

*1 Ezra 1-4 “Cyrus God’s Servant Sent Us Home”

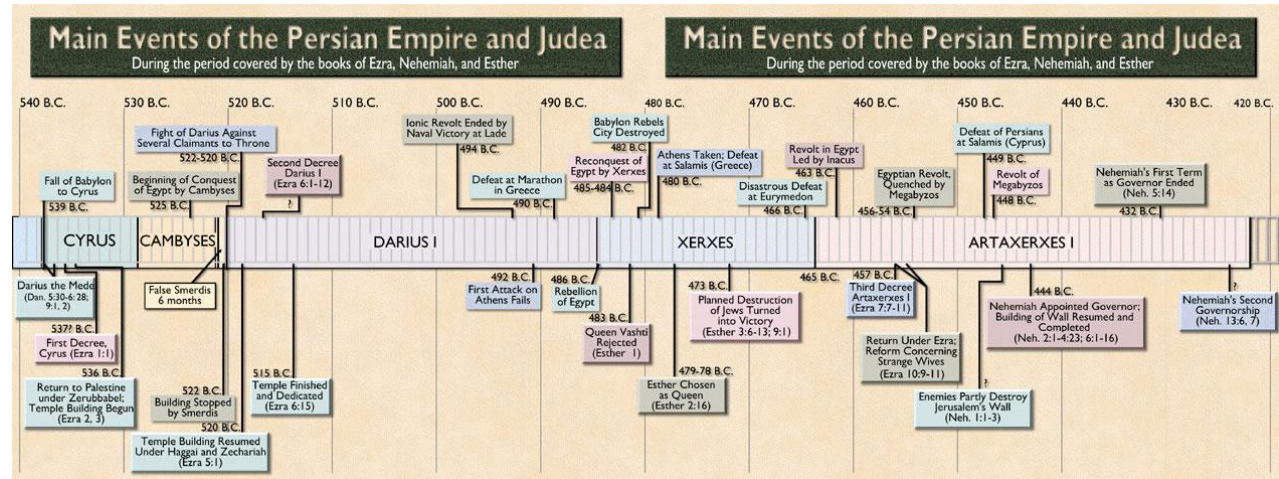
*2 – *2a – Chart of Chronological Order of OT Books

*3 – The Three Returns from Exile Chart

Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the return to the land and the city, the rebuilding of the temple, and the rebuilding of the walls. The Book of Esther also fits into this period, as do the books of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (see Ezra 5:1ff). Please note that Ezra did not lead the first group of Jews back to Jerusalem; this was done by Zerubbabel and Joshua. Ezra does not come on the scene until chapter 7 of his book, when he led a second company (and a smaller one) to the Holy Land. Ezra remained there to labor, and finally joined hands with Nehemiah (Neh. 8:9; 12:26).¹

*4 A passage in the Talmud credits Ezra with the authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. The earliest historical reference in Ezra is to the decree of Cyrus that he issued in his first year on the throne (1:1), 538 B.C. The latest historical reference was just prior to Nehemiah’s first trip to Jerusalem (4:21–23; Neh. 1:1–3), 446 B.C. Therefore this book spans a period of 92 years of history. However most of the events recorded took place in 538-515 B.C. (chapters 1–6) *4a and 458 B.C. (chapters 7–10). Between these two separate series of events, the Book of Ezra records nothing. *4b The events in the Book of Esther transpired during those years (482-473 B.C.). *4c – Haggai/Zechariah Tom Constable

*5 – Timeline continues for Nehemiah *5a



“The Holy City and the house of God are both prominent subjects in Ezra-Nehemiah. Jerusalem occurs eighty-six times, and the phrases ‘temple,’ ‘house of YahWeH,’ and ‘house of God’ appear fifty-three times.” Yamauchi

*6 Ezra 1 (NLT)¹ In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, YahWeH fulfilled the prophecy He had given through Jeremiah. He **stirred the heart** (Lit.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), Ezr.

“Spirit”) of **Cyrus** to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:

***6a** “From east to west, it [the Persian Empire] was as wide as the continental United States.” Howard F. Vos, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, p. 16.²

***7** **2 Chronicles 36:22–23 (NASB95)** ²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of YaHWeH by the mouth of Jeremiah—**YaHWeH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia**, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying, ²³ “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘**YaHWeH, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may YaHWeH his God be with him, and let him go up!’**”

***7a** **Proverbs 20:27 (NASB95)** The spirit of man is the lamp of YaHWeH, searching all the innermost parts of his being.

