

## BBS#11 • The Return Era

---

\_\_\_\_\_ Samuel and others were  
\_\_\_\_\_ chosen as \_\_\_\_\_ to  
\_\_\_\_\_ the people for  
\_\_\_\_\_ rebellious years.

\_\_\_\_\_ David, the greatest king in the  
\_\_\_\_\_ new \_\_\_\_\_, is followed  
\_\_\_\_\_ by a succession of mostly  
\_\_\_\_\_ kings, and God  
\_\_\_\_\_ eventually \_\_\_\_\_ Israel  
\_\_\_\_\_ for her sins, sending her into  
\_\_\_\_\_ exile.

\_\_\_\_\_ Daniel gives \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and encourages  
\_\_\_\_\_ among the  
\_\_\_\_\_ for the next  
\_\_\_\_\_ seventy years.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ezra \_\_\_\_\_ the people  
\_\_\_\_\_ back from \_\_\_\_\_ to  
\_\_\_\_\_ rebuild \_\_\_\_\_.

# BASIC BIBLE STUDY

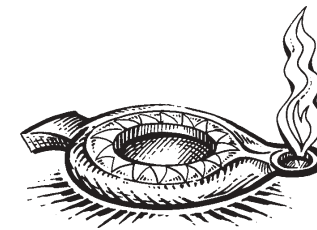
## An Introductory Guide To Understanding The Scriptures

---

### PART ELEVEN

### The Return Era

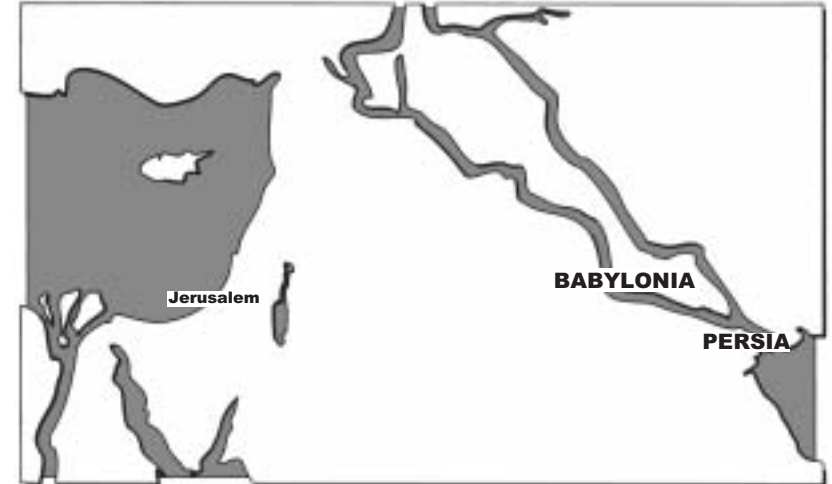
---



"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet,  
and a light unto my path"  
PSALM 119:105

**Test #3: The Geography of the Return Era**

(Draw an arrow from Persia to Jerusalem on the map at the top of the next page to represent geographical movements during the Return Era)



**Test #4: Story of the Old Testament**

(Fill in the blanks)

ERA	FIGURE	LOCATION	STORYLINE SUMMARY
_____	_____	_____	Adam is created by God, but he _____ and _____ God's original _____ for man.
_____	_____	_____	Abraham is _____ by God to _____ a people to _____ God to the world.
_____	_____	_____	Moses _____ the Hebrew people from _____ in Egypt and then gives them the _____ .
_____	_____	_____	Joshua leads the _____ of the _____ .

## BBS#11 • The Return Era

Without the teaching of the law; without the invincible faith and fearless action of these two leaders, it is doubtful if a distinctive Jewish religion and community - with all that means for the world through the birth and death of Christ - could have survived. To this end their strong line on mixed marriage was essential. The objection to foreign women was not on the grounds of race, but because of their debased religions. History had taught them that the admixture of paganism, with its easy standards and its appeal to the lowest in human nature, could quickly bring the Jewish faith to the brink of extinction.

