

# Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther – An Overview (1)

About 49 years covered

1. After the Persians and Medes defeated Babylon (Chaldean Empire), king Cyrus the Persian commanded for the temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt by Jews, thus ending 70 years of captivity. (Ez1)
2. Of Israelites, 42,360 returned, plus 7,337 servants, 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, & 6,720 asses. (Ez2)
3. They were lead by the governor Zerubbabel, of the house of David, and the high priest Jeshua (Joshua), of the house of Aaron. They set up the altar, and then laid the foundation of the temple. (Ez3)
4. The Samaritan peoples around them said they wanted to help build the temple, but the Jews declined. So, those peoples got the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to forcibly stop the construction work. (Ez4)
5. After about 14-16 years, prophets Haggai and Zechariah got the people to return to work regardless of Artaxerxes' command. They were again challenged by the Samaritans, but refused to stop work, and so another letter was sent to Persian king Darius. (Ez5)
6. Darius commanded a document search, and found Cyrus's original decree in the archives of the Mede city Ecbatana, and commanded the construction to go forward with materials to be supplied. The temple was then completed about 4-5 years later. (Ez6)
7. Darius' son, Ahasuerus, came to the throne of the Persian empire in great power, and was insulted by his wife, Queen Vashti. (Er1)

# Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther – An Overview (2)

About 49 years covered

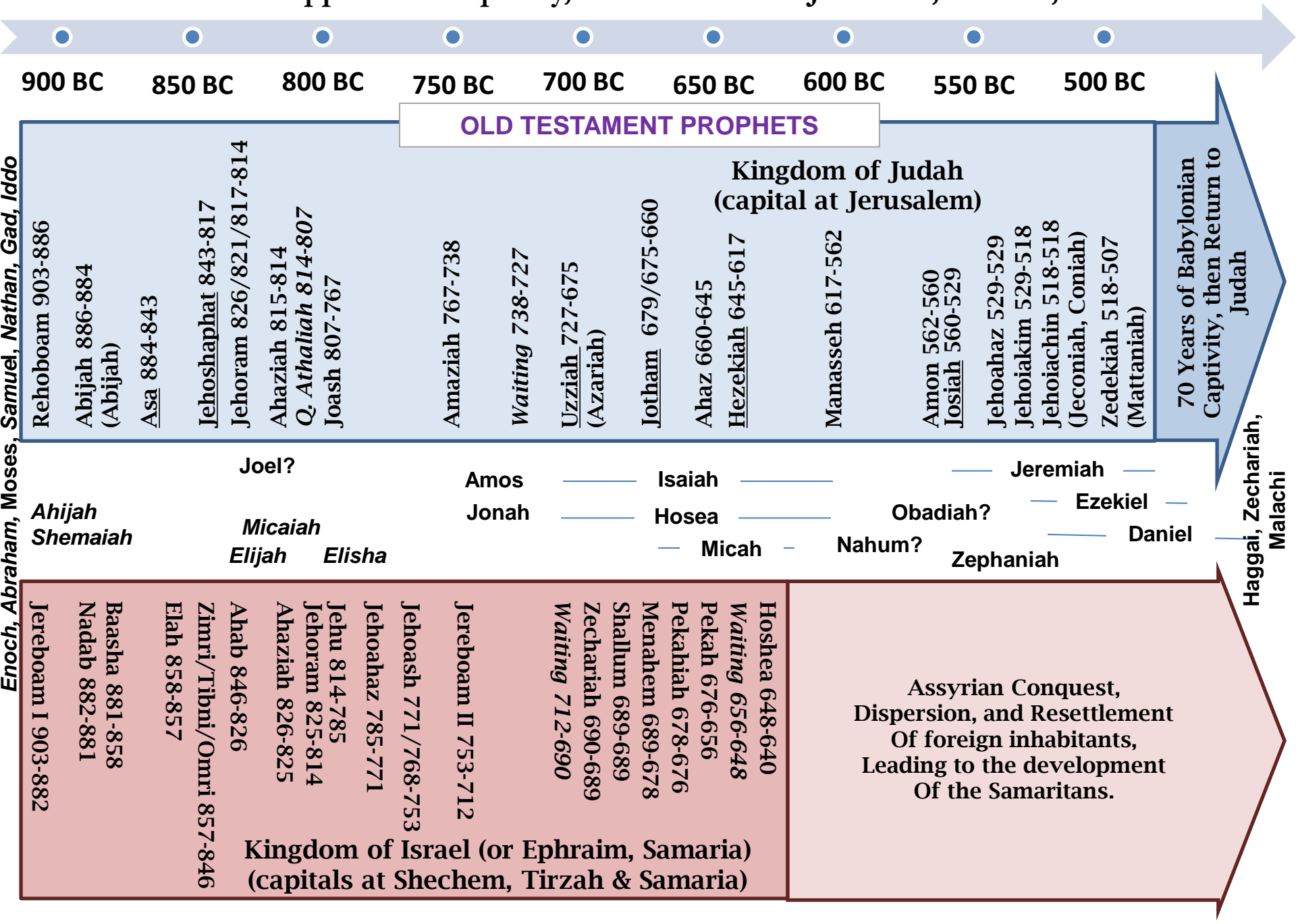
8. A search was made for another queen, and king Ahasuerus chose Esther, a Jewish girl raised by her cousin Mordecai. Mordecai prevented an assassination attempt, against the king; the heroic act was chronicled but not rewarded. (Er2)
9. King Ahasuerus advanced an Amalekite named Haman to power, who subtly gained permission to slay all the Jews after 11 months. (Er3)
10. Mordecai persuaded Esther, risking her life, to speak to the king. (Er4)
11. Esther asked the king and Haman to attend her banquet, and Haman prepared to hang Mordecai. (Er5)
12. King Ahasuerus learned Mordecai had saved his life and assigned Haman to honor Mordecai! (Er6)
13. Esther revealed that Haman was trying to kill her people. (Er7)
14. Ahasuerus had Haman hung. (Er7)
15. Mordecai and Esther worked to reverse the law allowing the destruction of the Jews, and were able to give the Jews victory. Jews remember this in the feast Purim, at the end of their year. (Er8-10)
16. Nehemiah was appointed as cup-bearer to Persian king Artaxerxes, son of Ahasuerus. He prayed for the weakness of Jerusalem. (Ne1)
17. Nehemiah risked his life, asking the king to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. The king granted him permission, and materials and armed men. (Ne2)
18. Artaxerxes also commanded Ezra the Levite scribe to carry some of the vessels from the first temple from Babylon to Jerusalem. (Ez7)
19. Nehemiah's and Ezra's crowds both came safely to Jerusalem. (Ne2, Ez8)

# Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther – An Overview (3)

About 49 years covered

20. Nehemiah rode through Jerusalem, and found it a mess. He called together the people, and told what he hoped to do, and how God had blessed him so far. The Jews were began to work, but the Samaritans began to oppose them. (Ne2-3)
21. The opposition grew as the walls went up, and the Jews had to work in constant alert mode. (Ne4)
22. Many of the Jews were in huge debt because their brethren had been charging usury, which was forbidden by God among Jews. Nehemiah put a stop to that. (Ne5)
23. The Samaritans tried to distract, discredit, and finally threaten Nehemiah, but he kept building, finishing the walls in 52 days. (Ne6)
24. Nehemiah appointed Hanani over Jerusalem. (Ne7)
25. The people of Jerusalem gathered together to hear the reading of God's word, keep the feast of tabernacles, pray, fast, and commit themselves to serving God and keeping God's house. (Ne8-10)
26. People moved into Jerusalem by lot to increase its population, and a thanksgiving ceremony was held. Worship was organized. (Ne11-12)
27. The Jews separated themselves from the Ammonites, Moabites, and others according to God's law, and put away such wives. (Ez9-10, Ne 13)
28. Nehemiah cast out items enemies had placed in the temple, and commanded that the people support the Levites, and stopped commerce on the sabbath. (Ne13)

To find out what happened in captivity, one should read Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.



# Names of Chaldean (Babylonian) Kings Mentioned in Bible

Chaldean Names	Bible Names	Bible Background
?	Baladan	II Kings 20:12, Isaiah 39:1
Marduk-apla-iddina II	Merodach-Baladan Berodach-Baladan	II Kings 20:12, Isaiah 39:1
Nabopolassar	?	None
Nabu-kudurri-usur II	Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadrezzar	Many Verses!
Amel-Marduk	Evil-merodach	2Kings 25:27, Jeremiah 52:31
Nergal-shar-usur (Neriglissar)	?	None
Labashi-Marduk	?	None
Nabu-naid (Nabonidus)	?	None
Bel-sharra-usur	Belshazzar	Daniel 5:1-30, Daniel 7:1, 8:1



Four Great Empires Prophesied

A kingdom set up by God,  
which shall triumph

# Names of Persian-Median Kings Mentioned in Bible

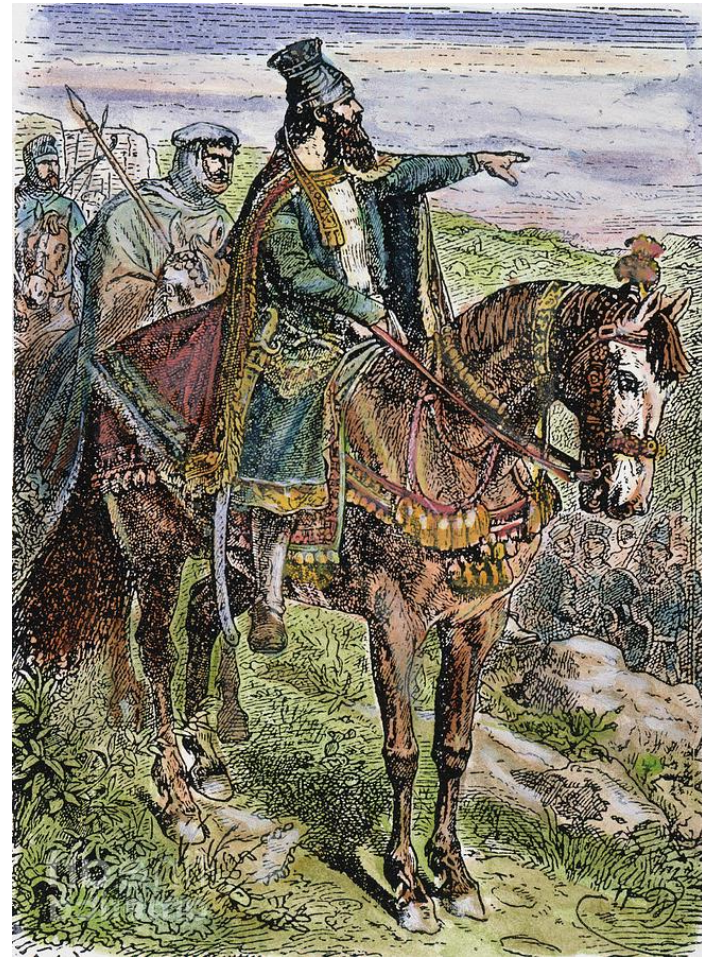
Secular Name	Persian Name	Bible Name	Bible Background
Cyrus	Koorush	Cyrus	Isaiah 45, Daniel, Ezra 1-3
Cambysses	Cambujieh	Ahasuerus	Ezra 4-6
Pseudo Smerdis	Berooyeh Doroughi	Artaxerxes	Ezra 4:7-23
Darius the Great	Darryoosh	Darius	Ezra 5,6
Xerxes	Khashayarshah	Ahasuerus	Esther 1-10
Artaxerxes I	Ardeshier Deraz Dast	Artaxerxes	Nehemiah 1 - 13, Ezra 7-10

