

# HOW TO REACH THE JEW FOR CHRIST

by

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT

This lesson brings us to the close of the Old Testament period of Jewish history.

- A. The New Policy of Cyrus
- B. The Return Under Zerubbabel
- C. The Return Under Ezra
- D. Nehemiah's Journeys to Jerusalem
- E. The Last Prophets of the Old Testament

*Information source: the books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

#### A. THE NEW POLICY OF CYRUS

In 538 B.C., the Babylonian dynasty, which had defeated the Assyrians, was in turn defeated by the Persians. First, King Darius the Mede, and then the great Emperor Cyrus, ruled Babylon. Discontinuing the policy of the Assyrians and Babylonians, he generously permitted all the exiled peoples within his realms to return to their own countries. The homesick Jews received special encouragement to do so (Ezra 1). Though many of them stayed in Babylonia, a large body of the Jewish nation returned to Palestine during the next century.

#### B. THE RETURN UNDER ZERUBBABEL

In 538 B.C., about seventy years after the first deportation, Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David, led 42,500 people back to their homeland in Judah.

With holy zeal they set about the discouraging task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple. Beholding the humble-looking new house of God brought tears to the eyes of the old men and women who remembered the magnificent Temple of Solomon. Even this humble house of God, however, was not to be completed for many years, chiefly because the people became indifferent to their task. The indifferent ones easily found an excuse in the opposition of the Samaritans. These were a mixed race of Israelites and heathen blood who had gradually occupied Palestine during the Captivity.

God sent the Prophet Haggai who encouraged the people to continue their work in rebuilding the Temple. Under Zerubbabel, the new Temple was finally completed in 516 B.C., exactly seventy years after the destruction of the Temple of Solomon by Nebuchadnezzar's army.

### **C. THE RETURN UNDER EZRA**

Two generations later, 458 B.C., Ezra, a priest and scribe, led another expedition of 1,800 men back to the Holy Land. Meanwhile, those who had returned under Zerubbabel had begun to degenerate. The administration of justice had become very lax. The poor were neglected and trodden down. Even the strict laws forbidding intermarriage with the Samaritans were openly transgressed. Jerusalem needed the strong guiding hand of Ezra to correct this condition. But even Ezra could not do it alone; reports of his difficulties soon reached Babylon.

### **D. NEHEMIAH'S RETURN TO JERUSALEM**

At the court of King Artaxerxes, there was a Jewish official named Nehemiah. Resigning his important office as royal cupbearer, he received a commission from the Persian ruler to restore order in his own Judean province.

With the help of Ezra and his faithful followers, he soon succeeded. However, when he returned to Babylon, the disorders broke out again. Once more Nehemiah returned and took over the control at Jerusalem. The Samaritans no longer attempted to unite with God's people. Instead, they built their own temple on Mount Gerizim, which remained the center of their half-Jewish religion until New Testament times (John 4:20).

### **E. THE LAST PROPHETS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The prophets of the Return and Resettlement were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Haggai rebuked those Jews who were more interested in building their own houses than the house of God. He succeeded in having the Temple completed. When the faithful mourned over the humble structure, he pointed them forward to the time when all the spiritual glories of Israel would be revealed, when God would shake the nations, and the Desire of all nations (the Messiah) would come (Haggai 2:1-9; Hebrews 12:26-28). Zechariah, a contemporary of Haggai, prophesied in much the same vein.

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, was active nearly one hundred years later, under Nehemiah (420 B.C.). He warned against flagrant transgressions of the Law. He condemned deeds of violence, dishonest offerings and laxity in intermarrying with Samaritans. He warned of coming judgment and exhorted his people to prepare for the coming of Elijah, who should prepare the way of the Lord. "**And,**" says he, "**the Lord shall suddenly come to his temple.**"

Thus speaks the last of the Old Testament prophets.

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## THIS LESSON APPLIED TO JEWISH MISSIONS

### *The Prophetic Picture of the Messiah*

We must guard against the assumption that all was idolatry and wickedness in the disastrous period since the death of Solomon. God always had His remnant of believers, sometimes few, sometimes many, who were upheld amidst the trials and discouragements of an apostate age by the prophetic promises concerning the coming Redeemer. Taking reference from the various prophets, we shall now piece together a picture of the Messiah such as a pious Jew at the close of the Old Testament period might have formed.

### A. THE PERSON OF THE MESSIAH

#### *1. His Human Nature*

The Messiah, according to the prophets, is to begin life as a child (Isaiah 9:6), a member of the tribe of Judah, born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), a descendant of the royal line of David (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5, 6).

Though of royal descent, He is more humble than the average man for **“he is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”** (Isaiah 53:3). Yet this Person is a remarkable man. He is anointed by the Lord God to be the Messiah (Isaiah 61:1; cf. Matthew 11:5), and the Spirit of God rests upon Him (Isaiah 11:2). Even His human birth is supernatural for **“behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son”** (Isaiah 7:14); as son of the virgin He is human, yet she **“shall call his name Immanuel”** (**“God with us”**—Isaiah 7:14).

#### *2. His Divine Nature*

His divine nature is foretold by the divine names which are given to Him. **“His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty god, the everlasting father, the Prince of Peace.”** He possesses divine power (Micah 5:4). At His coming **“the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing”** (Isaiah 35:4-5).

### B. THE WORK OF THE MESSIAH

1. He is the Son of Man prophesied by Daniel, and as such is the Ruler of the universe and the Judge of all men.
2. He is the Suffering Servant—the Saviour of the world (Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10).

### C. THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE MESSIAH’S MESSAGE

Multitudes of Gentiles shall come to the light of the Messiah’s kingdom (Isaiah 60:1-6). Universal opportunity based upon universal need (Joel 2:28).

## EXAMINATION

1. Name the three leaders of the Jews in the Return and Resettlement.
2. Describe the work of these leaders in the following ways:
  - a. The number of people.
  - b. The success of their attempts to rebuild the religious and national life.
  - c. The opposition they met.
3. Who were the Samaritans? What was their attitude toward the rebuilding of the Temple?
4. Give the names and the messages of the prophets of this period.

**~ end of chapter 7 ~**

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