

17-18 Bible Study #10

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The Return

- The historical reflections on **the return** are listed in the books of:
 - **Ezra**
 - **Nehemiah**
 - **Haggai**
 - **Zechariah**
- The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah may originally have been one book from the author of the Book of Chronicles
- The Return lasted from **539 B.C.** to **444 B.C.** . (a total of 95 Years)

The 14 Historical Books of the Bible

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Numbers
- Joshua
- Judges
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1st Kings
- 2nd Kings
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- 1 Maccabees
- Luke
- Acts

Babylonian Kings

- **Nebuchadnezzar 605-562 B.C.**
 - Destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and begins the Exile 581 B.C.
- **Belshazzar was later a viceroy in Babylon**
 - Held a feast using the vessels from the Temple
 - Saw the hand writing on the wall which were interpreted by Daniel who predicted his demise

The Return

- Both *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* deal with the century containing the 3 returns of the Jews from the Exile: **538 B.C.; 525-457 B.C.; 444 B.C.**
- Their main purpose is to:
 - Describe the religious and political reorganization after the return
 - Underline the workings of God's providence
- They do not present a complete history and the order of events may not be completely accurate

Key Dates

- **King Nebuchadnezzar** – 605-562 B.C.
- **King Cyrus** – 550 – 525 B.C.
 - Fall of Babylon and the **Edict of Cyrus** – 539 B.C. allowed Jews to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple and the city
 - Based on prophesies of *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah*
- **1st return – 538 B.C.**
 - **Zerubbabel** was the governor
 - **Jeshua** was the high priest
 - The Altar was built 536 B.C. (construction on the rest if temple halted for 20 years)
 - The Samaritan offer to help was rejected
- The number of those who returned - **42,360**
- All of captured Temple treasures were returned
- Foundation of the Temple was laid in 536 B.C.
 - Youth rejoiced
 - Elderly wept

Key Dates

- **2nd return 525-457 BC**
- *The prophet **Haggai*** called for the people to return to the construction of the Temple
- *The Prophet **Zechariah*** called for construction of the Temple 520 – 480 B.C.
- ***King Darius*** 522-486 B.C.
 - Temple was completed – 515 B.C.
 - Jews were ordered to stop building of Jerusalem
 - Issued an edict to stop construction
 - Asked by the Jews to check the records of Cyrus
 - Finds Cyrus letter and allowed building to resume

Key Dates

- ***King Artaxerxes*** 465-424 B.C.
- ***Ezra*** returned and taught in Jerusalem in 458 B.C.
- **3rd return 444 B.C.**
 - **Nehemiah** led the rebuilding of walls of Jerusalem – 444 B.C.

Ezra

- **Ezra 1:1-4**
 - Cyrus King of Persia conquered the Babylonians
 - He made a proclamation (decree) in 539 B.C. directing the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem
 - The reason for this decision can be found in **Isaiah 44:24-45:7; Jeremiah 50-51**

Ezra (Cont)

- Here, the prophet Isaiah talked about the rise of a man named Cyrus who will be called “the anointed” who God has ordained to restore “the kingdom”
- According to Jewish tradition, the Jewish historian Josephus states that the reason for Cyrus making this decree is that when the Jews saw Cyrus rise to power they told him that their God had prophesied about him and what he would do

Ezra (Cont)

- The Jews presented the Prophecy of Isaiah to *King Cyrus* and when he read this passage he made his proclamation
- Whatever the case may be, *Cyrus* released the Jews from the Babylonian captivity and allowed them to return to Jerusalem and begin to rebuild the temple *

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 1:5**

- Many of the Jews returned to the destroyed city of Jerusalem and began rebuilding the temple
- We see only members of three tribes returning (Judah, Benjamin, and Levi)
- Jerusalem was originally part of the land given to Benjamin but was later annexed to Judah by King David
- Many Levites also lived in the city as they were the only ones who could serve in the temple
- Members of all three of these tribes were taken into the exile*

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 1:6-11**

- *Shesh-bazzar* is another name for *Zerubbabel*
- He was not referred to as a king, but as a governor under the Persian Empire
- This was a wise decision by *Cyrus* as he put on the throne a descendant of David and gave him authority to rule but only as a vassal leader
- He keep the Jewish people happy because they could say that they had (sort of) a king over them in the line of David
- The Persians were happy as long as he ensured that the taxes flowed to *King Cyrus*

