

# OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

## SCORE KEY 7B

**MEMORIZE: Jeremiah 29:11-13** <sup>11</sup>For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. <sup>12</sup>Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. <sup>13</sup>And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

### EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER

The monarchical period ended in 586 BC with the destruction of Jerusalem. Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther cover a period of about 100 years following the captivity of Israel. The captivity ended with the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, allowing Jews to go back to the land to rebuild The Temple. There are four divisions to this period distinguished by \_\_\_\_\_.

#### I. 536 BC—59,897 return from Babylon to Jerusalem

Ezra was a phenomenal man that God could use. The reason God could use Ezra was because he had \_\_\_\_\_ to seek, do, and teach the law of God. (Ezra 7:10)

Ezra demonstrated the centrality of the Temple in Chronicles. It is commonly believed that Ezra was the scribe that wrote the Chronicles. It continues to show that the temple was central to the life and worship of the nation of the Jews as God's people.

It is significant to notice that the book of Ezra demonstrates how God \_\_\_\_\_ the heart of the kings as rivers of water”, disposing the king of Persia to order the rebuilding of the temple. It also becomes evident, that in spite of all the plans of the enemies of God's people, they were used of God to help promote the building of the temple.

The word of prophets such as Haggai and Zechariah was indispensable to the building of the temple. Ezra 1-6 gives the account of the return of the Jews with \_\_\_\_\_, and a brief account of what happened as the Jews attempted to rebuild the temple. Many years passed from the decree to go forth and rebuild the Temple to the time the Temple was completed.

The decree of Cyrus was the reverse of the policy which was given by Tiglath-pileser of Assyria in 745 B.C. to deport conquered peoples. Thus it was that thousands of Jewish exiles left Babylon with the Temple vessels which had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar. Zerubbabel, a grandson of King Jehoiachin of the line of David, and \_\_\_\_\_ (Joshua) the high priest led this pilgrimage.

Upon their return to Jerusalem, Jeshua immediately built the altar so the burnt offerings could again be made (for 70 years there was no sacrifice given for the children of Israel). They began celebrating the feasts God had given them, starting with the Feast of Tabernacles.

They also began a system of freewill offerings to raise money to rebuild the temple, setting aside money for supplies, food for the workers, and money to hire carpenters for rebuilding the Temple.

The laying of the foundation was accompanied by the playing of instruments, singing, and a great shout of joy. At the same time of \_\_\_\_\_, there were many that remembered the glory of Solomon's temple and \_\_\_\_\_ with a loud noise. While the people were enthusiastic in their beginnings, they were delayed for 15 years by the enemies from the north.

The Samaritans began asking the Jews allow them to help in the building of the temple. The Samaritans said, "...we seek your God, as ye do: and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither".

Zerubbabel and Jeshua along with the fathers of Israel told them, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel..." The Samaritans were not the descendants of the ten tribes which had gone into captivity in Assyria, but were transplanted heathens who included Jehovah as one of their many gods.

Their attitude was hostile toward the Jews, particularly since some of them may have been displaced by the return of the Jews after the 70-year captivity. When they were denied participation in building of the Temple, the Samaritans became even more hostile, writing to Artaxerxes to stop the building.

Because they originated from the heathen nations, they had a certain amount of credibility before the Persian king. They pointed out that Jerusalem had been a hotbed of rebellion and filled with sedition against the king of Babylon. When the return letter from the king forbade the building of the Temple, they immediately went to Jerusalem, reading the letter, and forcing them to stop until 520 BC.

In the second year of Darius, the new ruler in Persia, Haggai and Zechariah began prophesying, stirring up the people to begin again the rebuilding the Temple. King Darius' letter came back, not only confirming the order to rebuild, but ordering the opposing faction to stop interfering with the work, and pay for the expenses from the king's provisions.

After the Temple was completed, the Jews dedicated the new temple, setting the priests and Levites in their courses for the service of God. The Jews then began to keep all the feasts, starting with the Feast of the Passover.

