

Nehemiah

Return to Me

Daniel

chapter 1

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah (605 BC), **Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.** The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar [a region of Babylonia], to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. Daniel 1:1-2

*Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze chains to take him to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar also brought some of the articles of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon. 2 Chronicles 36:5-7



Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel [hostages], including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. Daniel 1:3-4



Drawing of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel chapter 2 which predicted a series of world empires

King Cyrus of Persia Issues A Proclamation

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia [538 BC], in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.' " Ezra 1:1-4



The Lord said, “It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’ ”
Isaiah 44:28

First return led by Zerubbabel

- Now these are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city. Ezra 2:1
- Scripture states that 42,360 people returned to Judah, accompanied by 7,337 slaves and two hundred singers (Ezra 2:64–65), including members of the ten northern tribes taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 B.C. (Ezra 2:70). Still, they were only a small remnant.

Second return led by Ezra

- With letters from a new Persian king, Artaxerxes, Ezra the priest and scribe led a second expedition back to the Promised Land. He had a profound love for God's Word, deplored sin, and trusted God every step of his life.
- The king's commission invited all the Jewish people who so wished to accompany Ezra. The male registry showed that about 1,754 or fewer responded.
- As Ezra examined the list, he noticed that members of a special group were missing. There were no Levites. Although the Levites were men with many privileges associated with Temple service, not one chose to go. Ezra probably sent a delegation to find volunteers (Ezra 8:15–20).
- Full of grief, Ezra threw himself on the ground in front of the Temple entrance. Many joined him in his cry to God for mercy and forgiveness. Finally, under a heavy rain, hearts came under conviction. Confession was made, and action was taken to put away sin.
- At Jerusalem the first order of business was to rebuild the altar of the Lord and reestablish sacrifices. Also, the Temple was to be rebuilt with donations of material and money (Ezra 3:1–7). The primary lesson for the new arrivals was to put the Lord first in all things (cf. Prov. 3:6).
- Most of the returnees rejoiced to see the finished Temple. But some of the older folks wept when they compared the humble structure with the magnificence of the first Temple. To them it was simply too inferior (Hag. 2:3; Zech. 4:10).

