

A dramatic landscape featuring a person standing on a grassy cliff edge, looking out over a vast cityscape. The sky is filled with large, dark, blue and grey clouds, with a bright, golden light breaking through a gap in the clouds, casting a long shadow of the person onto the ground. The overall mood is one of contemplation and hope.

The Wrestle Against “This Present Darkness”

Ezra 4:1-7, 24

New Baptist Church
June 8, 2025



D - Day
June 6, 1944

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (536 BC to 436 BC)

- **606 BC - Babylon takes political prisoners (first wave of exiles).**

God promises that the exile will be 70 years long (Jeremiah 25:11-12).

70 years

*586 BC - Babylon destroys Jerusalem and the Temple.
The people of Judah are taken into exile.*

- **536 BC - The Book of Ezra Begins!!! The People of Judah Return!**

Ezra 1: God stirs the heart of Cyrus to allow the people to return, and God stirs the heart of the people to return.

Ezra 1:5, "Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem."



Ezra 3 - The Altar is built and the
foundation of the temple is laid.
536 BC

“For he is good, for his
steadfast love endures
forever toward Israel!!”
(Ezra 3:11)



Ezra 4 “1 **Now when the adversaries** of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, 2 they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers’ houses and said to them, “Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of **Esarhaddon** king of Assyria who brought us here.”

- 722 BC - Assyria destroys the Kingdom of Israel.
- **668 BC - Esarhaddon resettles people into the land of Israel (see 2 Kings 17).**
 - *The people resettled incorporated the worship of Yahweh into their worship of other gods.*
- 606 BC - Babylon takes political prisoners (first wave of exiles).
- 586 BC - Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple are Destroyed by Babylon
- **536 BC - The People of Judah Return, altar and temple foundation built.**

Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, "You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

The Purpose of the Return

Ezra 1:5 "everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD"

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 - *These resettled people will become known as "The Samaritans."*
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Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia (536 BC).

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(Ezra 4:24) “Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia (520 BC).”

• **536 BC - The People of Judah Return, altar and temple foundation built.**

• **520 BC - Work on the Temple Begins.**

For 16 years, the people called and equipped by God to rebuild the temple did nothing. WHY?

Fear, discouragement, and distraction became the tools of their adversaries to keep them from doing what God had called them to do.

The Purpose of the Return

Ezra 1:5 “everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD”

Fear, discouragement, and distraction became the tools of their adversaries to keep them from doing what God had called them to do.

But the adversaries never ceased, even after the temple was completed. (A Key Point of Ezra 4).

There will always be adversaries, both seen and unseen, working to hinder the work of God.

• 536 BC - The People of Judah Return, altar and temple foundation built.

• 520 BC - Work on the Temple Begins.

• 516 BC - The temple is completed

• 486-465 BC - Xerxes I (Ahsuerus)

Ezra 4:6 And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

• 465-424 BC - Artaxerxes I

Ezra 4:7 In the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia. The letter was written in Aramaic and translated.... (450 BC)

There will always be adversaries, both seen and unseen, working to hinder the work of God.



(Luke 21:17) “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”

