

THE BOOK OF EZRA

Restoration
and
Revival



RESTORATION

&

REVIVAL



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Details about the Book

Ezra is the beginning of the post-exilic books. It is a record of the return of the people of God to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity after 70 years. The writing of the book for some is between “440-430 B.C.”¹ The book would have to be written at the close of the events of the returns to Jerusalem. Ezra led the 2nd return around 458 B.C. and Nehemiah led next return to Jerusalem in 444 B.C. Some place the writing of the book between 457-444 B.C. but “the book cannot have been written much later than 425 B.C.”²

The book is not clear about who the author is. It is said that Ezra is the author because the book bears his name and because of the presence of the pronouns in the 1st person, but others say Nehemiah because Nehemiah “lived and ministered later than Ezra.”³ There are other theories that Ezra composed Ezra and Nehemiah composed Nehemiah. The most common theory “is that the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles is the final author of Ezra and Nehemiah but drawing largely on memoirs from both men.”⁴ We are not sure who wrote the book, but many arguments favor Ezra.

The book of Ezra and Nehemiah is seen as one book among scholars mainly because they detail the return of the people of God from captivity to Jerusalem. Earlier writings have them as one, later writings viewed them as separate. As stated earlier, Ezra narrates the 1st return led by Zerubbabel and the 2nd return led by him. The book of Nehemiah focuses on the events surrounding his return. It is also seen as one book because of the recurring theme of rebuilding or restoration. Ezra’s focus is on the rebuilding of the temple and Nehemiah is on the rebuilding of the wall. While some writings treat them as one and some writings have them separated, “the connection between them is widely agreed-upon.”⁵

¹ J. Brian Tucker, *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 637.

² Charles Dyer & Gene Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer* (Nashville: World, 2001), 342.

³ IBID, 341.

⁴ Robert S. Kinney, *Christ Church Notes: Ezra* (Vienna: Christ Church, 2021), 2.

⁵ Ibid.

Historical Background

Zedekiah was the last of Judah's king who reigned for 11 years in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:11). What is said of his reign is what has been said about most of Judah's kings, "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."⁶ 2nd Chronicles emphasizes the sinfulness of Judah's leadership, priests, and people, their unfaithfulness to the Lord through idol worship, the grace of the Lord to provide prophets to urge them to repent and turn back to the Lord, their refusal to repent, the wrath and judgement of God upon his people brought through the Chaldeans (Babylonians). The devastating image of the captivity is recorded in 2 Chronicles 36:17-21 which includes the death of old and young, the temple ravaged with its vessels and treasures of gold and silver taken, the temple burned, the walls broken down and those who were left alive were taken captive into Babylon for 70 years. The siege of Jerusalem began around 605 B.C. and there were waves of deportations through approximately 581 B.C.

The book of Ezra opens up with a historical reference to the 1st year of King Cyrus of Persia. Babylon fell to Persia in 539 B.C. under Cyrus II, Cyrus the Great. One year later in 538 B.C., Cyrus moved by the Sovereign hand of God allows the people to return to their homeland of Judah and rebuild the house of God. This is the context of this book. It is a historical narrative that is a continuation of 1st and 2nd Chronicles and the ending of 2nd Chronicles is the beginning of Ezra. Ezra narrates the return of the people of God, the rebuilding of the temple, the opposition to the rebuilding, "the reestablishment of Judah's national calendar of feasts and sacrifices"⁷, and Ezra's spiritual leadership before the people and leading them to repentance over their intermarriage upon their return with the people of the land.

⁶ 2 Chronicles 36:12 (ESV).

⁷ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook: Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 2003), 122.

Key Doctrines concerning the Character of God

Faithfulness of God (1:1), Sovereignty (2:1), Providence (1:2; 7:27), Goodness (3:11; 7:9), Omnipotence (8:22), Love (7:28, 3:11)

The Key Theme

The dominant theme of this book is the grace of God and the faithfulness of God. “The book of Ezra is a message of God’s continuing covenant grace to Israel.”⁸

Key Verse(s)

Ezra 9:8-9, “but now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. For we are slaves, yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.”

God continued to be faithful to Israel even though Israel continued to be unfaithful to God. God honored his word even when Israel did not honor their word.

The prophet Jeremiah 25:11-12 says, this whole land shall become a ruin and waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon for 70 years. Then after 70 years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land and everlasting waste.

Jeremiah 29:10-14 says, thus says the Lord, when 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare, and not evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places

⁸ Ibid, 123.

where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

The Structure of the Book

Ezra can be divided into 2 main sections. The 1st section is chapters 1-6 which is the First Return of the Exiles under Zerubbabel and the Rebuilding of the Temple. The 2nd section is chapters 7-10 which is the 2nd Return of the Exiles under Ezra and the Rebuilding of People.

The Outline of Ezra

- I. The Return under Zerubbabel (1:1-6:22)
 - A. The decree of Cyrus (1:1-4)
 - B. Gifts and Treasures for Rebuilding the Temple (1:5-11)
 - C. The List of Exiles that Returned (2:1-70)
 - D. The Construction (3:1-6:22)
 1. Altar & Foundation (3:1-9)
 2. Celebration of Rebuilding the Temple (3:10-13)
 3. Opposition (4:1-24)
 4. Encouragement by Haggai and Zechariah to Continue (5:1-2)
 5. More Opposition (5:3-6:12)
 6. The Temple Completed and Dedicated (6:13-22)
- II. The Second Return under Ezra (7:1-10:44)
 - A. Ezra's Arrival (7:1-8:36)
 - B. Ezra leads Revival (9:1-10:44)