This is not the first time God “stirred up the spirit” of pagan kings or Hi own people in order to accomplish His purposes:

1 Chronicles 5:26 NIV So the God of Israel **stirred up the spirit** of **Pul king of Assyria (that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria)**, who took the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh into exile. He took them to Halah, Habor, Hara and the river of Gozan, where they are to this day.

Jeremiah 51:11 RSV Sharpen the arrows! Take up the shields! **YaHWeH has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes**, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of YaHWeH, the vengeance for his temple.

***8** “The Cyrus Cylinder, from which the following is an extract, gives his own account of this: ‘I return to these sacred cities . . ., the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations . . . May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me . . .; to Marduk, my lord, may they say this: ‘Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son . . .’” Derek Kidner

***9** **Ezra 1** ² “This is what King Cyrus of Persia says: “**YaHWeH, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth.** He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ **Any of you who are His people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of YaHWeH, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you!** ⁴ **Wherever this Jewish remnant is found, let their neighbors contribute toward their expenses by giving them silver and gold,**

² Tom Constable, [Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003).

supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a voluntary offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.”

Cyrus was wise to ascribe his victories to the God of heaven; it's dangerous to take credit for what only the God of heaven can accomplish. Just ask King Herod about that (Acts 12:23)! **Psalm 115:1 NLT** Not to us, O YaHWeH, not to us, but to Your name goes all the glory ...

If there's ANY thing good or even decent that comes from my life, believe me (!) it's God!!!

Daniel and others knew this is what Cyrus would do because it was all predicted though the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah:

***9a** **Isaiah 45** ⁵ I am YaHWeH, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides Me; I am YaHWeH, and there is no other.

***10** **Ezra 1** ⁵ Then **God stirred the hearts of the priests and Levites and the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of YaHWeH.**

It is GOD who must stir men's hearts. We need to change our prayers, for it is GOD who stirs the spirit of those whom He wants into action: This is true whether it is your boss at work, your husband or wife who doesn't seem to listen to reason, your wayward child, people to help you in your ministry, or even public figures! PRAY! There is no human being beyond the power of God!

Ezra 1 ⁶ And all their neighbors assisted by giving them articles of silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock. They gave them many valuable gifts in addition to all the voluntary offerings. ⁷ King Cyrus himself brought out the articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from YaHWeH's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods. ⁸ Cyrus directed Mithredath, the treasurer of Persia, to count these items and present them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of the exiles returning to Judah. ⁹ This is a list of the items that were returned: gold basins 30, silver basins 1,000, silver incense burners 29, ¹⁰ gold bowls 30, silver bowls 410 other items 1000. ¹¹ In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and silver. Sheshbazzar brought all of these along when the exiles (approx. 50,000) went from Babylon to Jerusalem.

***11** **Sheshbazzar was evidently the uncle of Zerubbabel (1 Chron. 3:17–19).** He seems to have been the leader and governor when the first group of captives returned. Sheshbazzar was a variation of the name Sheshbazzar. The writer named both Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel as having had a part in the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 5:16; Hag. 1:1, 12; Zech. 4:9). **It seems most probable that Zerubbabel succeeded his uncle as the chief man in the restoration leadership since Zerubbabel became the governor of Judah** (Hag. 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21). Tom Constable

***11a** What is conspicuously *missing* from the list is any mention of the more significant articles of the temple – **the altar of incense, the table of showbread, the brazen altar, the golden lampstand, and especially the Ark of the Covenant **Urim/Thummin.** These articles were presumably lost to history at the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians, or they were hidden in Jerusalem and recovered? David Guzik

***12 Ezra 2** ¹ Here is the list of the Jewish exiles of the provinces who returned from their captivity. King Nebuchadnezzar had deported them to Babylon, but now they returned to Jerusalem and the other towns in Judah where they originally lived. ² **Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.** This is the number of the men of Israel who returned from exile:

***12a Note:** This Nehemiah must have been a different person from the Nehemiah in the book that bears that name. **The second Nehemiah did not return to Judah until almost 100 years later**, in 444 B.C. (Neh. 2:9). **Likewise this Mordecai was not Esther's cousin** (Esth. 2:5) since the latter Mordecai remained in Susa, one of the capitals of the Persian Empire, and **lived about 50 years later** than this Mordecai. Tom Constable

