

Seminar 2 – Understanding The New Testament

The Bible speaks of God's love for the world and his gracious work in it. Seminar 1 emphasized the Old Testament's story and purpose by illustrating how Jesus is central to all of Scripture. This seminar will consider the important meaning of the gospel and salvation, as well as provide an overview of the 27 New Testament books (Gospels, Acts, Paul's Letters, General Letters to Churches, and Revelation). In the end, students will learn how to present truths discovered in their proper biblical setting by:

1. Grasping how the Intertestamental Period prepared the world for the coming of Jesus.
2. Discovering how New Testament books fit together and proclaim truth for today.
3. Understanding the gospel of God's Kingdom in order to proclaim it clearly.
4. Embracing the fullness of salvation and how it is presented in biblical terms.
5. Applying New Testament themes in the Ugandan church of today.

Before beginning Seminar 2, review the nine Scripture study ideas discovered in Seminar 1.

Session 1- The Kingdoms of Man and "The Fullness of Time"

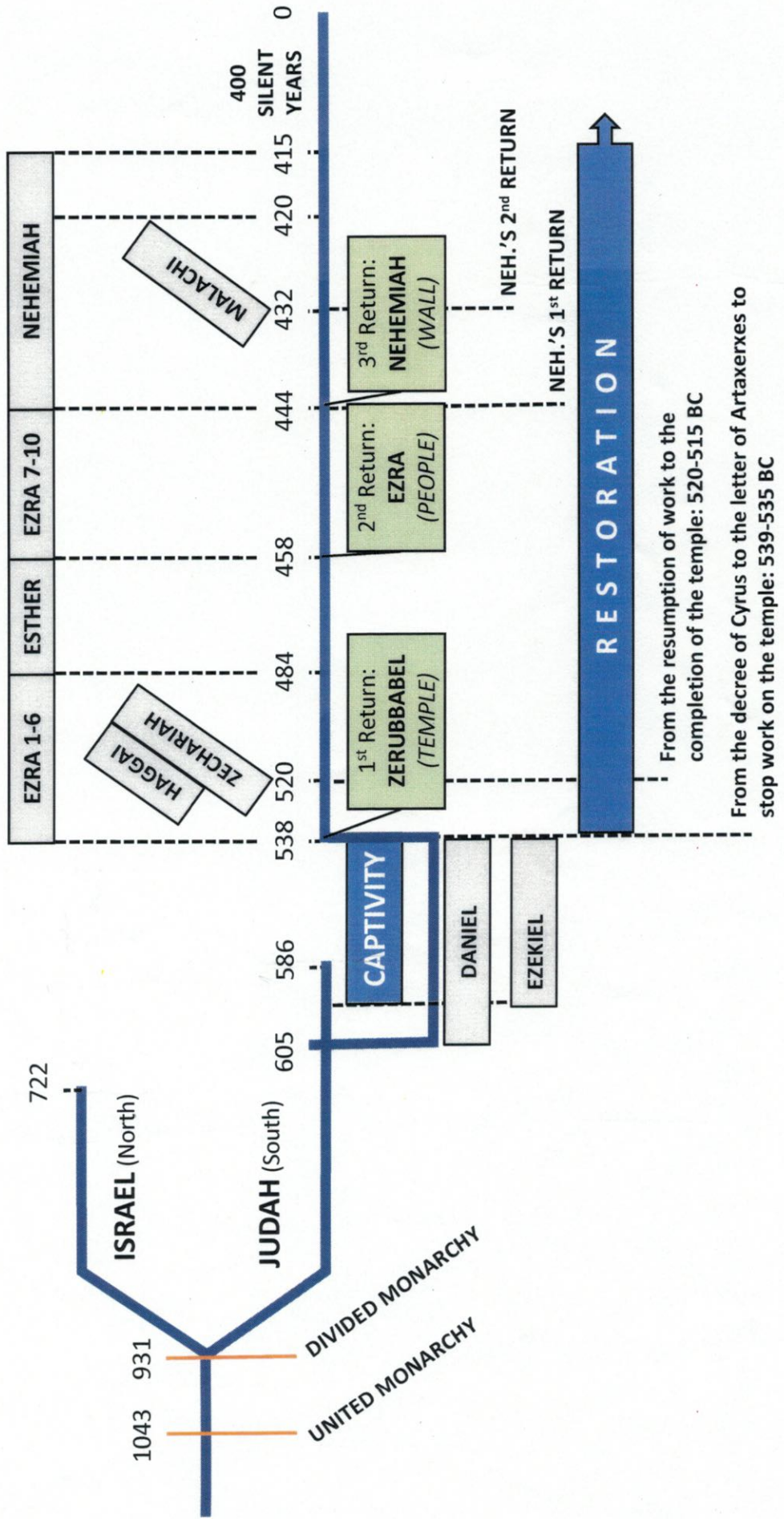
"When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Galatians 4:4-5

