

Unpacking the Book

Lesson #17: The Post Exilic Period

I. An Overview of the Returns from Babylon

| | Date | # of Returnees | Leader | Scripture | Persian Ruler | Focus | Events/ Notes |
|---------|---------|------------------|----------------------|-----------|--|--|---|
| Group 1 | 538-537 | 49,897 | Zerubbabel Jeshua | Ezra 1-6 | Cyrus (559-530 BC) | Rebuild the temple 1. Provided Funding 2. Returned gold and silver from the temple | Burnt offerings Start Rebuilding |
| | 516 | Temple Completed | | Ezra 6:15 | (note the reaction of the people: Hag. 2:3 vs Ezra 3:12) | | 1. Stopped rebuilding (Ezra 4:21) 2. Resumed Rebuilding (Ezra 6:6) |
| Group 2 | 458 | 1,754 | Ezra | Ezra 7-10 | Artaxerxes | Spiritual Leadership | 1. National repentance 2. Public Worship |
| Group 3 | 444 | Unknown Number | Nehemiah | Nehemiah | Artaxerxes | Rebuild Walls | 1. Opposition 2. Completed-52 days (Neh. 6:15) |

II. The Players:

A. Cyrus

Cyrus presented himself and the rule of Persia as a kind of liberation for the countries he conquered. He allowed idols to be returned and expatriates to go back to their homes. He encouraged the Jews to return to Judah to rebuild the Temple. (See 2 Chron. 36: 22-23, Ezra 1:1-6). Isaiah calls Cyrus the “anointed one.” (See Isa. 44:27-28, 45:1-5)

B. Zerubbabel

The grandson of King Jehoiachin. He was heir to the throne of Judah (1 Chron. 3:17-19). He is also listed in the genealogy of the Lord (Matt. 1:13, Luke 3:27). He was a civil leader, appointed the governor by Cyrus.

C. Jeshua

The high priest and religious leader. He and Zerrubbabel were able to set up the altar for burnt offerings and lay the foundation of the temple until opposition caused the work to stop.

D. Ezra

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 Levites, seeks reforms and established public worship.

E. Nehemiah

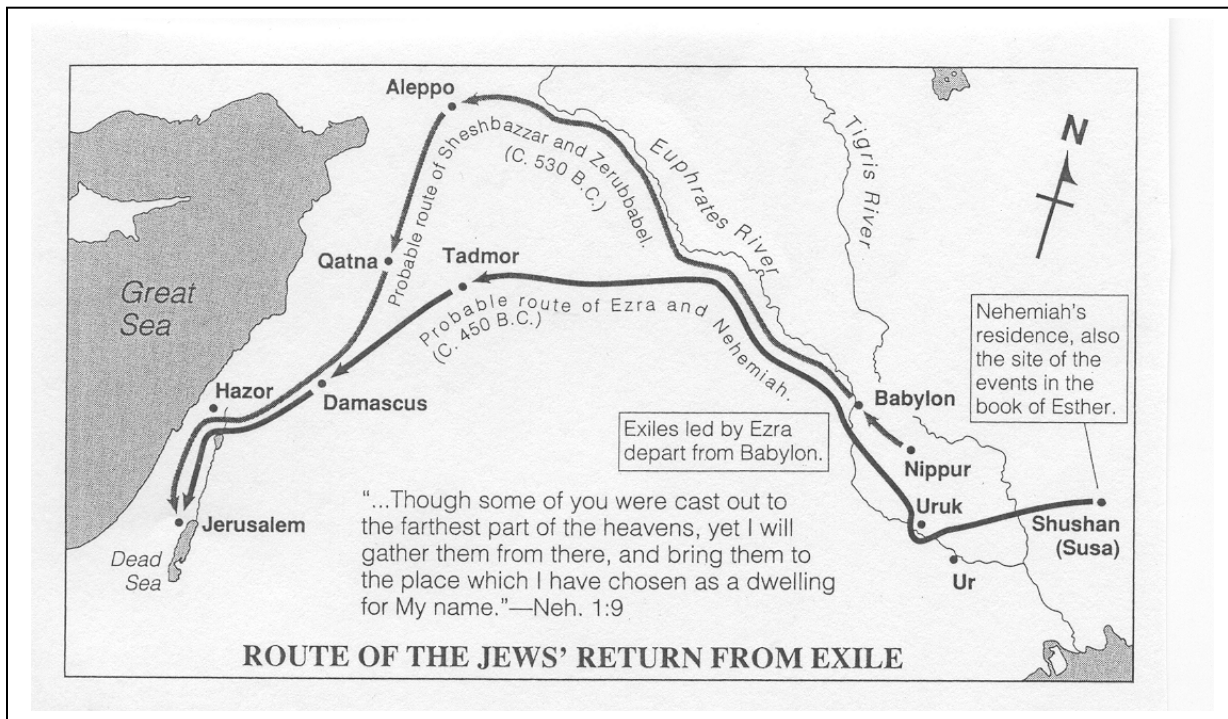
Nehemiah’s focus was on the rebuilding of the wall. “Nehemiah, a layman, was able to cooperate with this contemporary Ezra, in spite of the fact that these two leaders were of entirely different temperaments. In reaction to the problem of mixed marriages, Ezra plucked out this own hair (Ezra 9:3), whereas Nehemiah plucked out the hair of the offenders (Neh. 13:25)!” (EB Commentary) He served in Jerusalem for 12 years then returned to Babylon. Sometime later he came back to Jerusalem.

