

# I WANT TO KNOW MY BIBLE

## Rebuilding Lives

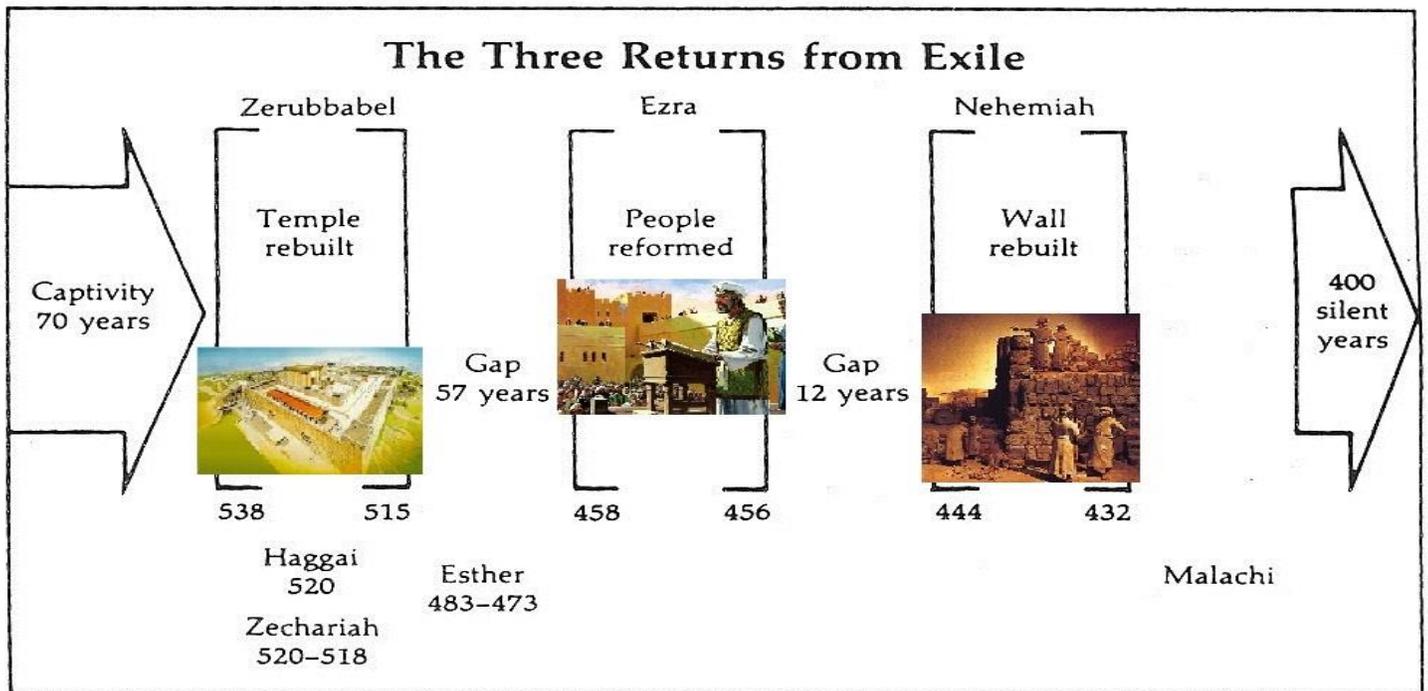
TEXT: Nehemiah

INTRODUCTION: It is hard to believe that we have come to the end of the Old Testament in our chronological reading through the Bible. Here we are: 39 weeks of reading and 39 books of the Old Testament read. Yes, I know you still have 6 chapters left to read Monday and Tuesday, but I probably won't see you Tuesday to congratulate you.

And I do congratulate you, all of you that have completed the reading and all of you who have participated, even if you did not quite get every chapter read. And I know that God has given you your prizes for your reading along the way. He always does as we read and heed His Word.

Now this morning, whether you completed the reading of the Old Testament or not, I want to help you understand how the Old Testament ends. As I prepared this message, I thought, we preachers do not often do that. We are often more diligent about discussing the beginning of things than declaring the end.

But what I am doing today is really both, an ending and a beginning, because the ending of the Old Testament is the launching pad for the beginning of the New. I confess that I am a very visually oriented person, and a picture to me really is worth a thousand words. So, let me offer you a picture that I know will help me, and I hope will help you to understand the ending of the Old Testament.



Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem	606 B.C.	Dan. 1:1
Three deportations	605-596 B.C.	
Fall of Jerusalem	July 9, 586 B.C.	
Ministry of Daniel and Ezekiel in Babylon		
Babylon falls to Medes and Persians	Oct. 29, 539 B.C.	Dan. 5:30-31
Cyrus decrees rebuilding of temple	538 B.C.	Ezra 1
The Remnant Returns under Zerubbabel	Spring, 536 B.C.	Ezra 2
Altar built; sacrifices begun	Oct. 1, 536 B.C.	Ezra 3
Work begins on the temple	May, 535 B.C.	Ezra 3
Samaritans interfere with rebuilding	535 B.C.	Ezra 4
Cyrus dies. Rebuilding stopped for 7 years	529 B.C.	Ezra 4
Prophets Haggai and Zechariah urge continued work on temple	521 B.C.	Haggai & Zechariah
Opposition overcome by finding the decree of Cyrus	521 B.C.	Ezra 5-6
Zerubbabel's temple completed	Mar. 3, 516 B.C.	Ezra 6
Dedication of the temple	April, 516 B.C.	
Ahasuerus (Xerxes) begins reign in Persia	485 B.C.	Esther 1
Esther becomes queen	Jan., 479 B.C.	Esther 2
God's deliverance of the Jews	474 B.C.	Esther 7-8
Artaxerxes I comes to the throne	464 B.C.	
Artaxerxes commissions Ezra to return	458 B.C.	
Ezra departs for Jerusalem	April 12, 458 B.C.	Ezra 8

