

Exile and Restoration

587–428 BC

With the fall of Jerusalem most of the Judeans are taken captive to Babylon, where they and their descendants will live for seven decades. Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia, issues a decree in 538 BC allowing the Judeans to return to their ancestral land, and some of them do so over the next decades. Yet some remain in Persia and Mesopotamia, as well as Egypt. During the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) one of them, Esther, becomes queen of Persia.

The Ministries of Daniel and Ezekiel (605–536 BC)

Both Daniel and Ezekiel are among the first Judeans to be taken into captivity. Therefore, even before the eventual fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, these two men actively prophesy in Babylon. All of Ezekiel's prophecies in Ezekiel 1–25 are proclaimed before Jerusalem's fall. The events related in Daniel 1–3 also take place before the final Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. Daniel will continue his prophetic ministry into the early reign of Cyrus.

- 605 BC Daniel is taken captive to Babylon
- 597 BC Ezekiel is taken captive to Babylon
- 571 BC Ezekiel delivers his last prophecy
- 593 BC Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are cast into the fiery furnace
- 539 BC Daniel reads the handwriting on the wall and Babylon falls to the Persians
- 539 or 538 BC Daniel is rescued from the lions' den
- 550 BC Daniel receives his first vision
- 536 BC Daniel receives his last vision

The Story of Esther (478–c. 473 BC)

The accomplishments of Esther and Mordecai are chronicled in the book of Esther. The Persian king at this time is Xerxes (Ahasuerus; r. 485–465 BC). Esther and Mordecai work together to stave off Haman's plot to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire—which includes the Jews in Judea and Egypt. The only Jewish festival in the Old Testament not instituted by Moses—Purim—is instituted by Esther and Mordecai in 473 BC.

The Ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah (458–428 BC)

With Cyrus's decree that Judeans in his realm may return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, Sheshbazzar leads a group of exiles to begin the resettlement of Judah and reconstruction of the temple. When the temple's construction is halted for some years, God eventually raises up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, whose messages encourage the Judeans to complete the temple during the reign of Darius I. Eighty years after Cyrus's decree, Ezra arrives in Jerusalem and implements religious reforms. Thirteen years later Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem as the appointed Persian governor of Judea and rebuilds the city walls and initiates other reforms.

538 BC	Cyrus issues his decree
533 BC	The first Judeans return to Jerusalem and work on the temple begins
c. 531 BC	Work on the temple is halted
520 BC	Haggai and Zechariah begin prophesying
515 BC	The temple is completed
c. 490 BC	Malachi prophesies
478 BC	Esther becomes the Persian queen
473 BC	The first Purim is celebrated
458 BC	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem
445–433 BC	Nehemiah is governor of Judea and rebuilds Jerusalem's walls
late 429/early 428 BC	Nehemiah's second term as governor begins