

The Bible Project

THE RESTORATION OF JERUSALEM/JUDEA

Week 32



History of the period from Exile to Ezra/Nehemiah – the “restoration”

BIG IDEA 1 – Babylon defeated; Persia takes over

Cyrus takes Nabonidus apart – Nabonidus had changed the religion of Babylon and thus destroyed its internal consistency – population already not particularly in favor of their government

Opis fell, then Babylon capitulated without a fight and

Cyrus enters in triumph, October 539

Cyrus – the model of toleration – worshipped Marduk

By 538 Cyrus ruled all of western Asia to the Egyptian frontier

“Cyrus was one of the truly enlightened rulers of ancient times.” --Bright, 362

Instead of crushing nationalism by brutality and deportation, Cyrus used complex bureaucracy, the army and efficient system of communication.

Respected customs and religions of all subject peoples, including Babylon

BIG IDEA 2 – Judah begins restoration

538 Cyrus issues edict of restoration: Ez 1.2-4, 6.3-5

Temple be rebuilt; expenses out of royal treasury

Shesh-bazzar – prince of Judah given lead

Member of royal house

Chr 3.18 “Shenazzar” son of Jehoiachin

Return

Probably not many returnees accompanied him

Many Jews well established in Babylon – soon many Jewish names appear in business documents.

Telescoped his work into that of Zerubbabel

Given title governor in Ezra 5.14

Proceeded to begin laying foundations to temple – Ez 5.16

Possibly began to renew worship services

Early years of restoration

World situation 538-522

Persian power grew to totalitarian dimensions – no sign of Isaiah’s triumph of God’s rule

Cyrus dies on a military campaign in 530 BC

Son Cambyses adds Egypt to Persian Empire in 525 BC

Addition of Egypt to Persian Empire was like a door slammer on Israel's hopes because Egypt had for a long time been the source from which Judah could count on support in its many bids for independence.

Jewish Community

The "day of small things" Zch 4.10

522 population including returnees not above 20,000

Jerusalem still a ruin; *population small*; *Neh11.1 10% sent from country to Jerusalem.*

Hardship, privation, insecurity combined with succession of poor seasons, partial crop failures – Haggai 1.9-11, 2.15-17

Aristocracy of Samaria resented any limitations on their prerogatives, therefore, hostile.

Open hostilities emerged

Discouragement with poor facility they were building, many Jews ready to give up

Shesh-bazzar fades from scene – probably in his sixties at the time of return

His nephew Zerubbabel succeeds him – Zerubbabel is Jehoiachin's grandson, son of Shealtiel.

Joshua ben Jehozadak, a Zadokite priest, worked on spiritual affairs.

[“Zerubbabel” means “Offspring of Babylon”] – arrives in Jerusalem sometime between 538 & 522 – in place ahead of Darius accession to the Persian throne.

Morale was dangerously low – Haggai & Zechariah – the high hopes raised by Isaiah were too high for the hardscrabble existence of the returned exiles facing economic tensions, political pressures and religious accommodationism.

And the harder things got, the more difficult it became to maintain both identity and morale; so religious mixtures grew – spiritual leaders began calling for exceptionalism – Hag 2

Failure to get on with Temple was symptomatic

Haggai ties that failure to the failure of crops and the lack of blessing

It took 18 years to get the work really started (520)

Temple of sorts was completed in 515 – 70 years after captivity.

BIG IDEA 3 – TEMPLE COMPLETED AND DEDICATED

Darius comes 522

- Cambyses commits suicide
- Darius, an officer, takes control; empire goes into revolt all over
- 520 Darius finally settles things down
- This is the period of Haggai and Zech. Who harkened back to the official pre-exilic theology and encouraged the re-establishment of the Davidic Dynasty and rebuilding of Zion
- Temple dedicated with great rejoicing – March 515 –Ez. 6.10
- What happens to Zerubbabel is a mystery – **we hear no more and none of his family succeed him.**
- Judah eventually may have been administered by Nehemiah as a Samaritan province.
- David line gone – difficult to harken back to that old form ever again.

Next 70 years – No information

Obadiah? Malachi

Disappearance of Zerubbabel and Davidic line meant no re-establishment of Jewish nation along old lines –***not even in modified form***

The Persian Empire

Darius 522-486 – Persia reached its zenith under Darius! -- His only failure was to conquer Greece

Xerxes - 486-465 – put down rebellion at Babylon

Attacked and overwhelmed Sparta at Thermopylae, captured Athens, torched the Acropolis

Saw 1/3 of the Persian fleet destroyed at Salamis

Eventually lost all of Greece and retreated from Europe.

