



Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Second Series: “The Bottom Edge” Old Testament: History

Lesson 12: Exile and Return

I. Some Background Information

A. Historical overview

In the 8th century B.C., Assyria devastated the Northern Kingdom of Israel. One hundred years later, Babylon smashes Jerusalem’s defenses (2 King 25:10), destroys the temple and palace (2 Kings 25:9, 13-17, Jer. 52:13, 17-23), devastates the country side (Jer. 32:43), kills many of the leaders and priests (2Kings 25:18-21) and deports up to 1/3 of the total population of Judah (most of whom are from cities and upper classes).

“After some years of initial hardship, the exiles made adjustments and even prospered (Jer. 29:4-5). With the birth of a second and third generation, many Jews established roots in Mesopotamia.” (Expositors Bible Commentary)

B. The Biblical account of the exile and return to Israel is discussed in seven books: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel and the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah were one book. Esther is the account of the “vast majority of Jews who chose to remain in Persia rather than return to Palestine.” Historically speaking, Esther’s story occurs between Chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. (Between the first return led by Zerubbabel and the second return led by Ezra.

The book of Daniel covers the years in exiled experienced by Daniel and his three Hebrew friends.

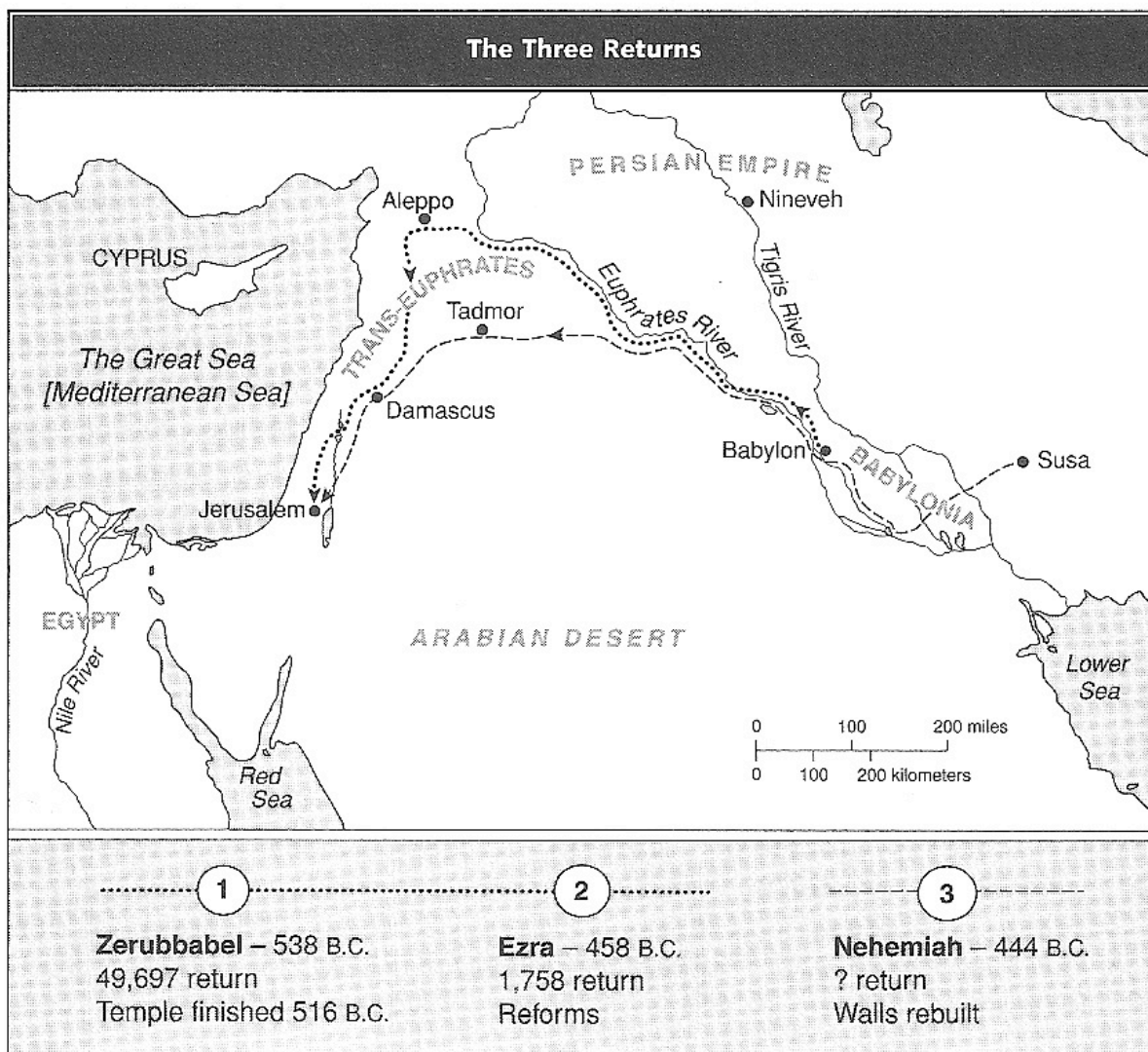
Haggai – post exilic prophet who both encouraged and rebuked the Jews. His five short messages cover only 3 months and 23 days.

Zechariah – a contemporary of Haggai and the head of a priestly family – he encouraged the Jews to finish the temple.

Malachi – it’s assumed that he follows Haggai and Zechariah and addresses the spiritual decline of the Jews.

