

Week 40 Chronological

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.

September 29: Nehemiah 11-13 and Psalm 126

These people are trying their best to ensure that they do not lose their land again. They now know what they lost when they were exiled to Babylon. They do not want to lose it again!

Nehemiah 11 resumes the narrative about the repopulation. Jerusalem was underpopulated. The neighboring towns cast lots to identify the ten percent of their population that would move to Jerusalem. These people that left their homes to settle in Jerusalem were cheered by the people.

Chapter 12 gives us a detail of the priests and Levites who went up to Zerubbabel. When it came time to dedicate the wall of Jerusalem, all the Levites were sent for to celebrate the joyous occasion. The priests and Levites purified themselves and singers gathered to worship.

The book of Moses is read publicly to the people. In the reading they discover how the Ammonites and Moabites had acted against Moses and the Israelites. Instead of bringing them food and water, they hired Balaam to curse them. As a result, the Ammonites and Moabites are separated from the rest of the people gathered for the reading.

Nehemiah has gone back to Artaxerxes. In his absence, Eliashib, the priest in charge of the storerooms for the house of God, makes a mistake. He clears out a storeroom for holding grain and allows his relative Tobiah to stay in the room. We probably do not see that as a big deal from our vantage. The issue here is that the room was supposed to be set apart to hold grain for The LORD. With Tobiah occupying the space, the room is not purified.

That is not all that is going wrong. Nehemiah witnesses the people in Judah treading the wine press on the Sabbath. Further, the Tyrianians living in Judah were importing fish and other merchandise, selling them on the Sabbath. Just a couple of chapters ago, the people agreed to not engage in such activities. They made a vow against it! They are quick to forget the promises they made to God. My hope and prayer is that when we make a vow to God, we do what we can to fulfill it. My prayer is that we daily serve Him and do His will.

September 30: Malachi 1-4

Today is a momentous day because we finish the Old Testament. Great job!

Malachi gives the essential message of the Old Testament and shows the reader God's nature and our responsibilities and relationship to Him and others in the community of believers. The reader is reminded that God showed favor to Jacob instead of Esau. God also reminds them that they are to honor their mothers and fathers. He asks the question of where His honor is since He is their Father? God is our Father; do we honor Him in that way?

The people have been shirking their responsibilities. Rather than bring the unblemished animal to God for sacrifice, they bring the blind or deformed animals to Him. As believers, we should bring our best to God, not offer Him the stuff we do not want.

The priests have condoned this lackadaisical faith. As a result, God will send His curse among them. God is wearied by their actions. They ask how they have wearied God. His answer is simple, they have declared that what is evil is good in God's sight and asked where the God of justice is. There are people today that claim evil as good and right in the LORD's sight.

God is going to send His messenger to prepare the way. This is a prophecy about John the Baptist. He is the new Elijah, exhorting the people to repent of their sin and prepare for Jesus's arrival.

Malachi closes with a final warning. He will send the prophet and the disobedient will accept the wisdom of the righteous.

There is a 400-year period between the words spoken by Malachi and the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This period is known as the "Intertestamental" times. As we go into the New Testament, we will see that the priests send people to interview John the Baptist thinking that perhaps he is the long-awaited Messiah. They have been hoping for this day, just as the generations before them did. This group probably did not think they would live to see the day that the Messiah arrived. Of course, they will mess it all up since the Messiah does not match the description they want.

October 1: Luke 1 and John 1

We tend to focus on the announcement of the birth of Jesus. However, John the Baptist's birth was also foretold. His father Zechariah was a priest and chosen to enter the temple to burn incense. While in the temple, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and announced that his wife Elizabeth would bear him a son and he will be named John. Zechariah asks how he can know any of this is certain since he and his wife are advanced in age. I find it interesting that Zechariah does not recount the birth of Isaac despite Sarah and Abraham's advanced age. Gabriel, the angel, makes Zechariah mute.

Gabriel then appears to Mary and lets her know that she will bear a Son and He will be called the Son of the Most High. She is also confused how this can happen since she is a virgin. Gabriel explains how it will happen. He also reminds her about her cousin Elizabeth and her pregnancy. God is all powerful and He can do what He wants. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth and when they meet, John jumps in Elizabeth's womb. Even in utero, John knows how important Mary's baby is.

John gives the creation narrative from a different perspective. This Scripture demonstrates that Jesus has been since the very beginning. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been around since before time. John chapter one also explains that Jesus came first to the Israelites and then to everyone else. Jesus has come so that everyone may live eternally with God, regardless of their nationality. However, not everyone will come to Him. The darkness hates the light and many will turn away from Him, seeking to follow their own sinful desires.

October 2: Matthew 1 and Luke 2

Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus. This genealogy identifies Jesus as a descendant of David. God had made a covenant with David that he would always have a descendant on the throne. Since Jesus is LORD, God fulfills His promise through Jesus. Matthew also details Jesus's genealogy through the Babylonian exile.

Mary becomes pregnant and this seems off to Joseph since he and Mary are not married and have not consummated the marriage. Joseph is an honorable man and plans to call it quits. However, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and explains how Mary came to be pregnant. The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 has been fulfilled.

