

Theme: Return, Rebuild and Restore

The Message of Ezra & Nehemiah Including the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah



Wednesday Night Ministry Bible Study
Rose Hill Missionary Baptist Church
Reverend Maurice Y. Jones, Pastor

Bible Study Questions to Ponder

Is there a promise from God here?

Is God instructing me to do something?

Does this passage expose a sin I need to confess?

What does this passage tell me about God?

About Jesus?

About me?

And my Christian life?





Key Definition For Ministry

The faithful Service of God's people rendered
unto God and others on His behalf
to bring Him glory,
build up His church,
and reach out to His world.

Biblical Thoughts on Ezra and Nehemiah

Historical Background.

The unified book of Ezra-Nehemiah (called “Esdras b” in Greek manuscripts) describes the return of exiles from Babylonia after 538 BCE, and the reconstruction of Jewish life in Judah under Persian imperial rule between 538 and approximately 420.

The book depicts a massive return from exile, authorized by the edict of the Persian king Cyrus, and a lengthy process of rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple

The book illustrates how Israel reconstituted itself as the “people of the Book” with scripture, specifically the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch, known in Ezra-Nehemiah as the Law of Moses, the Law of God/the LORD, or the Law), becoming authoritative for communal and personal life.

Ezra-Nehemiah extends through the reign of several Persian kings and under Jewish leadership: Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Ezra and Nehemiah.

The book shows that the temple and its personnel gained unprecedented powers, and the community developed new criteria for identity and membership.

Cyrus’s edict permitting the return to Judah sets the agenda for the entire book of Ezra-Nehemiah, launching a national and religious rebirth and reconstruction. In response the people rebuild the Temple, the community, and Jerusalem.

The edict also establishes official Persian legitimization of Jewish life in the Persian province of Judah. Claiming harmony between Persian imperial policies and the will of Israel’s God.

Purpose:

1. *The Historical Purpose:*

- a. To document both the return of the Jews from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple.
- b. To show the importance of the temple – how it was rebuilt and how it was the proper center of worship.
- c. To show how the Northern and Southern Kingdoms merged into one nation during the captivity.
- d. To trace the genealogy of the returned exiles.
- e. To show that God had preserved the lineage of the Messiah.

2. *The Doctrinal or Spiritual Purpose:*

- a. To point out that God's plan for Israel was not void. God, in His sovereignty, stirred the hearts of kings to allow His people to be released and to rebuild the temple. God would still allow His Name to be in Jerusalem. He would still honor the covenant He made with Abraham and King David. And God's presence would still dwell in the midst of His people.
- b. To teach that believers must be united in their efforts to serve the LORD. Those who do the LORD's work must be willing to work diligently to overcome all opposition the enemy. They must faithfully perform even undesirable jobs, fighting through exhaustion and staying totally committed to the task at hand.
- c. To teach that God's guiding hand is with the believer in all situations, good and bad.
- d. To teach that repentance and obedience always bring God's blessing. Peace, provision, protection, hope, victory, safety, and the fullness of God's presence.

Purpose:

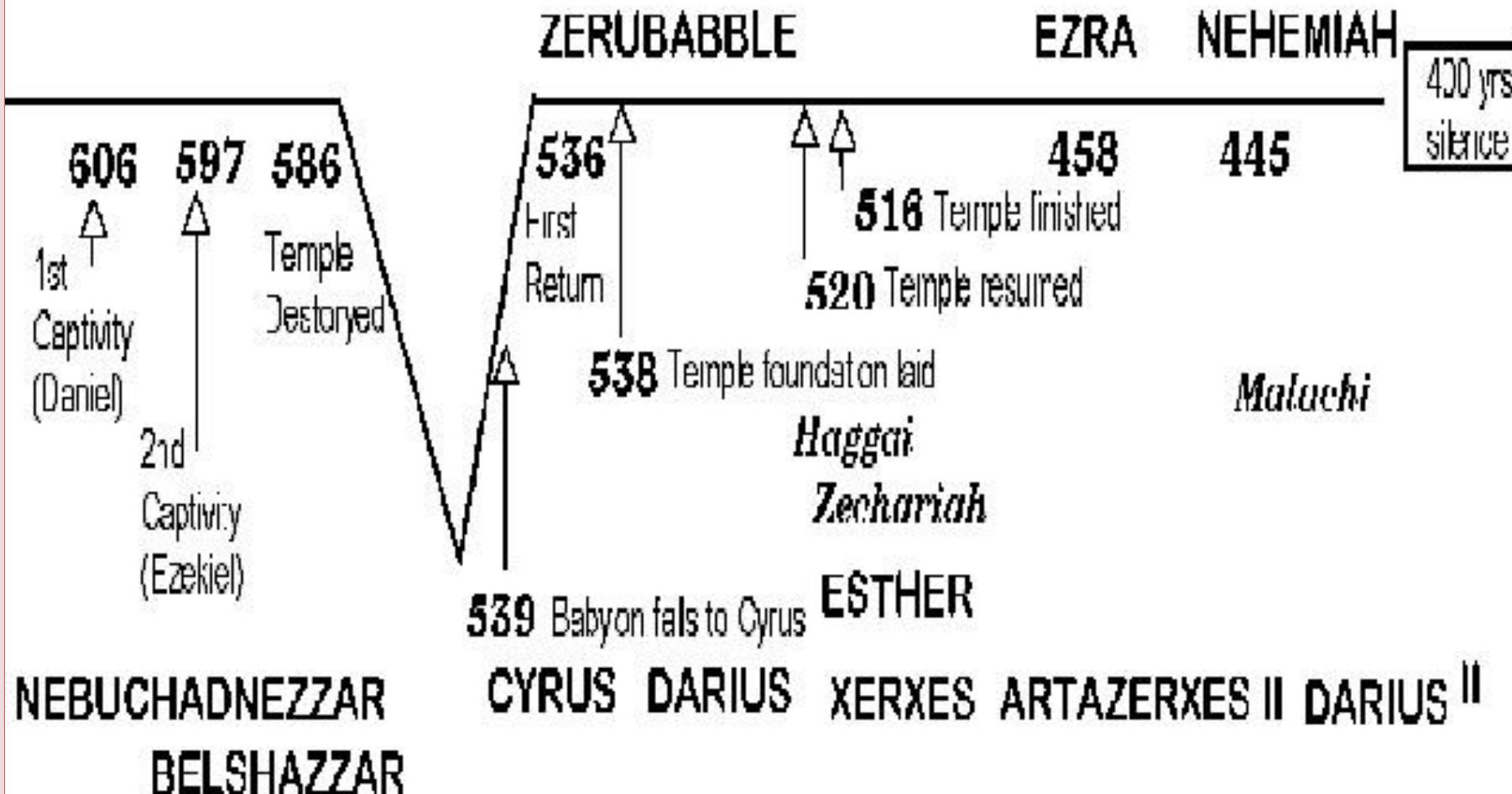
2. The Doctrinal or Spiritual Purpose:

- e. To inspire all readers to remain faithful in their personal and corporate worship, stirring them to be fully committed to the Lord, to allow His blessing to continually flow upon them.
- f. To teach that there is a spiritual rest and assurance for all who trust in the Lord. Just as God's blessing to the Jews included dwelling safely in the promised land, the eternal rest and reward of heaven awaits a life of faithful service.

3. The Christological or Christ-Centered Purpose:

Jesus Christ, the savior of the world, came through David's family line. The animal sacrifices offered up in the temple where God's Holy Presence dwelled were a symbol of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for our sins. All true worship in Old Testament times celebrated forgiveness of sins. Therefore, all true worship pointed forward to the sacrifice Christ so willing made on the cross, where he shed His life's blood to free us from sin. The faithful service of the Jews in Ezra and their commitment to reestablishing true worship both point to one critical fact: Jesus Christ is worthy of all worship. We are to worship God and God alone, the Eternally Existent One, existing in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Captivity and Return



Historical Circumstances...