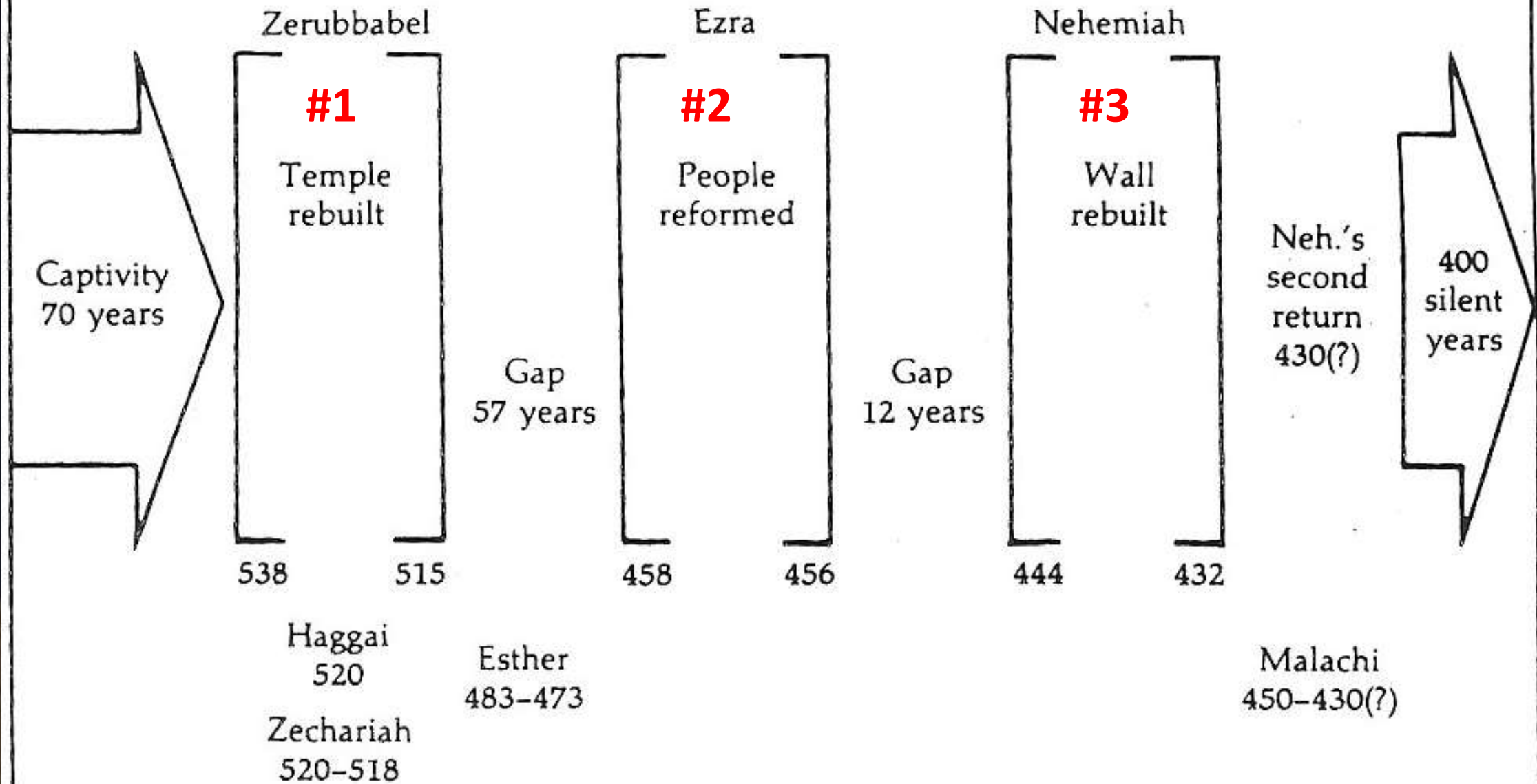
Third return led by Nehemiah

- A cupbearer in the Persian summer court at Shushan was sad. Nehemiah had received bad news. Jerusalem's walls and gates were still in ruins. Strengthened by prayer, he spoke to the king and, in 445 B.C., was granted permission to go to Judah (Neh. 2:5–8). It was Nehemiah, during this Persian period of Israel's history, who opened the door for more Jews exiled in foreign countries to return to the Promised Land (Neh. 5:17).
- Nehemiah was willing to leave a position of power and influence to share in the hardships of his people.

1375 B.C.	Judges begin to rule Israel	536 B.C.	Temple reconstruction begins
1050 B.C.	Saul becomes king	516 B.C.	Temple reconstruction complete
1010 B.C.	Saul dies and David becomes king over Judah	486 B.C.	Xerxes becomes king of Persia
1003 B.C.	David becomes king over all Israel and Judah	479 B.C.	Esther becomes queen
970 B.C.	Solomon becomes king	474 B.C.	Haman's decree to destroy the Jews
966-959 B.C.	Temple built	465 B.C.	Artaxerxes I becomes king of Persia
930 B.C.	Kingdom divides	458 B.C.	Ezra comes to Jerusalem with 4,000-5,000 Jews (Ezra chapters 7-10)
722 B.C.	Northern kingdom of Israel falls	445 B.C.	Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem; wall completed
640 B.C.	Josiah becomes king of Judah	443 B.C.	Nehemiah returns to Babylon
622 B.C.	Book of the Law found	432 B.C.	Nehemiah goes back to Jerusalem
586 B.C.	Judah falls to Babylonians; Jerusalem destroyed and exiles to Babylon	430 (?) B.C.	Malachi begins his ministry
539 B.C.	Babylonians overthrown by King Cyrus of Persia		
538 B.C.	King Cyrus of Persia decrees that exiled Israelites can go home – led by Zerubbabel (Ezra chapters 1-2)		

