

READING PLAN RESTORATION

September 11– November 26, 2022

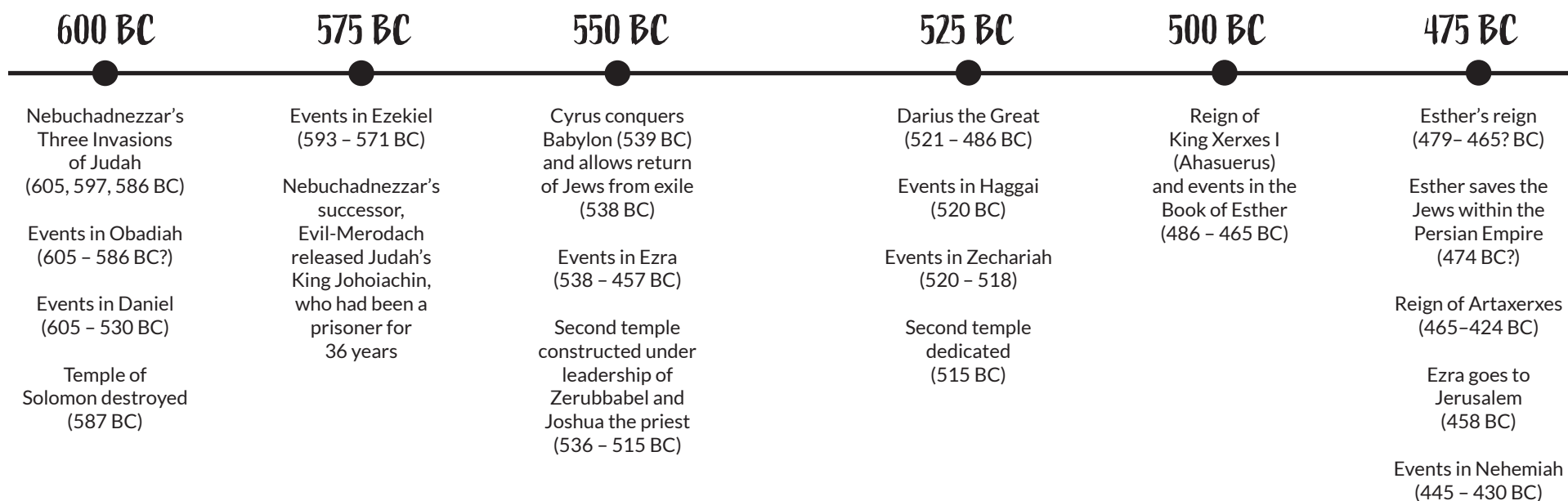
READING FOR WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 11–17

The Chapel Annual Focus for 2022-2023 is RESTORATION! This fall, the emphasis will be specifically on the restoration of Jerusalem and the Jewish people in their homeland after being exiles in Babylon. As Pastor Travis wrote in the Annual Focus overview, “In due time, God used the Persian King, Cyrus, to defeat the Babylonians and invite His people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild. The books of the Bible written in response to these events tell the story of how God moves people from disruption to restoration.” However, the biblical teaching about the restoration is an interspersed mingling of history and prophecy, penned by several authors. These study aids and reading plan aim to help us connect the dots for a clearer understanding of the restoration of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem. Throughout the year, we will build on those truths to better understand God’s work today to take His people from disruption to restoration.

As you read the passages, here are some key points to keep in mind:

- the exile from Jerusalem to Babylon took place in three separate groupings over several years and not everyone who had lived in Jerusalem was deported;
- the return from Babylon to Jerusalem did not include all of the Jewish people who went to Babylon. Many of the exiles stayed in Babylon or went to other areas;
- those who did return went back in at least four different groupings spanning 92 years (537–445 BC);
- God instrumentally used several different kings to accomplish both the exile and the return/restoration of His people;
- several godly leaders obeyed the LORD in trusting faith to pursue the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the restoration of temple worship;
- without the return of a “remnant” of Jews from Babylon, we would not have the fulfillment of God’s promises about the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

BIG PICTURE TIMELINE



FOREIGN KINGS AND HOW GOD USED THEM FOR HIS PLANS OF RESTORATION

Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon who reigned from 605–562 BC. He is best known for conquering Jerusalem and taking Jews from Judah back to Babylon in captivity. Jeremiah 52:28–30 informs us, “These are the people Nebuchadnezzar deported: in the seventh year (597), 3,023 Jews; in his eighteenth year (586), 832 people from Jerusalem; in Nebuchadnezzar’s twenty-third year (574), Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guards deported 745 Jews. Altogether 4,600 people were deported.” Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were four of the young Jewish men deported who served Nebuchadnezzar as recorded in the Book of Daniel. According to Dan 1:1, some Jews had been deported to Babylon in 605 BC. In 597 others had been exiled, among them, the prophet Ezekiel. Nebuchadnezzar removed the temple vessels from the temple Solomon had built in Jerusalem (2 Chron 36:7; 2 King 24:13; Ezra 6:5).

