



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Old Testament Survey

Lesson 39 – The Return of the Exiled Jews to Jerusalem (Ezra, various Psalms)

Important Dates in the History of the Exiles:

605 BC – Some skilled Jews, including Daniel and his 3 friends, were sent to Babylon.

597 BC – More Jews, including Jehoiachin and Ezekiel, were exiled to Babylonia.

586 BC – Jerusalem was destroyed, and most of the remaining Jews were exiled.

605-536 BC – The 70-year Babylonian Captivity, as prophesied by Jeremiah

539-536 BC – The Persians overthrow the Babylonian Empire, and some Jews return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (Sheshbazzar) and Jeshua (Joshua) the priest.

520-516 BC – The Jews rebuild the Temple under the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

458 BC – Ezra, scribe and priest, arrives in Jerusalem with more Jews.

445 BC – Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer, arrives in Palestine.

God sends Malachi to the Jews as the last of His prophets.

A List of Persian Kings During This Period

Darius the Mede (name mentioned only in the Bible; could be identical to Cyrus the Great)

Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC) – he gave the orders for the Jews to return to Jerusalem.

Cambyses (530-522 BC) – conqueror of Egypt

Smerdis (522 BC)

Darius I Hystaspes, the Great (522-486 BC)

Xerxes I (486-465 BC) – known in the Bible as Ahasuerus

Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC)

Xerxes II (424 BC)

Darius II (423-404 BC)

Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC)

Artaxerxes III (358-338 BC)

Arses (338-336 BC)

Darius III (336-331 BC)

Cyrus the Great

Cyrus the Great was the founder of the huge Persian Empire. He began his rule in 559 BC. He conquered the wealthy Croesus of Lydia in 546 BC, and he took control of Babylonia in 539 BC. The Persian Empire continued in power until Alexander the Great of Macedonia conquered Persia in 333 BC.

The Book of Ezra

The book of Ezra gives us the history of the various returns of the exiled Jews from Babylonia to Judea in the years from 539 (when Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylonia) until 458, (when Ezra led a band of Jews to Jerusalem). Remember:

- Isaiah had prophesied not only the captivity itself but also that a man named Cyrus would deliver the people from this captivity.
- Jeremiah had prophesied that this captivity would last for 70 years.
- Daniel was in Babylonia during the entire 70 years, and he prayed that the promised

deliverance would come (Daniel 9).

God kept His word; He delivered His people. Cyrus the Great (Darius the Mede) took Babylon from Belshazzar, and shortly afterward, Cyrus permitted the exiled Jews to return to their homeland. This was his policy for all exiled nations.

The prince of Judah at this time was Zerubbabel (also known as Sheshbazzar). He was a descendant of Jehoiachin and an ancestor of **JESUS**, the Messiah. The high priest was Jeshua (Joshua). Under these two men, a small group of about 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem and restored the worship of God. Compare this with 3,000,000 Jews who were living in the Persian Empire. This small group rebuilt the Temple with the encouragement of two prophets of God: Haggai and Zechariah. Most of the Jews remained in Babylonia, however, including Daniel. Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah were also in Babylonia. During the reign of Xerxes I, the Jewess Esther became his queen.

In 458 BC Ezra, a priest and scribe, returned to Jerusalem with about 6,000 Jews. He stopped the intermarriage of the Jews with the heathen. He educated the Jews in the true meaning of God's Word. From this time on, the Jews in Palestine did not commit open idolatry as their fathers had done. Ezra is probably the man responsible for gathering and organizing all the books of the Old Testament into one sacred collection.

Read all the chapters below. If you have questions, do not hesitate to ask them.

Chapter 1 – *The Return of the Exiles under Zerubbabel and Jeshua* (around 536 BC)

Cyrus permits the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (vv. 1-4) (also in 2 Chronicles 36).

Cyrus returns the stolen Temple treasures to the Jews before they leave (vv. 5-11).

Chapter 2 – *A List of the Returning Jews and Their Possessions*

Chapter 3 – *The Restoration of Worship and the Foundation of the Temple*

Zerubbabel and Jeshua build an altar and restore the Old Testament worship of God (vv. 1-7).

The foundations of the Temple are laid in great joy mingled with sadness (vv. 8-13).

“Old men who had seen the first temple wept with a loud voice” (v. ___)

Chapter 4 – *The Opposition of the Samaritans*

The Samaritans offer to help Zerubbabel and the Jews rebuild the Temple (vv. 1-3).

Zerubbabel refused the offer because the Samaritans did not worship God in truth, but their worship was mixed with heathen religion.

“You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God” (v. ___)

The Samaritans hinder the rebuilding of the Temple in the days of Cyrus and Cambyses (vv. 4-5, 24)

The Samaritans also hinder the rebuilding in later years, in the days of Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I, by accusing the Jews of rebellion and treason (vv. 6-24).

Chapter 5 – *The Building of the Temple Is Resumed* (520 BC)

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the Jews to continue building (vv. 1-2).

The Persian governor Tatnai writes to Darius I to ask him whether the Jews should be permitted to rebuild the Temple (vv. 3-17).

Chapter 6 – *The Temple Is Completed and Dedicated* (515 BC)

Darius I finds Cyrus' original decree and orders Tatnai to permit the Jews to continue rebuilding the Temple (vv: 1-12).

The Jews complete the Temple, dedicate it, and celebrate a Passover (vv: 13-22).

“They kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king...toward them” (v. ____

Chapter 7 – *The Arrival of Ezra and Other Jews in Jerusalem* (458 BC)

Ezra, the priest and scribe, and others with him travel from Babylon to Jerusalem (vv. 1-20).

Artaxerxes I commissions Ezra to teach the Law of God in Judea (vv. 11-26).

Ezra thanks God for leading Artaxerxes I to permit him to return to Jerusalem (vv. 27-28).

Chapter 8 – *More Information Concerning Ezra's Journey*

A list of those who return with Ezra (vv. 1-14).

The Jews fast and get organized on their way to Jerusalem (vv. 15-36).

Chapter 9 – *Ezra's Confession and Prayer Concerning the Intermarriage Problem*

Ezra learns of the sinful mixed marriage between the Jews and the heathen (vv. 1-2).

Ezra confesses the sins of Israel and prays to God for deliverance (vv. 3-15).

“Our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens”
(v. ____

“He extended mercy to us...to revive us, to repair the house of our God” (v. ____

“You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve” (v. ____

“Should we again break Your commandments, and join marriage with the people committing these abominations? Would You not be angry with us?” (v. ____

Chapter 10 – *The Correction of the Sin of Mixed Marriages*

Shechaniah proposes that all the heathen wives be put away (vv. 1-4).

The Jews swear to put away heathen wives, and Ezra prays for the people (vv. 5-6).

Ezra and the Jews, with slight opposition, separate themselves from their heathen wives (vv. 7-44).

“Make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives” (v. ____

Some of the Late Psalms of Israel

Read each of these psalms. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask them.

Psalm 71 – *The Prayer of an Aged Servant of God* (Jeremiah?)

“When I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me” (v. ____

Psalms 74 and 79 – *Two Laments over the Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar*

“They have set fire to Your sanctuary” (74:____ **“Your holy temple they have defiled”** (79:____

Psalm 137 – *In Memory of the Babylonian Captivity*

“How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?” (v. ____

Psalms 85, 107, 126 – *Psalms of Thanksgiving for the Restoration of Israel*

“You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin” (85:___

“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (107:___

“The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad” (126:___

“Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy” (126:___

Psalms 102, 130 – *Prayers of Troubled Ones Awaiting the LORD's Help*

“Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble” (102:___

“If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You... O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy” (130:_____

Questions

1. Name some of the persons taken captive in each of three attacks by Babylon.
2. Locate the prophecies that named Cyrus in advance, as well as those that said that the captivity would last 70 years.
3. What permission did Cyrus give to the Israelites in his kingdom?
4. Who was the leader of those that returned to Jerusalem the first time?
5. Why did the old men weep when the foundations of the new temple were laid?
6. What kind of opposition developed against the Israelites and the rebuilding of temple?
7. Why was a search made for Cyrus' original decree concerning the Israelites?
8. What did the scribe Ezra discover soon after he arrived in Jerusalem?
9. What suggestion was made to deal with the problems Ezra discovered?
10. Why was the destruction of the temple a trial for faithful Israelites?