Though Joseph lives in Nazareth, he must make the journey to Bethlehem to be counted in the census. Since he is engaged to Mary, she comes along with him. Since she is so far along, she gives birth to Jesus while in Bethlehem. This is in keeping with God's promise through the prophet Micah that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem.

While shepherds were out tending their flock in Bethlehem, an angel appears to them and announces Christ's arrival. The shepherds in Bethlehem did not tend to ordinary sheep. These sheep acted as the sacrifice for the day of atonement. Now that Jesus is here, these sacrifices will soon end because Jesus will be the perfect sacrifice that cleanses His people from their sin.

Jesus, though He was fully God, is also fully human. He is brought to Jerusalem for purification and to be presented to The LORD. While He is there, Simeon enters the temple, takes Jesus into his arms and gives thanks to God that he has seen God's salvation. Simeon recognizes that Jesus is not just the mode of salvation for the Israelites, but for the Gentiles as well.

Later, when Joseph and Mary made the pilgrimage back to Jerusalem, Jesus remains in the temple. Joseph and Mary begin the trek back home, but after three days realize that Jesus is not with them. When they get back to Jerusalem, they find Jesus in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking questions. The learned men in the temple are amazed at Jesus's understanding at such a young age.

October 3: Matthew 2

Wise men come from the east to Jerusalem and approach Herod. They ask where the king of the Jews is, they saw His star and they have come to worship Him. When Herod hears this, he is troubled and assembles all the chief priests and scribes to ask them where the Messiah would be born. They explain the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah and where He would come from. Herod assembles the wise men in secret and tells them the direction to go. He also asks that they come back to let him know where the baby is so that he too can go worship Him. However, he really wants the opportunity to murder the child.

The wise men head the direction Herod sends them. They find Jesus, rejoice, and give Him gifts. They are then warned by an angel not to go back to Herod, so they went back to their own country a different way. Joseph is warned by an angel of the Lord to gather his wife and child and flee to Egypt until they are told to head back home. Herod is about to go on a murderous rampage. Sadly, Herod kills all the male children in Bethlehem and in the region that were two years old and younger.

After Herod dies, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus return to Nazareth.

October 4: Matthew 3, Mark 1, and Luke 3

John the Baptist comes preaching in the wilderness of Messiah the need to repent. The kingdom of heaven is near. John wore a camel hair garment, a leather belt, and ate locusts and wild honey. He was the one prophesied about in Isaiah 40:3, the voice crying out to prepare the way of the LORD.

John was baptizing in the Jordan river. People were coming to him, confessing their sins, and being baptized. The Pharisees and Sadducees approach him and he calls them a brood of vipers and asks them who warned them to flee the wrath that is coming. John explains that he is baptizing with water, but the One coming after him is mightier than he is. This One will baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Jesus approaches John to be baptized. At first John seems reluctant to baptize Him. After all, He is the Messiah. He is perfect and has no need for repentance of sin. John states that it would be better for him to be baptized by Jesus. The LORD explains that it must be like this to fulfill all righteousness. This does not mean that the baptism itself bestows righteousness on the person. Baptism is a public display that we the believers undergo to identify ourselves with Christ. It is an act of obedience. Jesus is baptized to keep in line with His Father's will. He is already righteous and perfect, but He still submits to baptism as a sign of obedience.

October 5: Matthew 4, Luke 4 and 5

Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He is tempted by the devil. He does not eat for forty days and forty nights. The devil first tempts Jesus with food, telling Him to make bread out of the stones around Him to satisfy His hunger. Jesus thwarts this attempt using Scripture. The enemy then takes Jesus up high on the pinnacle of the temple and tells Jesus to throw Himself down. After all, He will be protected since God will command His angels over Him. Jesus does not take the bait. Instead, He uses Scripture to combat the devil. The enemy then takes Jesus up to a high point and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and promises them to Jesus if He would only bow down and worship him. This is an incredibly stupid temptation considering that Jesus is already sovereign and has authority over all kingdoms. Again, the LORD does not give in and the devil leaves Him.

Notice that Jesus uses Scripture to deny the enemy's attacks. One way to safeguard our hearts against temptation is to know the Scriptures and know what context they are to be used in. The devil uses Scripture to tempt Jesus, but Jesus knows it is out of context and hits him back with more Scripture.

After the temptation, Jesus begins His ministry. He goes to Nazareth to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He stands up and reads from the scroll of Isaiah. When he read this prophecy, he sat down and explains that this prophecy had been fulfilled that day. Everyone spoke well of Him, but others, knowing Him as a child begin to question His authority, stating that He was just a carpenter's son. Jesus explains that a prophet is without honor in his hometown, further drawing ire from the crowd.

Jesus leaves, heads to Capernaum where He begins healing people. From there, He begins calling His first disciples. He approaches Andrew and Simon, two fishermen.

They had no luck the night before. Jesus gets in their boat and tells them to put out to sea a bit and drop their net. Simon is doubtful that they will catch anything because of their bad luck earlier. They are obedient and their haul is so large they require help from another boat to help haul their catch back to shore. Simon realizes the authority Jesus has and asks that He depart since he is a sinful man. Jesus tells Simon to not be afraid. From here on out, he will be catching people.