### THE LAST HISTORIAN & PROPHET OF THE O.T. AGE

Nehemiah was the last historian, and Malachi the last prophet of the Old Testament Age. The closing verses of Malachi's Prophecy, pointing back, as they do, to Moses, and forward to Elijah, are very significant (**Malachi 4:4-6**). Malachi's last word is "curse." It was a curse that was not pronounced, but threatened - and the chosen people of Israel and the world had yet to wait 400 years before He came Who was to be made a curse for us, that we might enter into everlasting blessing (**Galatians 3:13**)!

## TESTS

### Test #1: Four Major Subjects in the Return Era

(Write in the correct subject from the options at left)

OPTIONS:	SUBJECT:	DESCRIPTION:
Disrepair		Spiritual rebuilding
Temple		Rebuilding the temple
People		Destruction from war and neglect
Walls		Restoration complete

### Test #2: Story-line Summary

(Fill in the blanks from memory)

ERA	STORYLINE SUMMARY
Return	Ezra _____ the people back from _____ to rebuild _____ .

## BBS#11 • The Return Era

The Israelites went into exile a drifting and confused people. They spent agonising years in solitude, and in physical and mental torment. They were ministered to unexpectedly by people sent from God. They returned to Israel a sobered people. They were home, re-focused in their purpose as a nation, ready to begin again the worship of Jehovah.

## THE ARC OF BIBLE HISTORY #8 ... THE RETURN ERA



### I. Review:

(Fill in the blanks to bring the chart up-to-date with this era; p4).

### II. Story-line Summary:

**Ezra leads the people  
back from exile to rebuild Jerusalem.**

### III. Story-line Expansion:

There are four major subjects in the Return Era:

1. Disrepair
2. Rebuilding the Temple
3. Spiritual Rebuilding of the People
4. Rebuilding of the Walls

## 1. DISREPAIR: DESTRUCTION FROM WAR AND NEGLECT (Nehemiah 1:1-3)

During the 70 years of captivity, the leadership of Judah has been taken into exile, and the city of Jerusalem falls into disrepair. Not only has the city suffered the ravages of the military campaign during the

ERA	FIGURE	LOCATION	STORYLINE SUMMARY
_____	_____	_____	Adam is created by God, but he _____ and _____ God's original _____ for man.
_____	_____	_____	Abraham is _____ by God to _____ a people to _____ God to the world.
_____	_____	_____	Moses _____ the Hebrew people from _____ in Egypt and then gives them the _____ .
_____	_____	_____	Joshua leads the _____ of the _____ .
_____	_____	_____	Samuel and others were chosen as _____ to _____ the people for _____ rebellious years.
_____	_____	_____	David, the greatest king in the new _____ , is followed by a succession of mostly _____ kings, and God eventually _____ Israel for her sins, sending her into exile.
_____	_____	_____	Daniel gives _____ and encourages _____ among the _____ for the next seventy years.
_____	_____	_____	To be completed in this study.

there was deeply rooted in him that strong patriotism for which the Jews have always been noted; and when one day he was informed by some of his brethren from Jerusalem of the state of affairs in the West across the desert, he was filled with grief and mourned for four months. Longimanus questioned him as to his sadness of countenance, and at Nehemiah's request gave him leave to go to Jerusalem to rebuild it (**Nehemiah 1&2**). Then unfolds the marvellous story of how the wall was put up in 52 days, in the face of the fiercest opposition (**Nehemiah 3-6**); and of how, together with Ezra, this devoted man revived the Mosaic Law, and called the people to obey it (**Nehemiah 7-13**).

**THE GREAT AWAKENING AND THE COVENANT**

It was a wonderful scene in Jerusalem when Ezra opened the Book in the sight of all the people, and when he blessed Jehovah the Great God, and all the people answered "Amen, Amen."

- A Covenant was made, and sealed by 84 signatories of priests, Levites, and people:
- one man of every ten was called upon to offer himself to live in Jerusalem, "and the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves":
- the Sabbath, the Feasts, and the services of the Temple were all reinstated,
- and then, at the end of twelve years, Nehemiah returned to Susa, according to his promise. It is possible that he was away for about a year, after which he returned again to Jerusalem.