Zerubbabel was the appointed governor over the province of Judah. "He was the lineal descendant of the royal house, the heir to the throne of David. This is a most significant fact." (Adeney)

***13 1 Chronicles 3:10–20 (NLT)** ¹⁰ **The descendants of Solomon** were Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, ¹¹ Jehoram, Ahaziah, Joash, ¹² Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, ¹³ Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, ¹⁴ Amon, and Josiah. ¹⁵ The sons of Josiah were Johanan (the oldest), Jehoiakim (the second), Zedekiah (the third), and Jehoahaz (the fourth). ¹⁶ The successors of Jehoiakim were his son Jehoiachin and his brother Zedekiah. ¹⁷ The sons of Jehoiachin, who was taken prisoner by the Babylonians, were **Shealtiel**, ¹⁸ Malkiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah. ¹⁹ The sons of Pedaiah were **Zerubbabel** and Shimei. The sons of Zerubbabel were Meshullam and Hananiah. **(Their sister was Shelomith.)** ²⁰ His five other sons were Hashubah, Ohel, Berekiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-hesed.

***13a Luke 3:27 (NLT)** ²⁷ Joda was the son of Joanan. Joanan was the son of Rhesa. Rhesa was the son of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel. Shealtiel was the son of Neri.

Matthew 1:12 (NLT) ¹² After the Babylonian exile: Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

"*Jeshua* the High Priest ([Zechariah 3:1](#)), whose name (in Greek, 'Jesus') is spelled Joshua in Haggai and Zechariah, was Zerubbabel's fellow-leader." **Zechariah 3:1 (NASB95)** Then He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of YaHWeH, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

Ezra 2 ³ The family of Parosh 2,172 ⁴ The family of Shephatiah 372 ⁵ The family of Arah 775 ⁶ The family of Pahath-moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab) 2,812 ⁷ The family of Elam 1,254 ⁸ The family of Zattu 945 ⁹ The family of Zaccai 760 ¹⁰ The family of Bani 642 ¹¹ The family of Bebai 623 ¹² The

family of Azgad 1,222 ¹³ The family of Adonikam 666 ¹⁴ The family of Bigvai 2,056 ¹⁵ The family of Adin 454 ¹⁶ The family of Ater (descendants of Hezekiah) 98 ¹⁷ The family of Bezai 323 ¹⁸ The family of Jorah 112 ¹⁹ The family of Hashum 223 ²⁰ The family of Gibbar 95 ²¹ The people of Bethlehem 123 ²² The people of Netophah 56 ²³ The people of Anathoth 128 ²⁴ The people of Beth-azmaveth 42 ²⁵ The people of Kiriath-jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth 743 ²⁶ The people of Ramah and Geba 621 ²⁷ The people of Micmash 122 ²⁸ The people of Bethel and Ai 223 ²⁹ The citizens of Nebo 52 ³⁰ The citizens of Magbish 156 ³¹ The citizens of West Elam 1,254 ³² The citizens of Harim 320 ³³ The citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono 725 ³⁴ The citizens of Jericho 345 ³⁵ The citizens of Senaah 3,630 ³⁶ These are the priests who returned from exile: The family of Jedaiah (through the line of Jeshua) 973 ³⁷ The family of Immer 1,052 ³⁸ The family of Pashhur 1,247 ³⁹ The family of Harim 1,017 ***14** ⁴⁰ **These are the Levites who returned from exile:** The families of Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah) 74 ⁴¹ The singers of the family of Asaph 128 ⁴² The gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai 139

***14a** Few Levites, only 341, chose to leave the comforts of life in Babylon. They assisted the priests. There were fewer Levites than priests, the opposite of the situation that existed before the exile. Tom Constable

“An examination of this list is remarkable principally from the small number of Levites who returned. Nearly ten times as many priests as Levites went back to the land. This, of course, was an inversion of the original order.” G. Campbell Morgan

Ezra 2 ⁴³ The descendants of the following Temple servants returned from exile: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, ⁴⁴ Keros, Siaha, Padon, ⁴⁵ Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, ⁴⁶ Hagab, Shalmal, Hanan, ⁴⁷ Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, ⁴⁸ Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, ⁴⁹ Uzza, Paseah, Besai, ⁵⁰ Asnah, Meunim, Nephusim, ⁵¹ Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, ⁵² Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, ⁵³ Barkos, Sisera, Temah, ⁵⁴ Neziah, and Hatipha. ⁵⁵ **The descendants of these servants of King Solomon returned from exile:** Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, ⁵⁶ Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, ⁵⁷ Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-hazzebaim, and Ami. ⁵⁸ **In all, the Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon’s servants numbered 392.**