Leading Themes of Ezra and Nehemiah:

To stress the faithfulness of God in continuing the royal line of David despite the unbelief and sin of the people.

➤ **God never abandons his purpose**

Granted that this return from exile was low-key and the flowing promises of, for example, Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 of the nations streaming to Zion and the end of sin and violence had not happened, yet this was an important partial fulfilment which was a guarantee that one day that purpose would be reality. Such conviction sustains God's people in days of deadness and gives hope and expectation when there is little to encourage.

➤ **God never gives up on His people.**

The exile looked as if God had abandoned the covenant people and washed his hands of them. Yet the emphasis of Ezra is that the return is a new exodus. Pagan monarchs, hostile officials and discouragement notwithstanding, God's people have at least partially returned to Zion and have resumed worship and Torah observance, which not only looks back to the youth of the nation but forward to the final gathering of God's people in the new Jerusalem.

➤ **God gives light for the guidance of his people.**

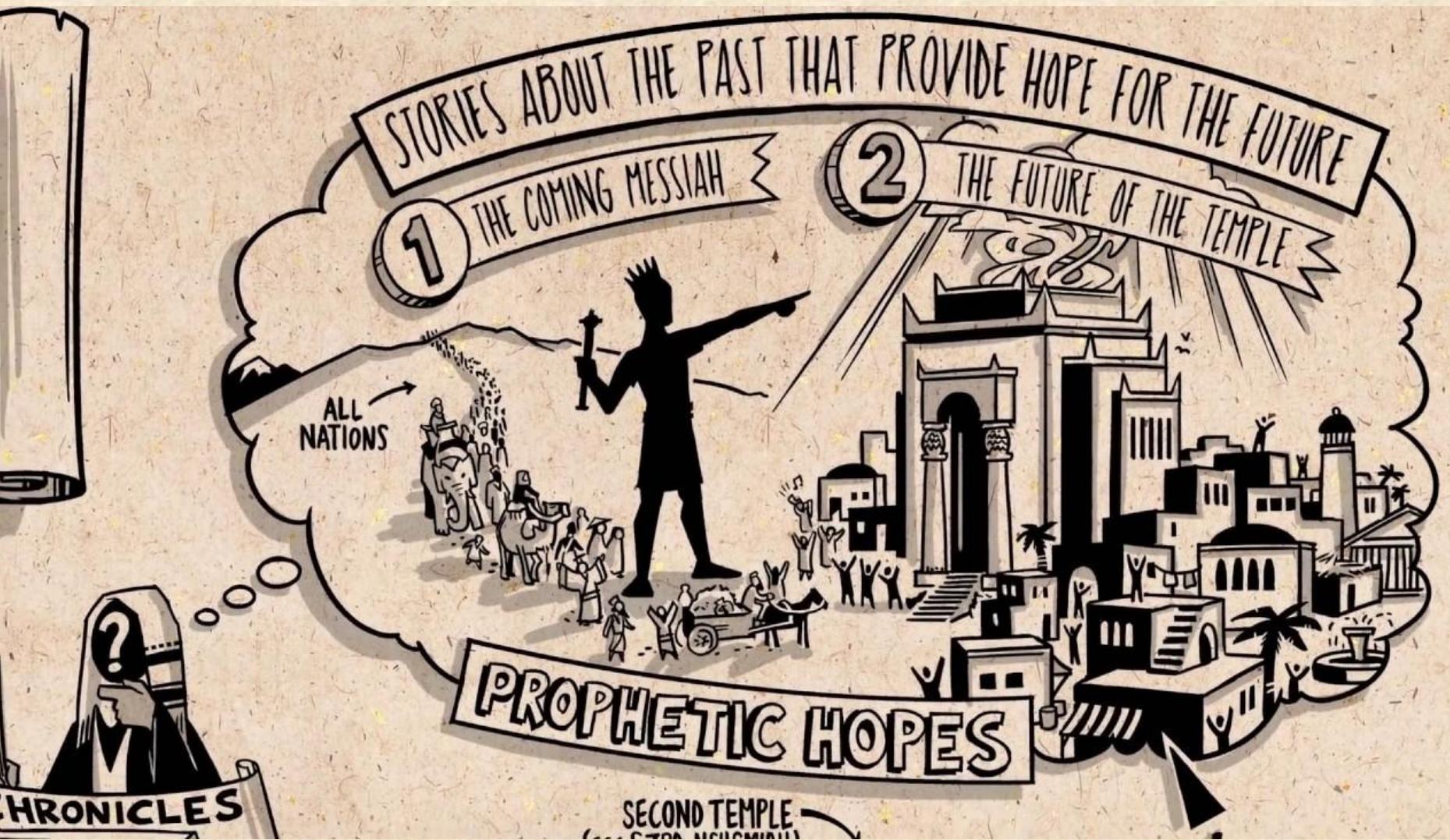
The emphasis on Scripture is the same as that in 2 Peter 1:19 where the word of the prophets is described as '**a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts**'. Ezra itself is part of that Scripture which helps us to walk safely through the darkness of this world until the day when all the promises are fulfilled, and the dwelling of God is with humans.

