

Ezra

Restoring the Temple and People									
Temple					People				
Zerubbabel					Ezra				
Chapters 1–6					Chapters 7–10				
50,000 Return					5,000 Return				
Survival					Revival				
Working					Worshipping				
538-516 BC (22 Years)					458-457 BC (1 Year)				
External Opposition: Samaritans					Internal Opposition: Intermarriage				
Return 1–2		Rebuilding 3–6			Return 7–8		Restoration 9–10		
Decree 1	Returnees 2	Begins 3	Opposed 4:1–6:12	Ends 6:13-22	Qualifi- cations & Provisions 7	Returnees & Protection 8	Inter- marriage & Lament 9	Divorces Carried Out 10	

Key Word: Temple

Key Verse: "... for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage" (Ezra 9:8)

Summary Statement:

The reason God restored the temple and people to the land under Zerubbabel and Ezra was to show his faithful fulfillment of his promise of restoration to encourage true temple worship and covenant obedience.

Application:

Restoration to God for the repentant believer requires action.

Ezra

Introduction

- I. **Title:** Ezra and Nehemiah originally formed a single book according to Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.8), Jerome (*Preface to the Commentary on Galatians*), and the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 15a). The Hebrew Bible also has the two books together under the title Ezra Nehemiah (עֶזְרָא נְחֵמְיָהוּ *ezra' nehemeyah*). However, the repetition of Ezra 2 in Nehemiah 7 may indicate that the two were originally separate works. Ezra means "help, succour, assistance" (BDB 740d 1) and Nehemiah means "Yahweh comforts" (BDB 637c 3). Once again the names are significant in that Ezra's ministry enabled the Jews to return to the land and consecrate themselves again while Nehemiah functioned as God's comfort through building Jerusalem's protective wall.

II. Authorship

- A. **External Evidence:** Jewish Talmudic tradition has long held that Ezra authored this book.
- B. **Internal Evidence:** In 7:27–9:15 the author refers to himself in the first person. This is significant since in all likelihood Ezra was not even born when the events of chapters 1–6 took place (538-516 BC) as he is first introduced in 7:1 (458 BC). Like Chronicles, the book has a strong priestly emphasis, and Ezra was in direct descent from Aaron through Eleazar, Phineas, and Zadok (7:1-5). The Apocrypha states that Ezra had access to the library of documents gathered by Nehemiah (2 Macc. 2:13-15) which furnished the material to write Ezra 1–6 as well as Chronicles (*TTTB*, 117); however, Nehemiah lived in Babylon until his arrival in Jerusalem in 444 BC so Ezra either used Nehemiah's documents later than 444 BC or else the Apocrypha is wrong (cf. Date below).

III. Circumstances

- A. **Date:** The events of Ezra 7–10 in which Ezra had part occurred in 458-457 BC. Also, Ezra was contemporary of Nehemiah (Neh. 8:1-9; 12:36), who arrived in Jerusalem in 444 BC. A likely date of composition may be between these two dates at about 450 BC (Martin, *BKC*, 1:651).

However, the Book of Ezra itself covers two distinct eras separated by 58 years. Ezra 1–6 relates the story of Zerubbabel (538-516 BC) while Ezra 7–10 is mostly an autobiographical account of Ezra that begins six decades later (458-457 BC). During the period covered by the Book of Ezra three other prominent non-biblical leaders lived (*TTTB*, 117): Gautama Buddha in India (ca. 560-480 BC), Confucius in China (551-479 BC), and Socrates in Greece (470-399 BC).

- B. **Recipients:** Ezra's readers were Jews who had recently returned to Israel from Persia who were the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who returned from Babylon a century earlier.
- C. **Occasion:** Ezra continues the account of Jewish history recorded in 2 Chronicles. The Chronicles record God faithfully fulfilling his promise of *judgment* for Judah's sin; Ezra records how God was faithful to his promise of *restoration* after 70 years as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). Ezra's account of this restoration exhorted the returnees to follow the LORD wholeheartedly—especially in true temple worship and covenant obedience. This emphasis was much needed as the Book of Malachi sadly reports deplorable conditions at this time (e.g., intermarriage, ritualism, etc.).

