf. Ps. 73:2). From this literal usage developed the metaphorical extension of faithful, trustworthy, loyal, and dependable (cf. Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4).
- C. Special usages:
 1. a pillar, II Kgs. 18:16 (I Tim. 3:15)
 2. assurance, Exod. 17:12
 3. steadiness, Exod. 17:12
 4. stability, Isa. 33:6; 34:5-7
 5. true, I Kgs. 10:6; 17:24; 22:16; Prov. 12:22
 6. firm, II Chr. 20:20; Isa. 7:9
 7. reliable (Torah), Ps. 119:43,142,151,168
- D. In the OT two other Hebrew terms are used for active faith:
 1. *bth*, trust (BDB 105)
 2. *yr'*, fear, respect, worship (BDB 431, cf. Gen. 22:12)
- E. From the sense of trust or trustworthiness developed a liturgical usage which was used to affirm a true or trustworthy statement of another (cf. Deut. 27:15-26; Neh. 8:6; Ps. 41:13; 70:19; 89:52; 106:48).
- F. The theological key to this term is not mankind's faithfulness, but YHWH's (cf. Exod. 34:6; Deut. 32:4; Ps. 108:4; 115:1; 117:2; 138:2). Fallen humanity's only hope is the merciful faithful covenant loyalty of YHWH and His promises.

Those who know YHWH are to be like Him (cf. Hab. 2:4). The Bible is history and a record of God restoring His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27) in mankind. Salvation restores mankind's ability to have intimate fellowship with God. This is why we were created.

II. NEW TESTAMENT

- A. The use of the word "amen" as a concluding liturgical affirmation of the trustworthiness of a statement is common in the NT (cf. I Cor. 14:16; II Cor. 1:20; Rev. 1:7; 5:14; 7:12)

- B. The use of the term as a close to a prayer is common in the NT (cf. Rom. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; 6:18; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; II Thess. 3:18; I Tim. 1:17; 6:16; II Tim. 4:18).
- C. Jesus is the only one who used the term (often doubled in John) to introduce significant statements (cf. Luke 4:24; 12:37; 18:17,29; 21:32; 23:43)
- D. It is used as a title for Jesus in Rev. 3:14 (possibly a title of YHWH from Isa. 65:16).
- E. The concept of faithfulness or faith, trustworthiness, or trust is expressed in the Greek term *pistos* or *pistis*, which is translated into English as trust, faith, believe.

▣ **“they praised the Lord”** “they” must refer to both the wealthy and poor Jews (“all the assembly”).

▣ **before then the people did according to this promise”** It is unusual that “the people” here refers to the wealthy Jews. The phrase is usually used of the people as a whole (cf. v. 15).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:14-19

¹⁴ Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, *for* twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food *allowance*. ¹⁵ But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. ¹⁷ Moreover, *there were* at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. ¹⁸ Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox *and* six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine *were furnished* in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food *allowance*, because the servitude was heavy on this people. ¹⁹ Remember me, O my God, for good, *according to all that I have done for this people*.

5:14 “for twelve years” This was 445 to 433 B.C. This was the time of Nehemiah as governor of Judah in Jerusalem. The following verses discuss his personal use of his privileges and fortunes during this period of governmental service.

▣ **“I nor my kinsmen”** This is another difficult phrase. It may refer to (1) Persian officials; (2) blood relatives; or (3) helpers. The same ones seem to be referred to in v. 10.

5:15 “laid burdens on the people” The VERB (BDB 457, KB 455, *Hipil* PERFECT) is a metaphor derived from placing a heavy yoke on a domestic animal (e.g., I Kgs. 12:10,14; II Chr. 10:10,14; Isa. 47:6). This is the non-religious use of the root *kbd* for “glory,” which means “heavy” and “dignity.”

▣ **“bread and wine besides the forty shekels”** This list of revenue can be understood in several ways: as (1) the daily requirements of the governor (LXX, TEV, NJB); (2) the yearly taxation on families; or (3) both (Peshitta, NKJV, NIV).

▣ **“I did not do so because of the fear of God”** This is a direct contrast to the wealthy Jews’ attitudes and methods (cf. v. 9).

5:16 “we did not buy land” Verses 13 - 19 show that Nehemiah did not abuse either his position or the circumstances of the Jewish nation during his time as governor.

▣ **“all my servants”** The phrase is much like “my kinsmen” in v. 14. To whom it refers is uncertain. This same group is mentioned in 4:16,21 (“we carried on the work”) and 5:10,14.

Those related (by blood, office, or service) to Nehemiah acted in the same way as he did. This is exactly opposite of the previous governors (i.e., v. 15, “even their servants domineered the people”).

5:17 Nehemiah as governor was required to entertain officials from other provinces and leaders from Judah. He did this (1) at his own expense or (2) he did not partake of the food allotted. Because of v. 14 option #2 is best.

5:18 “the servitude was heavy on this people” Nehemiah explains why he acted with such selflessness during this period: (1) the taxation was heavy (cf. v. 15), and (2) he wanted to please God (cf. vv. 9,15,19).

5:19 This has been Nehemiah’s prayer (“remember me,” *Qal* IMPERATIVE) from the beginning (cf. 1:11; 13:31). Nehemiah was a man of integrity, faith, and prayer!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What were the rich Jews doing to their poor brothers in chapter 5?
2. Was what they were doing legal or illegal according to Mosaic law?
3. Why did Nehemiah want them to promise with an oath and threaten with a curse?

NEHEMIAH 6

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Conspiracy Against Nehemiah		Plots Against Nehemiah	The Intrigues of Nehemiah's Enemies, the Wall is Finished
6:1-9a	6:1-9	6:1-3 6:4 6:5-7 6:8 6:9	6:1-9
6:9b			
6:10-13	6:10-14	6:10 6:11 6:12-13	6:10 6:11-13
6:14		6:14	6:14
The Wall Completed		The Conclusion of the Work	
6:15-16	6:15-7:4	6:15-16	6:15-16
6:17-7:3		6:17-7:3	6:17-7:3

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:1-9

¹Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, ²then Sanballat and Geshem sent *a message* to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono." But they were planning to harm me. ³So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" ⁴They sent *messages* to me four times in this manner, and I answered them in the same way. ⁵Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand. ⁶In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports. ⁷You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together." ⁸Then I sent *a message* to him saying, "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind." ⁹For all of them were *trying* to frighten us, thinking, "They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

6:1 The enemies have been listed earlier in 1:10 (Sanballat and Tobiah); 2:19 (Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem); 4:1,3 (Sanballat and Tobiah); 4:7 (Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites) and here (Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and "the rest of our enemies").

▣ **"Gershem the Arab"** His name is spelled differently in v. 6 (BDB 177 I), based on the difference between Arabic grammar and Hebrew pronunciation.. Tradition says that he was the king of Kedar (province of northwest Arabia, cf. R. K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times*, p. 284) or the southern Arabian area. He was a very powerful political person in the Persian empire. For a good brief discussion see NIDOTTE, vol. 4, pp. 675-676.

▣ **"although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates"** This seems to be out of chronological order to 3:1,3,6,13. Chapter 3 is the summary of the entire period, while chapters 4 - 6 are special accounts which fit in into this overall summary.

6:2 **"Come, let us meet"** The first VERB is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE and the second a *Niphal* COHORTATIVE (same patters of VERBS in v. 7). The enemies were trying to manipulate Nehemiah.

▣

NASB, NJB

NAB, REV,
NET

"Chephirim"

LXX, VULGATE

NKJV, NRSV
TEV, NIV

"one of the villages"

The inhabitants of this city were part of the conspiracy of the Gibeonites in tricking Joshua into a peace treaty (cf. Josh. 9:17). They were Hivites (cf. Josh. 9:7). This city was included in the tribal allocation of Benjamin (cf. Josh. 18:26). People from this city are mentioned as returning from Babylonian exile with Zerubbabel and Joshua (cf. Ezra 2:25; Neh. 7:29).

It is PLURAL in this verse, and because the same three Hebrew letters *kpr* (BDB 499) means “village,” some English translations translate it as such (NKJV, NRSV, TEV). It is also possible that the term means “young lion” (BDB 498), which may be literal or figurative for fierce warriors (e.g., Jer. 2:15; 4:7; 50:17).

▣ **“in the plain of Ono”** This Benjaminite city was the new home for Lod, Hadid, and Ono (cf. Ezra 2:33; Neh. 7:37), who returned with Zerubbabel. They had established villages and became craftsmen because in Neh. 11:35 Ono is called the valley of craftsmen. It was located on the western boundary of the new province of Judah, about 27 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

▣ **“but they were planning to harm me”** This is Nehemiah’s estimation of the intentions of these men who had proven themselves to be enemies (cf. 4:1; 6:8-9). The VERB (BDB 362, KB 359, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is frequently used of “planning against,” “plotting,” “scheming” (e.g., I Sam. 18:25; Ps. 10:2; 35:4; Jer. 11:19).

6:5-9 “Then Sanballat sent his servant to” This was the same old trick of accusing Nehemiah of treason. However, the repeated request (four times) and an open letter (brought by Geshem, cf. v. 2; 2:19) showed that it was a political threat.

6:5 “an open letter” The implication of the personal, governmental letter not being officially sealed was to make the contents known to all. The purpose was political intimidation. It had worked before (Ezra 4), maybe it would work again.

6:6 “the Jews are planning to rebel” This is the same accusation as 2:19 and Ezra 4 and is a litany of charges of political plotting and rebellion.

6:7 “you have also appointed prophets” Another means of threatening Nehemiah was claiming that he had political or even Messianic pretensions (cf. II Sam. 7). This shows that Sanballat was somewhat familiar with Jewish Scriptures.

▣ **“now it will be reported to the king according to these reports”** The king in this phrase refers to Artaxerxes I. This is the same rumor game that these enemies had used before. Here it is just the threat of sending a report (i.e., “So come now, let us . . . take counsel together”), because now the Persian king had ruled in favor of the rebuilding of the city’s wall (cf. 2:1-8,9).

6:8 “you are inventing them in your own mind” The VERB (BDB 94, KB 109, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) is from Aramaic. It is used only twice in the OT and means “to devise” or “to invent or make up” in a negative sense (cf. I Kgs. 12:33). The related two letter root (BDB 95) means “empty” or “idle talk.” The BDB adds “especially collective idea of imaginary pretensions or claims” (cf. Isa. 16:6; 44:25; Jer. 48:30).

6:9 “But now, O God, strengthen my hands” Notice in NASB 1970 translation that the term “O God” is in italics (assumed to be a prayer, as does KJV), which means that it is not in the original text but is supplied for English readers. However, the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Peshitta, and the Arabic, followed by the NJB, NAB, NEB, NET, have “I strengthen my hands all the more.” This book is filled with Nehemiah’s prayers (cf. vv. 14,16)! See note at 4:9.

The VERB (BDB 304, KB 302) is a *Piel* IMPERATIVE.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:10-14

¹⁰ When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night." ¹¹But I said, "Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." ¹²Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered *his* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me. ¹⁴Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were *trying* to frighten me.

6:10 "Shemaiah" He is called "the son of Delaiah," who is mentioned in Ezra 2:59-60 as a family of priests who could not document their ancestry. Apparently this was a false prophet (cf. vv. 12,14) who was hired by the surrounding nations (cf. vv. 12-13) to intimidate Nehemiah. Why he was confined to his home has been the subject of great debate: (1) it is related to Num. 19: 11-22; (2) he had advocated anointing Nehemiah as Davidic king and, therefore, caused him to be treasonous to Persia (cf. v. 7); or (3) it was a symbolic act showing what Nehemiah should do.

The false prophets' message was spoken in poetic verse (cf. NJB, NAB, REB, JPSOA, *Anchor Bible Commentary*, vol. 14, p. 136).

With Shemaiah restricted to his house Nehemiah would have to come to him, appearing to seek divine information and guidance. This may have been part of the premeditated plan to trick and destroy him. Shemaiah even delivers the message in typical prophetic poetry.

▣ **"Let us meet together. . .let us close the doors"** The first VERB (BDB 416, KB 419) is a *Niphal* IMPERATIVE used in a COHORTATIVE sense. The second (BDB 688, KB 742) is a *Qal* COHORTATIVE.

▣ **"within the temple"** Nehemiah was not only a layman (Num. 18:7), but may have been a eunuch (Lev. 21:17-24; Deut. 23:1), both of which disqualified him from going into the inner parts of the temple. This was a way to discredit Nehemiah.

There is a provision in Moses' writings for someone to flee to the sacrificial altar for safety (cf. Exod. 21:13, 14; 1 Kgs. 1:50-53; 2:28ff.)

6:11 The words of Nehemiah express the feelings of every generation of godly leadership; not an audacity, but a confidence of God's call, God's will, God's presence! Faith issues in confidence not in ourselves, but in our God and His purposes (e.g., Dan. 3:16-18; 4:20-22).

6:12 "then I perceived that surely God had not sent him" Nehemiah's personal relationship with God and his knowledge of God's will and word allowed him to evaluate the content of Shemaiah's words. God wants to equip all of His children to do the same thing!

6:13 Nehemiah associates fear with inappropriate actions, which he labels as sin (BDB 306, *Qal* PERFECT, "to miss the mark"). Notice that fear can lead to sinful acts! Faith and trust in God's presence, promises, and provision are crucial!

6:14 "Remember" Nehemiah called on God to remember (BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal* IMPERATIVE)

1. His word, 1:8
2. him (i.e., Nehemiah), 5:19; 13:14,22,31
3. his enemies (i.e., Nehemiah), 6:14; 13:29

and they are to remember that God is a great and awesome God, 4:14.

▣ **“according to these works of theirs”** Nehemiah lived under the first covenant of performance-based fellowship. The “two ways” of Wisdom Literature (e.g., Ps. 1; Prov. 4:10-19) characterize his theological understanding. He would have readily agreed with Matthew 7 or the book of James. The goal of our relationship with a Holy God is a holy life! The problem is how does sinful humanity achieve this goal? The New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38 shows the new pattern of grace-based faith, faith-received righteousness, which should issue in obedience (cf. Luke 6:46). The goal is the same, the means has changed.

▣ **“Noadiah”** This is a feminine name (BDB 418, although there is a masculine usage in Ezra 8:33) and shows the acceptability of female prophets. She happened to be a false prophetess. She was one of several false prophets active in Judah in Nehemiah’s day.

SPECIAL TOPIC: WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

I. The Old Testament

A. Culturally women were considered property.

1. included in list of property (Exod. 20:17)
2. treatment of slave women (Exod. 21:7-11)
3. women’s vows annulable by socially responsible male (Num. 30)
4. women as spoils of war (Deut. 20:10-14; 21:10-14)

B. Practically there was a mutuality

1. male and female made in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27)
2. honor father and mother (Exod. 20:12 [Deut. 5:16])
3. reverence mother and father (Lev. 19:3; 20:9)
4. men and women could be Nazarites (Num. 6:1-2)
5. daughters have right of inheritance (Num. 27:1-11)
6. part of covenant people (Deut. 29:10-12)
7. observe teaching of father and mother (Prov. 1:8; 6:20)
8. sons and daughters of Heman (Levite family) led music in Temple (I Chr. 25:5-6)
9. son and daughter will prophesy in new age (Joel 2:28-29)

C. Women were in leadership roles

1. Moses’ sister, Miriam, called a prophetess (Exod. 15:20-21)
2. women gifted by God to construct Tabernacle (Exod. 35:25-26)
3. a woman, Deborah, also a prophetess (cf. Jdgs. 4:4), led all the tribes (Jdgs. 4:4-5; 5:7)
4. Huldah was a prophetess whom King Josiah had to read and interpret the newly-found “Book of the Law” (II Kings 22:14; II Chr. 34:22-27)
5. Ruth, godly woman was ancestress of David
6. Esther, godly woman saved Jews in Persia

II. The New Testament

A. Culturally women in both Judaism and the Greco-Roman world were second class citizens with few rights or privileges (the exception was Macedonia)

B. Women in leadership roles

1. Elizabeth and Mary, godly women available to God (Luke 1-2)
2. Anna, godly woman serving at the Temple (Luke 2:36)

3. Lydia, believer and leader of a house church (Acts 16:14,40)
4. Philip's four daughters, were prophetesses (Acts 21:8-9)
5. Phoebe, deaconess of church at Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1)
6. Prisca (Priscilla), Paul's fellow-worker and teacher of Apollos (Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:3)
7. Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, Nereus' sister, several women co-workers of Paul (Rom. 16:6-16)
8. Junia (KJV), possibly a woman apostle (Rom. 16:7)
9. Euodia and Syntyche, co-workers with Paul (Phil. 4:2-3)

III. How does a modern believer balance the divergent biblical examples?

- A. How does one determine historical or cultural truths which only apply to the original context from eternal truths valid for all churches, all believers of all ages?
 1. We must take the intent of the original inspired author very seriously. The Bible is the Word of God and the only source for faith and practice
 2. We must deal with the obviously historically conditioned inspired texts
 - a. the cultus (i.e., ritual and liturgy) of Israel
 - b. first century Judaism
 - c. Paul's obviously historically conditioned statements in I Corinthians
 - (1) the legal system of pagan Rome
 - (2) remaining a slave (7:20-24)
 - (3) celibacy (7:1-35)
 - (4) virgins (7:36-38)
 - (5) food sacrificed to an idol (8; 10:23-33)
 - (6) unworthy actions at Lord's Supper (11)
 3. God fully and clearly revealed Himself to a particular culture, a particular day. We must take seriously the revelation, but not every aspect of its historical accommodation. The Word of God was written in the words of men.
- B. Biblical interpretation must seek the original author's intent. What was he saying to his day? This is foundational and crucial for proper interpretation, but then we must apply this to our own day. Now, here is the problem with women in leadership (the real interpretive problem may be defining the term. Were there more ministries than pastors who were seen as leadership? Were deaconesses or prophetesses seen as leaders?) It is quite clear that Paul, in I Cor. 14:34-35 and I Tim. 2:9-15, is asserting that women should not take the lead in public worship! But how do I apply that today? I do not want Paul's culture or my culture to silence God's Word and will. Possibly Paul's day was too limiting, but also my day may be too open. I feel so uncomfortable saying that Paul's words and teachings are conditional, first century, local situational truths. Who am I that I should let my mind or my culture negate an inspired author?!

However, what do I do when there are biblical examples of women leaders (even in Paul's writings, cf. Romans 16)? A good example of this is Paul's discussion of public worship in I Cor. 11-14. In 11:5 he seems to allow women's preaching and praying in public worship with their heads covered, yet in 14:34-35, he demands they remain silent! There were deaconesses (cf. Rom. 16:1) and prophetesses (cf. Acts 21:9). It is this diversity that allows me freedom to identify Paul's comments (as relates to restrictions on women) as limited to first century Corinth and Ephesus. In both churches, there were problems with

women exercising their new-found freedom (cf. Bruce Winter, *Corinth After Paul Left*), which could have caused difficulty for their church in reaching their society for Christ. Their freedom had to be limited so that the gospel could be more effective.

My day is just the opposite of Paul's. In my day the gospel might be limited if trained, articulate women are not allowed to share the gospel, not allowed to lead! What is the ultimate goal of public worship? Is it not evangelism and discipleship? Can God be honored and pleased with women leaders? The Bible as a whole seems to say "yes"!

I want to yield to Paul; my theology is primarily Pauline. I do not want to be overly influenced or manipulated by modern feminism! However, I feel the church has been slow to respond to obvious biblical truths, like the inappropriateness of slavery, racism, bigotry, and sexism. It has also been slow to respond appropriately to the abuse of women in the modern world. God in Christ set free the slave and the woman. I dare not let a culture-bound text reshackle them.

One more point: as an interpreter I know that Corinth was a very disrupted church. The charismatic gifts were prized and flaunted. Women may have been caught up in this. I also believe that Ephesus was being affected by false teachers who were taking advantage of women and using them as surrogate speakers in the house churches of Ephesus.

C. Suggestions for further reading

How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth by Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart (pp. 61-77)

Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics by Gordon Fee

Hard Sayings of the Bible by Walter C. Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce and Manfred T. Branch (pp. 613-616; 665-667)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:15-19

¹⁵So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of *the month* Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. ¹⁷Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's *letters* came to them. ¹⁸For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. ¹⁹Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

6:15 "the wall was completed" This VERB (BDB 1022, KB 1532, *Qal* IMPERFECT) has two distinct meanings in *Qal*.

1. have satisfaction
2. be completed (cf. I Kgs. 9:25)

This term is an Akkadian word for "the act or state of well-being, of being intact, safe, or complete (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 4, p. 130). This is the root *slm* from which the famous Hebrew greeting, *shalom*, is derived.

The wall was finished, complete, and it was good; it provided safety; it provided peace of mind.

▣ **"Elul"** See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars at Ezra 3:1.

▣ **"in fifty-two days"** Josephus tells us in his book, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 11.5.8, that it took two years and four months. It is possible from archaeological evidence and historical precedence that a city's

walls could be built in this short a time period in a functional way, but not with normal construction. We learn from Kathleen Kenyon's archaeological discoveries in Jerusalem that the nine foot wall on the eastern side was done with rough construction as if it were done rapidly.

6:16 “saw it” This is italicized in the NASB (1970), but the textual problem is that the MT has a word that can be understood as *yr'* (afraid, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament*, by John Joseph Owens, vol. 3, p. 69) or *r'h* (see *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, edited by John R. Kohlenberger III, vol. 3, p. 231). The MT, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate have “were afraid” (BDB 431, *Qal* IMPERFECT). As Nehemiah prayed in 4:4, the fear that they used to influence the Jews was now returned to them because they saw the hand of God helping the Jews in this amazingly rapid rebuilding of the walls.



NASB “they lost their confidence”

NKJV “they were very disheartened”

NRSV “fell greatly in their own esteem”

TEV “they lost face”

NJB “they thought it a wonderful thing”

The VERB (BDB 656, KB 709, *Qal* IMPERFECT) has such a wide semantic field. Notice the difference between the NASB, NKJV, and NJB. The NJB involved a textual emendation (i.e., replaces *npl* [to fall] with *kl'* [to be wonderful]). The context demands a negative response.

The second part of the phrase is literally “in eyes of them.” “Eyes” here is an idiom of self perception. This is the Oriental concept of “lost face” (TEV).

6:17 “Tobiah” His name is Jewish and he is one of the major antagonists of Nehemiah. His technique was to infiltrate the Jewish wealthy class (“nobles”) through marriages (cf. v. 8) so as to influence Nehemiah's plans.

6:18 “Arah” He is mentioned in Ezra 2:5; Neh. 7:10; and I Esdras 5:10.

▣ **“Meshullam”** This name refers to twenty different people in the OT. He is mentioned in Neh. 3:4,30 as someone who worked on two sections of the wall. Here we are told his daughter marries Jehohanan, who was Tobiah's son (IDB, vol. 2, p. 811).

6:19 “then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me” The Jewish leaders tried to make Tobiah look good in the eyes of Nehemiah, but his true self is seen in this verse. Even the high priest was involved in this conspiracy (cf. 13:4). He (cf. v. 18) was the son-in-law to Shechaniah, possibly the priest of 3:29 or 12:3, but uncertain because the name was so common during this period (cf. Ezra 8:3,5).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How did Sanballat try to discourage the rebuilding of the walls?
2. What was the prophet in 6:10-14 trying to do?

NEHEMIAH 7

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	TEV
The Wall Completed (6:15-7:3)	Troubles for the Builders (4:1-7:5)	The Conclusion of the Work (6:15-7:3)	The Intrigues of Nehemiah's Enemies (6:1-7:3)
The Captives Who Returned to Jerusalem 7:4-38	A Census of the First Return 7:5 7:6-38	The List of Those Who Returned From Exile 7:4-5 7:6-7 7:8-25 7:26-38	The Repopulation of Jerusalem 7:4-5 List of the First Exiles to Return 7:6-7a 7:7b-38
7:39-42	7:39-42	7:39-42	7:39-42
7:43-45	7:43-45	7:43-45	7:43 7:44 7:45
7:46-60	7:46-56 7:57-59 7:60	7:46-56 7:57-59 7:60	7:46-56 7:57-60
7:61-65	7:61-65	7:61-62 7:63-65	7:61-65
7:66-69	7:66-69	7:66-69	7:66-68 7:69-71 (vv. 68, 69 just listed at v. 68)
7:70-73a	7:70-72 7:73	7:70-72 7:73	7:72

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This list is very similar to the list of Ezra 2 (“those who came up first,” v. 5, also note I Esdras 5:8-42).
- B. They were probably originally based on the same official list (Persian or Jewish), but they are not exactly the same. Names are spelled differently and some names are added and omitted. The stated numbers also do not always agree.
- C. The list is divided into categories of people:
 1. men of Israel, 7:7b-38
 2. priests, 7:39-42
 3. Levites, 7:43-45
 4. temple servants, 7:46-56
 5. sons of Solomon’s slaves, 7:57-60
 6. those of undocumentable ancestry, 7:64-65
 - a. laymen, 7:61-62
 - b. priests, 7:63
- D. Summaries
 1. of those who returned, 7:66-67
 2. of the offerings, 7:70-72
 - a. Persian
 - b. Jewish
- E. See notes at Ezra 2 on specific names and categories of returnees
- F. I Esdras (also known as Esdras A) is a Greek version of Josiah’s Passover (II Chr. 35,36) through Nehemiah 7 (which is paralleled in Ezra 2). It differs from the MT and the LXX. For a good brief discussion see R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 1194-1199,

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:1-4

¹Now when the wall was rebuilt and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed, ²then I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah the commander of the fortress, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. ³Then

I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing *guard*, let them shut and bolt the doors. Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post, and each in front of his own house." ⁴Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few and the houses were not built.

7:1 “the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites” Some scholars see this as misplaced because it seems to refer to the temple and not the city. Yet, we learn later, that the Levitical gatekeepers were also appointed to the city gates because of the lack of people willing to live in Jerusalem (cf. v. 4).

7:2 “I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah” These could be two forms of one name (cf. BDB 337); both mean “YHWH has been gracious.” However, in v. 3 it says, “I said to them” which confirms that there were two men involved. Hanani is first mentioned in 1:2 as Nehemiah’s brother and source of his information about the condition of Jerusalem. The name Hananiah also appears in the list of 10:23.

▣ **“the commander of the fortress”** Most walled cities had an inner fortress. It is also used to describe Susa in 1:1 and Esth. 1:2,5, etc). Jerusalem’s citadel was close to the temple (cf. 2:8), possibly incorporating the towers, the Hundred and Hananel (cf. 3:1). The same word “fortress” (BDB 108) was used of the temple itself in I Chr. 29:1,19.

▣

NASB, NRSV	“he was a faithful man”
NKJV	“he was a faithful man”
TEV	“Hananiah was a reliable”
NJB	“he was a more trustworthy”

The term (BDB 54) for “faith” in the OT has the connotation of

1. reliability, sureness (e.g., “the right way,” Gen. 24:48)
2. stability, continuance, faithfulness (e.g., Neh. 7:2; Isa. 38:3)
3. truth (e.g., Esth. 9:30; Jer. 33:6)

This same term is often used of God (e.g., 9:33; Exod. 34:6; Isa. 38:18,19; Zech. 8:8).

▣ **“feared God more than many”** This term (BDB 431, KB 432, *Qal* PERFECT [*OT Parsing Guide*, p. 380], but *Qal* PARTICIPLE [*Analytical Key to OT*, p. 69]) is used several times in Nehemiah and in several senses.

1. *Qal* form
 - a. fear God, 1:11; 7:2
 - b. fear men, 2:2; 4:14; 6:13
2. *Niphal* form
God as awesome/fearful, 1:5; 4:14; 9:32
3. the NOUN, fear of God, 5:9,15

Effective leaders are those who are trustworthy and revere YHWH!

7:3 This verse has two IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense (“be opened,” “shut”) and one IMPERATIVE (“bolt”).

The New English Bible and REV think it refers to closing the gates during the noon time rest, while the RSV, TEV, and NJB imply that the gates were to be opened late (well after sunrise) and closed early (well before sundown). Whatever the specifics of this verse mean it is obvious that special care was given to the opening, closing, and guarding of these gates during this period.

Notice how the residents and businesses were to guard the entrances closest to their homes and shops. This is the same personal interest used to construct the walls. The NIV and the NET Bibles understand this aspect to relate to the separate guard stations, one at the gates and one by their homes.

7:4 “the city was large and spacious” This is exactly opposite of the new size of the reduced city. What can this mean? It must relate to the number of people living there, not a comparison of the previous size of the city or there was plenty of room for new houses and shops (an invitation for people to move into the city). Remember context, not lexicons, determine word meaning!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:5

⁵Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogies. Then I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first in which I found the following record:

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:6-7a

⁶These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city, ⁷who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.

7:6 “each to his city” This links up with 7:73a (“all Israel lived in their cities”). This was important because Nehemiah divided the responsibilities for building and wall construction (and guarding and protecting) by

1. original city of the returnees’ parents
2. residence in Jerusalem
3. guild/trade
4. tribe (Levites, priests)

7:7a These are the main leaders and families.

▣ **“Azariah”** In Ezra 2:2 this is replaced by “Seraiah,” in I Esdras 5:8, “Zaraias.”

▣ **“Raamiah”** In Ezra 2:2 this is spelled Reelaiah; in I Esdras 5:9, Resaias.

▣ **“Mispereth”** In Ezra 2:2 this is spelled Mispar; it is not in I Esdras.

▣ **“Nehum”** In Ezra 2:2 this is replaced by Rehum; it is not in I Esdras.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:7b-38

^{7b}The number of men of the people of Israel:

⁸ the sons of Parosh, 2,172;

⁹ the sons of Shephatiah, 372;

¹⁰ the sons of Arah, 652;

¹¹ the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818;

¹² the sons of Elam, 1,254;

¹³ the sons of Zattu, 845;

- ¹⁴ the sons of Zaccai, 760;
¹⁵ the sons of Binnui, 648;
¹⁶ the sons of Bebai, 628;
¹⁷ the sons of Azgad, 2,322;
¹⁸ the sons of Adonikam, 667;
¹⁹ the sons of Bigvai, 2,067;
²⁰ the sons of Adin, 655;
²¹ the sons of Ater, of Hezekiah, 98;
²² the sons of Hashum, 328;
²³ the sons of Bezai, 324;
²⁴ the sons of Hariph, 112;
²⁵ the sons of Gibeon, 95;
²⁶ the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188;
²⁷ the men of Anathoth, 128;
²⁸ the men of Beth-azmaveth, 42;
²⁹ the men of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah and Beeroth, 743;
³⁰ the men of Ramah and Geba, 621;
³¹ the men of Michmas, 122;
³² the men of Bethel and Ai, 123;
³³ the men of the other Nebo, 52;
³⁴ the sons of the other Elam, 1,254;
³⁵ the sons of Harim, 320;
³⁶ the men of Jericho, 345;
³⁷ the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 721;
³⁸ the sons of Senaah, 3,930.

7:8ff Except for numbers and spelling errors this is an exact parallel to Ezra 2.

7:8 “Parosh, 2,172” In I Esdras 5:9 it is “Phoros 2,172.”

7:9 “Shephatiah, 372” In I Esdras 5:10 it is “Saphat, 472.”

7:10 “Arah, 652” In I Esdras 5:10 it is “Ares, 756.”

▣ **“652”** In Ezra 2:5 the number is 775.

7:13 “Zattu, 845” In Ezra 2:8 the number is 945; I Esdras 5:12 has “Zathui, 945.”

7:14 “Zaccia, 760” I Esdras 5:13 has “Chorbe, 705.”

7:15 “Bennui” In Ezra 2:10 this is spelled Bani (as it is in I Esdras 5:13). The number of returnees is also different. Ezra has 642, but Nehemiah has 648 (as it is in I Esdras 5:13).

7:16 “628” In Ezra 2:12 the number is 623.

7:17 “Azgad, 2,322” In Ezra 2:12 the number is 1,222. In I Esdras 5:13 it is “Astad, 1,322.”

7:18 “667” In Ezra 2:13 the number is 666.

7:19 “Bigvai, 2,067” In Ezra 2:14 the number is 2,056; in I Esdras 5:14 it is “Bagoi, 2,066.”

7:20 “Adin, 655” In Ezra 2:15 the number is 454; in I Esdras 5:14 it is “Adinu, 454.”

7:22 “Hashum 328” In Ezra this name appears in 2:19 and the number is 223.

7:23 “Bezai, 324” In Ezra 2:17 the number is 323; in I Esdras 5:16 it is “Bassia, 323.”

7:24 “Hariph, 112” In Ezra 2:18 this is replaced by “Jorah, 112; in I Esdras 5:17 it is “Arsiphorith, 112.”

7:25 Gibeon” In Ezra 2:20 this is spelled Gibbar.

7:26 Nehemiah’s list combines the two cities with one number, 188, while Ezra 2:21-22 has 123 plus 56 which equals 179; I Esdras 5:17-18 has 123 plus 55 equaling 178.

7:28 “Beth-azmaveth” In Ezra 2:24 this is replaced simply by Azmareth. Beth was a common addition to city names (“house of,” cf. v. 26). The NET Bible (p. 732) has “the family of Azmaveth,” which is probably the sense intended.

7:29 “Kiriath-jearim” In Ezra 2:25 this is spelled Kiriath-arim”; in I Esdras 5:19 it is “Kariatharius.”

7:32 “Ai” This is the city mentioned in Josh. 7-8.

▣ **“123”** In Ezra 2:28 the number is 223.

7:33 “the men of the other Nebo 52” “The other” is left out in Ezra 2:29. In Ezra 2:30 “sons of Magbish” appears, but is left out in Nehemiah.

7:37 “721” Ezra 2:33 has the number 725. Also “the men of Jericho” in Ezra 2:34 is left out of Nehemiah.

7:38 “3,930” In Ezra 2:35 the number is 3,630.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:39-42

³⁹**The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973;**

⁴⁰**the sons of Immer, 1,052;**

⁴¹**the sons of Pashhur, 1,247;**

⁴²**the sons of Harim, 1,017.**

7:39 “Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973” Ezra 2 has the same, but I Esdras 5:24 has “Jeddu, the son of Jesus, among the sons of Sanasib, 972.”

7:40 “the sons of Immer, 1,052” Ezra 2 has the same, but I Esdras 5:24 has “the sons of Emmeruth, 1,052.”