*From <http://www.farsinet.com/iranbibl/kings.html>*



# The 70 Year Captivity Ends, As Prophesied (Ezra chap. 1)

- In Isaiah 44:24-45:4, God said he would raise up a king named Cyrus (which means “shepherd”) to order the temple rebuilt. Cyrus was a Persian, or Achaemenian.
- In Jeremiah 29:10, God said he would end the captivity in Babylon after 70 years.

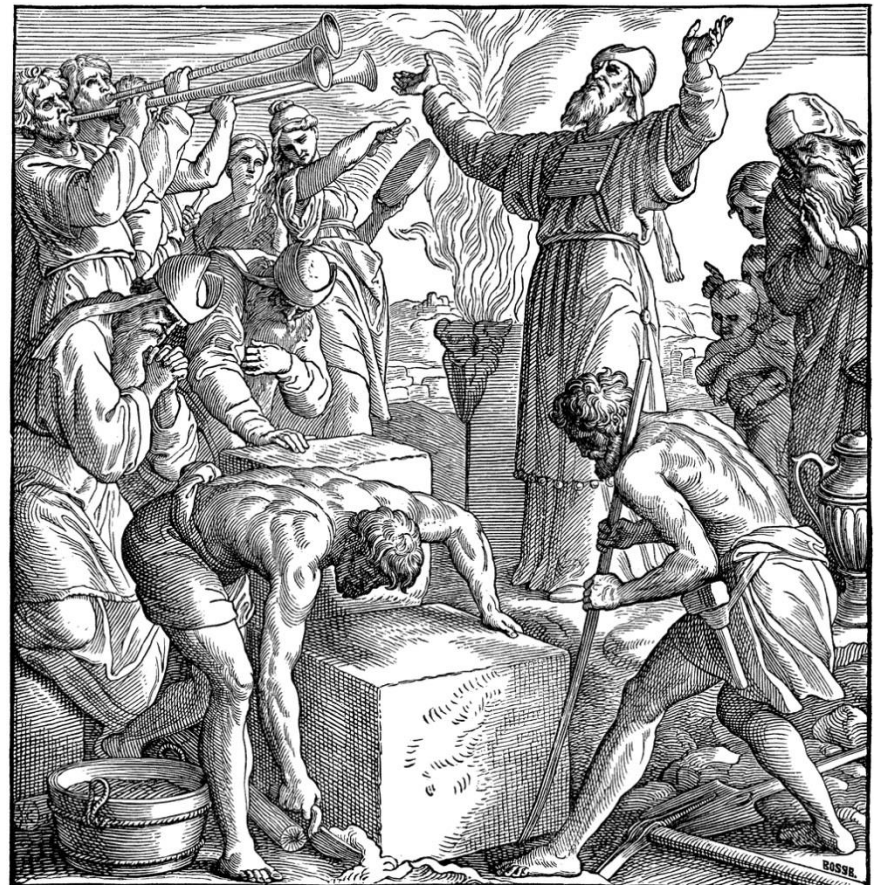


- Cyrus, in his first year, wrote this proclamation: *“Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”* (Ezra 1:2-4)
- Cyrus brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, and gave them to the people who would take them back to Jerusalem to use in the temple when it was rebuilt.