Nehemiah made governor of Judah	445 B.C.	Neh. 5
Rebuilding of the wall begun	Aug. 4, 444 B.C.	Neh. 2
Walls of Jerusalem rebuilt	Sep. 25, 444 B.C.	Neh. 6
And now we come to	Oct. 1, 444 B.C.	Neh. 8-10

**They have rebuilt the temple.**

**They have rebuilt the walls.**

**Now, they are rebuilding lives.**

### Nehemiah 8:1–8

<sup>1</sup> Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law.

<sup>4</sup> So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; ... <sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. ...

<sup>8</sup> So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading. ...

## I. THE PEOPLE ASKED FOR GOD'S WORD TO BE READ.

**Nehemiah 8:1** Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

**Nehemiah 8:3** Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

**Nehemiah 8:4-5** So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; ... **5** And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

**Nehemiah 8:6** And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ...

**Nehemiah 8:8** So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. ...

Look what happened next.

**Nehemiah 8:14, 16-17** <sup>14</sup> And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, ...

<sup>16</sup> Then the people went out and brought *them* and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. <sup>17</sup> So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

## II. THE PEOPLE APPLIED THE WORD OF GOD TO THEIR LIVES.

- A. In the reading they discovered that God had commanded them to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.
- B. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated God's deliverance of the people from their bondage to Egypt.  
(Baptism and the Lord's Supper are our commemorations of God's delivering us from our bondage to sin!)
- C. So the people went out and cut limbs, made booths, and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles.
  - 1. They read the Word.
  - 2. They noted their own disobedience of the Word.
  - 3. They repented and obeyed!
- D. There was very great gladness!

Remember the houses Jesus described built on the rock and the sand. Both houses represented people who heard the Word of God. The one that withstood the flood and storm and was not washed away was the one who both heard and did the Word.

**Matthew 7:24** "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:

And lastly we read ...

**Nehemiah 8:18** Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the *prescribed* manner.

**They read the Word.**

**They applied (obeyed) the Word.**

**They worshipped.**

### III. THE PEOPLE WORSHIPPED

The Sacred Assembly was a special time of worship.

Following this pattern is how they rebuilt their lives.

And the truth of the matter is that they did. Now they did not become perfect, and by the time Messiah comes, we see a whole new set of faults and frailties in this people called the Jews.

But remember that there are four centuries between this time of rebuilding and when Christ enters the world. Are Americans different today than when our country began? We are less than 250 years old as a nation. We have changed a lot, and a lot of it not for the better.

So do not equate all we know about the Jews from 5 B.C to 28 A.D. with the remnant who returned and were led by Ezra and Nehemiah. They did rebuild their lives. For one thing, they absolutely abandoned the worship of other gods. They did not worship the gods of Persia and when Greece became the world power, they did not worship the pantheon of Greek gods either. The same is true when Rome came to power and conquered their territory.

What did God use to change them?

**They treasured and read the Word of God.**

**They applied and obeyed the Word of God.**

**They worshipped the One True and Living God.**

And not just once, or for a little while. It was a pattern. Look at 9:3

**Nehemiah 9:3** And they stood up in their place and **read from the Book of the Law** of the LORD their God *for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.*

**They read**

**They applied**

**They worshipped**

And God changed their lives.

You know what else they did to help them stick with it? They made a covenant.

**Nehemiah 9:38** “And because of all this, **We make a sure covenant and write it;** Our leaders, our Levites, *and our priests seal it.*”

**Nehemiah 10:29** these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to **walk in God’s Law,** which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to **observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord,** and His ordinances and His statutes:

When I read this, I thought, "That is what we need to do." We are about to begin the reading of the New Testament as a church. **Testament means covenant.** We are going to read the book about God's new covenant with us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**The New Testament is the book telling us how God sent to us and all the world a New Day and showed us a New Way.**

We ought to covenant together to **read it.**

We ought to covenant together to **apply it.**

We ought to covenant together to faithfully **worship** the One who gave us a New Day and a New Way.

I am asking you to take the insert out of your folder. I am asking that every one of you hold this in your hand. People are going to come up the aisles with more copies, so if you do not have one they can pass you one. You need one per person, not per couple.

Now, you are not going to turn this in. You are going to keep it. But I want you to have it. Hold it up, let me see that you have it.

I want the Lord building my life. Therefore,

I will do my best to read through the New Testament this summer... \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I will intentionally seek to apply one of its teachings to my life each week... \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I will endeavor to worship the Lord every week this summer, wherever I am \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If one or more of those statements does not express the commitment you want to make to the Lord exactly, then write it your way. It's your commitment, your covenant with God. You are going to keep it, so make it your own. Let it say what you mean, and then mean what you say. Then sign it like the Ezra, Nehemiah and the Jews of old did. Put it in a place you will see it regularly through the summer.