**However, he was full of sorrow when he discovered that during the short period of his absence the priests and people had broken the covenant which had been so solemnly entered into, and had made unholy alliances, stopped the support of the house of God, violated the Sabbath, and resorted again to mixed marriages (Nehemiah 13).**

With a prompt, firm, and fearless hand Nehemiah set about rectifying these abuses, and in this difficult, delicate, and thankless task he was greatly supported by **Malachi**, in whose Prophecy all these evils are directly referred to.

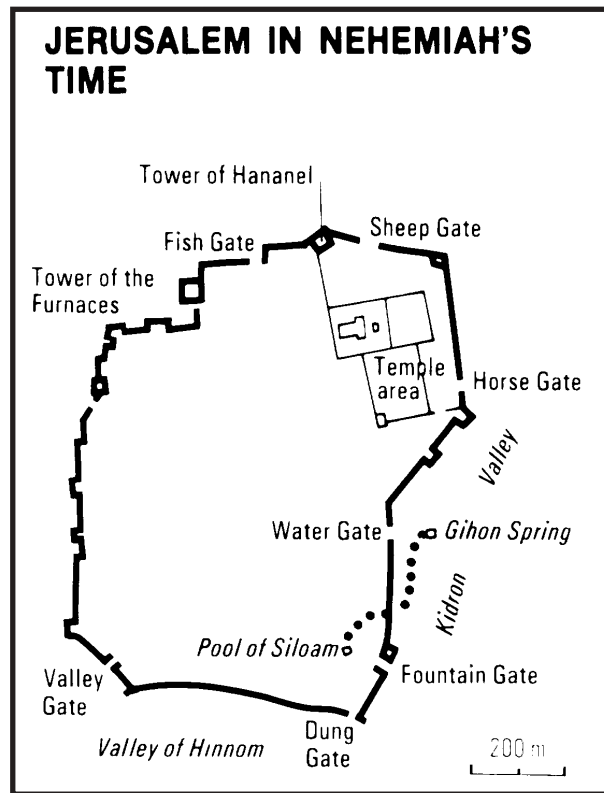
**CRUCIAL YEARS**

The achievements of Ezra and Nehemiah in the crucial years following the return of their decimated nation from exile are notable.

king of Persia, is burdened to rebuild the walls. He is given permission and financing by the king of Persia to do so. A short time later, the walls frame the noble city of Jerusalem, home of the temple of God. Restoration is complete as the temple is rebuilt, the people are rebuilt, and the walls are rebuilt.

**OUR SERVICE TO GOD**

God raised up a man in this bleak period of Jewish history to keep alive in the hearts and minds of the returned Jews their true character and destiny. Nehemiah tells us his own story, and it is **one of the most vibrant stories in the Bible - perhaps THE classic on personal service for God.**



This remarkable man held a post as cup-bearer in the palace of Susa (his job was to taste the king's wine, in case it was poisoned - a very responsible and trusted position!). He was a young man, having been born in captivity, and had never seen Judea or Jerusalem. Yet

initial conquest, but it has also fallen victim to the erosion of neglect. The destruction from war and neglect leaves Jerusalem in a state of object ruin.

**NEW HOPE**

However, as the words of **2 Chronicles 36:22&23** (repeated in **Ezra 1:1-3**) testify, God had not utterly abandoned His people. Jeremiah too, while he had spoken scalding words of God's judgment and condemnation, had also declared the continuing love of God for His exiled people - and had held out the hope of their eventual return (**Jeremiah 24:4-7**).

**REIGNS OF HEATHEN KINGS**

We need to name the kings of the Babylonian Empire, and of the Persian Power which followed it, to help us with our understanding when any of their names are mentioned.