7:41 “the sons of Pashhus, 1,247” Ezra 2 has the same, but I Esdras 5:25 has “the sons of Phassurus, 1,246.”

7:42 “the sons of Harin, 1,017” Ezra 2 has the same, but I Esdras 5:25 has “the sons of Charme, 1,017.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:43-45

⁴³**The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodevah, 74.**

⁴⁴**The singers: the sons of Asaph, 148.**

⁴⁵**The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hittite, the sons of Shobai, 138.**

7:43 “Hodevah” In Ezra 2:40 this is spelled “Hodariah.” This name is not found in I Esdras 5:26; it has “Bannas and Sudias.”

7:44 “Asaph” He was appointed by David as Levitical musician (cf. I Chr. 25; II Chr. 25:12). He became the head of a family of musicians (cf. Ezra 2:41; 3:10; Neh. 11:17,22; 12:35).

▣ **“148”** In Ezra 2:41 the number is 128 (as it is in I Esdras 5:27).

7:45 “138” In Ezra 2:45 the number is 139 (as it is in I Esdras 5:28).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:46-56

⁴⁶**The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,**

⁴⁷**the sons of Keros, the sons of Sia, the sons of Padon,**

⁴⁸**the sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagaba, the sons of Shalmal,**

⁴⁹**the sons of Hanan, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar,**

⁵⁰**the sons of Reaiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda,**

⁵¹**the sons of Gazzam, the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah,**

⁵²**the sons of Besai, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephushesim,**

⁵³**the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,**

⁵⁴**the sons of Bazlith, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,**

⁵⁵**the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,**

⁵⁶**the sons of Nezhiah, the sons of Hatipha.**

7:47 “Sia” In Ezra 2:44 this is spelled Siaha; in I Esdras 5:29, “Sua.”

7:48 “the sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagaba, the sons of Shalmal” In Ezra 2:45 the first two names have a concluding “h” and the last name is replaced by “Akkub.” Nehemiah’s list seems to omit Hagab. These two names, “Hagabah” and “Hagab,” found in Ezra 2:45-46, are easily confused. The list is quite different and abbreviated in I Esdras.

7:52 Nehemiah’s list leaves out “Asnah” of Ezra 2:50; “Asana” of I Esdras 5:31.

▣ **“Nephushesim”** In Ezra 2:50 this is spelled Nephisim.

7:54 “Bazleth” In Ezra 2:52 this is spelled Bazluth; Basaloth in I Esdras.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:57-60

⁵⁷ The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Perida,
⁵⁸the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,
⁵⁹the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Amon.
⁶⁰All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

7:57 “Sophereth” In Ezra 2:55 it is spelled Hassophereth; I Esdras 5:33 has “Assaphioth.” This word (BDB 709) may be related to the root “to write” (BDB 706), which would mean it refers to a family of scribes as in I Chr. 2:54.

▣ **“Perida”** In Ezra 2:55 this is spelled Peruda; in I Esdras 5:33 it is “Pharida.”

7:59 “Amon” In Ezra 2:57 this is replaced by Ami; I Esdras 5:34 has several short names beginning with “a”—Agia, Addui, Allon.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:61-65

⁶¹These *were* they who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses or their descendants, whether they were of Israel: ⁶²the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 642. ⁶³Of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them. ⁶⁴These searched *among* their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean *and excluded* from the priesthood. ⁶⁵The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest arose with Urim and Thummim.

7:62 “642” In Ezra 2:60 the number is 652.

7:63 “Hobaiaha” Ezra 2:61 spells the name “Habaiah.”

7:64 “they were considered unclean” The VERB (BDB 146 II, KB 169, *Pual* IMPERFECT) means “defiled,” here in the same sense that their Levitical ancestry could not be confirmed. The special food for the priests could not be eaten by them (cf. Lev. 2:3; 7:21-36).

7:65 “The governor” refers to Nehemiah (Ezra 2:63, “Tirshatha”; I Esdras 5:40 has “Nehemias” and “Atharías”). He demanded that their confirmation be a heavenly affirmation. The Urim and Thummim were a set of objects (cf. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8) kept by the High Priest (cf. Deut. 33:8) to determine the will of God (cf. Num. 27:21). Nehemiah seems to be using these objects and a future priest as a way of referring to God’s Promised One (much like Zechariah used Jesusha).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:66-69

⁶⁶The whole assembly together *was* 42,360, ⁶⁷besides their male and their female servants, of whom *there were* 7,337; and they had 245 male and female singers. ⁶⁸Their horses were 736; their mules, 245; ⁶⁹*their* camels, 435; *their* donkeys, 6,720.

7:66 “42,360” This same number is also in Ezra 2:64. When you add up both Ezra’s (29,818) and Nehemiah’s (31,089) lists by names, cities and groups neither equal this number. This shows that both lists are incomplete.

Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 525, has an interesting numerical comment.

“The probability is that neither list is intended as a perfect enumeration of all the families that returned from exile, but only of such families of Judah and Benjamin as could show an authentic genealogy of their father’s house, while the 42,360 includes many persons and families belonging to other tribes who in their exile had lost all certain record of their genealogy, but were nevertheless true descendants of some of the ancient tribes. It is also noticeable that Ezra’s list mentions 494 persons not recognized in Nehemiah’s list, and Nehemiah’s list mentions 1,765 not recognized in Ezra’s list; but if we add the surplus of Ezra to the sum of Nehemiah (494 + 31,089 = 31,583) we have the same result as by adding Nehemiah’s surplus to the sums of Ezra’s numbers (1,765 + 29,818 = 31,583). Hence it may be reasonably believed that 31,583 was the sum of all that could show their father’s house, that the two lists were drawn up independently of each other; and that both are defective, though one supplies the defects of the other.”

7:67 “245” In Ezra 2:65 the number of singers is 200; I Esdras 5:42 also has “245.”

7:68 Many Hebrew manuscripts omit this verse, as does the Septuagint. However, it is present in 2:66.

7:69 The amounts and weights of valuable metals between Ezra and Nehemiah are very different.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:70-72

⁷⁰Some from among the heads of fathers' *households* gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments. ⁷¹Some of the heads of fathers' *households* gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,200 silver minas. ⁷²That which the rest of the people gave was 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas and 67 priests' garments.

7:70-71 “gold drachmas. . .silver minas” See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Weights and Volumes at Ezra 7:22.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:73a

⁷³Now the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants and all Israel, lived in their cities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How are the list of names in Ezra 2 related to the list in Nehemiah 7?
2. What is the purpose of these lists?

NEHEMIAH 8

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Ezra Reads the Law	Reading the Book of the Law	Ezra Reads the Law to the People	Judaism is Born. Ezra Reads the Law, The Feast of Shelters
7:73b-8:8	7:73b-8:8	8:1-3 8:4 8:5-6a 8:6b 8:7-8	7:72b-8:3 8:4-8
8:9-12	8:9-12	8:9-10 8:11-12	8:9 8:10-12
The Feast of Tabernacles	Celebration of the Festival of Booths	The Festival of Shelters	
8:13-18	8:13-18	8:13-15 8:16-18	8:13-17 8:18

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS, NEHEMIAH 7:73b-10:39

This entire passage seems to form a literary unit, which deals with a recommitment to Yahweh as the faithful Covenant God (cf. 9:17), and a reaffirmation of the stipulations of the covenant (which Israel had broken repeatedly, cf. chapter 9), particularly dealing with the Feasts of the Seventh Month, and the continual maintenance of the temple (cf. Malachi).

- A. There is much discussion about the date and historical accuracy of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. It is obvious that these are both post-exilic leaders; Ezra being a priest/scribe, and Nehemiah being an administrator and high Persian governmental official. They are named together in 8:9.
- B. There has been much debate over why the Day of Atonement, mentioned in Leviticus 16, that should have occurred on the 10th day of Tishri (seventh month, cf. Num. 28), is not mentioned in this section, when the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Lev. 23) is so prominent. This occurred on the 15th of Tishri. Chapter 9 does describe a fast day that seems to have been a special occurrence not related to the annual Day of Atonement.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:73b

^{73b}And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel *were* in their cities.

7:73b “And when the seventh month came” This was the beginning of the civil calendar. On the first day (cf. v. 2; Deut. 31:9-11) was the New Year festival called Feast of Trumpets and today called Rosh Ha-Shanah (cf. Lev. 23:23-25; Num. 29:16). The Feast of Booths/Tabernacles starts on the 15th day. The Day of Atonement was to occur on the 10th. See Special Topic: Feasts of Israel at Ezra 3:4.

▣ **“the sons of Israel *were* in their cities”** This phrase is also found in Ezra 3:1, which shows the close connection between the book of Ezra and Nehemiah 8.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:1-8

¹And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. ²Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. ³He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah *and* Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. ⁷Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people

remained in their place. ⁸They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

8:1 “all the people gathered as one man” This is a Hebrew idiom of unity (cf. Ezra 3:1). Both Ezra 2 and 3 parallel Nehemiah 7 and 8. This was purposeful to link these two leaders together.

▣ **“at the square”** It is highly unusual that this convocation should occur at the city square, and not at the temple. Possibly this meeting occurred at the city gate, which was the place of justice and social life in ancient Jewish communities. This was the place where justice and wisdom were to be regularly proclaimed (cf. Prov. 1:20, 21; 8:1ff).

▣ **“the Water Gate”** This seems to be on the east side of the new city wall, just south of Ophel (cf. 3:26), close to the major water source of the city of Jerusalem, the Gihon Spring (where Solomon was anointed, I Kgs. 1:33,38,45).

▣ **“Ezra the scribe”** At this point in the book of Nehemiah the priest/scribe Ezra appears. See Introduction to Ezra, Authorship, for more information.

▣ **“the book of the Law of Moses”** I reject modern JEDP source criticism. I hold to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (i.e., Genesis-Deuteronomy), even though it may have been edited by someone like Ezra or Jeremiah. See Special Topic: Moses’ Authorship of the Pentateuch at Ezra 6:18. How much of the book of the law (cf. II Chr. 34:15) was read on this occasion is uncertain. The word “book” (BDB 706) would refer to a scroll.

▣ **“which the LORD had given to Israel”** The basic meaning of this VERB (BDB 845, *Peel* PERFECT) is “charge,” “command.” The covenant people (i.e., Israel from Jacob) were required to keep the covenant. There were privileges and responsibilities (cf. 10:29). For the possible meanings of “Israel” see note at 2:10.

8:2 “the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding” It was unusual to include women and children in these convocations. This shows the seriousness of the occasion.

The phrase “who could listen with understanding” reflects the Jewish concept of sin and responsibility. They do not focus on Gen. 3, as the church does, to explain human rebellion and an evil world. Jews prefer to assert that spiritual responsibility is related to age and knowledge (at 13 years of age the boy’s rite is called *Bar Mitzvah* and at 12 the girls is called *Bath Mitzvah*). Only after a period of study and personal commitment is a Jewish male of thirteen responsible to obey the Law.

The VERB (BDB 1033) means “to hear so as to do” (e.g., Deut. 4:1,6,9,13,14; 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9-10). Knowledge brings responsibility (cf. Luke 12:48). A person by this name appears in v. 4, “Shema.”

▣ **“on the first day of the seventh month”** The seventh month was a very important month to the Hebrews (cf. Lev. 23). It was not only a time of new year, but a time of fasting and repentance (the 10th), as well as a time of feasting and thanking God for the harvest (the 15th).

8:3 “He read from it, before the square. . .from early morning until midday” Apparently Ezra read for something like 6 hours in Hebrew (cf. v. 7).

▣ **“In the presence of men and women, those who could understand”** If this meeting had occurred in the temple, only men could have attended. By it being at the square, the entire Jewish population could come.

▣ **“all the people were attentive to the book of the law”** There is no VERB, literally “the ears of all the people to the book of Law.” This idiom shows the level of commitment and anticipation on the part of the people.

8:4 These people listed were apparently priests or Levites (Masseiah in both vv. 4 & 7). Many of the names appear only here, but others appear in other chapters of Ezra/Nehemiah. One is never certain if it is the same person or just the same name. An example is “Meshullam.” There are over twenty-one people (*Young’s Analytical Concordance*, p. 656). Some appear in Ezra - Nehemiah:

1. Ezra 8:16
2. Ezra 10:15
3. Ezra 10:29
4. Neh. 3:4,30; 6:18
5. Neh. 3:6
6. Neh. 8:4
7. Neh. 10:7
8. Neh. 10:20
9. Neh. 11:7
10. Neh. 12:13,33
11. Neh. 12:16
12. Neh. 12:25

Uriah and Meshullam seem to be the ones who helped build two sections of the wall (cf. 3:4,30). Meshullam was later oath-bound to Tobiah (cf. 6:18).

It is probable that Ezra could not read loudly for five or six hours, so these other men took turns reading with him. This would accentuate the Word of God and not just one leader. This format is followed in the synagogues where several read from the Scriptures.

I wonder if the origin of a raised, wooden pulpit came from this specially prepared, wooden platform (lit. “tower,” BDB 153) for reading the word of God.

8:5 “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. . .and when he opened it, all the people stood up” This was a sign of respect at the reading of God’s word. God’s word is a recurrent theme in Ezra-Nehemiah. Did they stand for the entire six hours?

This translation implies that the Law was written in codex form, but this was a later development. The word “book” (BDB 706) can mean scroll; if so “opened” (BDB 834 I) may imply scrolled to the beginning.

The Jewish (and later Christian) tradition of standing when the word of God is read comes from this verse.

8:6 “Amen, amen.” This Hebrew word comes from the root “to be firm.” It is related etymologically to the Hebrew word *emunah*, which is found in Habakkuk 2:4 and is translated in English “faith.” Here the crowd affirms the truth that the Lord is a great God (cf. 1:5; 4:14; 9:32). See Special Topic: Amen at Neh. 5:13.

▣ **“the LORD the great God”** As there was a transition from the centrality of the priesthood to the leadership of the prophet in early Israeli life, now another transition as the influence of the word of God (scroll of Moses) transcends the temple ritual as the focus of worship. Yes, they still performed the temple rituals, but the study of the Word, as seen in the further development of the synagogue, becomes the focus of daily life. The Word of God is a recurrent emphasis in Nehemiah. YHWH does not manifest Himself in the awesome physical ways that He did during the Exodus or dedication of Solomon’s temple, but His power, promises, and presence are fully revealed in His word (by faith).

▣ **“while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground”** The normal posture for Jewish prayer was the hands and the open eyes uplifted to heaven (as if in conversation with God). At certain times of intensity, there are Old Testament examples of Jewish people kneeling in prayer (cf. I Kgs. 8:54; Ps. 95:6; Isa. 45:23; Dan. 6:10). Here they bowed to the ground (cf. Exod. 34:8; Josh. 5:14; II Chr. 20:18; Job 1:20). This prostration before the Lord shows an intense degree of emotion and worship (cf. Exod. 4:31; 12:27). It is very similar to the posture and form of modern Muslim prayers.

8:7 This list of names seems to include priests and Levites; both functioned as teachers (cf. Lev. 10:11; Deut. 17:10-11; 33:10). However, because of v. 9 some see this as referring to Levites only (cf. NRSV, TEV, NJB, NET Bible). The Septuagint, I Esdras 9:48, and Vulgate do not have “and” before “the Levites.” C. D. Ginsburg also thinks the “and” should be dropped (notes in his Hebrew Bible). Levites were also teachers of the Law (esp. in later Judaism, cf. II Chr. 35:3). Here as Ezra (and the others of v. 4) read the Hebrew text they moved among the crowd and translated it (cf. v. 7) into Aramaic, which was the language used in the Persian Empire.

▣ **“explained the law to the people”** The VERB (BDB 106, KB 122, *Hiphil* PARTICIPLE PLURAL) means “to discern.” The *Hiphil* was often used of teaching the Law (cf. II Chr. 25:8; II Chr. 35:3; Neh. 8:7,9,12). It is often used of the wise in Proverbs (cf. 8:9; 17:10,24; 28:2,7,11). The implication is that they understood and then obeyed (cf. 8:12; II Chr. 26:5), which is parallel to *shema* (cf. v. 2).

▣ **“to the people while the people *remained* in their place”** This may relate either to (1) the people grouping themselves, and each group having an assigned teacher or (2) that they remained standing in family groups throughout the reading of the Law.

8:8

NASB, NJB **“translating”**

NKJV **“distinctly”**

NRSV **“with interpretation”**

TEV **“oral translation”**

The Hebrew VERB “translating” (BDB 831 I, KB 976, *Pual* PARTICIPLE) is uncertain. The Aramaic counterpart (*Pael* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE) is found in Ezra 4:18, where the NASB marginal note has “plainly read.” In this passage it could mean:

1. The Levites translate from Hebrew to Aramaic (Talmud sees this as this beginning of the Targums, (cf. *Megillah* 3a; TEV). This is the only place which implies that the returning Jews could not speak Hebrew and it is based on a disputed VERB. If they could not read Hebrew why are all the Scriptural books of the period written in Hebrew (cf. *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, pp. 251-252).
2. The Levites explained the Scripture to the hearers (also a function of the Targums)
3. The Levites spoke very distinctly (*Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible*, p. 486).
4. The Levites divided the reading into its literary units and then explained the meaning of that unit.
5. The hearers listened very carefully (cf. v. 3).

There seem to be two groups of people mentioned in this early part of chapter 8. A group that stood with Ezra, and possibly helped him read the Law, and another group that went among the crowd translating into Aramaic and explaining the reading’s meaning.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:9-12

⁹Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰Then he said to

them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." ¹¹So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." ¹²All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

8:9 "The governor" This is a Persian loan word (BDB 1077, cf. Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65,70; 8:9; 10:1). The Hebrew equivalent is *Pechah* (BDB 808, cf. Ezra 5:3,6,14; 6:6,7,13; 8:36; Neh. 2:7,9; 3:7; 5:14,15,18; 12:26). All of Israel's leaders (the last VERB of v. 12 is PLURAL "their") participated in these events (Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the official in charge of proper worship, and the Levite instructors).

▣ **"for all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the Lord"** This seems to mean godly sorrow over their apathy and non-performance concerning the word of God. This is the same attitude required for the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16. A similar time of fasting and repentance is found in chapter 9. It is surprising that the Day of Atonement is not mentioned as these people tried to reinstate and be obedient to the writings of Moses.

8:10 "eat of the fat" This term (BDB 1032) is used only here in the OT. It means the best pieces of meat. This is not the term for "fat" (BDB 804) which was offered only to God on the altar of sacrifice (cf. Lev. 1:8,12; 3:3-4; 4:8-10).

▣ **"Go, eat. . .drink. . .send"** These are all *Qal* PLURAL IMPERATIVES.

▣ **"drink of the sweet"** The term "sweet" (BDB 609), used of wine, is found only here in the OT. See Special Topic: Biblical Attitudes Toward Alcohol (Fermentation) and Alcoholism (Addiction) at Ezra 7:17.

▣ **"send portions to him who has nothing prepared"** The term "portion" (BDB 584) refers to the part of a sacrifice given back to an offerer (and his family, cf. I Sam. 1:4-5; Esth. 9:19,22). This was a common act in times of rejoicing (cf. Esth. 9:22). God cares for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien, so too, must His people, who are to reflect His character (e.g., Exod. 23:11; Deut. 15:4,7,11; 26:11-13; Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 22:9).

▣ **"this day is holy to our Lord"** In context this means given to or dedicated to God (*adon*). It was a covenant renewal ceremony, something like Josh. 8:30-35. See Special Topic: Holy at Ezra 8:28.

▣ **"do not be grieved"** The VERB (BDB 780 I, KB 864, *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) means "grieved" or "pained." The people were stunned at their disobedience and the disobedience of their ancestors (cf. chapter 9). However, the occasion was one of renewal and new beginnings; they must rejoice with the God of the Covenant.

Deity is denoted by *Adon* in the phrase "holy to the Lord," but in this phrase He is called YHWH, the covenant, the redeemer title for God.

▣ **"the joy of the LORD is your strength"** Both "joy" (BDB 292) and "strength" (BDB 738, as a stronghold, cf. II Sam. 22:23; Prov. 10:29) describe God Himself in I Chr. 16:27. The believers' joy and strength are in YHWH, not in themselves. Understanding of God's word unlocks the confusion of sin.

8:11-12 This shows the festival nature of Israel's religious feasts. Knowing God issues in joy, not sadness! All days with Him are festivals of joy! Only the Day of Atonement was a fasting occasion. The Levites communicated to the people the wishes of the leadership (cf. v. 11).

8:12 “the words which had been made known to them” The NIDOTTE, vol. 2, p. 414, makes the interesting comment that this VERB (BDB 393, KB 390, *Hiphil* PERFECT) is used for those who pass on God’s word:

1. Moses, Exod. 18:20
2. Samuel, I Sam. 10:8
3. Priests, Ezek. 44:23
4. Levites, Neh. 8:12

It also notes the missionary aspect of this VERB. God’s people are to live and speak God’s word so that “the nations” may also know YHWH (e.g., I Kgs. 8:43,60; II Kgs. 19:19; Isa. 12:4-5; 19:21; Ezek. 38:16).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:13-18

¹³Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law. ¹⁴They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. ¹⁵So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." ¹⁶So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing. ¹⁸He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.

8:13 “on the second day, the heads of the fathers’ households of all the people” The first day of Tishri was a general assembly, but the second day was a special day of training for the elders and leaders of the people that they might instruct their own tribal groups and clans in the Law of Moses.

8:14 “They found written in the Law how the LORD. . .the feast of the seventh month” The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths is discussed in Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:39-44; Num. 29:12-40; Deut. 16:13-15.

8:15 A helpful book on identifying flowers, crops, and trees in Palestine is *Fauna and Flora of the Bible* in the “Help for Translators” series from the United Bible Societies (ISBN 0-8267-0021-7).

▣ **“go”** This VERB (BDB 422, KB 425) is a *Qal* IMPERATIVE.

▣ **“bring”** This VERB (BDB 97, KB 112) is a *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE.

8:17 The Feast of Booths had been celebrated (cf. II Chr. 7:8; 8:13; Ezra 3:4; Hosea 12:9), but possibly the booths had not been a regular or required aspect of the feast.

8:18 “he read from the Book of the Law daily. . .on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance” This shows that the Feast of the Tabernacle was an eight day feast, with the eighth day having special significance (cf. Num. 29:35). This seems to relate to Jesus’ words in John 7:37. The Syriac has “they read” instead of “he read.”

The Discussion Questions for this chapter are included with those in chapter 9.

NEHEMIAH 9

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The People Confess Their Sin	The Great Confession	The People Confess Their Sin	
9:1-4	9:1-5	9:1-3	
		9:4	
9:5-8		9:5	
		The Prayer of Confession	
	9:6-8	9:6-8	
9:9-15	9:9-15	9:9-14	
		9:15-21	
9:16-25	9:16-25		
		9:22-25	
9:26-31	9:26-31	9:26-31	
9:32-37	9:32-37	9:32-37	
		The People Sign an Agreement (9:38-10:27)	
9:38	9:38	9:38-10:1	

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Nehemiah's summary of YHWH's gracious acts and covenant faithfulness (cf. v. 17) may have come from Ezra's reading of the Book of Moses (i.e., Pentateuch).
- B. The chapter outlines as
1. YHWH as creator (Gen. 1-11), v. 6
 2. YHWH's choice of Abraham (Gen. 12-50), vv. 7-8
 3. YHWH's actions in the Exodus (Exodus), vv. 9-14
 4. YHWH's faithful care and provision during the wilderness wandering period (Numbers), vv. 15-21
 5. YHWH's promises to Abraham fulfilled (period of the conquest, i.e., Joshua), vv. 22-25
 6. Israel's further rebellion (period of the Judges), vv. 20-31
 7. YHWH's covenant faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness continue (the period of the Monarchy), vv. 32-38
- C. Chapter 9 shows the theological basis of Israel's history—YHWH's faithfulness to His covenant; Israel's unfaithfulness to His covenant. It was not YHWH's powerlessness, but Israel's sin that brought destruction and exile; however, it is YHWH's character and power that Israel thus exists and is back in the land!

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:1-4

¹Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. ²The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. ³While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. ⁴Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God.

9:1 “On the twenty-fourth day of this month, the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloths, with dirt upon them” Two days after the Feast of the Booths (cf. 8:13-18) and twenty-three days after the reading of the law (cf. 8:2), the repentant actions so characteristic of the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16, which was to be observed on the 10th day) occurred (cf. 1:4). During the reading of the law these returnees felt these same feelings of remorse and guilt (cf. 8:9). Israel needed forgiveness as the rest of chapter 9 clearly shows. Their covenant God was faithful (cf. Ezra 9:8-9), but they were not (cf. 1:6; Ezra 9:6-7,10).

9:2 “descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners” This VERB (BDB 95, KB 110, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) means “to withdraw from,” “separate ourselves from.” This withdrawal was for the stated purpose of obeying YHWH's commands (cf. Exod. 33:16; Lev. 20:24,26; Ezra 6:21; 9:1; 10:1). To worship and obey YHWH meant a complete break with the pagan and semi-pagan culture and practices (cf. Lev. 20:24,26; e.g., marriages to foreign women).

▣ **“confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers”** This VERB (BDB 392, KB 389 II, *Hithpael* IMPERFECT) means “to confess” (cf. Lev. 5:5; 16:21; Ezra 10:1; Neh. 1:6; Dan. 9:4,20). Apparently this confession involved personal and national sin (e.g., Lev. 26-40; Jer. 3:25; 14:20).

9:3 “they stood in their place” This seems to refer to 8:4 (cf. v. 4).

▣ **“they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day”** These returnees longed to be instructed from the Law of Moses. It seems at this point that a major turning point in the life of the Jews occurred. Instead of being primarily people of the temple (ritual, liturgy, and form) they became people of the Book (the influence of the synagogue). This was a reading/teaching session lasting three hours in the morning (Bible study) and three hours in the afternoon (confession and worship).

9:4 If v. 3 refers to 8:4, then this verse must refer to a separate platform. The names mentioned here refer to the Levites of 8:7, who translated and interpreted Ezra’s (and the men standing with him) words.

These two groups may have been involved in antiphonal reading interspersed with translation and interpretation.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:5-8

⁵Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever!

**O may Your glorious name be blessed
And exalted above all blessing and praise!**

⁶You alone are the LORD.

**You have made the heavens,
The heaven of heavens with all their host,
The earth and all that is on it,
The seas and all that is in them.**

**You give life to all of them
And the heavenly host bows down before You.**

⁷You are the LORD God,

**Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees,
And gave him the name Abraham.**

⁸You found his heart faithful before You,

**And made a covenant with him
To give *him* the land of the Canaanite,
Of the Hittite and the Amorite,
Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite—
To give *it* to his descendants.**

**And You have fulfilled Your promise,
For You are righteous."**

9:5 The Septuagint adds the phrase “and Ezra said. . .” Apparently it is asserting the authorship of chapter 9 to Ezra instead of the Levite leaders, as the MT implies. The rest of this chapter is a history of God’s faithful covenant promises and the people’s unfaithful responses.

▣ **“Arise, bless”** These are both IMPERATIVES. The first VERB (BDB 877, KB 1086, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) means “to stand up.” Apparently unlike Ezra’s first reading of the Law (cf. Chapter 8), the people did not stand up the entire time (cf. 8:5).

The second VERB (BDB 138, KB 159 II, used twice, the first a *Peel* IMPERATIVE, the second a *Peel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense) means to praise or adore for having special power (cf. 8:6; I Chr. 29:20).

▣ **“the LORD your God”** The covenant name of God, YHWH, translated Lord, is from the Hebrew VERB “to be” in its CAUSATIVE form. Therefore, the phrase “forever and ever” is parallel. They both refer to the ever-living, only-living One! See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Neh. 1:4.

▣ **“forever and ever”** For “forever” see Special Topic: *'Olam* (Forever) at Ezra 3:11.

▣ **“Thy glorious name”** The name is a Hebraic idiom for the person (e.g., Exod. 32:33; I Chr. 28:13; Ps. 72:19; Acts 1:18; 4:10). God is glorious.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY

The biblical concept of “glory” is difficult to define. Believers’ glory is that they understand the gospel and glory in God, not in themselves (cf. 1:29-31; Jer. 9:23-24).

In the OT the most common Hebrew word for “glory” (*kbd*, BDB 217) was originally a commercial term relating to a pair of scales (“to be heavy”). That which was heavy was valuable or had intrinsic worth. Often the concept of brightness was added to the word to express God’s majesty (cf. Exod. 19:16-18; 24:17; Isa. 60:1-2). He alone is worthy and honorable. He is too brilliant for fallen mankind to behold (cf. Exod 33:17-23; Isa. 6:5). YHWH can only be truly known through Christ (cf. Jer. 1:14; Matt. 17:2; Heb. 1:3; James 2:1).

The term “glory” is somewhat ambiguous: (1) it may be parallel to “the righteousness of God”; (2) it may refer to the “holiness” or “perfection” of God; or (3) it could refer to the image of God in which mankind was created (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6), but which was later marred through rebellion (cf. Gen. 3:1-22). It is first used of YHWH’s presence with His people during the wilderness wandering period in Exod. 16:7,10; Lev. 9:23; and Num. 14:10.

▣ **“above all blessing and praise”** The TEV catches the meaning as “although no human praise is great enough.”

9:6 This verse is an emphasis on God as the only (in the spirit of Exod. 20:2-3 and Deut. 6:4) Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Here creation is attributed to YHWH. Usually it is attributed to *Elohim* (cf. Gen. 1). See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Neh. 1:4.

▣ **“Thou has made the heavens”** This phrase is parallel to “the earth and all that is on it.” “Heavens” here refers to the atmosphere of this planet (cf. Gen. 1:1).

▣ **“the heaven of heavens with all their hosts”** This seems to refer to the ancient association of heavenly bodies (e.g., sun, moon, planets, stars, comets) with gods or angels (cf. v. 6g; Deut. 4:19; Job 38:7).

There has been an ongoing discussion among the rabbis as to how many “heavens” there are and to what they refer. The “highest” heaven would be God’s throne. Some see this as the third heaven (cf. II Cor. 12:2), while others assert “seventh heaven” (b. Hagigah 11b).

In this context the “heavens of heavens” refers to the starry heavens (cf. Deut. 10:14; Ps. 148:3-4) that personified worship and praise to God.



NASB “You give life to all of them”

NKJV “You preserve them all”

NRSV “to all of them you give life”

TEV “you gave life to all”

NJB “You keep them all alive”

This VERB (BDB 310, KB 309, *Peel* PARTICIPLE) can mean

1. preserve alive (NKJV, JPSOA, cf. Col. 1:17)
2. give life (NASB, NRSV, TEV, NJB, NIV, REB)
3. restore life

YHWH is creator, sustainer, and restorer of life!

9:7-8 This seems to deal with God’s choosing and covenanting with Abraham (cf. Gen. 12-18).

9:7 “the LORD God” This is YHWH *Elohim*. This combined title occurs first in Gen. 2:4. See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Neh. 1:4.

▣ “Who chose Abraham” This VERB (BDB 103, KB 119, *Qal* PERFECT) refers to God’s choice. Here of Abraham (cf. Gen. 12); in Deut. 7:7 of Israel as a people. This refers theologically to the initiation of a covenant relationship. God must initiate. The burning question is does He call, choose, initiate to all or to some select group? Even in the OT, the choice of Abraham was a means to choose all humans (cf. Gen. 12:3); the choice of Israel was a choice for all humans (cf. Exod. 19:4-6, esp. v. 5c).

SPECIAL TOPIC: ELECTION/PREDESTINATION AND THE NEED FOR A THEOLOGICAL BALANCE

Election is a wonderful doctrine. However, it is not a call to favoritism, but a call to be a channel, a tool or means of others’ redemption! In the Old Testament the term was used primarily for service; in the New Testament it is used primarily for salvation which issues in service. The Bible never reconciles the seeming contradiction between God’s sovereignty and mankind’s free will, but affirms them both! A good example of the biblical tension would be Romans 9 on God’s sovereign choice and Romans 10 on mankind’s necessary response (cf. 10:11,13).

The key to this theological tension may be found in Eph. 1:4. Jesus is God’s elect man and all are potentially elect in Him (Karl Barth). Jesus is God’s “yes” to fallen mankind’s need (Karl Barth). Eph. 1:4 also helps clarify the issue by asserting that the goal of predestination is not heaven, but holiness (Christlikeness). We are often attracted to the benefits of the gospel and ignore the responsibilities! God’s call (election) is for time as well as eternity!

Doctrines come in relation to other truths, not as single, unrelated truths. A good analogy would be a constellation versus a single star. God presents truth in eastern, not western, genres. We must not remove the tension caused by dialectical (paradoxical) pairs of doctrinal truths:

1. Predestination vs. human free will
2. Security of the believers vs. the need for perseverance
3. Original sin vs. volitional sin
4. Sinlessness (perfectionism) vs. sinning less
5. Initial instantaneous justification and sanctification vs. progressive sanctification
6. Christian freedom vs. Christian responsibility

7. God's transcendence vs. God's immanence
8. God as ultimately unknowable vs. God as knowable in Scripture
9. The Kingdom of God as present vs. future consummation
10. Repentance as a gift of God vs. repentance as a necessary human covenantal response
11. Jesus as divine vs. Jesus as human
12. Jesus is equal to the Father vs. Jesus as subservient to the Father

The theological concept of "covenant" unites the sovereignty of God (who always takes the initiative and sets the agenda) with a mandatory initial and continuing repentant, faith response from humans. Be careful of proof-texting one side of the paradox and depreciating the other! Be careful of asserting only your favorite doctrine or system of theology!

SPECIAL TOPIC: PREDESTINATION (CALVINISM) VS. HUMAN FREE WILL (ARMINIANISM)

This passage is a balance to other NT passages on election. I thought it might be theologically helpful to provide my commentary notes from Rom. 8:29 and 9, as well as Ephesians 1.

I. Rom. 8:29 - Paul uses "foreknew" (*proginōskō*, "to know before") twice, here and 11:2. In 11:2 it refers to God's covenant love for Israel before time began. Remember that the term "know" in Hebrew related to intimate, personal relationship, not to facts about someone (cf. Gen. 4:1; Jer. 1:5). Here it was included in a chain of eternal events (cf. Rom. 8:29-30). This term was linked with predestination. However, it must be stated that God's foreknowledge is not the basis of election because if that were so, then election would be based on fallen humanity's future response, which would be human performance. This term is also found in Acts 26:5; I Pet. 1:2,20 and II Pet. 3:17.