“It seems likely that the more menial tasks fell to these men; and the presence of some foreign-looking names in the list may indicate that some of these groups came into Israel from David’s conquests, whether as immigrants or perhaps as prisoners of war.” Derek Kidner

***15 Ezra 2** ⁵⁹ Another group returned at this time from the towns of Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel. ⁶⁰ This group included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 652 people. ⁶¹ Three families of priests—Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai—also returned. **(This**

Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai of Gilead, and he had taken her family name.) ⁶² They searched for their names in the genealogical records, but they were not found, so they were disqualified from serving as priests. ⁶³ The governor told them not to eat the priests' share of food from the sacrifices until a priest could consult YaHWeH about the matter by using the Urim and Thummim—the sacred lots.

“Barzillai was a name that carried considerable weight; its bearer had been a staunch supporter of David, and a man of wealth (2 Samuel 19:32). It may be that in adopting this family’s name (and becoming its heir?) the ancestor of these claimants had laid himself open to the charge that he had renounced his own birthright, the priesthood.” (Kidner)

***16 Ezra 2** ⁶⁴ So a total of 42,360 people returned to Judah, ⁶⁵ in addition to 7,337 servants and 200 singers, both men and women. ⁶⁶ They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁷ 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys. ⁶⁸ When they arrived at the Temple of YaHWeH in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders made voluntary offerings toward the rebuilding of God’s Temple on its original site, ⁶⁹ and each leader gave as much as he could. The total of their gifts came to 61,000 gold coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, and 100 robes for the priests. ⁷⁰ So the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the Temple servants, and some of the common people settled in villages near Jerusalem. The rest of the people returned to their own towns throughout Israel.

***16a** The size of this entire group is here stated to be about 50,000. However, this was only the first wave of repatriation to Israel from the Babylonian captivity and includes only the heads of families. The approximate total of the returned exiles was probably somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000. This was only a small percentage of those who had been exiled and their descendants; the great majority stayed behind in Babylon. David Guzik

“Depending on one’s estimate of the numbers deported and the number of returning exiles, we have widely varying estimates for the population of postexilic Judah: 20,000 to 50,000 by W.F. Albright, 60,000 by H. Kreissig, 50,000 to 80,000 by J. de Fraine, 85,000 by R. Kittel, 100,000 by S. Mowinckel, 150,000 by J. Weinberg, and 235,000 by A. Schultz. An estimate of 150,000 is more probably correct than Albright’s estimate.” (Yamauchi)

***17** As a whole, Israelites had some reason to feel comfortable in Babylon. The Murashu tablets were discovered in 1873 and are records from Murashu and his sons, wealthy bankers and brokers of the late period of exile, who seemed to loan out almost anything for a price. “Among their customers are listed about sixty Jewish names from the time of Artaxerxes I, and forty from the time of Darius II. These appear as contracting parties, agents, witnesses, collectors of taxes, and royal officials. There seems to have been no social or commercial barriers between the Jews and the Babylonians. Their prosperous situation may explain why some chose to remain in Mesopotamia.” (Yamauchi)

Indeed, Josephus wrote, “many remained in Babylon, being unwilling to leave their possessions” (Antiquities XI, 8).

One should not think that there was no spiritual life among the Jewish exiles; Ezekiel (who went into exile after 597 or 586 b.c.) describes what we might call a “home Bible study” at his home with the elders of Judah ([Ezekiel 8:1](#)). “Deprived of the temple, the exiles laid great stress on the observation of the Sabbath, on the laws of purity, and on prayer and fasting. **It has often been suggested that the development of synagogues began in Mesopotamia during the Exile.**”
Yamauchi

***18** “Almost the whole community of Babylonian exiles who stayed when Babylon was destroyed came to this country then years ago – and their number was nearly thrice the number of those who returned to Zion in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.” (David Ben-Gurion describing the modern emigration of Jews from Iraq to Israel)

Operation Ezra and Nehemiah (Wikipedia):

From 1951 to 1952, **Operation Ezra and Nehemiah** airlifted between 120,000 and 130,000 Iraqi Jews to Israel via Iran and Cyprus. The massive emigration of Iraqi Jews was among the most climactic events of the Jewish exodus from Arab and Muslim countries.