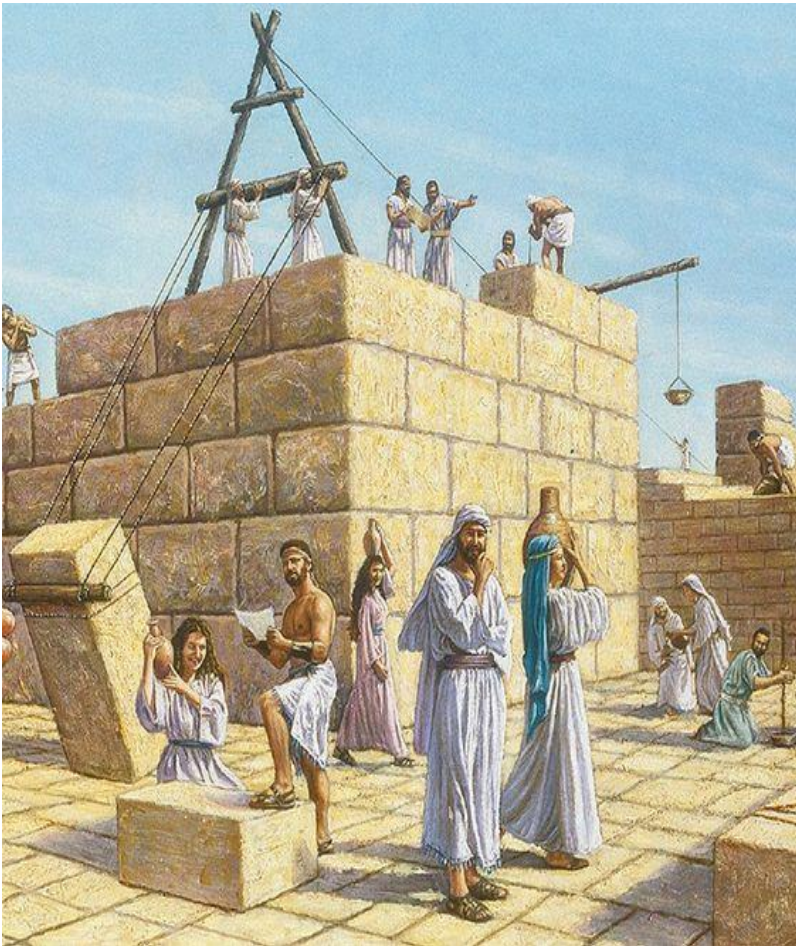


# The Captives Return to Jerusalem (Ezra chap. 2-3)

- According to the command of Persian king Cyrus, 42,360 Israelites returned to Jerusalem, plus 7,337 servants, 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, & 6,720 asses.
- They were led by governor Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, a descendant of David, and high priest Jeshua the son of Jozadak, a descendant of Aaron.
- They built the altar of God, and steadily offered sacrifices upon it.
- They used money from Cyrus' Persian grant to pay craftsmen.
- In the second year of their return, they began to lay the foundation of the temple.
- When the foundation was laid, they celebrated with praise and thanksgiving.
- Some of the older people compared this foundation to the first temple built by Solomon, and they wept.
- The weeping and rejoicing could not be distinguished from each other, and the noise was so great that it was heard at a distance.



# Opposition to Building the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple (Ezra chap. 4-6)



- Adversarial peoples who dwelled in the land of Israel while the Israelites were in captivity requested to help build the temple.
- Zerubbabel and the Israelites declined the help and said that they themselves must be the ones to build this temple.
- The adversaries got mad and began to hinder the building process.
- They also hired counselors to lobby against the project in the court of the Persian king.
- King Artaxerxes of Persia heard their arguments, and authorized force to stop the building process.
- For about 14 to 16 years, the building ceased, and the Israelites grew poorer and weaker.
- The prophets Haggai and Zechariah told them they must restart the building work, regardless of Persian law, because God commanded it.

- So, they started building again. When the work was challenged again, they sent word that the temple reconstruction had been commanded by Cyrus years ago.
- The Persian government searched their archives, and found Cyrus's edict. Persian king Darius commanded the work to continue, and the temple was finished in 4 to 5 years.



# Banishing the Queen of Persia (Esther chap. 1)

- Years passed, and king Darius died.
- His son Ahasuerus (or Xerxes) ascended to the throne of an empire that stretched from India to Ethiopia.
- Ahasuerus commanded a huge feast for his servants across the empire, lasting half a year.
- When that was over, he held another feast for the people in the royal city of Shushan (Susa), especially for the counselors in his court.
- During this feast, he commanded his wife Vashti, the queen, to come into the feast so that his guests might behold her beauty.
- She decided not to come. The king was angry, and his counselors recommended that he banish Vashti from being queen. They were concerned that such disobedience from wives might spread throughout the empire.
- King Ahasuerus listened to his counselors, and agreed. Vashti was banished.
- They sent forth a decree through the empire, that wives should honor their husbands, and that husbands should bear rule in their households.



# Selecting a New Queen (Esther chap. 2)

- Ahsuerus' servants recommended that he select a new queen through an empire-wide audition process.
- This pleased the king, so they gathered up beautiful young women from all over Persia.
- One that was selected was an Israelite, a Jewish girl named Hadassah in Hebrew, and Esther in Persian. Her parents were dead, and her cousin Mordecai was raising her.
- Mordecai told Esther to keep her Jewishness secret. She went to the palace.



- Each girl was to spend one year preparing, and then go spend a night with the king. She got to pick a gift of her choice, and then became a concubine.
- Esther did not ask for any gift, and she was the favorite of the king, so he made her the queen.
- The king made a huge feast to celebrate his new queen, and their marriage was celebrated through the empire.
- Mordecai received a position within the gate, perhaps like a job in the king's administration.
- While he was there, he discovered a plot to assassinate the king.
- Mordecai revealed this to Esther, who certified that he had taken this action. An investigation was launched, and the would-be assassins were executed by hanging.

# Genocide of the Jews Planned (Esther chapters 3-4)

- Later, king Ahasuerus promoted a man named Haman to be the highest among his princes and nobles. Haman's dad was an Agagite, which is another name for an Amalekite – a people who had attacked the weakest part of the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt, and a people God said would be his own enemies.
- Because Haman was in such a high position, almost everyone would bow to him and defer to him when he was near. But Mordecai the Jew, being an Israelite, would not bow.
- Mordecai's refusal to bow infuriated Haman, who decided to eliminate Mordecai and all Jews.
- While meeting with the king, Haman persuaded the king that the Jews were a problem, and asked for the assignment to eliminate them. The king granted it, and they cast Pur (or the lot) to determine when to do it. The lot fell on day 13 of the last month, Adar.
- The king gave his ring to Haman to authorize it, and announcements were posted throughout the empire.
- Mordecai mourned publicly, even in the king's gate – which was illegal, and Esther sent servants to stop it.
- Mordecai sent word back to her of the planned genocide, and said they must try to stop it.
- Esther told him that it would mean risking her life to petition the king without his request, but that Mordecai should fast and pray, and she and her maidens would fast and pray, and she would try it.





# Esther Risks Her Life (Esther 5)



- Esther put on her queenly robes, and went uninvited into the king's court - a capital crime.
- The king saw her and held out his golden scepter to her, thus sparing her life.
- The king asked her what her request was, and she requested that he and Haman would come to the banquet she had prepared.
- They came to the banquet, and the king asked her request. Esther said if he and Haman would consent to attend a banquet she would host the next day, she would make her request known.