A. "foreknew" (*proginōskō*, "to know before")

The terms "foreknow" or "predestine" are both compounds with the preposition "before" and therefore, should be translated "to know before," "to set bounds before," or "mark off before." The definitive passages on predestination in the NT are Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:13-14; and Romans 9. These texts obviously stress that God is sovereign. He is in total control of all things. These is a preset divine plan being worked out in time. However, this plan is not arbitrary or selective. It is based not only on God's sovereignty and foreknowledge, but on His unchanging character of love, mercy, and undeserved grace.

We must be careful of our western (American) individualism or our evangelical zeal coloring this wonderful truth. We must also guard against being polarized into the historical, theological conflicts between Augustine versus Pelegius or Calvinism versus Arminianism.

B. "predestined" (*proorizō*, "to set the bounds before")

Predestination is not a doctrine meant to limit God's love, grace, and mercy nor to exclude some from the gospel. It is meant to strengthen believers by molding their world-view. God is for all mankind (cf. I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9). God is in control of all things. Who or what can separate us from Him (cf. Rom. 8:31-39)? God views all history as present. Humans are time bound. Our perspective and mental abilities are limited. There is no contradiction between God's sovereignty and mankind's free will. It is a covenantal structure. This is another example of truth given in dialectical tension. Biblical doctrines are presented from different perspectives. They often appear paradoxical. The truth is a balance between the seemingly opposite pairs. We must

not remove the tension by picking one of the truths. We must not isolate any biblical truth into a compartment by itself.

It is also important to add that the goal of election is not only heaven when we die, but Christlikeness now (cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4; 2:10). We were chosen to be “holy and blameless.” God chooses to change us so that others may see the change and respond by faith to God in Christ. Predestination is not a personal privilege, but a covenantal responsibility. This is the major truth of the passage. This is the goal of Christianity. Holiness is God’s will for every believer. God’s election is to Christlikeness (cf. Eph. 1:4), not a special standing. The image of God, which was given to man in creation (cf. Gen. 1:26; 5:1,3; 9:6), is to be restored.

- C. “conformed to the image of His Son”—God’s ultimate goal is the restoration of the image lost in the Fall. Believers are foreordained to Christlikeness (cf. Eph. 1:4).

II. Romans 9

- A. Chapter 9 is one of the strongest NT passages on God’s sovereignty (the other being, Eph. 1:3-14), while Romans 10 states humans’ free will clearly and repeatedly (cf. “everyone” v. 4; “whosoever” vv. 11,13; “all” v. 12 [twice]). Paul never tries to reconcile this theological tension. They are both true! Most Bible doctrines are presented in paradoxical or dialectical pairs. Most systems of theology are logical half-truths. Augustinianism and Calvinism versus semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism have elements of truth and error. Biblical tension between doctrines is preferable to a proof-texted, dogmatic, rational, theological system that forces the Bible onto a preconceived interpretive grid.

- B. This same truth (found in Rom. 9:23) is stated in Rom. 8:29-30 and Eph. 1:4,11. This chapter is the strongest expression of God’s sovereignty in the NT. There can be no dispute that God is in total charge of creation and redemption. This great truth should never be softened or diminished.

However, it must be balanced with God’s choice of covenant as a means of relating to human creation, made in His image. It is surely true that some OT covenants, like Genesis 15, are unconditional and do not relate at all to human response, but other covenants are conditioned on human response (e.g., Eden, Noah, Moses, David). God has a plan of redemption for His creation; no human can affect this plan. God has chosen to allow individuals to participate in His plans. This opportunity for participation is a theological tension between sovereignty (Romans 9) and human free will (Romans 10).

It is not appropriate to select one biblical emphasis and ignore another. There is tension between doctrines because eastern people present truth in dialectical or tension-filled pairs. Doctrines must be held in relationship to other doctrines. Truth is a mosaic of truths.

III. Ephesians 1

- A. Election is a wonderful doctrine. However, it is not a call to favoritism, but a call to be a channel, a tool or means of others’ redemption! In the OT the term was used primarily for service; in the NT it is used primarily for salvation which issues in service. The Bible never reconciles the seeming contradiction between God’s sovereignty and mankind’s free will, but affirms them both! A good example of the biblical tension would be Romans 9 on God’s sovereign choice and Romans 10 on mankind’s necessary response (cf. 10:11,13).

The key to this theological tension may be found in 1:4. Jesus is God’s elect man and all are potentially elect in Him (Karl Barth). Jesus is God’s “yes” to fallen mankind’s need (Karl Barth). Ephesians 1:4 also helps clarify the issue by asserting that the goal of predestination is not heaven only, but holiness (Christlikeness). We are often attracted to the benefits of the gospel and ignore the responsibilities! God’s call (election) is for time as well as eternity!

Doctrines come in relation to other truths, not as single, unrelated truths. A good analogy would be a constellation versus a single star. God presents truth in eastern, not western, genres. We must not remove the tension caused by dialectical (paradoxical) pairs of doctrinal truths (God as transcendent versus God as immanent; security vs. perseverance; Jesus as equal with the Father vs. Jesus as subservient to the Father; Christian freedom vs. Christian responsibility to a covenant partner, etc).

The theological concept of “covenant” unites the sovereignty of God (who always takes the initiative and sets the agenda) with a mandatory initial and continuing repentant, faith response from man. Be careful of proof-texting one side of the paradox and depreciating the other! Be careful of asserting only your favorite doctrine or system of theology.

- B. “He chose us” in Eph. 1:4 is an AORIST MIDDLE INDICATIVE which emphasizes the subject. This focuses on the Father’s choice before time. God’s choice must not be understood in the Islamic sense of determinism, nor in the ultra-Calvinistic sense as some versus others, but in the covenantal sense. God promised to redeem fallen mankind (cf. Gen. 3:15). God called and chose Abraham to choose all humans (cf. Gen. 12:3; Exod. 19:5-6). God Himself elected all persons who would exercise faith in Christ. God always takes the initiative in salvation (cf. John 6:44,65). This text and Romans 9 are the biblical basis for the doctrine of predestination emphasized by Augustine and Calvin.

God chose believers not only to salvation (justification), but also to sanctification (cf. Co1:12). This could relate to (1) our position in Christ (cf. II Cor. 5:21) or (2) God’s desire to reproduce His character in His children (cf. 2:10; Rom. 8:28-29; Gal. 4:19). God’s will for His children is both heaven one day and Christlikeness now!

“In Him” is a key concept of Eph. 1:4. The Father’s blessings, grace, and salvation flow through Christ (cf. John 14:6). Notice the repetition of this grammatical form (LOCATIVE of sphere) in v. 3, “in Christ”; v. 4, “in Him”; v. 7, “in Him”; v. 9, “in Him”; v. 10, “in Christ,” “in Him”; v. 12, “in Christ”; and v. 13, “in Him” (twice). Jesus is God’s “yes” to fallen mankind (Karl Barth). Jesus is the elect man and all are potentially elect in Him. All of God the Father’s blessings flow through Christ.

The phrase “before the foundation of the world” is also used in Matt. 25:34; John 17:24; I Pet. 1:19-20 and Rev. 13:8. It shows the Triune God’s redemptive activity even before Gen. 1:1. Humans are limited by their sense of time; everything to us is past, present and future, but not to God.

The goal of predestination is holiness, not privilege. God’s call is not to a selected few of Adam’s children, but to all! It is a call to be what God intended mankind to be, like Himself (cf. I Thess. 5:23; II Thess. 2:13); in His image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). To turn predestination into a theological tenet instead of a holy life is a tragedy. Often our theologies speak louder than the biblical text.

The term “blameless” (*amōmos*) or “free from blemish” is used of (1) Jesus (cf. Heb. 9:14; I Pet. 1:19); (2) Zachariah and Elizabeth (cf. Luke 1:6); (3) Paul (cf. Phil. 3:6); and (4) all true Christians (cf. Phil. 2:15; I Thess. 3:13; 5:23). God’s unalterable will for every Christian is not only heaven later, but Christlikeness now (cf. Rom. 8:29-30; Gal. 4:19; I Pet. 1:2). Believers are to reflect God’s characteristics to a lost world for the purpose of evangelism.

Grammatically the phrase “in love” in this verse could go with either v. 4 or v. 5. However, when this phrase is used in other places in Ephesians it always refers to human love for God (cf. 3:17; 4:2,15,16).

C. In Eph. 1:5 the phrase “He predestined us” is an AORIST ACTIVE PARTICIPLE. This Greek term is a compound of “before” and “mark off.” It refers to God’s predetermined redemptive plan (cf. Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 17:31; Rom. 8:29-30). Predestination is one of several truths related to mankind’s salvation. It is part of a theological pattern or series of related truths. It was never meant to be emphasized in isolation! Biblical truth has been given in a series of tension-filled, paradoxical pairs. Denominationalism has tended to remove the biblical tension by emphasizing only one of the dialectical truths (predestination vs. human free will; security of the believer vs. perseverance of the saints; original sin vs. volitional sin; sinlessness vs. sinning less; instantaneously declared sanctification vs. progressive sanctification; faith vs. works; Christian freedom vs. Christian responsibility; transcendence vs. immanence).

God’s choice is not based on foreknowledge of human performance, but on His gracious character (cf. vv. 9 & 11). He wishes that all (not just some special ones like the Gnostics or modern-day ultra-Calvinists) would be saved (cf. Ezek. 18:21-23,32; John 3:16-17; I Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; II Pet. 3:9). God’s grace (God’s character) is the theological key to this passage (cf. vv. 6a, 7c, 9b), as God’s mercy is the key to the other passage on predestination, Rom. 9-11.

Fallen mankind’s only hope is the grace and mercy of God (cf. Isa. 53:6 and several other OT texts quoted in Rom. 3:9-18). It is crucial in interpreting these first theological chapters to realize that Paul emphasizes those things which are totally unrelated to human performance: predestination (chap. 1), grace (chap. 2), and God’s eternal plan of redemption (mystery, 2:11-3:13). This was to counterbalance the emphasis of the false teachers on human merit and pride.

▣ **“brought Him out of Ur of the Chaldees”** Originally Abraham’s family were apparently worshipers of the moon god (cf. Gen. 11:31). Ur was one of several centers for moon god (i.e., *sin* or *zin*) worship. At this point, in history all were polytheists (many gods) or henotheists (many gods, but one special god for me).

▣ **“gave him the name Abraham”** His original name “Abram” means “exalted Father” (BDB 4, KB 10). The term Abraham means “chief of a multitude” (BDB 4, KB, cf. Gen. 17:5, where it is defined as “the father of a multitude of nations”).

9:8 “You found his heart faithful before Thee” Because of the use of the word “faithful,” this must refer to Gen. 15:6 (cf. Rom. 4:3,9,22; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23), which refers to God’s promise of descendants. Abraham’s faith is fully revealed in Gen. 22 (cf. James 2:22).

The term “heart” is a Semitic idiom for the whole person. See Special Topic: Heart at Neh. 4:6.

▣ **“and made a covenant with him”** This covenant is first delineated in Gen. 12:1-3, but reaffirmed in chapters 15 and 17. See Special Topic: Covenant at Ezra 6:14.

▣ **“give him the land of the Canaanite”** This aspect of the covenant is fully delineated in Gen. 15:17-21. For a full discussion of these tribes of Canaan see Ezra 9:1.

▣ **“to his descendants”** This is literally the term “seed.” In the OT it focuses on the Jewish people, but in the NT Paul sees it as referring uniquely to Christ (cf. Gal. 3:15-22).

▣ **“You have fulfilled Your promise”** This relates to Gen. 15:12-21, which refers to the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan.

☐ **“For You are righteous”** This relates to YHWH’s character (cf. II Chr. 12:6; Ezra 9:15), but the same term is used in v. 33, translated “just” and refers to His actions (i.e., judgments, cf. Exod. 9:27; Ps. 119:137; 145:17). See Special Topic: Righteousness at Neh. 4:5b. The specific texts that relate to the reason for the Canaanite defeat is Deut. 9:4-6.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:9-15

⁹**You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,
And heard their cry by the Red Sea.**

¹⁰**Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,
Against all his servants and all the people of his land;
For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them,
And made a name for Yourself as *it is* this day.**

¹¹**You divided the sea before them,
So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground;
And their pursuers You hurled into the depths,
Like a stone into raging waters.**

¹²**And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day,
And with a pillar of fire by night
To light for them the way
In which they were to go.**

¹³**Then You came down on Mount Sinai,
And spoke with them from heaven;
You gave them just ordinances and true laws,
Good statutes and commandments.**

¹⁴**So You made known to them Your holy sabbath,
And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law,
Through Your servant Moses.**

¹⁵**You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger,
You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst,
And You told them to enter in order to possess
The land which You swore to give them.”**

9:9-14 This deals with the period of the Exodus and wilderness wandering period. God’s promise and fulfillment of bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt is a recurrent theme (e.g., Ps. 78:12ff; 105:23ff; 106:7ff; 135:8ff; 136:10ff).

9:9 **“You saw see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt”** This relates to Exod. 2:25; 3:7 (Acts 7:34).

☐ **“And heard their cry by the Red Sea”** This refers specifically to Exod. 14.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE RED SEA

I. Name

- A. Literally the name is *Yam Suph*.
 - 1. “Sea of Weeds” or “Sea of Reeds” (Egyptian root)
 - 2. “Sea at the end (of the earth)” (Semitic root)
- B. This can refer to
 - 1. salt water, I Kgs. 9:26 (Gulf of Akaba); Jonah 2:5 (Mediterranean Ocean)
 - 2. fresh water, Exod. 2:3; Isa. 19:26
- C. The Septuagint is the first translation to call it “the Red Sea.” Possibly these translators were relating it to the sea of Edom (red). This designation was perpetuated by the Latin Vulgate and later the King James English translation.

II. Location

- A. There are several bodies of water referred to by this name:
 - 1. the narrow body of water between Egypt and the Sinai peninsula about 190 miles long (Gulf of Suez)
 - 2. the body of water between the Sinai peninsula and Arabia about 112 miles long (Gulf of Akaba)
- B. It could relate to the shallow marsh area in the northeastern part of the Nile delta close to Tanis, Zoan, Avaris, Ramesses, which is on the southern shore of Lake Menzaleh (the marshy region).
- C. It could be used metaphorically of the mysterious waters to the south, often used of the sea at the end (of the earth). This means it could refer to
 - 1. modern Red Sea (Gulf of Suez or the Gulf of Akaba, cf. I Kgs. 9:26)
 - 2. Indian Ocean (cf. Herodotus 1.180)
 - 3. Persian Gulf (cf. Josephus, *Antiq.* 1.7.3)

III. *Suph* in Numbers 33

- A. In Num. 33:8 the body of water that was miraculously divided is called *suph*.
- B. In Num. 33:10,11 the Israelites are said to camp by *yam suph*.
- C. There are two different bodies of water.
 - 1. the first is not the Red Sea (Gulf of Suez)
 - 2. the second is probably the Red Sea (Gulf of Suez)
- D. The term *suph* is being used in the OT in three ways.
 - 1. body of water parted by YHWH to allow the Israelites to pass, but the Egyptian soldiers to drown
 - 2. the northwestern extension of the Red Sea (Gulf of Suez)
 - 3. the northeastern extension of the Red Sea (gulf of Akaba)
- E. *Yam suph* possibly does not mean “reed sea” because
 - 1. there were/are no reeds (papyrus) in the Red Sea (salt water)
 - 2. the supposed Egyptian etymology refers to a land, not a lake
- F. *Suph* could come from the Semitic root “end” and refer to the mysterious unknown waters to the south (see Bernard F. Batts, “Red Sea or Reed Sea? What *Yam Suph* Really Means” in *Approaches to the Bible*, vol. 1, pp. 291-304).

9:10 This verse refers to the series of plagues that YHWH sent through Moses (cf. Exod. 7-11). These plagues target and repudiate the nature and animal gods of Egypt. YHWH wants Egyptians to believe in Him also (cf. v. 10d; Exod. 9:14-16).

9:11 “their pursuers You hurled into the depths” This refers to Exod. 14, especially vv. 26-31.

▣ **“like a stone into raging waters”** This is almost an exact quote from the Song of Moses in Exod. 15:5,10.

9:12 “a pillar of fire” This refers to Shekinah cloud of glory (physical symbol of the presence of YHWH) that separated the children of Israel from the army of Pharaoh, and led them throughout the wilderness wandering period (e.g., Exod. 13:22; 14:19-24; 16:10; 19:9,16; 24:15-18; 34:5; 40:34-38). This is referred to again in v. 19.

▣ **“the way”**

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE ROUTE OF THE EXODUS

- A. The location of: (1) the Egyptian cities; (2) bodies of water; and (3) early Hebrew camp sites are all uncertain.
- B. The term “Red Sea” is literally *Yam Suph*, which
 1. means, “sea of weeds” or “sea of reeds.” It can refer to salt water, Jonah 2:5; I Kgs. 9:26 or fresh water, Exod. 2:3; Isa. 19:26. The LXX first translated it as “Red Sea,” followed by the Vulgate and then the King James Version.
 2. referred to the “sea to the south” or “sea at the end (of the earth).” It could have referred to the modern Red Sea, Indian Ocean or Persian Gulf.
 3. had several usages in the OT (cf. Num. 33:8,10).
- C. There are three possible routes involving three different bodies of water:
 1. A northern route - this was along the Mediterranean coast, following the commercial highway known as “the way of the Philistines.” This would have been the shortest way to the Promised Land. The body of water that they would have encountered would have been one of the shallow, marshy areas called: Lake Sirbonis or Lake Menzalach. However, one must take into account Exod. 13:17, which seems to negate this option. Also the presence of Egyptian fortresses along this route militates against this option.
 2. A middle route - this would involve the central lakes called
 - a. “The Bitter Lakes”
 - b. “Lake Balah”
 - c. “Lake Timsah”This would also have been following a caravan route through the wilderness of Shur.
 3. A southern route - this would involve the large body of salt water we call the Red Sea today. There was also a caravan route from this area that linked up with the “King’s Highway” (the transJordan road to Damascus) at Ezion-Geber.
 - a. militating against this is the absence of reeds in this body of water
 - b. pointing toward this is that I Kgs. 9:26 says Ezion-Geber is on the Yam-Suph. This would be the Gulf of Aqaba or part of the Red Sea (cf. Num. 21:4; Deut. 27; Jdgs. 11:16; Jer. 49:12).
 4. Numbers 33 clearly shows the problem. In v. 8a they “pass through the sea,” then in v. 10 they camped by the “Red Sea,” a different body of water.

5. Whichever body of water was crossed, it was a miracle of God. Israel was provided weaponry from the dead Egyptian soldiers who floated to their side of the body of water, another miracle, Exod. 14:30; 15:4-5.
6. It is possible from other literature that “the *yam suph*” was the uncharted, mysterious body of water to the south. In some literature the Indian Ocean or the bay of Bengeli is called “*yom suph*.”

9:13 “then You came down on Mount Sinai”

SPECIAL TOPIC: LOCATION OF MT. SINAI

- A. If Moses was speaking literally and not figuratively of the three day journey he requested of Pharaoh (Exod. 3:18; 5:3; 8:27), that was not a long enough time to get to the traditional site in the southern Sinai peninsula. Therefore, some scholars place the mountain near the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea.
- B. The traditional site called “Jebel Musa,” in the Wilderness of Sin, has several things in its favor:
 1. A large plain before the mountain
 2. Deut. 1:2 says it was an eleven day journey from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea,
 3. The term “Sinai” is a non-Hebrew term. It may be linked to the Wilderness of Sin, which refers to a small desert bush. The Hebrew name for the mountain is Horeb (wilderness).
 4. Mt. Sinai has been the traditional site since the 4th century A.D. It is in the “land of Midian” which included a large area of the Sinai peninsula and Arabia.
 5. It seems that archaeology has confirmed the location of some of the cities mentioned in the Exodus account (*Elim, Dophkah, Rephidim*) as being on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula.
- C. The traditional site of Mt. Sinai was not established until *Pilgrimage of Silvia*, written about A.D. 385-388 (cf. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, p. 151).

▣ **“You gave them just ordinances and true laws”** There are some cultural examples similar to the decalog.

1. The *Laws of Lipit-Ishtar* (Sumerian), from the king of Isin (1934-1924 B.C.)
2. The *Laws of Eshnunna* (old Babylonian), dating about 1800 B.C. from the reign of Dadusha, king of Ashnunna
3. The Code of Hammurabi (old Babylon) from the king of Babylon, Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.)
4. The law codes of the Hittite kings Mupsilis I or Hattusilis I, from about 1650 B.C.
5. The Mesopotamian law codes focus primarily on civil laws, while the biblical laws focus primarily on religious/cultic laws. “. . .we might suggest a civil bias in all cuneiform law and a cultic bias in Israelite law. . ., in Mesopotamia, offense is ultimately viewed in relation to society; while in Israel, all offense is ultimately against God.” Walton, p. 80.
6. Albrecht Alt in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Oxford, 1966, pp. 81-132, has identified two types of laws:
 - a. casuistic, which use conditional clauses. It is characterized by an “if. . .then” structure. It does not appeal to religious or societal norms but states a prohibition and consequence.
 - b. apodictic, which does not use conditional clauses.
 - (1) Exodus 21 and Deut. 27:15-26 use the third person and relate to individual, specific cases
 - (2) Lev. 18:7-17 and Exodus 20/Deuteronomy 5 use the second person and are more general in scope.
 - c. Mesopotamian law is primarily casuistic while Israelite law is primarily apodictic.

9:14 This verse, like v. 13, relates to the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai recorded in Exodus 19-20.

The phrase “Thy holy sabbath” probably refers to Exod. 20:8-11, which is a theological development of the seventh day of rest of Gen. 2:1-3.



NASB, NRSV,

TEV, NJB “Through Thy servant Moses”

NKJV “By the hand of Moses Your servant”

The NKJV retains the literal idiom. Moses is said to have “written” God’s laws several times (cf. Exod. 17:14; 24:4,7; 34:27,28; Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9,22,24-26!)

9:15-21 This is a description of the wilderness wandering period and God’s unique care amidst the children of Israel’s rebellion (Ezra’s theme in chapter 9).

9:15 “You provided bread from heaven” This daily provision of manna is described in Exodus 16, especially vv. 14-15,31.

▣ **“You brought forth water from a rock”** This must have occurred regularly, but only two times are recorded (Exod. 17:6; Num. 20:7-13).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:16-25

¹⁶ **“But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly;**

They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments.

¹⁷**They refused to listen,**

And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them;

So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.

But You are a God of forgiveness,

Gracious and compassionate,

Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness;

And You did not forsake them.

¹⁸**Even when they made for themselves**

A calf of molten metal

And said, 'This is your God

Who brought you up from Egypt,'

And committed great blasphemies,

¹⁹**You, in Your great compassion,**

Did not forsake them in the wilderness;

The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day,

To guide them on their way,

Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go.

²⁰**You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,**

Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth,

And You gave them water for their thirst.

²¹**Indeed, forty years You provided for them in the wilderness *and* they were not in want;**

Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell.

**²²You also gave them kingdoms and peoples,
And allotted *them* to them as a boundary.**

**They took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon
And the land of Og the king of Bashan.**

**²³You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven,
And You brought them into the land
Which You had told their fathers to enter and possess.**

**²⁴So their sons entered and possessed the land.
And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites,
And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land,
To do with them as they desired.**

**²⁵They captured fortified cities and a fertile land.
They took possession of houses full of every good thing,
Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves,
Fruit trees in abundance.
So they ate, were filled and grew fat,
And reveled in Your great goodness."**

9:16-17 Here is the recurrent theme of the chapter.

1. God's faithfulness and love, v. 17b
2. Israel's unfaithfulness and rebellion, vv. 16-17a

YHWH's righteousness and Israel's rebellion are graphically revealed in Deut. 9:4-6,7,13,24,27.

9:16

NASB "they became stubborn"

NKJV "hardened their necks"

NRSV "stiffened their necks"

TEV "grew. . .stubborn"

NJB "grew obstinate"

The VERB (BDB 904 I, KB 1151, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT) and the NOUN (BDB 791) both denote purposeful rejection of truth (i.e., rebellion, cf. v. 17,29; II Chr. 30:8; 36:13; Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15).

9:17 "Thy wondrous deeds" This VERB (BDB 810, KB 927, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE) can mean "difficult" (cf. Deut. 17:8; Prov. 30:18) or "wonderful" (cf. Exod. 3:20; Ps. 78:12-16). In this passage, like so many Psalms, it refers to God's mighty, powerful, extraordinary acts of deliverance during the exodus, wanderings, and conquest.

▣ **"appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt"** This relates specifically to Num. 14:4. The precursor is found in Exod. 14:10-12 and Num. 11:1-9.

This translation follows the Septuagint and a few medieval Hebrew manuscripts. Instead of "Egypt" the MT has "bondage" (BDB 715, cf. NKJV), which is very similar in spelling.

▣ **"You are a God"** There are six specific things stated about God's character.

1. forgiving (BDB 699, used exclusively of God's forgiveness)
2. gracious (BDB 337, cf. Deut. 4:31; II Chr. 30:9)

3. compassionate (BDB 933)
4. slow to anger (cf. Num.14:18)
5. abounding in lovingkindness (BDB 338, Covenant loyalty, see Special Topic: *Hesed* at 13:14)
6. He did not forsake them!

This is one of a select number of OT texts that delineate the basic nature of God—Exod. 34:6-7; Ps. 103:8; and Joel 2:13.

Part of this text’s litany of God’s characteristics became a standard way of referring to His character (cf. Ps. 86:15; 145:8; Jonah 4:2). This is who God is! Rejoice and be glad!

Believers’ hope is based on the unchanging character of God. Remember the list is given in a verse that describes Israel’s intentional rejection of God and His word.

9:18 “they made for themselves a calf of molten metal” The calf was meant as a physical representation of YHWH, not as another god (cf. Exod. 32:1-8.31).

▣ **“and committed great blasphemies”** There is a series of sins recorded in Exod. 32.

1. idolatry (cf. LSS & Vulgate) or at least making a physical image of YHWH (cf. Exod. 20:4-5)
2. drunkenness
3. sexual promiscuity (cf. Exod. 32:6, “rose up to play” means a sexual orgy, cf. Gen. 26:18 for another use of this phrase)

9:20 “You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them” God’s “good spirit” does not necessarily refer to the NT Trinitarian understanding of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. In the OT God’s Spirit is a way of referring to His will being accomplished (cf. Gen. 1:2). In this context it is probably parallel to God’s angel who accompanied Israel during the wilderness wandering period (cf. Exod. 3:2; 14:19; 23:20,23,34; 33:2).

Also, God’s Spirit is a way of referring to revelation or inspiration (cf. v. 30; Ps. 143:10). He (NT Trinitarian sense) is the agent of inspiration (cf. 9:30; Num. 11:17,25,29; I Sam. 10:6,9-11; II Sam. 23:2; I Kgs. 22:24; I Chr. 12:18; II Chr. 24:20; Isa. 11:2; 42:1; Ezek. 11:5,24; Hos. 9:7; Joel 2:28-29; Micah 3:8; Zech. 7:12).

9:21 Even though the wilderness wandering period was a time of judgment because of their unbelief, God was with them in a personal, powerful, daily way. The rabbis later called this time “the honeymoon” period because of YHWH’s tender care and provision. The term “forty” is a round, symbolic number. This period only lasted 38 years. The specific reference to the clothes not wearing out is from Deut. 8:4; 29:5.

9:22 This refers to Joshua’s conquest on the eastern side of the Jordan (cf. Num. 21:21-35; Ps. 35:11; 36:19-20).

9:23-25 This seems to refer to Joshua’s conquest of the land of Canaan.

9:23 “You made their sons numerous as the stars of heaven” This was part of the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; Exod. 32:13, i.e., numerous descendants also referred to as “like the sand of the sea,” cf. Gen. 22:12; 32:12; Isa. 48:19; Hos. 1:10).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:26-31

**²⁶“But they became disobedient and rebelled against You,
And cast Your law behind their backs
And killed Your prophets who had admonished them**

So that they might return to You,
And they committed great blasphemies.

²⁷Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them,
But when they cried to You in the time of their distress,
You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion
You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors.

²⁸But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You;
Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them.
When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven,
And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion,

²⁹And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law.
Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your
ordinances,

By which if a man observes them he shall live.
And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen.

³⁰However, You bore with them for many years,
And admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets,
Yet they would not give ear.
Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

³¹Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them,
For You are a gracious and compassionate God."

9:26-31 This refers to the period of the Judges, which was one of the darkest periods of Israel's history. Cycle after cycle of sin and restoration!

9:26 "and cast them behind their backs" This is a Hebrew idiom for being out of sight, being out of mind (cf. Isa. 38:17). It has the connotation of willful rejection (cf. I Kgs. 14:9; Ezek. 23:35 and the same concept is in Ps. 50:17).

▣ **"And killed Your prophets"** God's people did not want to hear from God through His spokespersons so they silenced the speaker!

▣ **"return"** See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT at 1:9.

9:27 The recurrent theme of YHWH's patience, love, and covenant loyalty is contrasted with Israel's rebellion, generation after generation (cf. v. 28).

9:29 "to turn back" See Special Topic: Repentance in the OT at 1:9.

▣
NASB "they acted arrogantly"
NKJV "they acted proudly"
NRSV "they acted presumptuously"
TEV "in pride they rejected"
NJB "they became arrogant"

This VERB (BDB 267, KB 268, *Hiphil* PERFECT) implies the willful rejection of God’s authority expressed through His prophets (cf. v. 30) and His word. Often one’s personal, cultural, or national opinions are substituted for God’s truth (e.g., false prophets).

▣ **“By which if a man observes them he shall live”** This is the OT understanding of salvation (cf. Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:12). However, the repeated failure of each and every generation of the sons of Adam forced YHWH to bring about a “new covenant” (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38) based on God’s performance (in Christ) only dependent on a faithful human reception. The goal is still the same—a righteous people, but the mechanism has changed; an internal law/a new heart/a new spirit!

▣ **“They turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck”** This terminology refers to Deut. 9:6, 7,13,24,27.

9:30 “the peoples of the land” In Ezra (cf. 3:3; 9:1,2,11; 10:2,11) and Nehemiah (cf. 9:30; 10:29,31,32) this means native inhabitants (i.e., those who survived the deportations and those resettled in Palestine and the resulting intermarriages). Earlier in the OT it referred to either (1) the wealthy land owners or (2) the people who had legal rights as citizens.

9:31 God’s covenant judgment (cf. Deut. 27-29) was always an attempt to cause Israel to repent and return. However, grace and mercy rejected results in judgment even beyond this life. God chose Israel to choose the world! He retained a faithful remnant to accomplish His Messianic promises and world evangelization!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:32-37

³²“Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness,

Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You,

Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers and on all Your people,

From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day.

³³However, You are just in all that has come upon us;

For You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.

³⁴For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law

Or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them.

³⁵But they, in their own kingdom,

With Your great goodness which You gave them,

With the broad and rich land which You set before them,

Did not serve You or turn from their evil deeds.

³⁶Behold, we are slaves today,

And as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty,

Behold, we are slaves in it.

³⁷Its abundant produce is for the kings

Whom You have set over us because of our sins;

They also rule over our bodies

And over our cattle as they please, So we are in great distress.

³⁸Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests."

9:32-37 These verses deal with the period of the United (Saul, David, and Solomon) and Divided Monarchy (Israel until 922 B.C. and Judah until 586 B.C.).

9:32 “our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and lovingkindness” Again the character and faithfulness of YHWH, in contrast to His people, is emphasized (cf. v. 33). This is the recurrent theme.

The term “great” (BDB 152) is attributed (1) several times (cf. 1:5; Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Ps. 77:13; 95:3; Jer. 32:18; Dan. 9:4); (2) to *Elohim* (cf. 8:6; II Chr. 2:5); and (3) to YHWH (cf. Exod. 18:11; I Chr. 16:25; Ps. 48:1; 96:4; 99:2; 135:5; 145:3; Jer. 10:6). God’s power is great (Num. 14:17); God’s name is great (II Sam. 7:26; I Chr. 17:24); God’s works are great (Ps. 92:5).

The term “awesome” (BDB 431, KB 432, *Niphal* PARTICIPLE) is used in several but related senses in connection to God.

1. God’s redemptive acts (e.g., Deut. 10:21)
2. description of God Himself (e.g., Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Neh. 1:5; 4:18; 9:32)
 - a. of His name (e.g., Deut. 28:58)
 - b. of His appearance (e.g., Jdgs. 13:6; Isa. 64:3).

Humans tremble or should tremble at the presence or even mention of the God of creation.

The last two in the list are synonymous. God’s power is established by His faithfulness (see Special Topic: *Hesed* at 13:14) to His promises. These last two characteristics often appear together (cf. 1:5; 9:32; Deut. 7:2,9,12; I Kgs. 8:23; II Chr. 6:14; Dan. 9:4).

A good article on the relationship between *berith* (covenant) and *hesed* (lovingkindness) is Edmund Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 103-107.

▣ **“from the days of the kings of Assyria to this day”** Assyria took the Northern Ten Tribes captive in 722 B.C. For a list of their kings in sequence see Appendix.

9:33 “You are just in all that has come upon us” The consequences for covenant violation are clearly spelled out in Deut. 27-29. God’s judgments are both judicially fair and redemptively purposeful.

9:35 “the broad and rich land” The Promised Land could hardly be characterized as “spacious,” so it must be used metaphorically for a place of freedom (cf. Exod. 3:8).

Canaan was a very fertile land in Moses’ day (cf. Exod. 3:8,17; 13:5; Num. 13:23,27).

9:36 “Behold, we are slaves today” This refers to the continuing domination, albeit benevolent, under Persia.

9:38 “we are making an agreement in writing” Although the word “covenant” is not used here, a similar but rare word is employed. The term “agreement” is really from the Hebrew root “amen” and should be translated “firm agreement” (BDB 53). The verb “making” is the Hebrew term “to cut” (BDB 503, KB 500, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE). This is often associated with the common phrase “to cut a covenant.”

