

Ezra

The Return Begins

“When are we going home?” is a question we often hear, especially if we have children. But this question has long ago ceased to pass from the lips of the Israelites who have been in exile in Babylon for _____ years. They have all but given up on ever returning home to Jerusalem. But then it happens—the prophesied _____ years of captivity have actually come to an end. It’s finally time to go home!

There were _____ waves of _____ of the inhabitants of Jerusalem to Babylon (606 B.C., 597 B.C., and 586 B.C.), and _____ from Babylon back to Jerusalem (536 B.C. under Zerubbabel, 457 B.C. under Ezra, and 444 B.C. under Nehemiah).

The book of Ezra _____ where 2 Chronicles leaves off, and records the first two of three _____ to Jerusalem from Babylon. In 539 B.C. the King of Persia, King Cyrus, overthrows Babylon and issues a decree in 538 B.C. that allows the exiled Jews to _____ to their homeland.

But out of a population of some 2 or 3 million Jews, only 49,897 choose to _____ to their homeland. The difficult 900-mile journey, and the prospects of having to _____ a destroyed Jerusalem, discourage all but the most committed Jews.

The _____ of the three _____ is led by Zerubbabel. On his return to Jerusalem, Zerubbabel begins to rebuild the Temple, but _____ arises and the work _____. Finally, fourteen years later, in 515 B.C., the Temple is _____.

In 457 B.C., _____ years after Zerubbabel’s return, Ezra leads the _____ to Jerusalem. With the Temple structure now completed, Ezra returns in order to _____ the _____ both morally and spiritually.

During the period covered by Ezra, Siddhartha Gautama, “The Buddha” (c. 560–480 B.C.) is in _____, Confucius (551–479 B.C.) is in _____, and Socrates (470–399 B.C.) is in _____. But of all these thinkers, only Ezra “...had set his heart to

_____ the laws of the LORD, and to _____ it, and to _____ His statutes and ordinances...” (Ezra 7:10).

The book of **Ezra** can be outlined as follows:

<u>Chapters</u>	<u>Theme</u>
1–6	Zerubbabel Rebuilds the _____ (1st Wave)
7–10	Ezra Rebuilds the _____ (2nd Wave)

Some key events:

1. The pagan king of _____, King Cyrus, is moved by God to rebuild the Jewish _____ in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–3; cf. 2 Chron. 36:22,23).
2. The return of _____ to Jerusalem in 536 B.C. is in fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 25:9–11; 29:10–14) that Judah would be in exile for _____ years (606 B.C. to 536 B.C.) because of their _____ and failure to give the land its _____ rest (2 Chron. 36:20,21).
3. After the Temple foundation had been laid, there was _____ shouting by those who had never seen Solomon’s Temple, and loud _____ by those who had (Ezra 3:10–13).
4. The building of the Temple is _____ due to bad vibes from the neighbors (Ezra 4:4,5).
5. _____ to the Temple building project _____ and accusations are submitted to King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) of Persia (Ezra 4:6,12), who issues a _____ letter against the Temple building project (Ezra 4:21,24).
6. About eighteen years after the Temple construction _____, Temple construction _____, and so does the _____, and further accusations against those who had begun rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 5:3–10). A letter is sent to the current king of Persia, King Darius, to look into this matter. He does, and discovers that one of his predecessors, King Cyrus, had not only decreed the _____ of the Temple, but had agreed to help _____ it (Ezra 6:1–5,8)!
7. This second Jewish temple is _____ and the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are _____ (Ezra 6:15,19,22).

8. Artaxerxes, king of Persia, gives Ezra _____ to return to Jerusalem and even funds the trip (Ezra 7:11–18).
9. Ezra leads the _____ wave of Jewish returnees to _____, asking God for _____ travels (Ezra 8:1,22,23).
10. Ezra confesses the _____ sins and asks for God's forgiveness (Ezra 9:2–6).
11. The Jewish men put away their foreign _____ and _____ (Ezra 10:1–3).

Nehemiah

The Third Wave

How do you feel when someone tells you about the problems of those who are close to you? What do you do about those feelings?

Nehemiah was a man of great _____ for others. But he was more than that. He was a man of _____. While serving as the _____ to the Persian king, Artaxerxes I, Nehemiah learns of some bad news. Due to continual harassment and persecution, the Jews have still not finished _____ the city of Jerusalem, which they started almost a century earlier.

It has been _____ years since the _____ wave of Jews left Babylon and returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem (Ezra 1–6). It has been _____ years since the _____ wave of Jews made this same journey under Ezra (Ezra 7–10). And though the initial efforts to rebuild Jerusalem were sincere, progress has come to a screeching _____.

