

Week 16: The Return**Reading for WK 17: 1 Maccabees; Other: Wisdom 3:1-8; Sirach 2; 2 Maccabees 7**

1. This section may offer real meaning to you personally – sometimes we may feel our lives are in exile; everything has fallen apart, and we don't know what to do. How does God bring us back to Him?
2. RECAP: Baby Blue Period, Judah went began 3 deportations to Babylon beginning in 605, 597, and 587 for 70 yrs but extended for another 70 yrs (Daniel 9); came back physically but not with their hearts; stories such as prodigal son (Jesus was fixed on exile and return); many comparisons with Exodus from Egypt – problem is *complacency*.
NOTE: Acronym to remember sequence of world powers during this time period: **Eat A Big Purple Grape** (**E**=Egypt; **A**=Assyria; **B**=Babylon; **P**=Persia; **G**=Greece; **R**=Rome); time of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, 1st Greek translation of Old Testament, Septuagint written in Alexandria, Egypt; Great Wall of China built
3. God used King Cyrus of Persia (539 BC) to free Israel and finance return/rebuilding/reorientation of Israel and Jerusalem (King Cyrus was more of a liberator than conqueror – issued the Charter of Freedom – freedom from slavery, religion, and oppression at his coronation).
4. Now entering Yellow period of RETURN – Ezra and Nehemiah (narrative books) tell us of how *disoriented* their lives were; not have things they always depended like the temple, the sacrifices, the *Word* (Torah), no active priesthoods – return from Babylon becomes a *re-orientation* (Ezra 33:10 – how shall we live now?)-3 waves of return. First wave of re-orientation: WORSHIP (Zerubbabel rebuilds Temple); 2nd Wave: WORD (Ezra re-establishes prominence of *Torah*; 3rd Wave: WALL (Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem walls) **NOTE:** Isaiah prophesied this exile including name of King Cyrus over 2 centuries before kingdom was divided and Judah exiled – provided hope for those who would live during that time
5. **1st Return – WORSHIP***: *Zerrubbabel* – **a prince** (represents the political side) (Ezra 3:6-7:18) – not same glory as Solomon's temple – takes 20 years; Obstacles (Ezra 4:1-5)- Samaritans (poor people who remained when most of Northern kingdom were exiled; were mixed with Gentiles that King Sargon relocated from foreign countries to repopulate the area; they want to help rebuild temple – answer was **NO**- they cause delays and problems); other problem – people start building their own homes, businesses, lives and have to be called back to building temple; Prophets were Haggai, Nehemiah, Malachi, Zachariah, Esther
6. **2nd Return – WORD** (Ezra – descendent of **priests** from days of David and Solomon; **a scribe** – teacher of Law of Moses; devoted to studying, observing and teaching Word of God); when arrives in Jerusalem, find first wave of returning exiles have taken wives from neighboring peoples; he tells them to separate from these people from their foreign wives – the physical return to land was not enough – must return with their **HEARTS**, cut their attachments to others gods and follow HIM alone. Must return to obeying God's WORD, back to basics – steady, faithful foundation of WORSHIP and WORD; gets our lives back on track – not centered around Temple (Church) circumstances but around worship and word
7. **3rd Return – WALL** (Nehemiah – **a layman** – tasked with rebuilding the way); he returns to find the builders of the wall working AND caring weapons to protect their families and land-foreigners did not want wall rebuild and conspired to stop – he set up a security plan; also finds officials have taxed fellow Israelites into slavery to pay the taxes) – he gets them to agree to return land and interest.
8. **Feast of Tabernacles**: When walls are build and people are settled in their towns, Nehemiah sets up weeklong celebration of Feast of Tabernacles; EZRA brings out Book of the Law and reads to entire assembly; they confess their sins and worship God in thanksgiving (Neh 9:10-32:29), people enter into a covenant with God to walk in God's law which was given by Moses the servant of God and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord and His ordinances
9. **Esther**: Fits between 1st and 2nd returns; Example of God raising one of His people to position of prominence in another court to save His people (Esther 4:14); Jewish feast of Purim celebration of this victory

*How apply to us: Literal sense – intended meaning of the author; Spiritual sense: ¹Allegorical (how relate to Jesus Christ), ²Moral (how relate to me and my conduct), ³ Logical (how relate to future); In reviewing, ask¹

how does relates to Jesus – He will rebuild the temple in 3 days – Jesus reconstitutes Israel around Himself, He is the new temple with new sacrifice, new priests; ² Moral sense – (1Cor 3) *“I laid a foundation and another man is building upon it.”*; 2Cor 6: *“Don’t get involved with prostitutes.”* 1Peter 2 *“...your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit.”*: Living Stones (1Peter 2:5); ³ Logical sense – commitment to continue reading the Word, teaching others through word and actions;

From Dr. J. Vernon McGee: **5 Lessons from Nehemiah on serving God**

Lesson #1: “Full-time” ministry is not required

Three men played important roles in the rebuilding of Jerusalem: Zerubbabel, the prince, who represented the political side; Ezra, a priest and scribe; and finally Nehemiah, the layman. Now the prince and priest played their roles well, but they couldn’t get the job done. They failed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and cleanse the temple. So for that job God raised up Nehemiah. Nehemiah had a good government job in Persia. As the cupbearer to the king, he needed to be a moral, honest man or else he would be susceptible to bribery. He held the king’s highest trust. Easily, Nehemiah could have been concerned about Jerusalem from afar and remained in Persia. (But if he had, he would not have been in the record of God and we would never have heard of him!)