IV. Characteristics

- A. Ezra records the first events following the Babylonian Exile, but only in a selective sense as a 58-year gap separates chapters 1–6 and 7–10. The book of Esther occurs during this gap.
- B. Ezra is one of the few books of Scripture originally written in two languages (Daniel is the other). Almost one fourth (67 of 280 verses) is written in Aramaic with the majority in Hebrew. This material (4:8–6:18; 7:12-26) is Aramaic because it mainly comprises official correspondence for which Aramaic was the standard language of the day (Martin, *BKC*, 1:652).

- C. The events in the restoration of Israel under Ezra and Nehemiah continued to fulfill God's purposes for Israel as stated in the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).
- 1) Events: The events of the restoration came in three separate returns to the land from Babylon (see the charts in these class notes beginning on p. 295).
 - a) The first return under Zerubbabel (538 BC) involved about 50,000 Jews who came back to the land to rebuild the temple as a result of Cyrus' decree (cf. Ezra 1–6). They quickly rebuilt the altar and re-instituted sacrifices, and then began rebuilding the temple (536 BC). However, opposition from Tattenai and others halted the work for 16 years until it resumed in 520 BC and was finally finished in 516 BC. The prophets Zechariah and Haggai also ministered at this time. Their exhortations to rebuild the temple contributed significantly to its reconstruction.
 - b) The second return under Ezra (458 BC) brought back about 5,000 Jews in the reign of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7–8). Ezra restored the people by leading them to obey the Law by abolishing intermarriage with foreign women (Ezra 9–10). He restored the people's faith in God by teaching and preaching the Law of Moses, which led to a national revival.
 - c) The third return under Nehemiah (444 BC) to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem revolved mostly around Nehemiah himself, as the number of Jews with him is never recorded (cf. Book of Nehemiah). His return under Artaxerxes rallied the people to work together despite opposition from Sanballat, Tobias, and Gershem the Arab so that the entire wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt in a mere 52 days. Nehemiah then organized the defense of the city, led in a recommitment to Sabbath observance, and enacted a process by which Jerusalem would be repopulated to defend it and the temple from attack. He, too, had to deal with the problem of intermarriage that Ezra addressed less than two decades earlier (Neh. 13). The Book of Malachi also records the deplorable state of the temple at this time in which sacrificial ritual had replaced genuine heart commitment to Yahweh. Nehemiah's selfless example also rebuked the people's exacting interest from their fellow Israelites in violation of the Law.
 - 2) Relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant: The restoration era is important in that without a return to the land, the Abrahamic Covenant could never be fulfilled.
 - a) God promised Abraham that his descendants would occupy the land from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18), yet Israel in Babylon was living outside of these boundaries. The nation needed to return to the land for the land promises to be fulfilled. Jeremiah 25:11-12 also promised a restoration to the land.
 - b) The Messiah had already been prophesied to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). In God's own prophetic timetable as seen in Daniel 9:25-26, the nation needed to return to the land for this seed aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant to be fulfilled by the prophesied time of Christ's birth. Also, Jesus offered the kingdom during his earthly ministry, which would not have been possible apart from a return to the land.
 - c) The books of Ezra and Nehemiah also show the problem of intermarriage (see above). It was vital to put away this sin so that Israel might keep the purity of the Davidic line to fulfill the seed promises given to Abraham. Had Ezra and Nehemiah not taken such drastic measures to stop intermarriage, there would have been no guarantee that the Messianic King was from the lineage of David (cf. Matt. 1; Luke 3).

Argument

The Book of Ezra shows a keen interest in the temple as it continues from the end of 2 Chronicles. Unfortunately, the remnant that returned did not convey as strong a commitment to the covenant and temple as one would expect. Therefore, Ezra records the restoration of the temple under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–6) and the restoration of the people to their covenant obligations under Ezra (Ezra 7–10) to encourage the remnant in true temple worship and covenant obedience.

