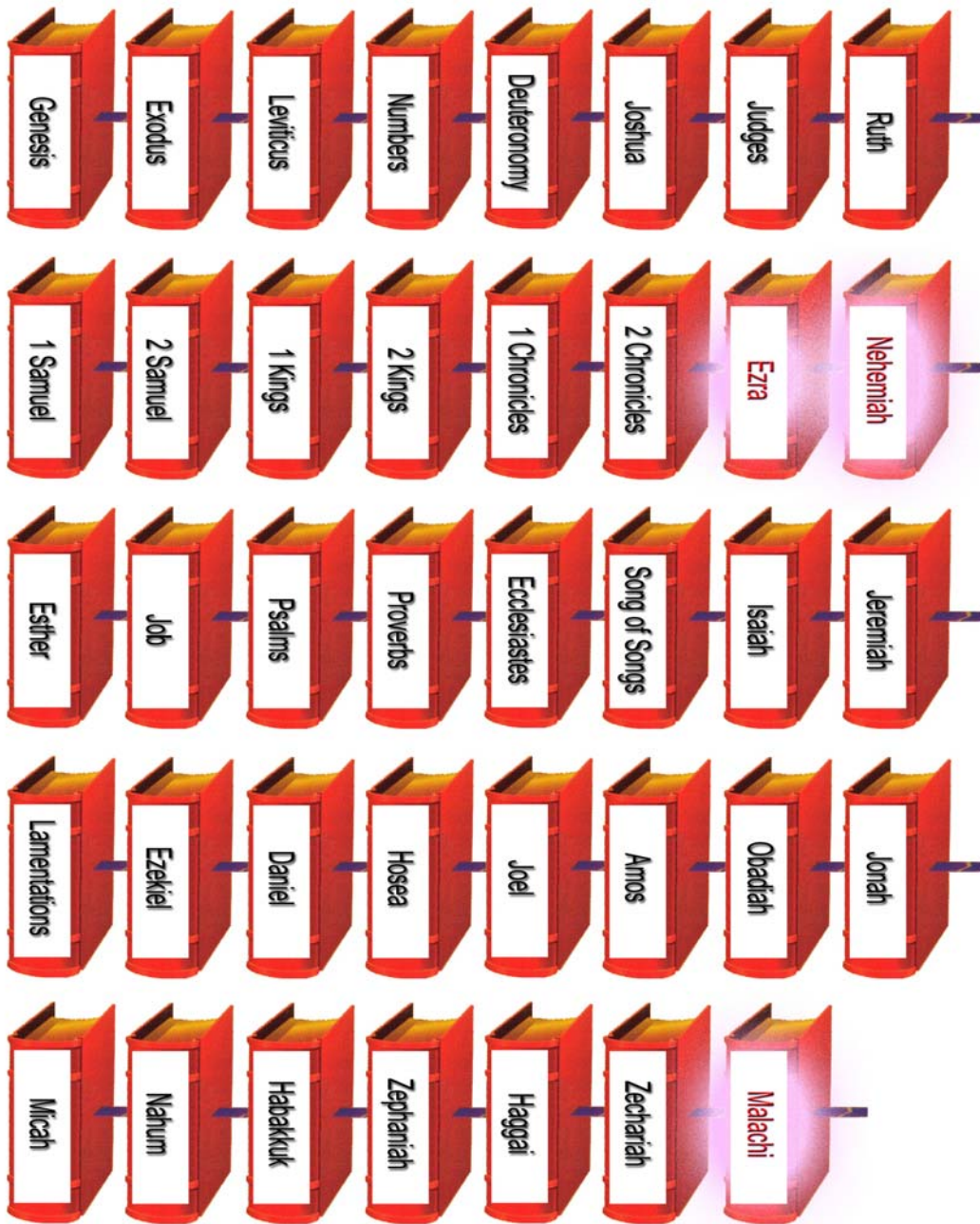


# Old Testament Books



## Chapter 29

**Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Malachi**

### The Story so Far

Before, during and after the exile God spoke to His people through prophets. They were people called by God to speak God's words to His people. Their message was simple – Israel had sinned, God would remove them from the land. But they gave a message of hope – God would be faithful to His promises. He would bring a remnant back into the land. In particular God promised a new covenant, one in which He would change the human heart to obey His laws, and also in which He would forgive people's sins forever.

### Objectives

- To understand the books of Ezra and Nehemiah = rebuilding of temple and walls of Jerusalem
- To show how the new covenant has not yet fully arrived

### Connections

- Partial fulfilment of new covenant promises
- Still waiting for the King to arrive

### Summary

**The new covenant has not yet arrived as God's people continue to disobey Him back in the land. God is coming to visit His temple in judgement.**

## **Still Waiting...**

### **Rebuilding (Ezra 1:1-3; Nehemiah 2:4-5)**

After 70 years God brings a remnant of His people back into His land. They rebuild God's temple and also the walls of Jerusalem, which have been destroyed by the Babylonians. This is recorded for us in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. God's law is taught again to the people and they want to obey it. It seems as if God's Kingdom is going to be rebuilt.

### **The Kingdom...not yet (Nehemiah 10:28-29; 13:6-28)**

Once the people are back in the land their hearts have not been changed. This is illustrated to us in the book of Nehemiah. When the people return to the land they renew their commitment to God by making three main promises to God: not to intermarry, to observe the Sabbath (religious day), and to maintain the temple. However, by the end of the book of Nehemiah the people have failed in each of their promises. They have disobeyed God again, and are abusing the sacrifice system and the new temple. The new covenant has obviously not yet arrived. The people's hearts remain unable to obey God's rules.

### **God Himself is coming (Malachi 3:1)**

God's temple has been rebuilt after the exile but it is being abused. Even the priests are not offering the right sacrifices or with the right attitude of worship. God speaks to His people through the prophet Malachi and promises a coming judgement. He Himself is coming to visit His people. To be more exact; He is coming to His temple.

### **The Kingdom of God is coming...**

The new promise God made through Jeremiah and Ezekiel has not yet arrived. It is only partially fulfilled. We know from the Bible that God keeps His promises. God has promised through the prophets that He will rebuild His Kingdom.

The Old Testament ends with a big expectation for the Kingdom of God to finally come. God promised it to Abraham near the beginning of the Bible, but we have not yet seen it fulfilled. God promised a Rescuer-Ruler in the very beginning who would rebuild His Kingdom. A King will come from David's family line that will shepherd God's people and rule over them in the land. A new

temple is coming when God will live again with His people in the best way possible. A change of heart is on its way.

**The new covenant has not yet arrived as God's people continue to disobey Him back in the land. God is coming to visit His temple in judgement.**

## **400 years of silence**

At about 400 BC, there is a pause in God's revelation of Himself in history. During this time in history, Alexander the Great, a general of the Greeks, conquers the Middle East, bringing the Jews under his rule. The Israelites from the tribe of Judah and Benjamin become known as the Jews. Greek becomes the spoken language of this area.

Some Jews combine Greek culture and their beliefs about God. These people are called "Sadducees". The Sadducees start to deny parts of the Bible and take away parts of it. On the opposite side are the "Pharisees". They do not take away from the Bible but add to it. The Pharisees add to God's 10 rules and make their own interpretations of them. There is another group of people living at this time in Israel, called the "Scribes". They are like human photocopiers – they write down copies of the Old Testament, and are known as experts on the Law of God.

In 67 BC General Pompey from Rome conquers the land of Canaan and enters Jerusalem. The Romans treat the Jewish people fairly and let them follow their religion, as long as they pay their taxes. The Roman Empire is too big to be ruled in every country by Romans, so local leaders are chosen to rule in different areas. The Romans choose a man named Herod as king, and he rules from Judea. He is not God's choice as king, but is the Roman's choice.

Four hundred years pass without God acting for His oppressed people. By this stage, His people are looking for a king from God who will bring political freedom – but God has promised a spiritual Rescuer-King, not a political one. There are 400 years of silence and the people still wait...



## Think it through & discuss

1. What are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah about?
2. Why do the old men cry?
3. Has the new covenant arrived yet? Justify your answer.