Ezra (Cont)

- Next, we see a list of the items taken by the Babylonians and placed in their temple being returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:9-11)
- Notice that the list does not include the **Ark of the Covenant** because the Babylonians did not remove it from the Temple (2nd Maccabees 2:4)
- We can see a very similar list of what was taken in 2nd Kings 25 where again there is no reference to the **Ark of the Covenant**

Ezra (Cont)

- This tells us that Indiana Jones was looking in the wrong place as it certainly was not in Egypt or Ethiopia
- And also that the Ark was not present in the temple when it was destroyed
- The king also directed that the governors of surrounding provinces provide gold and silver to the returning Israelites*

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 2:1-2**

- The major players are **Zerubbabel** and **Jeshua**
 - **Jesus** is a version of the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic name **Jeshua** which came for the Hebrew
 - When it reached the Greek the ending was changed to “us” to avoid it ending in “a” making it a feminine word
- What is important about these two men is that they were the leaders of the returning people
- **Joshua** was the high priest (religious leader) and **Zerubbabel** was the governor in the line of David under the authority of the Medo-Persian leaders *

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 2:59-63**
 - Within the list of the tribes and number by tribe that were in the first return is a section dealing with those who could not prove their family heritage
- **Ezra 2:64** provides the total number of the assembly
 - 42,360
 - 7,337 men servants and maid servants
 - 200 male and female singers
- The section concludes with their offerings to the temple*

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 3:1-6**

- Now that many have returned they turned to their decision to rebuild the temple by **building the altar**
- It happened during the period of the **Festival of Booths** which commemorated the dwelling of God among His people during the years of wandering in the desert
- The people in Jerusalem wanted the return of God and the glory cloud

Ezra (Cont)

- They knew this would not happen until they rebuild the temple (the garage for the Ark of the Covenant)
- Thus, they celebrate the feast of Booths as the beginning of the restoration process
- But they had not laid the foundation for the temple at this point*

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 3:10-13**

- There is some good and bad news here
- After laying the foundation they sang Psalm 118
- The foundation was laid, but the temple was in no way like the old temple built by King Solomon
- The young men of Jerusalem were happy at the dedication of the foundation while the old men wept as they said this is not the way it is suppose to look

Ezra (Cont)

- The old men were discouraged because:
 - They could see by the foundation just how small it was going to be
 - They did not see any way for them to cover this temple with gold as had been the case of Solomon's temple
 - Further, they saw no way to ever restore the kingdom to its original power *

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 4:1-3**

- The second problem that plagued them was that they were being harassed by the *Samaritans* (2nd Kings 19:37)
- These were the remnant of the northern kingdom which had been infested with peoples and pagan religions from five locations within Assyria
- So, 70 years after the destruction of the temple, the returning Jews started rebuilding the temple and the *Samaritans* arrived and offered to help in this project

Ezra (Cont)

- After being rejected by the Jews, the *Samaritans* became a major roadblock to the rebuilding of the temple
- They begin to harass and throw rocks at the Jews working on the temple to prevent them from completing this task
- This leads God to send them a prophet to encourage them to complete the building of the temple*

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 4:4-24**

- The *Samaritan* began in earnest to stop the building of the temple by writing a letter asking King *Artaxerxes*, King of Persia, to forbid the Jews from working on the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem
- The king responded by making a decree that the work must be stopped until he could properly research their request
- Then the *Samaritans* went to Jerusalem to enforce this decree

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 5:1-17**

- During this period God helps *Zerubbabel* and *Jeshua* in two ways
 - First, He sent the prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah** to encourage them to finish building the temple
 - Second, He gave them political backing for this project as two or three more proclamations from the Medo Persian empire arrived confirming that they had the right to build the temple
- With this they began the rebuilding of the temple*

Persian Kings

- ***Darius I* 522-486 B.C.**
 - Divided his empire into 20 provinces (satrapies)
 - Decreed that the Jews **may not** rebuild
- ***Xerxes I* 486-465 B.C.**

Ezra (Cont)

- **Ezra 6:1-15**

- *King Darius* decreed that a search be made to see if King Cyrus had decreed the rebuilding of the temple
- It was finally decreed by Darius that the Jews **could rebuild the temple**
- So the God of Israel commanded them to rebuild the temple through Haggai and Zachariah and they also get the necessary political backing from the King of Persia by the decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes
- So they finally completed the task in the sixth year of Darius*