Cyrus, also known as Cyrus the Great, was king of Persia between 559–529 BC. According to Ezra 1:3 and 6:3, when Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC, he ordered the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s temple. His decrees ordering the return of exiles to Jerusalem are found in Ezra 1:2–4; 5:15; and 6:3–5. Written years earlier, Isaiah 45:1 referred to Cyrus as God’s anointed—literally “messiah”—who would serve as the LORD’s instrument to deliver and return the descendants of Jacob to Jerusalem.

Darius I, son of Hystaspes, was king of Persia and of Babylon, where he succeeded Cambyses (after two usurpers had been displaced), and ruled 521–486 bc. He enabled the returned Jews to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem with Joshua and Zerubbabel (Ezr. 4:5; Hg. 1:1; Zc. 1:1). Ezra and Nehemiah mention Darius in their histories of the exile (Ezra 4:5, 24; 5:5–7; 6:1, 12–15; Neh 12:22). The prophets Zechariah and Haggai also prophesied during his reign (Hag 1:1, 15; 2:10; Zech 1:1, 7; 7:1).

Xerxes 1, also known as Xerxes the Great and Ahasuerus, reigned over Persia from 486–465 BC. He was the son of Darius I. Xerxes married Esther and was instrumental in protecting the Jews of Persia from being wiped out by Haman’s plan. Note that the events of Esther

happened more than 50 years after King Cyrus had sent exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and shortly after King Darius had restarted the stalled building of the temple and city of Jerusalem.

Artaxerxes I, son of Xerxes, reigned as king over the Persian Empire from 464–424 bc. In his reign, Ezra and Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, according to Ezr. 7:1; Ne. 2:1. In Ezra 4:7–24, Artaxerxes received complaints against the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem and responded by forcing the Jews to stop rebuilding the city. However, in Ezra 7, at Nehemiah’s courageous request, King Artaxerxes sent Ezra and any Jews who wanted to return to Jerusalem with his blessing along with gold, and silver, and to help with the rebuilding and restoration.

KEY LEADERS GOD CALLED AND USED IN THE RETURN AND RESTORATION

Sheshbazzar was a Jew called by a Babylonian name. He is referred to as the “Prince of Judah.” Sheshbazzar was appointed governor (Ezra 5:14) and returned to Judah with the first wave of exiles (Ezra 1:8, 11). He was entrusted with the items that had been taken from the original temple.

Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, is referred to as “governor of Judah” in Haggai 1:1. Zerubbabel teamed with the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak, to rebuild the temple altar and begin construction of the new temple. Zerubbabel was listed in Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies of Jesus (Matt 1:12–13; Luke 3:27). He was a descendant of King David (Hag 1:1) and a grandson of King Jehoiachin.

Joshua (Jeshua in some translations), the son Jehozadak, served as high priest and worked with Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the temple and the establishment of temple sacrifices and worship. (Note, this is a different Joshua than Joshua, son of Nun, who was Moses’ assistant and successor who led the Israelites into the Promised Land.)

Ezra was a priest from the line of Aaron (Ezra 7:1–5) as well as a scribe “skilled in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). His works are recorded in Ezra 7–10 and Neh 8. Ezra led other Israelites back to Judah in 458 BC, about 60 years after Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah, was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Neh 1:1). He returned to Jerusalem in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign (445 BC) to help rebuild the walls and the city. He was appointed as governor of Judah from 445–433 BC (Neh 5:14). Nehemiah teamed with Ezra to make several reforms for spiritual renewal (Neh 8–12).

BABYLONIAN EMPIRE (609 - 539 BCE)



PERSIAN EMPIRE (550 - 330 BCE)



Babylon would have corresponded roughly to modern Iraq and Persia to modern Iran.

BROAD OVERVIEW OF THE RESTORATION PERIOD

After King Solomon’s death, Israel was divided into two kingdoms (930 BC). The southern kingdom, known as the Kingdom of Judah, was comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The other 10 tribes made up the northern kingdom, known as Israel. Many Israelites from the northern kingdom were deported when Assyrians attacked in 740 BC (1 Chron 5:26). In 722 BC, the Assyrians invaded again, taking control of the remaining northern territory and deporting many more. The Assyrians were unable to conquer the southern Kingdom of Judah. The deported tribes from the northern kingdom became known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. Many of those who were not deported from the northern kingdom intermarried with foreigners, resulting in the mixed-race mixed-religion people known as the Samaritans.

