

A Chronology of the Returns from Exile and the Post-Exilic Period in Israel's History

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(All times are BC)

539-530 - Reign of Cyrus

539 - Medo-Persia conquered Babylon (Daniel 5)
538 - Cyrus decreed the Jewish people can return to Palestine and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4)
538?? - Daniel in the lions' den (Daniel 6)
537 - **First Return.** Jewish people under Zerubbabel and Joshua returned to Jerusalem, and rebuilt the altar (Ezra 1:5-3:7) (Death of Daniel??)
536 - The foundation for the temple was laid (Ezra 3:8-13)
535-520 - Enemies halted the building of the temple (Ezra 4:1-5) *

521-486 - Reign of Darius

520 - Haggai and Zechariah began their ministry to encourage the people to rebuild the temple; work on the temple resumes (Haggai 1:1-2:23; Ezra 5:1-2; Zechariah 1:1-6)
520 - Tattenai (the governor of "the province beyond the river") opposed the re-building of the temple, and wrote to Darius; Darius reiterated the decree to rebuild the temple; Tattenai obeyed (Ezra 5:3-6:13)
520 - Zechariah's first set of visions (Zechariah 1:7-6:15)
517 - Zechariah's second set of visions and prophecies (Zechariah 7:1-14:21)
515 - Work on the temple is completed and the Passover observed (Ezra 6:14-22)

486-465 - Reign of Ahasuerus/Xerxes

486-483?? - Opposition described by Ezra 4:6 *
483-473 - Events of the book of Esther

465-424 - Reign of Artaxerxes

465-458?? - Opposition/letter and decree described by Ezra 4:7-23 *
458/7 - **Second Return** from captivity under Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10:44)
445 - Decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-2:8)
444 - **Third Return** from captivity under Nehemiah; walls rebuilt (Nehemiah 2:9-6:19)
444-433 - Governorship of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:6)
432?? - Return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:4-31)
430-425?? - Ministry of Malachi (Malachi 1-4) (Is it possible that Nehemiah's return comes after Malachi's ministry??)

* Ezra 4:1-5, 4:6, 4:7-23 describe three separate occasions (under three different Persian kings) during which there arose opposition from Jewish enemies. Ezra 4:6-23 interrupts the flow of the story of the temple and should be considered a parenthetical commentary on the opposition.

In addition, the opposition indicated by the letter of Ezra 4:7-23 seems to have been resolved prior to either Ezra's (457) or Nehemiah's (445) leading of groups back to Jerusalem.