**Six Babylonian Kings**

- Nabopolassar, B.C. 625-604, **Father.**
- Nebuchadnezzar**, B.C. 604-561, **Son.**
- Evil-Merodach, B.C. 561-559, **Grandson.**
- Nergal-Sharezer, B.C. 559-556, **Usurper.**
- Laborosoarchod, B.C. 556-555, **Usurper.**
- Nabonadius, B.C. 555-538, **Great Grandson,**  
with **Belshazzar, his son.**

**Two Median Kings**

- Cyaxares, B.C. 634-595 (Ahasuerus, **Daniel 9:1**).
- Astyages, B.C. 594-536 (**Darius, Daniel 5:31**).

**Six Persian Kings**

- Cyrus**, B.C. 559-530 (**Ezra 1; Daniel 1:21; 10:1**).
- Cambyzes, B.C. 530-522 (Not mentioned in Bible).
- Gomates, B.C. 522-521
- Darius I**, B.C. 521-486 (**Ezra 4:5&24; 5; 6; Haggai & Zech.**).
- Xerxes I, B.C. 486-465 (**Ahasuerus, Book of Esther; Ezra 4:6**).
- Artaxerxes I**, B.C. 464-423 (**Ezra 4:7-23; 7:1ff, Neh. 2:1**).

It should be remembered that 'Ahasuerus,' (like Pharaoh, Sultan, or

Czar), is not a name, but a title, and is applied to several different persons in Scripture. With these facts before us we can now proceed.

**SETTING THE GUIDELINES**

Two passages of Scripture, set side by side, will set the guidelines here: **Habakkuk 1:6**: "Lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs."

**Jeremiah 50:9&10**: "Lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon, an assembly of great nations, from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken ... and Chaldea shall be a spoil."

**The first passage** predicts the triumph of Babylonia over Assyria (and other countries), which took place in B.C. 606; and **the second passage** predicts the overthrow of Babylonia at the hands of Medo-Persia, which took place in B.C. 538-7. Therefore the greatest period of the Babylonian power lasted approximately 70 years - the time of Judah's captivity - a remarkable and significant fact.

**THE FALL OF BABYLON**

Belshazzar was the son of Nabonadius, and was associated with him on the throne. **Daniel 5** provides the details. During Belshazzar's profane feast, writing appeared on the wall, which the aged Daniel was summoned to interpret. It proved to be the fatal sentence of Babylon: "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." Belshazzar was slain that night.

Just as there had been three stages in the captivity of Judah, so three stages can be clearly marked in the return of the remnant from Babylon.

**2. THE FIRST RETURN UNDER ZERUBBABEL:  
REBUILDING THE TEMPLE  
(Ezra 1-6)**

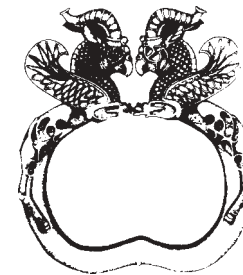
God prompts Cyrus, king of Persia, to initiate the financing and rebuilding of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Under the direction of Zerubbabel, a notable Jewish figure in Persia, the rebuilding of the

garment, and plucked off his hair, and sat down astonished. Every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel then gathered before him, and Ezra made intercession for them all. **A covenant was entered into by the guilty, to put away all foreign wives, and to restore their proper wives who had been divorced.** Many of the priestly caste were offenders in this matter, but they bowed before the word and power of God.

The whole history of Ezra is deeply interesting, and covers a period of about 80 years.

**FROM EZRA TO NEHEMIAH**

12 years elapsed between the returns of Ezra and of Nehemiah. Of



this interval Professor Sayce says: "Megabyzos, the satrap of Syria, had successfully defied the Persian king, and forced him to agree to his own terms of peace, thus giving the first open sign of the internal decay of the Empire. It is possible that the disaffection of the satrap may account for the silence in Scripture as to the events which followed Ezra's reform. Deprived of the royal support, he would no longer be able to main-

tain himself as Governor in face of the opposition he was certain to experience from the Samaritans. It would also account for the condition in which we find the Jews when the Book of Nehemiah opens. The walls of the city are still unbuilt, Ezra has ceased to be Governor, the people are in great affliction and reproach, the Arabs are encamping close to Jerusalem, Samballat and his allies are all-powerful, and priests and laity alike have gone back to their heathen or foreign wives."