9:38-10:27 “leaders, Levites, priests” The leaders are mentioned in 10:1,14-27; the Levites in 10:9-13; and priests in 10:2-8 (cf. 12:1-7). There has been much discussion among scholars whether individuals or families are listed. It is also unusual that Ezra is not mentioned, however, he was a member of the first named priestly family (Seraiah).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How are vv. 1-2 related to the Day of Atonement?
2. Is confession individual or corporate or both? How does this affect the way we pray/confess today?
3. Who verbalizes the Psalm (vv. 5-32)?
4. How is the group on the platform in v. 4 related to the group speaking in v. 5?
5. Outline the different periods of Israel's history alluded to in the Psalm.
6. Why is v. 17 so important?
7. Explain the OT concept of "Spirit." How do v. 20 and v. 30 relate?
8. Explain the significance of v. 31.

NEHEMIAH 10

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The People Who Sealed the Covenant	The Covenant to Support God's House (9:38-10:39)	The People Sign an Agreement (9:38-10:27)	The Record of the Promise Made by the Community
10:1-27	9:38-10:27	9:38-10:1	(9:38 counted as 10:1) 10:1
		10:2-8	10:2-9
		10:9-13	10:10-14
		10:14-27	10:15-28
The Covenant That was Sealed		The Agreement	
10:28-39	10:28-31	10:28-29	10:29-30
		10:30	10:31
		10:31a	10:32a
		10:31b	10:32b
	10:32-39	10:32	10:33-35
		10:33	
		10:34	
		10:35	(10:35 & 40 placed last)
		10:36	10:36-40b
		10:37a	
		10:37b-39a	
		10:39b	

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph

3. Third paragraph

4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:1-27

¹Now on the sealed document *were the names of*: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah,

²Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

³Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah,

⁴Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,

⁵Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

⁶Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

⁷Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

⁸Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah. These *were* the priests.

⁹And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;

¹⁰also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

¹¹Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

¹²Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

¹³Hodiah, Bani, Beninu.

¹⁴The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

¹⁵Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

¹⁶Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

¹⁷Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

¹⁸Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,

¹⁹Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

²⁰Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,

²¹Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,

²²Pelathiah, Hanan, Anaiah,

²³Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,

²⁴Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,

²⁵Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,

²⁶Ahiah, Hanan, Anan,

²⁷Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:28-31

²⁸ Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, ²⁹are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the

commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;³⁰ and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. ³¹As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego *the crops* the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

10:28 This mentions the other groups of Israeli society.

▣ **“all who had knowledge and understanding”** See note at 8:2. This seems to refer to the children.

10:29 “a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law” This is a covenant renewal service much like Josh. 8:30-35 and 24:1ff. These renewal ceremonies were based on the covenant blessings and cursings summarized in Deut. 27-29. Obedience and disobedience had consequences in this life and the next!

The term “walk” is a biblical metaphor for lifestyle faith. God’s word/teachings are a path for His people to follow (e.g., Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23).

▣ **“the commandments. . .ordinances. . .statutes”** The revelation of God to God is characterized by several terms. Notice the list and parallelism of Ps. 19:7-9.

▣
NASB “God our Lord”
NKJV, NRSV,
 TEV “the *Lord* our Lord”
NJB “Yahweh our Lord”

The first term is YHWH, the covenant name for God (cf. Gen. 2:4). The second is *Adon*, which meant husband, owner, master, or lord. See Special Topic: Names for Deity at Neh. 1:11.

10:30 “and we will not give our daughters to the people of the land or take their daughters for our sons” This does not refer to racial exclusion, but religious exclusion (cf. Exod. 34:12-16 Ezra 9:10; Neh. 13:23-28). This was a major issue in restored Judah.

10:31 “as for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell” The indigenous habitants of the Persian province who were supposedly “YHWHistic” were violating the Sabbath requirements. This is one example of the problems of trying to work with or associate with the inhabitants who were in the land when the returnees arrived.

▣ **“and we will forgo *the crops* the seventh year”** This is a second feature of Mosaic law which was a means of acknowledging YHWH’s ownership of the land and His care and concern for the needy (cf. Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:4-7,20-22).

▣ **“and the exaction of every debt”** This is a third element related to Moses’ law. All debts were cancelled on the seventh year (cf. Deut. 15:1-2; 31:10), which was called the Sabbath year. They were serious about reinstating the Mosaic law in its fullness.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:32-33

³²We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: ³³for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God.

10:32 “to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God” In Exod. 30:11-16, it is a half of a shekel given to the tabernacle, but it is not given annually. Exactly what the fee paid for is delineated in v. 33. In the pre-exilic period, the king supported the cost of the temple, but in the post-exilic community the cost was shared among the people

10:33 “the showbread” See Exod. 25:23-30.

▣ **“the continual grain offering”** See Num. 28:1-8.

▣ **“the continual burnt offering”** See Exod. 29:38-42; Num. 28:1-8

▣ **“the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times”** See Num. 28:9-10,11-15; 29:39-40.

▣ **“for the sin offering to make atonement for Israel”** See Lev. 4:1 - 5:13 and Num. 15:23-29.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:34-39

³⁴ Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood *among* the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law; ³⁵and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually, ³⁶and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God. ³⁷We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. ³⁸The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. ³⁹For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.

10:34 “we cast lots for the supply of wood” The casting of lots was a mechanical way (like the Urim and Thummim) to discern God’s will. In this case the lots help divide the responsibility for wood for the burnt offerings among the returnees. Each family was responsible for a period of time. This later turns into a feast (cf. Josephus, *Wars* 17.6).

10:35 “the first fruits” Giving God the first ripened fruit was a way to show God’s ownership of the entire harvest. These offerings helped support the priests. See Exod. 22:29; 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 26:1-11; and Ezek. 44:30.

10:36 “the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle” this was a way to show God’s ownership of all things. See Exodus 13.

10:37 “we shall also bring the first of our dough” See Lev. 23 :17.

▣ **“and the tithe of our ground to the Levites”** See Lev. 27:30.

10:38 “the priest. . .shall be with the Levites” This was one of the checks and balances procedures installed to insure the taxation system.

▣ **“the tenth of the tithes”** The Levites were required to tithe to the priests (cf. Num. 18:26). In the OT there were many Levites so the priests got all they needed from their tithe, but in these days there were few Levites. The priests, however, did not want to alter the Mosaic regulations.

There is some confusion about exactly how the tithing system in Israel worked. From Deut. 14:22-29

1. individuals brought a tithe to the central sanctuary for two years
2. the third year the tithe was paid locally to benefit the poor
3. every seventh year the fields lay fallow so there was no tithe of produce

In this passage (vv. 32-39), all non-produce items were brought to the priests in Jerusalem, but the produce was brought to the Levites in the local towns, who then tithed that to Jerusalem. The special offerings like “the first fruits” or “first born” were also taken to Jerusalem.

10:39 “new wine” See Special Topic: Biblical Attitudes Toward Alcohol (Fermentation) and Alcoholism (Addiction) at Ezra 7:17.

▣ **“Thus we will not neglect the house of God”** All of the provisions mentioned in vv. 34-39 were to equip the temple and its personnel for its regular duties.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the relationship between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah?
2. Can you name the post-exilic prophets?
3. Why is the Day of Atonement left out of this section?
4. Outline chapter 9 concerning God’s relationship to Israel through the years.

NEHEMIAH 11

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The People Dwelling in Jerusalem	A Census List	People Who Lived in Jerusalem	Nehemiah's Method of Repopulating Jerusalem
11:1-2	11:1-2	11:1-3a	11:1-3
11:3-14	11:3-6	11:3b	The Jewish Population at Jerusalem
		11:4-6	11:4a
			11:4b-6
	11:7-9	11:7-9	11:7-8
			11:9
	11:10-14	11:10-14	11:10-14a
			11:14b
11:15-18	11:15-18	11:15-18	11:15-18
			Supplementary Notes
11:19-21	11:19-21	11:19	11:19 (v. 20 follows v. 24)
		11:20-21	
			11:21-24
11:22-24	11:22-24	11:22-23	
		11:24	
The People Dwelling Outside Jerusalem		The People in Other Towns and Cities	The Jewish Population Outside Jerusalem
11:25-30	11:25-36	11:25-30	11:20,25-30
11:31-36		11:31-36	11:31-35
			11:36

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph

2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:1-2

¹Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths *remained* in the *other* cities. ²And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

11:1 “the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem” Since the terrible siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., no one wanted to live in the city. The leaders (the wealthy laymen, cf. v. 3) and the temple personnel were the only large groups that lived within the city’s walls (cf. v. 3; 2:16-17). They were to be joined by 10% of the Jewish population of the surrounding towns plus any volunteers (cf. v. 2). This involved leaving established homes and farms. This same subject is first introduced in 7:4.

▣ **“cast lots”** This VERB (BDB 656, KB 709, *Hiphil* PERFECT) means “casting lots (cf. I Chr. 24:31; 25:8; 26:13-14; Esth. 3:7; 9:24). This had religious connotations (cf. 10:34; Num. 26:55-56; Josh. 14:2; Prov. 16:33; 18:18). It was a way to know the will of YHWH, as was the Urim and Thummim (cf. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21). The Urim was used exclusively by the High Priest, but “lots” were used to know YHWH’s will by others (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 1, pp. 840-842).

▣ **“the holy city”** This was a way of referring to the place where YHWH dwelt (cf. Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Dan. 9:24).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:3-6

³Now these are the heads of the provinces who lived in Jerusalem, but in the cities of Judah each lived on his own property in their cities—the Israelites, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants and the descendants of Solomon’s servants. ⁴Some of the sons of Judah and some of the sons of Benjamin lived in Jerusalem. From the sons of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the sons of Perez; ⁵and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of the Shilonite. ⁶All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were 468 able men.

11:3 “Now these are the heads of the provinces who lived in Jerusalem” This list is quite similar to I Chr. 9; about half of the names are the same. The exact relationship between these two lists as with other lists in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is uncertain.

▣ **“each lived on his own property”** The term “property” (BDB 28) usually meant “to grasp” or “to seize,” but in connection to tribal allotments it has the connotation of given by YHWH (both as a promise to Abraham, cf. Gen. 5:12-21 and by the Urim in Josh. 13-19).

▣ **“Israelites”** This refers to Jewish laymen. This verse lists the different elements of Jewish society. The different kinds of temple personnel and lay persons are included.

▣ **“temple servants”** This term (BDB 682) in post-exilic texts always has the ARTICLE and is PLURAL. It designates a temple labor force. The origin of the term may be “the given ones,” referring to those non-Israelites defeated in battle by King David and given to the temple to help the Levites (cf. Ezra 8:20); therefore, they are like “Solomon’s servants” (cf. Ezra 2:58; Neh. 7:60; 11:3).

11:4 “sons of Judah. . . sons of Benjamin” The preponderance of returning Jews were from these two tribes because they made up the last tribal groups to be exiled. Simeon was also part of the tribe of Judah but had lost their tribal identity.

▣ **“Perez”** See Gen. 38:29.

11:5 “the son of the Shilonite” This designation is surprising in a list of names (cf. I Chr. 9:5). There is no first name associated with this place (Shiloh, a city in Ephraim). It is possible that the consonants of “Shilonites” should refer to “Shelah,” one of Judah’s sons in Gen. 38:5,26, therefore, “Shelanite” (cf. Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Commentary*, p. 118), which is the way NEB and REB translate I Chr. 9:5 and the form appears in Num. 26:20.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:7-9

⁷Now these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah; ⁸and after him Gabbai and Sallai, 928. ⁹Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer, and Judah the son of Hassenuah was second in command of the city.

11:8

NASB, NKJV,

JPSOA “after him”

NRSV, NJB “his brothers”

TEV “close relatives”

NET, NIV “his followers”

REB “his kinsmen”

This Hebrew term (BDB 29) has a large usage. All of the above translations are a possibility. For me those that focus on kinship fit the context best. However, “brothers” involves a textual emendation.

11:9 “their overseer” This term (BDB 824) means “commissioner, deputy, overseer. It is used in v. 22 for a leader of Levites. It is used of the king’s officers in II Chr. 24:11 and of the king’s military officers in II Kgs. 25:19. This text does not specify exactly what kind of overseer.

▣ **“second in command of the city”** This may imply that he was next to Nehemiah’s brother, Hanani (cf. 7:2). It is possible that Judah was the overseer of Benjamin’s labor force who helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

The NIV translates this phrase “was over the Second District of the city.” The only other English translation that I have found that has this interpretation is James Moffatt, *A New Translation of the Bible*. It is also in the footnote of the NEB.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:10-14

¹⁰From the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin, ¹¹Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the leader of the house of God, ¹²and their kinsmen who performed the work of the temple, 822; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, ¹³and his kinsmen, heads of fathers' *households*, 242; and Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, ¹⁴and their brothers, valiant warriors, 128. And their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of Haggadolim.

11:11

NASB, NKJV “the leader of the house of God”
NRSV “officer of the house of God”
TEV “who was High Priest”
NJB “the chief of the Temple of God”

The term (BDB 617) means “one in front.” It is used of political leaders, but also of religious leaders (cf. II Chr. 31:12; 35:8; Jer. 20:1, also of High Priest, I Chr. 9:11; II Chr. 31:13 [different word in v. 10]; Neh. 11:11; Dan. 11:22).

11:14

NASB, NRSV “valiant warriors”
NKJV “mighty men of valor”
TEV “outstanding soldiers”
NJB “outstanding people”
NET “capable men”
REB “men of substance”

This term (BDB 298) can refer to

1. physical strength
2. military prowess (e.g., Josh. 1:14; 8:3; 10:7; Jdgs. 6:12; 11:1; II Chr. 13:3; 14:8)
3. ability (cf. v. 6; Exod. 18:21,25; I Chr. 9:13)
4. wealth (I Sam. 9:1; II Kgs. 15:20)

Because these men are priests either #1 or #3 fits the context best.



NASB, NRSV “the son of Haggadolim”
NKJV “the son of *one of the great men*”
TEV “a member of a leading family”
NJB “men of substance”

The term (BDB 153, KB 177) means “great” and is used to describe many things and persons (NASB 1970 marginal note, p. 700, “the great ones”). The TEV translation carries the basic thought of the PLURAL form in this context.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:15-18

¹⁵Now from the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; ¹⁶and Shabbethai and Jozabad, from the leaders of the Levites, who were in charge of the outside work of the house of God; ¹⁷and Mattaniah the son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, who was the leader in beginning the thanksgiving at prayer, and Bakbukiah, the second among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸All the Levites in the holy city *were* 284.

11:16 “who were in charge of the outside work of the house of God” In the context of Nehemiah, one wonders if this refers to

1. normal temple activities, but done outside the precincts of the temple (e.g., raising sacrificial sheep)
2. the work done on the walls and gates of the city which were near the temple area
3. other administrative assignments (cf. I Chr. 26:29)

The term has the connotation in this text of secular work.

11:17 “Asaph. . .Jeduthun” These were two of the three groups of temple singers appointed by David (cf. I Chr. 25:1-4; II Chr. 5:12).



NASB “who was the leader in beginning the thanksgiving at prayer”

NKJV “who was the leader who began the thanksgiving with prayer”

NRSV “who was the leader to begin the thanksgiving in prayer”

TEV “He led the Temple choir in singing the prayer of thanksgiving”

NJB “who led the praises and intoned the thanksgiving associated with the prayer”

This Levite was somehow related to the liturgical aspect of prayer/praise. The Hebrew “the begin” is close to the Hebrew “the praise” (cf. LXX & Vulgate). The JPSOA combines the meaning by “he would lead off with praise” (*The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1706).

Asaph was a leader of a Levitical family involved in temple music and praise (cf. I Chr. 25:1-2; II Chr. 5:12).

▣ **“and Bakbukiah, the second among his brethren”** This seems to imply that this Levite was the assistant to Mattaniah (cf. TEV). This Hebrew term (BDB 1041) is often used to denote the second in charge/control/leadership (cf. II Kgs. 23:4; 25:18; I Chr. 5:12; 15:18; II Chr. 31:12; Jer. 52:24).

▣ **“Abda the son of Shammua”** I Chronicles 9:16 has Obadiah son of Shemaiah.

11:18 Many of the Levites lived outside of the city of Jerusalem (cf. vv. 3,20), but 284 did live in the city.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:19-21

¹⁹Also the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon and their brethren who kept watch at the gates, were 172. ²⁰The rest of Israel, of the priests and of the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, each on his own inheritance. ²¹But the temple servants were living in Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of the temple servants.

11:19 “the gatekeepers” These were also ancient families who were appointed to this special task at the temple (cf. I Chr. 9:17-27; 23:5; Ezra 2:42).

11:20 “each on his own inheritance” Originally the tribe of Levi did not inherit land. The Lord Himself was their inheritance (cf. Num. 18:20,24; Deut. 10:9; 18:1-2; Josh. 13:14,33). The Levites asked Joshua for houses in certain special cities called “Levitical cities” (cf. Josh. 21) along with a small part of the surrounding pasture land. In this way they could grow vegetable gardens or raise an animal.

11:21 “the temple servants” See note at Ezra 2:43.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:22-24

²²Now the overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica, from the sons of Asaph, who were the singers for the service of the house of God. ²³For there was a commandment from the king concerning them and a firm regulation for the song leaders day by day. ²⁴Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the sons of Zerach the son of Judah, was the king's representative in all matters concerning the people.

11:22 There are so many lists of people in Ezra and Nehemiah. Often the names are common. The only way to try to tell them apart is to

1. check which group they are a part of (e.g., lay persons, priests, Levites, etc.)
2. check the tribe
3. check the order of the names

Here in v. 22 it is obvious that Uzzi is from the same family of Asaph mentioned in v. 17.

11:23 “the king” This refers to David, not Artaxerxes I (cf. 12:24,45-46). These temple personnel were appointed special tasks to perform in the temple on a regular basis, many of the tasks going back to David's day.

11:24 “Pethahiah” This is the name of a priest in David's day who was involved in the twenty-four divisions (cf. 1 Chr. 24:16).

There is another man by this same name mentioned in v. 24. The interpretive question is (1) do vv. 23 and 24 go together and, thereby “the king” refers to David or (2) is the man a representative of Artaxerxes I, the Persian king during Ezra's and Nehemiah's day?

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 11:25-36

²⁵Now as for the villages with their fields, some of the sons of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba and its towns, in Dibon and its towns, and in Jekabzeel and its villages,

²⁶and in Jeshua, in Moladah and Beth-pelet,

²⁷and in Hazar-shual, in Beersheba and its towns,

²⁸and in Ziklag, in Meconah and in its towns,

²⁹and in En-rimmon, in Zorah and in Jarmuth,

³⁰Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, Azekah and its towns. So they encamped from Beersheba as far as the valley of Hinnom. ³¹The sons of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, at Michmash and Aija, at Bethel and its towns,

³²at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,

³³Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,

³⁴Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,

³⁵Lod and Ono, the valley of craftsmen.

³⁶From the Levites, some divisions in Judah belonged to Benjamin.

11:25-36 The list of cities in chapter 3 which relates those who worked on the city wall is different from this list. The only name that is the same is Zamoah. This is hard to explain for the lists are supposed to be a list of the surrounding cities with Jewish populations. The possibilities are (1) that these cities mark the extent of the boundaries of Judah and Benjamin, not the cities close to Jerusalem or (2) that these are cities in the pre-exilic land allocations of Judah (cf. vv. 25-30) and Benjamin (cf. vv. 31-36) in which the returnees settled.

11:25 “Kiriath-arba” This is the ancient name for Hebron (cf. Gen. 23:2), which is 20 miles south of Jerusalem (cf. Josh. 14:15; 15:54; 20:7; Jdgs. 1:10).

▣ **“and its towns”** This is literally the Hebrew idiom “daughters.”

▣ **“Dibon”** This is possibly the same as Dimonah. See Josh. 15:21-26.

▣ **“Jekabzeel”** A village in southern Judah close to Edom. See Joshua 15:21.

11:25, 28, 32, 34 “Jekabzeel...Meconah...Ananiah...Neballat” These are cities which appear only here in the Bible.

11:26 “Moladah” See Josh. 15:26; 19:2; I Chr. 4:28.

▣ **“Beth-pelet”** This is a village in southern Judah. See Josh. 15:27.

11:27 “Hazar-Shual, in Beersheba” Both are mentioned in Josh. 15:28.

11:28 “Ziklag” See Josh. 15:31; 19:5; I Sam. 27:6; 30:1,14,25.

11:29 “En-rimmon” See Josh. 15:32.

▣ **“Zorah”** See Josh. 15:33.

▣ **“Jarmuth”** Like Lachish this was originally an Amorite city. See Josh. 10:3,5,23; 12:11; 15:35.

11:30 “Zanoah, Adullam” Both are mentioned in Josh. 15:34-35.

▣ **“Lachish”** This was a major walled city (e.g., Josh. 10; 12:3-16; 11 Chr. 11:9; 22:9).

▣ **“Azekah”** This is a city of Judah located on the coastal plain. See Josh. 15:35.

▣ **“Beersheba”** This is about 32 miles south of Jerusalem. The current Persian land allocation for Judah did not extend that far north.

▣ **“the valley of Hinnom”** One of the valleys in Jerusalem known as the location of the worship of the Phoenician fire god *Molech*. This valley was later used as the garbage dump for Jerusalem. Jesus uses it to describe Hell - *Gehenna*.

SPECIAL TOPIC: WHERE ARE THE DEAD?

I. Old Testament

A. All humans go to *She'ol* (etymology uncertain, BDB 1066), which is a way of referring to death or the grave, mostly in Wisdom Literature and Isaiah. In the OT it was a shadowy, conscious, but joyless existence (cf. Job 10:21-22; 38:17; Ps. 107:10,14).

B. *She'ol* characterized

1. associated with God's judgment (fire), Deut. 32:22
2. associated with punishment even before Judgment Day, Ps. 18:4-5

3. associated with *Abaddon* (destruction), also open to God, Job 26:6; Ps. 139:8; Amos 9:2
4. associated with “the Pit” (grave), Ps.16:10; Isa. 14:15; Ezek. 31:15-17
5. wicked descend alive into *She’ol*, Num. 16:30,33; Ps. 55:15
6. personified often as an animal with a large mouth, Num. 16:30; Isa. 5:14; 14:9; Hab. 2:5
7. people there called *Repha’im*, Isa. 14:9-11)

II. New Testament

A. The Hebrew *She’ol* is translated by the Greek *Hades* (the unseen world)

B. *Hades* characterized

1. refers to death, Matt. 16:18
2. linked to death, Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14
3. often analogous to the place of permanent punishment (*Gehenna*), Matt. 11:23 (OT quote); Luke 10:15; 16:23-24
4. often analogous to the grave, Luke 16:23

C. Possibly divided (rabbis)

1. righteous part called paradise (really another name for heaven, cf. II Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7), Luke 23:43
2. wicked part called *Tartarus*, II Pet. 2:4, where it is a holding place for evil angels (cf. Gen. 6; I Enoch)

D. *Gehenna*

1. Reflects the OT phrase, “the valley of the sons of Hinnom,” (south of Jerusalem). It was the place where the Phoenician fire god, *Molech* (BDB 574) was worshiped by child sacrifice (cf. II Kgs. 16:3; 21:6; II Chr. 28:3; 33:6), which was forbidden in Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5
2. Jeremiah changed it from a place of pagan worship into a site of YHWH’s judgment (cf. Jer. 7:32; 19:6-7). It became the place of fiery, eternal judgment in I Enoch 90:26-27 and Sib. 1:103.
3. The Jews of Jesus’ day were so appalled by their ancestors’ participation in pagan worship by child sacrifice, that they turned this area into the garbage dump for Jerusalem. Many of Jesus’ metaphors for eternal judgment came from this landfill (fire, smoke, worms, stench, cf. Mark 9:44,46). The term *Gehenna* is used only by Jesus (except in James 3:6).
4. Jesus’ usage of *Gehenna*
 - a. fire, Matt. 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:43
 - b. permanent, Mark 9:48 (Matt. 25:46)
 - c. place of destruction (both soul and body), Matt. 10:28
 - d. paralleled to *She’ol*, Matt. 5:29-30; 18:9
 - e. characterizes the wicked as “son of hell,” Matt. 23:15
 - f. result of judicial sentence, Matt. 23:33; Luke 12:5
 - g. the concept of *Gehenna* is parallel to the second death (cf. Rev. 2:11; 20:6,14) or the lake of fire (cf. Matt. 13:42,50; Rev. 19:20; 20:10,14-15; 21:8). It is possible the lake of fire becomes the permanent dwelling place of humans (from *She’ol*) and evil angels (from *Tartarus*, II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6 or the abyss, cf. Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:1-10; 20:1,3).
 - h. it was not designed for humans, but for Satan and his angels, Matt. 25:41

E. It is possible, because of the overlap of *She’ol*, *Hades*, and *Gehenna* that

1. originally all humans went to *She’ol/Hades*

2. their experience there (good/ bad) is exacerbated after Judgment Day, but the place of the wicked remains the same (this is why the KJV translated *hades* (grave) as *gehenna* (hell)).
3. only NT text to mention torment before Judgment is the parable of Luke 16:19-31 (Lazarus and the Rich Man). *She'ol* is also described as a place of punishment now (cf. Deut. 32:22; Ps. 18:1-5). However, one can not establish a doctrine on a parable.

III. Intermediate state between death and resurrection

- A. The NT does not teach the “immortality of the soul,” which is one of several ancient views of the after life.
 1. human souls exist before their physical life
 2. human souls are eternal before and after physical death
 3. often the physical body is seen as a prison and death as release back to pre-existent state
- B. The NT hints at a disembodied state between death and resurrection
 1. Jesus speaks of a division between body and soul, Matt. 10:28
 2. Abraham may have a body now, Mark 12:26-27; Luke 16:23
 3. Moses and Elijah have a physical body at the transfiguration, Matt. 17
 4. Paul asserts that at the Second Coming the souls with Christ will get their new bodies first, II Thess. 4:13-18
 5. Paul asserts that believers get their new spiritual bodies on Resurrection Day, I Cor. 15:23,52
 6. Paul asserts that believers do not go to *Hades*, but at death are with Jesus, II Cor. 5:6,8; Phil. 1:23. Jesus overcame death and took the righteous to heaven with Him, I Pet. 3:18-22.

IV. Heaven

- A. This term is used in three senses in the Bible:
 1. the atmosphere above the earth, Gen. 1:1,8; Isa. 42:5; 45:18
 2. the starry heavens, Gen. 1:14; Deut. 10:14; Ps. 148:4; Heb. 4:14; 7:26
 3. the place of God’s throne, Deut. 10:14; I Kgs. 8:27; Ps. 148:4; Eph. 4:10; Heb. 9:24 (third heaven, II Cor. 12:2)
- B. The Bible does not reveal much about the afterlife. Probably because fallen humans have no way or capacity to understand (cf. I Cor. 2:9).
- C. Heaven is both a place (cf. John 14:2-3) and a person (cf. II Cor. 5:6,8). Heaven may be a restored Garden of Eden (Gen. 1-2; Rev. 21-22). The earth will be cleansed and restored (cf. Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21; II Pet. 3:10). The image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) is restored in Christ. Now the intimate fellowship of the Garden of Eden is possible again.

However, this may be metaphorical (heaven as a huge, cubed city of Rev. 21:9-27) and not literal. I Corinthians 15 describes the difference between the physical body and the spiritual body as the seed to the mature plant. Again, I Cor. 2:9 (a quote from Isa. 64:6 and 65:17) is a great promise and hope! I know that when we see Him we will be like Him (cf. I John 3:2).

V. Helpful resources

- A. William Hendriksen, *The Bible On the Life Hereafter*
- B. Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death’s Door*

11:31 “Geba” This was a northern city of Benjamin. Its name means “height” or “hill.” See Joshua 18:24.

▣ **“Michmash and Aija”** Both are mentioned in Isa. 10:28-20. They were located near Bethel. Aija means “ruins” and may be a way of referring to Ai.

11:32 “Anathoth” This was a Levitical city three miles north of Jerusalem (cf. Josh. 21:18). It was Jeremiah’s hometown (cf. Jer. 1:1).

▣ **“Nob”** Another Levitical city two miles north of Jerusalem (cf. I Sam. 21:1; 22:9,11,19; Isa. 10:32).

11:33 “Hazor” Often these village names, like the people, are hard to identify because there are several by the same name. Hazor is a good example.

1. a major Canaanite walled city in the north of Palestine (cf. Josh. 11; 12:19; 19:36)
2. a small city in the south of Judah (cf. Josh. 15:23; I Kgs. 9:15)
3. another city in southern Judah (Hazor-Hadattah, cf. Josh. 15:25)
4. a small post-exilic city north of Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 11:35)
5. this term even refers to countries or chiefdoms east of Arabia (cf. Jer. 49:28,30,33)

As an added point, people are hard to identify because

1. in this period Levites and priests often used the names of ancestors
2. in this period the Jewish families named their children after their grandfathers

▣ **“Ramah”** This is a city of Benjamin five miles north of Jerusalem. See Joshua 18:25; Jdgs. 4:5; 19:13; Ezra 2:26.

▣ **“Gittaim”** The name means “two wine presses” and was northwest of Jerusalem. See II Sam. 4:3.

11:34, 35 “Hadid. . .Lod and Ono” See Ezra 2:33 and Neh. 7:37.

11:35 “the valley of craftsmen” The ancient guilds lived close together (cf. I Chr. 4:14).

11:36 As vv. 25-30 describe the restored land of Judah in this Persian period, so vv. 31-35 describe the extent of the land of Benjamin. The Levites lived in all areas of the restored land (cf. TEV).

NEHEMIAH 12

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Priests and Levites	An Appendix	List of Priests and Levites	Priests and Levites Who Returned Under Zerubbabel and Joshua
12:1-7	12:1-7	12:1 12:2-7	12:1 12:2-7
12:8-9	12:8-11	12:8 12:9 Descendants of the High Priest Joshua	12:8-9 Genealogical List of High Priests
12:10-11		12:10-11 Heads of the Priestly Clans	12:10-11 Priests and Levites In the Time of the High Priest Joiakim
12:12-21	12:12-21	12:21-21 Record of the Priestly and Levite Families	12:12-21
12:22-26	12:22-26	12:22 12:23 Assignment of Duties in the Temple 12:24 12:25 12:26	12:22 12:23 12:24-25 12:26
Nehemiah Dedicates the Wall	The Dedication of the Walls	Nehemiah Dedicates the City Wall	The Dedication of the Walls of Jerusalem
12:27-30	12:27-30	12:27-30	12:27-30
12:31-37	12:31-37	12:31a 12:31b-37	12:31-37
12:38-43	12:38-43	12:38-40a 12:40b-42 12:43	12:38-39 12:40-43
Temple Responsibilities	Arrangements for Temple Revenues	Providing for Worship in the Temple	A Golden Age
12:44-47	12:44-47	12:44-47	12:44-13:3

READING CYCLE THREE (from “A Guide to Good Bible Reading” p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR’S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author’s intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. The purpose of the lists in this chapter (and for that matter the whole book) is difficult to grasp.
 1. Verses 1-11 refer to those who initially returned with Zerubbabel and Joshua.
 2. Verses 12-26 refer to a later group:
 - a. priests in Joiakim’s (cf. v. 10) day
 - b. Levites in Eleashib’s (cf. v. 10) day
 3. Verse 26 implies that the list in vv. 22-26 were contemporaries with Ezra and Nehemiah.
 4. Nehemiah 10:2-8 refers to Nehemiah’s day (cf. Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Commentary Series*, p. 122).
- B. In comparing all of these other lists in Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, it seems that often priests identify themselves by a prominent ancestor instead of their personal name. The twenty-four divisions of King David (cf. I Chr. 23-24) become a guiding paradigm.

An additional problem is that the priestly families used the same names over and over again.
- C. The problem of trying to put a date or historical setting to these names is clearly seen in that Mattaniah and Bakbakhiah were Levitical leaders of antiphonal choirs in Zerubbabel’s day (cf. 12:8-9) and Nehemiah’s day (cf. 11:17).

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:1-7

¹Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,

²Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,

³Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,

⁴Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,

⁵Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,

⁶Shemaiah and Joiarib, Jedaiah,

⁷Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah and Jedaiah. These were the heads of the priests and their kinsmen in the days of Jeshua.

12:1 “Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel” The main return of exiled Israelites under Cyrus’ decree occurred in 538 B.C. Documenting one’s ancestry was very important for the returning exiles to verify their tribal lineage. This list is similar to, but has some differences in comparison with Ezra 2:36-39 and Neh. 7:39-47. The exact reasons for the differences are uncertain.

▣ “Ezra” This is not Ezra, the priest/scribe (cf. Ezra 7; 10; Neh. 8; 12:13,26,33,26).

12:4 “Ginnethoi” The priest’s name appears as Ginnethon in 10:6; 12:16 (and the Vulgate).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:8-11

⁸The Levites *were* Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, *and* Mattaniah who *was* in charge of the songs of thanksgiving, he and his brothers. ⁹Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brothers, stood opposite them in *their* service divisions. ¹⁰Jeshua became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada, ¹¹and Joiada became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua.

12:8-9 This list expands the list in Ezra 2:40-42 of Levites who returned with Zerubbabel and Jeshua.

12:8 “Mattaniah who *was* in charge of the songs of thanksgiving” This was a common name among Levitical musicians. It is also mentioned in I Chr. 9:15; II Chr. 20:14; Neh. 11:17,22; 12:8,25,35.

12:9 “Unni” The MT has (*Kethiu*-written) Unno, but has a note that it should be read (*Qere* - read) as Unni.

▣ “stood opposite them in *their* service divisions” This may refer to liturgical or antiphonal singing aspects of worship (cf. II Chr. 7:6).

Because of v. 24 and the term “opposite” (BDB 617), which means “in front of,” it may simply refer to the Levites being divided into twenty-four groupings to share the load of ministry (cf. I Chr. 23:6).

12:10-11 This is a list of the High Priest’s family, which may run into the Greek Period. Josephus (*Antiq.* 11.7.8) says Judda was high priest in 322 B.C.

12:10 “Jeshua. . .Joiakim. . .Eliashib” Jeshua was the descendant of the last high priest when Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. (cf. Ezra 3:2). Eliashib was the chief priest when Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445 B.C. (cf. Neh. 3:1).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:12-21

¹²Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of fathers' *households* were: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;

¹³of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan;

¹⁴of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph;

¹⁵of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai;

¹⁶of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam;

¹⁷of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai;

¹⁸of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan;

¹⁹of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;

²⁰of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber;

²¹of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

12:14 “Malluchi” In 12:2 the name is spelled Malluch.