The history of the ancient world describes the rise and fall of rulers and kingdoms. Reading through the Old Testament prophets, one discovers that the **Assyrian Kingdom defeated Israel (Northern Kingdom 10 tribes) in 722 BC** and the **Babylonian Kingdom conquered the tribes of Benjamin and Judah (Southern Kingdom), as well as Jerusalem in 586 BC**. After years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule, the Persian Empire conquered Babylon in 536 B.C. under the leadership of Xerxes 1. Despite the political power of these kingdoms, Scripture highlights that God was still at work preparing the world for the coming of Jesus. Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, and Malachi played key roles in the teaching God's Word to God's people (see next page for a chart of *The Captivity and Return to Jerusalem*).

After Malachi wrote the final book of the Old Testament, God's people experienced **God's silence for 400 years**. No prophets spoke God's word. No Jewish king led God's people against the nations. Many Jews were exiled and scattered around the ancient world. It all seemed hopeless. Yet, in the midst of all that was happening to his people, God was preparing the way for the coming of Jesus Christ and for the spread of God's Kingdom beyond Jerusalem into the far-flung corners of the world. In 433 B.C. Malachi prophesied about the coming of a final prophet who would prepare the way for the Messiah. John the Baptist's job was to point to Jesus. After years of silence, God spoke again through John and ultimately in Jesus Christ.

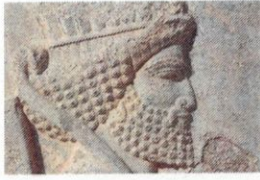
Apply to Life– How do you respond when it appears that God is not involved in events today?

THE CAPTIVITY AND RETURN TO JERUSALEM



Video Assignment – watch “In The Fullness of Time

If God was silent, yet still working, what happened during the 400 years between Malachi and the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus?



The Persian Period (397-336 B.C.) - Persia had a foreign policy that allowed for the Jewish remnant, that lived in Palestine, to continue to worship in the rebuilt Temple (think Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zerubbabel). They were ruled by an appointed governor without much empire interference. **As a result, religious rituals were allowed and the**

High Priest had religious authority over the people.

The Greek Period (336-323 BC) – Persia was defeated by **Alexander the Great** whose goal was to establish a worldwide empire unified by “language, custom, and civilization.” The term “Hellenization” describes Alexander’s desire that the entire western world speak the Greek language and be influenced by Greek thinking, idolatry, and philosophy. This Hellenistic influence lasted well into the Roman Period and had an idolatrous impact on people. **Koine Greek became the common language of the land. Eventually, the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, and was read and used in churches across the Roman Empire.**



The Egyptian (323-198 BC), Syrian (198-165 BC) and Maccabean (165-63) Periods were very turbulent; with much conflict and strife. Yet, during the **Egyptian Period** the Old Testament was translated into Greek and is called the *Septuagint* (meaning 70 in Latin). **The Syrian Period** included the defiling of the Jewish Temple’s Holy Place in

Jerusalem (168 BC) by ruler **Antiochus Epiphanes** (image on coins). He set up an altar and offered a sacrifice to the Greek god Zeus in the Holy Place. This period became desperate for the Jewish people as they were persecuted, the Hebrew Scriptures were being destroyed, and all the religious laws of Sabbath and purity were set aside. During the **Maccabean Period**, the Jewish people revolted defeating the Syrian leadership and as their **religious leaders** grew in authority, different views on God’s law were taught by **Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Scribes.**

The Roman Period (63-4 BC) began when Pompey conquered Syria and entered Palestine. As the Roman Empire expanded, **law and stable government systems** were brought to conquered territories. In doing so, it brought **peace (Pax Romana)** even though Rome embraced slavery of conquered people. In order to improve communication and access around the Roman Empire, **a highway system** was built for safe and easy travel. These highways played an important role in taking the gospel across the Roman Empire (Acts 1:8) and beyond. In Jerusalem, **Herod the Great** ruled the territory and rebuilt the Temple, though he was a worshipper of Roman deities. During this period, several groups emerged and influenced how daily life was lived. (**Herodians** - supported Herod and Rome, **Zealots** - opposed Herodians and Rome and **Essenes** – a religious sect that withdrew from society).



