

RETURN

AN OVERVIEW



After decades in exile, and when it seemed like all hope was lost, Israel finally returned home. More than a geographical move, God worked to revive a nation after it had nearly been destroyed. It was a spiritual and national revival. The return stands as one of the most remarkable redemptive events in all of Scripture.

THOUGH ISRAEL HAD BEEN TORN FROM THEIR LAND, GOD HAD NOT ABANDONED THEM.

Through prophets like Jeremiah, God had spoken a promise: after 70 years in exile, He would bring His people back (Jeremiah 25:11-12). But how do you rebuild a nation that's lost everything? Who leads when everything feels shattered?

Before the return, Daniel stood as a voice of hope in a foreign land. He fasted and prayed for God's promises to come to pass, encouraging the people to believe that restoration would come. And through divine providence, God answered Daniel's prayer. In 539 BC, King Cyrus miraculously decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem.

THE RETURN BEGINS

However, the journey was not quick or easy. The return unfolded slowly, spanning decades, marked by waves of discouragement, devastation and disunity. Still, God was not finished.

He raised bold, Spirit-led leaders to accomplish a God-sized task. They were ordinary people entrusted with an extraordinary mission: to rebuild all the broken things and guide His people back to worship, identity, and purpose. When God calls, He equips.

Zerubbabel led the first wave back to lay the foundation of the Temple. Esther became queen and risked everything to protect her people from destruction. Decades later, Ezra returned to Jerusalem to rekindle worship and call them back to God's Word. Later, Nehemiah returned to rebuild the city walls, reestablishing the city's strength and identity. God also raised prophets like Haggai, who reminded them that God was with them and Zechariah, who proclaimed that by God's Spirit the work would be done.

IT WOULD TAKE NEARLY A CENTURY BEFORE JERUSALEM FELT LIKE HOME AGAIN.

Each leader faced real obstacles, fear, injustice, disunity, and delay, but through it all, they chose obedience, courage, and faith. And as they stepped forward, the people followed. By 516 BC, the Temple was finally rebuilt. It stood as a place of worship and a symbol that God's presence was with His people.

It was a powerful reminder: when God pursues, He restores. That same hope is woven through the message of Malachi, the final prophetic voice of the Old Testament. This last book anticipates a time when God's people will be given a new heart, a new covenant and a new Spirit. And yet, after this final word, came 400 years of silence.

Out of this profound silence, a cry in the wilderness. A child in a manger. The Saviour would come.



