

The Book of EZRA

Chapters 1 – 6

“Restore & Rebuild!”

Intro: Ezra continues the Old Testament narrative of Second Chronicles by showing how God fulfilled His promise to return His people to the Land of Promise after seventy years of exile. Israel’s “second exodus,” this one from Babylonia is less impressive than the Egyptian bondage because only a remnant choose to leave. Ezra relates the story of two returns from Babylonia, the first led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple (chs. 1-6), and the second under the leadership of Ezra to rebuild the spiritual condition of the people (chs. 7-10). Sandwiched between these two accounts is a gap of nearly six decades during which Esther lives and rules as queen in Persia.

As in Chronicles, there is a strong priestly emphasis, and Ezra as a direct priestly descendant of Aaron through Eleazar, Phinehas, and Zadok (7:1-5). He studied, practiced, and taught the law of the Lord as an educated scribe (7:1-12). Ezra was a godly man marked by strong trust in the Lord, moral integrity, and grief over sin. He was a contemporary of Nehemiah (see Neh. 8:1-9; 12:36) who arrived in Jerusalem in 444 B.C.

Ezra wrote this book probably between 457 B.C. (the event of Ezra 7-10) and 444 B.C. (Nehemiah’s arrival in Jerusalem). During the period covered by the Book of Ezra, Gautama Buddha (c. 560-480 B.C.) is in India, Confucius (551-479 B.C.) is in China, and Socrates (470-399 B.C.) is in Greece.

> **Historical background:** Cyrus the Persian overthrows Babylonia in October, 539 B.C. and issues his decree allowing the Jews to return in 538 B.C. The temple is begun in 536 B.C. The Exile lasts only fifty years after 586 B.C., but the seventy year figure for the Captivity is taken from a beginning date of 606 B.C. when the first deportation to Babylonia takes place. The rebuilding of the temple is discontinued in 534 B.C., resumed in 520 B.C., and completed in 515 B.C. It is begun under Cyrus and finished under Darius I. The two intervening kings, Cambyses and Smerdis, are not mentioned in any of these books. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah minister during Zerubbabel’s time, about 520 B.C. and following years. Esther’s story fits entirely in the reign of Zerxes, and Ezra ministers during the reign of Artaxerxes I, as does Nehemiah. There were three waves of deportation to Babylonia (606, 597, and 586 B.C.) and three returns from Babylonia: 538 B.C. (Zerubbabel), 457 B.C. (Ezra), and 444 B.C. (Nehemiah).

> **List of Persian Kings:** Cyrus (559-530 B.C.), Cambyses (530-522 B.C.), Smerdis (522 B.C.), Darius I (521-486 B.C.), Ahasuerus (486-464 B.C.), Artaxerxes I (464-423 B.C.), Darius II (423-404 B.C.).

> **Chronological relationship of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther:** Ezra chs. 1-6- Zerubbabel “first return” (538-515 B.C.). Esther (483-473 B.C.), Ezra chs. 7-10 “second return” (457 B.C.), Nehemiah “third return” (444-425 B.C.).

> Understanding *The Book of Ezra*

- **Key Word:** *Temple*

- **Key Chapter:** *Chapter 6*- This chapter records the completion and dedication of the temple which stimulates the obedience of the Remnant to keep the Passover and separate themselves from the “filth of the nations of the land” (6:21).

- **Key Verses:** *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. 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.*

- **Christ in Ezra:** Ezra reveals God’s continued fulfillment of His promise to keep David’s descendants alive. Zerubbabel himself is part of the messianic line as the grandson Jeconiah (Jehoiachin, 1 Chr. 3:17-19; see Matt. 1:12-13). The Book Ezra as a whole also typifies Christ’s work of forgiveness and restoration. This book forcefully emphasizes the power of the Word of God and the crucial need to obey it on every level of life (see (1:1; 3:2; 6:14,18; 7:6,10,14; 9:4; 10:3,5).¹

- **Chapters 1—6 - Restoration of the Temple**

- **Chapters 7—10 - Reformation of the People**

Chapters 1 & 2- The First return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel

(1:1-4) The decree given to return by Cyrus, king of Persia as prophesied by Isaiah 200 years before- Isa 44:24-28- Isa 45:1-2- *“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their knowledge foolishness; Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers; Who says to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be inhabited,’ To the cities of Judah, ‘You shall be built,’ And I will raise up her waste places; Who says to the deep, ‘Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers’; Who 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.” 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 doors, So that the gates will not be shut”*

(1:5-11) Contributions for the return & restoration of the temple.

(2:1-63) Census of those returning to Jerusalem and Judah- the leaders (1-2), the people (3-35), the priests (3-39), the levites (40-42), the servants (43-58), people of unknown descent (59-63)

(2:64-70) An account of gifted people & offerings

Chapter 3:1-6:22- The Construction of the Temple

(3:1-13) Worship before work

(4:1-24) Subversion, hindrances, & false accusations stop the work

(5:1-17) The prophets encourage the work—a letter of truth is sent to the king.

(6:1-22) The kings decree discovered, the work completed & dedicated.

¹ *Talk Thru The Bible*, Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, pg. 116-120