- Haman left the banquet very proud of himself. He went home and gathered his wife and friends, and bragged about his riches, his children, and his promotions, and the fact that he was going to another exclusive banquet tomorrow. But he said Mordecai's refusal to bow still made his life miserable. They advised him that, though the Jewish genocide was scheduled for the end of the year, to go ahead and kill Mordecai tomorrow. So Haman had a gallows built that day, about 80 feet tall, to hang Mordecai.

# God's Provides a "Coincidence" (Esther chap. 6)

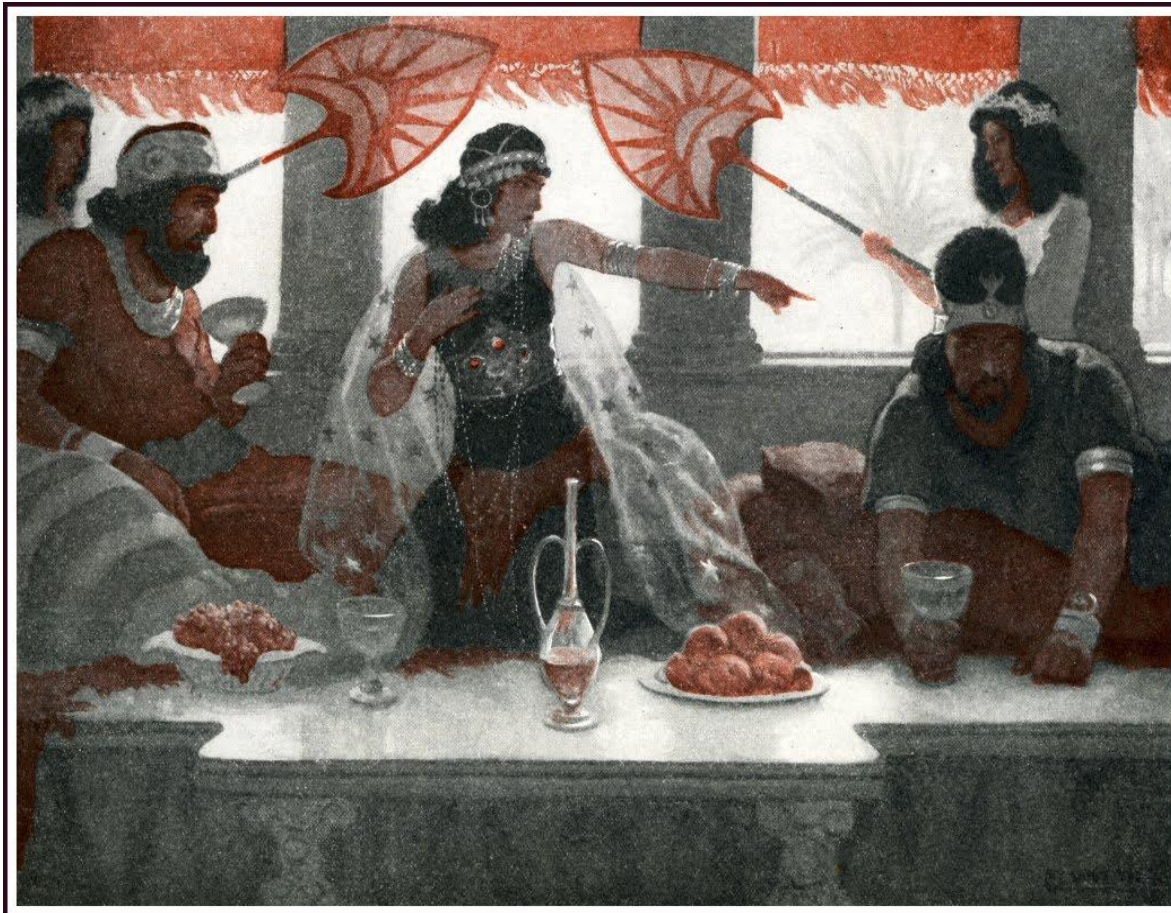
- Haman went that night to request the king's permission to hang Mordecai.
- The king could not sleep that night, and had commanded that his chronicles, or business minutes, be read to him. When they came to the part recorded about Mordecai saving him from assassination, he asked what reward had Mordecai gotten, and they answered "none".
- Haman arrived at that time, and the king asked Haman, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?"
- Haman assumed this meant himself.
- So, Haman suggested putting royal robes and crown on such a man, and have the king's most noble princes escort him though the city on the king's horse, proclaiming his honor.
- Since Haman was the king's highest prince, Ahasuerus told him to prepare all of this, and to go forth through the city the next day, proclaiming Mordecai's honor.
- Haman had to do all of this to follow orders, and he went home in shame.
- After he arrived home, servants of the king came to bring him to Esther's second banquet.





# Haman's Death (Esther chapter 7)

- King Ahasuerus and Haman arrived at Esther's second banquet.
- Again, at this banquet, the king asked her what she requested, and that he would grant it, even if she asked for half of his kingdom.
- Esther requested only that her life be spared, and the lives of her people, for they were scheduled to be destroyed. The king was shocked, and asked who would do this.



- Esther answered that wicked Haman was the one trying to kill her people and her.
- The king rose in anger and went out into the garden.
- Haman stood up to plead for his life before Esther, and fell on her couch with her.
- The king came back in and was greatly offended.
- As he gave the command, his servants covered Haman's face, and took him out to be hung on the high gallows he had built for Mordecai.

