

# Bible Stories for Adults

## Judah Returns From Captivity

### Ezra & Nehemiah

## Opening

Gathering: What great things has God done to His glory through the members of my church?

Today's Focus: God returned the Jews to Israel as He had promised.  
They responded with a renewed faithfulness.

Key Verses: *What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, You have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this.*  
Ezra 9:13

*In Your great mercy You did not put an end to them or abandon them, for You are a gracious and merciful God.* Nehemiah 9:31

Opening Prayer

## Lesson

Judah Exiled in Babylon (*Jeremiah 29:1-23*)

Why had the Jews been exiled to Babylon? = Exiled, but not abandoned

Nehemiah 9:16, 29-31 (1-37) = They rejected God's commands & His prophets

What had God promised before the exile that comforted the Jews in Babylon?

Isaiah 13:1, 17, 19; 14:1 = God would stir Medes (Persians) against Babylon & return Israel

Did the Jews have any idea how long they would have to wait for this to happen?

Jeremiah 29:10-14 = They would return after repenting and 70 yrs of exile

What action did Daniel take when the 70 years were nearly complete?

Daniel 9:1-3 (1-19) = He prayed and fasted for God to return the Jews

The Edict of Restoration (*Ezra 1*)

Who was responsible for sending the Jews back to Judah and why?

Ezra 1:1-2 = **God** appointed Cyrus to build a temple in Jerusalem

After being settled for 70 years, who gave up their homes and returned?

Ezra 1:3, 5 (3-5) = *everyone whose heart God had moved* (a sifting to get the most faithful)

How could these people afford the move and living during the temple construction?

Ezra 1:6 = Neighbors gave money, livestock, etc. per Cyrus' edict (v 4)

What important items did Cyrus send back with this first group of Jews?

Ezra 1:7 = Gold & silver articles taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar

How much wealth did the remnant bring?

Ezra 1:8, 11 (8-11) = 5400 gold & silver items

Who was this Sheshbazzar that Cyrus appointed as governor over Judah? = Don't read in class

1 Chronicles 3:17; Ezra 5:2, 14-16; Haggai = Jehoiachin's grandson, also called Zerubbabel

Note: Scholars disagree as to whether Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were the same person

Where do we see Zerubbabel later? = Don't read in class

Matthew 1:12; Luke 3:27 = In both sides of Jesus' lineage (Matthew – Joseph, Luke- Mary)

How many Jews returned?

Ezra 2:1, 64-67 (1-70) = Over 42,000 plus 7500 servants (537 BC)

# Bible Stories for Adults

## Judah Returns From Captivity

Page 2

### Reconstruction of the Temple (*Ezra 3*)

What did the Jews begin to do after first settling in the towns?

Ezra 3:1-2 (1-6) = Rebuilt the altar and began sacrifices (had been there 3 months)

What was special about this happening in the seventh month (Tishri)?

Leviticus 23:24, 27, 34 = Sacred month with Trumpets, Day of Atonement & Feast of Tabernacles

What was their next step after building the altar and starting sacrifices?

Ezra 3:8 (8-9) = They began rebuilding the temple

How did the Jews feel react they saw the temple foundations?

Ezra 3:10-13 = They wept aloud and shouted for joy in celebration

### Efforts Frustrated by Samaritans (*Ezra 4*)

Who wanted to help rebuild the temple?

Ezra 4:1-2 = Samaritans: We've sacrificed to God since the Assyrians brought us here

Were these really Israelites & did they follow Jehovah as the one true God?

2 Kings 17:22-24, 28, 33 = Others settled in Samaria, taught to worship God in Jeroboam's way

Did the Jews accept this help & why or why not?

Ezra 4:3 = No, the Samaritans weren't pure Israelites - Besides, the king only said us

How did the Samaritans accept this rejection?

Ezra 4:4-5 = They worked to frustrate the reconstruction efforts through lawyers...

What happened as a result of this opposition? = See timeline on page 4

Ezra 4:24 = Reconstruction of the temple was stopped until the second year of Darius

### Temple Construction Resumed (*Ezra 5-6*)

Why did God raise the prophets Haggai and Zechariah? = Both were called in the second year of Darius

Haggai 1:1-4, 7-8 (1-15) = To remind the people to build His temple

Did the people listen to these prophets?

Ezra 5:1-2 = Yes, the Jews began working on the temple again

Did they meet any opposition this second time around? = Wrote a letter to King Darius

Ezra 5:3, 5, 7, 17 (3-17) = Yes, the Samaritans tried to stop them again

How did King Darius respond?

Ezra 6:1-2 (1-5) = He searched records & found Cyrus' Restoration edict

What extra touch did Darius add?

Ezra 6:7-8 (6-12) = He ordered the Samaritans to stay away and to help financially

What did the Jews do after the temple was completed?

Ezra 6:15-16, 19 (13-22) = They dedicated the temple and celebrated Passover in 515 BC

### Reconstruction of the City Walls (*Ezra 4*)

Was there any opposition when the Jews began to rebuild Jerusalem's city walls?

Ezra 4:6 = Under Xerxes, the Samaritans tried again to thwart the Jews' efforts

Note: King Xerxes married a Jew (*Esther*) who saved Jews from annihilation – last week's story

What did the Samaritans do after not being able to get Xerxes to stop the construction?

Ezra 4:11-13 (7-16) = Wrote to King Artaxerxes (Xerxes' son) warning of danger of revolt

Did King Artaxerxes agree with their concern?