▣ **“Shebaniah”** Many assume he is the same as Shecaniah of 12:3.

12:15 “Meraioth” Many assume he is the same as Meremoth of 12:3.

▣ **“Helkai”** Many assume he is the Hilkiah of 12:6.

12:16 “Zechariah” This is the post-exilic prophet (519 B.C., cf. Zech. 1:1) linked with Haggai, Zerubbabel, and Joshua.

12:20 “Sallai” Many assume he is the same as Sallu of 12:7.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:22-26

²²As for the Levites, the heads of fathers' *households* were registered in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan and Jaddua; so *were* the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian. ²³The sons of Levi, the heads of fathers' *households*, were registered in the Book of the Chronicles up to the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. ²⁴The heads of the Levites *were* Hashabiah, Sherebiah and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers opposite them, to praise and give thanks, as prescribed by David the man of God, division corresponding to division. ²⁵Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon *and* Akkub were gatekeepers keeping watch at the storehouses of the gates. ²⁶These *served* in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest *and* scribe.

12:22 “Darius” This either refers to the reign of Darius II (423-404 B.C., i.e., Josephus is inaccurate so Derek Kidner, *Tyndale Commentary*, pp. 143-146) or to the reign of Darius III (336-331 B.C., if Josephus' identifications are correct). Apparently, Jewish scribes had added to the genealogies unto their day

12:23 “the book of the Chronicles” This does not refer to the biblical book of I & II Chronicles, but to the temple records which Ezra and Nehemiah draw from freely.

12:24 “the son of Kadmiel” This is preferable to KJV “Binnui.”

▣ **“as prescribed by David”** See I Chr. 23:6.

▣ **“the man of God”** This is a title used of Moses (cf. Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6). It was used of the prophets. In Hebrew theology one must be a prophet to write Scripture. Moses is called a prophet in Deut. 18. David was considered to be the author of numerous Psalms; therefore, he too must be a prophet, a man of God (*ish Elohim*).

12:25 “the storehouses of the gates” There were storehouses in the temple in several locations.

1. small rooms off of the central building
2. small rooms at the gates

12:26 “in the days of Nehemiah. . .Ezra” Those who assume that Ezra 7:7 is inaccurate and place Ezra after Nehemiah usually change or delete this verse and vv. 36 and 38. This debate grows out of three theories concerning Ezra 7:7, “seventh year of King Artaxerxes.” The traditional view has been to date this in 457 B.C. in the reign of Artaxerxes I. A second theory has been to suppose a scribal error, which should have been “twenty-seventh year of King Artaxerxes.” The third theory supposes it to refer to Artaxerxes II which would be 398 B.C. I like the first!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:27-30

²⁷Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem so that they might celebrate the dedication with gladness, with hymns of thanksgiving and with songs to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps and lyres. ²⁸So the sons of the singers were assembled from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites, ²⁹from Beth-gilgal and from their fields in Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰The priests and the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gates and the wall.

12:27-43 This section deals with the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem, which relates back to chapter 7. The FIRST PERSON SINGULAR PRONOUN “I” appears again (cf. v. 31), as it last did in 7:5.

12:27 “cymbals, harps and lyres” These were also used in Solomon’s dedication of the temple (cf. II Chr. 5:13). These returnees tried to mimic Solomon’s rituals, procedures, and actions.

12:28 “Netophathites” This was a city near Bethlehem (cf. Ezra 2:22; Neh. 2:26).

12:29 “Beth-gilgal” Beth means “house” or “place.” Gilgal means “wheel” or “circle.” There are two possibilities:

1. the first camp site of Joshua in the Promised Land (cf. Josh. 4,5,10), near Jericho
2. a place twelve miles north of Shechem (cf. II Kgs. 2:1; 4:38) associated with Elijah and Elisha.

▣ **“Geba”** This means “height” or “hill.” It was a Levitical city of Benjamin (cf. Joshua 21:17; I Sam. 13:3; II Sam. 5:25; I Chr. 6:60; 8:6; II Chr. 16:6; Neh. 11:31; 12:29; Isa. 10:29; Zech. 14:10).

12:30 “purified” This VERB (BDB 372, KB 369, used twice, the first *Hithpael* IMPERFECT and the second *Peel* IMPERFECT) means “cleanse” or “purify.” The *Peel* form denotes cleansing:

1. the altar of incense, Lev. 16:19
2. the temple, II Chr. 29:15,16,18; Neh. 13:6
3. Judah and Jerusalem, II Chr. 34:3,5,8
4. of Jerusalem, Neh. 12:30
5. the priesthood, Neh. 13:30
6. the altar Ezek. 43:26

Often the cleansing was by blood or water.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:31-37

³¹Then I had the leaders of Judah come up on top of the wall, and I appointed two great choirs, the first proceeding to the right on top of the wall toward the Refuse Gate. ³²Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah followed them, ³³with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, ³⁵ some of the sons of the priests with trumpets; *and* Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, ³⁶and his kinsmen, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah *and* Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. ³⁷At the Fountain Gate they went directly up the steps of the city of David by the stairway of the wall above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.

12:31-43 This is the official dedication of the walls. How soon it followed their construction is uncertain. It was a religious occasion much like Joshua's covenant renewal at Shechem. It is unusual to dedicate a wall in the OT, but in reality it offered protection for the holy city and its holy temple.

12:31 "two great choirs" These two processions started on the top of the western wall about in the middle (south of the temple). This was exactly where Nehemiah had started his nighttime reconnoitering (cf. 2:13-16). Ezra led one group (v. 36) south, counter clockwise, while Nehemiah followed with the other one north, clockwise (cf. v. 38). They met on the eastern wall level with the temple (the Gate of the Guard, v. 39).

For specific locations see notes at Neh. 3.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:38-43

³⁸The second choir proceeded to the left, while I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of Furnaces, to the Broad Wall, ³⁹and above the Gate of Ephraim, by the Old Gate, by the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped at the Gate of the Guard. ⁴⁰Then the two choirs took their stand in the house of God. So did I and half of the officials with me; ⁴¹and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah, with the trumpets; ⁴²and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. And the singers sang, with Jezrahiah *their* leader, ⁴³and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 12:44-47

⁴⁴On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served. ⁴⁵For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David *and* of his son Solomon. ⁴⁶For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, *there were* leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God. ⁴⁷So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required, and set apart the consecrated *portion* for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the consecrated portion for the sons of Aaron.

12:44-47 This seems to be a parenthesis giving further information and not part of Nehemiah's first person account.

12:45 “in accordance with the command of David and Solomon” See I Chr. 23-26 and II Chr. 8:14.

12:47 The order of tithes is seen in Num. 18:21-32 (cf. Neh.10:38).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How are the lists here and I Chronicles 9 related?
2. Why are the lists of the cities in 11:25-36 and 3:1ff different?
3. How are the lists of chapters 12 and 7 related?
4. Were Ezra and Nehemiah contemporaries?
5. How were the priests supported?

NEHEMIAH 13

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Principles of Separation	Nehemiah's Second Administration	Separation from Foreigners	A Golden Age (12:44-13:3)
13:1-3	13:1-3	13:1-3	
The Reforms of Nehemiah		Nehemiah's Reforms	The Second Mission of Nehemiah
13:4-9	13:4-9	13:4-9	13:4-9
13:10-13	13:10-14	13:10-13	13:10-13
13:14		13:14	13:14
13:15-18	13:15-18	13:15-18	13:15-22a
13:19-27	13:19-22	13:19-22a	
		13:22b	13:22b
	13:23-27	13:23-27	13:23-27
13:28	13:28-29	13:28	13:28
13:29		13:29	13:29
13:30-31	13:30-31	13:30-31a	13:30-31a
		13:31b	13:31b

READING CYCLE THREE (from "A Guide to Good Bible Reading" p. vii) *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one main subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. This chapter illustrates how quickly things can deteriorate. Apparently Nehemiah had returned to the Persian court for a period of time.
- B. Note the problems:
1. violations of the holiness of the temple, vv. 4-9
 2. lack of support promised to the Levites, vv. 10-14
 3. violation of Sabbath requirements, vv. 15-22
 4. return to mixed marriages, vv. 1-3,23-29
- C. Note Nehemiah's Actions:
1. threw Tobiah out, v. 8 and cleansed the temple storerooms, v. 9
 2. restored the Levites to their posts, v. 11 by charging the population to tithe again, v. 12
 3. brought in honest stewards from different areas of social life to administer the tithes, v. 13
 4. stopped Sabbath trading:
 - a. confronted the nobles, v. 17
 - b. closed the gates at dusk, v. 19
 - c. warned the traders themselves, v. 21
 - d. appointed Levitical city gate keepers, v. 22
 5. stopped the inter-religious marriages by force, v. 25
 6. excommunicated part of the family of the high priest, v. 28
- D. This chapter seems to end the book on a negative note, but in reality it is a note of restoration and purification.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:1-3

¹On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God,²because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³So when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.

13:1 “they read aloud from the book of Moses” The VERB (BDB 894, KB 1128) is a *Niphal* PERFECT. Whether this is an informal reading like Ezra 8:1-8 or a specifically called for reading like Deut. 31:11 the Feast of Tabernacles, is uncertain (cf. 8:4; 9:3).

These two post-exilic books are characterized by a reverence and desire for the word of God. They hear it and they respond in repentance and faith. The trend is set! They are becoming people of the book! At this point the book was about a thousand years old (i.e., depending on the date of the Exodus), but it was still relevant and crucial for their relationship with YHWH. Cultures change but revelation does not!

▣ **“there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God”** This is a direct reference to Deut. 23:3-6, which shows that the Mosaic law was available and well known.

This sounds so racist to us, but two things must be noted.

1. These people had to restore a pure people unaffected by Canaanite or pagan culture and myths.
2. Ruth, David's ancestor, was from Moab and she is in the line of the Messiah, as is Rachel the Canaanite prostitute!

See Special Topic: Racism at Ezra 10:3. See Special Topic: 'Olam (forever) at Ezra 3:11.

▣ **“the assembly of God”** This is the only place in the OT where the word for assembly, *Qahal* (BDB 874), and the word *Elohim* (BDB 43) are placed together. This term *Qahal* is what the translators of the Septuagint replace with *ecclesia*, which is the early church's self-chosen title. This shows they were identifying themselves with the Old Testament people of God.

13:2 “Balaam” The account of Moab and Ammon's (who were relatives of the Jews, cf. Gen. 19:30-38) treachery is found in Num. 22:3-11.

Balaam seems to be a spokesperson for God (cf. Num. 22:8-13,18,20; 23:4-5,12,16; 24:1-2). He honored God, but sought his own personal interest. This whole account is a strange and bizarre event!

1. God's prophet hurts Israel
2. God says “go,” but is angry when he does
3. a talking donkey
4. Israel's sudden turn to fertility worship

▣ **“However, our God turned the curse into a blessing”** This is a major theological affirmation and world-view. This has been the history of mankind from Gen. 3. This role reversal concept is so clearly seen in

1. Abraham, Gen. 15:12-21
2. Joseph, Gen. 45:1-15
3. Moses, Exod. 2

One of the best popular books I have ever read that was such a blessing to my life is Hannah Whithall Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*.

13:3

NASB, TEV

NJB “foreigners”

NKJV “the mixed multitude”

NRSV “those of foreign descent”

The term (BDB 786 I) as used in this text, seems to imply a racism on God's part, but this very same term is used in Exod. 12:38 to describe the believing Egyptians who accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt. The term, although literally referring to descent, is used in a religious sense. In Exodus 12 it is used in a positive sense and here in a negative sense.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:4-9

⁴Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah, ⁵had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. ⁶But during all this *time* I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had gone to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king, ⁷and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. ⁸It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room.

Then I gave an order and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned there the utensils of the house of God with the grain offerings and the frankincense.

13:4 “Eliashib the priest” He will become the High Priest (cf. 3:1). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are not in chronological order. Themes and patterns from the past, that moderns do not understand, mold the outline of these books. Events seem out of place to us who are accustomed to sequential, cause and effect, history. Their way of doing history was not bad, but different (selective and theological), as are the Gospels.

▣ **“over the chambers of the house of our God”** There were many storage rooms in the temple, some along the sides of the main shrine and others in the gates (cf. 12:44). These rooms were to store the tithes of the Levites (cf. v. 5) and the necessities of the cultus rituals. They also housed the money sent from Persia. In this case they converted one of the large rooms into a personal residence for Tobiah (cf. v. 5).

▣

NASB **“being related”**

NKJV **“being allied”**

TEV **“who was related”**

TEV **“had for a long time been on good terms”**

NJB **“who was close to”**

The ADJECTIVE (BDB 898) means “near.” It can mean (1) close neighbors (cf. I Chr. 12:40) or (2) relatives (cf. Lev. 21:2-3; 25:25; Num. 27:11; Ruth 2:20).

▣ **“Tobiah”** Tobiah (BDB 375, “YHWH is my good”) was an Ammonite who opposed Nehemiah (cf. 2:10,19; 4:3,17; 6:1,12,14,19; 13:4,7,8). As Ezra and Nehemiah resisted the inroads of foreigners in Israel’s life, it was inevitable that foreigners of influence and ambition would have places of leadership in Nehemiah’s absence and would be hostile to the return to a Mosaic law which excluded them (cf. v. 3), but not all, as vv. 4-9 make plain.

13:5 “grain offering” This was a special flour used to make the cakes for the daily offering.

▣ **“frankincense”** This (BDB 526 I) was a white tree resin from southern Arabia used in the incense which was placed daily in the Holy Place (cf. Exod. 30:34).

▣ **“the contribution for the priest”** The Jews tithed to the Levites (cf. 10:38); the Levites tithed to the priests (cf. 10:38).

13:6 Nehemiah served as governor from 445 to 433 B.C. At that time he returned to the court of Artaxerxes I where he stayed for an indefinite period of time. It was long enough for the Jews to relapse from his reform efforts.

Artaxerxes is called king of Babylon. This seems unusual to us because he was king of Persia and yet, Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius I are also referred to as the king of Babylon.

13:7 “in the courts of the house of God” Exactly what court this refers to is uncertain, but it was unlawful for anyone but Levites to be in this temple area.

13:8 Nehemiah was not a gentle man as was Ezra. His anger was both personal and religious. To him God’s house was being violated by an evil man.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:10-14

¹⁰I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given *them*, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field. ¹¹So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts. ¹²All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine and oil into the storehouses. ¹³In charge of the storehouses I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen. ¹⁴Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.

13:10 Not only was Tobiah allowed to reside in the temple precincts, but the Levites had not been distributed their allotted portions (cf. Num. 18:21-32; Neh. 10:37).

▣ **“each to his own field”** The Levites were allowed a small portion of land next to the Levitical cities (cf. Numbers 35 and Joshua 21) to supplement what they received from the people (cf. Num. 35:4; Josh. 21:3).

13:11

NASB “reprimanded”

NKJV “contended”

NRSV “remonstrated”

TEV, NJB “reprimanded”

This Hebrew VERB (BDB 936, KB 1224, *Qal* IMPERFECT) means “a dispute,” “a controversy,” or “a legal court case.” It is used in 5:7; 13:11, 17, 25. It shows the seriousness of these violations.

▣ **“then I gathered them and restored them to their posts”** “Them” must refer to the Levites who had left the temple service to farm their own small plots of land (cf. v. 10).

13:13 “in charge of the storehouse I appointed” This verse has been used by some to say that Ezra came after Nehemiah because in Ezra 8:33 there were already four treasurers appointed. We know so little about this period that this cannot be used as evidence for a theory of the historical relationship between Nehemiah and Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah are mentioned together in 12:26,36,38.

The VERB and NOUN are from the same root (BDB 69), which means “treasure,” “treasury,” or “store,” “storehouse.” Edwin Yamauchi, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 362, tries to catch the word play by “I made treasurers over the treasuries.”

▣

NASB, NJB “they were considered reliable”

NKJV, NRSV “they were considered faithful”

TEV “I could trust these men in being honest”

The key term (BDB 52) is “faithful,” which becomes the term “amen.” See Special Topic: Amen at Neh. 5:13.

13:14 “Remember me for this, O my God” The VERB (BDB 269, KB 269, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) is used in the sense of supplication, not command. Nehemiah’s devotion to YHWH can be clearly seen in his numerous prayers throughout the book (e.g., 5:19; 13:22,31). His leadership skills were derived from his intimate faith in YHWH.

▣ **“loyal deeds”** Here Nehemiah uses the term *hesed* to describe his own acts (cf. II Chr. 32:32, where it applies to Hezekiah’s acts). However, in v. 22 he uses the term *hesed* to describe God’s loyal covenant acts.

SPECIAL TOPIC: LOVINGKINDNESS (*HESED*)

This term has a wide semantic field. The BDB characterizes it this way (338-339).

- A. Used in connection to human beings
 - 1. kindness to fellow men (e.g., I Sam. 20:14; II Chr. 24:22)
 - 2. kindness toward the poor and needy (e.g., Micah 6:8)
 - 3. affection (cf. Jer. 2:2; Hos. 6:4)
 - 4. appearance (cf. Isa. 40:6)
- B. Used in connection to God
 - 1. covenant loyalty and love
 - a. “in redemption from enemies and troubles” (e.g., Jer. 31:3; Ezra 27:28; 9:9)
 - b. “in preservation of life from death” (e.g., Job 10:12; Ps. 86:13)
 - c. “in quickening of spiritual life” (e.g., Ps. 119:41,76,88,124,149,150)
 - d. “in redemption from sin” (cf. Ps. 25:7; 51:3)
 - e. “in keeping the covenants” (e.g., II Chr. 6:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32)
 - 2. describes a divine attribute (e.g., Exod. 34:6; Micah 7:20)
 - 3. kindness of God
 - a. “abundant” (e.g., Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8)
 - b. “great in extent” (e.g., Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 7:9)
 - c. “everlasting” (e.g., I Chr. 16:34,41; II Chr. 5:13; 7:3,6; 20:21; Ezra 3:11)
 - 4. deeds of kindness (e.g., II Chr. 6:42; Ps. 89:2; Isa. 55:3; 63:7; Lam. 3:22)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:15-18

¹⁵In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading *them* on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought *them* into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished *them* on the day they sold food. ¹⁶Also men of Tyre were living there *who* imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold *them* to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem. ¹⁷Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day? ¹⁸Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath."

13:15 “on the sabbath” From Exod. 31:14 and Jer. 17:19-27, we see the seriousness of the Sabbath-breaking practices which originally were part of the apathy and idolatry that caused the exile!

In this short space of Nehemiah’s return to the Persian court, the offensives against God’s law had reappeared. In the past it was non-Jews who sold produce on the Sabbath (cf. 10:31; 11:16), but now it was the Jews themselves! They flaunted it, even in Jerusalem (cf. v. 16).

13:16 “the men of Tyre” See Ezek. 27:12-36 and 28:16. These merchants coming on the Sabbath was first mentioned in 10:31.

13:17 “profaning the sabbath day” This VERB (BDB 320 III, KB 319, *Peel* PERFECT) means “to pollute,” “to defile.” It is used often in connection with the Sabbath (cf. Exod. 31:14; Isa. 56:2,6; Ezek. 20:13,16,21,24; 22:8; 23:38).

The Mosaic covenant promised blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience (cf. Deut. 27-29). The first covenant depended on human performance, but the reality of Genesis 3 doomed it from the start. It thereby forms the need for a new covenant based on YHWH’s character and the Messiah’s performance. These Jews should have known and done better:

1. the recent experience of the exile
2. the regular reading of the word of God
3. the godly leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah

13:18 YHWH’s covenant with all of its blessings was also a great responsibility. Not only for the Israelites, but for the eternal redemptive purposes of God. The Israelites had reaped the consequences of disobedience time and time again (cf. Neh. 9), but still each generation rebelled. Herein is the problem of the Mosaic covenant. It depended on human performance which was affected by the fall of Gen. 3.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:19-22

¹⁹It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so *that* no load would enter on the sabbath day. ²⁰Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. ²¹Then I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath. ²²And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day. *For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness.*

13:19 Nehemiah uses his official governmental authority to close the city on the Sabbath. Godly leadership can affect society.

13:20 “the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem” The reason that Nehemiah would not allow this was because of the temptation for the citizens to walk outside and purchase goods on the Sabbath. Also, the visible reminder of their presence caused problems.

13:22 “the Levites. . .as gatekeepers” The city as a whole was considered holy to Nehemiah, and he appointed Levites to guard the city gates (cf. 7:1).

☐ **“For this also remember me, O my God”** This is another of Nehemiah’s prayers for God to remember his covenant deeds and leadership (e.g., vv. 14,22,31; 5:19). This is in contrast to Nehemiah’s prayers for God to remember those who violated His covenant (cf. 6:14; 13:29).

The paradox of biblical faith is clearly seen in this verse. Nehemiah asked God to remember (BDB 209, *Qal* IMPERATIVE) his deeds, but he based the request on the covenant faithfulness (*hesed*, BDB 338) of God! God’s relationship with fallen humanity is both relational and obedient (cf. Luke 4:46).

☐ **“Your lovingkindness”** See Special Topic: *Hesed* at 13:14.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:23-29

²³In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon *and* Moab. ²⁴As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people. ²⁵So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin. ²⁷Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?" ²⁸Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me. ²⁹Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

13:23 “in those days I saw that the Jews had married women” There is some problem as to the relationship between Ezra 9 and 10 and Nehemiah 10. We cannot answer all of the questions about this, but it is obvious that it was a recurring problem which was not solved by either leader.

▣ “Ashdod, Ammon, *and* Moab” Not only were these pagan people, but they were enemies of the returning Jews. Their inclusion in the people of God was mandated by Moses (cf. v. 1).

13:24 “As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod” The Hebrew idiom is difficult to translate. It is not certain if they spoke a mixture of one language and the other or simply spoke the other, but it does show the major problem of these mixed marriages was that the education of the children was being done by their pagan mothers. This corrupted the purity of the monotheism of YHWH. These children could not read nor understand God’s word.

▣ “the language of Judah” This must refer to Hebrew (cf. II Chr. 32:18). The other people groups in the Persian Province Beyond the River probably spoke a dialect of Aramaic (although it is possible they retained a working knowledge of the ancient tribal language) as did most Jews. The need for a knowledge of Hebrew (learned in synagogue school) was to be able to read and understand God’s word.

13:25 This shows the emotional intensity and the seriousness of their sin (“cursed” [BDB 886, KB 1103, *Peel* IMPERFECT]; “struck” [BDB 645, KB 697, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT]; “pulled out their hair” [BDB 595, KB 634, *Qal* IMPERFECT]; “made them swear” [BDB 989, KB 1396, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT]; also in v. 28, “drove them away” [BDB 137, *Hiphil* IMPERFECT]).

▣ “I contended with them” The VERB (BDB 936, KB 1224, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is used several times in this context (cf. vv. 11,17,25; and 5:7).

13:26 See the tragic account in I Kings 11.

13:27 “by acting unfaithfully against our God” This term “unfaithfully” (BDB 591, KB 612, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) is also used in Ezra 10:2,10 to describe Jews marrying pagan women. In Arabic this same root is used for treason, treachery, and betrayal. God is the victim! This term speaks of intimate, personal relationships (cf. Num. 5:11-31, esp. vv. 12,27). This is the very VERB used to describe Moses’ act of rebellion in striking the rock (cf. Num. 20:10-12; 27:12-14).

13:28 “even one of the sons of Joiada” This shows that the family of the high priest was involved in these inter-racial marriages even to the point of marrying the daughter of Sanballat, the enemy of the people of God. Verse 29 records Nehemiah’s prayer/curse!

13:29 “Remember them” Another prayer of Nehemiah, but this one is a curse!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 13:30-31

³⁰Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, ³¹and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

13:30-31 Nehemiah restored the order established before he left (cf. v. 11).

Jack Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past*, vol. 11, thinks that when Nehemiah sent away Manasseh, the son of Joiada, grandson of Eliashub, the high priest, that he started the Samaritan schism and built the rival temple on Mt. Gerizim (p. 310).

13:31 “Remember me, O my God” This book is characterized by Nehemiah’s prayers for God to remember

1. His word - 1:8
2. His servant, Nehemiah - 5:19; 13:14,22,31
3. His enemies - 6:14; 13:29

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did the leaders of Jerusalem make alliances with Tobiah and Sanballat?
2. How long was Nehemiah gone from Jerusalem?
3. List the problems which had occurred in his absence. Why was he so upset about these abuses?
4. What is the relationship between Ezra’s dealing with mixed marriages and that of Nehemiah’s?

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

- A. It is named after the Persian Queen of the day.
- B. Her name in Hebrew is Hadassah (BDB 213), which means “myrtle” (2:7; Neh. 8:15; Zech. 1:8,10,11). This term is symbolic among the Jews for peace and joy (Zech. 1:8). Myrtle branches are carried in procession during the Feast of Booths.
- C. Esther’s Hebrew name may have had a similar sound to the following Persian words:
 - 1. star (Persian root, possibly because of the shape of the myrtle blossoms)
 - 2. Ishtar (Queen of Heaven, cf. Jer. 7:18, from Babylonian root)
 - 3. best
 - 4. desired one(the last two possibilities are from Joyce Baldwin, “Esther,” *Tyndale OT Commentaries*, p. 60)

II. CANONIZATION

- A. This book had difficulty being included in the Hebrew canon:
 - 1. probably because it does not mention
 - a. any name of God
 - b. the temple
 - c. the Law of Moses
 - d. sacrifice (the cultus of Israel)
 - e. Jerusalem
 - f. prayer (although it is implied)
 - 2. the Dead Sea Scrolls have copies (in whole or part) of every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther
 - 3. the book of Esther, like Ruth, is not quoted in the NT
 - 4. it has gotten mixed reviews from commentators:
 - a. The Jerusalem Talmud (*Megilla 7a*) says that the “Prophets” section of the Hebrew canon and the “Writings” section may come to an end, but not the Torah and Esther. They would never perish (taken from E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*).
 - b. Maimonides, a Jewish commentator of the Middle Ages (A.D. 1204), said that it was next to the Law of Moses in importance.
 - c. Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, said it should be excluded from the canon because it was too Judaistic (he also rejected James and Revelation).
 - 5. it was one of the disputed books discussed at Jamnia (A.D. 90) by the Pharisees after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70
 - 6. the author of “Ecclesiasticus,” also called “the Wisdom of Ben Sirah,” who wrote about 180 B.C., never mentions Esther at all (but he does not mention several others also)
 - 7. it seems to have been included in the Jewish canon to explain the origin of the non-Mosaic feast of Purim (9:28-31). In II Maccabees 15:36 Purim is called “the Day of Mordecai.”
- B. The book of Esther is part of a special list of five rolls/scrolls called the *Megilloth*. These five small books—Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations and Esther—are part of the

“Writings” section of the Hebrew canon. They are each read at different annual feast days. Esther is read at Purim.

- C. The text of Esther varies greatly between the Masoretic Text (Hebrew) and the Septuagint (Greek) translations. The Septuagint is much longer and includes the prayers of Mordecai and Esther. These may have been added to help the book be accepted into the Jewish canon.
- D. The church councils of Hippo (A.D. 393) and Carthage (A.D. 397) affirmed Esther’s place in the Christian Bible (basically the church accepted the Hebrew canon).

III. GENRE

- A. It is historical narrative (cf. 10:2, E. J. Young).
- B. It has a historical core which was embellished (cf. K. Harrison).
- C. Some scholars would identify its genre as historical fiction (novel) to reveal spiritual truth through
 - 1. use of irony
 - 2. careful plot
 - 3. main characters not being known from history
 - 4. exaggerated items (cf. VIII. D.)

IV. AUTHORSHIP

- A. There have been many theories about the authorship of this anonymous book.
 - 1. Rabbi Azarias says that Joiakim the High Priest wrote it during the reign of Darius I, in the late sixth century B.C.
 - 2. The Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 15a, says the men of the Great Synagogue wrote the scroll of Esther. The Great Synagogue was apparently a group of leaders in Jerusalem, which traditionally was said to have been started by Ezra. It later became the Sanhedrin. Although the term “wrote” is used in *Baba Bathra* it seems to mean “edited,” “compiled,” or “collected.”
 - 3. Iben Ezra, Clement of Alexandria, and Josephus (*Antiq.* 11.6.1) say Mordecai wrote it, but Esth. 10:3 seems to contradict this (unless it was added by a later editor).
 - 4. Isidore and Augustine both affirm that Ezra wrote it.
- B. It is obvious that no one knows. It seems certain that it was a Jew in exile in Persia who was familiar with the Persian court.
- C. This unknown author used sources:
 - 1. the memoirs of Mordecai, 9:20
 - 2. Persian historical documents, 2:23; 3:14; 4:8; 6:1; 8:13; 10:2
 - 3. possibly oral traditions, especially of what happened in the provinces
 - 4. what “the book” of 9:32 refers to is uncertain

V. DATE

- A. This book mentions a Persian king named Ahasuerus (BDB 31, KB 37), which in Persian means “mighty man” or “mighty eye.” Most scholars agree that this is the king known in history by the Greek title Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.).
- B. The Septuagint and Josephus, however, call him “Artaxerxes,” which is the title of Xerxes’ successor, Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.)
- C. Esther, chapter 1, may reflect a Persian planning session to invade Greece. There is a considerable gap between 1:3 and 2:16 (i.e., 483-480 B.C.). We know from the historian, Herodotus (2.8), that Persia invaded Greece and was repulsed in 480 B.C. He says that the Persian king returned home and spent much more time with his harem (9.108). Xerxes I was defeated by the Greek army at
 1. Thermopylae in 480 B.C.
 2. Salamis in 480 B.C.
 3. Plataea and Mykale in 479 B.C. (cf. Herodotus, *History of the Persian Wars* VII-IX).
- D. As for a Biblical chronology this would put the book between Ezra chapters 6 and 7. There is a 57 year gap in Ezra’s account at this point. The man Ezra is not introduced until chapter 7.
- E. Esther 10:1-3 implies a time after Xerxes I’s death. He was assassinated in 465 B.C.
- F. A date in the late fifth century B.C. seems convincing because
 1. the form of the Hebrew in Esther is like that of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah
 2. of the presence of Persian loan words
 3. of the author’s knowledge of Persian customs and court life. An example would be 1:6-8, 10.

VI. SOURCES CORROBORATING THE HISTORICAL SETTING

- A. The cuneiform tablets from Nippur, written during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.), confirm the presence of a large Jewish population in Mesopotamia after the return allowed by the decree of Cyrus II in 538 B.C.
- B. Herodotus
 1. Herodotus’ history about Xerxes I seems to fit the story line of Esther:
 - a. called an assembly to plan the invasion of Greece (Herodotus 7.8)
 - b. after his defeat he spent much more time with his harem (Herodotus 7.7)
 - c. describes Xerxes as capricious, despotic, and passionate
 2. This, however, cuts both ways. Herodotus also names and describes Xerxes I’s wife. Her name was Amestris, and she had to be from the “family of the seven” (inner circle of counselors, cf. 1:14). The Persian King had seven close counselors (1:14; Ezra 7:14). Herodotus mentions that Amestris accompanied Xerxes I on his Greek campaign (9.108-113).
- C. The Elamite tablets of Persepolis (during the reigns of Darius I and Xerxes I) list the name Mordecai as an official of the gate.

VII. LITERARY UNITS (context)

The NIV Study Bible outline is very helpful (cf. p. 719). It uses the three feasts in Esther as the structure to follow the story line:

- A. Feast of the King, 1:1-2:18
- B. Feast of Esther, 2:19-7:10
- C. Feast of Purim, 8-10

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

- A. Obviously the book explains the origin of the annual non-Mosaic feast of Purim (9:28-32). The only other annual non-Mosaic Jewish feast is Hanukkah. There is a good chart on p. 176 of the NIV Study Bible.
- B. It was an encouragement to faithfulness to God during times of persecution (especially for those who remained in exile).
- C. It clearly demonstrates God's guiding hand in history, not only of Israel but also Persia. The absence of any name of God and any reference to the normal Jewish spiritual practices (except an allusion to fasting and prayer) was a literary foil to emphasize God's mysterious influence and guidance of all human history (cf. 4:14, i.e., the unseen hand).

- D. It is interesting that The Jewish Study Bible asserts that the book is "best read as a comedy" (p. 1623). This is based on
 - 1. preposterous rabbinical embellishments
 - 2. the book itself has embellishments
 - a. the size and length of the first banquet (1:4)
 - b. the time to prepare the virgins (2:12)
 - c. the large amount of money (3:9)
 - d. the size of the gallows or impaling stake (5:14)
 - e. the large number of people killed in one day (9:16)

Adele Berlin's final analysis is that the book is purely literary and not historical (p. 1624), mentioning Esther's similarity with Joseph and Daniel.

It must be admitted that genre and authorial intent are the key in biblical interpretation. This book does have some surprising aspects, but I am reluctant to jettison the historical in this book (as I am with Joseph and Daniel).

- E. Some see this book as another attempt by Satan to destroy the covenant community (cf. 3:6,13) and, thereby, the promised Messiah!
 - 1. Adam's fall (Gen. 3)
 - 2. Angels mixing with men (Gen. 6)
 - 3. Abraham and Isaac giving away their wives
 - 4. destruction of the Jewish people in Esther

ESTHER 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS*

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The King Dethrones Queen Vashti	Ahasuerus' Feast	Introduction	Ahasuerus' Banquet
1:1-9	1:1-9	1:1-2	1:1-4
		1:3-4	
		1:5-8	1:5-8
			Disgrace of Queen Vasti
	Vasti's Fall (1:10-2:4)	1:9	1:9-20
1:10-12	1:10-12	1:10-12	
1:13-22	1:13-20	1:13-15	
		1:16-20	
	1:21-2:4	1:21-22	1:21-22

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section) FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3, p. viii). Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

*Although not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized the paragraph divisions as they understand them. Every paragraph has one central topic, truth or thought. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own way. As you read the text, which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions?

