



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year



Ezra

Background

The book of Ezra picks up at the end of the Babylonian exile which is spoken of in Jeremiah as lasting 70 years. It was a time in which Jews were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. It is an important period of biblical history because both the captivity/exile and the return and restoration of the Jewish nation were fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies.

God used Babylon as His agent of judgment against Israel for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him. There were actually several different times during this period (607-586 B.C.) when the Jews were taken captive by Babylon. With each successive rebellion against Babylonian rule, Nebuchadnezzar would lead his armies against Judah until they laid siege to Jerusalem for over a year, killing many people and destroying the Jewish temple, taking captive many thousands of Jews, and leaving Jerusalem in ruins.

Dating

Though they were not considered to be written by the same author, the books of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles seem to form a series and are usually assigned closely related dates. It is commonly believed that Ezra was the author of Most scholars date the writing of Ezra somewhere around 460 - 440 B.C. and the occurrences of Ezra approx around 537 B.C. which is the date recorded as the beginning of Cyrus' reign.



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Outline

- I. The first Return from Exile and the Rebuilding of the Temple (1:1 – 6:22)
- II. Ezra's Return to Jerusalem (7:1 – 8:30)
- III. Ezra's Reforms (9:1 – 10:44)

The First Return from Exile and the Rebuilding of the Temple

Ezra's opening verses are virtually identical with the last verses of 2 Chronicles.

1. Cyrus issues the edict to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple
 - a. He does this because "the Lord moved the heart" to make such a proclamation.
 - b. NOTE – Cyrus is a pagan king
2. Return happens under Sheshbazzar
 - a. We find that the Lord not only moved the king but many others who had been exiled and had maintained their faith in the Lord despite the devastation of their homeland.

The List of those returning from Exile (2:1-70)

The Revival of Temple Worship

To this point for a number of years temple worship has not existed. Those Jews who were accustomed to worship daily and weekly were not allowed to do such at least not in a public way.

The altar was rebuilt and worship was reinstated.

1. They feared those around them (3:3)
2. They persevered in worshipping the Lord both morning and evening.



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The Festival of the Tabernacle soon followed the reestablishment of the altar. It was a nine day feast that would look a lot like the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. They would take branches of palm and wave them in the air as a symbol of worship to God.

The beginning of Temple Reconstruction (3:7-13)

Following a time of rightful worship and praise the reconstruction of the long awaited temple had now begun.

Verse 11-13 show just how emotional this reconstruction is for the people of God.

1. Great shouts of praise (v.11)
2. Weeping aloud (v.12)
3. Shouts of joy (v.12)

*“The people made so much noise.
And the sound was heard far away.”
Ezra 3:13*

The Opposition to the Rebuilding (4:1-24)

1. During the reign of Cyrus – the enemies of the people tried to get within the people to tear them apart.

The Enemy has always been known to lie to deceive to get what he wants. This instance is no different.



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2. The people of Jerusalem knew that the enemy would not just find a kind streak and decide to help them in their efforts and so they refused.
 - a. A letter was sent to the now king, Artaxerxes, asking for a cease and desist on the temple.
 - i. This was granted as Artaxerxes felt his power was threatened by the temple and he would lose dominion. (4:17-23)
 - b. King Darius allowed the resuming of the construction to happen (4:24)

The Completion of the Temple (5:1 – 6:22)

Haggai and Zechariah, prophets of the Lord, inspired the construction to resume.

Personal Application: God's voice will get through the clutter. It is up to us to listen and obey when we hear the voice come to us.

Opposition continued from enemy as further reports were sent back to Darius to try and stop the construction. After a look at the archives of Darius saw that the people were granted by Cyrus to rebuild and he allowed the project to continue.

1. Temple rebuilding is complete (6:13-15)

The temple took time to rebuild because of two primary reasons:

- a. Opposition from the enemy
 - b. Preoccupation of the returnees concerning their own interest (Hag 1)
 - i. God actually sent a famine as a judgment and reminder and Haggai and Zechariah continued to spur and preach to the people.
2. The Dedication of the Temple (6:16-18)
 3. The Celebration of the Passover (6:19-22) – the equivalent of having the church built in time for Easter (the Passover lamb was slain). Approx. 21 April 515B.C.



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Ezra's Return to Jerusalem (7:1 – 8:30)

Ezra was a priest and a teacher of the law and was sent from the Lord. He would be the modern day traveling evangelist that came to town to do a big tent revival. He was sent by the Lord to bring the people back under the submission of the scriptures.

Ezra also came with the authority of the King, Artaxerxes.

1. Ezra begins his recounting of how he got to Jerusalem (7:27-28)
2. Returnees with Ezra (8:1-14)
 - a. He had hundreds of people that returned with him to Jerusalem. This was the account of those men.
3. The Levites, prayer and fasting, and assignment of possessions. (8:15-30)
4. The journey and arrival (8:31-36)

*Side Note: Many scholars regard the letter of Artaxerxes as "the beginning point" of Daniel's first 69 weeks. If each week represented a solar year, then 69×7 would equal 483 years, added to 457 B.C. equals A.D. 26, the traditional date for the beginning of Christ's ministry. – Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.*

Ezra's Reform (9:1 – 10:44)

1. The offense that brought about repentance (9:1-6a)
 - a. The mixing of God's people with the pagan nations.
 - i. This issue was not that they were from another tribe or nation so much as it was they were not followers of God. Those whom mixed marriages were taking place made sacrifices to



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idols. Men were marrying their own daughters and brothers were marrying sister. IT WAS A HUGE UNHOLY MESS!!

This brought Ezra to his knees in repentance. (9:6-15)

A very powerful prayer of a leader of this land calling for forgiveness and change.

The people respond (10:1-4)

Ezra's brokenness sparks revival.

- 1. A leader calls for repentance**
- 2. People follow in repentance**
- 3. Lives are changed and affected for God's glory**

A public assembly is called (10:5-15)

Ezra enlisted the priest to first be on board with what the Lord was calling them to do and then Ezra spoke the truth to the people and God softened and changed their hearts.

Church Discipline was carried out (10:16-43)

Not only did they deal with the sin present in the church they reconciled the sin immediately. Notice they did not say, your sin is wrong so take some time and think about it and then we can resolve it down the road.

God cannot work where sin is reigning triumphant. Repentance has to occur for the Lord to open the floodgate and pour out his abundance on his people.

An End to Sin and open door to the work of God (10:44)