Turn to the next page for a summary of God’s 400-year preparation work for Christ’s coming to earth. Also, discuss how the main views of the Jewish religious leaders might impact Jewish culture and religious life when John the Baptist and Jesus lived. These leaders found John the Baptist interesting, but directly opposed the life and teaching of our Lord.

Summary Sheet

“When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:4-5

Intertestamental History

(400 Years of Silence from God)

How God Prepared the Way for Jesus and the Gospel Message

Xerxes sent Jewish remnant back to Jerusalem to rebuild Temple
Permission given to keep Jewish identity
Other Jews scattered around ancient world

- **Greek Period**

Alexander the Great promoted Greek culture and language
Koine Greek became common language in ancient world so
New Testament could be written and understood easily

- **Egyptian, Syrian, Maccabean Periods**

Old Testament now was written in Greek (Septuagint)
Antiochus Epiphanes abolished Jewish worship in Temple
Religious leadership important during Maccabean period
resulting in role of Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and Scribes

- **Roman Period**

Roads and highways system built
Pax Romana – peace by strength of Roman army
Growing desire for Messiah to come and defeat Roman rule
Local synagogues became centers of worship in and out of Israel

Main Jewish Religious Leaders at the Time of Jesus

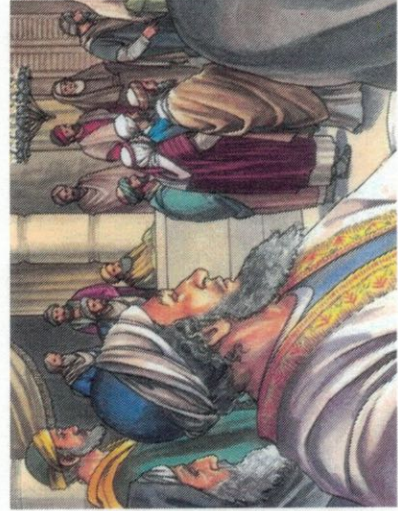
Pharisees – observed the Jewish religious laws in Old Testament and added many laws and restrictions to them. They had a great impact on everyday life due to their emphasis on outward obedience to law. They believed in the coming of the Messiah, but proclaimed it wasn't Jesus.

Sadducees – believed only in the written law found in the Pentateuch and rejected “oral traditions added to by Pharisees. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and were not interested in the coming of the Messiah. They enjoyed their status as priests and loved political power.

High Priests – Secular and religious leaders responsible for the upkeep of the Temple and managing peaceful order among the Jewish community. They were appointed by the Roman governor of Judea.

Sanhedrin– Council of Religious Leaders that enforced religious laws and ruled on day-to-day affairs.

Essenes – lived in separation from other religious leaders and had large Scripture Library. Was John the Baptist part of this community?



Small Group Study on John the Baptist – The Final Old Testament Prophet



*Why study John the Baptist? Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 4:5,6 speak of one who prepares the way for the promised Messiah. In the Gospels, we discover that John the Baptist is God's spokesman in the "fullness of time". His message of repentance and forgiveness threatened the Jewish religious leaders of his day. **Break into small groups** and each group is assigned one of the following points to study. Come back to the large group and report your answers.*

1. What does Luke 1:5-25, 39-45; and 67-80 tell us about the birth of John the Baptist and his parents? What is surprising about these verses?
2. Summarize how the following verses describe John the Baptist's God-given role.
 - Matthew 3:1-12,
 - Mark 1:7-8,
 - Luke 3:1-18
 - John 1:6-9, 3:22-36
3. Why did John the Baptist baptize Jesus? (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-13; Luke 3:21-22)
4. What did Jesus say about John and the purpose of John's mission? (Luke 7:18-35)
5. **Read John 3:30** and describe John the Baptist's view of Jesus. How do John's thoughts differ from the religious leaders of his day? Why is this verse such an important truth for you to apply as you point people to Jesus?

Large Group Application Questions for Session 1

How did God's silence, over 400 years of foreign occupation, build a desire for a Jewish political Messiah to overthrow Rome and set up God's earthly kingdom?

How have recent events in Ugandan history impacted the nation's view of Jesus Christ and Christianity (For example: the death of the Ugandan Martyrs in 1885-1887; the East African Revival during the late 1920's and 1930's; the nation at war in 1980's; the rise of Islam in recent years)?

How do Ugandan religious leaders of today remind you of the religious of Jesus time? What are some ways you can handle the temptations of power and prestige that come to leaders?

What are some ways that God is at work in Uganda today preparing people for the gospel message?

Wrap-up Prayer - Join together and pray for God's Spirit to move across Uganda and bring people to Jesus!