(John 15:19) “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

(1 Peter 5:8–9) “8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

(Ephesians 6:12) “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

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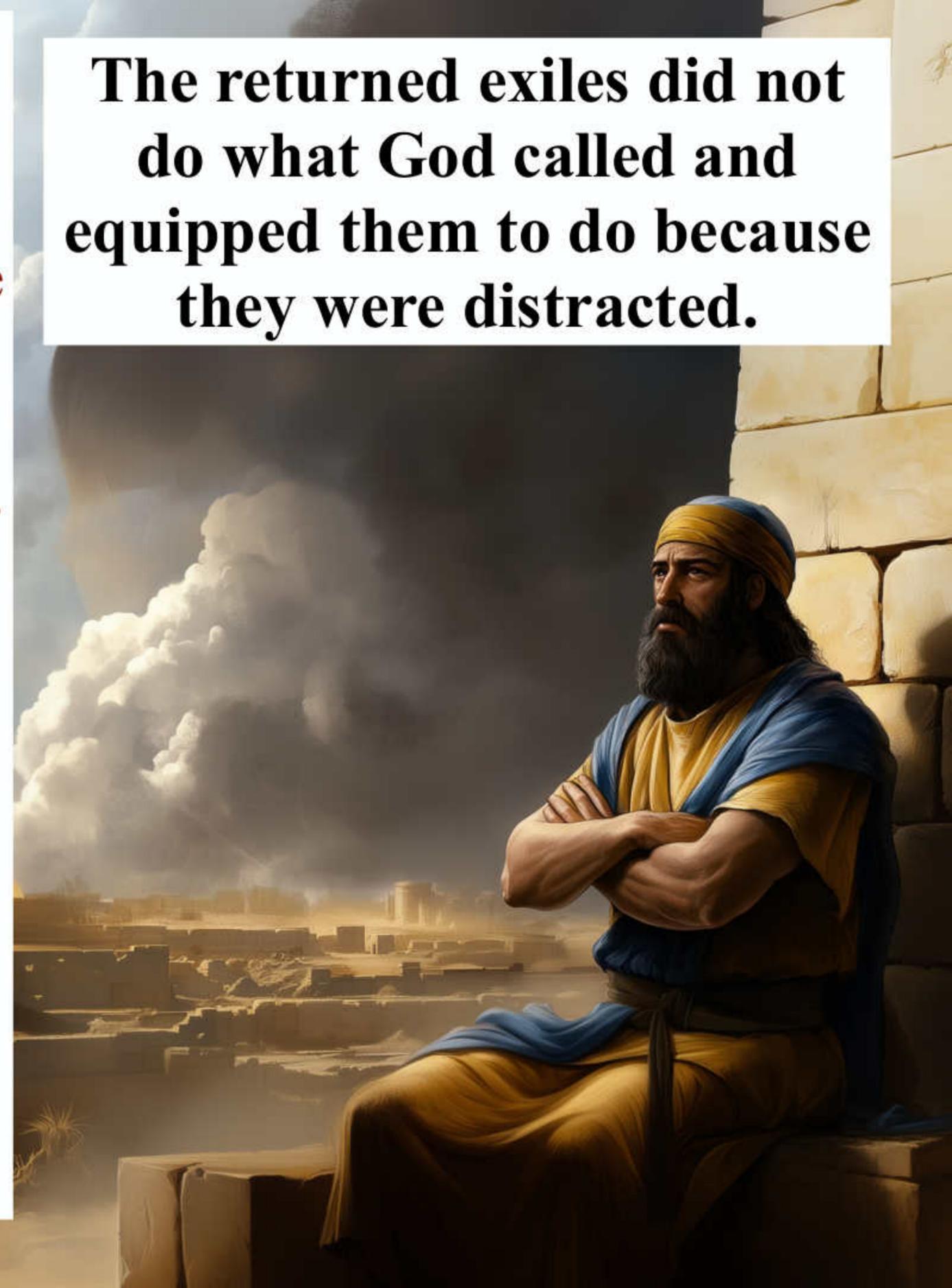
(Ephesians 6:12) “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,”
(2 Timothy 3:12)

On August 29, 520 BC, the Prophet Haggai began to preach.

Haggai 1:2 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.” 3 Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, 4 “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? 5 Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. 9 You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.

The returned exiles did not do what God called and equipped them to do because they were distracted.



God didn't save us so we could build comfortable, insulated lives. He called us to seek first His kingdom—to make His presence, His glory, His mission the foundation of all we are and do.



When God's people are distracted,

- Mission becomes Maintenance,
- Devotion Becomes Duty
- Worship music becomes background noise
- Obedience becomes optional
- Evangelism becomes embarrassing
- Faith becomes feelings
- Ministry becomes meetings
- Church Becomes a Social Club
- Prayer becomes ritual
- Scripture becomes a good luck charm

(Ephesians 6:10–18) “10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,”

A dramatic landscape with a person on a cliff looking at a city under a stormy sky with a bright light breaking through the clouds. The sky is filled with large, dark, billowing clouds, and a bright light source is visible through a gap in the clouds, casting a glow over the scene. The person is silhouetted against the bright light, standing on a stone path that leads down towards a city in the distance. The city is partially obscured by a layer of mist or low clouds, and the overall atmosphere is one of hope and struggle.

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