Synthesis

Restoring the temple and people

partial fulfillment of land promise

1-6	Temple—Zerubbabel
1-2	Return
1	Decree
2	Returnees—50,000
3-6	Rebuilding
3	Begins
4:1-6:12	Opposed
4:1-23	Summarized
4:24	Interrupted
5:1-2	Zechariah/Haggai
5:3-6:12	Tattenai humiliated
6:13-22	Ends
7-10	People—Ezra
7-8	Return
7:1-10	Qualifications
7:11-28	Provisions
8:1-14	Returnees—5,000
8:15-36	Protection
9-10	Restoration
9:1-2	Intermarriage
9:3-15	Lament
10	Divorces

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The reason *God restored the temple and people to the land under Zerubbabel and Ezra was to show his faithful fulfillment of his promise of restoration to encourage true temple worship and covenant obedience.*

- I. **God used Zerubbabel to return 50,000 exiles to rebuild the temple to worship him (Ezra 1-6; 538 BC).**
 - A. The first return under Zerubbabel showed God as faithful to fulfill his promise of restoration (Ezra 1-2).
 1. Cyrus of Persia supported all Jews in Babylon to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple as proof of God fulfilling his promise of restoration even through a pagan king (Ezra 1).
 2. The list of returning exiles had 50,000 Jews who returned and gave freewill offerings for the temple reconstruction to show God fulfilling his promise of restoration (Ezra 2).
 - B. God restored temple worship despite opposition and the idolatry that caused the exile (Ezra 3-6).
 1. Temple rebuilding began by rebuilding the altar and foundation and resuming sacrifices as God's help to worship at the temple—not the high places (Ezra 3).
 2. Enemies halted the temple rebuilding for 16 years until Zechariah and Haggai exhorted the Jews to continue until God moved the key enemy to assure their success (4:1-6:12).
 - a) Opposition to temple rebuilding (ca. 536 BC under Cyrus) stopped the work for 16 years (4:1-5; 536-520 BC).
 - b) A parenthesis of later opposition to wall rebuilding (ca. 484 under Xerxes and ca. 444 BC under Artaxerxes) shows God granted success over enemy opposition (4:6-23).
 - c) Temple rebuilding stopped for 16 years (536-520 BC) by Jews who intermarried with pagans and worshipped other gods (4:24).

- d) Zechariah and Haggai successfully encouraged the Jews to keep rebuilding the temple despite opposition (5:1-2; 520 BC).
 - e) Tattenai's opposition backfired as Darius appointed him to fund the work until completion to show God providing a house to properly worship him (5:3-6:12).
2. The Jews celebrated the completed temple rebuilding in 516 BC (20 years after its beginning) with a special dedication and Passover observance (6:13-22).

II. The reason God used Ezra to return 5,000 exiles was for them to fulfill their covenant obligations (Ezra 7-10; 458 BC).

- A. The second return under Ezra the priest with 5,000 Jews shows that God mercifully protects all who trust him (Ezra 7-8).
 1. Ezra's credentials to lead more returnees back to Jerusalem show God leading his life as priest to restore the remnant spiritually (7:1-10).
 - a) Ezra was a priest (7:1-5).
 - b) Ezra was a teacher (7:6a).
 - c) Ezra saw the hand of God on his life (7:6b-9).
 - d) Ezra prioritized the study, obedience, and teaching of the law (7:10).
 2. God funded the return by King Artaxerxes giving money and authority to Ezra to lead and tax exemption for temple workers to show how God blesses obedience (7:11-28).
 3. Returnees of 18 family heads, 1496 other men, women and children, totaled about 5,000—a far smaller group than the 50,000 with Zerubbabel 80 years before (8:1-14).
 4. God protected the returnees due to their spiritual preparation by adding 258 Levites as temple leaders and celebrating a fast to show his hand on all who trust him (8:15-36).
- B. God protected the messianic seed by Ezra purifying Judah's marriages so they would obey the covenant (Ezra 9-10).
 1. Ezra saw that leaders tempted Judah to sin by unlawful marriage to pagan wives (9:1-2; cf. Gen 24:3; 26:34-35; 28:1-8; Exod 34:16; Deut 7:1-2; 20:17-18; Judg 3:5; 1 Kings 11).
 2. Ezra lamented the intermarriage and contrasted God's faithfulness with Israel's unfaithfulness to model repentance for the covenant people (9:3-15).