When Nehemiah hears this bad news, he breaks down and _____. Then he begins to fast and _____ for God's intervention. God uses Nehemiah to be the answer to his own prayers, and before he knows it, the king has commissioned Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to lead the Jews in finishing the rebuilding of the _____ and the _____ of Jerusalem.

Under the leadership of Nehemiah, the Jewish people successfully rebuild the _____ around the city of Jerusalem, accomplishing in only _____ what had not been done in the _____ since the first return under Zerubbabel. During this period, Ezra, the priest, is also busy helping Nehemiah rebuild the _____ morally and spiritually.

As one reads the book of Nehemiah, one can't help but notice the role that _____ played in Nehemiah's life. He demonstrated a balance of prayer and _____. And his life was a testimony to both the believer and unbeliever alike.

“So the wall was completed in . . . fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it . . . they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God” (Neh. 6:15–16).

The book of **Nehemiah** can be outlined as follows:

<u>Chapters</u>	<u>Theme</u>
1–7	Nehemiah rebuilds the _____ (3rd Wave)
8–13	Ezra rebuilds the _____

Some key events:

1. Nehemiah weeps, mourns, and prays when he learns that the _____ of Jerusalem had not yet been _____ (Neh. 1:1–4).
2. Nehemiah, the _____ to the king of Persia, King Artaxerxes, asks permission from the king to return to Jerusalem to _____ the _____ (Neh. 2:1–5).

Excursus #1: The king’s decree to _____ the _____ of Jerusalem was predicted by the prophet _____ in the 6th century B.C. (see Dan. 9:25). This decree to rebuild Jerusalem was given in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes’s reign (Neh. 2:1), the year 445 B.C. And Daniel prophecies that _____ years after this decree, the Messiah (Jesus) would come and be “cut off,” i.e. rejected and _____. And this is exactly what happened in _____ A.D., exactly 483 years after the decree to rebuild the city was issued. (Note: The Jews used a 360-day-per-year calendar, so this is what must be used to determine the proper date of fulfillment for this prophecy.)

Excursus #2: Nehemiah makes it a point to mention that “the queen [was] sitting beside him,” i.e., beside King Artaxerxes. Both because Nehemiah points this out, and because of the unusual Hebrew word used here for “queen,” commentators suggest that this is quite possibly a reference to the “queen mother,” the king’s _____, who was none other than Queen _____. This would further explain why the king was so favorable to this proposal and so eager to fund the _____ of the city of Jerusalem.

3. The king gives Nehemiah letters for safe passage to Jerusalem from Susa, the capitol of Persia (modern day Iran). This was a journey of about _____ miles and would take roughly _____ months (Neh. 1:1; 2:7,8).
4. Nehemiah inspires both enthusiasm _____, and enthusiasm _____, the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:17–20).
5. Due to threats of violence, the Jews _____ themselves while they _____ the wall (Neh. 4:7–9,14–17,23).
6. Nehemiah's _____ leads to an _____ plot against his life and a _____ report (Neh. 6:1,2,6–10).
7. The _____ was completed in _____ days with the help of _____ (Neh. 6:15,16).

Excursus #3: The wall around the city measures approximately _____ miles long, with an average height of nearly _____ feet and an average thickness of _____ feet. The wall also contained over _____ watchtowers and _____ gates.

8. Beginning with chapter 8 the emphasis is on the priest, _____, and his rebuilding of the _____ through the renewing of the _____ between God and Israel.
9. Ezra _____ the book of the law of Moses publicly to the Jewish people in Jerusalem, and it is simultaneously translated from _____ to _____, the spoken language of the people (Neh. 8:1–3).
10. The people respond with _____ and confession, followed by _____ and rejoicing (Neh. 8:9–12; 9:1–3).
11. The people are led in a lengthy public prayer that starts with acknowledging God as the _____ and the Giver of all _____ (Neh. 9:6).
12. The Jewish _____ sign a document renewing their commitment to follow God's laws and the _____ agree to do so as well (Neh. 9:38; 10:28–30).
13. With the wall _____, and the city of Jerusalem _____, people start to _____ into the city (Neh. 11:1–3).

14. Nehemiah leads the people in a great _____ celebration of the _____
(Neh. 12:27,31,38,40,43).
15. After a prolonged absence from Jerusalem, Nehemiah returns to the city only to find corruption, violation of the _____, the dishonoring of the _____, and marriages to _____ women. And Nehemiah is _____ (Neh. 13:6–9, 15–17,23–25).