# The Jews Delivered, and Purim Starts (Esther chap 8-10)

- Having revealed to the king that she was a Jew, Esther revealed that Mordecai was her cousin and guardian. The king gave Esther authority over Haman's family, and gave Haman's ring of authority to Mordecai. Mordecai's authority grew from then on.
- Esther again went in to the king, who again held out the golden scepter, and she tearfully begged the king to reverse letters of Jewish genocide that had gone through the empire.
- King Ahasuerus pointed out that the law of the Persians and Medes could not be reversed, but that Mordecai, having the ring, could write and issue laws to benefit the Jews.
- Mordecai composed such laws, and they went through the empire in Ahasuerus' name.
- This was the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the third month, called Sivan. The laws allowed the Jews to gather together for defense, to destroy their enemies on Adar 13, and to take spoil.
- Mordecai went forth in princely robes, and the capital city Shushan rejoiced, and many people became proselyte Jews out of fear.
- On Adar 13, the Jews began to slay their enemies. Esther asked the king for another such day, and he granted it. On Adar 13-14, the Jews slew 800 men in Shushan, 75,000 men through the rest of the empire, and the 10 sons of Haman.
- They proclaimed Adar 13-14 as the holiday Purim, to be kept by feasting and giving.





# Ezra & Nehemiah go to Jerusalem (Ezra 7, Nehemiah 1-2)



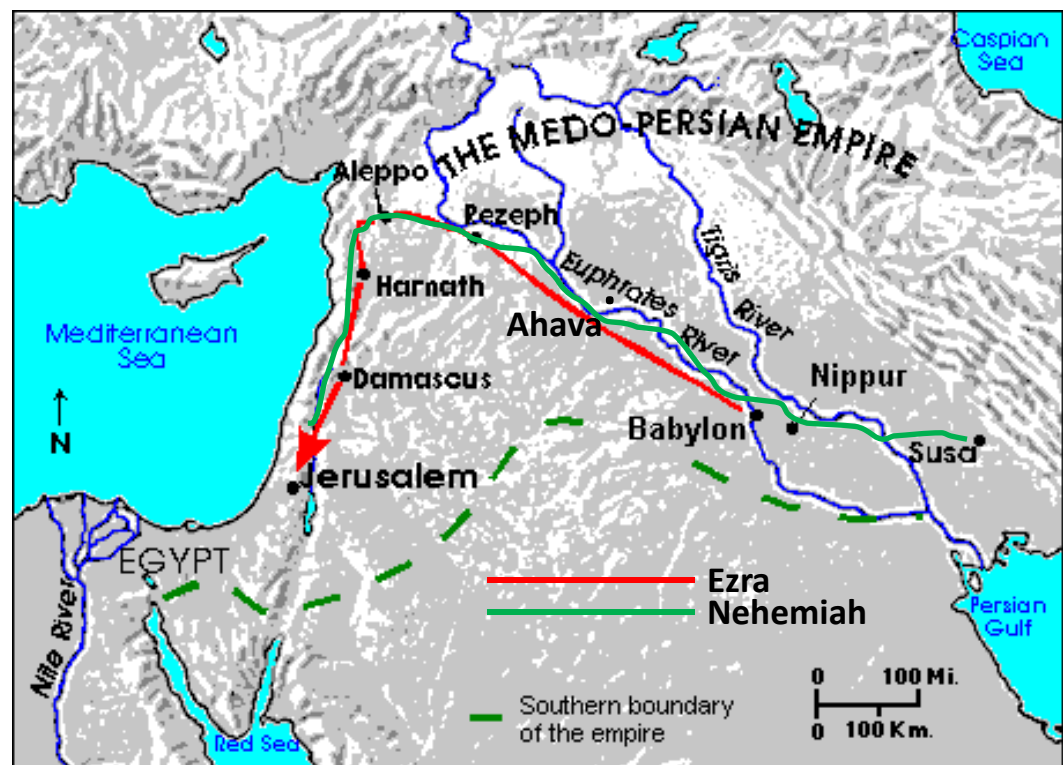
- Ahasuerus' son, Artaxerxes came to the throne of the Persian empire. In his 7<sup>th</sup> year, he commanded one of Aaron's descendants, named Ezra, leading many Levites, to take the remaining vessels from Solomon's temple out of Babylon and carry them back to Jerusalem for use in the second temple of Zerubbabel. So Ezra and his people went.
- Ezra was authorized to draw on provincial resources for sacrifices and worship there.
- Artaxerxes also appointed a Jewish cupbearer named Nehemiah, in Persia's capital.

- One day in Artaxerxes 20<sup>th</sup> year, Nehemiah asked a friend named Hanani how the Jewish people in Jerusalem were. Hanani told him that the wall was broken, the gates were burned, and the people pitiful. Nehemiah was sad, and prayed and fasted.
- Sadness before the king was a capital crime, but when Artaxerxes noticed Nehemiah's sadness, he asked what was wrong, and Nehemiah told him.
- The king asked Nehemiah what he wished to do.
- Nehemiah gathered his courage, and asked to go to Jerusalem, to rebuild the walls. The king, sitting with the queen, granted his request, to be in Jerusalem for a specific time.
- Nehemiah also asked for building supplies, and the king granted that, plus armed men.
- So Nehemiah went to Jerusalem as its governor, and rode about the city to inspect.