Ezra and Nehemiah

The Outline Ezra and Nehemiah

- A. Zerubbabel (538-515 B.C.)
 - 1. Reconstruction of the temple (Ezra 1:1-6:15)
 - 2. Assembly for celebration and Passover (Ezra 6:16-22)
- B. Ezra (458-457 B.C.)
 - 1. Reinstitution of the Law (Ezra 7-8, Nehemiah 7:73b-8:19, Ezra 9-10)
 - 2. Assembly for fasting and confession (Nehemiah 9-10)
- C. Nehemiah (446-433 B.C.)
 - 1. Reconstruction of the wall and repopulating of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-7:73a, 11:1-12:26)
 - 2. Assembly and dedication (Nehemiah 12:27-13:3)
 - 3. Cultic reforms of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:4-4-31)

The Promise by God through the Prophets



The Second Return of Exiles From Captivity and Their Reform Led By Ezra, 7:1-10:44

Chapter 10 summary

- Ezra functions as an intercessor, openly confessing the sins of the people whom he represents. The offenders will act in accordance with the law and make a covenant to send their wives and children away (vv. 1-4).
- Ezra calls on God to witness the declaration of the people and act against them if they break their vow. Ezra fasts and orders people to assemble at Jerusalem in three days (vv. 5-8).
- Ezra confronts the assembly, declaring that they have been unfaithful by marrying foreign women. He calls them to confess to the Lord and separate themselves from these relationships to restore covenant faithfulness. Due to the complexity of the issue, they propose a time to investigate the case to ensure justice, but not all agree (vv. 9-15).
- The exiles follow through on their commitment. Ezra the priest selects and appoints family heads by name to investigate each case. These leaders begin their work on the first day of the tenth month. The investigations take about 3 months (vv. 16-17).
- The final passages provide a detailed account of those who had violated the covenant by marrying foreign women, beginning with the priest and other leaders (vv. 18-44).

The Second Return of Exiles From Captivity and Their Reform Led By Ezra, 7:1-10:44

Key Theme: Confession

Key verse 10: 1-4 *Confession isn't about shame, it's about freedom.*

Personal Application: *Trust that God can move even unlikely people or systems to accomplish His purpose for you.*

Key Thought: *Restoration can only come through confession and repentance.*

Key Thing To Look Out For: *Hiding sin creates a false self. It distances us from others and from our true identity in Christ. Sin clouds judgment. Without confession, we may begin to justify wrong behavior, compromise truth, or lose sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's conviction.*

*THE MAN OF THE WORD
OF GOD*

The Second Return of Exiles From Captivity and Their Reform Led By Ezra, 7:1-10:44

Key “Quotable Quote”

“Confession is a spiritual journey toward finding and embracing God as the ultimate truth.”

St. Augustine of Hippo

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