

Ezra

MEANING: Ezra means “Yahweh helps.”

AUTHOR: Ezra

TIME WRITTEN: Probably between 457 B.C. and 444 B.C.

POSITION IN THE BIBLE: • 15th Book in the Bible
• 15th book in the Old Testament
• 10th of 12 books of History
• 14 have preceded it. 51 to follow it.

CHAPTERS: 10

VERSES: 280

WORDS: 7,441

KEY WORD: Temple

TWO KEY PASSAGES:

0. **Ezra 1:3** – Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem.
0. **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.

KEY CHAPTER: Ezra 6

1. Ezra 6 records the completion and dedication of the temple.
2. Its completion and dedication stimulates the obedience of the remnant to keep the Passover and separate themselves from “the fifth of the nations of the land” (**6:21**)

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT 2 CHRONICLES:

1. Ezra continues the Old testament narrative of 2 Chronicles by showing how God fulfills His promise to return His people to the land of promise after seventy years of exile.
2. Israel’s “Second Exodus,” this one from Babylon. Only a remnant choose to leave Babylon. Not as elaborate as the one in Exodus from Egypt.
3. Ezra relates the story of two returns from Babylon.
 - a. 1st led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple (1-6).
 - b. 2nd led by Ezra to rebuild the spiritual condition of the people (7-10)

Note: Sandwiched between chapters 6 and 7 is a gap of nearly six decades (60 years), during which Esther lives and rules as queen in Persia.

4. Ezra was a godly man characterized by:
 - a. Strong trust in the Lord.

- b. Moral integrity.
- c. Grief over sin.
- 5. Ezra was a contemporary of Nehemiah who arrived in Jerusalem in 444 B.C.
- 6. During the period covered by the Book of Ezra:
 - a. Gautama Buddha (560-480 B.C.) is in India.
 - b. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) is in China.
 - c. Socrates (470-399 B.C.) is in Greece.
- 7. Out of perhaps 2 to 3 million people, only 49,897 choose to return to Judea.

SUMMARY OF EZRA

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Ezra continues the story exactly where 2 Chronicles ends and shows how God's promise to bring His people back to their land is fulfilled (Jeremiah 29:12-14)
 - 1. God is with these people, and although their days of glory seem over, their spiritual heritage still remains and God's rich blessings will be fulfilled.
 - 2. Seemingly the majority choose to remain in Babylon, and only a remnant choose to return to Judea and Jerusalem.
 - 3. God's faithfulness does not depend on numbers.
- B. Ezra relates the story of the first two returns from Babylon.
 - 1. The 1st led by Zerubbabel in 538 B.C.
 - 2. The 2nd led by Ezra in 457 B.C. some 81 years later.
- C. There are two major divisions in the book:
 - 1. The Restoration of the Temple (1-6)
 - 2. The Reformation of the People (7-10)

THE RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE. (1-6)

- A. King Cyrus of Persia overthrowa Babylon in October 539 B.C. and issues a decree in 538 B.C. that allows the exiled Jews to return to their homeland.
 - 1. Isaiah prophesied two centuries before that the temple would be rebuilt and actually named Cyrus as the one who would bring it about.
 - a. **Isaiah 44:28 - 45:4** —says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

Chapter 45

Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held -- To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double

I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron.

I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel.

For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.

b. Cyrus may have read and responded to this passage.

2. Out of the total Jewish population, estimated by some to be 2 or 3 million people, only 49,897 choose to return to Judea.

a. Only a remnant choose to leave a life of relative comfort in Babylon, , endure a trek of 900 miles, and face the hardship of rebuilding a destroyed temple and city.

b. Zerubbabel, “a prince of Judah,” and a direct descendant of David, leads the faithful remnant to Jerusalem.

c. Those who return are from the tribes of:

1. Judah

2. Benjamin

3. Levi

d. It is evident that representatives from the other ten tribes eventually return as well. The ten “lost tribes” are not entirely lost.

B. Zerubbabel's priorities are in the right place:

0. He first restores the altars and the religious feasts before beginning work on the temple itself.

2. The rebuilding of the temple: (Zerubbabel's temple)

a. The foundation of the temple is laid in 536 B.C.

b. Opposition arises and the work on the temples ceases for 14 years from 534-520 B.C.

c. In Ezra 5:1-2, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhort the people to get back to building temple.

d. The work begins again under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest.

e. Tattenal, a Persian governor protests to King Darius about the temple building and challenges their authority to continue its rebuilding.

1. According to Daniel 6:8 & 12, the laws of the Medes and the Persians cannot be (“altered”) changed.

2. King Darius finds the decree of Cyrus and confirms it, even forcing Tattenal to provide is needed to complete the work.

f. The temple is finished in 515 B.C.

3. Chronology of the rebuilding of the temple.

a. Completed 21 years after the foundations were laid.

b. 2 years the work was underway. 536-534 B.C.

- c. 14 years the work was stopped due to opposition. 534-520 B.C.
- d. Work was resumed in 520 B.C.
- e. Temple was completed five years later in 515 B.C.
- f. Actual work time was seven years.

THE REFORMATION OF THE PEOPLE. (7-10) Sandwiched between chapters 6 and 7 is a gap of nearly six decades (60 years), during which Esther lives and rules as queen in Persia.

- A. A smaller return under Ezra (less than 2,000 men) takes place in 457 B.C., some 81 years after the first return under Zerubbabel.
 - 1. Many priests but few Levites return with Zerubbabel and Ezra.
 - 2. When Ezra discovers that the people and the priests have intermarried with foreign women, he identifies with the sin of his people and offers a great intercessory prayer on their behalf.
 - 3. They quickly respond to Ezra's confession and weeping by making a covenant to put away their foreign wives and to live in accordance with God's law.
- B. The confession and response to the Word of God brings about a great revival and changed lives.