Are Ezra and Nehemiah functioning primarily to teach us proper leadership style?
Then whom should you follow?

- ◆ Intermarriage lead Ezra to pull out his own hair (Ezra 9:13)
- ◆ Intermarriage lead Nehemiah to pull out others' hair (Neh. 13:25)!

3. The initiation by the leaders that Israelites divorce their foreign wives was carried out faithfully for 113 men to exhort Israel to live according to the covenant (Ezra 10).
 - a) After the whole nation lamented the sin of intermarriage, the leaders initiating the idea to divorce all foreign wives fulfilled their vow to do so (10:1-17).
 - b) That those who divorced pagan wives included priests, Levites, and commoners shows the great extent that this sin corrupted the holy nation (10:18-44).

God's Approval of Divorce Under Ezra

Issue: How could God approve of divorce here when he elsewhere disapproves of it and even says clearly, "I hate divorce" (Mal. 2:16; cf. Matt. 19:8)?

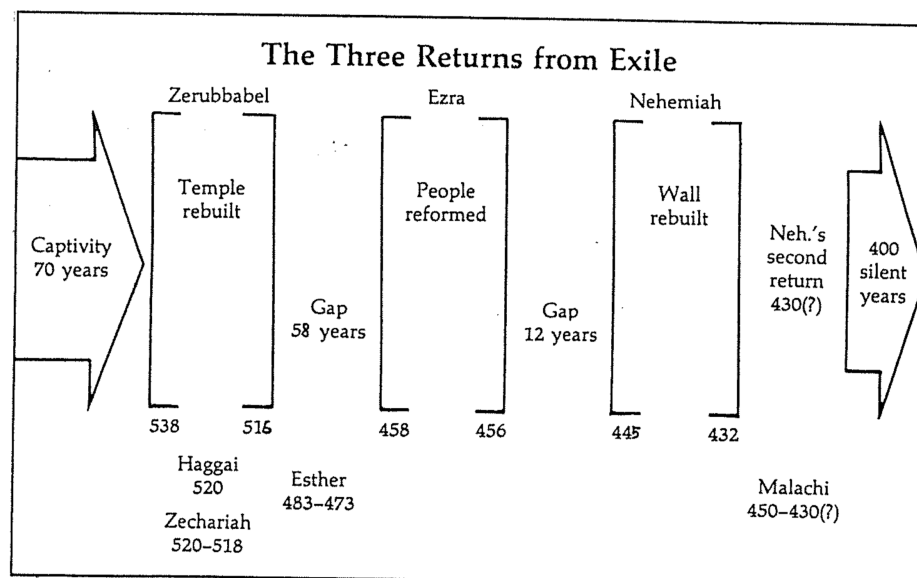
1. The text doesn't specifically say that God approved of divorce. One solution could have been for the 113 men to leave the community with their families. However, for the sake of argument, the other reasons below are offered.
2. The account illustrates that maintaining the purity of the covenant people of God was more important than even keeping some individual families intact (especially families destined to destroy the messianic line).
3. Though 113 men may seem a small number, this included leaders of the people, so intermarriage was certainly going to spread further to the common people as had happened in the Jewish community in Egypt and the northern kingdom of Israel.



