

## **Week 39 Chronological**

### **September 21: Zechariah 5-9**

In the sixth vision, a flying scroll represents the punishment set aside for the land. The woman in the basket also represents judgment. The woman is idolatry and she is shoved in the basket and sent off to Babylon where idolatry belonged. The first and eighth visions act as bookends to the visions. They convey the same message. God is sovereign and has complete control over His creation.

Chapter seven begins with another line of questioning about the wickedness of their ancestors. Their ancestors are charged with going through the motions when it comes to their fasting. They are not fasting for the LORD; they are doing it for themselves. God wants relationship, not ritual. The relationship should drive the ritual, not the other way around.

The book turns from judgment to blessing. It goes from complete dispersion to total restoration. God reiterates what He told the Israelites on the exile. He will be their God and they will be His people. God is restoring His covenant with them.

The enemies of Zion will be judged. Zion has much to rejoice about. Her king is coming riding on a donkey. Kings in those days would normally ride mules. The fact that He is riding a donkey indicates unexpected humility from the king. Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. He is fully God and fully human, but He did not use that to overpower the people and be served. Instead, He humbled Himself and gave Himself up to the Father's will so that we could be saved.

### **September 22: Zechariah 10-14**

In Zechariah 10, God promises the restoration of His people. When they ask for rain in the spring, He will give it to them. He will bring them back from the land of Egypt and Assyria and bring them to Gilead and Lebanon. The people will be strengthened in Yahweh and march in His name.

Chapter 11 discusses the problem of shepherds. Some are good, some are bad. The shepherd over the flock intended for slaughter has two staffs. One is named Favor and the other Union. He takes the staff named Favor and cuts it in two, identifying that they are no longer favored. The shepherd then demands that they give the wages, which only amounts to 30 pieces of silver, an allusion to the value of a slave. Though the price is called "magnificent", it is sarcastic. The second staff is cut. Unity is broken.

Zechariah 12:10-14 speaks of the One that they have pierced. They will mourn for Him. This indicates that God's true followers will recognize that they have disobeyed and rejected the Divine Shepherd. These folks have pierced God's soul. This text also anticipates Christ's crucifixion.

God pronounces that His people will be cleaned. A fountain will be opened for the house of David and the residents of Jerusalem. The idols of the land will be erased and no longer remembered. The prophets and unclean spirits will be removed. God is going to clean it all up!

Zechariah ends in the classic prophetic fashion. All of the nations rise up to attack Jerusalem. God intervenes and blesses Jerusalem in a mighty and miraculous way. Then God announces judgment against Jerusalem's enemies. Finally, all of the people of the world go to Jerusalem to worship God. Everything from the cooking pots to the horses' bells are set apart as HOLY TO THE LORD. What a day that will be. One day, God will make it all right and everyone will seek His face. As His people, my hope and prayer is that we live our lives serving Him and doing His will.

### **September 23: Esther 1-5**

Esther is a unique book in the Bible for one specific reason; it never mentions God. His presence is implied by Mordecai's allusion to divine providence, but His name is not called out or mentioned in the book. The events in Esther occurred between 486 and 465 BC.

Queen Vashti makes the king, Ahasuerus, mad by refusing to dance at one of his banquets. These banquets were not coed, only the men were gathered. The king was merely having her come out to show off her beauty to the gathered guests. She refuses. The king consults his wise men. They decide that Vashti has not only insulted the king, but the entire land. They recommend he issue a decree that removes her from her position as queen. The belief is that this decree will prevent any other women from rising up.

After a while the king's anger dies down. He remembers Vashti and what she did. Now he has a problem. He does not have a queen. So, the king's attendants suggest that they have auditions for the position. Whoever pleases the king the most will become queen.

Meanwhile, in the fortress of Susa, a Jew named Mordecai has adopted his cousin named Esther. She was beautiful and when the king's command for the women to gather to try out as queen, she was taken to the palace where she comes under Hegai's care. During her time in the palace, she does not let anyone know that she is Jewish. Preparations to meet the king took an entire year. After her preparation time, Esther is presented to the king, and she is selected as queen.

Mordecai uncovers a plot by two of the king's eunuchs to assassinate him. Mordecai reported it to Esther, who promptly had it investigated. When the report was proven true, the two conspirators were hanged. Mordecai saved the king's life.

Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, is promoted in rank and put in a position higher than any other officials. When he was coming through the King's Gate, the entire assembly stood up to pay respect to Haman. Well, not everyone. Mordecai remained seated. He would not bow down and pay homage. Haman gets mad, but rather than take it out directly on Mordecai, he learns that Mordecai is Jewish and decides to launch a plan to have them all killed.

