

**Episode:** Kings and Prophets Series No. 20

**Narrator:** Ezra, Malachi

**Primary Scriptures:** *Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi*

**Story Summary:** Return of the Jews from exile to Jerusalem and Judah

**Location:** Judah

**Time:** 538-43 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Ezra 3:3, 3:12; 8:21-23; 9:6; Nehemiah 4:9; 5:19; Malachi 1:8, 2:7, 2:15-16; 3:1, 3:10, 3:18; 4:5

The Jews of the Southern Kingdom were taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The first contingent of Jews returned in 538-539 BC, soon after King Cyrus of the Persians conquered Babylon. The second contingent returned in 458 BC under Ezra, and the third contingent returned in 445 BC under Nehemiah.

Ezra's goal was to improve the situation of the Jews who had previously returned. He had approval of the Persian government, and brought donations and holy vessels to the Temple. The Persian government supported the trip by giving Ezra supplies.

Ezra realized the situation in Israel had deteriorated over the previous decades. Political harassment from local leaders, intermarriage with other ethnic groups, and heavy taxes were burdens for the Jews. Their culture was under siege.

The efforts of Ezra to help his people were so successful that the local politicians appealed to the Persians to stop his efforts. The Persians managed to stop the work on the city walls for a period of time.

About thirteen years after Ezra's departure, Nehemiah concluded that he should lead more Jews back. As a beloved cupbearer of the King, Nehemiah not only got permission to go, but was given great favor.

A strong administrator, Nehemiah divided the construction work into 42 groups of families, each responsible for their own district. The builders not only had to build, but had to protect themselves and the rest of the people.

A wise man, Nehemiah solved a near uprising of the people who were working on the walls. While they worked, the rich Jews supplied their needs, but charged high prices and interest. Nehemiah got them to reduce their prices and forgive much of the debt. By coming to a peaceful solution, he set the stage for the successful completion of the wall and the firm establishment of a Jewish society.

Malachi prophesied during the time of Nehemiah, and chastised the people for not behaving as God wanted them to. The words of Malachi would ring in the ears of the Jewish people for over four decades, when his words would be supplemented and replaced by a young Jewish rabbi named Jesus.



### Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Cyrus allow the Jews to start returning to Judah?
2. What were the first things the Jews built when they returned from exile?
3. How many returns of the Jewish exiles are recorded in the Bible?
4. What were the reactions of the Jews when they saw the foundations of the rebuilt Temple?
5. According to Ezra 7:1 and 7:10, who was Ezra?
6. What was the purpose of the return led by Ezra?
7. What was the purpose of the return led by Nehemiah? How did he prepare to lead the return?

1. The Lord moved him to do so in order to fulfill the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezra 1:1. 2. The altar to make sacrifices, then the temple. 3. Three 4. Ezra 3:12-13 seems to indicate that some of them were thrilled and some were disappointed. 5. A very well-qualified teacher of the Law of Moses. 6. To help rebuild the Temple and to honor God. 7. To rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He prepared by mourning, fasting, and praying.

### Application Questions:

1. According to Ezra 1:5, the leading Jews who returned from exile were those whose hearts God moved. In modern times, how do you know if God has moved your heart to do something? Does having the support of your friends and neighbors indicate that God is involved?
2. Ezra 4:24 describes the halting of the Temple rebuild. How do you react when you receive bad news or encounter setbacks? Are you willing to follow authority even when it opposes what you believe to be right? Why or why not?
3. Nehemiah and his people were greatly threatened when they wanted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. How did they react according to Nehemiah 4:9? What does it look like in your life to react both spiritually and physically? Does that mean you might not trust God enough to just react spiritually?

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. According to Ezra 5:1-2, Zerubbabel defied the orders of the king because the prophet Haggai told him to. How do you know when you should follow earthly authority?
2. In Ezra 8:21-22, Ezra is described as being ashamed to ask the king for protection, so he asked his people to humble themselves by fasting. Have you ever fasted in order to humble yourself before God? According to Ezra 8:23, how did God respond?
3. Read Nehemiah 5:19. Is it okay to ask God to reward you when you are obedient to him? What if he doesn't reward you in the way you ask?