



MTA - OLD TESTAMENT **THE RETURN**

INTRODUCTION

Review: Stages in Israelite History

CREATION	<i>Genesis 1-11</i>
PATRIARCHS	<i>Genesis 12-50, Job</i>
EXODUS	<i>Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy</i>
CONQUEST	<i>Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel 1-7</i>
UNITED KINGDOM	<i>1 Samuel 8-31, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles 1-9, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon</i>
DIVIDED KINGDOM	<i>1 Kings 12-22, 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles 10-36, Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk</i>
EXILE	<i>Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther (inc. parts of Isaiah)</i>
RETURN	<i>Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</i>

General Timeline

722 BC	Assyrians overthrow Israel
605, 597	Early Babylonian deportations
586	Fall of Jerusalem; mass deportation
539	Edict of Cyrus (start of "Restoration Stage")
538	First return to Palestine

EZRA

TITLE & DESCRIPTION

- Heb: עֲזָרָה (= "help," Aram.)
- Gk: *Esdras Deuteron* (= "Second Esdras," referring to Ezra-Nehemiah¹)
- Ezra continues the narrative of Second Chronicles by showing how God fulfills His promise to restore his people to the Land of Promise after the exile.

AUTHOR & DATE

- Commonly accepted: Ezra
- Ezra is both priest and scribe/teacher (7:11).²
- Note the first person portions of the book (7:28-9:15).

¹ For most of antiquity, Ezra-Nehemiah was seen as one book. In the Masoretic Text (MT) there is no space between the end of Ezra 10 and the beginning of Nehemiah 1. Also, in the MT the verse statistics are given for both books at the end of Nehemiah and not at the end of Ezra.

² There is a strong "priestly" emphasis. Note that Ezra was a direct priestly descendant of Aaron through Eleazar, Phineas, and Zadok.

SETTING

- Cyrus the Persian overthrows Babylonia³ in 539 BC and issues a “return edict.”
- This decree ends the seventy years of captivity.
- Picture of Cyrus Cylinder

Historical Coverage	Events	Main Bible References
1000-931 BC	Reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon	1 Samuel 9-31, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11, 1 Chronicles 10-29, 2 Chronicles 1-36
931-722 BC	Solomon's death Civil wars	1 Kings 12-22, 2 Chronicles 10-28
722-586 BC	Assyrian deportations Samaria (Northern Kingdom) falls Israel's Assyrian Captivity	2 Kings 18-24, 2 Chronicles 28-36
586-539 BC	Judah (Southern Kingdom) falls Judah's Babylonian Captivity	2 Kings 25, 2 Chronicles 36, Daniel 1-5
539-444 BC	Persia comes to power Return from Captivity	Daniel 5, Ezra, Nehemiah

OUTLINE

- Chs 1-6 Return under Zerubbabel
Chs 7-10 Reforms under Ezra

THEMES

- Theology: Sovereignty of the “God of Heaven”
- Hope: Reconstruction of the Temple
- Covenant: Israel & the Law of Moses
- Prayer: Reliance on God
- Holiness: The Priesthood and Levites

TEACHING/COMMENTARY

- 1:1-11 The edict of Cyrus, 538 BC
The edict had a specific purpose: for anyone to return and rebuild the house of God; anyone who wished to return could do so.
- Ezra 3 “A New Beginning”
- Ezra 5-6 “Temple Rebuilt”
- Ezra 7-8 “Ezra’s Mission”
Take special note of Ezra’s threefold goal (7:10):
 - To study (Heb: *darash*); meaning, to inquire or seek understanding
 - To observe (Heb: *asah*); meaning, to act out or practice
 - To teach (Heb: *lamad*); meaning, to instruct or train

NEHEMIAH

TITLE & DESCRIPTION

- Heb: נְחֵמְיָהּ (=“comfort of Yahweh”)
- Gk: *Esdras Deuteron* (=“Second Esdras,” combined with Ezra)
- Lat: *Liber Nehemiae* (=“Book of Nehemiah”)

³ It seemed impossible for the great city of Babylon to be suddenly conquered. Yet true to biblical prophecy, Daniel predicted its demise the same night it fell to the Persians.

AUTHOR & DATE

- Clearly, much of this book is from Nehemiah's personal memoirs (1:1-7:5).
- Suggested authors: Nehemiah, Ezra, "The Chronicler."

SETTING

- Same historical background as Ezra.
- Nehemiah fits within the reign of Artaxerxes I of Persia (464-423 BC).
- Elephantine papyri support the historical reliability of the book.

OUTLINE

Chs 1-7	Reconstruction of the Wall
Chs 8-13	Restoration of the People

THEMES

- Rebuilding
- Restoration
- Leadership

COMMENTARY

Neh. 1:1-3
Neh. 1:4-9⁴
Neh. 1:10-11
Neh. 2:17-18
Neh. 6:15-16
Neh. 8:8-9

HAGGAI

TITLE & DESCRIPTION

- Heb: חַגַּי (derived from "hag"=festival?)
- Gk & Lat: *Aggaios, Aggaeus*
- This is the record of Haggai's preaching ministry to stir up the people to finish God's temple in Jerusalem.

AUTHOR & DATE

- Authorship of Haggai is virtually uncontested. His name is mentioned nine times (1:1, 3, 12-13; 2:1, 10, 13-14, 20).
- Haggai is known only from this book and from two references in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.
- He prophesied in 520 BC.

