

NAME

The book derives its title from the leading character in the book: Ezra. His name means "help."

The Massorettes called Ezra-Nehemiah one book. The LXX called Ezra "Ezra B" (Ezra A being the apocryphal book). The Vulgate called it Ezra A (Ezra B being Nehemiah). Modern Hebrew Bibles treat them as two books - the repetition of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 indicate that the two books were originally separate works.

AUTHOR

It is not clear who wrote this book as the author is not mentioned. Some feel it may have been the work of several different men and compiled possibly by the same individual who compiled 1 & 2 Chronicles (see notes on 1 & 2 Chronicles: Author). It is highly probable that Ezra himself wrote the book using various decrees, letters, and genealogies as this original sources. This is a probable explanation for why the narrative appears in both the 1st and 3rd persons (Ezra 7:28-9:15). Also given as a possible author is Nehemiah. Although it has been suggested that Ezra may have edited Nehemiah.

About Ezra:

- Some Jews refer to him as the 2nd Moses
- He was a distant descendant of Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5)
- He was an expert in God's law as a teacher and organizer of Israel's religious life
- He was a priest and scribe
- He was a descendant of the High Priest Hilkiyah
- He was reared in Babylon with unusual privileges for applying himself to the study of the law and the Chaldean learning
- He wrote Chronicles (see class notes on 1 & 2 Chronicles: Author) and Psalm 119
- He was probably the instigator of synagogues in Judah
- He is said to have been a member of the Great Synagogue which drew up the limits of the Hebrew canon. Great Synagogue was a council of 120 members organized by Nehemiah c. 410 B.C. with Ezra as President. Its purpose was rebuilding the religious life of the returned captives. It governed the Jews until c. 275 B.C. (see Halley page 276)
- He was probably one of the most learned men of the Old Testament

DATE

Date of composition: c. 430-400 B.C.

Ezra's ministry took place during the reign of Artaxerxes 1, between 465-424 B.C. He may have completed his writings a little later. The decree of Cyrus, ending the exile, was issued in 538 B.C. The Babylonian Empire had fallen to Media-Persia in 539 B.C.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther complete the 17 historical books of the Old Testament. These three books actually record the post-captivity (i.e. post-exilic) period of Hebrew history as they record God's dealings with His people after their going into captivity. The prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi also belong to this period. Ezra and Nehemiah deal with remnant returning from the captives to Jerusalem.

Ezra deals with the return of the remnants to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel which took place in about 536 B.C. or at the end of the 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Only a small remnant returned because the Jews had prospered in exile. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted both the Babylonian exile

(Jeremiah 25:11,12) and the return (Jeremiah 29:10,11) before the captivity had begun. Ezra begins with a recognition of this fulfillment of prophecy with the first verse: *"The first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled..."* (Ezra 1:1a). Ezra also records the return of certain Jews under Ezra in 458 or 457 B.C.

Restoration Decrees:

- Cyrus the Great - 538 B.C.
Issued in beginning of construction of the Temple (Ezra 1:1-4)
- Cambyses (Ahasuerus) - 529 B.C.
Issues in suspension of the Temple construction (Ezra 4:17-24)
- Darius I (Hystaspes) - 520 B.C.
Issued in completion of the Temple construction (Ezra 6:1)
- Artaxerxes (Longimanus) - 457 B.C.
Issued in Ezra's return to reestablish worship (Ezra 7)
- Artaxerxes (Longimanus) - 445 B.C.
Issues in Nehemiah's return to rebuild the city wall (Nehemiah 2:6-8)

Media-Persian Rulers of the Period:

Cyrus the Great (over Persia from 559 B.C.)	539-529 B.C.
Darius (Gobryas - a victory of Cyrus in Babylon)	
Cambyses (Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6)	529-522 B.C.
Guamata (Pseudo-Smerdis)	522 B.C.
Darius I (Hystaspes)	521-486 B.C.
Xerxes I (Ahasuerus of Esther)	486-464 B.C.
Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) of Ezra 7:1	464-424 B.C.

Dating of Post-exilic Events:

Return under Zerubbabel	537 B.C.
Events of the Book of Esther	484-473 B.C.
Return under Ezra	457 B.C.
Return under Nehemiah	444 B.C.

THEME

Type of Literature: History & Government

Halley (page 43): Return From Captivity

Mitchell: The Word of God - The Basis of Everything

There are no less than ten references to the Word of God in this little book. God's Word forms the basis for not only the religious life of the people, but for their economic and social life as well. Likewise, Christians today ought to be a people of the Book (2 Timothy 3:16).

Purpose and Theme of Ezra and Nehemiah (WBCS Notes)

The purpose of these books is to continue the history of Israel where the Chronicles left off. The book of Ezra shows the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of return after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10). The book of Nehemiah gives the date of the building of the wall, at which point the 70 weeks of Daniel begin. Ezra-Nehemiah extend from the year of the beginning of Daniel's second Gentile world empire (Media-Persia) to the end of that empire (539-330 B.C.).

The theme again is the faithfulness of Jehovah to fulfill His promises and the constant tendency of the people to defection. Nehemiah gives the historic background for Malachi and together they complete the canon and set the stage for the 400 years of silence prior to the appearance of John the forerunner of Messiah.