**KEY LEADERS:
ONE DIVINE MISSION**

470 BC

Esther

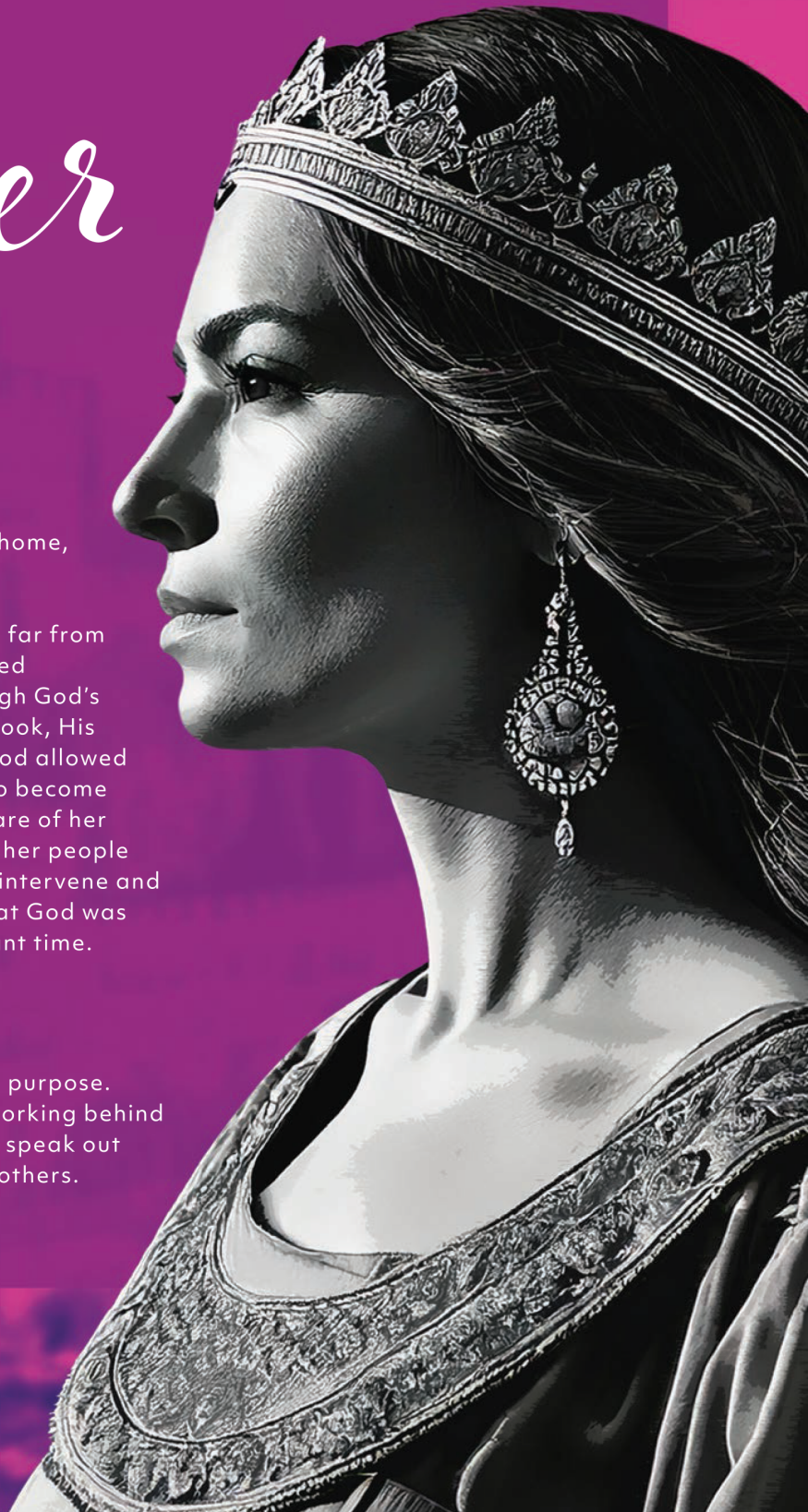
POSITIONED FOR PURPOSE

Even after God had made a way home, many Jews remained in Persia.

Esther's story unfolds in a palace far from Jerusalem, where her people faced discrimination and danger. Though God's name is never mentioned in the book, His fingerprints are unmistakable. God allowed Esther, a young Jewish woman, to become Queen without anyone being aware of her heritage. When a plot to destroy her people emerges, she risks everything to intervene and serve her people. She realizes that God was working in her life for an important time.

ESTHER REMINDS US...

God places us where we are for a purpose. Even in unlikely positions, He is working behind the scenes, inviting us to step up, speak out and be vessels of His blessing to others.



457 BC

Ezra

RESTORING THE HEART OF WORSHIP

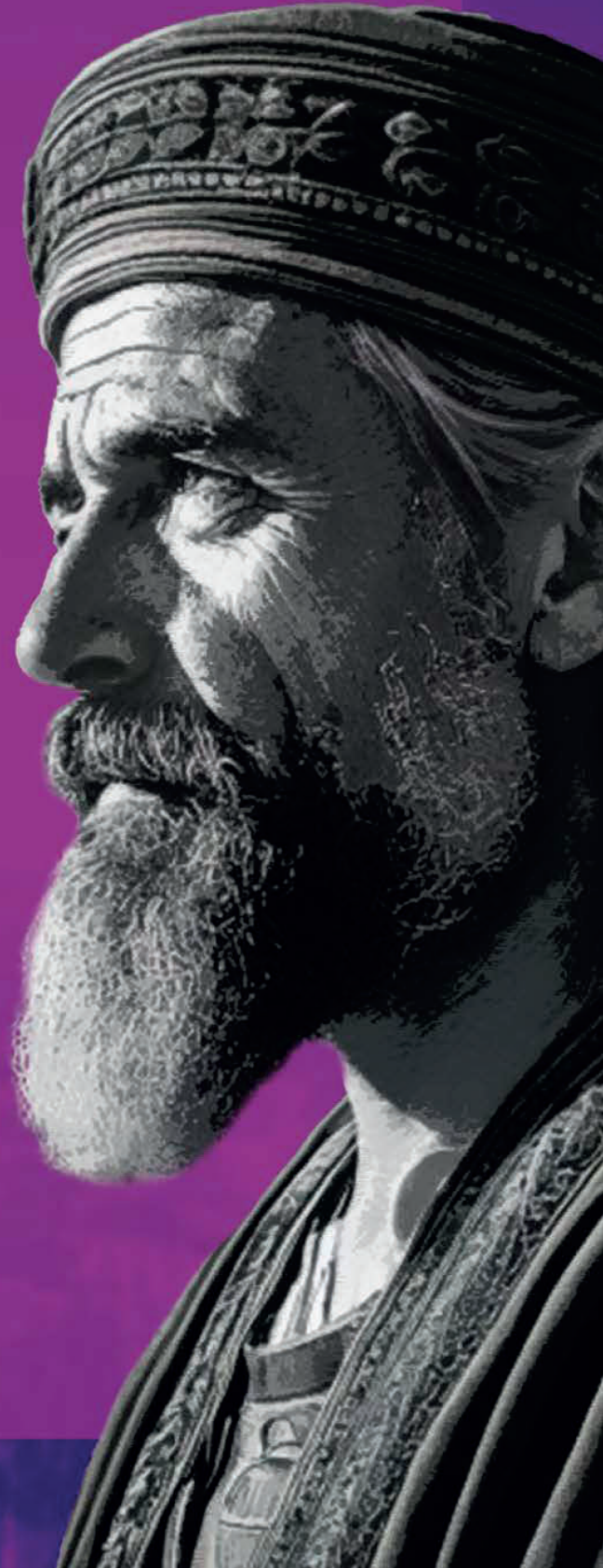
Known as a scribe and priest, Ezra was deeply devoted to God's Word and focused on rebuilding hearts.