Lesson #2: Pray about everything

Nehemiah believed in watching and working. He also believed in working and praying. Watch and pray and work characterized this man. In this short book, we have 14 of his prayers. Before he set out on the project, Nehemiah prayed. When he approached the king, he prayed. When he was in trouble, he prayed.

Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. -Nehemiah 2:4

What a fabulous example of how to get something done. Pray before you start. Pray as you go. Pray when you’re between a rock and a hard place. Pray about everything.

Lesson #3: Care about the things of God

Notice Nehemiah was deeply concerned about God’s cause. One day while he was busy in the palace, he encountered a brother who had just returned from Jerusalem. He stopped and asked, “How are things going in the land?” “Not good,” was the response. The bad report troubled him because God’s commandments were being ignored. The walls in shambles meant the people lived in danger. Now as much as Nehemiah cared about Jerusalem, he didn’t want to run ahead of God. So, as was his typical practice, he prayed about it. He said, “Lord, if you want to use me, I am making myself available to You.” When God opened the door for him to speak to the king, he didn’t mind asking for the king’s official help and protection along the route.

Lesson #4: God leads different people different ways

God is not going to lead us all alike. He led Ezra back to the land with no support whatsoever, and He led Nehemiah with half of the Persian army with him. God will use both ways. What was true for them is still true for us: God will lead you one way, and He will lead me another way. I made a mistake at the beginning of my ministry by trying to imitate a certain preacher. He was highly successful and a great man of God. One day an elder of my church said, “Vernon, we would rather have an original Vernon McGee than an imitation of anyone else.” From that day on I have not tried to imitate anyone, and the Lord helps the man who would try to imitate me.

Lesson #5: God sees your faithfulness

The rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem was one of the greatest building projects we have ever heard of. What Nehemiah did was a tremendous thing, and it was a wonderful testimony of God working through individuals. It was hard work, and it took a lot of people. Many made significant sacrifices for God. Remember, my friend, God takes note of it all. Many unknown Christians will be called before the judgment seat of Christ and rewarded. You think of preachers and missionaries and other church workers as receiving the great rewards, but I think that some of the greatest rewards will go to some of the unknown saints who live for God in this day.

The Feast of Booths (Ezra 3:4)

"You shall dwell in booths for seven days ... that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" Leviticus 23:33–43

Few of the feasts that were a part of old covenant worship were as joyful as the **Feast of Booths**. Also known as the **Feast of Tabernacles** or by its Hebrew name, **Sukkot**, this celebration was the last of the fall festivals and was held at the end of the agricultural year when the grapes and olives were harvested in Israel. This was a time to thank God for all of the preceding year's provision and to pray for a good rainy season, which lasted from October through March.

Primarily, however, Sukkot was designed to *remember the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan*, when God made the people live in booths (Lev. 23:33–43). During the time of the feast, each Israelite family was supposed to construct a booth, or **sukkah**, and *live in it for a week*. These booths were small, temporary shelters with thatched roofs of palm fronds and other plants, and according to one interpretation of verse 41, they were decorated with different kinds of fruit that grew in Palestine. Later generations obeyed the command to rejoice with fruit and foliage (v. 40) by having men carry an *etrog*, or citron, and a *lulav* in joyful processions. A citron is a citrus fruit native to the Middle East that looks something like a large lemon, and a *lulav* is a branch of palm with two myrtle branches bound to one side of it and three willow branches to the other. Furthermore, in keeping with Sukkot's purpose to remember the wilderness journey, later Israelites added a water-pouring ceremony to recall those occasions when the Lord gave Israel water in the desert (Ex. 17:1–7; Num. 20: 1–13). The officiating priest would draw water from the pool of Siloam and pour it into the basin near the altar in the temple. Moses often warned the Israelites not to forget the God who redeemed them from slavery once they were fat and happy in the Promised Land (Deut. 8). This reveals **another purpose of Sukkot**. It could be tempting for the Israelites to sit in their houses after a great harvest and say, *"Look at what we did and how we have profited."* Living in booths for a week reminded them that their success in Canaan was wholly on account of the Lord's grace. He had brought them to the good land and could just as easily take them out of it. A tangible reminder of His provision in the wilderness during Sukkot showed the Israelites they must always **trust Him alone** for their supply.

Coram Deo: At each Feast of Booths, the Israelites gave up the comforts of their homes in order to commemorate God's salvation. This is a reminder that in order to be redeemed, the people of the Lord must surrender certain things. We must give up self-reliance and selfishness. We must turn from our idols and the *"comforts of our sin."* Unless we repent, turning from such things unto the Redeemer, we cannot be saved.

Passages for Further Study: Numbers 29:12–38; Zechariah 14:16–21; Matthew 17:1–8; Luke 9:57–62

Nehemiah, also spelled Nehemias, (flourished 5th century bc), was a Jewish leader who supervised the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the mid-5th century bc after his release from captivity by the Persian king Artaxerxes I. He also instituted extensive moral and liturgical reforms in rededicating the Jews to Yahweh.

Nehemiah is a cup-bearer to king Artaxerxes I of Persia – an important official position. At his own request **Nehemiah** is sent to Jerusalem as governor of Yehud, the official Persian name for Judah. Jerusalem had been conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC and **Nehemiah** finds it still in ruins.

Purim, (Hebrew: "Lots") English **Feast** of Lots, a joyous Jewish **festival** commemorating the survival of the Jews who, in the 5th century BC, were marked for death by their Persian rulers. The story is related in the biblical Book of Esther.

What does a **vizier** do?

Responsibilities. The **viziers** were appointed by the pharaohs and often belonged to a pharaoh's family. The **vizier's** paramount duty was to supervise the running of the country, much like a prime minister. ... The **viziers** often acted as the pharaoh's seal bearer as well, and the **vizier** would record trade.