F. Artaxerxes

The king that Nehemiah served was Artaxerxes I, named Longimanus (the long-handed one, his right hand was longer than his left). Although known as a man with a gentle and noble spirit, Artaxerxes ruled at the center of discord and violence.

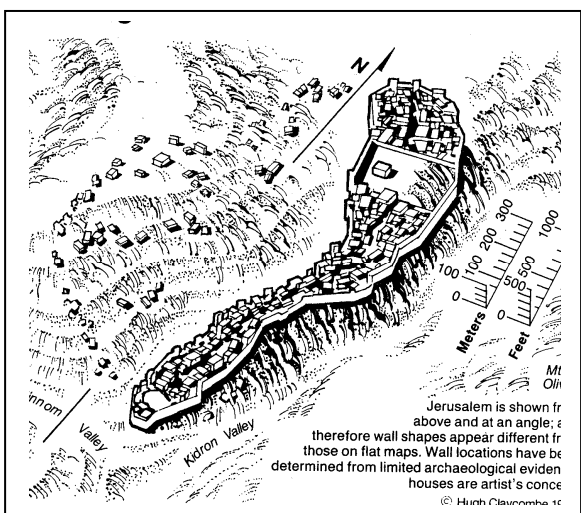
- His father was assassinated in his bedroom
- At 18, Artaxerxes avenged his father by killing his brother
- He defeated his other brother, Hystaspes, in war
- For 10 years he battled a major revolt in Egypt
- This was a man of action, a powerful leaders... not someone to be trifled with

III. The Route of the Jews' return from exile

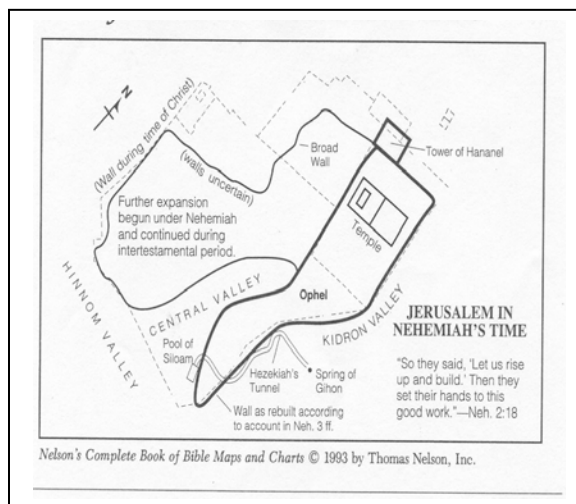


(Nelson's Book of Maps and Charts)