Mordecai learns of this and appeals to Esther. She is worried about approaching the king to

request that her people be spared. Mordecai explains to her that she had been called for such a time as this to spare her people. A series of events brought her to that moment where she could have an audience with the king. Had any other woman been selected to that position, they most likely would not have cared about the plight of the Jewish people. God put Esther in this position so that she could advocate for His people. Sometimes God is going to put us in scary situations for “such a time as this”. How will we respond?

Esther approaches the king. She asks that Haman and the king come to a banquet she has prepared for them. The king has Haman summoned and they all go to the meal Esther had made. Esther asks that the three dine together the next day. When Haman leaves, he is overjoyed until he sees Haman not get up to pay homage to him. He is filled with rage but maintains his composure. When he gets home, he complains to his wife about it. She, along with some of his friends, recommend that he have a 75-foot gallows built and then ask the king to hang Mordecai from it.

### **September 24: Esther 6-10**

The king cannot sleep. So, he orders the book recording daily events to be brought out and read to him. (I find that a lot of government documents are good for curing the toughest cases of insomnia. We had a manual for the UHF transceiver that could put anyone to sleep). While they are reading through the book, the king discovers Mordecai’s act to prevent the eunuchs from assassinating him. He asks what they have done to honor Mordecai. Nothing has been done to award him for saving the king’s life.

Haman enters the king’s court to ask him to hang Mordecai. He is never able to make the request. When the king finds out he is in the courts, he has Haman brought to him. The king asks Haman what he should do to honor someone. Haman thinks that the king is talking about him, so he gives a long-drawn-out explanation of what the king should do to honor the man. The king orders Haman to go and do everything he has suggested for Mordecai! I wish I could have been there to see his face!

Haman did as he is commanded, but then rushes home. His wife and advisors warn him that his downfall is certain. While they are trying to get him off this collision course, the eunuchs arrive to escort him to the banquet Esther had made.

At the banquet, the king asks Esther what she would like. She explains the plight of her people and how they have been sold out. When the king asks for her to identify who has sold the Jewish people to destruction, she points out Haman as the man that has devised the wicked scheme. The king is furious, gets up and walks out to take a breath. Haman stays behind to beg for his life. When the king gets back, he sees Haman falling on the couch where Esther is reclining. He sees this as Haman trying to violate her. The king asks, “Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the palace?” As soon as he says this, Haman’s face is covered, he is marched to the 75-foot gallows and hung.

Upon Haman’s death, Esther appeals further to the king asking that the decree to kill the Jews be rescinded. The king agrees. An edict is issued that allows them to assemble and defend

themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate any army that is hostile toward them. Mordecai becomes a great leader, and the Jews have many victories. Throughout his life, he continued to seek good for the Jews and speak for the welfare of all his descendants. All of this was possible because Esther stood up for her people at the right time.

### **September 25: Ezra 7-10**

Ezra, a scribe skilled in the law of Moses comes to Jerusalem from Babylon. He brings along correspondence from Artaxerxes allowing any Israelites in his territory to return to Jerusalem if they want to.

Ezra eight starts with the genealogical record of the families returning to Jerusalem with Ezra. Prior to their return, Ezra calls for a fast by the Ahava River. The intent is to humble themselves before God and ask for His protection on their way home. Ezra did not want to ask the king for protection. Instead, he asks God for it. On the twelfth day of the month, they depart to Jerusalem.

Upon their return, Ezra is presented a problem. The Israelites have not kept themselves separated from the other nations. Some of the men have married women from the pagan nations. Ezra tears his robe and tunic and pulls some of the hair from his head and beard, a sign of intense mourning, upon receiving the news.

The folks that fear God gather around Ezra. He falls on his knees and prays to God. This is a prayer of penitence. There is no petition or request made to God on this. Instead, Ezra focuses on confessing.

The people are called to repentance, to separate themselves from the pagan nations and their foreign wives. This is a hard decision for some to make. Many say that they will do as Ezra says and separate from them. The book of Ezra closes with a detailed list of the men married to foreign women. From our vantage, this seems harsh, asking people to separate from their families. However, when we look at Ezra, it is best to frame it from their viewpoint. Those that returned to Jerusalem do not want to do anything that could get them sent away again. They are doing what they can to get back to the way God had called them to live prior to the exile.

### **September 26: Nehemiah 1-5**

The ending of Ezra is rather abrupt and not much of an introduction is given to Nehemiah. Remember, both of the books were treated as a whole for a very long time. Nehemiah receives word that the remnant in Jerusalem that survived the exile are in trouble and disgrace. Nehemiah prays a penitential prayer similar to the prayer of Ezra.

