

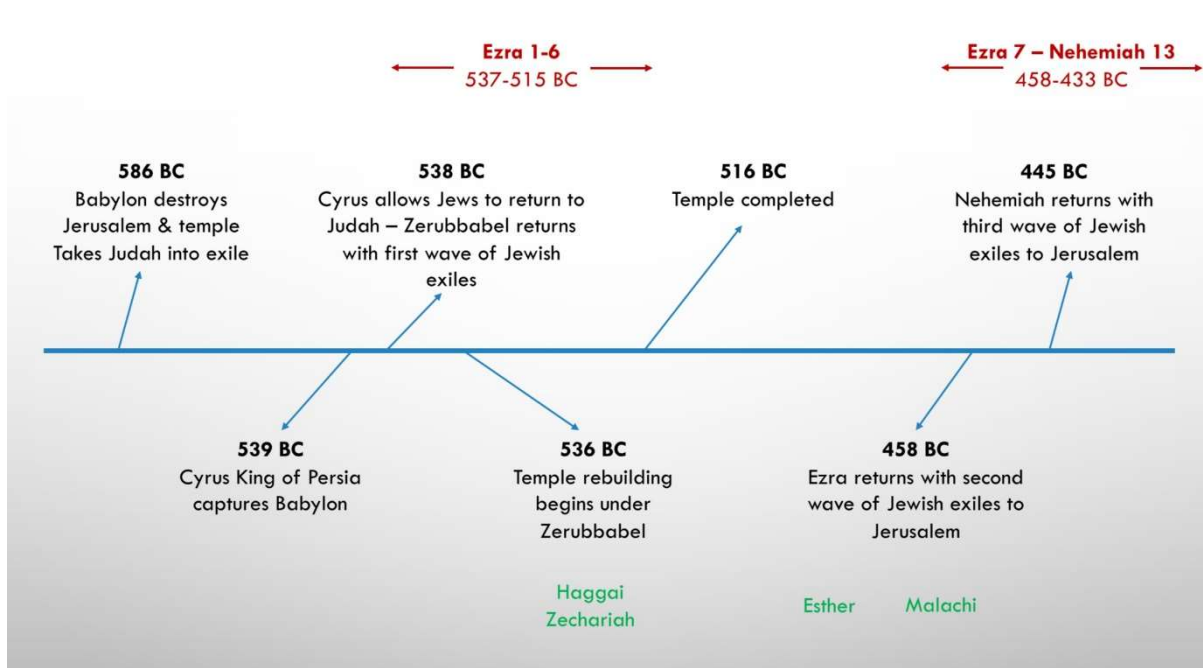
Ezra and Nehemiah

Study 4: A Second Return – By God’s Good Hand (Ezra 7-8)

Context

After the temple is rebuilt, the book moves forward 57 years to focus on a second returning group, led by Ezra. There’s a new Persian king (Artaxerxes), and there is the same pattern of God’s sovereign direction of the king to bless and prosper the returning remnant. Chapters 7–8 mirror the process of preparation we saw in Ezra 1–2. Here it is Ezra who is sent by the king, this time not to rebuild but to teach the “laws of your God” (7:25–26).

Timeline



Ezra 7: 1-10

1. Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah,
2. son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub,
3. son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth,
4. son of Zerariah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki,
5. son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest—
6. this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him.
7. And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants.
8. And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

9. For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem,
10. for the good hand of his God was on him.
11. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

Q1: What do we learn about Ezra from these verses?

He is a priest descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses.

He is a scribe skilled in the law of Moses

The good hand of God was on him

He had set his heart to teach statutes and rules in Israel

He had the courage to ask the king for what he needed

He was given authority and everything he needed by Artaxerxes

Q2: How does God figure in these verses?

The hand of God was on him

God had given Moses the Law

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.

Ezra 7: 11-28

11. This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel:

12. "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace. And now
13. I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you.
14. For you are sent by the king and his seven counsellors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the Law of your God, which is in your hand,
15. and also to carry the silver and gold that the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,
16. with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, vowed willingly for the house of their God that is in Jerusalem.
17. With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God that is in Jerusalem.
18. Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God.
19. The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem.
20. And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which it falls to you to provide, you may provide it out of the king's treasury.
21. "And I, Artaxerxes the king, make a decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence,
22. up to 100 talents¹ of silver, 100 cors² of wheat, 100 baths³ of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much.
23. Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be done in full for the house of the God of heaven, lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons.
24. We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on anyone of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.
25. "And you, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God that is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God. And those who do not know them, you shall teach.
26. Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on him, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of his goods or for imprisonment."
27. Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem,
28. and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

¹ A talent = 34kg

² 1 core = 220 litres

³ 1 bath = 23 litres

Q3: How does the second return in chapter 7 compare to the first return in chapter 1?