Returns from Exile

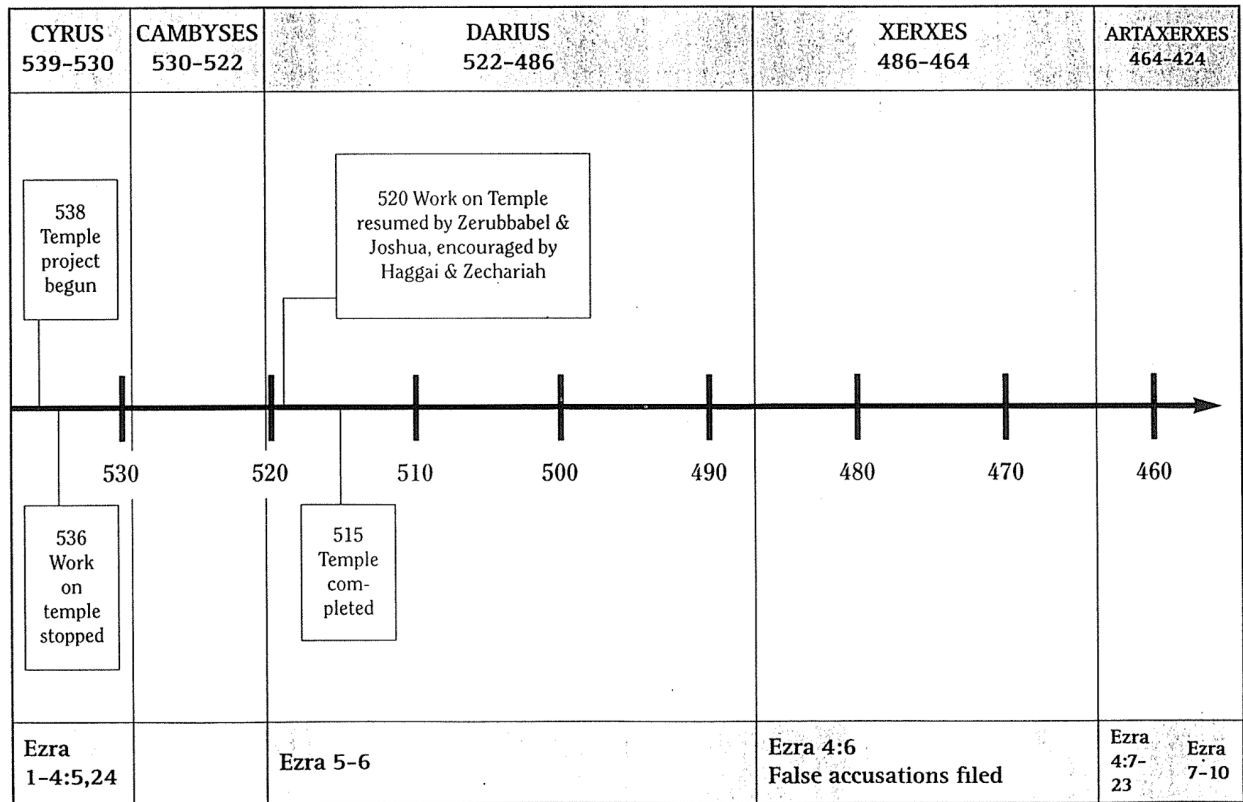
John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, 35 and John A. Martin, "Ezra," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:652, adapted

RETURN	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
Reference	Ezra 1-6	Ezra 7-10	Nehemiah 1-13
Date	538 B.C.	458 B.C.	444 B.C.
Leaders	Sheshbazzar Zerubbabel Jeshua	Ezra	Nehemiah
Persian King	Cyrus	Artaxerxes Longimanus	Artaxerxes Longimanus
Elements of the Decree	As many as wished to could return. Temple could be rebuilt, partially financed by royal treasury. Vessels returned.	As many as wished to could return. Finances provided by royal treasury. Allowed to have own civil magistrates.	Allowed to rebuild the wall
Number Returning	42,360 <u>7,337 (servants)</u> 49,697	1,500 men 38 Levites <u>220 helpers</u> 1,758 + women + children = 5,000 ?	Unknown
Events, Accomplishments, and Problems	Temple begun; sacrifices made and Feast of Tabernacles celebrated. Samaritans made trouble, and work ceased until 520. Temple completed in 516.	Problems with inter-marriage	Wall rebuilt in 52 days, despite opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Walls dedicated and Law read.



Chronological Sequence in the Book of Ezra

John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the OT*, 2d ed., 36



Chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah

The Bible Visual Resource Book, 93

Dates below are given according to a Nisan-to-Nisan Jewish calendar (see chart on "Hebrew Calendar," p. 102).