Ezra 4:19, 21 (17-23) = Yes, and he ordered the reconstruction to stop

# Bible Stories for Adults

## Judah Returns From Captivity

Page 3

### Nehemiah Gets Involved (*Nehemiah 1-3*)

Note: The Book of Nehemiah was originally part of the Book of Ezra

Who was Nehemiah? = Cupbearer had to be a very trusted individual - threat of poisoning

Nehemiah 2:1 = He was a Jew serving as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes

For what did Nehemiah ask of King Artaxerxes? = He prayed before making request (v4)

Nehemiah 2:4-5 (1:1-2:5) = He asked for permission & authority to rebuild Jerusalem's city walls

Besides letting him go and funding the effort, how else did Artaxerxes help Nehemiah?

Nehemiah 2:9 (6-10) = He sent Nehemiah with letters and military protection

What did Nehemiah do soon after he arrived in Jerusalem?

Nehemiah 2:15-16 (11-16) = He secretly inspected the city walls

How did the Jews respond to Nehemiah's call to begin rebuilding the walls?

Nehemiah 2:17-18 = They agreed and immediately began the work

Nehemiah 3 = Various sections were assigned to different groups (Don't read in class)

### Let's Try Again (*Nehemiah 4*)

Did they meet any opposition the second time around? = Nehemiah took a bold stand

Nehemiah 2:10, 19-20 = Others asked: *Are you rebelling against the king?*

How did the Samaritans respond when the walls started going up?

Nehemiah 4:1-3 = The Samaritans ridiculed the Jews and their efforts

How did the Samaritans respond when the wall reached half its height?

Nehemiah 4:6-8, 11-12 (4-12) = They planned to attack Jerusalem and end the work

Did this threat stop the efforts?

Nehemiah 4:16-18 (13-23) = The Jews kept working but were always ready to defend

### Jerusalem's City Walls are Completed (*Nehemiah 6*)

What other opposition did Nehemiah resist? = Tried to draw Nehemiah out of town to harm him,

Nehemiah 6:2, 5-10, 13 (1-14) = Charged treason, and tried to discredit him

How long did this reconstruction effort take?

Nehemiah 6:15-16 = 52 days, To God's glory

What did the Jews do after the city walls were completed?

Nehemiah 12:27, 31, 38, 40, 43 = Dedicated wall in huge celebration and parade on the wall

How was Jerusalem populated?

Nehemiah 11:1-2 = Ten percent of the Jews were chosen by lot to live in Jerusalem

### Ezra Returns to Jerusalem (*Ezra 7-8*)

Who was Ezra? = Sent to Jerusalem under Artaxerxes, around 80 years after return under Cyrus

Ezra 7:1, 6 (1-10) = Jewish scribe in Babylon, well versed in God's Law, descended from Aaron

Why was Ezra sent to Jerusalem?

Ezra 7:19-20, 25-26 (11-28) = To outfit temple; teach and execute God's Law

Why did King Artaxerxes go out of his way for the Jews like this?

Ezra 7:23 = To win the favor of the Jews' God

What did Ezra do before setting out for Jerusalem with around 2000 men and riches?

Ezra 8:21 (1-36) = Everyone fasted 3 days and asked God for a safe journey

# Bible Stories for Adults

## Judah Returns From Captivity

Page 4

### Ezra's First Crisis (*Ezra 9-10*)

What was the first problem Ezra was presented in Jerusalem?

Ezra 9:1-2 (1-3) = Jews had not stayed separate and had intermarried

What did Ezra and the people agree to do?

Ezra 10:10-12 (1-44) = Remove foreign wives and their children (v3) from the community

### Law Reform (*Nehemiah 8-9*)

How did the people learn about God's Law?

Nehemiah 8:2-3 (1-4) = Ezra read the Book of the Law to the large assembly

Did the people really want to learn God's Law or were they just watching a show?

Nehemiah 8:5-6 = The people shouted Amen!, bowed down and worshipped

How did the people understand since they now spoke Aramaic?

Nehemiah 8:8 (7-8) = Levites translated the Hebrew to Aramaic

How did the people respond when they realized how they had been sinning?

Nehemiah 8:9 = They cried & mourned

How did they respond later in the month after their situation sank in?

Nehemiah 9:1-3 (1-37) = They were greatly moved & confessed their sins

Did they decide to do anything in response to their now-recognized guilt?

Nehemiah 9:38; 10:29 (9:38-10:39) = Rededicated selves & made an oath to keep God's Laws

### Closing Prayer

#### Persian Rulers

	Astyages		
	Darius Cyaxares II		
553-529	Cyrus II the Great	Died	Issued Decree of Restoration
529-522	Cambyses II	Died	
522-485	Darius I	Died	Commanded Temple Reconstruction
485-465	Xerxes I	Murdered	Married Esther
465-424	Artaxerxes I	Died	Stopped Wall Reconstruction, Sent Nehemiah to Restart
424-424	Xerxes II	Murdered (2 mo)	
424-405	Darius II	Died	
405-359	Artaxerxes II	Died	
359-338	Artaxerxes III	Murdered	
338-336	Arses	Murdered	
336-333	Darius III	Conquered	
333-	Alexander the Great (Greek)		

### Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. What consequences have I experienced from going against God's will?  
(*Ezra 9:13; Nehemiah 9:29-30, 37; Leviticus 26:14-39; 2 Kings 18:11-12*)
2. How have I responded when God has worked through me to do great things?  
(*Ezra 3:10-13; 6:16; Nehemiah 12:43; Exodus 15; Ephesians 3:2-13*)
3. How have others frustrated my efforts to do the Lord's work?  
(*Nehemiah 4; Galatians 1:6-10; 5:7-12; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16*)
4. How have I unwittingly frustrated the efforts of others doing the Lord's work?  
(*Ezra 5; Acts 11; 15; Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 8*)
5. When have I felt remorse after recognizing that I sinned against God?  
(*Ezra 9:6-7; Nehemiah 8; 2 Samuel 12:1-23; Ezekiel 33:10-11; Matthew 26:69-75*)