Old Testament Timeline

The Three Returns from Exile

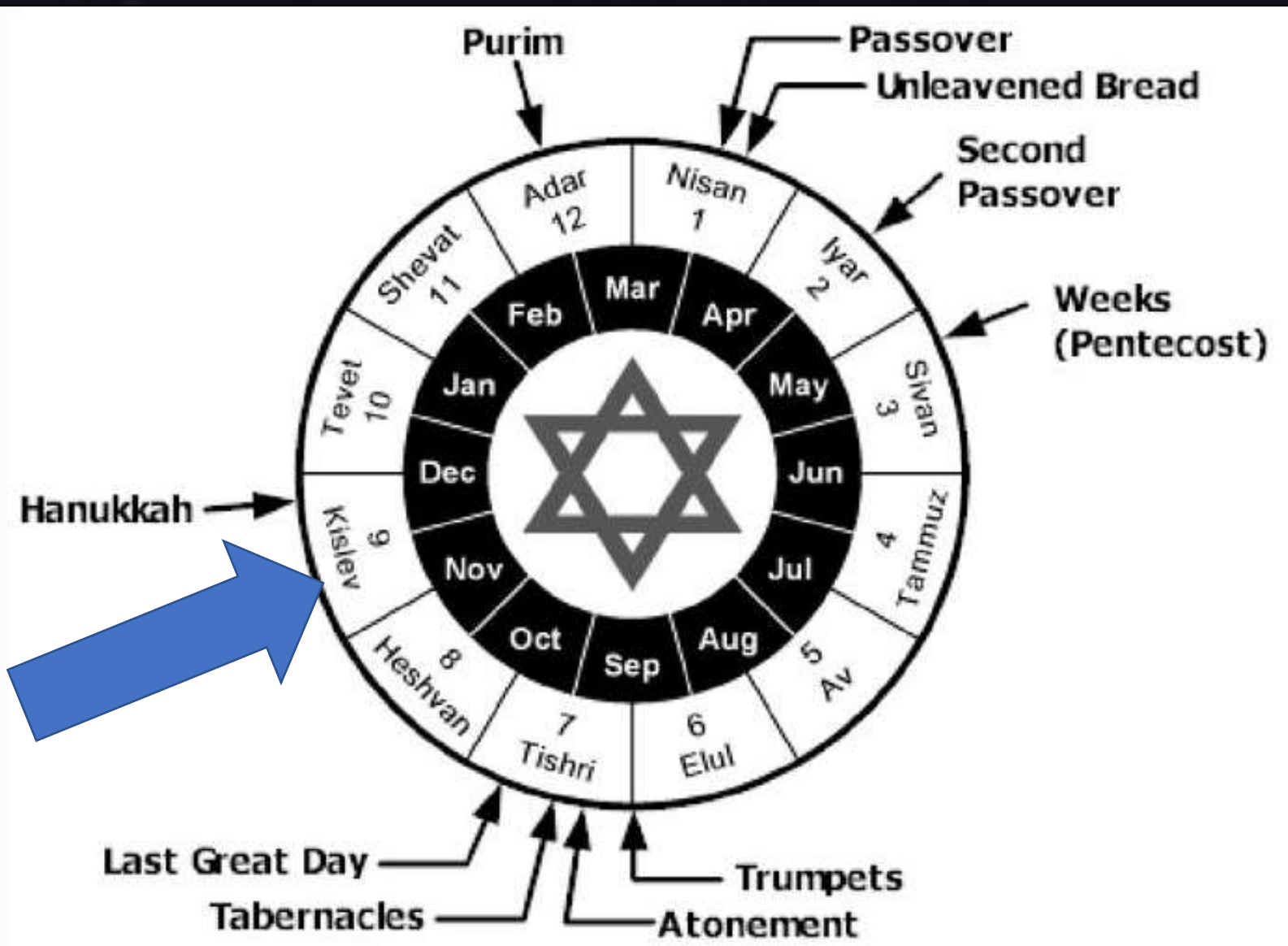


Nehemiah's Biography

- The name “Nehemiah” in Hebrew means “Yahweh has comforted.” He was the son of Hacaliah and probably of the tribe of Judah.
- He was a contemporary of Ezra and Malachi of the Bible, Socrates in Greece (470–399 BC), and only a few decades later than Gautama Buddha in India (560–480 BC) and Confucius in China (551–479 BC).
- He was one of the “Jews of the dispersion,” and in his youth was appointed to the important office of royal cupbearer at the palace of Shushan.
- Nehemiah served as cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464–424 BC).
- Nehemiah was the last of the governors sent from the Persian court. Judea after this was annexed to the satrapy of Coele-Syria, and was governed by the high priest under the jurisdiction of the governor of Syria, and the internal government of the country became more and more a hierarchy.

Nehemiah chapter 1

נְחֵמְיָה is Hebrew for
“Yahweh has comforted”



The words of **Nehemiah** the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month **Chislev**, in the twentieth year [of Artaxerxes the king], while I was in Susa the capitol, **Nehemiah 1:1**

Artaxerxes, Persia's sixth king, began reigning in 464 BC, so this year was 444 BC.

The Persian Empire



**Distance from Susa to Jerusalem
is approximately 1,678 miles.**

Susa, also known as Shushan, the ancient capital of Elam (the southwestern area of modern Iran), which reached its height of importance as the residence and especially the winter capital of the kings of Persia. Called 'Susa the capital' in Esther 1:2 (and Neh. 1:1), it provides the setting for the story of Esther and Mordecai. Daniel is also placed in Shushan during the reign of Belshazzar (Dan. 8:2).

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. Nehemiah 1:1-2

Hanani - Nehemiah's brother who reported the poor conditions in Jerusalem to him while Nehemiah was still in Persia (Neh. 1:2). Nehemiah placed him in charge of the military protection of the restored Jerusalem (Neh. 7:2). – Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

They [visitors] said to me, “The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.”

Nehemiah 1:3

*This left the city defenseless against enemy attacks.

Why was Jerusalem still in ruins?

- When Nehemiah learns of the poor state of Jerusalem, it has been almost 90 years since the first group of exiles returned to the Holy Land under the leadership of Zerubbabel. It has been 12 years since the second group returned under Ezra's leadership.
- Ezra chapter 4 describes efforts to rebuild the city by the earlier groups of Jews who returned to Jerusalem.
- Why was Jerusalem still in ruins?
- These efforts were stopped by armed forces of King Artaxerxes because it was feared that a restored and fortified Jerusalem would allow the Jews to stop paying taxes to the Persian king.