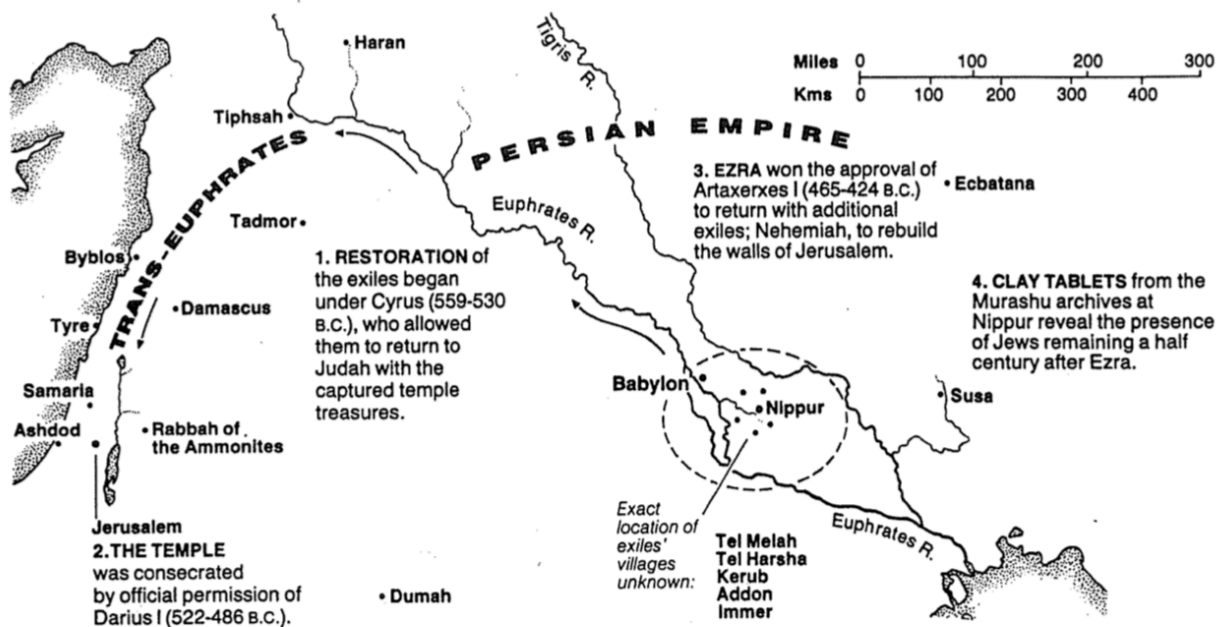
Roman numerals represent months; Arabic numerals represent days.

	YEAR	MONTH	DAY	EVENT	REFERENCE
540 B.C.					
530	539 B.C.	Oct.	12	Capture of Babylon	Da 5:30
	538	Mar.	24	Cyrus's first year	Ezr 1:1-4
520	537	to Mar.	11		
	537(?)			Return under Sheshbazzar	Ezr 1:11
	537	VII		Building of altar	Ezr 3:1
510	536	II		Work on temple begun	Ezr 3:8
	536-530			Opposition during Cyrus's reign	Ezr 4:1-5
	530-520			Work on temple ceased	Ezr 4:24
500	520	VI =Sept.	24 21	Work on temple renewed under Darius	Ezr 5:2; Hag 1:14
	516	XII =Mar.	3 12	Temple completed	Ezr 6:15
490					
480	458	I =Apr.	1 8	Ezra departs from Babylon	Ezr 7:6-9
		V =Aug.	1 4	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem	Ezr 7:8-9
	IX =Dec.	20 19	People assemble	Ezr 10:9	
		X =Dec.	1 29	Committee begins investigation	Ezr 10:16
470	457	I =Mar.	1 27	Committee ends investigation	Ezr 10:17
460	445	Apr.	13	20th year of Artaxerxes I	Ne 1:1
	444	to Apr.	2		
450	445	I =Mar.-Apr.		Nehemiah approaches king	Ne 2:1
		Aug.(?)		Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem	Ne 2:11
	VI =Oct.	25 2	Completion of wall	Ne 6:15	
440	VII =Oct. to Nov.	8 5	Public assembly	Ne 7:73-8:1	
		VII =Oct. =Oct.	15-22 22-28	Feast of Tabernacles	Ne 8:14
	VII =Oct. =Oct.	24 30	Fast	Ne 9:1	
430 B.C.	433	Apr.	1	32nd year of Artaxerxes;	Ne 5:14; 13:6
	432	to Apr.	19	Nehemiah's recall and return	