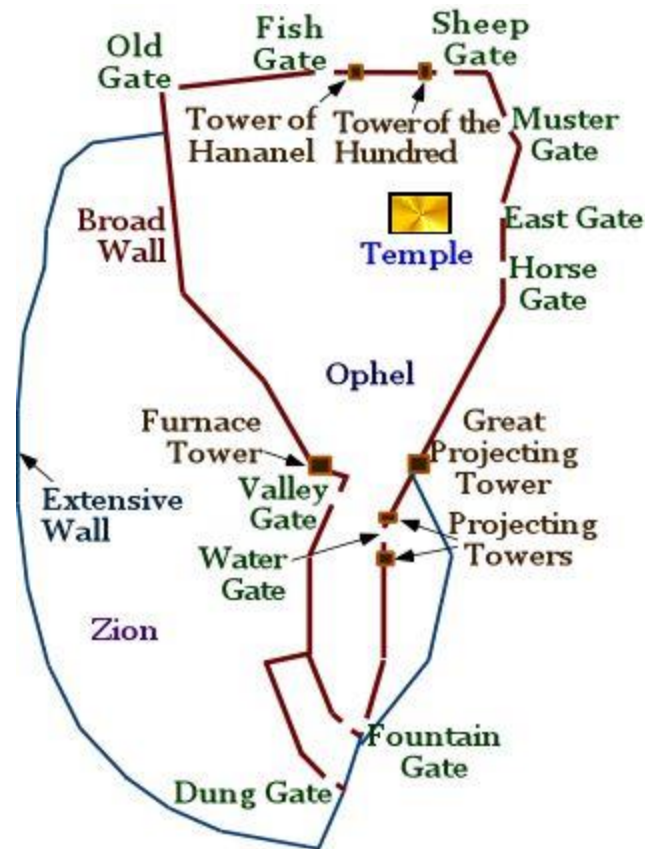
# Ezra's Journey (Ezra chapter 8)

- Ezra led several hundred people out of Babylon to Ahava.
- He sent word for more Levites to join them there; many came to meet them.
- Ezra had them weigh all the gold and silver vessels, so they could make sure that all of these valuable items reached the temple all right.
- Ezra called for fasting and prayer, for they still had a long, dangerous journey ahead of them. They were without military escort, for he had told the king that God would be with them.
- God blessed them to reach Jerusalem safely, and they rested three days.
- On the fourth day, they weighed the gold and silver and vessels in the temple, and dedicated them to the service of God there.
- They offered sacrifice to worship God.
- They delivered the commissions of the king to the Persian officers in the area.



# Nehemiah Starts the Work (Nehemiah chapters 2-4)

- Nehemiah gathered the Jewish rulers of Jerusalem, and told them of his hope to rebuild the walls, and told them how God had blessed him to get there.
- Some non-Jewish leaders – Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem – were angry at his presence.
- The people were ready to work, and so different families and groups began to rebuild the walls near their own houses. As the work started, the non-Jewish enemies mocked.

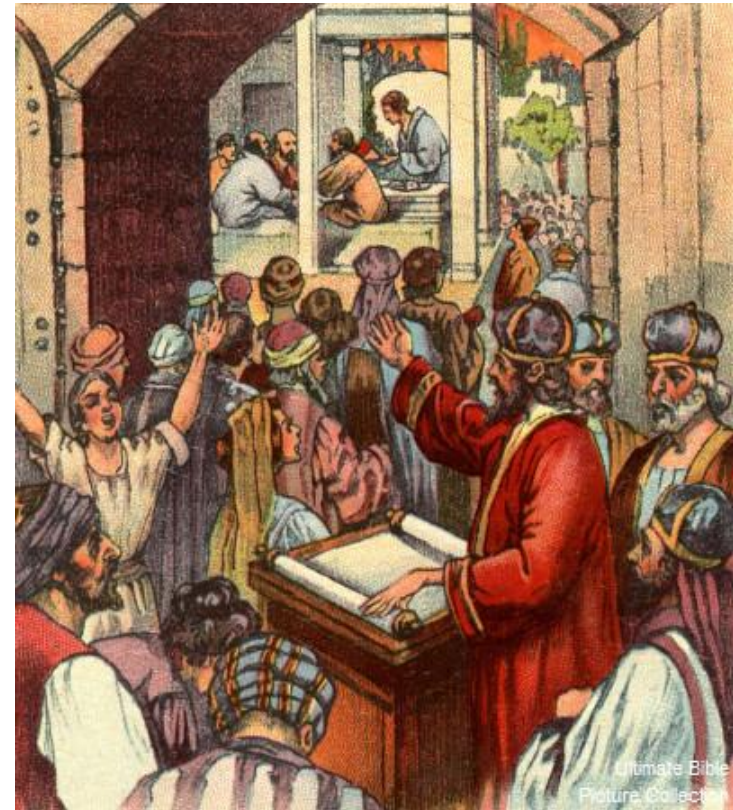


NEHEMIAH'S JERUSALEM

- The people were weary from carrying out so much trash.
- As the work progressed, the enemies threatened attack.
- The Jews prayed, and Nehemiah encouraged them, and they set a watch against attacks. Having lost the element of surprise, the attacks were called off.
- The Jews went back to work, but they often worked with one hand, and carried a weapon with the other.
- The Jews also developed an alarm system with trumpets, so they could call for defense assistance to any part of the city if they should come under attack.
- Nehemiah called for all the people to spend nights within the city walls, and they slept in their clothes, only taking them off when they needed to wash them.

# Nehemiah Upholds God's Law on Debts (Neh. chap 5)

- While they were building the walls, the common people came to Nehemiah with a complaint against the rich and noble people that lived among them.
- In order to survive, and in order to pay taxes, or tribute to Persia, they had borrowed money from the rich, who were charging usury (interest) on the loans.
- This was contrary to the law God gave Moses:  
*"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it."* (Deuteronomy 23:19-20)
- As a result of this disobedience, many were still in debt, and some of their children had become slaves.
- Nehemiah rebuked the creditors, saying that many had paid to relieve Jews out of Gentile slavery, but now they were oppressing their brethren, and he told them they needed to restore many possessions.
- The creditors said they would do this, and Nehemiah held them to their promise.
- Nehemiah fed a large number of people at his own table at his own expense during this time. His daily food prepared was: 1 ox, 6 sheep, several fowls, and all sorts of wine.