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. Nehemiah 1:4

* Nehemiah's response to hearing the news is indicative of his awareness that God was calling him to a completely new sphere of service, for which his position and training had uniquely prepared him. – New Bible Commentary

Fasting and Praying

- Fasting, though not a requirement of the Torah except on the annual Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), often evidenced one's distraught condition.
- David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. 2 Samuel 12:16
- It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. 1 Kings 21:27
- So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty. Ezra 8:23

(Looking back on those days...) By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it we hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs, and our tormentors mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O **Jerusalem**, may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth If I do not remember you, if I do not exalt **Jerusalem** above my chief joy. Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom the day of **Jerusalem**, who said, "Raze it, raze it to its very foundation." O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one, how blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have repaid us. How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock. Psalm 137:1-9

Why didn't ALL the Jews return to Jerusalem?

- Not all the Jews went back home. Some of them took advantage of Cyrus' decree and left Babylon, while others stayed in Babylon and helped by donating gold, silver, and other resources.
- Some Jews would have been too old to return. It had been 70 years since the destruction of Jerusalem, and there were many who would have been unable to endure the journey of approximately 900 miles. The same would have been true for families with young children and those who were sick or disabled.
- Some of the Jews probably refused to move due to the comforts of Babylon. Many of them had been born in Babylon during the exile, and they knew nothing else. Many Jews had attained significant status during the reign of Cyrus. They were comfortable where they were.
- Some Jews would not have returned to Jerusalem out of concern for personal safety. The road to Jerusalem and the land of Judea itself were fraught with peril.
- Unfortunately, some Jews were living in disobedience to God at this time. As a result, they would not have sensed the need to return to Jerusalem.
- Some of the Jews elected not to return because of the amount of work it would take to reestablish the nation there. Jerusalem would have to be rebuilt. It was not an easy challenge to rebuild an entire city, including the city wall.

