

“Let Us Rise Up and Build”

Ezra 1–8; Nehemiah 1–2; 4; 6; 8

47

Prayerfully study the following scriptures:

- a. Ezra 1–6. King Cyrus frees the Jews who have been captive in Babylon and invites them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1). Zerubbabel and Jeshua lead approximately 50,000 people back to Jerusalem, and they begin to rebuild the temple (Ezra 2–3). The Samaritans offer to help work on the temple, are turned down, and attempt to stop the work; the rebuilding ceases (Ezra 4). Several years later, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhort the Jews to finish the temple; the Samaritans continue to oppose it (Ezra 5; see also Haggai 1). King Darius renews the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple, and it is finished and dedicated in about 515 B.C. (Ezra 6).
- b. Ezra 7–8. Ezra receives permission from King Artaxerxes of Persia to lead another group of Jews back to Jerusalem. Ezra and his people fast and pray, and the Lord protects them.
- c. Nehemiah 1–2; 4; 6. Learning that the Jews who have returned to Jerusalem are “in great affliction and reproach,” Nehemiah receives permission from King Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls (Nehemiah 1–2). The enemies of the Jews seek to prevent them from rebuilding the walls. Nehemiah keeps the work going forward until the walls are finished (Nehemiah 4; 6).
- d. Nehemiah 8. After the walls are rebuilt around Jerusalem, Ezra reads the scriptures to the people. The people weep and desire to obey the words of the law.

After Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C., Babylonia declined rapidly in power. In 539 B.C. Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians, who were united under the leadership of Cyrus (see Daniel 5). Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus was a benevolent ruler who treated conquered peoples kindly and respected their religions.

Shortly after taking over Babylon, Cyrus invited the Jews (Israelites) in his empire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

In 458 B.C. Ezra, a Jewish priest and scribe, brought another group of Jews back to Jerusalem from Babylon. Nehemiah, a Jew who held the important office of cupbearer (butler) in the court of the Babylonian king, obtained a royal commission authorizing him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah and Ezra worked together to help the Jews accomplish this task.

- What did Nehemiah do when Sanballat asked him to stop working and meet with him? (See Nehemiah 6:1–4.) How do some people try to distract Church members from the Lord’s work today? How should we respond to such distractions?
- How long did Ezra read the scriptures to the people? (See Nehemiah 8:3, 17–18.) How did the people respond? (See Nehemiah 8:3, 6, 9, 12.) How can we be more attentive as we read the scriptures? How can we develop the kind of excitement for the scriptures that these people had?

Additional reading: Haggai 1; “Ezra,” Bible Dictionary, page 669; “Nehemiah,” Bible Dictionary, page 738.