Only about 50,000 Jews returned from exile. The vast majority of them stayed in the nations to which they were dispersed. This explains why Paul found Jews everywhere he went to preach the Gospel. Thus he preached to the Jew first, then to the Greek.

Though Ezra wrote the book that bears his name, he does not come on the scene in Jerusalem until the seventh chapter. The book of Ezra \_\_\_\_\_ how God fulfilled His promises and preserved His people. Ezra follows Chronicles because the information given at the very end of Chronicles is the same as the information at the very beginning of Ezra.

**Ezra 1:1** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying,

**2 Chronicles 36:22-23** <sup>22</sup>Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD *spoken* by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, <sup>23</sup>Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. Who *is there* among you of all his people? The LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up.

\_\_\_\_\_ prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years.

**Jeremiah 25:12** And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.

**Jeremiah 29:10** For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

Isaiah foretold that Cyrus would be the one who would allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

**Isaiah 44:24-28** <sup>24</sup>Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I *am* the LORD that maketh all *things*; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; <sup>28</sup>That saith of Cyrus, *He is* my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

If Cyrus issued his decree in 536 BC and the captivity was to last seventy years, we have only to add 70 to 536 to determine when the captivity began (Remembering that in the BC years we are counting down from creation).

$$536 \text{ BC} + 70 \text{ years} = 606 \text{ BC}$$

We should ask ourselves what recorded event happened in 606 BC? The following verses give the answer:

**2 Kings 24:1-2** <sup>1</sup>In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and \_\_\_\_\_ became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. <sup>2</sup>And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets.

**2 Chronicles 36:6-7** <sup>6</sup>Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him

in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. <sup>7</sup>Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.

**Daniel 1:1-2** <sup>1</sup>In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. <sup>2</sup>And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

This is the first \_\_\_\_\_ of Jews of the tribe of Judah. It marked the beginning of the 70 year captivity. We don't know how many people were taken captive at this time, but we know some important people, such as Daniel, were taken.

### **536 BC—The Seventh month, the Altar is built and sacrifices are offered**

This was important date because sacrifices are a big part of the Old Testament worship. The Temple is in ruins, but the worship can begin at the place that God has chosen for his name.

### **535 BC—Work on the Temple is started and stopped**

In the second year, the second month they laid the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Temple. There was great rejoicing, but there was also sadness. Some remembered the glory of Solomon's temple and wept because this building would not approach the splendor of the first temple.

**Ezra 4:23-24** <sup>23</sup>Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter *was* read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. <sup>24</sup>Then ceased the work of the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The enemies of Israel were people who had been brought into the area by the Assyrians. Rehum and Shimshai were two officials who had adopted the local religion. Perhaps they were what came to be known as Samaritans. They \_\_\_\_\_ the builders in any way possible. Eventually they wrote letters to the Persian king to stop the progress. Some of them claimed to be of the priestly line but could not prove it. Some were Jewish but had gentile spouses.

Not long after the restoration of the Temple began, they were able to get a decree from Darius that forced the Jews to stop working on the Temple. This work stoppage lasted for fifteen years. Finally, two prophets were sent by God to encourage the people to continue the work.

### **520 BC—the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, encourage the people of God.**

**Ezra 5:1-2** <sup>1</sup>Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that *were* in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, *even* unto them. <sup>2</sup>Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem: and with them *were* the prophets of God helping them.

Hezekiah promised,

**Haggai 2:3** Who *is* left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? *is it* not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

**Haggai 2:9** The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

The people began to build again. Their enemies could not stop them so they sent another appeal to the king of Persia. This caused a new search to be made. Finally, the scroll was found that recorded the decree of Cyrus the Great. The decree was renewed and the building continued.

### **516 BC—The Temple completed**

In 516 BC the Temple was finally completed.

## **II. 478 BC—Esther becomes Queen of Persia**

The book of Esther takes place between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7, between the first return of the exiles led by Zerubbabel and the second led by Ezra himself. Historically, Esther is identified with the reign of Xerxes or Ahasuerus, king of Persia (485-465 B.C.).