I said, “I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven [Yahweh Elohe HaShamayim], the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness [חֶסֶד chesed] for those who love Him and keep His commandments,” Nehemiah 1:5

* “Lord” (Yahweh) speaks of His covenant relationship to Israel, “God of heaven” refers to His sovereignty, and the words “great and awesome” are mindful of His power and majesty. Surely such a God could answer Nehemiah’s prayer.

Nehemiah prayed, “let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father’s house have sinned.” Nehemiah 1:6

About 100 years earlier, Daniel wrote...

“I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said, ‘Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land.’” Daniel 9:4-6

Nehemiah prayed, “We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.”
Nehemiah 1:7

* Are we praying on behalf of our nation?



Nehemiah prayed... “Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses [in Leviticus 26:33], saying, ‘If you are unfaithful [מַעַל ma‘al... unfaithful or treacherous] I will scatter you among the peoples;”

Nehemiah 1:8

Why would God allow this calamity?

- “Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins.” Leviticus 26:27-28
- “Moreover, the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known.”
Deuteronomy 28:65

Why would God allow this calamity?

“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.” Deuteronomy 30:1-3

Why would God allow this calamity?

- “For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight,” declares the Lord, “they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.” Jeremiah 7:30-31
- “For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs.” Habakkuk 1:6

Nehemiah prayed... “Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you **return to Me** and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to **the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.**’” Nehemiah 1:8-9

- The Lord said to Moses, “You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause **My name** to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you.” Exodus 20:24
- For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for **His habitation**. This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.” Psalm 132:13-14
- Solomon said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David and has fulfilled it with His hands, saying, ‘Since the day that I brought My people from the land of Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house that **My name** might be there, nor did I choose any man for a leader over My people Israel; but I have chosen Jerusalem that **My name** might be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.’” 2 Chronicles 6:4-6

- “But you shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish **His name** there for His dwelling, and there you shall come.” Deuteronomy 12:5
- When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for **His name** to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord. Deuteronomy 12:10-11
- “You shall sacrifice the Passover to the Lord your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the Lord chooses to establish **His name**.” Deuteronomy 16:2

- Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen from all the tribes of Israel to put **His name** there. And his mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess. 1 Kings 14:21
- “May the God who has caused **His name** to dwell there overthrow any king or people who attempts to change it, so as to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued this decree, let it be carried out with all diligence!” Ezra 6:12
- He (King Manasseh) built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, “In Jerusalem I will put **My name**.” 2 Kings 21:4
- “O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by **Your name**; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion.” Daniel 9:18