# The Wall is Finished (Nehemiah chapters 6-7)

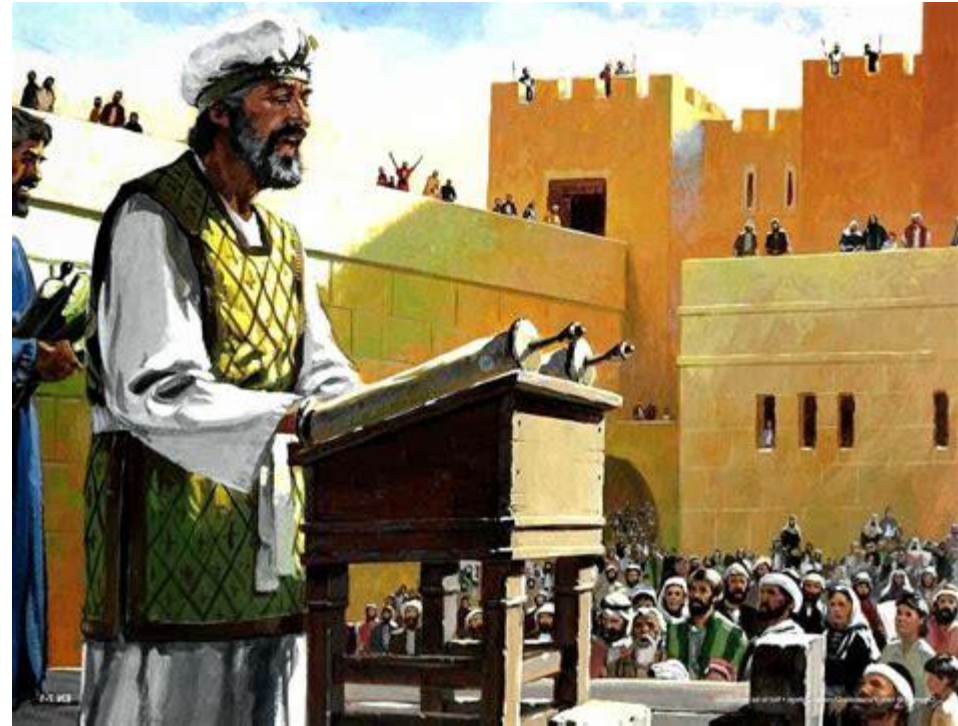


- The walls of Jerusalem were nearing completion, but the doors were still not set up. Nehemiah's enemies plotted.
- First, they asked him to meet them in a village, so they could do him mischief, but he told them he was busy.
- Second, they sent an open letter by Sanballat's servant, claiming that Nehemiah was building the wall to rebel against the king of Persia, and accusing Nehemiah of wanting to establish himself as king over Jerusalem. Nehemiah told them such a claim was fake news.
- Third, they got someone to meet with Nehemiah and urge him to hide in the temple to avoid an assassination attempt, so that he could be charged with using the temple for his own safety. Nehemiah refused to do it.

- Finally, the walls of Jerusalem were complete, including the doors and gates.
- The project, even with fierce opposition, had taken 52 days. It was completed on Elul 25.
- Nehemiah's enemies were very sad about this achievement, because God had blessed Nehemiah and the Jews, but they did not stop trying to do harm.
- Also, many of the Jewish nobles provided intelligence from within Jerusalem to Nehemiah's enemies, and they also reported news to Nehemiah to try to discourage him.
- Nehemiah appointed Hananiah ruler over Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem were still very few. Nehemiah ordered a census to establish the genealogies of those people. 85

# The Assembly in Jerusalem (Nehemiah chapters 8-10)

- The people of Jerusalem gathered in the street before the water gate, and asked for the law of God to be read to them.
- Ezra stood upon a pulpit of wood, and read from the law. Other Levites were present to help the people understand what was read.
- When the people heard the law, they wept.
- Nehemiah told the people not to weep, for the day was holy to God, and they should celebrate, for the joy of the Lord was their strength. This comforted and stilled them.
- They read that they should live in booths seven days to keep the feast of tabernacles.
- The Israelites had not done this since Joshua's day (about 1000 years ago), so they tried obeying God in that, and had a great time of rejoicing while keeping that feast properly.
- After that, the people assembled again, fasting in sackcloth, and they read the scriptures for  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the day, and then confessed sins and worshipped God another  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the day.
- The Levites stood and prayed a prayer of confession, describing the many times Israel had disobeyed God, and they described their current misery and weakened state.
- Then they stated their desire to make a covenant with God, and they put their seal to that covenant.
- Those listed by name vowed to return to keeping the laws that God gave by Moses.





# Continuing Onward (Nehemiah chapters 11-13, Ezra 9-10)

- The Jews of the land held a lottery, so that one tenth of the people would live in Jerusalem, and nine-tenths would live in other cities in Judah. They also blessed the people who voluntarily chose to live in Jerusalem.
- They then recorded the names of many of the chiefs of the people, especially those who worked in the temple. Other dwelling-places in Judah were listed.
- Those who had come to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel many years ago were again listed.
- Nehemiah gathered the people together for the dedication of the wall, and a great company assembled to give thanks, and at that time some were appointed to oversee the administration of gifts to the temple and the sacrifices that took place there.
- As they looked into the law of Moses, some came to inform Ezra that many of the men had married wives from nations that were specifically forbidden in God's law.
- Ezra greatly mourned, and prayed to God. Many children had been born in these.



- The men confessed their sin, and decided to divorce these wives. It was late autumn, and raining, and they took their time, completing the divorces by the end of winter.
- Nehemiah not only built the wall, but also rid the temple of Tobiah's possessions, re-established the income of the Levites, and stopped merchants from trying to sell on the sabbath.
- After this revival, the book of Malachi speaks of another falling away before the coming of Christ.