Assassinated and succeeded by a younger son Artaxerxes I

Artaxerxes I 465-424 further retrenched under Greek pressure and lost much of Egypt

the Jews 515-450 – not much positive information but clear that no Davidic kingdom was about to emerge and therefore, no major rush to return from exile to Jerusalem.

- Babylon remained a center for Jewish life; prospered; promoted like Nehemiah;
- Jewish community found at Sardis during this period
- Egypt – lower Egypt
- Elephantine – highly syncretistic religion – no urge to return to Judaism

Restoration Jews

Groups drifted back, population may have doubled by mid-5th century – list of Ezra 2/ Nehemiah 7 makes population a little under 50,000 – many arriving after the reconstruction of the temple.

Neh 3 shows many towns now inhabited. Jerusalem still had few inhabitants. Neh 11.1 Insecurity from Samaria – accused of sedition during the time of Xerxes when Egypt was in revolt



Edomites moving into land under pressure from Arabs – Petra etc. overrun by Arabs, Edomites move into southern Palestine which becomes “Idumea” – Obadiah
Jews tried to rebuild walls but Samaritans getting orders from Xerxes stopping the work by force of arms—intention to keep Jews permanently defenseless.

Completion of Temple gave Jews a rallying place and status as a worshipping community --- regarded themselves as the true remnant of Israel.

But Morale still low –

Priests offered sick and injured animals on altar – Mal 1.6-14

Partiality in law – Mal 2.1-9

Sabbath neglected – Neh 13.14-22

Nonpayment of tithes – Mal 3. 7-10

Forced Levites to leave duties to make their own living
 Divorce a public scandal – Mal 3.5
 Cheating of employees for wages – Mal 3.5
 Poor reduced to servitude – Neh 5.1-5
 Lines separating Jews from pagan environment break down with intermarriage –
 Mal 2.11ff

Some new path would have to be found if Israel was to survive.

BIG IDEA 4 – Reorganization of Restoration community – Ezra/Nehemiah

Ezra-Nehemiah Chronology From *NIV Chronological Study Bible*.

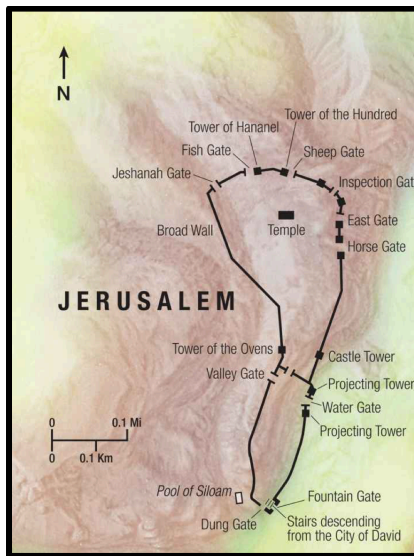
Date	Event	Reference	Chronology	Comment
538 BC	Edict of Cyrus, first exiles with Sheshbazzar	Ezra 1	Cyrus Conquers Babylon in 539 BC	Sheshbazzar may have been Zerubbabel
515 BC	Temple completed and dedicated	Ezra 6	6 th Year of Darius I is 515 BC	Puts Ezra in Jerusalem before Nehemiah
458 BC	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem	Ezra 7	7 th year of Artaxerxes I is 458 BC	Ezra gets to Jerusalem before Nehemiah
445 BC	Nehemiah arrives	Neh. 2.1	20 th year of Artaxerxes I 445 BC	Elephantine records confirm
433 BC	Nehemiah returns to Persia for unspecified time	Neh 5.14, 13.6	32 nd year of Artaxerxes I 433 BC	
428 BC	another Proposal for Ezra's arrival	Ezra 7	The [3]7 th year of Art I	Transmission error???
398 BC	3 rd proposal for Ezra's arrival	Ezra 7	7 th year of Artaxerxes II is 398 BC	Bible does not say which Art is which????

Nehemiah – Artaxerxes I – 445-433 BC – time confirmed by Elephantine texts

Ezra's relation in time

1. The way Bible has it – Ezra came in 7th year of ART (458) and completed his work shortly after Nehemiah arrives on scene
2. Seventh year of ART II – 398 – long after Neh passed from scene
3. Bright: “7th” year a scribal error (37th?) of ART I puts him in Jerusalem after Neh (428) but before Neh is finished. – Bright claims the disarrangement comes from the transmission of the text.