The city of Jerusalem today



Valleys in the city of Jerusalem today



Valleys in the city of Jerusalem



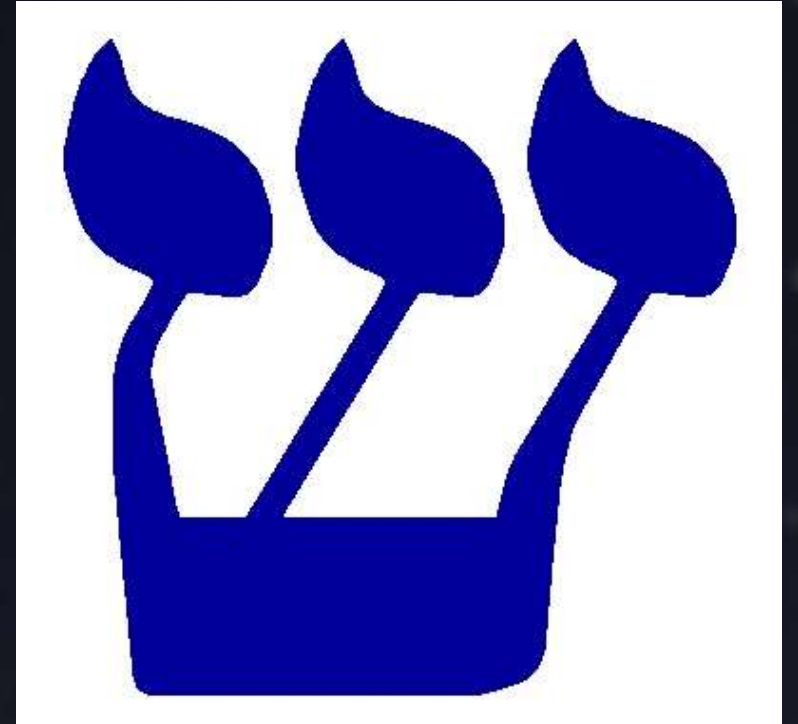
Hinnon Valley

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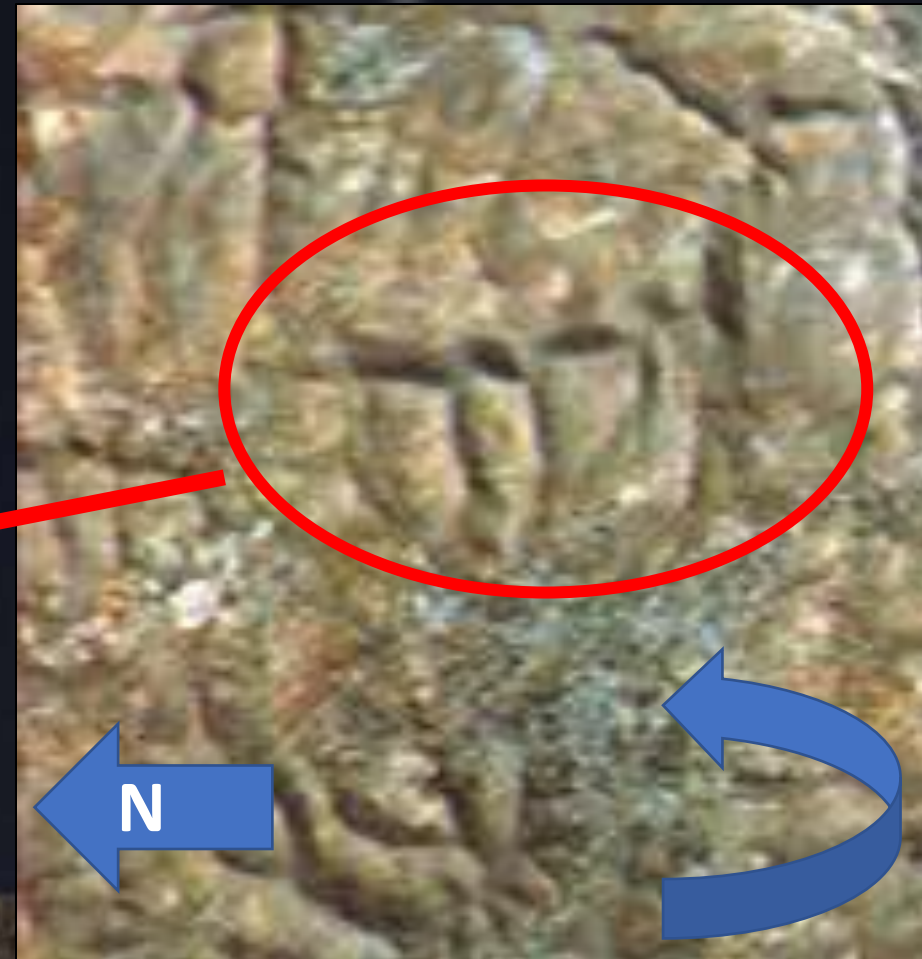
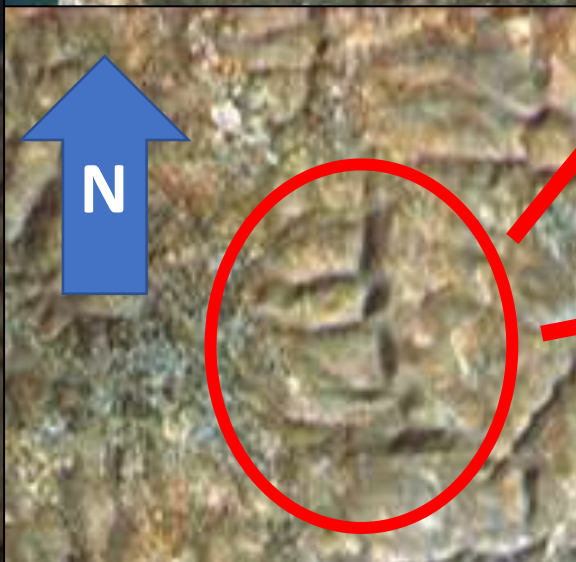
Words with Hebrew letter SHIN

