

Persia conquers Babylon

Daniel records the fall of Babylon after interpreting the writing on the wall by the mysterious hand (Dan 5:30-31). The BKC tells us that this took place on: 'The overthrow of Babylon took place the night of the 16th of Tishri (October 12, 539 b.c.).'¹

Return to build the Temple

We are also told by Ezra (Ezra 1:1) that Cyrus, king of Persia, in his first year (1st year of ruling over Babylon, not his first year of his official reign) made a proclamation that the Israelites were to return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple.

This fulfills what the LORD spoke through Isaiah the prophet around 150 years earlier:

Isa 44:28 who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'²

Isa 45:3-4 so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.⁴ For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name.³

Isa 45:13 I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.⁴

Isaiah was prophet through Hezekiah's reign (715-686_{BC}) and probably wrote this part of his prophesy sometime before Hezekiah died. We see Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 14:28 being the year Ahaz died and these prophecies occurring later in chapters 44-45. Cyrus issues the decree to return to Israel in 538_{BC}. So that's around 150 years before Cyrus's decree.

This also fulfills what the LORD spoke through Jeremiah the prophet about 70 years earlier:

Jer 29:10 This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place."⁵

Jer 25:11-12 This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

¹² "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever."⁶

The first deportation of Jews to Babylon was in 605 b.c. Cyrus' decree in 538 was 67 years later. By the time the people returned and built the altar in 536, 70 years were almost up.⁷

¹ Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Da 5:29-31). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Is 44:28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Is 45:3-4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Is 45:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Je 29:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Je 25:11-12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ Martin, J. A. (1985). Ezra. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Ezr 1:1-4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Rebuilding the temple

- In the 1st year of Cyrus king of Persia, God moves his heart to rebuild the temple of God and send His people back. (Ezra 1:1-4)
- Cyrus further has the temple items brought out of the treasury and given to the people to take back with them (Ezra 1:7-11). These are the ones that Nebuchadnezzar had taken when he captured Jerusalem in 586_{BC} and that Belshazzar was using when the mysterious hand wrote on the wall (Dan 5:2-3).
- List of people who returned to Jerusalem and Israel (Ezra 2)
- We see their first priority is to rebuild the **alter** (Ezra 3:1-6). We also see them offering sacrifices during *The Feast of Tabernacles* which occurs in the Sept/Oct time frame. It needs to be noted here that while they were building the alter the Jews feared the surrounding people (remember that after the fall of the northern kingdom, the Assyrian king had brought in foreigners to occupy the northern kingdom after deporting most of the Jews).
- Rebuilding the temple started in the 2nd month of the 2nd year after arriving in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:8)
- After starting to rebuild the temple, the surrounding people came to foil the plan of rebuilding the temple (Ezra 4:1-4).
- We are then told that they continued this evil act throughout the reign of Cyrus and into the reign of Darius (Ezra 4:5).
- Ezra now continues to explain how these evil people continued to harass the Jews even beyond the building of the temple. This harassment went on even until the time of Artaxerxes time. He methodically lists harassment under each of the Persian kings after Darius: Xerxes and Artaxerxes. Remember that the Jews were harassed under Xerxes when Haman got the king to send out an edict for all others under the Persian empire to kill all Jews during the time of Esther. Then they (this is a larger group in the Persian kingdom, note carefully all those mentioned in Ezra 4:9-10) sent a letter to Artaxerxes requesting that he put a stop to the Jews rebuilding Jerusalem (the city). Surprisingly this new king Artaxerxes grants their request at first anyway (Ezra 4:21, 23).
- Then in Ezra 4:24 he lets us know that work on the temple was stopped probably from Ezra 4:1-4 and not resumed until the 2nd year of Darius. [this would be much prior to the harassment of Ezra 4:5-23]
- Now Ezra (Ezra 5:1-2) tells us how God sent 2 prophets which motivated the people to resume building the temple.
- We also see how the enemies continued to harass the Jews and sent a letter to Darius (Ezra 5:3-17)
- Then we see in Ezra 6:1-12 we see Darius's responding letter. Wow, he came down on these enemies of the Jews.
- We are then told that the Jews did complete the temple and were encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. It was completed in the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (515_{BC}). Note in Ezra's recognizing God's power in verse 6:14, he includes Artaxerxes as one of the kings that God has moved to assist the Jews; we know that the temple was completed long before Artaxerxes, but we see Ezra giving God credit for further assistance much later. Remember Ezra mentions rebuilding Jerusalem as well which had its wall restored during Artaxerxes time via Nehemiah.
- In chapter 7 we see Ezra letting us know that he had returned to Babylon and in the 7th year of Artaxerxes. He goes on to tell us that other Israelites return with him according to the king granting request made by Ezra in the sight of God. Ezra goes on to show a copy of the letter that Artaxerxes gave him when he returned (Ezra 7:12-26).
- In Ezra 8:1-14 documents those who returned with him after Artaxerxes gave him the letter.
- In Ezra 8:15-36 we see Ezra giving us a detailed report on this return of exiles.
- And in Ezra 9-10, we see sometime after all these exiles have returned that leaders reported that the people of Israel had sinned in that they had married pagan wives. Ezra goes through the details on how the people rid themselves of these wives and children and dedicate themselves to God.

Return from Babylon Timeline

Kings of Persia

Cambyses
530 - 522

Cyrus
559 - 530

Darius I
521 - 486

Xerxes
485 - 465

Artaxerxes
464 - 424



539
Persia conquers the
Babylonian empire.
(Dan 5:30-31)

520
Haggai prophesied
(Book of Haggai)

520-518
Zechariah prophesied
(Book of Zechariah)

515
Temple completed
(Ezra 5-6)

538
Edict from Cyrus for the Jews to return.
First return of 49,897 exiles, under
Zerubbabel (to build the temple)
(Ezra 1)

479
Esther becomes queen
(Esther 2:16-17)

450-430 ??
Malachi prophesied
(Book of Malachi)

458
Second return of 4,000-5,000 exiles,
under Ezra (to beautify the temple and
reform the people)
(Ezra 7-10)

444
Third return of exiles, under Nehemiah
(to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem)
(Book of Nehemiah)

430
Nehemiah's second return
(Nehemiah 13:6)

[God spoke this through Isaiah the prophet (Isa 44:28)
around 150 years earlier and called Cyrus by name
(Isa 45:3-5).]