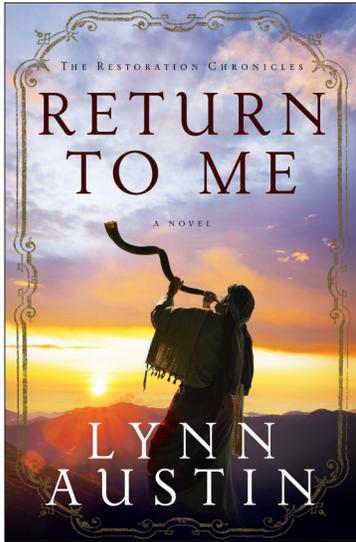




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH LYNN AUSTIN



Return to Me

THE RESTORATION CHRONICLES #1
by Lynn Austin

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1. Tell us briefly about your new novel, *Return to Me*.

Return to Me is the first in a three-book series based on the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It tells the story of a small group of Jewish exiles who make the difficult decision to return to Jerusalem from Babylon to rebuild the city, their temple, and their faith in God.

2. Why is your new series called THE RESTORATION CHRONICLES?

When the people of God were carried into exile in Babylon, many of them began to compromise with the surrounding culture until true Old Testament faith in God nearly disappeared. Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, and the other characters in this series led a movement to restore the Jews to their promised land, to rebuild the temple of God, and most of all, to restore the people's faith and their relationship with God.

3. What first drew you to write historical fiction?

When I wrote my first books, THE CHRONICLES OF THE KINGS series, I discovered how much I enjoyed researching the past, seeing the challenges and choices people faced, and then showing the lessons that we can learn from history. That passion has remained the same for me. Personally, I love reading Scripture and studying biblical history because they enhance my own faith walk. I have a very vivid imagination, and I can almost see the biblical stories and characters in 3-D. I enjoy bringing the Bible to life for my readers so they can see it the same way I do.

4. In recent years, you've written many historical novels. What led you to write another biblical fiction series?

My readers asked for it! So many people wrote to me saying that the biblical books were their favorites, and that they used those novels in personal Bible study and in group studies. One church I visited read THE CHRONICLES OF THE KINGS as they studied the book of Isaiah. Reading and studying Scripture is one of my greatest passions, and so fulfilling my readers' request was an easy choice to make.

5. What research did you conduct to write this series?

I began with the biblical texts, reading and re-reading them using several translations. Then I turned to the commentaries on this material, Jewish as well as Christian. I also read numerous history books and learned about the archaeological discoveries from this time period—and I even took some courses on the Jewish faith with a rabbi at the Chicago Torah Network. But my favorite way to research was to travel to Israel and immerse myself in the country's sights and sounds and tastes. While I was there, I was also inspired to write my first nonfiction work, *Pilgrimage*, which is also coming out this fall. In *Pilgrimage*, I share with readers a private and intimate look at my struggle with spiritual dryness in a season of loss and unwanted change. As I take readers on a journey through Israel, I turn to Scripture at each site I visit, drawing insights for renewed faith, and a sense of direction for the future.

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6. Tell us a little about the main characters in *Return to Me* and why you selected them.

I chose Iddo and his grandson, Zechariah (who prophesied during this time period) because they're listed in Scripture as being part the first wave of exiles to return to the land. Curiously, Zechariah's father (Iddo's son) isn't mentioned—leaving me to wonder why he chose to remain in Babylon. The other POV characters are Iddo's wife, Dinah, and Zechariah's friend, Yael, who I created to provide the women's viewpoint of these epic events. Ezra and Nehemiah don't enter the series until books 2 & 3, which are entitled *Keepers of the Covenant* (Fall 2014) and *On This Foundation* (Fall 2015).

7. These characters examine the nature of their own relationships with God, whether they are motivated by love or fear. Can you tell us more about that?

One of my characters witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple and decides to return, not out of love for God, but out of fear of His wrath if he disobeys. He must learn to truly know God and serve Him out of love. The same is true for the women, who initially return because they love their husbands or fathers, not because they love God.

8. At one point, Iddo asks his family if they are willing to obey God, no matter the cost. Why did you include this question? Does it have a broader meaning for the Israelites of that day and/or for God's people today?

It required an enormous sacrifice to obey God's call and leave the comforts of Babylon to return to a desolate, ruined land. Obeying meant giving up many of the things that had become "idols" in their lives and stepping out in faith to trust a God they barely knew. One of the characters asks, "Why is it so impossible to follow God?" and another one replies, "Yes, it's very difficult to follow God—that's why so few people do it. But it's not impossible." Today, I think we have to make decisions almost daily to choose between God's call and the pull of our culture, and sometimes those decisions also have a high cost.