While the name of God is not mentioned in Esther, the \_\_\_\_\_ is very clear (evident). When the kings of the earth forgot God and the rulers tried to dispose of His chosen people, God intervened in a marvelous way.

The name of God is not mentioned in Esther, but the hand of God is very evident. Esther tells the story of a beautiful Jewish girl whom King Xerxes of Persia chose to be his queen after becoming displeased with his previous queen. Esther was raised by her pious uncle, Mordecai. Mordecai uncovered a plot in which two guards conspired to take the king's life.

When Esther reported these plans, Mordecai's actions to protect the king were chronicled, and he was given credit for saving the king's life. Haman, a Persian official, was advanced by the king to be higher than any of the other princes in the nation. Everyone greatly honored him, except Mordecai, who refused to bow down to Haman. Haman was an \_\_\_\_\_.

In the course of time, Haman discovered Mordecai was a Jew, and plotted to destroy the Jewish people with the king's endorsement. Mordecai alerted the Jewish people to the plot to destroy them, asking them to fast and pray. He then prevailed upon Esther to go to the king and intercede on behalf of the Jewish people.

He warned her, "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom \_\_\_\_\_." (Esther 4:14)

As a result, Esther invited the king and Haman to dine with her on two successive days, making her request on behalf of the Jewish people known on the second day. During the night after the first dinner, the king, unable to sleep ordered the \_\_\_\_\_ to be read to him. He discovered that Mordecai, who had saved his life, had never been rewarded for what he had done.

When Haman appeared at the king's court in the morning to request the right to hang Mordecai on gallows he had prepared, the king asked him, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" Haman was shocked when he discovered that the man to be honored was Mordecai, and that he was to lead Mordecai through the streets declaring, "Thus shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor."

That same afternoon, at her banquet for Haman and the king, Esther risked her life to point out to the king that someone had sold her people to be destroyed and slain. When the king asked who did so, Haman was pointed to as the culprit.

In his wrath, the king had Haman hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. He authorized the Jews to resist their enemies, resulting in the deaths of thousands of gentiles. After Haman's death, peace was restored to the Jews. This was a great victory for the Jews. They celebrate their deliverance with the \_\_\_\_\_ each year. God, who promised to preserve His people, was once again proven to be faithful to His promises.

### **III. 457 BC—Ezra goes from Babylon to Jerusalem**

The activities of Ezra, who returned to Jerusalem in 457 BC, are recorded in the last 4 chapters of the book of Ezra. God's hand was upon him, and as a \_\_\_\_\_, the king granted him a commission to lead a group of Jews back to the province of Judah. Ezra prepared by planning what he would need in advance, not only for the trip to Jerusalem, but also for the worship when he got there.

He also received authorization for whatever he would need beyond the "river" from the king's treasures speedily. The king's decree stated, "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" Ezra took with him generous royal contributions, freewill offerings contributed by the exiles, and the sacred vessels for use in the Temple.

Ezra's \_\_\_\_\_ indicated that provincial rulers must supply him with food and money so the royal family would not incur the wrath of Ezra's God. In spite of planning ahead, Ezra did not ask the king for protection as they traveled, but asked the people to pray and fast for God's aid as they journeyed nearly a thousand miles to Jerusalem.

Upon his arrival, Ezra found that many of the people had disobeyed God's commands to not intermarry with the surrounding idol worshippers. He immediately called for a public assembly in the temple square and confronted the people with their disobedience. After a three-month examination of the guilty parties, Ezra made a sacrifice. The offenders pledged to annul their marriages.

#### IV. 444 BC—Nehemiah rebuilds the Wall

Nehemiah, who is one of the most colorful figures in the post-exile period, came to Jerusalem in 444 BC. Nehemiah was \_\_\_\_\_ when he heard the afflictions of God's people and the state of Jerusalem. As a result, he fasted and prayed for his people, feeling a great burden. He was willing to forfeit his position as the king's cupbearer to serve his people.