The operation is named after Ezra and Nehemiah, who led the Jewish people from exile in Babylonia to return to Israel in the 5th century BC, as recorded in the books of the Hebrew Bible that bear their names.

Most of the \$4 million cost of the operation was financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Between April 1950 and June 1951, Jewish targets in Baghdad were struck five times. Iraqi authorities then arrested 3 Jews, claiming they were Zionist activists, and sentenced two — Shalom Salah Shalom and Yosef Ibrahim Basri—to death. The third man, Yehuda Tajar, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. In May and June 1951, arms caches were discovered that allegedly belonged to the Zionist underground, allegedly supplied by the Yishuv after the Farhud of 1941. There has been much debate as to whether the bombs were planted by the Mossad to encourage Iraqi Jews to emigrate to Israel or if they were planted by Muslim extremists to help drive out the Jews. This has been the subject of lawsuits and inquiries in Israel.

After the initial emigration, the number of Jews in Baghdad decreased from 100,000 to 5,000. Although they enjoyed a brief period of security during the reign of Abdul Karim Qassim, later regimes would seriously increase the persecution of Iraqi Jews. In 1968 there were only about 2,000 Jews still living there. On January 27, 1969 nine Jews were hanged on charges of spying for Israel causing most of the remaining community to flee the country. Today fewer than 100 Jews remain.

Until Operation Ezra and Nehemiah there were 28 Jewish educational institutions in Baghdad. About 400 students studied medicine, law, economics, pharmacy, and engineering. In 1951 the Jewish school for the blind was closed; it was the only school of its type in Baghdad. The Jews of Baghdad had two hospitals in which the poor received free treatment, and several philanthropic services.

***19 Ezra 3** ¹ In early autumn, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled in Jerusalem with a unified purpose. ² Then **Jeshua**

son of Jehozadak joined his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his family in rebuilding the altar of the God of Israel.

They wanted to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as instructed in the Law of Moses, the man of God.

This was an important month on the spiritual calendar of Israel. In the seventh month they celebrated the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

***19a** Jeshua was the grandson of Seraiah the high priest, who was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar **2 Kings 25:18–21 (NASB95)** ¹⁸ Then the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest, with the three officers of the temple. ¹⁹ From the city he took one official who was overseer of the men of war, and five of the king’s advisers who were found in the city; and the scribe of the captain of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. ²⁰ Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹ Then the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was led away into exile from its land.

***20 Ezra 3** ³ Even though the people were afraid of the local residents, **they rebuilt the altar at its old site.** Then they began to sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar to YaHWeH each morning and evening. ⁴ They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed in the Law, sacrificing the number of burnt offerings specified for each day of the festival. ⁵ They also offered the regular burnt offerings and the offerings required for the new moon celebrations and the annual festivals as prescribed by YaHWeH. The people also gave voluntary offerings to YaHWeH.

***20a** “Courage is not lack of fear; it is the will to act in spite of fear.” Breneman

***21** They built the altar first because they understood its *spiritual significance*.

Fundamentally, the altar was where sin was dealt with and where the common man met with God (the temple was only for the priests to enter). They started with the **altar** because it was a *wise spiritual priority*, showing they understood their need to have atonement from sin and acts of dedication to God. David Guzik

If you will make your relationship with the Lord and serving Him in the church family and whatever service He calls you to – in other words you make your spiritual life the most important part of your life – then the Lord will bless the rest; and as in our case, provide a job that will allow you to serve Him for that season!

***21a** “There cannot be a temple without an altar, but there may be an altar without a temple. God meets men at the place of sacrifice, even though there be no house for His name...The ruined Jerusalem was better guarded by that altar than if its fallen walls had been rebuilt.” Alexander Maclaren

Ezra 3 ⁶ Fifteen days before the Festival of Shelters began (Fall), the priests had begun to sacrifice burnt offerings to YaHWeH. This was even before they had started to lay the foundation of YaHWeH's Temple. ⁷ Then the people hired masons and carpenters and bought cedar logs from the people of Tyre and Sidon, paying them with food, wine, and olive oil. The logs were brought down from the Lebanon mountains and floated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, for King Cyrus had given permission for this.