- Yeshua ישוע
- Messiah מָשִׁיחַ
- HaShem ה'שם
- El Shaddai אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי





“the place where I have
chosen to cause
My name to dwell”
Nehemiah 1:9



“the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell”
Nehemiah 1:9

- “But go now to My place which was in **Shiloh**, where I made **My name** dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.” Jeremiah 7:12
- Solomon said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David and has fulfilled it with His hands, saying, ‘Since the day that I brought My people from the land of Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house that **My name** might be there, nor did I choose any man for a leader over My people Israel; but I have chosen **Jerusalem** that **My name** might be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.’” 2 Chronicles 6:4-6

Satellite image taken between Jerusalem and Shiloh. You can see the divine name of Yahweh carved out by the valleys. The Bible speaks of only two places where Yahweh has placed his name, "Shiloh and Jerusalem" and this is halfway between the two.



**“the place
where I
have
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to dwell”**

**Nehemiah
1:9**

Nehemiah prayed... “Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you **return to Me** and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.’” Nehemiah 1:8-9

Nehemiah prayed... “They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.” Nehemiah 1:10-11a

* Humanly speaking only one person could make it possible for Nehemiah to help the Jews in Jerusalem—the king he served. Years earlier, Artaxerxes had issued a decree to stop the construction work in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21), and he was the only one who could reverse that order. That is why Nehemiah prayed specifically, “Give Your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.” Nehemiah was referring of course to King Artaxerxes. A favorable relationship with the king could open the door for his petition. – Bible Knowledge Commentary

Now I was the cupbearer to the king. Nehemiah 1:11b

- An officer of high rank with Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, and Jewish monarchs. The cupbearer of the king of Egypt is mentioned in connection with Joseph's history (Gen. 40:1–21; 41:9). Rabshakeh was cupbearer in the Assyrian court (2 Kings 18:17). Nehemiah filled this office to the king of Persia (Neh. 1:11). We read also of Solomon's cup-bearers (1 Kings 10:5; 2 Chr. 9:4). – Easton's Bible Dictionary
- A confidant in a royal entourage (1 Kings 10:5). The cupbearer could exercise influence on a king's policies (Neh. 1:11-2:8). The first servant of the Pharaoh imprisoned with Joseph had held the Pharaoh's cup 'in my hand ...' (Gen. 40:11), suggesting that the cupbearer carried responsibility for nurturing (giving food and drink to) those in his care. – Harper's Bible Dictionary
- An office of trust; tasting the king's wine and food, the cupbearer stood between the king and death. That Nehemiah, a Jew and a captive, served this Gentile king in such a strategic capacity was an unusual credit and honor to this man of strong character.

Return to Me

“For the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn His face away from you if you **return** to Him.”

2 Chronicles 30:9b

Do you need to change course today?