



WEEK 8 : RETURN

In 538 BC, Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians and issued a decree that the exiles should return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple.

They went in three 'waves'. The first group came with Zerubbabel, who began the rebuilding of the temple, which was completed in 515 BC. However, although this was a significant moment, the temple they built was a far cry from Solomon's before it.

The second group came about 60 years after the first. They travelled with Ezra, an expert in the scriptures. Under his leadership, the centrality of God's law as the regulator of all life was reaffirmed.

A few years later again, and Nehemiah brought another group to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Question: In what way do you think these three things relate to the re-establishment of life under God's rule, protection and blessing?

During the time of exile, Ezekiel had prophesied about a new temple (Ezekiel 40-42). Immediately afterwards, in chapter 43, we are told what should happen as a result of this temple being built.

Read Ezekiel 43:1-9

What does Ezekiel see coming from the east (from Babylon)? (v1)

What does this cause Ezekiel to do? (v2)

What happens next? (v4 & 5)

What does Ezekiel hear from inside the temple? (v6)

In verses 7 and 8 we see that the Israelite people and kings had been using God's temple to make offerings to other gods. What did this do? And what was God's response?

What will be different this time around? And how long will it last? (v 7,9)

Now, read Nehemiah 12:44-13:31.

What do the people do that suggests their hearts have changed? (12:44-13:3)

But, what does Nehemiah also find is happening?

40:7 –

40:15 –

40:23 –

What does Nehemiah remind the people of? (40:18, 26)

In Ezekiel's prophecy, God had said: "The people of Israel will never again defile my holy name..." But this is clearly not the case. Although they have returned to Jerusalem and taken many steps towards honouring their covenant with God, there is still a heart problem that needs to be solved.

"Spiritually speaking, God's people are still in exile, waiting for the Lord to return to them and fulfil all his promises of salvation. God's kingdom still has not come, because God's king has not come." – Vaughn Roberts, 'God's Big Picture', p.109

Because of this, even after the exiles return, God still speaks messages of rebuke and warning through the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and, finally, Malachi. As before, the prophecies call the people to hope in God, who will certainly bring the completeness of his promises to pass.

Read Malachi 3:1-4

What will God send? And who will come suddenly afterwards? (v1)

What will he do? (v3)

What will be the result? (v4)