During their long stay in Babylon, the Jews were not able to offer any sacrifices, as this could only be done in Jerusalem. Instead they were surrounded by a myriad of pagan temples. **About fifty temples are mentioned in Babylonian texts together with 180 open-air shrines for Ishtar, three hundred daises for the Igigi gods, and twelve hundred daises for the Anunnaki gods.**" (Yamauchi)

***22 Ezra 3** ⁸ The construction of the Temple of God began in midspring, during the second year after they arrived in Jerusalem. **The work force was made up of everyone who had returned from exile, including Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jehozadak and his fellow priests, and all the Levites.** The Levites who were twenty years old or older were put in charge of rebuilding YaHWeH's Temple. ⁹ The workers at the Temple of God were supervised by Jeshua with his sons and relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons, all descendants of Hodaviah. They were helped in this task by the Levites of the family of Henadad.

Under the Mosaic Law, Levites began their service at age 25 (Num. 8:24). The Mosaic Law did not allow them to carry the tabernacle until they were 30 (Num. 4:3). David had allowed Levites to begin some service at age 20 (1 Chron. 23:24, 27). Zerubbabel and Jeshua allowed them to begin working on the reconstruction project at age 20 (v. 8). Tom Constable

"This would hardly have escaped their notice – the second was the month in which Solomon's Temple had been started (1 Kings 6:1)." (Kidner)

"This time there is no ark, no visible glory, indeed no Temple; only some beginnings, and small beginnings at that. But God is enthroned on the praises of Israel, and these could be as glorious as Solomon's." (Kidner)

***23 Ezra 3** ¹⁰ When the builders completed the foundation of YaHWeH's Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places to blow their trumpets. And the Levites, descendants of Asaph, clashed their cymbals to praise YaHWeH, just as King David had prescribed. ¹¹ **With praise and thanks, they sang this song to YaHWeH: "He is so good! His faithful love for Israel endures forever!"**

***23a** This was written by King David: **1 Chronicles 16:34 (ESV)** Oh give thanks to YaHWeH, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!

***24** It was repeated when Solomon built the Temple and it was dedicated: **2 Chronicles 5:13–14 (NLT)** ¹³ The trumpeters and singers performed together in unison to praise

and give thanks to YaHWeH. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments, they raised their voices and praised YaHWeH with these words: “He is good! His faithful love endures forever!” At that moment a thick cloud filled the Temple of YaHWeH. ¹⁴ **The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of YaHWeH filled the Temple of God. (2 Chronicles 7:3)**

***24a** Also in Psalm 106, 107, 136 and most importantly twice in Psalm 118: **Psalm 118:1–4 (ESV)** ¹ **Oh give thanks to YaHWeH, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!** ² Let Israel say, “**His steadfast love endures forever.**” ³ Let the house of Aaron say, “**His steadfast love endures forever.**” ⁴ Let those who fear YaHWeH say, “**His steadfast love endures forever.**” ...²⁹ **Oh give thanks to YaHWeH, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!**

***25 Ezra 3** Then all the people gave a great shout, praising YaHWeH because the foundation of YaHWeH’s Temple had been laid. ¹² But many of the older priests, Levites, and other leaders who had seen **the first Temple wept aloud when they saw the new Temple’s foundation.** The others, however, were shouting for joy. ¹³ The joyful shouting and weeping mingled together in a loud noise that could be heard far in the distance.

These people were crying because they remembered the glory of Solomon’s temple – but also because of the shame of how they had gotten to this point. They had failed God – caused the desolation of God’s house and Jerusalem and now had to start over. The original glory was gone and humanly speaking – the damage was done and Israel never recovered their glory the rest of the OT period. Jesus had to come to really get to the root of the problem – their sinful natures and the accompanying failures!

When we fail in our walk with the Lord, there are consequences, many times permanent. Once we come back and start over – it is different. Rebuilding always has the memory of the shame of the past failures. Though we may have joy at God’s fresh work in our lives – there are sometimes still tears over the past, what would have been, IF we had only listened to God’s Word in the first place. Beware that you don’t take sin lightly – there is always the death of something involved in our sin.