More than a century later, in 612 BC, the Babylonians conquered the Assyrian city of Nineveh and concluded their takeover of the Assyrian Empire. According to Daniel 1:1, some Jews were deported to Babylon in 605 BC. The Prophet Ezekiel was among a second group deported in 597 BC. When Nebuchadnezzar’s army destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 587, thousands more were taken to Babylon. Around that time, the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the city walls were torn down, and Jerusalem lay in ruins. The Babylonians took thousands of people from Judah back to Babylon along with the gold, silver, and valuables from the temple.

We should note that not everyone from Judah was deported to Babylon. Many of the poor and the elderly, who would not have been able to contribute much in Babylon, were left in the ruins of Judah. As with those left behind in the north by the Assyrians a century earlier, intermarriage with foreigners was common and unfaithfulness to the LORD increased even more. We read of one group who left Judah for Egypt after the destruction of Jerusalem and they took the Prophet Jeremiah with them (2 Kings 25:25-26; Jer 41:16–18).

“After their recovery from the emotional and physical distress of being uprooted (cf. Psalms 74; 137), the situation of most Jews in Babylon appears to have been good (Jer 29:4–7; Ezek 8:1; Ezra 2:65–69). Only King Jehoiachin and his family, captured in 597 BC, were confined; and they were released in 562 BC (2 Kings 25:27). The

rest of the Jews were free to settle in communities and to engage in normal agriculture or trade, as indicated by the business documents from the fifth century Murashu Texts.”¹ Babylon was the only home those born in exile had ever known and the relative comfort they enjoyed explains why many were not attracted to the idea of returning to the ruins of Jerusalem with an uncertain future.

In 539 BC, the Persian King Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire and greatly expanded the Persian Empire. In 537 BC, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the people of Judah to return and rebuild the temple and their lives in Judah (Ezra 1:1–4). Cyrus also sent back the gold, silver, and valuables that had been taken from the temple. Before there could be a true restoration of God’s people, they needed to restore the temple and their faithful worship of Him. 49,897 exiles returned early during the time of Shesbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Joshua the priest (Ezra 2:64–65).

Work on the temple foundation began in 536 BC but stopped when opposition arose from those who had remained in Judah but had not remained faithful to the LORD God. Work on the temple was halted for about 18 years (Ezra 4:4–5). Around 520 BC, the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhorted the people to continue the rebuilding. The people did restart the temple construction and completed it in 515 BC (Ezra 4:5–6)—72 years after the destruction of the temple in 587 BC. That date closely aligns with the 70 years of captivity Jeremiah prophesied (Jer 25:12–14; 29:10). After the temple was completed, the Prophet Malachi urged the people to remain faithful to the LORD.

Ezra, a priest and scribe, led another group of exiles back around 57 years later. Ezra was sent to teach the people the Law of God (Ezra 7) and restore faithful worship in the temple. There were so few Levites — descendants of Levi but not of the priestly line of Aaron — Ezra had to make a special plea for more Levites to return with him to carry out non-priestly duties associated with temple worship. Nehemiah returned 13 years later to rebuild the walls around the city (Nehemiah 1–12). He and Ezra overlapped several years and partnered to bring reforms and restore faithful worship to the LORD.

In the reading plan below, we find historical passages from Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. These passages relate the story that leads up to the fall of Jerusalem, the tribes of Benjamin and Judah being exiled to Babylon, and God’s promise fulfilled to return a remnant of Jews to Jerusalem who wanted to restore and retain their worship of the LORD. Interspersed with these historical books, we find prophetic passages from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Hosea, Haggai, and Malachi. They all weave together to tell the story of the restoration after the Babylonian exile. However, after all of the work recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, the book of Nehemiah concludes with the temple being neglected, the walls are in disrepair, and people are breaking the sabbath. The story of restoration remained far from complete.

Since the first sin corrupted creation in the Garden of Eden, the LORD God has been on a mission to redeem and restore shalom—universal flourishing. That flourishing included making Himself known to all the nations and people groups of the world. We saw God send His people into Egypt as slaves and deliver them out through the parted waters of the Red Sea. We see a second exodus theme in Ezra and Nehemiah as the LORD sends His people away for unfaithfulness and brings them back with gifts from foreigners.

However, the return of His people to Judah and the restoration of temple worship only pointed to a more complete restoration in the future. Mervin Breneman observes, “This new situation under foreign rule meant that the Jewish people became again more strictly a covenant community and not a nation as in the monarchy. The community’s identity did not now depend on its political institutions and identity as a nation but on its special covenant relation to God. In God’s providence this was a step in the preparation for the New Testament transition to the church under the new covenant in which all believers are one in Christ and where physical, ethnic, political, and geographic distinctions are overcome.”² The stage is set for the ultimate Messiah King who “will make all things new” (Rev 21:5).

