

Session 16: Return

- The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel saw **the Babylonian exile as penitential discipline for the Jews**, who had become steeped in wickedness, committing every kind of sin and abomination.
- However, this penitential discipline of exile was tempered with **hope for return to Jerusalem**, prophesied by the prophets.
- **For example, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that God would return the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem after 70 years** (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10).
- **Similarly, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that God would raise up a pagan gentile king named Cyrus, who would permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its city walls and its Temple** (Is 45:1-13). Therefore, as God is the One Who guides history, this very specific prophecy proved true. **Cyrus, king of the Persians, conquered Babylon, and having been inspired by the Holy Spirit, soon released the Jews to return to Jerusalem.** Though not all chose to return, as some had become fat and happy in Babylon, and also had had no affinity for Jerusalem, which some of the younger generations had never even seen.
- The return to Jerusalem, the homecoming, occurs in three waves over several decades, and is portrayed by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as a **new Exodus. However, though the new Exodus has begun with the exiles' return to Jerusalem, it yet strains toward a further fulfillment, ultimately in and through Christ. He, as the new Moses, will lead the new Exodus** (liberation from Satan to the Promised Land of Heaven), **by means of a new Passover liturgy** (Eucharistic Liturgy) **with its new Passover sacrificial lamb** (Lamb of God), **which must be eaten** (Holy Communion).
- **The 1st wave is led by Zerubbabel**, who is of the line of David and of the eventual line of the Messiah-King or Christ (see Timeline chart). He becomes governor of Judah, and leads the rebuilding of the Temple, called the Second Temple, which will not be nearly as glorious as Solomon's Temple. **Nor will it be the glorious Temple prophesied by Ezekiel during the exile in Babylon** (Ez 40-48). **Instead, this glorious Temple prophesied by Ezekiel will be the physical Body of Christ** (Jn 2:19).
- **The 2nd wave is led in 457 BC by the priest-scribe Ezra, who teaches the Jews in Jerusalem the Word of God** (Torah). In this, Ezra fulfilled the prophecy of the Archangel Gabriel given to Daniel of the precise coming of Christ,, as Gabriel prophesied, "You shall know, therefore, and understand, that **from the going forth of the word to build up Jerusalem again** unto Christ the prince, there shall be seven weeks (of years) and sixty-two weeks (of years) (Dn 9:25)."
- **The 3rd wave is led by Nehemiah**, who rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem. In antiquity, Jerusalem would not have been considered a city without its walls.

Malachi

- The prophet **Malachi**, who prophesied to the returning exiles at the end of the Nehemiah narrative, is the **last of the prophets of the Old Testament**. Malachi, who prophesied more than 400 years before the coming of Christ, **had been sent by God to prepare the Jews for the long wait for Christ**, which, of course, will be 490 years “from the going forth of the word to build up Jerusalem again” in 457 BC (Dn 9:24-27).
- Two of his prophecies heightened anticipation for the Messiah-King (Christ).
- First, Malachi, speaking for God, prophesied, “Behold, I send **my messenger** to prepare the way before me, and the **LORD** whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple (Mal 3:1).” An interpretive key to this prophecy is that the Tradition, as expressed in the liturgy, includes this prophecy as the 1st reading in her celebration of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. **Thus, the messenger is the forerunner John the Baptist, while the LORD is the Christ Child Himself. Also, this prophecy indicates to the Jews that they *should have been expecting the Christ to be the LORD, which means “Yahweh”, and thus they should have been expecting the Christ to be the Incarnate God.***
- In another prophecy, spoken as the very last words of the very last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi prophesied, “**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD (Mal 4:5).**” **Therefore, the Jews should have been expecting Elijah, or at least a prophet in the spirit of Elijah, to be the forerunner of the LORD.** This is clear in the Gospels. First, the priests and levites ask John the Baptist if he is Elijah, but he denies it, since he is not Elijah in the flesh (Jn 1:21). Second, the apostles report that many say that Jesus is Elijah, though this too is wrong, as Jesus, as Peter correctly states, is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:13-16). **Third, Christ identifies John the Baptist as the long-expected prophet who comes in the spirit of Elijah, as he told the crowds, “For all the prophets of the law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come (Mt 11:13-14).” Thus, John the Baptist is the new Elijah, who eventually yields to, and is surpassed by, the new Elisha, Who is Christ.**
- Very importantly, though the Temple had recently been rebuilt, Malachi nonetheless prophesied a **new means of sacrificial worship to come**, which will not be offered exclusively in the Temple in Jerusalem by levitical priests, as was prescribed in Deuteronomy 12. Instead, this new sacrificial worship will be offered throughout the world and among all peoples, among the gentiles and by gentile priests. **Specifically, Malachi prophesied, “From the rising of the sun to its setting, my Name is great among the gentiles, and in every place incense will be offered to my Name, and a *minhah*/pure offering/unleavened bread sacrifice (Mal 1:11a).” This prophecy is ultimately fulfilled in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the unleavened bread sacrifice through which the Sacrifice of the Cross is mystically (mysteriously) made present.**