**4. THE THIRD RETURN:  
REBUILDING THE WALLS  
- RESTORATION COMPLETE!  
(Nehemiah)**

Even though not all Jews returned when they could have (cf. the **Book of Esther**, whose events take place during this Era) many Jews are now back home in Jerusalem. The temple stands restored as the dominant structure in the city, but the walls of the city are still broken down. This is a security threat as well as a source of national humiliation. Nehemiah, another Jewish notable serving Artaxerxes,

**WHERE THE BOOK OF ESTHER FITS IN**

The story of this Book takes place during the reign of Ahasuerus, (the son of Darius, and the father of Artaxerxes). He is the Xerxes of classic fame, and reigned from 486-465 B.C.

Esther's story is very familiar ...

- how the queen was desposed, and the beautiful young Jewess was selected in her place;
- how Mordecai, Esther's cousin, saved the king's life by revealing a plot, refused to bow down to Haman, and was in consequence hated by the latter;
- how he got Esther to speak for the Jews against whom Haman had lifted up himself; the sleepless night of the king; the banquets; the charge of Esther against Haman; Haman's downfall, and Mordecai's advancement; the deliverance of the Jews, and the slaughter of their enemies.

All this should have stirred up the exiled Jews to recognise their sin in not having returned to their own land when the opportunity was given them! The history also teaches great lessons in the inscrutable providence of God, and the certain retribution of the wicked.

### **3. THE SECOND RETURN UNDER EZRA: THE SPIRITUAL REBUILDING OF THE PEOPLE (Ezra 7-10)**

Rebuilding the temple is a direct parallel to the spiritual rebuilding of the Jewish people. Temple worship has been discontinued for seventy years. Most of the Jews have never seen or heard the Law of Moses. They have to be instructed in a national reeducation program. Ezra sets his heart to study the Law of the Lord, to practice it, and to teach God's statutes and ordinances in Israel to rebuild the people as they return from exile.

When the history in the Book of **Ezra** is resumed (**chapter 7:1**), we learn of the permission which Ezra obtained from Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem. 1700 men accompany him. They travel with gifts valuing more than £1,000,000. Some account is given of their journey, and of the condition of things which the priest found upon his arrival at Jerusalem. **The people were far from God, living in disobedience to the Law. Marriage with foreigners had become common.** When Ezra heard of it he was filled with shame. He rent his

temple is begun. Considerable opposition from Gentiles around Jerusalem is encountered. At the urging of Haggai and Zechariah, two Jewish prophets living in Jerusalem, the restoration of the temple is completed.

**CYRUS AND HIS DECREE**

Babylon's conqueror was Cyrus, (whom Isaiah had predicted should come for Judah's deliverance, and who, unconsciously, was girded by Jehovah; **Isaiah 44:26-28; 45:1-13**). He was a great and good man. The policy of Cyrus was a remarkable one. In his inscriptions he expressly declares that he collected all the peoples that had been dispossessed of their habitations and deported to Babylon, and repatriated them. The Jews benefitted from this change of policy in Babylon. As far as Cyrus' treatment of the Jews was concerned, those who wished were permitted to return to Judea, and to build again the Temple at Jerusalem; those who remained in Babylonia were exhorted to give freewill offerings to the Jews who returned, for the house of God (**Ezra 1:1-6**). Cyrus also restored to the Jews the Temple vessels (5,400 in number), which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem.

**Only some of the exiles responded to the decree of the king (Ezra 2).** 42,360 Jews, and 7,337 slaves, 200 of whom were singers, went back to their own land. Of the 24 courses of priests, only four returned, consisting of 4,000 persons, and there were also 74 Levites.

"Those belonging to the old Northern Kingdom, whose families had been transplanted by the Assyrian conquerors, never returned, or only in trifling numbers. And of the Judahites many of the settlers in Babylonia, or of those who had attained to office at Court, Daniel apparently among them, preferred to remain. Ezekiel was probably dead, murdered, says one tradition, by a Babylonian, for rebuking him for idolatry, or he would certainly have been at the head of the joyful band who went with songs from the land of their captivity."

**THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE (Ezra 3-6)**

- Zerubbabel's work was the rebuilding of the Temple;
- Ezra's, the restoration of Worship;
- and Nehemiah's, the reconstruction of the City.



The vast majority of those who returned to the land went with Zerubbabel (a prince).

**THE PRINCE AND THE PRIEST**

Associated with this man was Joshua, (a priest): these two in their official capacity were typical of that Priest-King who is yet to lead this people out of exile into the fulness of a restored kingdom ... the Lord Jesus Christ (**Zechariah 3,4&6**).

Soon after the arrival of the Jews in the land:

- the people assembled at Jerusalem,
- the altar of burnt offering was set up (this was *the first thing* to be rebuilt),
- the morning and evening sacrifices resumed,
- and the set feasts of the Lord were restored.

**In the second year since their return, the foundation of the Temple was laid amidst the mingled shouts and cries of the people.** The Samaritans came forward at this point, and offered their assistance. When their offer of help was firmly declined, the people of the land opposed the work of rebuilding. This opposition lasted from the time of Cyrus to the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

The plot was successful, and for 15 years the work of rebuilding the Temple was at a standstill (**Ezra 4:1-5, 24**). [**Ezra 4:6-23** interrupts the chronological sequence to carry the account of the opposition through to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, where the bone of contention became the rebuilding of the city walls; cf. **v12**].

The leaders at Jerusalem became quite indifferent, and instead of erecting the House of God, they spent their time and money in building fine mansions for themselves.

**HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH**

But God did not leave them to themselves. **Two prophets were raised up who dealt very faithfully with the people about their sin, and who greatly encouraged them to go forward and complete the work.**

Haggai delivered his message in the year 520 B.C. It is believed that Haggai was born in captivity, and had returned under Zerubbabel. His ministry lasted for about four months. He delivered four messages within that time. He pointed out that all the material troubles which had come upon the people had been caused by their sin and neglect in allowing God's house to lie waste - and declared that from the day

they returned with determination to the work, the Lord would bless them.

Haggai was accompanied by Zechariah in his mission of encouragement. It is fair to say that Zechariah's message is much more extensive, for it reaches across the ages to the latter days, and predicts the triumph of Messiah. Under the stimulus of these words of rebuke and promise, the House went forward to completion, and was finished in the sixth year of the reign of Darius (516 B.C.). Attempts to stop this work of rebuilding had the opposite effect: Darius made inquiries which led him to confirm the decree of Cyrus, and to place under severe judgment any and all who interfered with the progress of the work (**Ezra 5&6**). The temple is finished in 4 years and the people are able to celebrate the Passover.

**THE 'MISSING' 60 YEARS**

Almost 60 years separate **Ezra 6:22** from **Ezra 7:1**. During this time Esther is enabled to prevent a complete massacre of the Jewish people, and, indirectly, to save the lives of Ezra and Nehemiah. The result is that Artaxerxes is favourably disposed towards the Jews and Ezra is given official sanction to teach the law and appoint magistrates in his homeland, to offer sacrifices and beautify the temple.

**XERXES AND ESTHER**

Between the time when Zerubbabel's Temple was finished, and the return to Judea of Ezra, (i.e. between **chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra**), 57 years elapsed; 516-458 B.C..

Classical history has much to say of this period, but the Bible gives us only one glimpse into it. The Books **Ezekiel, Daniel, and Esther**, are alike in this, that they were all the products of the captivity period, but unlike in this, that the two former were written during the prescribed period of exile, but Esther was written subsequent to the return under Zerubbabel. The Book of **Esther** helps to fill the gap in the history **between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra**.

**HOW TO READ EZRA, ESTHER, NEHEMIAH**

B.C. 536-520	B.C. 520-516	B.C. 516-458	B.C. 457	B.C. 457-445	B.C. 445-432
<b>EZRA 1-4</b>	<b>EZRA 5-6</b>	<b>ESTHER</b>	<b>EZRA 7-10</b>	<b>NEHEMIAH</b>	
16 Years	4 Years	Interval – 57 Years	About 1 Year	Interval – 12 Years	About 13 Years