IV. Jerusalem of the returning exiles



(The Bible Visual)



V. An outline for the book of Ezra

| OUTLINE OF EZRA | |
|--|-----------------|
| Part One: The Restoration of the Temple of God (1:1—6:22) | |
| I. The First Return to Jerusalem Under Zerubbabel | 1:1—2:70 |
| A. Decree of Cyrus | 1:1-4 |
| B. Gifts from Israel and Cyrus | 1:5-11 |
| C. Census of the Returning People | 2:1-63 |
| D. The Return Completed | 2:64-70 |
| II. The Construction of the Temple | 3:1—6:22 |
| A. Construction of the Temple Foundation | 3:1-13 |
| B. Interruption of the Temple Construction | 4:1-24 |
| C. Completion of the Temple | 5:1—6:18 |
| D. Celebration of the Passover | 6:19-22 |
| Part Two: The Reformation of the People of God (7:1—10:44) | |
| I. The Second Return to Jerusalem Under Ezra | 7:1—8:36 |
| A. The Decree of Artaxerxes | 7:1-28 |
| B. Census of the Returning Israelites | 8:1-14 |
| C. Spiritual Preparation for the Return | 8:15-23 |
| D. The Return Is Completed | 8:24-36 |

(Nelson's Book of Bible Maps and Charts)

VI. An outline for the book of Nehemiah

| OUTLINE OF NEHEMIAH | |
|--|------------|
| Part One: The Reconstruction of the Wall (1:1—7:73) | |
| I. The Preparation to Reconstruct the Wall | 1:1—2:20 |
| A. Discovery of the Broken Wall | 1:1-3 |
| B. Intercession of Nehemiah | 1:4—2:8 |
| C. Arrival of Nehemiah in Jerusalem | 2:9-11 |
| D. Preparation to Reconstruct the Wall | 2:12-20 |
| II. The Reconstruction of the Wall | 3:1—7:73 |
| A. Record of the Builders | 3:1-32 |
| B. Opposition to the Reconstruction | 4:1—6:14 |
| C. Completion of the Reconstruction | 6:15-19 |
| D. Organization of Jerusalem | 7:1-4 |
| E. Registration of Jerusalem | 7:5-73 |
| Part Two: The Restoration of the People (8:1—13:31) | |
| I. The Renewal of the Covenant | 8:1—10:39 |
| A. Interpretation of the Law | 8:1-18 |
| B. Reaffirmation of the Covenant | 9:1—10:39 |
| II. The Obedience to the Covenant | 11:1—13:31 |
| A. Resettlement of the People | 11:1-36 |
| B. Register of the Priests and the Levites | 12:1-26 |
| C. Dedication of the Jerusalem Wall | 12:27-47 |
| D. Restoration of the People | 13:1-31 |

(Nelson's Book of Bible Maps and Charts)

VII. The biblical books of Esther, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

A. Esther

Written after the death of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) around 400 BC, this historical book tells the story of a Jewish maiden who becomes the queen of Persia.

B. Haggai

This post exilic prophet had the mission to both encourage and rebuke the Jews. His five short messages cover only three months and twenty-three days.

C. Zechariah

He is a contemporary of Haggai and the head of a priestly family. This prophecy has five separate messages. Some of the messages were to encourage the Jews to finish the temple, the later messages focused on the coming of the Lord.

D. Malachi

Since the temple had been completed and sacrifices were occurring (1:7-10, 3:8), it is assumed that Malachi's prophecies occurred after Haggai and Zechariah. He addresses the spiritual decline of the people (mixed marriages, failure to tithe, etc.)

VIII. So What?

Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be in captivity for 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10). God kept His Promise. He still does!