In every chapter you must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs). Then compare your understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation at the paragraph level, can one truly understand the Bible. Only the original author was inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility to apply the inspired truth to their day and lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in Appendices One, Two and Three.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1-4

¹Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, ²in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which *was* at the citadel in Susa, ³in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence. ⁴And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

1:1 “Now it took place in the days of” *The Handbook on the Book of Esther* mentions that this was a common opening term (BDB 224, KB 243 *Qal* IMPERFECT), used to link the current events (or story) with previous events (p. 13). The same term introduces the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, and Jonah. Esther also concludes with a standardized ending used in I Kings (cf. 14:19,29; 15:23). The author obviously expects it to be understood as history.

▣ **“Ahasuerus”** This is the Hebrew spelling of the name (cf. Ezra 4:6, BDB 31, KB 37). He is known in history by his Greek name, Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.). The Persian name is Khshayarsha. He is the son of Darius I Hystapes (522-486 B.C.) and grandson of Cyrus (550-530 B.C.). Both the Septuagint and Josephus identify him as Xerxes’ successor, Artaxerxes I. Most historians and Bible commentators agree that Esther relates to the reign of Xerxes I.

▣ **“India”** This would refer to the land of the Indus River, which for us would be in the area of modern Pakistan. It was conquered by Darius I (Herodotus 3.94-106).

▣ **“Ethiopia”** This would refer to the large territory south of the First Cataract of the Nile, including southern Egypt, Sudan, and parts of Ethiopia (BDB 468 I), which was conquered by Cambyses (530-522 B.C.).

▣ **“over 127 provinces”** The Persian Empire covered most of the ancient Near East. It included many ethnic groups and nationalities (cf. 9:30). The Persians allowed these groups much local autonomy. Over several provinces there was a regional administrator called a satrap and many lesser officials. Xerxes I’s father, Darius, had 20 satraps (cf. Herodotus 3.89).

1:2 “Susa” Susa (called Sushan in Hebrew) was originally the capital of Elam, located on the Kerkha River. It is an ancient city, even mentioned in early Sumerian documents (3000 B.C.). It became the eastern regional capital of the Persian Empire. The city was expanded and beautified under Darius I. Its climate was so hot that the Persian kings used it primarily in winter.

▣

NASB “the capital”

NKJV, NRSV,

NJB “the citadel”

TEV “capital city”

This Hebrew term (BDB 108, KB 123, from an Assyrian loan word) could refer to a city fortress (cf. Ezra 6:2; Neh. 2:8; Dan. 8:2), a palace, or even a fortified temple (cf. Neh. 7:2; I Chr. 29:1,19). Here it refers to the inner fortress in a large, walled city. This city is also the location of chapter 1 of Nehemiah.

1:3 “in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all” We know from history that Xerxes I gave a great feast to plan his military campaign against Greece (cf. Herodotus 7.19). This occurred after his conquest of Egypt. The third year of Xerxes I would be 483 B.C.

▣ **“Persia and Media”** Cyrus is the first king of the combined Media-Persian Empire. The term Media comes first in Daniel because Cyrus was king of Media before he became king of Babylon and Persia. Persia was the more powerful of the two nations and by Esther’s time the order of the names had switched (cf. 1:3,14,18,19), however, in 10:2 they are reversed.

1:4 “180 days” Some see here two different feasts, one lasting 180 days (v. 4) and one lasting 7 days (v. 5). A better understanding of the Hebrew text is that these Persian leaders were given 180 days to assemble on a certain day for a seven day feast in Susa, the capital.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:5-9

⁵When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. ⁶*There were hangings* of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, *and couches* of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones. ⁷Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty. ⁸The drinking was *done* according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person. ⁹Queen Vasti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

1:5 “seven days” Apparently seven was a special number for Persians as it was for Jews (e.g., 1:5,10,14; 2:9).

▣
NASB **“the greatest to the least”**
NKJV **“from great to small”**
NRSV **“both great and small”**
TEV **“rich and poor”**
NJB **to high and low”**

Literally it is “great and small.” The same two terms (BDB 152 & 881 I) are used in 1:20 and I Sam. 30:19; II Chr. 15:13 (BDB 152 & 882). In this context it means that all of the people who worked and served in the fortified, upper city (acropolis) were invited to the palace for a seven day feast.

1:6
NASB ***“There were hangings”***
NKJV ***“There were. . .curtains”***
NRSV ***“There were. . .curtains”***
TEV **-----**
NJB ***“There were. . .hangings”***

The italics (NASB, NKJV) show how this verse intrudes into the context in a grammatically unrelated way. When moderns read this verse we think of wall hangings, but in this hot and windy climate they may have served as shade canopies or walls (cf. James M. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, pp. 201-202). Persia’s colors were white and purple/blue.

▣ **“a mosaic pavement”** The list of the stones used in the pavement are

1. NASB, NRSV, NJB, “porphyry”
NKJV, “alabaster”
TEV, “red feldspar”
BDB has porphyry, which denotes a reddish to purple color mixed in with other darker rock.
2. NASB, NRSV, NJB, “marble”
NKJV, TEV, “white marble” (?) another hapax legommonon (BDB 1010 II)
3. NASB, NRSV, NJB, “mother of pearl”
NKJV, “black marble” (?)
TEV, “shining mother of pearl,” another hapax legommonon (BDB 204)
4. NASB, NJB, “precious stones”
NKJV, NEB, “turquoise” (?)
NRSV, “colored stones”
TEV, “blue turquoise,” another hapax legommonon (BDB 695)

▣ Archaeology has confirmed the wealth of the Persian court (cf. also Herodotus 7.27; 9.82). The Persian kings wanted to impress their people and foreign visitors with their wealth, culture, and power!

There are several words in this verse found only here in the OT. Often the only way to translate these hapax legommonon are (1) cognate languages and (2) ancient translations.

1:7 “in golden vessels of various kinds” This also shows an eyewitness detail. Many of these golden vessels were found when the Greeks overran the Persian military camps (cf. Herodotus 3:96).

1:8 “and the drinking was done according to the law” This ambiguous phrase has caused much confusion. The meaning could be:

1. no one could drink the King’s wine, but an exception was made for this event
2. all guests could drink as much as they wanted with no restrictions (TEV)
3. usually all guests drank when the king drank (Herodotus 1.13 and *Xenophon Cyropaedia* 8.8), but on this occasion this rule was not in effect.

▣

NASB, NJB “official of his household”

NKJV “the officers of his household”

NRSV “the officials of the palace”

TEV “police servants”

This title (BDB 913 II) can refer to several types of leaders (cf. NIDOTTE, vol. 3, p. 1029).

1. royal officials or administrators (cf. Dan. 1:3; 2:48; 5:1)
2. palace stewards (cf. Esther 1:8)
3. military commanders (e.g., Jer. 39:3,13; Dan. 2:14)
4. professionals (cf. Dan. 4:6; 5:11)
5. ship captain (cf. Jonah 1:6)

1:9 “Vasti” The precise etymology of this word is uncertain (BDB 255, KB 260), but it may come from:

1. a corruption of Avestan term for “best” (BDB 255)
2. FEMININE PASSIVE PARTICIPLE of Avestan term “the beloved” or “the desired one” (H. S. Gehman, taken from Carey A. Moore, *Anchor Bible*, “Esther,” vol. 13, p. 8).
3. some scholars think that both Amestris and Vasti are attempts to translate one Persian name.

▣ “gave a banquet for the women in the palace” This either refers to the harem (seven eunuchs mentioned in v. 10) or, more probably, to the wives of the guests of the king.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:10-12

¹⁰On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹to bring Queen Vasti before the king with *her* royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful. ¹²But Queen Vasti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.

1:10 “and on the seventh day” The use of the number 7 in chapter 1 is recurrent. See note at 1:5.

▣ “the heart of the king was merry with wine” This context shows the problem of alcohol abuse. See Special Topic at Ezra 7:17.

The phrase itself was an idiom describing the satisfaction of wine and a full dinner (cf. Jdgs. 16:25; I Sam. 25:36; II Sam. 13:28; Prov. 15:15, or satisfaction in general, I Kgs. 8:66).

▣ “eunuchs” This Akkadian term can refer to castrated males (later usage, but possible here because of their dealings with the harem). It was quite common for administrators in the ancient world to have eunuchs and it was a title (e.g., II Chr. 18:8; Jer. 39:3,13). It was used of a married man in Gen. 39, which shows it was not always taken literally.

Some of these personal names have been found in Persian documents and monuments. They do not have any connection with Greek names (refuting a supposed second century Greek authorship) and are probably Persian in origin. This helps substantiate the historical setting as fifth century B.C. from Persia.

1:11 “to bring Queen Vasti before the king with *her* royal crown” Older Jewish commentators suggest that she was commanded to appear in “only” her crown! Josephus says that in Persia strangers were not allowed to look at a man’s wife. Whatever the reason (cultural or personal), Vasti would not come before this large number of drunken men.

Placing the royal crown on someone’s head was a sign of affirmation (cf. 6:8) and status (cf. 1:11; 2:17). It was a symbol of Persian royal authority and power.

Herodotus (9.108-113) says the king was married to a strong willed woman named Amestris. Her father was one of the seven special families and an army general. He had helped Darius I (Xerxes I’s father) during a time of rebellion (cf. Herodotus 3.61-84). She was the mother of Artaxerxes I, who was born the very year of Vasti’s demotion, 483 B.C. She had great influence with her son, even when he became king. The name Vasti does not appear anywhere outside of Esther.

1:12 Kings were not accustomed to being rebuffed (cf. v. 15). The two VERBS (BDB 893, KB 1124, *Qal* IMPERFECT and BDB 128, KB 145, *Qal* PERFECT) describe the king’s rage growing within him and becoming a settled wrath!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:13-20

¹³Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times—for it was the custom of the king *so to speak* before all who knew law and justice ¹⁴and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom—¹⁵“According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vasti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *delivered* by the

eunuchs?" ¹⁶In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, "Queen Vasti has wronged not only the king but *also* all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vasti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.' ¹⁸This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in *the same way* to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger. ¹⁹If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vasti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she. ²⁰When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small."

1:13 “the wise men who understood the times” This same idiom is used in I Chr. 12:32. Maybe the best way to make it contemporary would be “they understood the cultural impact” (cf. vv. 15-18).

Some scholars assert that this refers to the seven special family counselors of the Persian kings (cf. Ezra 7:14,15,28; 8:25).

▣ **“before all who knew law and justice”** This phrase either characterizes the wise men mentioned above or is a second group of wise men who were specialists in the law (cf. v. 15). Herodotus says there was a group of judges who were appointed for life who advised the Persian kings on matters of law.

1:14 “the seven princes of Persia” We learn from Herodotus 3.84 that there were seven special families who made up Persian nobility (cf. Ezra 7:14; Herodotus 3.84; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.4.6). Members of these families were the close counselors of the Persian kings.

1:15-16 Ahasuerus’s advisors made this event a national threat (not only of the king, but potentially of the other husbands) because of Vasti’s precedent of disobedience in the presence of the other assembled wives.

1:18 “there will be plenty of contempt and anger” The TEV catches the implication of this phrase by attributing the contempt to the wives of the nobility, and the anger to their husbands.

1:19 “the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed” This historical addition is only known from the Bible (cf. 8:8; Dan. 6:8,12,15). This may have been a literary device used by the writer to ridicule the Persian government. Their unchanging laws were “changed” by YHWH’s powerful presence with His covenant people!

In this context it is stated so that Xerxes will not change his mind about the beautiful Vasti when he sobers up (cf. 2:1).

▣ **“that Vasti should come no more into the presence fo the King”** Vasti remained in the harem, but could not physically be with the king anymore. This was like an official separation.

▣

NASB	“who is more worthy”
NKJV, NRSV	“who is better”
TEV	“to some better woman”
NJB	“worthier”

The Hebrew term (BDB 373 II) has a wide semantic field, but in this context it means more obedient or to show proper respect to the king.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:21-22

²¹This word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. ²²So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.

1:22 This verse seems unusual, out of place, but possibly it fits exactly into the ancient, multi-racial Persian context where the native language of the father (whatever the language of the wife) was spoken in the home and taught to the children. Therefore, this decree being written in the many languages of the empire was, in a sense, a way to reinforce the authority of the husband (which was the purpose of Vasti's removal from office).

This thought may connect to Neh. 13:24 and shows the dominance of the Canaanite women.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did the book of Esther have such problems being accepted as Scripture?
2. Are we certain of the exact identity of Ahasuerus, and if so, who is he?
3. How does the image of the king change from the beginning of chapter 1 to the end?
4. What extravagant items are found in this chapter that make some scholars think this is a novel or comedy?

ESTHER 2

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Esther Becomes Queen	Vasti's Fall (1:10-2:4)	Esther Becomes Queen	Esther Becomes Queen
2:1-7		2:1-4a	2:1-4
	Mordecai and Esther	2:4b	
	2:5-11	2:5-7	2:5-7
2:8-11		2:8-9	2:8-11
		2:10-11	
2:12-14	2:12-14	2:12-14	2:12-14
2:15-20	2:15-18	2:15-18	2:15-17
			2:18
		Mordecai Saves the King's Life	Mordecai and Haman
	2:19-23	2:19-20	2:19-3:6
2:21-23		2:21-23	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section) ***FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL***

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3, p. viii). Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:1-4

¹After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vasti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. ²Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. ³Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given *them*. ⁴Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vasti." And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

2:1 "when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vasti" Older Jewish commentators (Targums #1 and #2) and Josephus (*Antiq.* 11.195) say that he remembered her with pleasure and regretted what he had done to her. This seems to fit because the attendants acted quickly to get the king's mind off of the deposed queen (cf. 2:2), who would surely still be mad at them. One of the attendants, Memucan, mentions that the laws of Persia and Media cannot be changed (cf. 1:19).

2:2 "let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king" This VERB (BDB 134, KB 152) is a *Peel* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense. It is known from history (Herodotus) that, after Xerxes' defeat by the Greeks in his seventh year, he spent much more time with his harem. This seems to fit precisely the dating of the book of Esther.

Xerxes had a reputation of having many affairs outside of his large harem.

2:3

NASB, NKJV,

TEV, NJB "harem"

NKJV "into the women's quarters"

This is literally "the house of the women" (BDB 61 and 108, cf. 2:9,11,13,14).

▣ **"Hegai"** Herodotus (9.33) mentions the name of one of Xerxes I's eunuchs, *'egias*, which is similar.

▣ **"the king's eunuch"** See note at 1:10.

▣ **"let their cosmetics be given them"** From verse 12 we know that there was a year of training involved in the preparation of these women. This included instructions in both court etiquette (especially in light of Vasti's behavior) and the use of beauty aids (cf. v. 9) available in this day.

This term translated "cosmetics" (BDB 600) means to scour (BDB 599, KB 634, cf. Prov. 20:30). In this context it may refer to (1) skin treatments or (2) rubbings (BDB 599). The Anchor Bible, vol. 7b has "massage," p. 18, with oil of myrrh and other cosmetics, p. 23 (cf. KB 634). Notice also the TEV translation of vv. 3,9,12.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:5-7

⁵Now there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, ⁶who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled. ⁷He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had

no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

2:5 “a Jew” This term (BDB 397, KB 394) has several meanings.:

1. from the tribe of Judah, son of Jacob
2. from the land of Judah
 - a. tribal allotment in Joshua
 - b. southern tribes after 922 B.C. split
 - c. small area around Jerusalem in post-exilic period
3. “someone who is Jewish, not necessarily of the tribe of Judah” (e.g., 2:5; 3:4; 5:13; 6:10; 8:7; 9:29,31; 10:3). This is the historical period when the term “Jew” takes on its modern usage.

▣ **“Mordecai, the son of Jair”** The exact etymology of the word “Mordecai” is uncertain (BDB 598, KB 632, possibly it related to the Babylonian god, Marduk, cf. Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:7). He was a Benjaminite. He was in some capacity connected with the gate of the palace (cf. 10:6).

2:6 “who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem” Many have assumed that if this refers to Mordecai he would have been over 100 years old since the exiles under Nebuchadnezzar occurred in either 605, 597, 586, or 582 B.C. However, “who” seems to relate to one of his ancestors and not to Mordecai himself (cf. NRSV, specifies the “who” as Kish).

The mentioning of “Kish” and “Shimei” means

1. he was of the royal line of Benjamin, a relative of King Saul
2. his immediate ancestor taken into captivity carried the famous family names
3. both Kish (cf. I Sam. 9:1-2; genealogy in I Chr. 8:33-40) and Shimei (cf. II Sam. 16:5) are ancient Benjamite family names (Josephus, the Targums).

As we have seen so often in comparing the lists of peoples in Ezra and Nehemiah, specific family names appear again and again and often “son” refers to distant relatives or famous descendants.

▣ **“Jeconiah King of Judah”** See the account in II Kgs. 24; II Chr. 36. He also is known by Coniah (cf. Jer. 22:24,28) and Jehoiachin (cf. II Kgs. 24:6,8,12).

2:7 “Hadassah. . . Esther” This is a Hebrew name from the term “myrtle” (BDB 213, from the Targums, cf. Isa. 41:19; 55:13; Zech. 1:8,10,11).

▣ **“that is Esther”** This lady apparently had two names, one Hebrew and one Persian, which must have been common for Jews taken into exile. It is possible that Esther was Hadassah’s throne name, but this is unsubstantiated.

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NJB “his uncle’s daughter”

NRSV, TEV “his cousin”

The Hebrew term (BDB 187, KB 215) can have several familial references. Josephus and Jewish tradition assert that Mordecai was her uncle; the Old Latin and Vulgate texts have “niece” (cf. F. B. Huey, “Esther,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 806,807; NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 779, says it is “cousin” not “niece,” but p. 923 says it is a possibility). The word has a wide semantic range.

▣ **“the young lady was beautiful of form and face”** The NKJV is more literal, “lovely and beautiful.” The author of Esther often combines words, phrases, and sentences that have similar meanings.

The first term (BDB 1061) means “form” and was used in the sense of “gazed at” (cf. Gen. 29:17; Deut. 21:11; I Sam. 25:3).

The second phrase (BDB 909 and 373 II) means “good appearance.” This was used to describe Vasti in 1:11. We would say Esther was stunning and stood out in a crowd, a real show-stopper, eye-catcher (aren’t metaphors wonderful!).

▣ **“took her as his own daughter”** The NET Bible (p. 745) has “he was acting as the guardian.” To support this change they use the Koehler-Baumgartner Lexicon, p. 64, and compare the usage “guardian” with II Kgs. 10:1-5.

There is little direct evidence of adoption in the OT, probably because there were so many ways culturally available to have children. See *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, pp. 14-15 or deVaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, pp. 51-52.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:8-11

⁸So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women. ⁹Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem. ¹⁰Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make *them* known. ¹¹Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared.

2:8 “many young ladies” Josephus (*Antiq.* 6.2) tells us that there were 400 young ladies. This does not seem impossible since Plutarch (*Artaxerxes*, 27.5) mentions that Artaxerxes had 360 concubines.

▣ **“Esther was taken to the king’s palace”** This VERB (BDB 542, KB 534, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) may imply that she was taken by force (*Qal* form, cf. v. 15; Gen. 42:36; 44:29; I Kgs. 11:34). The *Niphal* is used of the Ark being taken away by force (cf. I Sam. 4:11,17,19,21,22). Esther had no cultural choice!

2:9 This verse shows the personal appeal of Esther. Her personality matched her physical beauty. She found favor (see Special Topic: *Hesed* at Neh. 13:14) with the head eunuch amidst so many other beautiful women.

▣ **“He quickly provided”** This VERB (BDB 96, KB 111, *Peel* IMPERFECT) is used several times in Esther (cf. 6:14; 8:14), where it always denotes haste, possibly urgency.

▣ **“food”** Apparently Esther ate the king’s food (unlike Daniel). She either was not familiar with the Levitical food laws (cf. Lev. 11) or perhaps she was concealing her Jewish identity as Mordecai had instructed her (cf. v. 10).

▣

NASB “seven choice maids”

NKJV “seven choice maid-servants”

NRSV “seven chosen maids”

TEV “seven young women especially chosen”

NJB “seven special maids”

Verse 9 shows how Hegai treated Esther with special favors. The number seven was special to both Hebrews and Persians (see note at 1:5). Esther had seven specially chosen (BDB 906, KB 1154, *Qal*, PASSIVE PARTICIPLE) servants. Apparently the other young virgins did not have this extra care.

Why did Hegai do this?

1. He and Esther had become friends.
2. He saw in Esther the probability of the new queen and wanted to gain her favor.
3. This was the unseen hand of God.

2:10 On Mordecai's request Esther did not let anyone know that she was of a royal line of Benjamin, a Jew.

Mordecai's daily visits were a sign of

1. his love for his adopted daughter
2. his fear of anti-Semitism in Persia

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:12-14

¹²Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women—¹³the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

2:12 “after the end of twelve months under the regulations for the women” This shows that there was a year of training in court etiquette and beauty treatments (which was meant to remove skin blemishes and lighten skin color). The lengthy period may also have been a way of detecting any kind of disease.

2:13 “anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace” Letting the women choose their own dress and adornments was one way of letting the king know something about the girl's personality.

2:14 “the second harem. . .the concubines” It is uncertain exactly what this phrase specifically relates to, but it is known from history that there were three segments of the royal harem. There were the king's wives, concubines, and virgins. The women who went into the king's presence one time and were never called again still became permanently part of the harem (i.e., concubines) because of their one intimate contact with the king. They became, in some sense, royalty themselves (cf. II Sam. 16:20ff dealing with Absalom and I Kings 1 and 2 dealing with Adonijah).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:15-16

¹⁵Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abigail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her. ¹⁶So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

2:15 Esther had grown to trust Hegai. His recommendations would be honored and implemented. Esther's natural beauty may have been accentuated by the plainness of her attire. Apparently Hegai knew the king's preferences.

Esther had a certain presence which attracted people (cf. 2:17; 5:2). This was the unseen hand of God, which is active throughout the account.

2:16 “in the tenth month. . .in the seventh year of his reign” It had been almost four years since Vasti was removed from her place as queen. She was not removed from the harem, but from her position as the king’s number one wife. Historically, this seems to be a long period of time, but if a two year Greek campaign is interposed it fits precisely in the known history of the Persian period. See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars at Ezra 3:1.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:17-18

¹⁷The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vasti. ¹⁸Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.

2:17 Again the author’s literary style of using parallel words, phrases, or sentences is seen.

- A. The overall pattern of the verse
1. The VERB “loved” (BDB 12, KB 17) is *Qal* IMPERFECT, which matches the VERB (BDB 669, KB 724) before “favor” and “kindness” (see Special Topic: *Hesed* at Neh. 13:14). This VERB (*Qal* IMPERFECT) describes a deep longing for one’s sexual partner.
 - a. Isaac - Rebekah, Gen. 24:67
 - b. Jacob - Rachel, Gen. 29:18,20,30
 - c. Samson - different women, e.g., Jdgs. 16:4
 - d. Elkanah - Hannah, I Sam. 1:5 (*Qal* PERFECT)
 - e. Rehoboam - Ma’acah, II Chr. 11:21
 - f. Xerxes - Esther, Esther 2:17(List from NIDOTTE, vol. 1, p. 291, but with changes)
 2. The descriptive phrase, “more than all the women,” is an inclusive, emphatic assertion. It parallels the descriptive phrase, “more than all the virgins.”
- B. The descriptive terms
1. favor (BDB 336, cf. 5:2; VERB form used in 5:8; 7:3; 8:5)
 2. kindness (BDB 338, cf. 2:9)
- This is apparently a hendiadys. Apparently Esther’s turn with the king was later in the rotation (four years had passed), possibly last because with her arrival before the king the contest stopped! As is common with Persian kings, the drinking party begins!

2:18 “he also made a holiday for the provinces” The term (BDB 629, KB 252), meaning “a giving of a rest,” is a hapax legomenon and could refer to several royal favors:

1. no taxation (for a set period of time, KB 252)
2. no military draft (for a set period of time)
3. special amnesty (for a set period of time)
 - a. to slaves
 - b. to debtors
 - c. to prisoners (LXX)
4. a special holiday (BDB 629, from Aramaic root)

There is a historical example of the same type of amnesty found in Herodotus, *Histories* 3.67, which denotes a cancellation of #1 and #2 for three years.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 2:19-23

¹⁹When the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care. ²¹In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ²²But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. ²³Now when the plot was investigated and found *to be so*, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

2:19 “when the virgins were gathered together the second time” It is uncertain what the “second time” refers to (i.e., a time, a place, a part of the house of women). Some have assumed that it refers to (1) a second assembling of the first group at the king's house or to the main harem in contradistinction to the second harem (cf. v. 14) or (2) a second group of virgins (the king's sexual freedom did not stop with his infatuation with Esther).

2:21 “while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate” Mordecai's presence at the king's gate (cf. 2:19, 21; 3:2; 4:6; 5:9,13; 6:10,12) denotes a place of power and trust. He was a Persian official of some type connected with (1) protecting the king; (2) administering legal matters for the king; or (3) some type of advisor.

There has been much speculation as to how Mordecai became privy to this assassination attempt: (1) Targum #1 says that he knew the seventy languages of the world and simply overheard them speaking; (2) Targum #2 says that the Holy Spirit revealed it to him (i.e., the unseen hand of God); (3) Josephus says that a slave of the conspirator Teresh heard of the plot and since the slave was a Jew himself, told Mordecai.

▣ **“those who guarded the door”** Apparently, these were two eunuchs (see note at 1:10, i.e., personal guards) whom the king had made angry in some way. These close servants would have direct access to the king and would have had the best opportunity to assassinate him.

2:23 “hanged on a gallows” It is uncertain if this refers to the manner of death (i.e., hanging, BDB 1067, KB 1738, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) or to a later public humiliation by impaling. The Jewish Study Bible, p. 1629, gives Gen. 40:19; Deut. 21:22; Josh. 8:29; 10:26; I Sam. 31:10 as biblical accounts of impaling and then gives comments by Herodotus (cf. *Hist.* 3.125; 7.238) as confirming the practice. The NIV Study Bible agrees with this interpretation and gives further references in Herodotus (i.e., 3.129,159; 4.43).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. How can we explain the almost four years between the deposing of Vasti and the crowning of Esther?
2. Explain the beauty treatments and their purpose (cf. v. 12).

ESTHER 3

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Haman's Conspiracy Against the Jews	Haman and Mordecai	Haman Plots to Destroy the Jews	Mordecai and Haman (2:19-3:6)
3:1-7	3:1-6	3:1-6	The Decree of Extermination Against the Jews
	3:7-11	3:7	3:7-9
3:8-11		3:8-9	
		3:10-11	3:10-11
3:12-15	3:12-15	3:12-14	3:12-13
			3:14-15a
		3:15	
			3:15b

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEST: 3:1-6

¹After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who *were* with him. ²All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage. ³Then the king's

servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?" ⁴Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. ⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. ⁶But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him *who* the people of Mordecai *were*; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

3:1 “After these events” The UBS Handbook on the Book of Esther, p. 88, says that this phrase is a regular literary device used by the author of Esther to signal the beginning of the next part of the story (e.g., 2:1).

▣ **“promoted”** This VERB (BDB 152, KB 178, *Peel* PERFECT) is also used in 5:11. It means to make great or powerful. The reason for Haman’s promotion is not stated.

There is a parallel relationship between this VERB and

1. “advanced him” (BDB 669, KB 724, *Peel* IMPERFECT)
2. “established his authority over all the princes” (BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERFECT)

This was a major political promotion into the second most powerful position of authority at the palace, if not the realm. The irony is that Mordecai’s efforts in saving the king’s life went unnoticed (cf. 2:19-23).

▣ **“Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite”** The exact etymology of the term “Agagite” (BDB 8, KB 10, “violent” or “angry”) has caused much discussion. It is either an unknown geographical location (cf. NJB, from an inscription of Sargon, a district of Persia-Agag) or a family name, or it may be related to Agag (cf. TEV), the king of the Amalekites (Talmud, Targums, and Josephus’ *Antiq.* 11.209), the traditional enemy of the Jews (cf. Exod. 17:8-16; Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:17-19; Jdgs. 6:3,33; I Sam. 15:8; I Chr. 4:42, 43). This third option is more plausible when Mordecai’s Benjamite ancestry is contrasted to Haman’s (literary foil).

The Jewish Study Bible mentions that Jewish tradition (the Targums) takes the rivalry between Israel and the Amalekites back to the rivalry between Jacob and Esau (cf. Gen. 36:12).

3:2 “bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him” This was simply polite court etiquette (cf. Herodotus 1.134; BDB 502, KB 499, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE and BDB 1005, KB 295, *Hithpael* PARTICIPLE. Both mean “bow down,” but the second implies prostration). Some have assumed that since the king commanded (BDB 845, KB 1010, *Piel* PERFECT) it that Haman was a non-Persian. For whatever the reason, Mordecai would not bow down and pay homage to Haman. There have been many theories concerning his refusal:

1. bowing down involved worship and he refused because he was a Jew (cf. Daniel 3 and Esth. 3:4)
2. older Jewish commentators assert that Haman wore an idol (winged disk symbolic of Ahura Masda) around his neck and Mordecai would not bow down to the idol
3. others assume that Haman was a descendant of Agag (the Agagite or Amalekite), the enemy of Israel who was attacked by King Saul (cf. I Sam. 15), and Mordecai would not bow down to an enemy

3:3-4 From these two verses it is obvious that Mordecai’s continuing refusal to pay homage to Haman was connected to his being a Jew (cf. vv. 4,6). By wilfully disobeying a royal command, he was putting his job and his life in jeopardy. By angering Haman he was putting every Jew in the empire at risk!

3:5 “Haman was filled with rage” The plot develops around this man’s “being filled (“filled [BDB 569, KB 583, *Niphal* IMPERFECT] with rage” [BDB 404, KB 326]) at this one Jew from which he extrapolates an irrational hatred for all Jews (as Saul had attempted to kill all Amalekites, Josephus, *Antiq.* 11.211). An

element of anti-Semitism is obvious (cf. v. 8). This is the first of several mood swings. Haman is depicted as rapidly moving from elation to fury!

▣ The term “rage” (BDB 404, KB 326) is used several times in Esther:

1. of the king, 1:12; 2:1; 7:7,10
2. of Haman, 3:5; 5:9

Haman’s anger develops into the king’s anger.

NASB (UPDATED) TEST: 3:7-11

⁷In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month *to month*, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar. ⁸Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from *those* of all *other* people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain. ⁹If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries." ¹⁰Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people *also*, to do with them as you please."

3:7 “the first month, which is the month of Nisan” See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars at Ezra 3:1.

▣ **“in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus”** Esther would have been queen now for approximately four years. This would be 474 B.C.

▣ **“Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and month to month”** This term “Pur” (BDB 807, KB 920) seems to be related to the Feast of Purim (BDB 807, cf. 9:32). It is now known that it is an Akkadian loan word which denoted a means by which one could know the best timing for future events (cf. v. 13). This was an ancient way to know the will of a deity. It is used in the OT for the dividing of the Promised Land in Joshua (i.e., the Urim and the Thummim of the High Priest); notice two uses in Nehemiah (cf. 10:34; 11:1) and in the NT for the filling of the place of Judas Iscariot (cf. Acts 1:26). Apparently Haman had the magi or sorcerers (cf. 6:13; Herodotus 3:128) cast these stones in order to know the specific date on which he would (1) revenge himself on the Jewish nation or (2) approach the king about their destruction. He was obviously looking for divine sanction for his evil plans. The lot fell on a date about eleven months in the future.

In this verse both the Akkadian term (BDB 807) translated “Pur” and the parallel Hebrew term (BDB 174) translated “the lot” are used together as in 9:24.

3:8 “their laws are different from those of all other people” Here is another example of “different equals bad.” This is also flagrant exaggeration and stereotyping. Haman takes Mordecai’s refusal to bow down to him because he was a Jew and extends his actions to all Jews in all provinces.

▣

NASB, NKJV	“scattered and dispersed”
NRSV	“scattered and separated”
TEV	“scattered”
NJB	“a certain unassimilated nation scattered”

There are two *Pual* PARTICIPLES. They are parallel, but not synonymous. The first (BDB 808, KB 921) means distributed through the Persian empire (because of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles). The second (BDB 825, KB 962) means “self-imposed separateness or exclusiveness,” Anchor Bible, vol. 7B, p. 39. This meaning is seen in the NJB translation. The next phrase characterizes one aspect (“their laws are different”) of this separateness. It is the very separateness that allowed the Jews to maintain their culture and tradition while in exile. The chief mechanism of the preservation of culture was the local synagogue.

3:9 “Let it be decreed” This VERB (BDB 507, KB 503) is a *Niphal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense (cf. 1:19).

▣ **“and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business, to put into the king’s treasuries”** This is a stupendous amount of money. We know from history that it equals two-thirds of the annual budget of the Persian empire (cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.95). Whether Haman was personally very wealthy or if he planned to use the plunder of the slain Jews is uncertain. Obviously the king was interested in this kind of arrangement since his coffers had been drained by the Greek war. The amount of money shows the intensity of the hatred of Haman.

3:10 “the king took his signet ring from his hand” The signet ring was a sign of the king’s authority. It is amazing that the king checked Mordecai’s story in 2:23, but does not check Haman’s story!

3:11 “and the king said to Haman, ‘The silver is yours’” Literally this is “the silver is given to you,” which is a *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE. It seems from the context that this is the beginning of an Oriental bargaining section (similar to Gen. 23), not simply the king saying to Haman to keep all the money (i.e., silver) yourself (cf. 3:9; 4:7). The king was allowing him to pay those who would destroy the Jews and turn in their property to the crown.

The term “silver” was used in the sense of money, not always for literally weighing out the metal itself (e.g., I Kgs. 20:39; Isa. 55:2).

NASB (UPDATED) TEST: 3:12-15

¹²Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. ¹³Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder. ¹⁴A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day. ¹⁵The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.

3:12 “on the thirteenth day of the first month” The IVP *Bible Background Commentary, Old Testament*, has a great comment about this date.

“Passover, the greatest celebration of deliverance of the Israelites, was celebrated on the fourteenth of Nisan. The edict was written on the thirteenth of Nisan, so it began to be distributed on the fourteenth. Thus, just as the Jews were celebrating deliverance from their great enemy of the past, the Egyptians, they were learning of a new plot from a new enemy” (p. 488).

▣ **“satraps...governors...princes”** These are the three levels of Persian administration. The highest being the satraps, which numbered about thirty.

▣ **“sealed with the king’s signet ring”** This phrase is parallel to “being written in the name of King Ahasuerus.” The ring was used as an official seal. It was pushed into a blob of hot wax, not to seal a document, but as a sign the document was from the king (cf. 8:8; Gen. 41:42).

