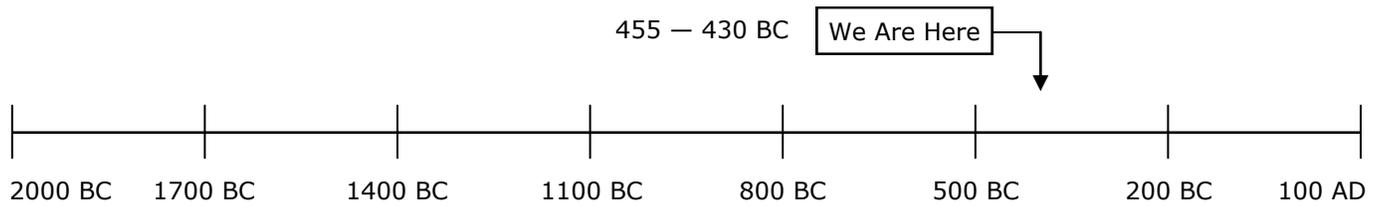


Wall Builders

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Week 38: September 17-23 — *Ezra 9, 10; Nehemiah, Malachi*

72.6% Complete — 99 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Overview of Bible History (p.37), Maps of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day (p.117)
Map of Palestine in Time of Christ (p.119), When God Was Silent (p.221)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

We have finally come to the end of our reading in the Old Testament! It will be more than 400 years before the New Testament picks up with the birth of Christ. For details about the Inter-testament Period, see the sheet entitled, "When God Was Silent," which follows this review. However, before we jump ahead, let's consider how the Old Testament closes. The last historical book is *Nehemiah*, which describes the third return of the Jews from captivity (445-444). The Persian king Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah Governor over Judea (or Judah), whose primary goal was to rebuild the ruined walls of Jerusalem. His book details the steps he took, the opposition he faced, and the victory he achieved after completing the work in just 52 days. The other half of the book records a great revival that occurred after Jerusalem was rebuilt. This cultural renewal was a result of the devoted work of Ezra, the priest and scribe, who read and taught the words of God and confronted the people with their sins. Because of his challenge to the people and his many prayers for revival, the Jews experienced an awakening that would last for generations to come. Thus, the Old Testament closes with the Jews back home in their land again, living in their newly refurbished citadel, worshiping in a new Temple, enjoying an intimate, rededicated commitment to God, and waiting for their promised Messiah. Now, we are ready for the New Testament to begin.

- Personal Application

The Process of Spiritual Growth

Within the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are included an interesting picture of the process of spiritual growth. The three returns from captivity into spiritual intimacy with God are telling of the steps one takes to a stronger walk with the Lord. Let's review the major events in these books and look at how they symbolize the path on which believers should progress today.

1. **Babylonian Captivity:** Captivity in a foreign land is a great picture of how we as unbelievers were once slaves to the wicked ruler of this world, captives under his domain.
2. **First Return:** What a moment for the Jews! What a moment for those who receive Christ! Here is a transference from a land of darkness into light, a rebirth, an awakening.

3. **Temple Reconstruction:** As the Jews focused on their Temple and sacrifices, so we as believers must start with our Temple, our hearts (*1 Cor. 3:16*). To experience rebirth, we must begin with the sacrifice of Christ and accept God's gift of forgiveness on His behalf.
4. **Ezra's Teaching:** Once the Jews rebuilt their Temple, God sent Ezra, the great teacher, to instruct the people concerning His laws and expectations. Likewise, as young believers, it is crucial that we learn as much as we can of the Christian life and how to live it.
5. **Building Jerusalem:** After the people began to live out the laws of God, the Lord sent Nehemiah to rebuild their fallen walls. Similarly, throughout our lives, God will use key individuals and events to place bricks in our wall of faith. Those instruments may be the establishment of strong disciplines, scenarios that test your faith or challenge your character, or perhaps people who are sent to come alongside you and build you up.
6. **Ripe for Revival:** Once the Temple is rebuilt, God's laws are taught and practiced, and the city is standing again, the people were ripe for restoration and revival. Oftentimes, we have our spiritual ducks in a row but end up only going through the motions, not really making a difference for the Lord. The Christian life should never plateau for long, but rather it should always climb to greater heights with God.
7. **Ready for the Messiah:** As we close the Old Testament, the Jews expectantly await their promised Messiah, living for the Lord and loving each other. Today, we too await the promised Messiah (to return), but in the meantime, we are to live a life that is telling of His goodness and that is honoring to His Name.

To summarize, God transforms His people and their sacred city from inside out, starting with the Temple (actually the altar), then their commitment to His laws, and finally the walls of their beloved city. The world does not seek to change individual's lives in that way, but rather works from the outside in. True life change must occur internally (with the heart) and then proceed to change the person externally.

- Prophetic Passages
 1. **Coming Messenger** (*Malachi 3:1; 4:5*): God promised that He would send one to introduce the Messiah for both His first and second advents. This person was to be Elijah or an Elijah-type person, which for Christ's first advent was identified as John the Baptist.
 2. **Coming Messiah** (*Malachi 3:2, 3; 4:1-3; Joel 2:30, 31*): Described here are the two advents of the Lord, both sudden or unannounced.
 3. **Coming Spirit** (*Joel 2:28, 29*): Although this prophecy could have double meaning (and describe the end times), Peter refers to it in *Acts 2*, when God sent His Spirit to indwell believers, shortly after the ascension of Christ.

The Bottom Line

God uses *others* to build your *spiritual walls*; He also uses *you* to build the *walls* of others.

Questions to Consider

1. Who are your top three spiritual wall builders? Have you taken the time to thank them?
2. To whom has God called you to help build their spiritual walls? Have you been faithful?
3. Don't forget to take time to understand the mysterious Inter-testament Period.