¹ Mervin Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, *electronic ed.*, vol. 10 of The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 26–27.

² Mervin Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, *electronic ed.*, vol. 10 of The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 51.

READING FOR WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 18–24

1. **2 Kings 21:1–16** – The sin of Judah’s King Manasseh – Motivation for the LORD’s judgment on Jerusalem
2. **2 Kings 24:1–18** – Nebuchadnezzar sets up Zedekiah as a puppet king who ruled in Jerusalem for 11 years before he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar
3. **2 Kings 25:1–21** – Siege and destruction of Jerusalem in fulfillment of the LORD’s warning
4. **Isaiah 45:1–13** – The LORD’s promise to use Cyrus to deliver His people from captivity

READING FOR WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 25–OCTOBER 1

5. **Isaiah 11:1–16** – Messianic promise of a righteous branch from the root of Jesse
6. **Hosea 3:1–5** – Messianic expectation after the exile
7. **Zechariah 8:1–23** – Promise of a restored Jerusalem to the remnant who return
8. **Jeremiah 25:1–14** – Jeremiah’s prophecy of return from exile

READING FOR WEEK OF OCTOBER 2–8

9. **Ezra 1:1–11** – King Cyrus sends first group of exiles back to Judah
10. **Ezra 2:1–70** – List of families who returned to show continuity with pre-exile
11. **Ezra 3:1–7** – Construction of the altar
12. **Ezra 3:8–13** – Construction of the temple foundations begins
13. **Ezra 4:1–24** – Opposition to rebuilding leads to cease and desist order from King Artaxerxes

READING FOR WEEK OF OCTOBER 9–15

14. **Haggai 1:1–15** – The LORD speaks through Haggai the prophet, telling the people of Judah to continue the rebuilding they had stopped
15. **Ezra 5:1–17** – Rebuilding continues in spite of opposition
16. **Ezra 6:1–18** – The Persian King Darius decrees that the temple should be rebuilt without opposition and it was done.
17. **Ezra 6:19–22** – Passover is again celebrated

READING FOR WEEK OF OCTOBER 16–22

18. **Ezra 7:1–28** (NOTE THE EVENTS OF CHAPTER 7 OCCUR 57 YEARS AFTER THOSE OF CHAPTER 6) – Ezra is sent from Babylon to teach the people in Jerusalem God’s word.
19. **Ezra 8:1** – Ezra gathers Levites to return to Jerusalem with him to further establish worship in the temple.
20. **Ezra 9:1–10:17** – Ezra deals harshly with intermarriages involving foreign wives.
21. **Nehemiah 1:1–11** – Nehemiah hears of disrepair and shame in Jerusalem and prays

READING FOR WEEK OF OCTOBER 23–29

22. **Nehemiah 2:1–20** – Nehemiah is granted permission to leave the service of King Artaxerxes to go oversee the rebuilding of the walls
23. **Nehemiah 3:1–32** – Rebuilding of the walls begins
24. **Nehemiah 4:1–23** – Opposition arises but the construction continues
25. **Nehemiah 5:1–19** – Nehemiah stops the oppression of the poor and is appointed governor

READING FOR WEEK OF OCTOBER 30–NOVEMBER 5

- 26. **Nehemiah 6:1–14** – Nehemiah avoids the opposition's deceptive plot to kill him
- 27. **Nehemiah 6:15–7:4** – The wall is completed
- 28. **Nehemiah 7:5–73** – Genealogies of exiles who returned to Jerusalem and the gifts they brought
- 29. **Nehemiah 8:1–12** – Ezra read and explained the Book of the Law from God's word and others helped the hearers to understand it.

READING FOR WEEK OF NOVEMBER 6–12

- 30. **Nehemiah 8:13** – The Feast of Booths is celebrated in obedience to the Law
- 31. **Nehemiah 9:1** – The people confess their sins.
- 32. **Nehemiah 10:1–39** – The people renew their covenant with the LORD.

READING FOR WEEK OF NOVEMBER 13–19

- 33. **Nehemiah 11:1–36** – List of leaders in Jerusalem and those outside the city
- 34. **Nehemiah 12:1–47** – Dedication of the city walls and worship in the temple
- 35. **Nehemiah 13:1–31** – Disarray that occurred during Nehemiah's brief absence back to Persia and ensuing reforms by Nehemiah

READING FOR WEEK OF NOVEMBER 20–26

- 36. **Malachi 1:6–2:9** – Malachi the prophet rebukes unfaithful priests.
- 37. **Malachi 2:10–17** – Malachi rebukes the people for unfaithfulness in their covenants and their marriages.
- 38. **Malachi 3:1–5** – God's promise to send a messenger to prepare the way of the LORD.



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