3:13 “to destroy, to kill and to annihilate” The author of Esther regularly uses several VERBS in parallel (cf. 7:4):

1. “to destroy” (BDB 1029, KB 1552, *Hiphil* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT)
2. “to kill” (BDB 246, KB 255, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT)
3. “to annihilate” (BDB 1, KB 2, *Piel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT)

The object of this attack is “all Jews”:

1. young and old
2. children and women

This legal terminology clearly spells out the extent of the slaughter!

3:14 The interpretive question is, to whom is this decree addressed?

1. all citizens
2. the military

The answer probably lies in the compensation given to those who kill the Jews. Do they get part of their property? If so, then #1, but if not, then #2. If #2 Haman’s offer of money was to pay for the military operation.

▣ **“for this day”** Literally “in one day.” The interpretive question is, does this mean

1. all Jews were to be killed on one day, or
2. that the attacks were to be coordinated through all the provinces on one day?

From 9:11-15, option #1 seems best.

3:15 “the city of Susa was in confusion” The VERB “was in confusion” (BDB 100, KB 115, *Niphal* PERFECT) is used of Pharaoh thinking that evasive movement of the fleeing slaves was confusion (cf. Exod. 14:3). There have been two theories related to this phrase: (1) had a higher moral sense than the king, which seems to be implied from 8:15 or (2) citizens of Susa were planning how and who to kill in order to get their property.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Mordecai not bow down to Haman?
2. Are we certain that Haman is a relative of Agag, a king of the Amalekites?
3. How were lots cast and what was their purpose? Are there other examples in the OT?
4. How large a sum of money is ten thousand talents of silver and how does it relate to the economy of the day?

ESTHER 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Esther Agrees to Help the Jews	The Appeal to Esther	Mordecai Asks for Esther's Help	Mordecai and Esther Try to Avert the Danger
4:1-3	4:1-3	4:1-3	4:1-3
4:4-9	4:4-8	4:4-11	4:4-5
			4:6-8
	4:9-17		4:9-11
4:10-12		4:12-14	4:12-14
4:13-17		4:15-16	4:15-17
		4:17	

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section) ***FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL***

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Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3, p. viii). Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEST: 4:1-3

¹When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. ²He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³In each and every province where

the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.

4:1 “he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went in the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly” These were Jewish mourning rites; more are listed in v. 3:

1. tore his clothes, v. 1
2. put on sackcloth, vv. 1,3
3. put on ashes (or dust, but on the head), vv. 1,3
4. wailed loudly and bitterly, vv. 1,3
5. fasted, v. 3
6. wept, v. 3

Numbers 1 and 2 are often done together (cf. Isa. 58:5; Jer. 6:26; Jonah 3:6). The Persians also practiced #1 (cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.99).

4:2 Expressing personal emotions in the king’s presence or palace was inappropriate (cf. Neh. 2:1-2).

4:3

NASB, NKJV,

NJB, NIV “many”

NRSV, TEV,

REB “most”

JPSOA

“everybody”

NAB

“all”

The Hebrew has “many,” but this term often has the connotation of “all” (cf. Isa. 53:11,12 vs. 53:6; Rom. 5:19 vs. 5:18).

☐ **“lay on sackcloth”** Sackcloth was made of coarse goat or camel hair. It was rough and most uncomfortable when worn close to the skin. The Jews wore it as an outer garment and even slept on it (cf. II Sam. 21:10; I Kgs. 21:27; Isa. 58:5).

NASB (UPDATED) TEST: 4:4-8

⁴Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them. ⁵Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. ⁶So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate. ⁷Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go in to the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people.

4:4

NASB “the queen writhed in great anguish”

NKJV, NRSV “the queen was deeply distressed”

TE V “she was deeply disturbed”

NJB “she was overcome with grief”

The VERB (BDB 296 I; KB 297; *Hithpalpel* IMPERFECT) means to writhe in anxiety. The term is often used of child birth (cf. Ps. 29:8; 55:4-5; Isa. 26:17; 51:2), as well as the pain of the wicked in judgment

(cf. Job 15:20). The ADVERB “deeply” (BDB 547) is added for emphasis. This term is used for both physical and psychological pain.

Her servants evidently knew her close relationship to Mordecai even though they may not have known that they were blood relations. Esther was greatly concerned about her uncle’s actions.

4:7-8 Mordecai tells Esther’s servant (Hathach) the situation and even gives him a copy of the posted edict to show Esther.

NASB (UPDATED) TEST: 4:9-12

⁹Hathach came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him *to reply* to Mordecai: ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days."¹²They related Esther's words to Mordecai.

4:9-12 She seemed to fear for her own life in breaking Persian court customs more than for the slaughter of her people! We learn of some of these customs from Herodotus (*Hist.* 3.118,140), which implies that only members of the seven special Persian families could approach the king without his permission.

NASB (UPDATED) TEST: 4:13-17

¹³Then Mordecai told *them* to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. ¹⁴For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" ¹⁵Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

4:13 Mordecai seems to be somewhat upset at Esther’s response. Mordecai plainly tells Esther that if all the Jews die, then she will also die!

4:14 “relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place” This is where most commentators assert that a strong allusion to God is assumed (as in v. 16, cf. the Targums and Josephus’ *Antiq.* 6.7). This is the Hebrew doctrine of God’s providence. The Jews were an integral part of God’s redemptive plan for all humanity (cf. Rom. 9:4-5).

The term “relief” (BDB 926, KB 1194) has a wide semantic field (possibly reflects two separate roots). Its primary meaning was “to be wide or spacious,” but the same three consonants can also mean

1. liberation
2. air, breath, wind, spirit
3. smell, odor, scent

Here it means deliverance as in Gen. 32:16.

As God delivered His people from Egypt (cf. Gen. 45:5-7) He will deliver them from Haman. Esther has been placed in a special place for God to use (like Joseph) at this critical time (i.e., the unseen hand of God).

▣ **“And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this”** This is the most famous phrase in the book of Esther. It encourages great faith in God’s unseen, but present, care and providence (the unseen, but ever-present, hand of God)!

▣ **“you and your father’s house will perish”** Although Mordecai has confidence that God will deliver His people, Esther must choose if she will allow God to work through her life. This is the biblical tension between God’s unconditional covenant (i.e., human redemption) and the conditional individual response.

4:16 “do not eat or drink for three days” There is a series of IMPERATIVES (3) and two IMPERFECTS used in a JUSSIVE sense.

1. go (BDB 229, KB 246, *Qal* IMPERATIVE)
2. assemble (BEB 488, KB 484, *Qal* IMPERATIVE)
3. fast (BDB 847, KB 1012, *Qal* IMPERATIVE)
4. do not eat (BDB 27, KB 40, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense)
5. do not drink (BDB 1059, KB 1667, *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense)

This verse vividly communicates Esther’s fear and faith!

Although prayer is not specifically mentioned, prayer and fasting are definitely linked in the OT.

This verse alludes to the mystery of prayer and providence. It is obviously God’s will that the Jewish people survive in order for the Messiah to come. Why then such extraordinary means: (1) fasting (three days and nights with no food or water, a total fast) and (2) the numbers of people? Will God not act unless His people humble themselves and pray? God’s redemptive will must have priority over human action! Does this whole context imply that God will surely accomplish His purposes, but possibly not through Esther and Mordecai (cf. v. 14)?

These questions are mysteries. Mystery about (1) a sovereign God and a covenant people; (2) prayer and providence; and (3) the new modern theological emphasis on open-theism (cf. Clark Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover*). See Special Topic: Predestination Versus Human Free Will at Neh. 9:7.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Explain Mordecai’s statements in v. 14 and how they relate to your understanding of God’s activity in your life.
2. Where in this chapter is God’s presence and care assumed but not specifically stated?
3. Why does the book never mention God?

ESTHER 5

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Esther's Banquet	Esther Before the King	Esther Invites the King and Haman to a Banquet	Esther Intrudes on the Royal Presence
5:1-5	5:1-8	5:1-3 5:4	5:1-5
5:6-8		5:5-6 5:7-8	5:6-8
Haman's Plot Against Mordecai	Haman's Exaltation and Chagrin	Haman Plots to Kill Mordecai	
5:9-14	5:9-14	5:9-13 5:14a 5:14b	5:9-14

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

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2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:1-4

¹Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in

the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. ²When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter. ³Then the king said to her, "What is *troubling* you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you." ⁴Esther said, "If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him."

5:1 “on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes” This implies that she took off the sackcloth and ashes of fasting (cf. 4:16) or that she simply put on her royal robes as she approached the king.

▣ **“and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in the front of the king's rooms”** This verse is a very accurate description of the inside of the Persian palace at Susa. This has been confirmed by archaeological excavation and it is obvious that we are dealing with an eyewitness account of someone connected with the Persian court.

5:2 “she obtained favor in his sight” This theme of Esther finding favor is recurrent (cf. 2:9,15; 5:2,8; 7:3; 8:5). The invisible hand behind this favor shown to Esther by so many is the unseen hand of God. His presence was unseen in this post-exilic period, as it is today. Believers trust by faith, not sight, that God is with them and for them because of His promises in His book! The recurrent theme in Nehemiah was “trust and act on the word of God.”

▣ **“extended to Esther the golden scepter”** This was the sign of acceptance at the Persian court (cf. Herodotus, 1.99). This scepter is depicted in several Persian wall paintings and carvings.

5:3 “What is *troubling* you” Obviously, Esther being willing to risk her life by coming without being summoned meant that something was gravely wrong.

▣ **“even to half of the kingdom will be given to you”** This shows the king's favor of Esther by using an Oriental idiom of exaggeration (cf. 5:6; 7:2; and Herodotus 9.109-11, as well as Herod's use of the same idiom in Mark 6:23).

5:4 “may the king and Haman come” Some manuscripts of the Masoretic Text have the first four initial consonants of the first four words emphasized because they spell out the divine name YHWH. This seems to be a coincidence of word order, not the premeditated theology of the original author. I personally reject all secret messages which clever people find hidden in ancient texts. God wants all humans in every age to fully understand His word.

Usually Persian kings ate alone, possibly joined from time to time by family or someone from the seven special families. For Esther to invite the king for a private meal was unusual, but to also invite Haman would have been highly unusual. Why she did this is uncertain, but her fasting and prayers brought faith and wisdom (the unseen hand of God)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:5-8

⁵Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires." So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared. ⁶As they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther, "What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done." ⁷So Esther replied, "My petition and my request is: ⁸if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition

and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says."

5:7-8 Esther's request may have been (1) out of fear (i.e., afraid to ask) or (2) a purposeful plan to pique the king's interest.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 5:9-14

⁹Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai. ¹⁰Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. ¹¹Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every *instance* where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king. ¹²Haman also said, "Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king. ¹³Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." ¹⁴Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet." And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made.

5:9 "Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart" This book, like the Bible itself, is filled with shocking role reversals (i.e., Adam, Joseph, David, Solomon, Manasseh, etc.). The evaluations of the people of this planet are different from God's (e.g., Isa. 55:8-11; Ezek. 18:32).

In this book Haman is up and down, up and down, up and down. He becomes a type of restless evil, human cunning, thwarted by God's unseen hand.

▣ **"Mordecai in the king's gate"** Again Mordecai is identified with the palace guard (cf. 2:19,21; 3:2; 5:13; 6:10).

▣ **"he did not stand up or tremble before him"** After the issuing of the edict for the destruction of the Jews, Mordecai not only would not bow down, but would not even recognize Haman's presence. Mordecai had no respect for, or fear of, Haman!

▣ **"Haman was filled with anger"** The VERB (BDB 569, KB 583, *Niphal* IMPERFECT) expresses Haman's hatred (cf. 3:5).

His irrational anger (cf. v. 13) will be his undoing. The role reversal will occur because of Haman's anger/hatred/wrath (BDB 404).

5:10-14 Haman apparently had spiritual advisors who used divination for him (cf. 3:7; 6:13).

5:11 "the glory of his riches" The Hebrew word "glory" (BDB 458, KB 457) often is associated with wealth (cf. Gen. 31:1; I Chr. 29:12,28; II Chr. 1:11,12; Prov. 3:16). The word's basic meaning of "to be heavy" relates to weights of precious metals.

▣ **"the number of his sons"** From 9:7-10 we learn that Haman had ten sons. Both Hebrews and Persians saw a large number of sons as a sign of divine blessing (cf. Herodotus, 1.136).

5:13 “Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate”

Haman’s hatred was stronger than all of the wealth and power that the king had given. This is a valid psychological insight on what a root of bitterness will do to a human heart!

5:14 “Have a gallows fifty cubits high” There is a series of IMPERATIVES (2) and IMPERFECTS (2) used as JUSSIVES:

1. “have a gallows. . .made” (BDB 793, KB 889) *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
2. “ask the king” (BDB 55, KB 65), *Qal* IMPERATIVE
3. “hang Mordecai” (BDB 1067, KB 1738), *Qal* IMPERFECT used in a JUSSIVE sense
4. “go joyfully. . .to the banquet” (BDB 97, KB 112), *Qal* IMPERATIVE

A cubit is the distance from a man’s longest finger to his elbow, about 18 to 20 inches. We know from history about two different cubit measurements, one about 18 inches and a longer cubit as the official one for construction. This would have made the gallows about 75-85 feet high (higher than the columns of the king’s palace). This may not relate to a hanging gallows but to a sharpened stake. The Persians were noted for impaling people, not for hanging them (cf. 9:13; Herodotus 3:159; 4:43; the Behistun Inscription column 2, paragraph 13 and 14; column 3, paragraph 8).

It is the exaggerations (e.g., the amount of money Haman offered for the Jews’ destruction) in the book that cause literary scholars to reexamine the genre. It is not that the book itself causes insurmountable problems, but that, like Jonah and Job, it may have an historical core which is elaborated for theological reasons.

A 75-85 foot impaling stake certainly shows the extent of hatred and planning of Haman and his advisors! But the unseen hand of God, shockingly reverses the roles of Haman and Mordecai!

ESTHER 6

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The King Honors Mordecai 6:1-3	Mordecai's Triumph 6:1-11	The King Honors Mordecai 6:1-3a 6:3b 6:4a 6:4b-5a 6:5b 6:6a 6:6b 6:7-9 6:10 6:11	The Discomfiture of Haman 6:1-10 6:11-13
6:4-11		6:12-13 Haman Is Put to Death (6:14-7:10) 6:14-7:2	Haman at Esther's Banquet (6:14-7:7) 6:14-7:7
6:12-14	6:12-13 6:14		

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section) ***FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL***

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:1-9

¹During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. ²It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ³The king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." ⁴So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him. ⁵The king's servants said to him, "Behold, Haman is standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." ⁶So Haman came in and the king said to him, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?" ⁷Then Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king desires to honor, ⁸let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; ⁹and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.'"

6:1 “the king could not sleep” This not only shows the unseen hand of God (the LXX is specific), but also the results of eating too much the night before at the banquet! This same divine action occurs in Dan. 2:1; 6:1; and even in Gen. 31:40. There is certainly similarity between the lives of Joseph, Daniel, and Mordecai.

▣ **“the book of records, the chronicles”** These would be official court records (cf. 2:23 and 10:2).

6:2-3 The role reversal is beginning. The king has become aware of Mordecai’s service and lack of reward from several years previous. It is amazing that the king was having read such old events!

6:3 The Anchor Bible, vol. 7B, p. 64, mentions that Mordecai’s lack of reward would have reflected badly on the king (cf. Herodotus 3.138,140; 5.11; 8.85; 9.207; Thucydides, *Peloponnesian Wars* 1.138).

6:4 “Who is in the court” Haman had apparently come early in the morning to request the impaling of Mordecai. What irony!

6:5 Haman’s early arrival shows his intense and continuing hatred of Mordecai. He is there to get permission to kill him and hang him high!

6:6 “What is to be for the man whom the king desires to honor” The king is referring to Mordecai, but Haman thinks it is himself!

▣ **“and Haman said to himself”** Pride is an evil master!

6:8-9 There seems to be a series of three things: (1) a royal robe which had been worn by the king; (2) a royal horse which had been ridden by the king and on whose head was the symbol of the Persian crown; and (3) a royal procession, led by the most notable princes, through the streets on this horse with its bedecked rider and a great proclamation.

6:9 The purpose of honoring Mordecai was to encourage loyalty and service to the king!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:10-11

¹⁰Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said." ¹¹So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him *on horseback* through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor."

6:10 "Take quickly" This represents two IMPERATIVES (BDB 554 I, KB 553 and BDB 542, KB 534). This has the connotation of urgency. This honor had been long overdue.

▣ "the horse" The king's special horse is mentioned in 8:10.

▣ "and do so for Mordecai the Jew who is sitting at the king's gate" This is the third IMPERATIVE (BDB 793, KB 889, *Qal* IMPERATIVE). How Ahasuerus knew that Mordecai was a Jew is uncertain unless it was recorded in the chronicles which were read to him the night before. It also acknowledges his apparent official position at the king's gate. It is uncertain if the king remembered Haman's edict and realized its consequences toward Mordecai.

6:11 Is there anything that would have upset Haman more than this? Note v. 12.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:12-13

¹²Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning, with *his* head covered. ¹³Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him."

6:12 "with his head covered" This was an Oriental symbol of dejection, humiliation, and mourning (BDB 341, KB 339, *Qal* PASSIVE PARTICIPLE, cf. II Sam. 15:30; Ps. 44:15; Jer. 14:3-4).

6:13 "his wise men" These are the ones who cast the lots before Haman in 3:7. The Hebrew word (BDB 314) often is used for a class of diviners (cf. Gen. 41:8; Exod. 7:11; Isa. 19:11; 44:25; Jer. 50:35; 51:57).

▣ "Zeresh his wife said to him" This is an unusual statement. It is somewhat similar to Pilate's wife speaking to him during the trial of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:19). We simply do not know why she spoke in this prophetic fashion. It is also similar to Balaam's prophecies in Numbers (cf. Num. 22-24). The unseen hand of God is clearly manifesting itself (role reversal). One wonders why these counselors did not tell him this before, as he was planning the destruction of the Jews and, later, Mordecai. In all probability this is a literary device which reflects the author's theology proclaimed by the mouth of Haman's wife. Dialogue often carries the theological load!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 6:14

¹⁴While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

6:14 This set the stage for Haman's ultimate demotion and death.

ESTHER 7

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Haman Hanged instead of Mordecai	Haman's Fall 6:14-7:10	Haman is Put to Death (6:14-7:10) 6:14-7:2	Haman at Esther's Banquet (6:14-7:10) 6:14-7:7
7:1-4		7:3-4	
7:5-6		7:5 7:6-8a	
7:7-10		7:8b-9a 7:9b 7:10	7:8-10

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section) ***FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL***

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 7:1-10

¹Now the king and Haman came to drink *wine* with Esther the queen. ²And the king said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done." ³Then Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request; ⁴for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king." ⁵Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?" ⁶Esther said, "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!" Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen. ⁷The king arose in his anger from drinking wine *and went* into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king. ⁸Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?" As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. ⁹Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who *were* before the king said, "Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!" And the king said, "Hang him on it." ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.

7:4 "for we have been sold" This VERB (BDB 569, KB 581, *Niphal* PERFECT) is used in Lev. 25:34,48 in the sense of "sold for debt" (cf. Neh. 5:8). It became the opposite of "redeem." Esther sees herself and her people as sold to Haman's hatred and by implication, the king's nonchalance.

▣ **"to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated"** These three INFINITIVES (*Hiphil* [BDB 1029, KB 1552], *Qal* [BDB 246, KB 255], and *Piel* [BDB 1, KB 2]) describe the doom awaiting all Jews in Persia. The series is for intensity! It also is exactly what Haman had written in his decree (which Mordecai had given to Esther, cf. 3:13) under the king's authority.

▣

NASB "for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king"

NKJV "the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss"

NRSV "but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king"

TEV -----omitted-----

NJB "it will be beyond the persecutor's means to make good the loss that the king is about to sustain"

JPSOA "for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble"

This is polite court language. It is not meant to be literal, but demure. All of the "ifs" in v. 4 serve the same purpose.

The translations differ over how to take the term *nzq* (BDB 634, KB 684) an Aramaic loan word found only here in the Bible. Some translations take it as (1) "trouble" or "annoyance," but others (2) as "damage" or "loss" (referring to the money Haman offered in 3:9; 4:7). Esther is thinking of herself, her people, and her king!

7:5 “who would presume to do this” There may be a sound play in the term “sell” (v. 4, BDB 569, KB581, *Niphal* PERFECT) and “presume” (lit. “fill,” BDB 569, KB 583, *Qal* PERFECT). The king has asked the crucial question!

7:6 “foe. . .enemy. . .wicked” Esther combines a series of words (as v. 4) to describe the depth of her animosity toward Haman.

▣ **“terrified”** The Arabic root means “to come upon suddenly.” In Hebrew (BDB 129, KB147, *Niphal* PERFECT) the *Niphal* stem denotes terror (cf. I Chr. 21:30; Dan. 8:17).

7:7 “and the king arose in his anger from drinking wine” This shows how alcohol accentuates the emotions (cf. 1:12). See Special Topic on alcohol at Ezra 7:17.

7:8 “falling on the couch where Esther was” It must be remembered that the wife of the king took on something of his royal person. Therefore, to touch her was a grave offense. Haman probably had grasped Esther’s legs and may even have been kissing them when the king re-entered. Jealousy and anger took over!

It is interesting to speculate from a Jewish perspective how Haman was seen as wanting to be king himself:

1. wants the king’s clothes
2. wants to ride the king’s horse
3. Esther’s accusation in v. 4 may have implied a charge of treason
4. wants the king’s wife (or so the king thought)

▣ **“they covered Haman’s face”** Although we do not know this from the Persian period, we learn from Greek and Roman literature that this was done to condemned people (from the Anchor Bible, vol. 7B, p. 72; Curtius 6.8,22; Livy 1.26.25). Some scholars say that they have no right to see the king anymore, while other scholars say it was to protect the king from the person’s evil eye.

7:9 What irony!! In context Haman was trying to kill the very one who the king was honoring!

7:10 “hanged Haman on the gallows” This was probably impaling, not hanging as we understand the term. See note at 2:23.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. Did the Persians crucify, hang or impale criminals? How and why?
2. Explain the significance and/or origin of the theological statement of Haman’s wife in 6:13.

ESTHER 8

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Esther Saves the Jews	The Rise of Mordecai and the Revocation of the Edict	The Jews are Told to Fight Back	The Royal Favor Passes to the Jews
8:1-2	8:1-2	8:1-2	8:1-2
8:3-6	8:3-8	8:3-6	8:3-6
8:7-8		8:7-8	8:7-12
8:9-14	8:9-14	8:9-10 8:11-14	
			8:13-17
8:15-17	8:15-17	8:15-17	

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:1-2

¹On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther; and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her. ²The king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

8:1 “On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews” It was a common practice during the Persian period for the property of condemned people to revert to the crown (cf. Herodotus 3.128-129). The King gave Haman’s property to Esther because he was her enemy also.

▣ **“for Esther had disclosed what he was to her”** This could refer to their racial connection (cf. 6:10 and 7:3-4) or Esther may have shared more about Mordecai with the king (cf. 2:5-7). The context implies the second option.

8:2 “the king took off his signet ring. . .and gave it to Mordecai” Mordecai assumed the role of the second-in-charge (like Joseph, cf. 10:3), which had once been assigned to Haman. This was symbolized by the king’s own signet ring. There is significant parallelism between chapters 3 and 8.

▣ **“Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman”** This refers to his property, which must have been extensive. The king gave it to Esther (cf. v. 1) and she makes Mordecai its administrator.

The VERB (BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal* IMPERFECT) is used several times in Esther:

1. The king set the crown on Esther’s head, 2:17.
2. The king set Haman over all the princes, 3:1.
3. Esther set Mordecai over Haman’s house.
4. The king (apparently through Mordecai) assesses taxes on all the land (which may have made up for the tribute lost in Haman’s scheme).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:3-8

³Then Esther spoke again to the king, fell at his feet, wept and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews. ⁴The king extended the golden scepter to Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king. ⁵Then she said, "If it pleases the king and if I have found favor before him and the matter *seems* proper to the king and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. ⁶For how can I endure to see the calamity which will befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" ⁷So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews. ⁸Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal *it* with the king's signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring may not be revoked."

8:3 “spoke. . .fell. . .wept and implored” These are a series of IMPERFECT VERBS which describe Esther’s continuing supplication of the king to stop the slaughter of her people.

▣ **“Haman the Agagite”** It is uncertain if “Agagite” is related to (1) Agag, the king of the Amalekites; (2) a family name; or (3) a geographical location or an unknown entity. See note at 3:1. The literary nature of the book suggests #1. Surprisingly, the phrase, “the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite” is missing from the Septuagint.

8:4 “the king extended the golden scepter to Esther” This was a common sign of welcome and graciousness extended by the court (cf. 4:11; 5:2).

8:5 “then she said” Esther wanted the king, in court language, to rescind the previous edict. However, this was impossible because the law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed (cf. 1:19; Dan. 6:8,12,15).

Therefore, the king gave Mordecai the authority to write a second law which, to some extent, would counteract Haman's first letter.

▣ Again the literary style of this author is seen in the threefold repetition:

1. If it pleases the king.
2. If I have found favor (twice).
3. The matter *seems* proper.

8:6 This verse has two parallel phrases using the same VERB “endure” (BDB 407, KB 410 *Qal IMPERFECT*). Esther is emotionally unable to experience the murder of her kinsmen.

The term “destruction” (BDB 2, cf. 8:6 and 9:5) spells out what “calamity” means.

8:7-8 The king recounts for Esther what he has done for her cause:

1. gave Haman's house to Esther
2. impaled Haman on his own gallows
3. allowed Mordecai to write another edict to counteract Haman's

8:7 “because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews” In 7:8, the king said that Haman was going to be executed because he violated the queen, but here the true reason for Haman's death is divulged.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:9-14

⁹So the king's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which *extended* from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language. ¹⁰He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud. ¹¹In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city *the right* to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, ¹²on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar). ¹³A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies. ¹⁴The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king's command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out at the citadel in Susa.

8:9-13 “it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded” This parallels 3:12-15.

8:9 “the month of Sivan” This would be our May or June. The listing of these specific dates in these last few chapters adds to the historicity of the book. See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars at Ezra 3:1.

8:10 “riding on steeds sired by the royal stud” This is another example of the importance of the king's horse (cf. 6:8).

8:11 This seems cruel but in context, it was an eye for eye and tooth for tooth response (cf. Exod. 21:23-25) to what Haman had planned to do to them. This is more a case of self defense than vengeance. It possibly

relates to the total judgment of holy war (cf. Josh. 10:13; I Sam. 14:24; 18:25). Enemies of God's people are enemies of God (cf. Gen. 12:3; 27:29; Num. 24:9).

Although this edict allows the Jews to plunder their enemies, they apparently did not do this (cf. 9:10,15,16). Possibly they also did not execute "holy war" on their enemies' families (i.e., women and children). They could have legally because this is what Haman wanted to do to the Jewish families (cf. 3:13).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 8:15-17

¹⁵Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. ¹⁶For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor. ¹⁷In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.

8:15 "in the royal robes of blue and white" Ancient colors are hard to be specifically defined. Possibly, the blue is royal purple. However, it is obvious that these two colors were the royal colors of Persia.

There are many aspects of this book that remind one of Joseph (cf. Gen. 41:42) and Daniel (cf. Dan. 5:7,29).

▣ **"with a large crown of gold"** There is a distinction made between the large, royal crown and these lesser crowns of gold which were worn by the Persian nobles.

▣ **"and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced"** This seems to show the proper interpretation of 3:15 that, although the king reacted with such vengeful wrath against the Jews, the general population did not feel this way.

8:16 These four terms (possibly two sets of hendiadys) are an attempt to describe the emotional joy of the Jewish population of Persia (cf. v. 17).

The last term "honor" (BDB 430) implies a grant from the king. The king's support insured their victory! The Persian king's concern and care mimics the King of king's concern and care!

8:17

NASB, NKJV,

TEV, NJB "became Jews"

NRSV, JPSOA "professed to be Jews"

REB "professed Judaism"

NAB "embraced Judaism"

LB, NET "pretended to be Jews"

Whether this refers to circumcision, baptism, sacrifice and thereby full proselytism (cf. LXX), or simply that the populace supported the Jewish cause and pretended to become Jews is uncertain. The VERB (BDB 397, KB 393, *Hithpael* PARTICIPLE) is found only here in the OT. Haman's plot not only failed, but actually increased the power, prestige, and numbers of the Jewish population. The unseen hand of God was guiding all things!

ESTHER 9

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Jews Destroy Their Tormentors	Destruction of the Enemies and Inauguration of the Feast of Purim	The Jews Destroy Their Enemies	The Great Day of Purim
9:1-10	9:1-10	9:1-5	9:1-4 9:5-10
9:11-14	9:11-15	9:6-12 9:13-15	9:11-15
9:15			
9:16-17	9:16-17	9:16-19	9:16-19
The Feast of Purim			
9:18-19	9:18-19	The Festival of Purim	The Official Institution of the Feast of Purim
9:20-25	9:20-23 9:24-28	9:20-23 9:24-28	9:20-22 9:23-28
9:26-28			
9:29-32	9:29-32	9:29-32	9:29-32

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1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:1-10

¹Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them. ²The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm; and no one could stand before them, for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples. ³Even all the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and those who were doing the king's business assisted the Jews, because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater. ⁵Thus the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶At the citadel in Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, ⁷and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

9:1 Although Haman was dead, there was still a large, organized group of anti-Semites (or at least opportunists who wanted their possessions) in the empire.

▣ **“the month Adar”** See Special Topic: Ancient Near Eastern Calendars at Ezra 3:1.

▣ **“on that day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them”** This phrase shows that anti-Semitism was pervasive throughout the empire, not just Haman and his family. The reason is unsettled, but usually it is the exclusivism of YHWH and the “separation” from indigenous culture which generates anger, fear, suspicion, and lack of bonding.

▣ **“it was turned to the contrary”** The VERB (BDB 245, KB 253, *Niphal* INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE) shows the unseen hand of God which abrogated (1) the king's command; (2) the hatred of Haman; and (3) the hostility of the attackers!

9:2 **“The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus”** This does not refer to separate cities manned by Jews, but simply to cities which had a Jewish population. The Jews gathered together to combine their strength on this day of calamity.

▣ **“no one could stand before them”** This was one of the promises of holy war in Joshua and Judges (e.g., Deut. 7:24; 11:25; Josh. 6:2; 10:23).

▣ **“for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples”** This is another aspect of holy war (e.g., Exod. 15:14-15; 23:27; Deut. 2:25; 11:25; Josh. 2:9).

9:3 Mordecai's place of influence and governmental power (cf. v. 4) even caused the Persian bureaucracy to be supportive of the Jewish issue! Can you imagine the problem these governmental officials faced with two conflicting royal decrees. They chose the latest one, which was supported by the current “second-in-command”—Mordecai.

The Anchor Bible, vol 7B, adds the comment that the author of Esther mentions unexpected help from Persian governmental officials, but purposely does not mention the help of God (p. 86). This is a purposeful

literary technique which emphasizes the unseen hand of God in history. There is an eternal redemptive purpose, Israel is crucial to that purpose, she will surely survive.

9:7-10 The ten sons of Haman were killed on the set date of conflict! The will of God in the extermination of the Amalekites was finally complete (cf. Exod. 17:16; Deut. 25:17-19; I Sam. 15:3). The number ten symbolizes completeness!

9:10 “they did not lay hands on the plunder” There are three possible reasons: (1) they did not want their motives to be impugned; (2) this was to show that the enemies were enemies of the state and their property reverted to the crown; and (3) it possibly related to their relationship to Agag and Saul who was commanded not to spare any Amalekite nor take their property, but Saul did (cf. I Sam. 15:3,9).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:11-15

¹¹On that day the number of those who were killed at the citadel in Susa was reported to the king. ¹²The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman at the citadel in Susa. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be done." ¹³Then said Esther, "If it pleases the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa to do according to the edict of today; and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." ¹⁴So the king commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman's ten sons were hanged. ¹⁵The Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

9:11 “those who were killed at the citadel of Susa” The VERB (BDB 246, KB 255) is a *Qal* PARTICIPLE. The term “citadel” (BDB 108) can be understood in two ways.:

1. the whole walled city, vv. 13-15
2. the inner fortress, vv. 6,11,12

If #2 is correct then these 500 men were part of Xerxes’ administration. The second day was granted to eliminate the enemies of the Jews in the larger city itself.

9:13, 14 “if it please the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews” Many have assumed, because of this request, that Esther was a vindictive person, but this seems to be totally out of character with the book of Esther. We do not know the extent of Jewish casualties nor the extent of the battle that raged. Until further evidence is found it seems preferable to give Esther the benefit of the doubt.

The two days of slaughter correspond to the two day feast/fast which later developed.

▣ “let Haman’s ten sons be hanged on the gallows” They were already dead as is obvious from vv. 6-10. Therefore, they were to be publicly humiliated by being impaled (possibly on the same gallows as their father). This was not so much vindictive, but a public deterrent to anti-Semitism. The number ten can refer (1) symbolically to all of them or (2) to the literal number.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:16-17

¹⁶Now the rest of the Jews who *were* in the king's provinces assembled, to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies, and kill 75, 000 of those who hated them; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. ¹⁷*This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.*

9:16-18 There is a cluster of seven INFINITIVE ABSOLUTES in these verses.

9:16 “seventy-five thousand” Although the Septuagint changes this number to fifteen thousand, the MT, Josephus, and the Peshitta have the larger number. This large number is possible in a country as large as Persia (cf. 1:1; 8:9). However, this large number, like so many numbers in Esther, may be exaggerated for literary effect (e.g., 1:4; 2:12; 3:6,9; 5:14; 8:10).

9:17 “This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.” This seems to be the purpose of the book of Esther, which is to document the origin of the Feast of Purim (cf. vv. 23-28; Josephus *Antiq.* 11.6.13). Verses 18 and 19 explain the two-day feast which later developed into a one day fast (usually the 13th of Adar) followed by a two-day feast. In later Judaism most walled cities observed Purim on the fourteenth of Adar, but in Jerusalem on the fifteenth.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:18-19

¹⁸But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth of the same month, and they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing. ¹⁹Therefore the Jews of the rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another.