⁴ One of the most striking characteristics of Nehemiah was his recourse to prayer (cf. 4:4; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14). Both Ezra and Nehemiah display prayer lives worthy of imitation. Leaders should be called higher to pray like them.

SETTING

- The temple remains unfinished 16 years after the first wave of return.
- Haggai calls the builders to return to God's work.

OUTLINE⁵

- 1:1-1:15 Completion of the Temple
- 2:1-9 Glory of the Temple
- 2:10-19 Prosperity for the Land
- 2:20-23 Prominence for the Ruler

THEMES

- God's House
- God's Leader
- God's Blessing

TEACHING/COMMENTARY

- 1:1-9 The Lord's curse.
- 1:2, 4 Note the wrong attitude and wrong priorities.
- 1:7-9 Challenge to build the Temple.
- 2:4-5 Encouragement for leaders.⁶
- 2:9 Greater glory for the present house.⁷

ZECHARIAH

TITLE & DESCRIPTION

- Heb: זְכַרְיָהּ (=“God remembers”)
- Gk & Latin: *Zacharias*
- This is the record of Zechariah's ministry to the returnees who left the second temple half completed.

AUTHOR & DATE

- Zechariah was of priestly lineage as the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo (1:1, 7; Neh 12:4, 16).
- We can assume he was born in Babylonia and was a younger contemporary of Haggai.
- Book possibly written in two stages?

SETTING

- The temple remains unfinished 16 years after the first wave of return.

⁵ Haggai was very keen to arrange his material chronologically. He even puts date markers, showing when each discourse was delivered (1:1, 15; 2:1; 10, 20).

⁶ See the oracle later in 2:20-23. This is a Messianic prophecy which looks forward to a rebuilt Temple (cf. Ezekiel 20:40; 43:1-5) and a new David as ruler (cf. Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-28).

⁷ Grant “peace” = Shalom (not just absence of adversity but wholeness or completeness).

- Haggai focused more on the present while Zechariah focused more on the future.

OUTLINE

- Chs 1-6 Eight Visions
- Chs 7-8 Four Messages
- Chs 9-14 Two Burdens

THEMES

- The Coming Messiah
- Gentile Powers
- True Obedience

TEACHING/COMMENTARY

Eight Visions

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1:1-6 | Introduction: Call for Obedience |
| 1:7-17 | Vision 1: The Horses among the Myrtle Trees |
| 1:18-21 | Vision 2: The Four Horns and Four Craftsmen |
| 2:1-13 | Vision 3: The Man with the Measuring Line |
| 3:1-10 | Vision 4: The Reinstatement of the High Priest |
| 4:1-14 | Vision 5: The Lampstand and the Olive Trees |
| 5:1-4 | Vision 6: The Flying Scroll |
| 5:5-11 | Vision 7: The Woman in the Basket |
| 6:1-15 | Vision 8: The Four Chariots, The Crowning of Joshua |

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|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Zech 1:1-6 | Call to repent |
| Zech 3:7 | Requirement of obedience ⁸ |
| Zech. 4:6 | By God's spirit |
| Zech 6:12-13, 15 | Messianic passage |
| Zech. 9:9-10 | |

MALACHI

TITLE & DESCRIPTION

- Heb: מַלְאָכִי (=“My messenger”)
- Gk: *Malachias*
- Lat: *Maleachi*
- This is a record of Malachi's message or judgment to a people plagued with sin and corruption.

AUTHOR & DATE

- The authorship, date, and unity of Malachi have never been seriously challenged.
- Factors on dating:

⁸ Zechariah speaks of God's coming servant, the Messiah, as a Branch (Isaiah 4:2, cf. Zechariah 6:12). Later Jesus states that he is the true vine (John 15:1).

- the Persian term for governor, *pechah* (1:8, cf. Neh 5:14);
- the fact that sacrifices were being offered in the temple (1:7-10; 3:8);
- problems address similar to those in Nehemiah's time (c. 430 BC).

SETTING

- Not too long after the return, the people lapse into many of the same sins that resulted in their exile in the first place.
- Malachi is also used by God to mark the close of OT prophecy.

OUTLINE

1:1-5	God's Love Questioned
1:6-2:16	God's Name Defiled
2:17-3:15	God's People Corrupted
3:16-4:6	God's Great Promises

LITERARY FRAMEWORK

Malachi's Q & A approach:

- Accusation – a charge put forward by God
- Challenge – a question/objection from the people
- Defense – a refutation of the challenge, with further explanation

THEMES

- God's Message/Messenger
- God's Love
- God's Judgment (including the "day of the Lord")

TEACHING/COMMENTARY

1:2-3	Question on God's love
1:4-5	Love vis-à-vis judgment
1:6-12	Failure of priests to honor God
2:13-16	Breaking of faith in divorce
3:7-12	Neglect of tithes and offerings ⁹
3:14-15	Arrogant words against God

CONCLUSION: THE RETURN

- God showed his people that he was not done with them.
- The God who disciplines us is a God of renewal and restoration.

⁹ At least three kinds of tithes were collected in accordance with Mosaic Law: An annual tithe for the Levites (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:23-26); An annual tithe for communal worship (Deuteronomy 14:22-26); A triennial (every three years) tithe for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29).