BIG IDEA 4a – Mission of Nehemiah: Material rebuilding



Coincides with Golden Age of Athens – Pericles, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Phidias, Socrates, Plato
In ART I's interest to stabilize Palestine, the better to secure his communication lines with the always-fractious Egyptians – while watching the Greeks destroy themselves in the Peloponnesian War which ends in 404 with no more Greece.

Provisionally, Neh was in the right place at the right time. Probably a Eunuch as required.
Dec 445 his brother from Jerusalem – Hanani – informed him of deplorable conditions
Approached the king, given permission and sets out – perhaps going first to Babylon to collect Jews to go with him.

Most pressing problem – security – City Walls

Levy labor with specific group assigned to specific wall section

work done in 52 days – sort of. Reinforcing and finishing gates and battlements took another 2 years 4 months to Dec, 437 – Josephus.

Incredible difficulty

- Sanballat and Tobiah – connected to high priests in Jer.
- connected with Geshem – from Arabia to Sinai
- Mockery
- Terrorism
- Fifth column of relatives within Jerusalem who stole Neh's plans and carried threats, etc
- plot against his life announced by a prophet they hired

First term 445-433 Returned to Persian Court

Given second commission and returns to Jerusalem

May have planned regularizing religious affairs with elders in Babylon.

Returned to find a mess

High priest had installed Tobiah in a room in the Temple

Cleaned up the collection of funds for Levites and returned them to proper place

Appointed honest treasurers.

Ordered city gates shut all Sabbath Day. Drove merchants out of markets outside walls.

Sought to restrict intermarriage with foreigners – when he found that high priest Eliashib's grandson had married the daughter of Sanballat he ran him out of the country!



BIG IDEA 4b –Mission of Ezra – SPIRITUAL REBUILDING

Nehemiah has in a physical sense preserved the security of Judah

Ezra comes to reform its inner life. Neh with EZ would have probably proved temporary.

Ezra came with a copy of the Law – had edict from king with power to enforce it.

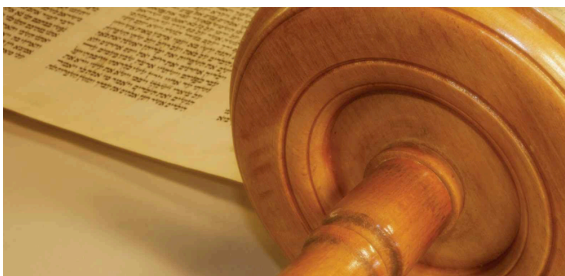
Empowered to teach law to the Jews in the land beyond the river (Abar-Nahara—Trans-Euphrates) and to set up an administrative system to see that it was obeyed.

All who claimed allegiance would now have to, by Persian directive, conform their lives in accordance with the Law brought by Ezra.

Title Ezra 7.12: ***“Scribe of the law of the God of heaven”*** was actually a Persian title: “Royal Secretary for the Law of the God of Heaven.” (Minister of the State for Jewish Religious Affairs”)

Ezra was a priest, but we do not know how he got this title.

Travelled with a company to return, but though journey dangerous, Ezra was ashamed to ask for military escort because that would seem to imply that God could not take care of him, after fasting and prayer, arrived safely in Jerusalem four months later.



Life Application Chronological Bible

Reforms

Ezra Commissioned to instruct the people in the law Ez 7.25f

Ezra did so – **THE FIRST BIBLE PROJECT** [!] -- Neh 8

Hoped that people would hear the Word and respond

People responded to the Word when Ezra made a great emotional show of confession and penitence and voluntarily suggest a covenant to divorce their foreign wives.

Princes and elders order all the people to present themselves in Jer on pain of exclusion and confiscation of property – Ezra had this authority but exercised it only through the recognized leaders of the people – EZ 10

Downpour of rain did not stop crowd from gathering to hear rebuke and only in the main pleaded for time because of rain and the time necessary to untangle affairs – the task of investigation being complicated. 3 months later all mixed marriages were dissolved.

Climax comes in Nehemiah 9 & 10 with the new covenant to live according to the law. 9.38; 10.29

Bright believes Ezra brought the completed Pentateuch and imposed it as the law of God at the reading to the people. The Pentateuch was by now in its present form and was thereafter known to be the normative rule of faith and practice.

The distinguishing mark of a Jew would not be political nationality, nor primarily ethnic background, nor even regular participation in the Temple worship, but adherence to the law of Moses. The great watershed of Israel's history had been crossed and her future secured for all time to come.
—Bright p. 390