Key Word (Nelson's): Temple - The basic theme of Ezra is the restoration of the Temple and the spiritual, moral, and social restoration of the returned remnant in Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"Whoever 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 rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—He is the God who is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3).

"For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach His statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 6 - Ezra 6 records the completion and dedication of the Temple which stimulates the obedience of the remnant to keep the Passover and separate themselves.

Setting:

Kartozian:

The connection of the book with the preceding books:

1. 2 Kings ends in failure (2 Kings 25:26)
 - a. The mass of the people were in Babylon under the chastening hand of God. The captivity in Babylon was a chastening. God was chastening them for their sins (2 Kings 25:6,11).
 - b. The remnant left in Palestine had fled to Egypt never to return. This was apostasy, a falling away from God, going back to the world. As Peter said, *"The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire"* (2 Peter 2:19-22). We lose sight of them. When a man deliberately turns from God and goes back to the world, we lose sight of him. His spiritual history is over (2 Kings 25:26).
 - c. Notice also in 2 Kings 25:27-30 that we have a picture of the grace of God. This example of grace is found in the place of chastisement, Babylon, not in Egypt. When a man goes back to Egypt (the world), he has fallen from grace. There is no more hope for him. But there is hope for those who are under the chastening hand of God. Out of Babylon grows hope. The books of the Kings end in failure. Man has again been found in the balances and found wanting. The Hebrew monarchy has failed. But God has not failed. Where sin abounds grace abounds more exceedingly (Romans 5:20). In all of man's failures we see the abounding grace of God. This has been true in every dispensation. Out of the failure of every dispensation the grace of God brought out a remnant. Out of the Garden of Eden

came the promise of the seed of the woman. Out of the flood came Noah and his family. Out of Sodom came Lot and his daughters. Out of Ur of the Caldees came Abraham. Out of Babylon came the remnant.

2. 2 Chronicles ends not with an example of the grace of God as 2 Kings does but with a promise of the grace of God (2 Chronicles 36:21) to fulfill three score and ten years. All chastening has an end for the honest heart, a good ending (Hebrews 12:11; 1 Peter 5:10). Chronicles holds out the promise of a glorious return to Canaan (2 Chronicles 36:22,23). It is important to notice here that Chronicles goes back to Adam and gives the race a new start. It traces the history down through the chosen people of God and comes to the close with the promise of grace and the call of the God of grace to His people to return to their own land.
3. The book of Ezra takes up the account where Chronicles left off. Remember that Chronicles goes a step farther than Kings. It is the beginning of the Jewish commonwealth which lasted until the year 70 A.C. when Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus at the head of the Roman armies.

Outline:

I. The Return Under Zerubbabel 1-6 (536 B.C.)

- 49,897 return to rebuild the Temple (chapters 1,2). Not everyone returns as life in Babylon is reasonably good. Shades of, "Life as a slave in Egypt is better than wandering out here in the desert"? Chapter 2 records the list of volunteers - God restores those who serve Him.
- After 15 years not much is happening - enthusiasm is dropped, the people are distracted (4:17-24)
- Haggai, Zechariah are used to restore the enthusiasm - chapter 5
- The completion of the Temple took 20 years (only 4 years after the resumption) - chapter 6
- Note that all 12 tribes return and are represented - which means that 10 tribes were not "lost." Notice also that at the time of Jesus' birth, Joseph (and Mary) knew his tribal lineage - which is crucial to identify the Messiah. James writes to the 12 tribes dispersed (James 1:1-12). Perhaps the tribal record was destroyed with the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. It would be impossible for someone today to legitimately claim to be the Messiah without the ability to prove Davidic lineage.

II. The Return Under Ezra 7-10 (458 B.C.)

- An interval of 58 years takes place between chapter 6 and the opening of chapter 7. The events of Esther probably take place sometime in this interval.
- 1,754 men return in 457 B.C.
- The return (chapters 7,8)
- The relapse (chapter 9) - which chronicles the deplorable moral and spiritual condition of the people. The sin is recorded in 9:1,2 and the confession in 9:3-15. Note that Ezra begins with prayer in which Ezra is personally involved.
- The reform (chapter 10). They put away their pagan wives - confession and separation take drastic actions. Revival is through prayer, confession, repentance, and restitution.

RECIPIENTS

God's people - specifically the Hebrews...and us. Same as Chronicles? Post-exilic audience.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

The book of Ezra shows the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of return after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10).

Teaches us that:

- God moves in His sovereignty in His time to accomplish His purposes.
- God uses kings as He wills: Cyrus, Darius I, Xerxes I
- God is faithful
- God is the God of the second opportunity
- Sin is serious business and does not pay
- Notice all the pagan wives taken with the result of broken homes and hearts and consider the response to our question: *"What if I compromise my standards for marriage?"*

Ezra prayed and taught the Word by personal involvement and the result was revival. He prepared himself and then taught others. He was personally active in keeping the Word (Ezra 7:10). Israel knew the Word but was failing in her obligation to maintain those laws and ordinances (obedience to the covenant they had agreed to).

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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