

# Return from Exile

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Call to Excellence

Part 10 – Excel Still More! December 4, 2016

Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love. – *Nehemiah @ 13:22*

## The Story

Nehemiah 11-12

538 B.C.	Cyrus issues decree for exiles to return to Jerusalem
458 B.C.	Ezra returns to reinstitute the Law
445 B.C.	Nehemiah returns to rebuild the wall
??? B.C.	Nehemiah returns to reform a backsliding Israel

In 433 B.C. Nehemiah returns to Babylon/Persia after 12 years in Jerusalem. How long he is gone we don't know for certain. Based on length of travel, etc., during that time it would have been no less than a year but could not have been longer than 10 years since he returned to Jerusalem while Artaxerxes was still on the throne (his reign ended in 423 B.C.).

What we DO know is that during Nehemiah's absence the nation of Israel slid once again into a moral abyss. Everything that they promised to do in Chapter 10 went out the window!! Nehemiah has a VERY bold response to each of the issues and cemented his legacy as not just a Rebuilder of the Wall but also a Reformer of the Nation! Here's a snapshot of the issues in the last, and most personal, chapter of of Nehemiah:

### Nehemiah's Bold Reforms:

- Israel's identity diluted (v. 1-3)
- Temple compromised (v. 4-9)
- Levite's forsaken (v. 10-14)
- Sabbath broken (v. 15-22)
- Foreign wives taken (v.23-27)
- Priesthood polluted (v. 28-31)

If we \_\_\_\_\_ we go \_\_\_\_\_!

Proverbs 1:32; Genesis 4:6



We'd like to live our spiritual journey as if it were a spin on the boardwalk on our beach bike. The reality is it's more like a cage match!!!

### Our Adversaries:

The World

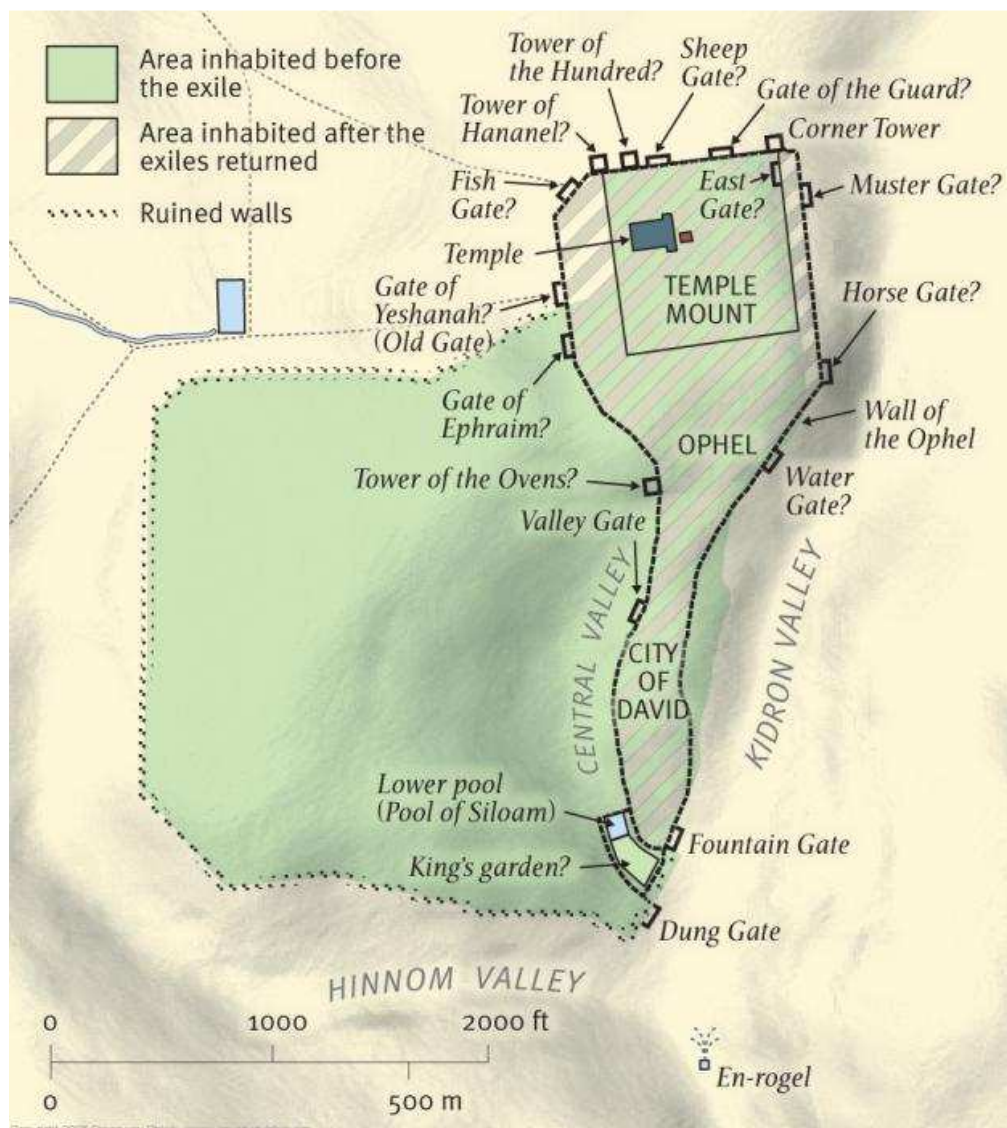
The Flesh

The Devil

The Scriptures provide an antidote to complacency: to pursue moral, ministry and missional excellence. The tone here is that we NEVER arrive! We do CELEBRATE progress but we keep PURSUING excellence with God's power and motivation. The stories in Ezra and Nehemiah reinforce this in many ways. The New Testament teaches it as well ... consider these passages from both Peter and Paul:

**We should \_\_\_\_\_ still more!**

II Peter 1:5-8; I Thessalonians 4:1 and 9-10



Next Week ... Return from Excellence: Appendix – City on a Hill