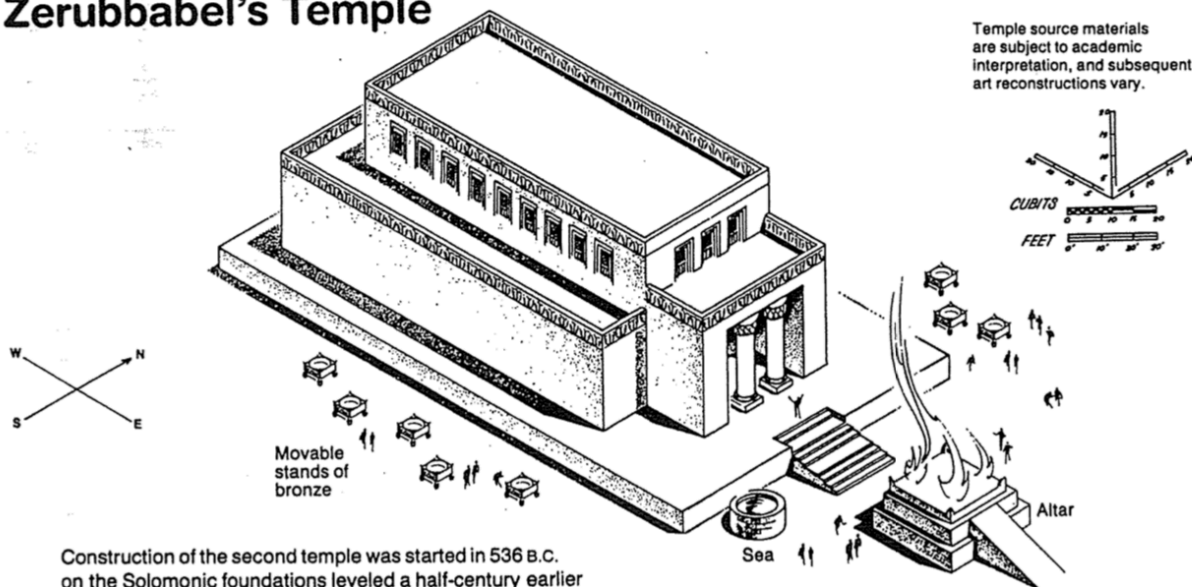
Return from Exile and Zerubbabel's Temple

The Bible Visual Resource Book, 95

Return from Exile



Zerubbabel's Temple



Construction of the second temple was started in 536 B.C. on the Solomonic foundations leveled a half-century earlier by the Babylonians. People who remembered the earlier temple wept at the comparison (Ezr 3:12). Not until 516 B.C., the 6th year of the Persian emperor Darius I (522-486), was the temple finally completed at the urging of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezr 6:13-15).

Archaeological evidence confirms that the Persian period in Palestine was a comparatively impoverished one in terms of material culture. Later Aramaic documents from Elephantine in Upper Egypt illustrate the official process of gaining permission to construct a Jewish place of worship, and the opposition engendered by the presence of various foes during this period.

Of the temple and its construction, little is known. Among the few contemporary buildings, the Persian palace at Lachish and the Tobiad monument at Iraq el-Amir may be compared in terms of technique.

Unlike the more famous structures razed in 586 B.C. and A.D. 70, the temple begun by Zerubbabel suffered no major hostile destruction, but was gradually repaired and reconstructed over a long period. Eventually it was replaced entirely by Herod's magnificent edifice.