But when we are given the wonderful opportunity of starting over, beginning a new life with Christ or re-dedicating ourselves afresh – we can’t allow the past to destroy God’s new work in our lives! We can grieve – but the remembering is a learning process to never forget our mistake and make it again! **“There was a danger in their weeping. “The backward look which discounts present activity is always a peril. Regrets over the past which paralyze work in the present are always wrong. Moreover all such regrets, as in this case, are in danger of blinding the eyes to the true value and significance of the present.” G. Campbell Morgan**

***26** The term “second temple” as biblical scholars commonly use it today refers to both this restoration temple and the Herodian temple that followed it. The second temple underwent changes occasionally, the major changes taking place as a result of Herod’s renovations. These

improvements were still in progress in our Lord's Day (John 2:20). This second temple stood from 515 B.C. (6:15) until the Romans destroyed it in A.D. 70. Tom Constable

***27 Ezra 4** ¹ **The enemies of Judah** and Benjamin heard that the exiles were rebuilding a Temple to YaHWeH, the God of Israel. ² So they approached Zerubbabel and the other leaders and said, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God just as you do. We have sacrificed to him ever since King Esarhaddon of Assyria brought us here."

The Assyrian government encouraged its residents to move to Israel and to settle there after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. This was official government policy during the reigns of the Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.; 2 Kings 17:24) and Ashurbanipal (668-ca. 630 B.C.; 4:10). ***27a** These immigrant people worshipped pagan idols (2 Kings 17:30–31) but also started worshipping Yahweh whom they regarded as the god of the land in which they now lived (2 Kings 17:32–33). Eventually they intermarried with the Jews who had remained in the land. Their descendants (later) became the Samaritans. They were a mixed breed racially and religiously. The exiles who returned from Babylon and their descendants despised them (cf. John 4:9). **It was these people of the land who approached Zerubbabel and offered to help the Jews rebuild their temple** (v. 2). Tom Constable

***28** "The proposal to unite in building the Temple was a political move; for, in old-world ideas, co-operation in Temple-building was incorporation in national unity. The calculation, no doubt, was that if the returning exiles could be united with the much more numerous Samaritans, they would soon be absorbed in them. The Samaritans did not worship Jehovah as the Jews, but along with their own gods (2 Kings 17:25-41). To divide His dominion with others was to dethrone Him altogether. It therefore became an act of faithfulness to Jehovah to reject the entangling alliance." Alexander Maclaren

In an attempt to infiltrate and disrupt the project, these people offered to help the Jews rebuild the Temple. They wanted to keep a close eye on what the Jews were doing. They were hoping to keep Jerusalem from becoming strong again. The Jews, however, saw through their ploy. Such a partnership with unbelievers would have tempted God's people to compromise their goals. ~ Life Application Bible Note

The fact that these neighbors had no sincere interest in helping the Jews became obvious very quickly (vv. 4–5). Their persistent opposition continued into the reign of Darius I (Hystaspes) of Persia (521-486 B.C.). Tom Constable

***28a** "Men of faith have often fallen into this blunder, and have associated with themselves those not sharing their faith, and therefore in the deepest sense opposed to their enterprises. These leaders were not deceived. They detected the peril." G. Campbell Morgan

***29 Ezra 4** ³ But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders of Israel replied, **"You may have no part in this work. We alone will build the Temple for YaHWeH, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us."** ⁴ Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work. ⁵ They bribed agents to work against them and to frustrate their plans. This went on during the entire

reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne.

***29a** “This attitude of exclusiveness displayed by the Jews . . . is troublesome to our modern society, where perhaps the highest virtue is the willingness to accept and cooperate with persons whose beliefs and practices differ from one’s own. If we are tempted to think that Zerubbabel and the other leaders were sinfully separatistic or mistaken in their evaluation of those who offered their assistance, we must observe that these outsiders are identified as ‘enemies.’ Their motives were clearly subversive.” Breneman

These enemies claimed to worship the same God as Zerubbabel and the rest of the Jews. In one sense, this was true; they worshipped God along with a host of other gods. But in God’s eyes, this was not worship – it was sin and rebellion. True worship involves devotion to God alone. To these foreigners, God was just another idol to be added to their collection.

Believers today must beware of those who claim to be Christians but whose actions clearly reveal they are seeking only their own best interests. ~ Life Application Bible note

It is getting to the point where if I disagree with someone or have different information than they do about a subject and therefore hurt their feelings; then I must be wrong! This is insanity. **“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts.”** Daniel Patrick Moynihan

Freedom of speech is in itself the right to disagree with someone in a civil way, and to accept them as a person made in the image of God. I feel sorry for people who are going to try and go through life believing everyone has to agree with them!

***30 Ezra 4** ⁶ Years later when Xerxes (Ahasuerus) began his reign, the enemies of Judah wrote a letter of accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. ⁷ Even later, during the reign of **King Artaxerxes of Persia**, the enemies of Judah, led by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, sent a letter to Artaxerxes in the Aramaic language, and it was translated for the king.

