

Ezra

Return,

Rebuild,

Restore

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Title of the Book

- Ezra-Nehemiah were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible
- “Ezra” means “help”
- Ezra is described as “the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of Yahweh and of his statutes to Israel” (7:11)

Overview Outline

Chs. 1-6: Zerubbabel led the first return from Babylon in 538 BC

Chs. 7-8: Ezra led the second return from Babylon in 458 BC

Chs. 9-10: Ezra brought about religious reforms for the returnees

Outline by Chapter

Ch. 1: Cyrus' decree

Ch. 2: Zerubbabel leads first return

Ch. 3: Temple foundation laid

Ch. 4: Artaxerxes stops the work

Ch. 5: Tattenai reports to Darius

Ch. 6: Darius' decree; temple completed

Outline by Chapter

Ch. 7: Artaxerxes' decree to Ezra

Ch. 8: Ezra leads second return

Ch. 9: Unholy marriages; Ezra prays

Ch. 10: Confession of improper marriages

Historical Background

- Covers about 80 years from the first year of Cyrus' reign over Babylon to the eighth year of Artaxerxes (538-458 BC)
 - 1:1; Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10; Dan. 9:1-2
- Six Gentile kings dominated the Jews during Ezra's lifetime:
- Cyrus, 550-530 BC (Is. 44:28—45:1-7)
- Cambyses, Cyrus' son, 530-522 BC

Historical Background

- Gaumata or pseudo-Smerdis (who posed as Smerdis, Cambyses' brother whom Cambyses had killed in 525), ruled a number of months in 522 BC
- Possible that either Cambyses or Gaumata was "Artaxerxes" (4:6-7, 11)
 - Halted work on the temple until the decree of Darius I (4:21-24; 6:6-12)

Historical Background

- Darius I, 522-486 BC
 - Killed pseudo-Smerdis and took power
 - Tattenai, a Persian governor, asked Darius to search for Cyrus' decree (5:3-17)
 - After Darius read the decree, he ordered Tattenai to provide the money and supplies necessary (6:1-12)

Historical Background

- Xerxes, 486-465 BC, Darius' son
- Artaxerxes I, 465-423 BC, Xerxes' son
 - the king under whom Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and did their work (6:14; 7:1, 7, 11, 12, 21; 8:1; Neh. 2:1; 5:14; 13:6)

Cyrus

(2 Chronicles, Ezra, Daniel)

- Cyrus, King of Persia and Babylon, decreed in 538 BC that the Jews could return to Judah from exile and rebuild the city and the temple
- Cyrus succeeded his father as king of Anshan, a vassal kingdom of Media, in 559 BC.
- In 550 BC, Cyrus rebelled against his maternal grandfather, Astyages, the king of the Medes and took the kingdom
 - Cyrus was now king of the Medes and Persians

Cyrus

(2 Chronicles, Ezra, Daniel)

- In September-October, 539 BC, Cyrus defeated the Babylonians at Opis on the Tigris River
- He then defeated Sippar, which was across the river, on October 10, 539 BC
- On October 12, 539 BC, Ugbaru, commander of Cyrus' armies, defeated Babylon without a fight
 - He diverted the Euphrates River which ran through the center of the city and the troops entered by the river bed; Belshazzar was killed (Dan. 5:30)

Cyrus

(2 Chronicles, Ezra, Daniel)

- Cyrus appointed Darius the Mede (539-525 BC) ruler of Babylon, Syria, and Palestine
 - Dan. 5:30-6:3
- Cyrus decreed that the Jewish people could return home and rebuild their temple
 - Ezra 1; 6:3-5; 2 Chron. 36:21-23

Three Returns

- Zerubbabel led the first return (538 BC) of nearly 50,000 (2:64-65)
 - Cyrus was king of Persia
 - They completed the temple in 515 BC during the reign of Darius I (chs. 1-6)
- Ezra led the second return (458 BC) of 1,754 males (8:1-20)
 - Artaxerxes was king of Persia (chs. 7-10)

Three Returns

- Nehemiah led the third return (444 BC)
 - Artaxerxes was king of Persia
(Nehemiah 1-2)

Hebrew & Aramaic in Ezra

- Ezra wrote the narrative sections in Hebrew and copied the official documents in the original Aramaic (4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26)
 - Aramaic was the official language of government and commerce in Persia at that time

Contemporary Prophets

- Haggai (520 BC), Zechariah (520-518 BC), and Malachi (450-430 BC) taught and wrote God's Word during this time period
 - 5:1; 6:14

Key Words & Phrases

- **Temple/House**
- **Law** (of Moses, of the Lord, of God)
 - 7:6, 12, 14, 21, 25, 26
- **Hand** (of the Lord, of God)
 - 7:6, 9, 28
 - 8:18, 22, 31

Verses to Remember

- 3:11
- 8:21-23
- 9:6, 8, 9, 13

Chapter to Remember

Chapter 6

- God's protection and provision for the work through Darius' decree
- The completion and dedication of the temple
 - vv. 14, 21, 22

Messages

- God keeps his word (1:1; 9:8-9)
- God has the right and power to rule any and all political rulers
 - Cyrus, 1:1
 - Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, 6:14
- God can and does stir and motivate people to do what he wants them to do—through his word and his goodness (1:1, 5; Rom. 2:4)

Messages

- Leaders must make critical decisions in times of spiritual danger to God's people
 - 7:21-24
 - Chs. 9-10

Trivia

Which chapters in Ezra taught the
sinfulness of marrying outside of
God's family?

(Chapters 9 & 10)

Memory Verse Review (2 Samuel—2 Chronicles)

- 2 Sam. 22:47a—“The Lord lives...”
- 1 Kings 22:14—“As the Lord lives...”
- 2 Kings 7:9—“We are not...”
- 1 Chron. 29:5b—“Who then...?”
- 2 Chron. 7:14—“If My people...”

Memory Verse for Ezra

7:10

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel”