

REVIEW: "Rebuilding and Restoring Jerusalem" Lesson One

The returning exiles cherished in their hearts the Jerusalem as it had been before the destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon. Now, as they return home, they are faced with the work of rebuilding the Temple and restoring Jerusalem. As we review Lesson One we will follow the timeline and the people used by God: beginning with Nebuchadnezzar and the start of the Seventy Year prophecy; ending with Ezra reading the book of the Law of Moses to the people after Jerusalem is rebuilt and restored. It is exciting to see how God moved through both his people and certain Gentiles, to accomplish his will during this important part of Israel's history!

1. Timeline: 605 BC, 538 BC, & 536 BC and the Rulers/Leaders:

A. Year 605 BC: Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon Carried away the "children of the province" – the Jews in Jerusalem and in Judah in four deportations: 605 BC, 597 BC, 586 BC, and a fourth lesser deportation in 582 BC. **The Seventy Year Prophecy began with the first deportation in 605 BC.** (Ezra 2:1; 2Kings 24:1, 10, 25:1, 22)

B. Year 538 BC: Cyrus king of Persia

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:1-2).

In 538 BC Cyrus king of Persia issued the decree to build the temple and restore Jerusalem.

The Jewish exiles were free to return home to Jerusalem. The arrival date may have depended upon the time required to sell their homes and businesses and organize the caravans necessary to make the 900 mile caravan journey back to Jerusalem. Some commentators contend that an arrival date of late 536 or early 535 BC is more likely. However, since this is uncertain we will stay with an arrival date of 538 BC.

Who is Cyrus; a king who played such an important role in Judah's history?

- a. Cyrus was the king of Persia whose reign began in 539/538 BC following his victory over Babylon. History claims the Babylonians were unhappy with king Nabonidus (the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar). Nabonidus spent his time in the countryside restoring temples to the moon god Sin. This made him unpopular with the Babylonians because they worshipped the god Marduk. Meanwhile, Nabonidus left the work of being king to his son Belshazzar. So when Cyrus entered Babylon most of the people were happy to welcome him. Cyrus saw himself as a liberator of people more than their conqueror.

- b. When Cyrus overtook Babylon he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy made over 100 years earlier:

"Thus saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut: (Isaiah 44:28 - 45:1).

- c. Cyrus was tolerant of the various religions in his vast Empire and an advocate of human rights.

REVIEW: "Rebuilding and Restoring Jerusalem" Lesson One

- d. One area of dispute surrounds whether or not Cyrus believed in the God of Israel. Many believe that he did and refer to this statement made by Cyrus in Ezra 1:1: "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth...". Had Cyrus heard about the faith of Daniel and how he interpreted the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar? Even though history records that Cyrus practiced Persia's official religion of Zoroastrianism, there is still a possibility that he came to believe in the God of Israel. What do you think?

What we do know however, is that the LORD God used Cyrus to fulfill prophecy for Israel enabling them to return home. Once home, they would rebuild and restore Jerusalem.

- C. In 538 BC: Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah and a descendant of David (Matt 1:12-13) was God's chosen to lead the first return of exiles in Babylon back to Jerusalem.** There were 49, 897 Jews in the first group (Ezra 2:64-65).

"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth...In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:21, 23)."

"Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; Which came with Zerubbabel..." (Ezra 2:1-2).

- D. In 538 BC: Jeshua, the priest and Zerubbabel were the two main leaders who led the work to build the altar.** This was done shortly after they arrived in Jerusalem. The seventh month is when Israel celebrated the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles. They understood the spiritual significance of the altar as being necessary for Israel to deal with their sin. It was an act of obedience to build an altar in order to obey the Law of Moses, the man of God. It was also significant that they build the altar in Jerusalem on God's holy hill:

"Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God" (Ezra 3:2).

"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6).

"Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy" (Psalm 99:9).

'And the LORD shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem' (Zechariah 2:12).

However, something important had not yet been done ...

"From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid" (Ezra 3:6).

- E. In 536 BC: Jeshua, the priest and Zerubbabel were the two main leaders who led the work to build the foundation of the temple.** Two years have passed since they had built the altar to offer burnt sacrifices.

"Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak...to set forward the work of the house of the LORD (Ezra 3:8).

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel" (Ezra 3: 10).

- a. The people praised the LORD!

"And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid" (Ezra 3: 11).

- b. However, some of the older men, many who were priests and Levites and chief of the fathers wept. Those considered "ancient" were 70-80 years old and older. Those men remembered the large size and grander of Solomon's temple so when they compared it to the size of the temple now being built to replace it they were sad. They missed the size and beauty of Solomon's temple. They may even have wept because they knew that it was the result of sin that brought about the destruction of the first temple. However, they shouted for joy that the temple was finally being rebuilt, but they were sad at what they had lost.
- The ancient men could have been twenty-five years old serving in the temple at Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC. Those men would be in their late seventies when the foundation was laid.
586 BC – 536 BC = 50 years; 50 years + 25 years (at 586 BC) = 75 years of age (at 536BC)
 - Numbers 8:24-26 defines the age limit for men to perform priestly work in the temple between twenty-five to fifty years of age. Older priests were allowed to advise and assist as long as they were not doing the actual physical work themselves.

After the foundation was built all work on the temple stopped.

- c. Before we go any farther in our timeline we need to talk about Jeshua. First, Jeshua is another way to spell Joshua, which is what we are more familiar with. However Joshua (Jeshua) is not the same Joshua who wrote a book of the Bible (who led the Israelites into the Promise Land). The Joshua of Zechariah was a Levite and a descendant of Aaron the priest. Later in Zechariah we will see how the LORD encourages him in his work as high priest and in rebuilding the temple with Zerubbabel.

REVIEW: "Rebuilding and Restoring Jerusalem" Lesson One**2. Timeline: 538BC, 520 BC the Samaritans, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.**

- A. The Samaritans:** In 931 BC God divided Israel into the Northern Kingdom of ten tribes and the Southern Kingdom of two tribes (Judah, Benjamin). In 722 BC the Northern Kingdom was defeated by the Assyrians who took many of the Jews captive to Assyria; but some remained. Those who remained often inter-married with the Assyrians. The children born from these marriages are half Jew and half Gentile and were called Samaritans because they lived in the region of Samaria.
- The Samaritans form of worship was in disobedience to the LORD because they combined pagan worship with worship to the LORD. . The Samaritans sacrificed in the temple they built at Mt Gerizim without the Levitical priesthood. The true temple and priesthood was in Jerusalem.
 - This is the reason why **Zerubbabel and Jeshua refused the help from these men whom they considered "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin"**. They did not trust the motivation behind their offer of help. Their adversaries may have been jealous of losing their authority and control to the returning exiles.
 - The Samaritans did not succeed in their offer of "help" so they tried another approach. They hired counselors who were likely officers of the Persian court willing to cause trouble for the exiles in building the temple. They would have interfered with the orders of Cyrus from being carried out. They may have also interfered with business deals for the materials necessary for the building of the temple. For eighteen years (538 – 520 BC) these men interfered with the building of the temple, beginning in 538 BC when the exiles returned and started work, until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in 520 BC encouraged the exiles to resume the work on the temple.

"Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:4-5).

Timeline of the Persian Kings during the period of building and restoring Jerusalem

Cyrus, king of Persia who defeated Babylon	Reigned from 539 – 530 BC (died same year)
Cambyses I (son of Cyrus)	Reigned from 530 – 522 BC (died same year)
Darius I (member of the royal guard of Cambyses I) Temple was rebuilt in 516 BC	Reigned from 522 – 486 BC (died same year)
Xerxes, aka as Ahasuerus in the Bible (son of Darius, Also, Esther, Queen of Persia)	Reigned from 486 – 465 BC (died same year)
Artaxerxes I (son of Xerxes)	Reigned from 465 – 424 BC (died the same year)
Darius II (son of Artaxerxes)	Reigned from 423 – 405 BC (died the same year)

REVIEW: "Rebuilding and Restoring Jerusalem" Lesson One

- B. Petitions to Xerxes and Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:7-23 were inserted out of chronological order among passages that discussed the return and rebuilding of the temple.** These verses in Ezra 4:7-23 include letters sent by the enemies of the Jews to two kings of Persia: Artaxerxes and Xerxes concerning the work surrounding the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This would be the time period of 486 – 445 BC. The Wall of Jerusalem was restored in 445 BC under the leadership of Nehemiah the cup bear to Artaxerxes I king of Persia. **Therefore...**
- Ezra chapters 1 – 4:5 are about the first return of exiles under Cyrus in 538 BC and their work on building the temple. Following a chronological order Ezra 4:24 belongs immediately after Ezra 4:5. If you do not know the chronology of the kings, then Ezra 4:4 could be confusing. With this in mind Ezra 4:5 and Ezra 4:24 would read as follows:

"And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." (Ezra 4:5).

"Then ceased the work of the house of God, which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" (Ezra 4:24).

- C. In 520 BC the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesize and encourage the exiles to resume their work on building the temple.** Darius the king of Persia reigned from 522 – 486 BC, so the second year of his reign was 520 BC. The work on the temple began again under the leadership of Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest saying Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:1-4)

In the eight month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet saying The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers" (Zechariah 1:1-2).

3. Timeline: 520 BC, 516 BC, 458 BC, 445 BC: Darius I king of Persia, Ezra, and Artaxerxes I king of Persia.

- A.** God's watchful eye was on the work on the temple. Around 520 BC, when Tatnai the governor questioned the work on the temple it was God who kept the elders of the Jews from ordering them to stop. **Then Darius king of Persia searched the achieves (rolls) and discovered the original decree of Cyrus ordering the building of the temple and restoration of Jerusalem.**

"Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders build this house of God in his place" (Ezra 6:7).

- B. The temple was completed in 516 BC; in the sixth year of Darius I the king of Persia.**

REVIEW: "Rebuilding and Restoring Jerusalem" Lesson One**C. In 458 BC, in the seventh year of the reign of king Artaxerxes I of Persia, Ezra led the *second return of exiles from Babylon home to Jerusalem.***

- a. Ezra led a small group of exiles, some who were priests, Levites, singers, porters, and the Nethinims.
 - The priests and Levites serve in the temple. The singers were first appointed by King David to offer praise to the LORD. The porters were men who watched the gates; they were their security who ensured God's glory and honor was maintained. The Nethinims performed the more backbreaking work in the temple.

(1Chronicles 6:31-32; 1Chronicles 9:33; Numbers 31:47; 1Chronicles 9:2)

D. In 445 BC, in the twentieth year of his reign, king Artaxerxes of Persia, issued the command to build the wall and to restore Jerusalem. Again, God has used a Gentile King for his purpose.

- a. King Artaxerxes allowed Nehemiah, his cup bearer, to return to Judah to build the gates of the palace and the wall of the Jerusalem. He gave him letters so he could receive timber to make the gates and the wall. Nehemiah returned with a single purpose: to build the gates and the wall of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the city of his God and of his people; the Jews.
- b. **Under the leadership of Nehemiah the wall was built in 52 days**, in spite of opposition.

"So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days"
(Nehemiah 6:15)

4. Shortly after all the work in rebuilding and restoring Jerusalem was finished the people gathered together to hear the book of the Law of Moses from Ezra the priest and scribe.
 - a. Ezra stood upon a pulpit of wood which the people had made just for the purpose of reading the book of the Law of Moses. When Ezra opened the book in front of the people they all stood up. By doing this they showed great respect for God and his Law.

"And Ezra blessed the LORD and all the people answered Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground"
(Nehemiah 8:6).

Timeline Summary

605 BC: The Seventy Year prophecy began when Nebuchadnezzar took captives from Jerusalem to Babylon.

538 BC: (1) Cyrus king of Persia **issued the decree** to build the temple and restore Jerusalem.

(2) Zerubbabel, leads the *first return of exiles* from Babylon home to Jerusalem.

(3) Zerubbabel and Jeshua, were the two main leaders who built the **altar**

536 BC: Jeshua and Zerubbabel were the two leaders who built the **foundation of the temple**.

520 BC: Haggai and Zechariah prophesize to encourage the exiles to resume their work on the temple.

516 BC: The temple is complete.

458 BC: Ezra leads the second return of exiles from Babylon home to Jerusalem.

445 BC: (1) Nehemiah leads the building of the wall and gates of Jerusalem in 52 days.

(2) Ezra read the book of the Law of Moses to the people.

In Lesson Two, our Study will focus on the prophet Zechariah and his prophecies and visions