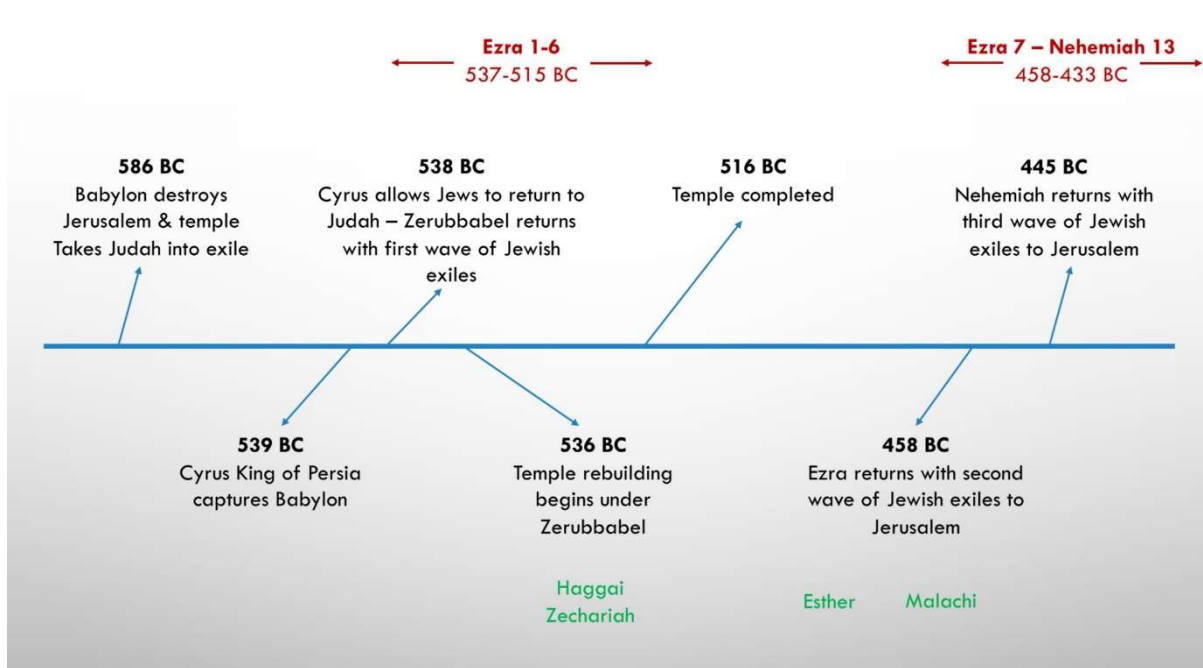


Ezra and Nehemiah

Study 1: The First Return - By God's Stirring (Ezra 1-2)



Jeremiah 25 (Written between 597 and 550 BC)

11. This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.
12. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.
13. I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.
14. For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.

Isaiah 44 (Written no later than 681 BC)

24. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself,
25. who frustrates the signs of liars and makes fools of diviners, who turns wise men back and makes their knowledge foolish,
26. who confirms the word of his servant and fulfils the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited,' and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins';
27. who says to the deep, 'Be dry; I will dry up your rivers';
28. who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfil all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

2 Chronicles 36

20. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia,
21. to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

Ezra 1

The Proclamation of Cyrus

1. 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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:
2. "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
3. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.
4. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."
5. Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.
6. And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered.

7. Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods.
8. Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.
9. And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers,
10. 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels;
11. all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

Q1: What do we learn about God from the words of Jeremiah and Isaiah and subsequent events?

God keeps his promises. God works through other people.

Q2: Why is this so important in establishing the truth about Jesus?

Because there are more than 300 prophecies about Jesus that he fulfilled.

Q3: What is significant about Cyrus?

He was a Persian, not a Babylonia. Persia had conquered Babylon just before his decree.

Q4: From another source the Cyrus boasts of restoring holy sanctuaries (plural) beyond the Tigris. Who is responsible for Cyrus sending the people of Israel back to Jerusalem and why?

Cyrus wanted peace with surrounding nations.

God was responsible. To fulfil his covenant with Abraham and Moses.

Q5: How does Cyrus characterise God?

The God of Israel. The God of heaven. Not the God of the whole earth.

Q6: Why is such attention given to the treasures in vv 10,11?

To show that God had protected everything that was ransacked from Jerusalem when the people were exiled to Babylon.

1 Kings 7/8

51. Thus all the work that King Solomon did on the house of the LORD was finished. And Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, the silver, the gold, and the vessels, and stored them in the treasuries of the house of the LORD.
1. Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion.
2. And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month.
3. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark.
4. And they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up.
5. And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered.
6. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim.
7. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles.

8. And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day.
9. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.
10. And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD,
11. so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

Q7: What did the temple represent for God's people (in Ezra's time)?

The Temple was where God was. The Temple, priesthood and sacrificial system were God's provision to allow a sinful people to approach him.

Q8: What is the significance if the temple to us today?

The church, i.e. believers in the Gospel, are the temple. Jesus is our high priest. His sacrifice allows was, a sinful people, to approach God.

Ezra 2 (extracts)

The Exiles Return

1. Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town.
2. They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, pMordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.
The number of the men of the people of Israel:
3. the sons of Parosh, 2,172. ¹
4. The sons of Shephatiah, 372.
5. The sons of Arah, 775.
6. The sons of Pahath-moab, namely the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,812.
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20. The sons of Gibbar, 95. ²
21. The sons of Bethlehem, 123.
22. The men of Netophah, 56.
23. The men of Anathoth, 128.
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36. The priests: the ssons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, 973.
37. The sons of Immer, 1,052.
38. The tsons of Pashhur, 1,247.
39. The sons of Harim, 1,017.
40. The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74.
41. The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128.

¹ This list is descendants of specific named people

² This list relates to inhabitants of specific towns

42. The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, in all 139.
43. The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,
44. the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon,
45. the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub,
.....
58. All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.
59. The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their fathers' houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel:
60. the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, 652.
61. Also, of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, and the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name).
62. These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.
63. The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.
64. The whole assembly together was 42,360,
65. besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers.
66. Their horses were 736, their mules were 245,
67. their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720.
68. Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site.
69. According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold³, 5,000 minas of silver⁴, and 100 priests' garments.
70. Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.

Q9: Why does Ezra spend so much time giving these lists? what do they show us?

The strong support for the return to Israel; The inclusion of priests and temple servants to re-establish a formal pattern of worship; A desire to ensure the "purity" of the descendants of Abraham.

Q10: Why are verses 68 and 69 important?

Because it provided the resources to kick-start the rebuilding project.

Q11: How does the return from exile fit in with the repeated theme of the Bible?

Deliverance from captivity. The escape from Egypt. The return from exile. Our release from captivity to sin to a new heaven and earth.

³ About 520 kg

⁴ About 3000 kg

Q12: Does Ezra 1 & 2 have any implications for us today?

Trust in God's promises and his ability to deliver what seems impossible (rebuild a temple, rebuild the walls).

Recognise what he has done and offer our praise.

Like the people of Israel, we are sinful. We need to confess our sins, to avoid being exiled from God.

Realise that God works through people without their realising it.

We can pray for him to influence the behaviour of Vladimir Putin, our government.