9:18-19 Because of the extra day of violence in Susa, Jews observed different days of rest (i.e., rural on the 14th and urban on the 15th).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:20-22

²⁰Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same month, annually, ²²because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and *it was a month* which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

9:20-22 The UBS, *A Handbook on the Book of Esther*, p. 239, gives a good explanation of the seeming contradiction or confusion over which day to celebrate in chapter 9:

1. Some Jews observed one day, some another (cf. vv. 17-19).
2. Mordecai wanted all Jews to observe both days (cf. vv. 20-23, 26-28).

9:22 “and *it was a month* which was turned from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday” This reversal is the recurrent theme of many OT characters (e.g., Job, Joseph, Jacob, Moses, Naomi, David, Solomon, Daniel, Jesus, Paul). God’s unseen hand is involved in this fallen world; choices result in consequences, but God’s eternal redemptive plan sets the course of human history. Individuals are caught up in the playing out play of God’s ultimate triumph over sin, evil, and suffering (e.g., vv. 1,25).

▣ **“gifts to the poor”** This was an emphasis of almsgiving which was such an important theological, as well as social, act to the rabbis.

SPECIAL TOPIC: ALMSGIVING

- I. The term itself
 - A. This term developed within Judaism (i.e., the Septuagint period).
 - B. It refers to giving to the poor and/or needy.
 - C. The English word, almsgiving, comes from a contraction of the Greek term *eleēmosunē*.
- II. Old Testament concept
 - A. The concept of helping the poor was expressed early in the Torah (writings of Moses, Genesis-Deuteronomy).
 1. typical context, Deut. 15:7-11
 2. “gleaning,” leaving part of the harvest for the poor, Lev. 19:9; 23:22; Deut. 24:20
 3. “sabbath year,” allowing the poor to eat the produce of the seventh, fallow year, Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:2-7.
 - B. The concept was developed in Wisdom Literature (selected examples)
 1. Job 5:8-16; 29:12-17 (the wicked described in 24:1-12)
 2. the Psalms 11:7
 3. Proverbs 11:4; 14:21,31; 16:6; 21:3,13
- III. Development in Judaism
 - A. The first division of the Mishnah deals with how to treat the poor, needy, and local Levites.
 - B. Selected quotes
 1. Ecclesiasticus (also known as the Wisdom of Ben Sirach) 3:30, “as water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin” (NRSV)
 2. Ecclesiasticus 29:12, “store up almsgiving in your treasury and it will rescue you from every disaster” (NRSV)
 3. Tobit 4:6-11, “for those who act in accordance with truth will prosper in all their activities. To all those who practice righteousness^b ⁷give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. ⁸If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. ⁹So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. ¹⁰For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness. ¹¹Indeed, almsgiving, for all who practice it, is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High.” (NRSV)
 4. Tobit 12:8-9, “⁸Prayer and fasting^d is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing^e. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. ⁹For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life.” (NRSV)
 - C. The last quote from Tobit 12:8-9 shows the problem developing. Human actions/human merits were seen as the mechanism for both forgiveness and abundance.

This concept developed further in the Septuagint where the Greek terms for almsgiving (*eleēmosunē*) became a synonym for righteousness (*dikaiosunē*). They could be substituted for each other in translating the Hebrew terms *hesed* (God’s covenant love and loyalty, cf. Deut. 6:25; 24:13; Isa. 1:27; 28:17; 59:16; Dan. 4:27).
 - D. Human acts of compassion became a goal in themselves to achieve one’s personal abundance here and salvation at death. The act itself, instead of the motive behind the act, became theologically

preeminent. God looks at the heart, then judges the work of the hand. This was the teaching of the rabbis, but it somehow got lost in the pursuit of individual self righteousness (cf. Mic. 6:8).

IV. New Testament reaction

A. The term is found in

1. Matt. 6:1-4
2. Luke 11:41; 12:33
3. Acts 3:2-3,10; 10:2,4,31; 24:17

B. Jesus addresses the traditional understanding of righteousness (cf. II Clement 16:4) in His Sermon on the mount (cf. Matt. 5-7).

1. almsgiving
2. fasting
3. prayer

Some Jews were trusting in their actions. These actions were meant to flow out of a love for God, His word and covenant brothers and sisters, not self-interest or self-righteousness! Humility and secrecy become guidelines for proper actions. The heart is crucial. The heart is desperately wicked. God must change the heart. The new heart emulates God!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:23-28

²³Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them. ²⁵But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. ²⁶Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, ²⁷the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually. ²⁸So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants.

9:24 “and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them” The term “pur” is Akkadian which means “the lot” or “the destiny.” Haman cast “lots” to find the best day to destroy Mordecai and his people (cf. 3:7).

Haman’s hatred is clearly seen in this verse:

1. “The adversary (BDB 856 III, KB 1058, *Qal* ACTIVE PARTICIPLE) of all the Jews”
2. “Had schemed (BDB 362, KB 359, *Qal* PERFECT) against the Jews to destroy (BDB 1, KB 2, *Peel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) them”
3. “Had cast Pur. . .”
 - a. “to destroy (BDB 243, KB 251, *Qal*, INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) them”
 - b. “to destroy (BDB 1, KB 2, *Peel* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT) them”

Number 3a, is often translated “confuse” and is a metaphor for “holy war” (e.g., Exod. 14:24; 23:27; Deut. 2:15; Josh. 10:10; Jdgs. 4:15; I Sam. 7:10; II Sam. 22:15; Ps. 18:14; 144:6).

9:25 The UBS, *A Handbook on the Book of Esther*, pp. 241-242, makes an interesting point about the FEMININE PARTICIPLE (BDB 97, KB 112, *Qal* INFINITIVE CONSTRUCT), “but when she came,” which they assert refers to the FEMININE NOUN “plot” (BDB 364, cf. NIV), not to Esther (since she is not mentioned in this paragraph, really not since v. 13).

9:26 “And because of the instructions in this letter” Mordecai possibly wrote the book of Esther (cf. Introduction), but this phrase refers specifically to his letter (cf. v. 20), which instructed the standardization of the observance of the feast/fast of Purim.

9:27 “all those who allied themselves” This could refer to

1. the people mentioned in 8:17
2. the governmental official of v. 3
3. those who aided the Jews when they were attacked

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 9:29-32

²⁹Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abigail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. ³⁰He sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, namely, words of peace and truth, ³¹to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations. ³²The command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book.

9:29-31 These verses seem to refer to a second letter from Mordecai which specifies that preceding the two days of feasting there should be a day of fasting. This would commemorate the fast of Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jews preceding the unseen hand of God in reversing the fortunes of Haman and the Jews. Most Jews fast on the 13th day of Adar and feast on the 14th and 15th.

9:29 “wrote” This is a FEMININE SINGULAR (BDB 507, KB 503, *Qal* IMPERFECT), yet two people are mentioned. Possibly Esther wrote to Mordecai who passed it on. This may refer to Esther’s royal authority (and influence with the king) behind Mordecai’s letter (cf. 9:20-22,23).

Another possibility is that Esther was adopted by Mordecai and Abigail.

9:30

NASB	“namely, words of peace and truth”
NKJV	“with words of peace and truth”
NRSV	“wishing peace and security”
TEV	“it wished the Jews peace and security”
NJB	“in terms of peace and loyalty”
JPSOA	“with an ordinance of ‘equity and honesty’”
NET	“—words of true peace—”

These are two theologically significant terms:

1. Peace (BDB 1022, KB 1536), which denotes the presence of all good things and the absence of all evil things.
2. Truth (BDB 54, KB 68), which usually means faithfulness or loyalty, can mean faithful trust.

It is possible that the discussion of fast days in Zech. 8:19 has a parallel phrase “so love truth and peace,” which is connected to Jewish “joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts.” So it might be a standardized greeting/conclusion (like *Shalom*).

ESTHER 10

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Mordecai's Advancement	Conclusion	The Greatness of Xerxes and Mordecai	Praise of Mordecai
10:1-3	10:1-3	10:1-3	10:1-2 10:3

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii in introductory section)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3, p. viii). Compare your subject divisions with the four modern translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 10:1-3

¹Now King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. ²And all the accomplishments of his authority and strength, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia? ³For Mordecai the Jew was second *only* to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation.

10:1 "laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea" Xerxes I lost the Aegean islands in his Greek campaign, but apparently retained some islands off of the coast of Europe and some off of the coast

of Egypt and Palestine. However, this verse is meant to show the greatness of Ahasuerus in his taxing program (only here, later meaning of “tribute” [BDB 586 I], which originally meant “forced labor,” e.g., Gen. 49:15; Josh. 16:10; 17:13; I Kgs. 4:6; 5:13-14; 12:18; II Chr. 10:18, cf. TEV, NET), which was desperately needed after the Persian wars. It is a closing comment on Mordecai as a good administrator (cf. v. 2). Mordecai helped his people, but also was a faithful servant of Xerxes (cf. v. 3) and helped the whole nation (like Daniel and his three friends).

In II Maccabees the feast of Purim is known as the feast of Mordecai (cf. II Macc. 15:36), which shows the historicity of the book of Esther and the greatness of Mordecai in Jewish tradition.

Mordecai was not second in command for an extended period of time (possibly only 8 years), if secular history is to be trusted.

10:2 “the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia” This does not refer to the biblical books of I & II Chronicles, but could refer to

1. the official court documents which were kept and archived (“Media and Persia” gives credence to this view)
2. a personal diary of Xerxes (cf. 2:23; 6:1)
3. a Jewish account of Jewish life in Persia (easier access to a Jewish leader)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the purpose of the king’s signet ring?
2. Does 8:17 describe a large scale conversion to Judaism?
3. Why did the Jews not seize the plunder of those who hated them (cf. 9:10)?
4. How many people did the Jews kill? What was the Jewish loss?
5. What is the purpose of the chapters 9 and 10?

APPENDIX ONE

KINGS AND EVENTS OF THE BABYLONIAN, PERSIAN, AND GREEK DYNASTIES

- 612 B.C. Nineveh falls to neo-Babylonian army (Nebuchadnezzar)
- 608 Pharaoh Necho II marched to Carchemesh to halt expansion of neo-Babylonian power
Josiah, King of Judah, tries to stop him
Death of Josiah and assumption of throne by his son, Jehoahaz
Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, replaced Jehoahaz on the authority of Pharaoh Necho II within 3 months
Palestine and Syria under Egyptian rule
Josiah's reforms dissipate
- 605 Nabopolassar sends troops to fight remaining Assyrian army and the Egyptians at Carchemesh
Nebuchadnezzar chased them all the way to the plains of Palestine
Nebuchadnezzar got word of the death of his father (Nabopolassar) so he returned to Babylon to receive the crown
On the way back he takes Daniel and other members of the royal family into exile
- 605 - 538 Babylon in control of Palestine, 597; 10,000 exiled to Babylon
- 586 Jerusalem and the temple destroyed and large deportation
- 582 Because Jewish guerilla fighters killed Gedaliah another last large deportation occurred

SUCCESSORS OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

- 562 - 560 Evil-Merodach released Jehoiakim (true Messianic line) from custody
- 560 - 556 Neriglissar
- 556 Labaski-Marduk reigned
- 556 - 539 Nabonidus:
Spent most of the time building a temple to the mood god, *Sin*. This earned enmity of the priests of Marduk.
Spent the rest of his time trying to put down revolts and stabilize the kingdom.

He moved to Tema and left the affairs of state to his son, Belshazzar

Belshazzar:

Spent most of his time trying to restore order.

Babylonia's great threat was Media.

Rise of Cyrus

585 - 550 Astyages was king of Media (Cyrus II was his grandson by Mandane)

550 Cyrus II, a vassal king, revolted

Nabonidus, to restore balance of power, made alliances with:

1. Egypt
2. Creus, King of Lydia

547 Cyrus marched against Sardis (capital Lydia) and captured all of Asia Minor

539 Gobiyas took Babylon without resistance (Dan. 5; Belshazzar Nabonidus' co-regent; also Gobiyas possibly Darius the Mede, Dan. 5:31).

Oct. 11, 539 Cyrus entered as liberator from Nabonidus' moon goddess, *Zin*

Cyrus' Successors

530 Cyrus' son succeeded him (Cambyses II)

530 - 522 Reign of Cambyses (Elephantine Papyri)

Added Egypt in 525 to the Medo-Persian Empire

522 - 486 Darius I came to rule

He organized the Persian Empire along Cyrus' plan of satraps

He set up coinage like Lydia's

486 - 465 Xerxes I (Esther)

Put down Egyptian revolt

Intended to invade Greece, but was defeated in the Battle of Thermopyly in 480

Xerxes I was assassinated in 465

480 Battle of Thermopyly

465 - 424 Artaxerxes I Longimanus (Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah, and Malachi)

Greeks continued to advance until confronted with Peloponisian Wars

Wars lasted about 20 years

During this period the Jewish community is reconstructed

423 - 404	Darius II
	Authorized the feast of unleavened bread in the Elephantine Temple
404 - 358	Artaxerxes II
358 - 338	Artaxerxes III
338 - 336	Arses
336 - 331	Darius III

GREECE

359 - 336	Philip II of Macedon built up Greece
	He was assassinated in 336
336 - 323	Alexander the Great (Philip's son)
	Routed Darius II at battle of ISUS
	He died in 323 in Babylon of a fever after conquering the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East
	Alexander's generals divided his empire at his death:
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cassander - Macedonia and Greece 2. Lysimicus - Thrace 3. Seleucts I - Syria and Babylon 4. Ptolemy - Egypt and Palestine 5. Antigonus - small part of Asia Minor
	Seleucids vs. Ptolemies
301	Palestine was under Ptolemy's rule for 100 years
175 - 163	Antiochus Epiphanes
	Wanted to Hellenize Jews, constructed gymnasium
	Constructed pagan altars; priests were mistreated
Dec. 13, 168	Hog was slain on the altar by Antiochus Epiphanies. Some consider this to be the abomination of desolation.
167	Mattathias and sons rebel. Mattathias killed. Judas took control.
	Judas Maccabeaus wages successful guerilla warfare
Dec. 25, 165	Temple rededicated

RULERS

BABYLON

MEDIA

626 - 605	Nabopolassar dies (“Nabu, Protect the Sun”) 625 - 585 Cyrzares
605 - 562	Nebuchadnezzar II (“Nebo, Protect the Boundary”) 585 - 550 Astyages
562 - 560	Evil Merodack 550 Cyrus II
556	Labaski Marduk
556 - 539	Nabonidus Belshazzar
539 -	Gobiyas

MEDO-PERSIAN

550 - 530	Cyrus II (538 Medo-Persian dominate power called Achaemenian Empire)
530 - 522	Cambyses II (Egypt added and Cyprus)
522	Gaumata or Pseudo, Smerdis (reign 6 months)
522 - 486	Darius I (Hystaspes)
486 - 465	Xerxes I (Esther’s husband)
465 - 424	Artaxerxes I (Ezra and Nehemiah in Palestine)
423 -	Xerxes II
424 - 404	Darius II Nothus
404 - 359	Artaxerxes II Mnemon
359 - 338	Artaxerxes III Ochus
338 - 336	Arses
336 - 331	Darius III Codomannus

GREEK

359 - 336 Philip II of Macedon

336 - 323 Alexander the Great

323 - Generals divide Empire

1. Cassander - Macedonia
2. Lysimachus - Syria
3. Seleucus I - Syria and Babylon
4. Ptolemy - Egypt
5. Antigonos - Asia Minor (killed in 301 B.C.)

The Ptolemies controlled Palestine, but in 175 - 163 control passed to the Seleucids

175 - 163 Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the eighth Seleucid ruler

*Dates and names have been mostly taken from *A History of Israel* by John Bright, pp. 461-471.

APPENDIX TWO

A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE POWERS OF MESOPOTAMIA

(using dates based primarily on John Bright's *A History of Israel*, p. 462ff.)

I. Assyrian Empire (Gen.10:11)

A. Religion and culture were greatly influenced by the Sumerian/Babylonian Empire.

B. Tentative list of rulers and approximate dates:

1. 1354-1318 - Asshur-Uballit I:
 - (a) conquered the Hittite city of Carchemish
 - (b) began to remove Hittite influence and allowed Assyria to develop
2. 1297-1266 - Adad-Nirari I (powerful king)
3. 1265-1235 - Shalmaneser I (powerful king)
4. 1234-1197 - Tukulti-Ninurta I
 - first conquest of Babylonian empire to the south
5. 1118-1078 - Tiglath-Pileser I
 - Assyria becomes a major power in Mesopotamia
6. 1012- 972 Ashur-Rabi II
7. 972- 967 - Ashur-Resh-Isui II
8. 966- 934 - Tiglath-Pileser II
9. 934- 912 - Ashur-Dan II
10. 912- 890 - Adad-Nirari II
11. 890- 884 - Tukulti-Ninurta II
12. 883- 859 - Asshur-Nasir-Apal II
13. 859- 824 - Shalmaneser III
 - Battle of Qarqar in 853
14. 824-811 - Shamashi-Adad V
15. 811-783 - Adad-Nirari III
16. 781-772 - Shalmaneser IV
17. 772-754 - Ashur-Dan III
18. 754-745 - Ashur-Nirari V
19. 745-727 - Tiglath-Pileser III:
 - a. called by his Babylonian throne name, Pul, in II Kings 15:19
 - b. very powerful king
 - c. started the policy of deporting conquered peoples
 - d. In 735 B.C.. there was the formation of the "Syro-Ephramatic League" which was an attempt to unify all the available military resources of the transjordan nations from the head waters of the Euphrates to Egypt for the purpose of neutralizing the rising military power of Assyria. King Ahaz of Judah refused to join and was invaded by Israel and Syria. He wrote to Tiglath-Pileser III for help against the advise of Isaiah (cf. II Kgs. 16; Isa. 7-12).
 - e. In 732 Tiglath-Pileser III invades and conquers Syria and Israel and places a vassal king on the throne of Israel, Hoshea (732-722). Thousands of Jews from the Northern Kingdom were exiled to Media (cf. II Kings 15).
20. 727-722 - Shalmaneser V
 - a. Hoshea forms an alliance with Egypt and is invaded by Assyria (cf. II Kgs.17)
 - b. besieged Samaria in 724 B.C.

21. 722-705 - Sargon II:
 - a. After a three year siege started by Shalmaneser V, his successor Sargon II conquers the capital of Israel, Samaria. Over 27,000 are deported to Media.
 - b. The Hittite empire is also conquered.
 - c. In 714-711 another coalition of transjordan nations and Egypt rebelled against Assyria. This coalition is known as “the Ashdod Rebellion.” Even Hezekiah of Judah originally was involved. Assyria invaded and destroyed several Philistine cities.
22. 705-681 - Sennacherib:
 - a. In 705 another coalition of transjordan nations and Egypt rebelled after the death of Sargon II. Hezekiah fully supported this rebellion. Sennacherib invaded in 701. The rebellion was crushed but Jerusalem was spared by an act of God (cf. Isa. 36-39 and II Kgs. 18-19).
 - b. Sennacherib also put down the rebellion in Elam and Babylon.
23. 681-669 - Esarhaddon:
 - a. first Assyrian ruler to attack and conquer Egypt
 - b. had great sympathy with Babylon and rebuilt its capital city
24. 669-633 - Ashurbanipal:
 - a. also called Osnappar in Ezra 4:10
 - b. His brother Shamash-shum-ukin was made king of Babylon (later demoted to viceroy). This brought several years of peace between Assyria and Babylon, but there was an undercurrent of independence which broke out in 652 led by his brother (who had been demoted to Viceroy).
 - c. fall of Thebes, 663 B.C.
 - d. defeated Elam, 653, 645 B.C.
25. 633-629 - Asshur-Etil-Ilani
26. 629-612 - Sin-Shar-Ishkun
27. 612-609 - Asshur-Uballit II:
 - a. enthroned king in exile in Haran
 - b. the fall of Asshur in 614 B.C. and Nineveh in 612 B.C.

II. Neo-Babylon Empire:

- A. 703-? Merodach-Baladan
 - Started several revolts against Assyrian rule
- B. 652 Shamash-shum-ukin:
 1. Esarhaddon’s son and Assurbanipal’s brother
 2. he started a revolt against Assyria but was defeated
- C. 626-605 Nabopolassar:
 1. was the first monarch of the Neo-Babylonian Empire
 2. he attacked Assyria from the south while Cyaxares of Media attacked from the northeast
 3. the old Assyrian capital of Asshur fell in 614 and the powerful new capital of Nineveh fell in 612 B.C.
 4. the remnant of the Assyrian army retreated to Haran. They even installed a king.
 5. In 608 Pharaoh Necho II (cf. II Kings 23:29) marched north to help the remnant of the Assyrian army for the purpose of forming a buffer zone against the rising power of Babylon. Josiah, the godly king of Judah (cf. II Kings 23), opposed the movement of the Egyptian army through Palestine. There was a minor skirmish at Megiddo. Josiah was wounded and died

(II Kgs. 23:29-30). His son, Jehoahaz, was made king. Pharaoh Necho II arrived too late to stop the destruction of the Assyrian forces at Haran. He engaged the Babylonian forces commanded by the crown prince Nebuchadnezzar II and was soundly defeated in 605 B.C. at Carchemesh on the Euphrates River.

On his way back to Egypt Pharaoh Necho stopped at Jerusalem and sacked the city. He replaced and deported Jehoahaz after only three months. He put another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim, on the throne (cf. II Kings 23:31-35).

6. Nebuchadnezzar II chased the Egyptian army south through Palestine but he received word of his father's death and returned to Babylon to be crowned. Later, in the same year, he returned to Palestine. He left Jehoiakim on the throne of Judah but exiled several thousand of the leading citizens and several members of the royal family. Daniel and his friends were part of this deportation.

D. 605-562 - Nebuchadnezzar II:

1. From 597-538 Babylon was in complete control of Palestine.
2. In 597 another deportation from Jerusalem occurred because of Jehoakim's alliance with Egypt (II Kings 24). He died before the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar II. His son Jehoiachin was only king for three months when he was exiled to Babylon. Ten thousand citizens, including Ezekiel, were resettled close to the City of Babylon by the Canal Kebar.
3. In 586, after continued flirtation with Egypt, the City of Jerusalem was completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (II Kgs. 25) and a mass deportation occurred. Zedekiah, who replaced Jehoiachin, was exiled and Gedaliah was appointed governor.
4. Gedaliah was killed by Jewish renegade military forces. These forces fled to Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them. Nebuchadnezzar invaded a fourth time (605, 596, 586, 582) and deported all remaining Jews that he could find.

E. 562-560 - Evil-merodach, Nebuchadnezzar's son, was also known as Amel-Marduk (Akkadian, "Man of Marduk")

- He released Jehoiakim from prison but he had to remain in Babylon (cf. II Kings 25:27-30; Jer. 52:31).

F. 560-556 - Neriglissar

- He assassinated Evil-merodach, who was his brother-in-law
- He was previously Nebuchadnezzar's general who destroyed Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 39:3,13)

G. 556 - Labaski-Marduk

- He was Neriglissar's son who assumed kingship as a boy, but was assassinated after only nine months (Berossos).

H. 556-539 - Nabonidus (Akkadian, "Nebo is exalted"):

1. Nabonidus was not related to the royal house so he married a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar
2. He spent most of the time building a temple to the moon god "Sin" in Tema. He was the son of the high priestess of this goddess. This earned him the enmity of the priests of Marduk, chief god of Babylon.
3. He spent most of his time trying to put down revolts (in Syria and north Africa) and stabilize the kingdom.
4. He moved to Tema and left the affairs of state to his son, Belshazzar, in the capital, Babylon (cf. Dan.5).

- I. ? - 539 - Belshazzar (co-reign)
 - The city of Babylon fell very quickly to the Persian Army under Gobryas of Gutium by diverting the waters of the Euphrates and entering the city unopposed. The priests and people of the city saw the Persians as liberators and restorers of Marduk. Gobryas was made Governor of Babylon by Cyrus II. Gobryas may have been the Darius the Mede of Dan. 5:31; 6:1. "Darius" means "royal one."

III. Medio-Persian Empire: Survey of the Rise of Cyrus II (Isa. 41:2,25;44:28-45:7; 46:11; 48:15):

- A. 625-585 - Cyaxares was the king of Media that helped Babylon defeat Assyria.
- B. 585-550 - Astyages was king of Media (capital was Ecbatana). Cyrus II was his grandson by Cambyses I (600-559, Persian) and Mandane (daughter of Astyages, Median).
- C. 550-530 - Cyrus II of Ansham (eastern Elam) was a vassal king who revolted:
 - 1. Nabonidus, the Babylonian king, supported Cyrus.
 - 2. Astyages' general, Harpagus, led his army to join Cyrus' revolt
 - 3. Cyrus II dethroned Astyages.
 - 4. Nabonidus, in order to restore a balance of power, made an alliance with:
 - a. Egypt
 - b. Croesus, King of Lydia (Asia Minor)
 - 5. 547 - Cyrus II marched against Sardis (capital of Lydia) and it fell in 546 B.C.
 - 6. 539 - In mid-October the general Ugbaru and Gobryas, both of Gutium, with Cyrus' army, took Babylon without resistance. Ugbaru was made governor, but died of war wounds within weeks, then Gobryas was made governor of Babylon.
 - 7. 539 - In late October Cyrus II "the Great" personally entered as liberator. His policy of kindness to national groups reversed years of deportation as a national policy.
 - 8. 538 - Jews and others (cf. the Cyrus Cylinder) were allowed to return home and rebuild their native temples (cf. II Chr. 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1-4). He also restored the vessels from YHWH's temple which Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Marduk's temple in Babylon (cf. Ezra 1:7-11; 6:5).
 - 9. 530 - Cyrus' son, Cambyses II, succeeded him briefly as co-regent, but later the same year Cyrus died while in a military campaign.
- D. 530-522 - reign of Cambyses II
 - 1. added Egyptian empire in 525 B.C. to the Medo-Persian Empire;
 - 2. he had a short reign:
 - a. some say he committed suicide;
 - b. Heroditus said he cut himself with his own sword while mounting his horse and died of the resulting infection.
 - 3. brief usurpation of the throne by Pseudo-Smerdis (Gaumata) - 522
- E. 522-486 - Darius I (Hystapes) came to rule
 - 1. He was not of the royal line but a military general.
 - 2. He organized the Persian Empire using Cyrus' plans for Satraps (cf. Ezra 5-6; also during Haggai's and Zechariah's time).
 - 3. He set up coinage like Lydia.
 - 4. He attempted to invade Greece, but was repulsed.
- F. 486-465 - Reign of Xerxes I:
 - 1. put down Egyptian revolt
 - 2. intended to invade Greece and fulfill Persian dream but was defeated in the battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C. and Salamis in 479 B.C.
 - 3. Esther's husband, who is called Ahasuerus in the Bible, was assassinated in 465 B.C.

- G. 465-424 - Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) reigned (cf Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah; Malachi):
 - 1. Greeks continued to advance until confronted with the Peloponnesian Civil Wars
 - 2. Greece divides (Athenian - Peloponnesian)
 - 3. Greek civil wars lasted about 20 years
 - 4. during this period the Jewish community is strengthened
 - 5. brief reign of Xerxes II and Sekydianos - 423
- H. 423-404 - Darius II (Nothos) reigned
- I. 404-358 - Artaxerxes II (Mnemon) reigned
- J. 358-338 - Artaxerxes III (Ochos) reigned
- K. 338-336 - Arses reigned
- L. 336-331 - Darius III (Codomannus) reigned until the Battle of Issus 331 and was defeated by Greece

IV. Survey of Egypt:

- A. Hyksos (Shepherd Kings - Semitic rulers)-1720/10-1550
- B. 18th Dynasty (1570-1310):
 - 1. 1570-1546 - Amosis
 - a. made Thebes the capital
 - b. invaded southern Canaan
 - 2. 1546-1525 - Amenophis I (Amenhotep I)
 - 3. 1525-1494 - Thutmose I
 - 4. 1494-1490 - Thutmose II - married Thutmose I's daughter, Hatshepsut
 - 5. 1490-1435 - Thutmose III (nephew of Hatshepsut)
 - 6. 1435-1414 - Amenophis II (Amenhotep II)
 - 7. 1414-1406 - Thutmose IV
 - 8. 1406-1370 - Amenophis III (Amenhotep III)
 - 9. 1370-1353 - Amenophis IV (Akhenaten)
 - a. worshiped the Sun, Aten
 - b. instituted a form of high-god worship (monotheism)
 - c. Tel-El-Amarna letters are in this period
 - 10. ? Smenkhare
 - 11. ? Tutankhamun (Tutankhaten)
 - 12. ? Ay (Aye-Eye)
 - 13. 1340-1310 Haremhab
- C. 19th Dynasty (1310-1200):
 - 1. ? Rameses I (Ramses)
 - 2. 1309-1290 - Seti I (Sethos)
 - 3. 1290-1224 - Rameses II (Ramses II)
 - a. from archaeological evidence most likely Pharaoh of the exodus
 - b. built the cities of Avaris, Pithom and Ramses by Habaru (possibly Semites or Hebrew) slaves
 - 4. 1224-1216 - Merneptah (Merenptah)
 - 5. ? Amenmesse
 - 6. ? Seti II
 - 7. ? Siptah
 - 8. ? Tefosret

- D. 20th Dynasty (1180-1065)
 - 1. 1175-1144 - Rameses III
 - 2. 1144-1065 - Rameses IV - XI

- E. 21st Dynasty (1065-935):
 - 1. ? Smendes
 - 2. ? Herihor

- F. 22nd Dynasty (935-725 - Libyan):
 - 1. 935-914 - Shishak (Shosenk I or Sheshong I)
 - a. protected Jeroboam I until Solomon's death
 - b. conquered Palestine about 925 (cf. I Kgs. 14-25; II Chr. 12)
 - 2. 914-874 - Osorkon I
 - 3. ? Osorkon II
 - 4. ? Shoshnek II

- G. 23rd Dynasty (759-715 - Libyan)

- H. 24th Dynasty (725-709)

- I. 25th Dynasty (716/15-663 - Ethiopian/Nubian):
 - 1. 710/09-696/95 - Shabako (Shabaku)
 - 2. 696/95-685/84 - Shebteko (Shebitku)
 - 3. 690/689, 685/84-664 - Tirhakah (Taharqa)
 - 4. ? Tantamun

- J. 26th Dynasty (663-525 - Saitic):
 - 1. 663-609 - Psammetichus I (Psamtik)
 - 2. 609-593 - Neco II (Necho)
 - 3. 593-588 - Psammetichus II (Psamtik)
 - 4. 588-569 - Apries (Hophra)
 - 5. 569-525 - Amasis
 - 6. ? - Psammetichus III (Psamtik)

- K. 27th Dynasty (525-401 - Persian):
 - 1. 530-522 - Cambyses II (Cyrus II's son)
 - 2. 522-486 - Darius I
 - 3. 486-465 - Xerxes I
 - 4. 465-424 - Artaxerxes I
 - 5. 423-404 - Darius II

- L. Several brief dynasties (404-332)
 - 1. 404-359 - Artaxerxes II
 - 2. 359/8 - 338/7 - Artaxerxes III
 - 3. 338/7 - 336/7 - Arses
 - 4. 336/5 - 331 - Darius III

*for a differing chronology see Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 2 p. 231.

V. Survey of Greece:

A. 359-336 - Philip II of Macedon:

1. built up Greece
2. assassinated in 336 B.C.

B. 336-323 - Alexander II “the Great” (Philip’s son):

1. routed Darius III, the Persian king, at the battle of Isus
2. died in 323 B.C. in Babylon of a fever at 32/33 yrs. of age
3. Alexander’s generals divided his empire at his death:
 - a. Cassander - Macedonia and Greece
 - b. Lysimachus - Thrace
 - c. Seleucus I - Syria and Babylon
 - d. Ptolemy - Egypt and Palestine
 - e. Antigonus - Asia Minor (He did not last long)

C. Seleucids vs. Ptolemies struggle for control of Palestine:

1. Syria (Seleucid Rulers):
 - a. 312-280 - Seleucus I
 - b. 280-261 - Antiochus I Soter
 - c. 261-146 - Antiochus II Theus
 - d. 246-226 - Seleucus II Callinicus
 - e. 226-223 - Seleucus III Ceraunus
 - f. 223-187 - Antiochus III the Great
 - g. 187-175 - Seleucus IV Philopator
 - h. 175-163 - Antiochus IV Epiphanes
 - i. 163-162 - Antiochus V
 - j. 162-150 - Demetrius I
2. Egyptian (Ptolemaic Rulers):
 - a. 327-285 - Ptolemy I Soter
 - b. 285-246 - Ptolemy II Philadelphus
 - c. 246-221 - Ptolemy III Euegetes
 - d. 221-203 - Ptolemy IV Philopator
 - e. 203-181 - Ptolemy V Epiphanes
 - f. 181-146 - Ptolemy VI Philometor
3. Brief Survey:
 - a. 301 - Palestine under Ptolemy rule for 181 years.
 - b. 175-163 - Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the eighth Seleucid ruler, wanted to Hellenize Jews by force, if necessary:
 - (1) constructed gymnasiums
 - (2) constructed pagan altars of Zeus Olympius in the Temple
 - c. 168 - December 13 - hog slain on the altar in Jerusalem by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Some consider this to be “the abomination of desolation” in Daniel 8.
 - d. 167 - Mattathias, priest in Modin, and sons rebel. The best known of his sons was Judas Maccabeas, “Judas the Hammer.”
 - e. 165 - December 25 - Temple rededicated. This is called Hanukkah or “Festival of Lights.”

For a good discussion of the dating problems, procedures and presuppositions see *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 10-17.

APPENDIX THREE

**CHART OF THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT
(on following page)**

APPENDIX FOUR

Timeline of the Post-Exilic Period

KINGS	Cyrus I (550-530)	Cambyses II (530-522)	Darius I (522-486)	Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) (486-465)	Artaxerxes I (465-424)
PROPHETS	Obadiah then Joel, early post-exilic	Haggai (520) Zechariah (519)			Malachi (430)
DATES			516 second temple built		
	538 Cyrus' decree				
HISTORICAL BOOKS	Ezra 1-6 first and second returns			Esther	Ezra 7-10 Nehemiah third return