Nehemiah takes wine to King Artaxerxes. When the king sees Nehemiah's forlorn look, he questions why he is so sad. Nehemiah has never been sad in the sight of the king before. Nehemiah responds that he is sad because he discovered how the folks in Jerusalem continue to suffer. Artaxerxes asks Nehemiah what he can do. Nehemiah requests permission to go to Jerusalem. The king sends him back to Jerusalem.

Preparations are made to rebuild the walls of the city. Eliashib and his fellow priests rebuild the Sheep Gate and the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and Tower of Hananel. The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. A lot of people put a lot of effort into rebuilding the city. These people are motivated to return the city to its former glory.

Sanballat discovers that the walls are being rebuilt and becomes furious. He mocks the Jews in front of his friends and colleagues. This mockery leads to more prayer on Nehemiah's part. He asks that God turn Sanballat's insults on his head and the heads of those joining in the mockery. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites plot to fight against Jerusalem. God hands them over to confusion. When the Jews see that their enemies' plan was thwarted by God, they continue building.

The return to Jerusalem was not all sunshine and rainbows for the people. People begin to complain. The first group to complain are the day laborers. The second group to complain are those that were forced to mortgage their property to survive. The third group had to borrow money to pay the king's tax. Nehemiah assumes that the nobles and officials are charging their fellow countrymen interest. Usury was forbidden in the Mosaic Law.

### **September 27: Nehemiah 6 and 7**

The news of the wall completion marks another attempt by Sanballat and his crew to stop the construction project. Nehemiah's life is even threatened. He is not intimidated, though, and carries on with the rebuilding.

The wall is rebuilt, but the danger persists. Nehemiah moves the gate keepers from their duties at the temple to keeping watch on the walls. Essentially, the city gates become an extension of the temple courtyards.

The city is large, but there are not many people in it. Many citizens of Jerusalem were killed prior to the exile. Others were deported. God puts it into Nehemiah's heart to gather the people. A census is conducted of all the returnees and is recorded in great detail in vv. 8-67. These details matter when it comes to establishing who will do what in the city. The returning exiles do not want to put someone in a position he is not qualified for. Remember Saul lost his kingdom because he made sacrifice instead of waiting for the priest to do it. The returning exiles are doing their best to follow God's commands.

### **September 28: Nehemiah 8-10**

The people gather to hear Ezra read the book of the law that God had given Moses. He starts reading from first light of day until noon. Ezra stood on a high wooden platform with the book open so everyone can see it. This is an important detail. This allowed the people to see that Ezra was not making anything up, but he was coming straight out of the book. Ezra praised God and the people followed suit by bowing down and worshipping with their faces to the ground.

A group is standing by and translating what the book of the law says. When the people hear it, they begin weeping. Ezra and the other priests quiet the people down, explaining that the day is holy to the LORD their God and they should not weep. This group wept because they realized how they did not keep God's law and they are showing remorse. However, rather than weep because of what they are hearing, they can rejoice because now they know how they are supposed to act. To a degree, there was probably some fear in their mourning as well since they have not been following God's commands and there is reason to fear His wrath. However, they are told not to mourn what they are hearing. Instead, they can rejoice because they now can live the way God wants them to. As believers, we are going to mess up. When we do, we mourn the sin, but when we confess it to God, we should not stay stuck down in our sin. Instead, we should rejoice in His forgiveness and work to live a life that is holy and set apart.

Nehemiah nine is a beautiful penitential prayer. It is a confession of God's faithfulness and mercy to His people. Further, it is a confession of the nation's consistent rebellion against God and His commands. Verse 16 speaks of their ancestors' arrogance. The arrogance described here is like the arrogance of the Egyptians in the time of the Exodus.

At the end of the prayer the nation makes a vow of faithfulness.

We read the names of everyone that signed the vow the Israelites made to the LORD. They promise to refrain from giving their daughters to other nations as brides. The LORD warned against allowing intermarriage early on. However, as the years went by, they fell into allowing their children to take foreign brides and give their daughters in marriage to foreign men. It is not so much nationality that was the problem. The issue is that these people worshiped other gods than God Almighty and they led their spouses to turn away from The LORD. The Israelites promise to prevent that from happening again. They also vow to keep the Sabbath. Even if a foreigner comes to trade on a holy day or on the Sabbath, they will not trade with them. They also promise to allow the land to rest after six years of cultivating it. They impose further commands on themselves.