Both were authorised by the King

Any Israelite who wanted to leave was allowed to do so

On the first return the looted treasures of the temple were returned; on the second, the treasure came from the King's treasury

Both were the work of God

Both kings constrained the role of God. "the God of heaven"

The first was to rebuild the temple, the second was to make sacrifices to God and to re-establish the pattern of worship.

Q4: What were the King's motives?

Fear. (v27). "Lest his wrath be against then realm of the king and his sons.

Q5: How does Ezra respond?

By thanking God.

By gathering leading men to go with him

Isaiah 41: 8-10

8. But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
9. you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off";
10. fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Psalms 106: 40-48⁴

40. Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage;
41. he gave them into the hand of the nations, so that those who hated them ruled over them.
42. Their enemies oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their power.
43. Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes and were brought low through their iniquity.
44. Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry.
45. For their sake he remembered his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
46. He caused them to be pitied by all those who held them captive.
47. Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.
48. Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD!

Q6: These words would have been familiar to Ezra, a scribe. What words stand out?

Fear not

Be not dismayed

I will strengthen you

I will help you

I will uphold you

⁴ This psalm is believed to have been written by David, so is prophetic not historical. Even if this particular psalm was written after the events, there are many other similar prophecies of exile and return.

He remembered his covenant

Caused them to be pitied by those who held them captive.

Ezra 8

Genealogy of those who returned with Ezra

1. These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king:
2. Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of ulthamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush.
3. Of the sons of Shecaniah, who was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered 150 men.
4. Of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men.
5. Of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah the son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men.
6. Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men.
7. Of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiah the son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men.
8. Of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him 80 men.
9. Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men.
10. Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith the son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men.
11. Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah, the son of Bebai, and with him 28 men.
12. Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men.
13. Of the sons of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men.
14. Of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

Ezra Sends for Levites

15. I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi.
16. Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of insight,
17. and sent them to Iddo, the leading man at the place Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers and the temple servants at the place Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God.
18. And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18;
19. also Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20;
20. besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.

Fasting and Prayer for Protection

21. Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods.
22. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him."
23. So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Priests to Guard Offerings

24. Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them.

25. And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counsellors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered.
26. I weighed out into their hand 650 talents of silver, and silver vessels worth 200 talents, and 100 talents of gold,
27. 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics, and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold.
28. And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers.
29. Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD."
30. So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

31. Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.
32. We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days.
33. On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui.
34. The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

35. At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD.
36. They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.

Q7: What did Ezra discover when they paused by a river? Why was that important?

There were no Levites in the group.
That meant no ministers for the temple.

Q8: How did Ezra address this issue?

He sent for some.

Q9: What Godly wisdom can we learn from this episode and verses 21-23.

Trust God .. he will provide and protect.
Better planning would have helped!

Q10: Why did Ezra refuse military protection (Nehemiah accepted it).

He had already told the king that he trusted God for protection (v22) and after that was ashamed to go back to the king.

Q11: Can you explain what is going on in verses 24-34. How does Ezra treat the twelve leading priests?

He placed his trust in them?
Ezra expected the inventory at the end of the journey would match that at the beginning' that was a demonstration that the priests could be trusted.

Q12: What did the returning exiles do on their arrival in Jerusalem?

They offered sacrifices to God.

They delivered their commission from Artaxerxes to the local officials

They got to work with the people already responsible for the house of God.

Q13: How do verses 21-23 give us a glimpse of the Gospel?

The hand of our God is for good to all who seek him

They asked (implored) God and he responded (listened to their entreaty)

The hand of God is for good on all who seek him through Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

The power of his wrath is against all who forsake him

The gospel shows how God delivers sinful rebels from the wrath they deserve.

Q14: What was the mistake that King Artaxerxes made?

He thought that he could buy relief from the wrath of God. 7v23 “lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons. lest his wrath be against the realm of the king and his sons”.

Q15: How is God helping to deliver his covenant among the remnant and re-establish Israel?

He provided the law through Moses which survived exile.

He motivated Ezra to study the law and be enthusiastic about teaching others

He provided Levites to serve in the temple

He protected the holy objects from the temple during exile and the journey back to Jerusalem

Q16: (The difficult question) What implications does this study on your own life? Have you learned anything new about God? Will you change how you lead your daily life?

This study shows how God kept his covenant and how he responded to the needs of the people of Israel.

We saw how Ezra and the people around him trusted in God’s promises. I need to do the same.

We saw how Ezra took his problems to God and God responded. I need to do the same.

We saw how Ezra and Nehemiah before him were not frightened to ask for what mighty have seemed to be impossible. I should not assume, for example, that someone will refuse an invitation to a guest event.