Referred to sometimes as the 'Second Moses', he was a significant influence on the Jewish faith. Through helping people interpret and apply God's word to their lives, he helped people reconnect with the law of Moses. When he read Scriptures aloud, revival broke out.

People repented and turned back to God. He reestablished rhythms of worship, reintroduced forgotten festivals and called the community to faithful living. Finally, the temple was completed in 516 BC, signifying the restoration of the heart of worship and a reminder of God's presence among His people.

EZRA REMINDS US...

God places us to bring spiritual renewal in the dark places. A leader's spiritual sensitivity can ignite a nation's return to God.





**KEY LEADERS:
ONE DIVINE MISSION**

444 BC

Nehemiah

REBUILDING WHAT'S BROKEN

Nehemiah was a Jewish exile, working for the Persian government. When he heard Jerusalem's wall was still in ruins and the city was unsafe, he prayed for God's direction. Given favour by the king, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to mobilize the rebuilding of the broken city.

He inspired people amidst constant opposition and foreign enemies. He faced conspiracies, slander, sabotage and yet, continued to remain prayerfully focused. In just 52 days, the wall was completed. He brought glory to God and unity to the people by leading them well.

NEHEMIAH REMINDS US...

Godly leadership builds a future rooted in prayer and dependence on God. God uses a leader's willingness to step into brokenness to rebuild a nation.



KEY PRINCIPLES: CRUCIAL LESSONS ON GODLY LEADERSHIP

The return of Israel to Jerusalem is a powerful picture of what godly leadership looks like in seasons of rebuilding. It is not merely about strategy, position, or charisma; it is also about character and conviction. The leaders God raised remind us that true leadership is sustained by a deep dependence on God.

GODLY LEADERS...



Anchor their efforts in prayer and scripture.

They seek God first, their leadership flowing from time spent in God. Ezra read the Word publicly, and Nehemiah prayed before he laid a brick.



Empower others through collaboration.

They don't carry the mission alone; they invite others in, build teams and mobilize. Nehemiah knew it required a united community.



Address issues like injustice, compromise and apathy directly.

They don't shy away from opposition or facing broken systems. They had the courage to speak the truth.



Cast a bold but also redemptive vision.

They help people see what could be, filled with hope and rooted in God's promises.



Serve alongside others with humility and courage.

They are at work, leading by example. Their courage comes from knowing who called them.



Expect resistance and grow through it.

They know that opposition isn't a sign of failure, but the work God calls us to matters. Nehemiah faced slander but pressed on.

God reminded His people of truths of renewal that still hold power today

WORSHIP IS ESSENTIAL

When we surrender our whole lives to God, He moves in power.

REPENTANCE BRINGS FREEDOM

When we humble ourselves and confess, God meets us with healing and strength.

HIS WORD IS OUR FOUNDATION

It anchors, corrects, and restores us.

RESTORATION IS COMMUNAL

Renewal rarely happens in isolation. God uses community to shape us and calls us to help restore others.

This is how the Kingdom is rebuilt, not in grand moments alone, but through daily acts of faithfulness. Through leaders who listen and obey. Through people who worship, repent, and return.

Even now, God is still in the business of raising leaders, rebuilding what's broken, and calling His people back to Himself. And when we walk in unity and surrender, His presence is felt, and His pursuit continues.

- 1** Worship
- 2** Repentance
- 3** His Word
- 4** Restoration

KEY TRUTHS SPIRITUAL REVIVAL



GENERAL HISTORY OF ISRAEL



1500: MOSES

And the Exodus



1400: JOSHUA

Leads Israel into the Promised Land



1000: RISE OF ISRAEL'S KINGS

King David and Saul



900: DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

Israel splits into Northern and Southern Kingdoms



722: NORTHERN KINGDOM

Taken into Exile



587: SOUTHERN KINGDOM

Taken into Exile



538: THE KING OF PERSIA

Allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem



520: ZERUBBABEL

Leads the first return



457: EZRA

Rebuilds the temple and strengthens the nation spiritually



444: NEHEMIAH

Rebuilds the city of Jerusalem and the walls around it

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where is God calling you to a God size task? Who has He given you to accomplish that?
2. What are the broken places of your neighbourhood, city or world that God may be calling you to make a difference?
3. As you read through Ezra and Nehemiah, how can their lives encourage you to persevere through difficult times?
4. Which of those godly leadership principles is God calling you to focus on?
5. Where might God be calling you to step out and lead?