C. Jeremiah predicted the 70 year Babylonia captivity (Jer. 25:1-12, 29:10). And so it was: The first deportation began in 605...(the 70th year would be 536 B.C.). Cyrus makes his declaration 538 B.C. Ezra departed in 458 B.C. Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem in 445 B.C.

The Returns:					
1	583 BC	Decreed by Cyrus	Led by Zerubbabel	49,897 return	Worked on the temple
2	458 BC	Decreed by Artaxerxes	Led by Ezra	1,754 return	Led spiritual worship
3	444 BC	Decreed by Artaxerxes	Led by Nehemiah	Unknown number return	Rebuilt the walls



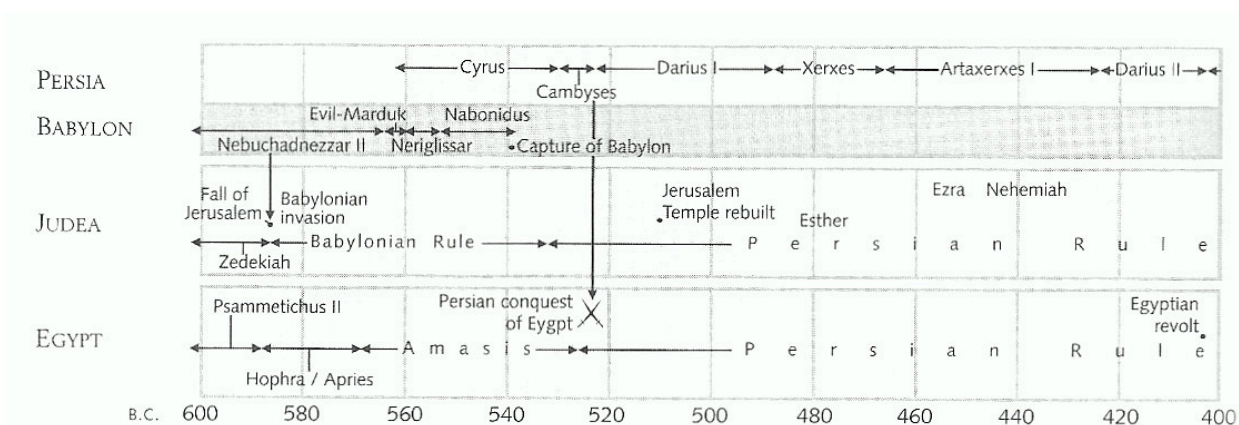
(A Survey of the Old Testament, p. 270)

II. “The Players”

- A. Zerubbabel – Political leader who focuses on rebuilding the temple
- B. Ezra was a scribe, an expounder of the scriptures. His leadership is focused on the spiritual “rebirth” of Judah. He calls for national repentance, searches for the Levites, seeks reforms and established public worship.
- C. Nehemiah’s focus is on the rebuilding of the wall. “Nehemiah, a layman, was able to cooperate with his contemporary Ezra, in spite of the fact that these two leaders were of entirely different temperaments. In reaction to the problem of mixed marriages, Ezra plucked out his own hair (Ezra. 9:3), whereas Nehemiah plucked out the offenders (Neh. 13:25)!” (EB Commentary)
- D. The Persian Kings Involved:
 1. Nebuchadnezzar: Babylonian King who destroyed Jerusalem
 2. Cyrus: Persian King: He encouraged the Jews to return to Judah and rebuild the temple

3. Darius: Persian King was made king in Daniel 5:31. He gave Daniel his high place in government.
 4. Xerxes (485-465 BC): Persian King. This is Ahasuerus mentioned in Ezra, Esther and Daniel.
 5. The king that Nehemiah served was Artaxerxes 1, nicknamed Longimanus (the long-handed one, his right hand was longer than his left), Esther was his stepmother. Although known as a man with a gentle and noble spirit, Artaxerxes ruled at the center of discord and violence.
 6. His father was assassinated in his bedroom
- At 18, Artaxerxes avenged his father by killing his brother

- For 10 years he battled a major revolt in Egypt
- And, his palace burned down!
- This was a man of action, a powerful leader...not someone to be trifled with



(A Survey of the Old Testament, p. 284)

- E. Esther is a young Jewish maiden (the relative of Mordecai) who wins a national beauty pageant and becomes the Queen to Xerxes. Her courage enabled the Jewish people to be protected and sustained.
- F. Daniel is one of the first hostages deported by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC.
- G. "Minor Players" :

Sheshbazzar and Jeshua (high priest) worked on the temple in order to get the sacrifices to begin again.

III. Jerusalem

The city had not changed much except the reconstructed second temple was just a poor "shadow" of Solomon's temple.

Temples:

1. Solomon's Temple – see 1 Kings 6-7 and 2 Chron. 3-4
2. Zerubbabel's Temple – see Ezra 3 and Haggai 1:4
3. Herod's Temple – begun in 19 BC, finished the sanctuary in 12 BC, completed in 64 AD
4. Future Temple – study the temple discussed in Ezekiel 40-48

IV. So What?

God keeps his promises – See Jer. 29:10 and 11. Seventy years in captivity and then deliverance.

God keeps his promises to us as well!

Discussion Questions:

1. If you were captured (and deported) as a young teenager, what affect do you think it would have on your personal/spiritual life? How did it affect Daniel?
2. If you got to be a leader, would you prefer to be Zerubbabel, Ezra, or Nehemiah? Why?
3. Why do you think the Book of Esther was included in our Bible?