

God's Story, Our Story

Lesson 19: Return to Zion

The Second Temple Period



Ez 1 :1-4

Ez 1 :5 - 2 :70

Ez 7

Neh 2

Ez 3 - 6

Ez 7 - 10

Neh 1

Neh 2 - 6

Neh 8 - 10

Neh 12:27 - 47

1. In the first year his reign, Cyrus king of Persia permits the Jews to return to Jerusalem and build the temple. The Jews return in 3 waves:
 - a. Zerubbabel leads the first wave in 538 B.C.E.;
 - b. Ezra leads the second wave in 458 B.C.E.;
 - c. Nehemiah leads the third wave in 445 B.C.E.
2. The Jews rebuild the Temple. Opponents interrupt the building for 15 years, but after an intervention of king Darius, it is completed in 517 BC.
3. In the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes (458 BC), the scribe Ezra leads a second wave of Jews back to Jerusalem. Ezra makes the people separate from their foreign wives.
4. In 445 BC, Nehemiah receives permission from king Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall, gates and city of Jerusalem.
5. After he inspects the ruined walls and gates at night, Nehemiah leads the Jews to rebuild them, under the protection of guards.
6. Ezra reads to the people the Law of Moses, and they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. The people renew the covenant with God and take an oath to walk in His law.
7. At the dedication of the wall, two choirs march on the wall in opposite directions and sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.
8. The shape of post-exilic Judaism:
 - a. The Davidic kingdom is not restored. There is no king in Judah.
 - b. The Ark of the Covenant is lost and the Holy of Holies is empty.
 - c. The Jewish religion is reoriented around the Mosaic books.
 - d. Eschatology and Apocalyptic literature: Judaism begins to form a theology of the end times, in which a deliverer would defeat the forces of evil.
 - e. Messianism: there is increased expectation for the Messiah, who is thought to be both a political and religious leader.
 - f. Otherworldliness: Judaism adopts more elaborate beliefs in the afterlife, where good is rewarded and evil is eternally punished.
9. The Synagogue: During the exile, the Jews had no more temple or sacrifices, and had to preserve their religion in the midst of pagan customs. This called for an *interiorization* and *universalization* of their faith through the Synagogue: it is not a place for sacrifice and worship but for teaching and fellowship.
10. Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire in 333-331 BC, and Judea becomes a province of the Empire in 331 BC.

11. The Diaspora: With the growth of commercial opportunities, Jews migrate to colonies throughout the known world, learn the Greek language and adopt Greek customs and ideas. The Scriptures are translated into Greek in the 3rd century BC (Septuagint).
12. After the death of Alexander in 323 BC, Judea is under the control of the Ptolemies (Greek rulers in Egypt).
13. In 198 BC, the Seleucid king Antiochus III defeats the Egyptians and conquers Judea. The Seleucid rulers begin a campaign of Hellenization forcing the Jews to abandon their faith for Greek paganism.
14. Antiochus IV Euphronius inherits the throne in 176 BC. In 168 BC, he proclaims the Jewish religion illegal and outlaws the Sabbath and circumcision. He defiles the temple by erecting an altar to the god Zeus and sacrificing pigs.
15. In 167 BC, the priest Mattathias and his 5 sons launch the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks. In 164 BC, the Maccabees recapture Jerusalem and have the temple purified and rededicated (Hanukkah). In 142 BC the Jews regain their independence, which they hold for 80 years.
16. Under the Hasmonean dynasty, the kingdom regains boundaries not far short of Solomon's realm. Political consolidation under Jewish rule is attained and Jewish life flourishes.
17. Three main religious factions emerged under Hasmonean rule:
 - a. The *Pharisees* are the spiritual fathers of modern Judaism. They believed in the divine authority of the oral law, of rewards and punishments in the afterlife, and in the coming of the Messiah.
 - b. The *Sadducees* were the priestly caste, who were willing to compromise with Hellenism and later cooperate with the Romans. The Sadducees rejected the oral law and belief in the afterlife.
 - c. The *Essenes* believed the others groups were corrupt, and so they moved out of Jerusalem and lived a monastic life in the desert, adopting strict dietary laws and a commitment to celibacy.
18. In 63 BC, the Roman general Pompey conquers Jerusalem. In 47 BC, the kingdom of Judea becomes directly subject to Rome. The *Pax Romana* brings peace and ease of travel throughout the Roman world.
19. In 37 BC, Herod is appointed King of Judea by the Romans. He rebuilds the Temple into one of the most magnificent buildings of its time.
20. By the beginning of the Common Era, there are high messianic expectations among the Jews. The Messiah is thought to be the royal son of David who will bring victory and prosperity to the Jewish nation and set up His throne in Jerusalem.