Starting at Ezra 4:8 and continuing all the way until 6:18, everything is written in Aramaic (instead of Hebrew); Ezra 7:12-26 is also in Aramaic.

“The letter was probably dictated in Persian to a scribe, who translated it into Aramaic and wrote it down in Aramaic script.” (Yamauchi)

Ezra 4 ⁸ Rehum the governor and Shimshai the court secretary wrote the letter, telling King Artaxerxes about the situation in Jerusalem. ⁹ They greeted the king for all their colleagues—the judges and local leaders, the people of Tarpel, the Persians, the Babylonians, and the people of Erech and Susa (that is, Elam). ¹⁰ They also sent greetings from the rest of the people whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal had deported and relocated in Samaria and throughout the neighboring lands of the province west of the Euphrates River.

“*Ahasuerus*, familiar to us from the book of Esther . . . The mention of him here marks simply the passage of time, which had still not cooled the enemy’s antagonism. But evidently nothing came of this attempt.” (Kidner)

***31 Ezra 4** ¹¹ **This is a copy of their letter:** “To King Artaxerxes, from your loyal subjects in the province west of the Euphrates River. ¹² “The king should know that the Jews who came here to Jerusalem from Babylon are rebuilding this rebellious and evil city. They have already laid the foundation and will soon finish its walls. ¹³ And the king should know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, it will be much to your disadvantage, for the Jews will then refuse to pay their tribute, customs, and tolls to you. ¹⁴ “Since we are your loyal subjects and do not want to see the king dishonored in this way, we have sent the king this information.

***32 Ezra 4** ¹⁵ We suggest that a search be made in your ancestors’ records, where you will discover what a rebellious city this has been in the past. In fact, it was destroyed because of its long and troublesome history of revolt against the kings and countries who controlled it. ¹⁶ We declare to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the province west of the Euphrates River will be lost to you.”

***32a** “It should hardly need emphasizing that the *walls* and *foundations* are those of the *city*, not the Temple; but the two operations are often confused. By the reign of Artaxerxes the new Temple had been standing for half a century.” (Kidner)

Ezra 4 ¹⁷ Then King Artaxerxes sent this reply: “To Rehum the governor, Shimshai the court secretary, and their colleagues living in Samaria and throughout the province west of the Euphrates River. Greetings. ¹⁸ “The letter you sent has been translated and read to me. ***33** ¹⁹ I ordered a search of the records and have found that Jerusalem has indeed been a hotbed of insurrection against many kings. In fact, rebellion and revolt are normal there! ²⁰ Powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and the entire province west of the Euphrates River, receiving tribute, customs, and tolls.

***33a** Their attack by letter was a skillful combination of truth and lies. It was true that Jerusalem had a sinful past; yet with these returned exiles, it truly was the past and not the present. However, that truth was completely irrelevant because of the great lie – the lie that Jews and the builders of Jerusalem had a rebellious intent. **In a similar pattern our adversaries – Satan and his angels, the enemies of our soul – often attack us with a combination of truth and lies. They tell us of our great sin (an accusation that is often true), but they lie about the greater work of Jesus.** Since Satan also accuses us before God (Revelation 12:10), he brings his accusing report against us before the Great King. David Guzik

***34 Ezra 4** ²¹ Therefore, issue orders to have these men stop their work. That city must not be rebuilt except at my express command. ²² Be diligent, and don’t neglect this matter, for we must not permit the situation to harm the king’s interests.” ²³ When this letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum,

Shimshai, and their colleagues, they hurried to Jerusalem. Then, with a show of strength, they forced the Jews to stop building. ²⁴ **So the work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem had stopped, and it remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.**

***34a** “This was a day of great shame to the Jewish population because their honest endeavor was thwarted by their archenemies, the Samaritans, and it was forced on them by Samaritan soldiers.” Fensham

So for now, the work grinds to a halt, the people go to their homes, and 16 years pass. This must have been terrifically discouraging for Zerubbabel. **He needs someone to give him some encouragement, so God sends the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to call the people back to the right priorities, to faithfulness, to persistence and perseverance.** Thank God for honest, encouraging friends, Amen?! Don't let circumstances or opposition stop you from the good work that God has uniquely called *you* to. After all, it is by persevering that we are able to produce a good crop (Luke 8:15; Ga 6:9).