When the king saw his sadness (for his countenance had not been \_\_\_\_\_ before in the king's presence), he inquired of Nehemiah as to what was causing it. When Nehemiah revealed the cause of his sadness, the king commissioned him to go to Jerusalem to serve as the governor there, providing him the necessary supplies and protection of his armies in traveling.

Immediately upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah took a nighttime tour of the walls of the city to inspect them. After appraising their condition, Nehemiah organized the people who responded enthusiastically to the idea of rebuilding the walls.

This sudden activity aroused the opposition of the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, led by Geshem, \_\_\_\_\_, and Sanballat. Nehemiah and the people not only prayed, but they worked and guarded against attack as well. Economically, because things were rough in Jerusalem, Nehemiah cancelled all interest payments.

He also set an example, becoming their governor for 12 years without accepting pay for his work. His enemies continually tried to trap him, but they repeatedly failed. Nehemiah continually looked to God for his protection against their schemes, and was able to counter every attempt against his life.

After 52 days, the enemies lost face when Nehemiah and the Jews \_\_\_\_\_ the building of the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jerusalem. The surrounding nations realized that the hand of God was upon Nehemiah, and the prestige of Jerusalem and the Jews was restored.

Nehemiah organized a system for defending Jerusalem, for there were not enough inhabitants to have people on the wall at all points. He called for a registration of all the citizens, and recruited some for settlement in the city.

Before he completed his plans, the people gathered in Jerusalem for the religious feasts, which took place in the seventh month. Nehemiah gave precedence to the reading of the Law, observing the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles under the leadership of Ezra. After Nehemiah completed the registration of the people, the leaders cast lots to bring one-tenth of the people to live in Jerusalem, and the others in the remaining cities.

The dedication of Jerusalem's walls involved the whole province, with civil and religious leaders participating in two processions. Headed by Nehemiah and Ezra, one procession went to the right, the other to the left, marching around the city upon its walls. When they met at the temple, thanksgiving service was held.

## 432 BC—Nehemiah revisits Jerusalem

In 432 BC, Nehemiah traveled briefly to Persia, but returned again to Jerusalem. Upon his return, he discovered that many irregularities had taken place in allowing strangers into the city and failure to keep up the temple services.

In the reading of the law, Nehemiah discovered that the \_\_\_\_\_ and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God forever because they did not provide Israel with bread in the wilderness and because they hired Balaam to curse them. He then required that all the mixed multitude of Israel be separated from the people.

The priest, Eliashib, had allied himself with Tobiah the Ammonite, and had given him a chamber in the temple as well as tithes, which were to be given to the Levites. Nehemiah dealt boldly with the offenders, expelling Tobiah, the Ammonite and restoring the temple services.

Nehemiah then saw some of the Jews working their winepresses on the Sabbath. Nehemiah stood up for keeping the Sabbath and against allowing the Gentile merchants into the city to trade on the Sabbath. He warned the nobles that failure to keep the Sabbath was the sin that had precipitated Judah's captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem.

As a spiritual leader, Nehemiah stood upon God's revealed truth. God, through Nehemiah, had warned Israel about the problem of \_\_\_\_\_. He warned the Jews how Solomon's foreign wives had led him into sin and idolatry.

When the grandson of Eliashib, the high priest, married the daughter of Sanballat the governor of Samaria, he was expelled from Judah by Nehemiah. Nehemiah concludes his account, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

The reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah are reflected in the book of Malachi, who ministered from about 450-400 BC. Malachi, who was the last of the Old Testament messengers, points ahead to a terrible day of judgment which will be preceded by the merciful coming of "Elijah."

Malachi reminds the world that they should be concerned about the Day of Judgment. Those who worship the true God are assured of God's eternal favor. God's curse rests on the wicked, but His blessing is given to the righteous.

The New Testament begins with the coming of "Elijah" in John the Baptist. As the Old Testament concludes, we find that the scarlet thread of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised coming Messiah again reflected.

This message was originally given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This \_\_\_\_\_ promise unfolded in the following generations.

These books conclude our study of Old Testament history, and leave a 400 years period of silence until the New Testament opens with the coming of "Elijah" and the birth of Christ.