

Week Thirty-Nine

Days 267–273



Return Narrative: Ezra 1–10; Nehemiah 1–3 | Supplemental: Haggai; Zechariah; Proverbs 20:1–26

THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE IS AWARDED IN WAVES



Nehemiah inspecting the broken walls of Jerusalem at night

After seventy years exiled in Babylon, God stirs Cyrus of Persia's heart to begin to let the Jews come home, hence the name of this "Return" section of *The Bible in a Year*. Their return takes place in three major waves. In the first wave, Zerubbabel immediately begins rebuilding the Temple, and hope arises in the hearts of the people of Judah. Ezra returns in the second phase, and he teaches the Law of the Lord. After returning in the third wave, Nehemiah rebuilds the walls around Jerusalem. As their time of captivity comes to an end, Judah is poised to enter a new era as God's People.

- The prophetic work of Haggai and Zechariah, prophets writing concurrently, can help us understand the historical details provided in Ezra and Nehemiah.
- The book of Haggai is only two chapters, but we can see three parts in it. First, we see apathy. Though Haggai is written just a few years after the Return, the people have not yet begun rebuilding the Temple.
- Second, he describes the discouragement of the people in that they want God's blessings but are not actually serving him faithfully. This leads to the third aspect, in which Haggai teaches that the people must reform their lives to enjoy God's intended blessings.
- Zechariah also offers words of encouragement to let the people know that when they turn from evil, God will bless them.
- Ezra 3 and 4 recount the restoration of worship with the difficult work of rebuilding the Temple.
- Temple restoration, though, is not enough, and Ezra's knowledge as priest and scribe leads him to demand reforms of the people's lives in ways that match the messages of Haggai and Zechariah.
- The problem of intermarriage, which Ezra must confront, is not new. Though living in the midst of other nations, God's People have been set apart and called to live differently. Intermarrying weakens the bond of the covenant. Whenever the Israelites have done this, they end up losing their faith in the Lord.
- Nehemiah sees that the walls of Jerusalem have not been rebuilt, so the city is vulnerable to attack. He leads the efforts to rebuild the walls and secure the people's peace.

Dive Deeper

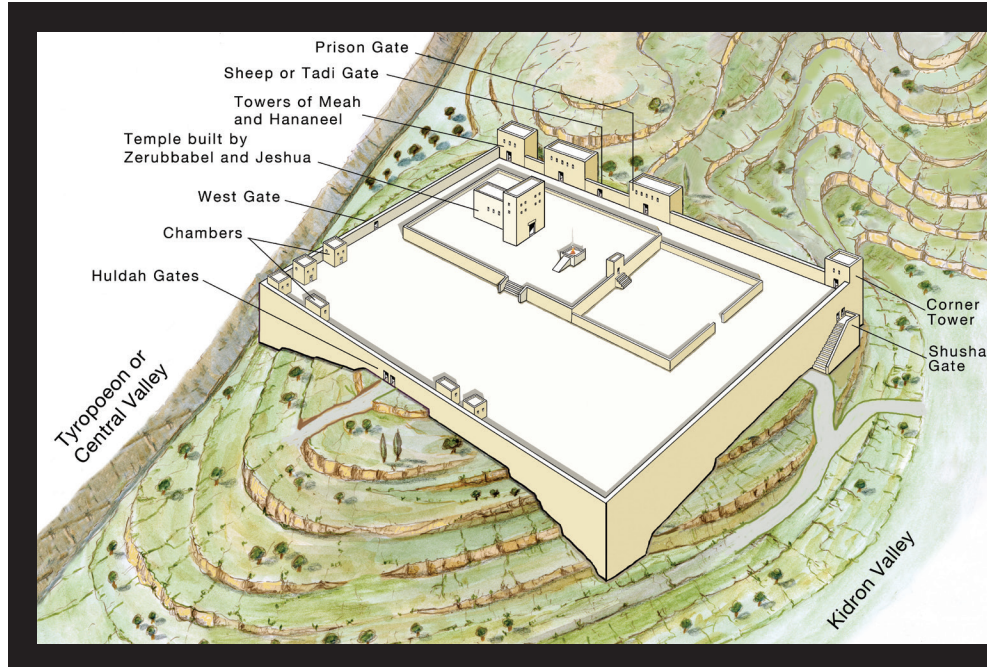
All of the small things in our lives make a difference, and we can rejoice in them. Bring the small things that feel insignificant to God in prayer, and trust that he will make something beautiful out of them in his time.

Bible Answers

Was Ezra being racially prejudiced when he grows distressed with the people for their intermarriages in Ezra 9?

What Ezra finds upon his arrival is “faithlessness” (Ezra 9:2). The people have intermingled and intermarried with the pagan nations of the land (see Ezra 9:1–2). The issue here is not racial but spiritual. We have seen examples of the people turning from God and the covenant when they intermarry, like Solomon (see 1 Kings 11:1–11).

It also appears that the main offenders are the “officials and chief men” (Ezra 9:2)—in other words, the upper echelons of society. These men were using marriage with foreigners as a means to advance their power and wealth, which then becomes an injustice against faithful Jewish women. This is what raises the ire of Ezra and causes the people to agree that foreign wives needed to be dismissed.



NEHEMIAH'S TEMPLE MOUNT

This image shows the Temple Mount as it existed under Nehemiah. Chapter 3 of the book of Nehemiah describes rebuilding projects in Jerusalem.



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